This paper traces the development of the different theoretical approaches to long term relationships. Although The IMP Group concept of interaction has long been accepted as an approach to buyer-seller relationships in Europe it has only recently gained much attention in North America. A number of American scholars' work in developing theory in the area of long term relationships is reviewed.

The underlying theories that drive the work of Anderson and Narus, Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, Speckman, Fraser and Johnston and Erin Anderson are reviewed along with The IMP Group work. The paper concludes by suggesting some directions for future research.
The term relationships are very much in vogue as more buyers seek to gain what they see as the strategic advantage that results from a strong relationship with a selling firm. Questions as to how to successfully develop and maintain relationships abound. Academics have for a number of years have been studying buyer-seller interactions and should be able to make some contributions to the debate over the appropriate approach to long term relationships. This paper attempts to assess the progress made in developing theories of interaction behavior between buyers and sellers since the IMP Group first proposed the interaction model [1]. The major competing models of the interaction process that have been proposed over the past six years are reviewed. The theoretical underpinnings of these models are examined and a comparison of the models is made. Proposed directions for future research conclude the paper.

INTERACTION MODELS

The IMP Group Interaction Model

The IMP Group developed their model through an inductive approach based upon the data from a large international study of buyers and sellers. Their theoretical underpinnings reflect Inter-Organizational Theory and the new institutionalists as characterized by the Williamson approach to organizational exchange. Their field studies contributed to the development of their model by suggesting the variables for inclusion in the model. Turnbull and Valla [2] position the IMP model as "a descriptive and explanatory framework of industrial market dynamics." The model is described in Figure 1.

The four major elements are:

1. The interaction process
2. The buyers and sellers in the interaction process
3. The environment within which interaction takes place
4. The atmosphere of the relationship.

Product, information, financial and social exchange episodes define the interaction process. These exchange episodes can be viewed as the currency of the interaction between the buyer and seller. The development of social relationships can over time become institutionalized such that neither party questions the mores and values that have developed to support the relationship.

Both individual and organizational variables are used to specify the characteristics of the buyer and seller interaction process. Although buyer and seller interaction is detailed in some depth in Chapter 4 of the IMP book, the
constructs are not well defined in terms of measurement and operationalization.

The atmosphere of the relationship encompasses such variables as power dependence, conflict, co-operation and social distance. The latter variable seems to be a combination of both physical and psychic distance between the buyer and seller. In discussing 'atmosphere,' Hakasson states, "These variables are not measured in a direct way in this study. Instead the atmosphere is considered as a group of intervening variables, defined by various combinations of environmental, company specific, and interaction process characteristics. The atmosphere is a product of the relationship, and it also mediates the influence of the groups of variables" ([1], p. 21). It is obvious that atmosphere is a complex construct which has yet to be fully conceptualized and operationalized.

The environment as presented in Figure 1 is a broad set of economic and social variables which are conceived to act differently upon the buyer and seller. These macro variables are likely situation specific and open to definition within the situation.

Detailed descriptions of all of these variables are contained in Hakasson [1] and Turnbull and Valla [2].

The relationship of how these IMP Group variables relate to dependent measures of performance or relationship quality tend to be descriptive. A set of propositional statements that is the beginning of a testable theory have not been developed and the model has not been subjected to a rigorous empirical testing as the original data generally did not lend itself to quantitative analysis. Nevertheless, the model has generated a considerable steam of research since its appearance [3, 4, 5].

Channel Models of Relationships

Anderson and Narus [6, 7], Anderson and Weitz [8] and Heide and John [9] have developed models of long-term relationships between manufacturers and channel members. The authors draw upon behavioral, channel and economic concepts to create the theoretical underpinnings of the models. First, the Anderson and Narus model will be reviewed followed by a review of the Anderson and Weitz model. A review of the Heide and John model concludes this section. It will be seen that these models all have similar constructs and theoretical antecedents.

Figure 2 describes the original model developed by Anderson and Narus [6] while Figure 3 describes their enhanced model [7]. The original model is grounded in the work of Thibault and Kelley [10] which along with work by Homans [11] has
come to be known as social exchange theory. Drawing upon the original work and more recent work [12, 13] Anderson and Narus posited the model described in Figure 2. They argue that the results of interaction between the distributor and manufacturer (termed outcomes) represent the rewards and cost for each participant in the interaction. These results are evaluated against the quality of the outcome the participant expects to receive within a given relationship. This construct is refined into the comparison level (CL) and the comparison level of the alternative (CL_alt). Anderson and Narus [3] define CL as, "a standard representing the quality of outcomes the distributor (manufacturer) has come to expect from a given relationship, based upon present and past experience with similar relationships, and knowledge of other distributors' (manufacturers') similar relationships. CL_alt is defined as, "the average quality of outcomes that are available from the best alternative exchange relationship. As such, CL_alt represent the lowest level of outcomes a manufacturer or distributor will generally accept and still remain in the relationship".

In Figure 2, outcomes/CL represents the perceived dependence of the distributor upon the manufacturer for as the outcomes increase in a positive direction given an alternative partner the distributor becomes more dependent upon the manufacturer.

Outcomes/CL captures the extent that the outcome of a relationship exceeds or falls below the expectations for that relationship. As such it is posited to be directly influential on the level of satisfaction.

Conflict is the frequency and degree of disagreements between the partners.

Satisfaction is the positive feeling that results from an evaluation of all of the aspects of the relationship.

Manufacturer control refers to the ability of the manufacturer to exert control; over the distributor's actions and hence have the ability to exert power over the distributor.

Communication is the formal and informal exchange of information and meaning between the partners.

Empirical testing of the model defined in Figure 2 resulted in reasonable support for the social exchange constructs and their relationship to the behavioral constructs. There where some measurement problems which limited the test of the model. Nevertheless, the authors were encourage enough to follow-up their initial work with a series of field interviews that lead to the refinement of the original model into the model shown in Figure 3. The basic structure of
Figure 2 remains but some of the constructs required refinement to more adequately reflect the intricateness of the exchange relationship.

They have modified or added the following constructs:

Relative dependence is the perceived difference between the firm's dependence and its partner's dependence on the relationship. It is conceptualized as outcome/CL_{alt} and represents the average quality of outcomes that are available for the best alternative relationship.

Influence over the partner firm and influence by the partner are constructs that reflect the reciprocal nature of a partnership and the need to have one's partner take action to bring about positive outcomes for one's firm. They represent the ability to exert power to influence one's partner and as such capture the sense of the behavioral control construct implicit in the underlying theory [7, 12].

Trust is expecting one's partner to take actions that will result in positive outcomes for the firm and leads to trusting behavior by each partner.

Cooperation refers to complementary action by the firms to achieve mutual benefits.

Functionality of conflict is the effective management of stress in an interdependent relationship.

The extended model of Figure 3 is a much richer representation of the reality of working relationships and represents a natural extension of the earlier model. Anderson and Narus have blended theory and empirical results to build a theoretical representation of reality which offers both explanation and prediction. Their models can be tested and revised to be more sensitive to the realities of the world.

In their empirical test of the second model they tested one model from the manufacturers' perspective and another from the distributors' perspective. Results for both models were very encouraging in that the vast majority of the hypothesized relationships were support and only a few of the none specified relationships between the constructs were found to have significant relationships.

The model developed by Anderson and Weitz [8] described in Figure 4 has many similarities to the Anderson and Narus model. Anderson and Weitz begin with the basic assumption that channel members assume continuity of relationships with their manufacturers. They state, "At the most basic level a manufacturer cannot hope to garner the benefits expected from a long term relationship unless the the channel member
is convinced the relationship is likely to last." Using this assumption of continuity they draw upon the work of Etgar [14], Arndt [15], Thorelli [16] and Williamson [17] to assert that channel members will engage in behavior that supports the manufacturer's marketing efforts. The construct of continuity is one of the three major constructs of the model. The other two key constructs are trust and communications.

They draw theory from social exchange, channel research [18, 19], negotiation [20] and structural economics [17] and the work of Dwyer, Schurr and Oh [21] to define the main variables and constructs of their model. These variables and constructs are briefly defined below:

Trust is "one party's belief that its needs will be fulfilled in the future by actions undertaken by the other party." This view of trust is consistent with the earlier definition of trust.

Power imbalance is the ability of one party to get the other party to do something it would not normally do. It is directly related to the degree of dependence of one party on the other party.

Communication is the two way exchange of information, goals plans and expectations.

Stake is the importance of the outcomes of the interaction between the partners to at least one of the partners.

Age of the relationship refers to the length of time the relationship has existed.

All of the above are postulated as impacting the continuity of the relationship.

Trust is postulated to be dependent upon the following variables:

Reputation is the markets view of the partnering behavior of a firm.

Support is the resources a manufacturer devotes to enhancing the efforts of the partners.

Goal congruence is the degree to which the partners share goals.

Cultural similarity refers to geographic and cultural distance between partners' values and methods.

Figure 4 describes how the above variables combine to form the main constructs of the model. Despite some measurement
problems the results of an empirical test of the model found, "the data largely in accord with the proposed model." Trust was found to be of particular importance in maintaining stable dyads.

Heide and John [9] draw upon dependence theory [23, 23] and the transaction cost work of Williamson [17, 24, 25] to create a model that argues that transaction specific assets create partner dependence. Dependence theory suggests specific responses to partner dependence. The major relationships of the model are presented in Figure 5. Heide and John suggest that small channel members protect themselves from exploitation by their manufacturer partner by making offsetting investments in customer relationships that balance their dependency upon the manufacturer. The key constructs of their model which are presented below have been set into a broader perspective than defined in their paper:

Specific investments in manufacturer relationship are those investment made by the channel member to maintain the relationship with manufacturer.

Offsetting investments are those investments that a channel member makes to develop close bonds with it customers. These investments are intended to create switching cost for the manufacturer.

Potential replacement of manufacturer is the opportunity to replace the income from selling the manufacturer's products. It is a measure of the channel members dependence upon the manufacturer.

Performance is a negatively scaled measure and is the ratio of selling costs for the product and the income from sales of the product line.

Other variables such as the number of manufacturer lines carried, concentration of exchange (fraction of sales from largest manufacturer) and market and product factors were included in the test of the model.

The model was tested using manufacturers agents as the subject population. The results provided support for the basic model. This model is much more narrow in scope than the two previous models but it does focus attention on the issue of investments in relationships.

Overall, each of the channel relationship models have some degree of similarity in that they have similar constructs although these constructs are operationalized in different ways. Nevertheless all of these models are exciting steps towards a better understanding of the variables that need to be managed in channel relationships.
Buyer and Seller Models of Relationships

Dwyer, Schurr and Oh [21], Wilson and Mummulaneni [26, 27], Mummulaneni and Wilson [28] and Frazier, Spekman and O'Neal [29] have developed models of buyer and seller relationships. These models draw upon similar theoretical concepts as the models reviewed earlier in this paper. A major difference is that the Dwyer, Schurr and Oh and the Wilson and Mummulaneni models suggest the process by which relationships develop. In the next section of the paper these models are reviewed as background to a synthesis of the state of our progress in modeling the buyer and seller relationship process.

The Dwyer et al. model is described in Figure 6. Again there is similarity of the constructs with the earlier models. The relationship develops through five general phases within each several subprocesses operate. The subprocesses in this model are broadly defined but are not specified as constructs that can be operationalized and measured. This model is akin to the IMP Group model in that the main relationships are more loosely defined than the other models discussed in this paper.

The first stage is awareness and the unilateral evaluation of the value of potential exchange partners. In the second stages the attraction, communication and bargaining and power and justice subprocesses operate. Attraction is seen as, "the degree to which buyer and seller achieve—in their interaction with each other—a reward-cost outcome in excess of some minimum level (CL_{alt})." Dwyer et al. seemed to be unaware of the constructs developed by Anderson and Narus [6, 7] and Ford, Hakansson and Mattsson [4] as they would help structure their model.

Communication and bargaining are the processes by which the obligations, benefits and burdens are shared between the buyer and seller. Power and justice is an attempt to relate the use of power by one party is seen as just and hence in their joint interests or unjust an hence a selfish move that may lead to the dissolving of the relationship.

In the next phase norm development creates a set of ground rules that will guide future relationship development. Expectations of behavior that will guide the relationship develop during this phase. Trust is seen an important concept by Dwyer et al.

In phase four, commitment, shared values and governance structures develop that will support joint investment in the relationship. Commitment is seen as having three measurable dimensions:
Inputs involves the exchange of communication, economic and possibly emotional resources.

Durability relates to the length of the relationship which is similar to the length of time for the relationship in the Anderson and Weitz model.

Consistency refers to a process that is predictable as to how resources will be input to maintain the relationship.

The final stage is dissolution during which the relationship is terminated. This phase is not developed and will not be consider in this paper.

The Dwyer et al. model introduces the development of relationships through several stages which is an important step forward. The Wilson and Mummalaneni model [27] evolves from their earlier model [26] by more fully developing the concept of both structural and social bonding between buyers and sellers. Their model is described in Figure 6.

This model is grounded in social exchange theory as is the Anderson and Narus model. In addition, Wilson and Mummalaneni draw upon the work of Johnson [30, 31], McCall [32] and Rusbult [33, 34] in social relationships and Wilson [35, 36] process models of dyadic interactions between buyers and sellers.

The constructs of this model have strong similarities to previous models and are described below:

Commitment is determined by multiple factors and can be viewed as the dedication to the continuation of a relationship. It can be measured as the behavioral intention regarding continued participation in the relationship and the inverse probability of leaving the relationship.

Satisfaction is seen conceptually as the net of rewards minus cost of the relationship. Rewards and cost are both measured in terms of economic and social exchange. In a broad sense, satisfaction is the degree of positive affect associated with a relationship and involves the positivity of feelings toward the relationship as well as the partner and the closeness of this relationship to the "ideal" one.

CLalt is a measure of the best alternative relationship other than the current one in which the firm is involved. It can be measured using a multi-attribute model where CLalt is the difference in performance between the incumbent supplier and the best alternative over the attribute set.

Social bonds measure the strength of a personal relationship between the buyer and seller and may range from a business
relationship to a close personal relationship. A personal relationship is distinguished from a business role relationship by the social bonds which eliminate the substitutability of individuals in a relationship. Also, a personal relationship is characterized by a greater degree of self-disclosure, concern for the welfare of the "other" and liking for the other person. The various resources (material as well as immaterial) that are "put into" and tied up with a particular relationship.

Structural bonds are the multiplicity of economic and social factors that develop during a relationship that tie the partners together. Structural bonds involve irretrievable investment, social pressures to maintain the relationship, ease of dissolving the relationship and contractual barriers to ending the relationship. Each of these variables can be further specified and measured.

The social bonding model has been tested and provided encouraging results [28]. Commitment is greater for strong social relationships than for pure business relationships. The model as described in Figure 8 received strong support from the data.

The final model to be reviewed has been developed by Fraser, Spekman and O'Neal to describe the development of just-in-time (JIT) as a special form of long term relationship. Drawing upon theory from channel research, transaction cost analysis, social exchange and inter-organizational exchange they suggest a four stage model (interest, initiation-rejection, implementation and review) to describe the managerial process for making a JIT decision and the internal and external factors that influences the decision process. There model is managerial in scope and is more focussed on the process of making the decision. Although the model is not tested and the constructs are not operationalized it does address a special case of long term relationships and is an interesting model.

TOWARDS A MODEL OF BUYER AND SELLER RELATIONSHIPS

It is obvious from the models described above that there are a number of approaches to describing buyer and seller relationships. The good news is that many talented people are addressing the problem while the bad news is that they do not share common construct definitions so that there is no way to build directly upon the work of others. The relational paradigm is new and hopefully we will begin to move towards some agreement on the basic constructs of interest. Although the authors use the same words to label a construct, how it is defined and operationalized varies by researcher. There is a trade-off between the freedom of the
researcher to choose how (s)he will do the research and the need to able to build upon the work of others.

Table 1 is a summary of the constructs used in the models reviewed in this paper. In creating this table we have taken some liberties in interpreting constructs so as to keep the table to a workable length. In many cases some of the constructs are discussed in the text of the paper but do not appear in the model and as such they are not listed in the table. What becomes apparent is the number of constructs that are shared in the different models and at the same time the number of constructs that are not shared is large. It seems we need to begin to refine our models of buyer-seller relationships to move towards a common view of the process. Although the field is new there is a discouraging lack of cross-referencing of work and building upon each others' research. Researchers on each side of the Atlantic ocean seem to ignore the work from the other side of the ocean.

The work of the IMP group has provided a solid beginning for model building in buyer-seller relationship development. European business market relationships reflected economic conditions that are only now beginning to energize North American buyer-seller relationships. Buyers are becoming pro-active in seeking new types of relationships from their suppliers which is accelerating the push for research on long term relationships. The work reviewed in this paper is an excellent foundation for further theory development in buyer and seller relationships.

The next step is to develop a contingency model of buyer and seller relationships that draws upon the work reviewed in this paper. Such a model should recognize the range of relationships from pure market transactions to long term relationships marked by close personal relations between the buyers and sellers. The development of such a model is beyond the scope of this paper but the work reviewed in the paper is a solid foundation on which to build a contingency model. There are many well developed concepts and constructs that could serve as building blocks in such a model.

In summary, we are making good progress in beginning to understand how buyer-seller relationships develop into long term relationships. We may all benefit from moving towards clarification of the key constructs and a general definition of these constructs to let us build on each others work. There are exciting and challenging opportunities for research in this area as it will become a more critical management decision area for firms competing in the global business environment. The pace of research will increase and we need begin to build a common vision to guide our research.
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Table 1: Constructs and Sources

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**LEGEND**

- IMP: IMP Group
- AN: Anderson and Narue
- AM: Anderson and Weitz
- DVO: Dwyer, Schurr and Oh
- HJ: Heide and John
- WM and: Wilson and Mummelani
- MW: Mummelani and Wilson
- FSO: Fraser, Spakman and O'Neal
Source: Turnbull and Valla [2]

Figure 1: The Nature and Scope of Supplier-Customer Interaction
Source: Anderson and Narus [6]

Figure 2: Distributor's Perspective of the Working Relationship
Source: Anderson and Narus [7]

Figure 3: A Model of Manufacturer and Distributor Working Partnerships
Source: Anderson and Weitz [8]

Figure 4: Hypothesized Relationships
Source: Heide and John [9]

Figure 5: Major Relationships in Model
1. Unilateral considerations of potential exchange partners.

2. Dyadic interaction occurs. A gradual increase in interdependence reflects bilateral testing & probing. Termination of the fragile association is simple.

3. A successful power source exercise marks the beginning of Expansion. Mutual satisfaction with customized role performance supports deepening interdependence. Additional gratifications are sought from the current exchange partner, rather than from an alternative partner.

4. Contractual mechanisms and/or shared value systems ensure sustained interdependence. Mutual inputs are significant & consistent. Partners resolve conflict & adapt.

Source: Dwyer, Schurr and Oh [21]

Figure 6: The Relationship Development Process
Figure 7: A Bonding Model of Long Term Relationships
Source: Mummalaneni and Wilson [28]

Figure 8: Hypothesized Effects of Close Personal Relationships