

Interdependence and Trust in Business Relationships Development: the Differences of Lithuanian Professional Services Providers' and Clients' Approaches

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crossref <http://dx.doi.org/10.5755/j01.ee.24.2.3573>

Professional service providers and clients are related by mutual interdependence and have to undertake obligations to nurture trust based relationship. Business relationship as interdependence and trust are dynamic and fluctuate depending on business situations. Theory of interdependence and trust transformation of business relationship transformation analysis are presented in the article. Lithuanian professional services providers' companies and clients' empirical study, which aim is to compare these two respondent groups attitude to interdependence and trust, outcome is presented. Professional service providers and clients prevailing attitude in business relationship is interdependence or dependence. According to service providers, in relationship with clients they indicate interdependence and dependence, clients indicate more dependence. Professional service providers' dependence on clients more often gains market and economical dimensions; clients' dependence on providers is gaining legal and knowledge dimensions. Both groups respondents' evaluation is similar, in business relationship engaging and aligning stages maintains cognition-based trust, and differs in assessing trust type in deepening stage: professional service providers in this stage indicate knowledge-based trust; clients indicate not only competence-based but also process trust. Knowledge determines professional service provider and client trust; as interdependence becomes dependence dealing, it should help to accept suitable management decisions and set up measures, enabling effective cooperation setting.

Keywords: *interdependence, dependence, trust, business relationships, professional services, providers, clients*

Introduction

Nowadays businesses and their clients operate in a continually changing environment and must take the high level of uncertainty and risk (Cooper, Robson, 2006). In such context the interdependence as well as trust becomes inevitably important and helps to cope with uncertainty. The interdependence assumes different forms, i.e. resources, ideas, goals; it can be realized by power and control (Gulati & Sytch, 2007). Trust building is one of the most important goals of the interaction between business actors (Mandjak *et al.*, 2011). Trust enhances the cooperation, saves transaction cost, improves capability, increases strategic flexibility (Luo, 2002), reduces uncertainty about the future (Hernandez & Santos, 2010), decreases conflict between firms, promotes diversity and better relations among different groups, makes easier to work in a globalized economy (Uslaner, 2007), influences business policies of products, sales, prices, communication, also every kind of negotiations (Dobrev, 2009). All the mentioned above is particularly relevant for professional service firms, whose relationships with clients represent the core of their business (Sieg *et al.*, 2002). Professional services tend to develop unique specialties, characteristics, and styles that evolve from the professionals, the clients they serve, and the environment in which they operate (Simon & Welsh, 2009). Professionals must be able to create and sustain relationships, adapt for new business and sell specific services, as well as deliver both process and outcome quality to their clients (Reid, 2008). Thus interdependence and trust are elementary qualities in

relationships between provider and client (Laaksonen *et al.*, 2008).

Service providers' and clients' relationship study is based on a variety of aspects. Polese *et al.*, (2011) study service culture and relationship valorisation relation, (Damkuviene & Balciunas, 2010) analyse relationship influence on endeavour and outcome, which are input to maintain relationship. Davis (2009) reflect that interactions between provider and client offer greater prospects for sustaining relationship value than by following procedures, Zvireliene *et al.*, (2009) analyse customer retention through supplier-organization-customer relationships, Radziszewska-Zielina (2010) illustrates the link between the level of partnering relations and success and etc. Professional service providers' and clients' survey, presented in the article, distinguishes for ambivalent novelty. Firstly, presented transformation is an evidence of business mutual relationship trust; secondly, there was surveyed attitude of both, business professionals' service providers' and clients'. Because interdependence and trust relate two business subjects, a research scientific problem is defined as follows: what is the difference between providers' of professional services and clients' attitude towards interdependence and trust business relationship development. The aim of the article – to reveal professional service providers' and clients' attitude towards interdependence and trust transformation in business relationship development differences based on theoretical analysis and empirical study of Lithuanian service market basis.

The object of this research is the factors of interdependence and trust which are realized during the

development of professional services provider's and client's business relationships.

The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To reveal the possible forms and intensity level of business partners' interdependence.
2. To identify the variety of trust types during business relationships development;
3. To compare the factors of interdependence and trust identified by professional services providers and clients in different stages of business relationships.

Used research methods are comparative analysis of scientific literature, focus group and survey.

The paper is organized as follows. The interdependence and trust are discussed in the first part of the paper, the research design is described in the second part, and the research results are discussed in the third. Finally, the conclusions are presented.

Forms and intensity of interdependence between business partners

Organizations are open systems: they are self-providers of resources from outside, cooperate with different business units, in order to produce and offer attractive product for the market. This is reasoning organizations' interdependence. There are few forms of interdependency of actors identified by researchers. Todeva (2006, p. 27) notes that business relationships have three distinctive interdependence links – resource, activity and actor's interdependence. *Resource interdependence* is represented by the accumulated resources that are available for business operations and the need for input resources; *activity interdependence* occurs when businesses perform the joint operations and they request mutual coordinated behaviour; *actor's interdependence* means the reciprocal dependency between two interacting partners. Ma and Dube (2011) focus their attention on process interdependency and outcome interdependency which are based on actors' behaviour. In *process interdependency* one actor's behaviour influences the behaviour of other actor's; in *outcome interdependency* the effect of each actor's behaviour on outcome depends on the other actor's behaviour. According to Sambasivan *et al.*, (2011) interdependency in business relationships can be defined by the task interdependence, goal interdependence and reward interdependence. *Task interdependence* refers to the degree which the behaviour of someone affects the performance of others; *goal interdependence* illustrates how the goal execution of an organization is affected by the goal achievement of others; *reward interdependence* takes place when the success and organizational performance of the partners are dependent on each other. Thereby in professional service it is possible to trace all mentioned interdependence forms. Supplier and client, reaching their goals interdependence, generalize resource interdependence, in process of service interdependence each of the parties perform their task interdependence, the following issues are vitally important for the outcome and both parties reward and needs fulfilment.

Partners' interdependence of business relationship may differentiate not only its form but intensity also. Gelderman (2003, p. 119) distinguished between

interdependency asymmetry (relative power) and total interdependence (total power). *Interdependency asymmetry* is the difference between two partner's levels of dependence. In business relationships which are based on dependency the stronger actor exploits the weaker actors. That destructs the long-term business relationships and leads to unproductive partnerships. According to Svensson (2004) the interdependence could be technical, time, knowledge, social, economical/juridical, market and information technology. *Total interdependence* is associated with collaborative long-term relationships as a result of mutual investments. As mentioned Huo *et al.*, (2011), interdependence between companies considerably reduced opportunistic behaviour due to interrelated interests. *In summarising we can say that the trust is formed by interdependence and the optimal level of trust is the appropriate match between trust and interdependence.*

Trust changes in business relationships development

Trust is a construct that can be applied to individuals, groups of individuals, companies, industry groups, political entities, and supply chains (Ghosh & Fedorowicz, 2008). It has been defined in one of the two possible ways: 1) as a confident belief or expectation (i.e. a trusting belief), 2) as a willingness or intention to depend on the trustee (i.e. a trusting intention) (Dicky *et al.*, 2007). *Trusting beliefs* base on competence, dependability/reliability (Svensson, 2004), congruence, ability (Sitkin & Roth, 1993), ability and integrity (Mayer *et al.*, 1995); competence, judgement, and openness (Mishra, 1996); predictability (Coleman, 1990); benevolence (Mayer *et al.*, 1995; Zhao *et al.*, 2010); congruence, consistency, capability (Hacker *et al.*, 2001). By contrast, *trusting intention* involves a willingness to become vulnerable to the others (Castaldo, 2003) or intention to depend on the others based on the expectation that the others will not exploit this vulnerability (Mayer *et al.*, 1995) and will be friendly as well as partner orientated (Svensson, 2004).

Interpersonal and inter-organizational trust is related but has different constructs (Zaheer & Haris, 2006). When trust definitions are transferred to interpersonal relations in business contexts, it is important to understand that trust is 1) an aspect of social interaction and involves two or more people, groups, or organizations which operate interdependently, 2) always associated with personal vulnerability that means trust is relevant only in situations characterized by uncertainty; 3) cannot be comprehensively explained just on the calculative behaviour; trust is equally based on intuition and emotions (Nippa & Grigoleit, 2009). Thereby it is logical to say it is the people and not organizations that trust each other because the exchanges among businesses are the exchanges among individuals or their groups. However organizations develop routines, processes and culture, which unify the behaviour of their employees and the responses to external contacts. This means that organizational trust can be viewed as a function of managerial philosophy and its manifestations, the organizational actions and structure; also experiences of reciprocity affected by organization context (Creed &

Miles, 1995, p. 20). As Starnes *et al.*, (2010) note, trust includes not only the individuals but also the nature of outcomes and the consequences of those outcomes. This is exceptionally important in a domain of professional services.

Due to different business situations many types of trust may be identified (Table 1).

Table 1

Trust types

Trust type	Descriptions	Author (-s)
Calculative trust	is an on-going, market-oriented, economic calculation for assessing the benefits and costs of creating and sustaining the relationships;	Paul & McDaniel, 2004;
	is an assessment of a partner's likely cooperation, based on the partner's qualities and social constraints;	Ghosh & Fedorovizc, 2008
Identificati on-based trust	is grounded on deep knowledge of the partner's desires and intentions; that leads both parties to act independently, knowing their interests will be met in the long run;	Hernandez & Santos, 2010
Cognition-based trust	connects with rational view and is associated with competence, ability, responsibility, integrity, credibility, reliability, and dependability;	Holste & Fields, 2010; Huotari & Iivonen, 2004, p.8
Affect-based trust	has emotional connotations and is grounded on mutual care and concern between actors, altruism, commitment, mutual respect;	
Benevolence trust	means the confidence that partner will behave with goodwill and with fair exchange. The benevolence is associated with honest, open communication, delegating decisions, sharing control, etc.	Dyer & Chu, 2000;
Institution-based trust (system trust)	is developed by reference to the institutional arrangements that exist in a given system and limit the opportunistic behaviour. Traditions, professions, certifications, licences, brand names, or memberships in certain associations are the sources of institutional-based trust;	Sydow, 1998 Babilute-Juceviciene <i>et al.</i> , 2012
Process-based trust	derived from a social system of mutual obligations where all partner have clear expectations of the other's behaviour. This type of trust seems emerge particularly in the case of professional services with their credence qualities;	Sydow, 1998
Competence trust (also known as expert trust)	relates to actor skills, competencies, and expertise that allows to perform the tasks, and covers technical, operational, human and financial abilities	Paul & McDaniel, 2004; Heffernon, 2004; White, 2005;

Therefore, despite trust variety types, our point of view is to distinguish two inter-organization trust groups: 1) calculative trust, when members are involved in relationship, follow rational attitude towards benefit and the amount of consumption, and 2) non-calculative trust, when partners trust is based on psychological – emotional nature and follows human values and norms.

Trust is critical for relationship between professional services provider and client (Duhan & Sandvik, 2009). It stimulates both parties to cooperate for successful achievement of their goals and objectives (Brinkkemper & Jansen, 2012, p 192). Trust is seen as an outcome of a

process; in time it may grow or diminish, can become stronger and more resilient. In business relationships between professional services provider and client few stages can be identified: engaging, aligning, deepening and partnering (Dawson, 2005).

On *engaging* stage the service provider and client begin to explore the probable benefits of relationships. Parties involved in the relationship may have high expectations but also high reservations (Blomqvist, 2005). The client carefully screens provider's qualifications (Green, 2005) and reputation (Thakor & Kumar, 2000). The behaviour of services provider is similar to the client's behaviour. Thus trust is tied to formal attributes of services providers and clients; it is fragile.

On *aligning* stage both parties increase their mutual knowledge, learn as much as possible about each other and become able to predict each other's behaviour. The provider and client try to align their objectives, collaboration styles, business processes, culture (Dawson, 2005), but the relationships between them have still the some distance due to limited mutual experience and obligations.

On *deepening* stage the service provider and client realize the reciprocal relationships' usefulness and concentrate on its enlargement. Trusted clients are prepared to allocate more financial and other resources in collaboration (Weatherill, 2006). The services provider develops better knowledge of the client, gains varied experience, executes more different projects (Dawson, 2005), expects the client's commitment and loyalty; good awareness of offered services; willing to continue collaboration and using of provided services, the recommendation for others market actors, etc. Consequently the service provider calculates on positive economic and non-economic results (Gouthier & Schmid, 2003). Similar values and effective communication are important factors for trust development (Christopher *et al.*, 2002).

On *partnering* stage both parties involved in relationships know each other well which enables to see themselves as a single identity (Blomqvist, 2005). Partnering encompasses creating and sharing value, processes' integration, sharing of exclusive information, sometimes joint development of intellectual property (Dawson, 2005). Reached this stage the partners are one accustomed to another pattern of thinking and action (Caniëls & Romijn, 2005). However at this stage the risk which may destroy trust is possible.

Summarizing, it is stated that trust in business relationship develops gradually, although this process is not linear. Trust may be destroyed in any professional service provider' and client' relationship development stage and regenerated – service provider and client may trust each other while working cooperatively.

The interrelated connections between interdependence and trust in dynamic of business relationships are clarified in Figure 1.

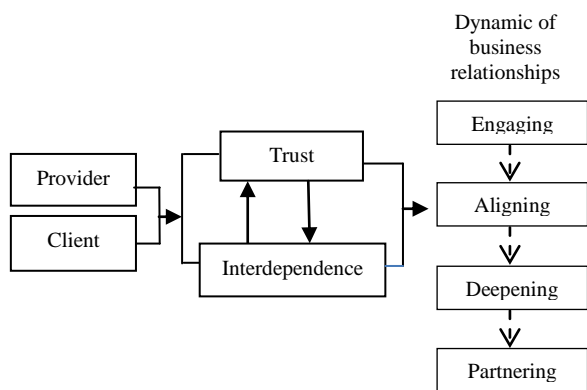


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Empirical research design

Empirical setting and sample profile. Empirical study consisted of two stages: during the first stage there were conducted discussions with representatives of professional service institutions and focus group, during the second stage clients' questionnaire survey was carried out. There were 12 out of 55 focus group discussion participants of professional service institutions. Focus group consisted of 4 members of service counselling (accounting, business, taxes, EU support receipt), 3 members of legal counselling and representing, 3 members of market research and 2 members of advertisement and PR institutions representatives. All focus group participants have a direct contact with clients' relationship management and have experience in this field from 3 to 5 years. Focus group discussion was moderated by the research organizers, duration was 1.5 h. It was recorded, and then transcribed.

There were 53 respondents in questionnaire survey. Respondents represented professional service institutions. Majority respondents (39 replies) use advertisement, legal counselling (35), accounting, EU support financing approval consultations (33), technical and IT programs installation consultations (32), work safety and audit (27) service.

Focus group protocol and survey's questionnaire. Focus group discussion questionnaire consists of 2 parts. First part focuses to find out service providers' and clients' interdependence form and presentation; second part strives to reveal significant professional service providers' and clients' trust dimensions, allowing identifying trust type and its development with clients. To validate this list of topics and help define specific questions for the protocol we had few discussions with academic colleagues whose research concentrate on business relationships development.

Questionnaire survey consists of 2 parts. First part consists of questions directed to clear out respondents' dependence on professional service providers. Replies to these questions were assessed by 5 point Likert scale, according to it the bigger score means the less clients dependence on supplier. Second part of the questionnaire questions focused on trust dimensions, which enable to identify key trust type in certain relationship development stage. In the questionnaire a cognition-based trust is

presented by 5, competence-based trust and benevolence trust – by 4 and process-based trust – by 3 points.

Research findings

Main results of focus group discussion. The first discussion part was based on findings of professional service providers' and clients' interdependence, moreover on ways of the expression and in what situations service providers feel higher interdependence on clients. All focus group discussion participants confirmed that interdependence of both parties exists. According to the replies of the respondents, business vitality depends on clients' attitude and cooperation skills. Table 2 provides indicators of service suppliers' and clients' interdependence.

Table 2

The basis of provider's and client's interdependence and its indicators

Basis of interdependence	Indicators	Frequency
Resources	Receiving information from client	8
	client institution staff involvement in service process	5
	receiving of material from client company	3
Process	problem identification and goals design	11
	Coordination of activities	9
	Coordination of accomplishments deadlines	7
Results	Problems solutions generalizations	8
	technical quality level	10
	warranties	4

The majority of discussion participants (10 of 12) claim, that in business relationships it is impossible to avoid mutual asymmetry of interdependence. Discussion participants denied a statement, that client depends more on supplier than vice versa. In their point of view, situations in business occur differently, that is in some cases clients' interdependence is higher, in other service providers. Table 3 illustrates discussions participants' replies to the question, „in which situations is observed service providers interdependence on clients“.

Table 3

Service providers' interdependence factors on clients

	Frequency
Negative/positive responses about service and its provider, influencing amount of orders	12
Clients payment disability/payment lag/ for the service	11
Information lack/misinterpretation/hiding	10
Unjustified requirements for service quality	9
Low client competence	8
Unreal service providing deadline requirements	7
Impossible implementation of service providing conditions	6

Generalizing this focus group discussion part, it is stated, that participants identified resource-based, process and outcomes of interdependence. The interdependence asymmetry in different situations gains market, economical, knowledge and time dimensions. The service providers'

interdependence, as well as its asymmetry, differs in accordance to service providers' service nature.

In the beginning of the second discussion part the question asked by moderators „what is common for each relationships between client and service provider stage”, was answered by the majority „it is complicated to answer“

- *Engaging stage* – in relationship with clients' common high time and finance input, i.e. search of clients' information and editing received information. (9 replies); offered service benefit for the client's business (5 replies); exclusive competence and experience providing offered service communication (5 replies);

- *Aligning stage* – having known the client and after deciding to develop relationship the provider begins look into the client's business (mentioned 8 times); finds out, if the client is interested in further cooperation (5 times); some cases tries to chain the client over a program of loyalty (4 times);

- *Deepening stage* – after increased relationship with the client, the provider consistently updates client's information (mentioned 7 times); along with business relationship develops social relationship (6 times); partially with the client collects information (6 times); service focuses not only to the client's needs, but also its served market needs (4 times).

- *Partnering stage*, in discussion participants view, cooperation has to be very close, indicating common marketing, in some cases – common intellectual possession. Unfortunately, such relationship with clients does not exist, on the other hand with some clients partnership lasts for decades. Discussion's participants commonly agreed and came to the conclusion, that time is a very important factor, however it is not the most and only indicator of relationship development engine.

With some client new business relationship develops to continuous cooperation, it depends on provider's trust to client. Table 4 illustrates discussion participants' ideas, which reflect factors which raise influence on trust in different relationship development stages.

Table 4

Providers trust factors to clients

Stage of relationships	Indicators	Frequency
Engaging	Clear client's use of service attempts/motives	7
	Client's awareness and reputation	6
	clarity of activity	5
	Client's payment ability	5
Aligning	Client's honesty and responsibility in cooperation	5
	timely provided information for the provider	5
	Client's competence	5
Deepening	Client's values	8
	Client's honesty and responsibility in cooperation	6
	goodwill and openness in cooperation	6
	Communication quality	6

However, focus group participants stated, that their representing companies do not maintain *partnership relationship* with clients, although, their view, in this stage of trust based on common client values, open

communication, goodwill etc., in generalizing *this discussion part*, it is possible to state, that in the process of business relationship it is tough to exclude separate stages. Relationship dynamic, their process depends not only on professional service provider, but also on clients' company business situation. In engaging and aligning relationship development stages, it is maintained *cognition-based trust*, in further stages – *knowledge-based trust*. Benevolence trust exists in business relationship.

Survey data analysis. 73.6 % of respondents pointed professional service providers' and clients' interdependence (see Table 5), 9.2 % think, that interdependence and dependence exist between provider and client. Relationship with new provider, otherwise than with regular client, reasons higher dependence (ranging 80 % and 59 %.)

More than half (52.8 %) of respondents stated that both parts had problems during cooperation. The following problems are most frequently mentioned: non-compliance of provider's terms (70 %), avoidance of provider to correct own mistakes (47 %), misunderstanding of problems faced by organization as well as specifics of organization's activity (46 %), disagreement in opinions of organization and provider of services rendered (43 %).

Table 5

Estimates of clients dependence on professional services provider

Dependence	Average	Std deviation
Time dependence		
The activity of our organization has to be coordinated (synchronized) with the terms of the activity of services providers	2.54	1.43
A service provider always follows his/her usual sequence, ways and terms of service rendering	2.74	1.35
Economical/juridical dependence		
Rendering terms, prices and the level of quality as well as forfeit are strictly defined in the contract of service rendering	1.74	1.06
Contract with providers and its maintenance	2.03	1.01
Providers keep confidentiality	2.26	1.18
The price of providers' services is reasoned and not changed though conditions in the market change	2.69	0.92
As conditions in the market have changed, providers fix new prices for services without informing our organization	3.82	1.86
Knowledge dependence		
Services rendered by professionals have to be individualised considering our needs	1.95	1.12
Providers possess necessary information and knowledge to provide appropriate services for our organization	2.08	1.69
Providers analyse peculiarities of the services ordered by our organization (ways of its rendering, terms, etc.) as well as our anticipated result	2.31	1.22
Providers involve us into the process of service rendering to achieve qualitative rendering of services	2.38	1.27
Providers always get deep and understand our problems and their reasons	2.77	1.37
Market dependence		
Services rendered by providers influence our position in the market	2.32	1.16
Services providers give us necessary information on a changed situation in rendering a service on time (terms, prices, etc.)	2.38	1.2

Table 5 shows the lowest estimation of economical and legal knowledge dependence of companies' features. Factors of client's trust on professional service providers in business relationship development are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Factors of clients trust

Stage of relationships	Indicators	Frequency
Engaging	Provider's reputation	64,2
	Expertise field	62,3
	Activity clarity	58,5
	Stand on morale norms	54,7
Aligning	Professional service providers promises fulfilment	60,4
	Providers reputation	58,5
	Complying with clients' needs	56,6
	Responsibility for mistakes and deadlines violation	56,6
	Stand on morale norms	56,6
Deepening	Service provider's open communication	73,6
	Executives' interest, if service meets clients' needs	66,0
	Flexibility to the new clients' needs	59,1
	Respectful conduct with client	58,5
Partnering	Open communication	49,1
	Responsibility	43,4
	Considerable attention to clients' expectations fulfilment	43,4

Summarizing it is stated, that trust is changeable. Making contacts maintains cognition based trust, further relationship development stages, and obvious competence-based and process trust. Benevolence trust consists of more of shadowing in relationship between professional service providers and clients.

Conclusions

In business relationships professional service providers and clients are interdepend; therefore vital necessity is to trust each other. Interdependence occurs in joint activity, integrating resources, service providers and client company's staff performing tasks, etc. Solid business partners' cooperation is the necessity in modern market. But in relationship it is complicated to avoid

interdependence asymmetry, gaining time, competence, economical/legal, market and other forms and differ in relationship development. Dependence asymmetry leads to unproductive relationship. Business power balance maintains trust, which is defined differently, is related, more often, with trusting beliefs and trusting intentions. As business relationships trust is dynamic – its changes depending on context, therefore different trust types are possible.

Empirical study outcome of the existing professional service providers companies of Lithuania, show more differences than similarities of interdependence and trust. Similarity is that, attitudes coincide between professional service providers and clients. In early relationship development stages – engaging and aligning – there is maintained cognition-based trust. Both respondents group opinions coincide in benevolence trust – it is requested, however it does not play a meaningful role. Differences occur when estimating, changing type maintains deepening stage. Professional service providers in this stage point to prevailing *knowledge-based* trust, *clients* indicate *competence-based and process trust significance*.

Professional service providers and clients attitudes differences imply assessing interdependence and dependence. Providers in business relationship notice interdependence and its asymmetry – dependence, clients indicate dependence (not interdependence). Dependence dimensions differ too: professional service providers' dependence on clients more often gains market and economical dimensions; clients' dependence on providers gains legal and knowledge dimensions.

Knowledge determining professional service provider and client trust and factors reflecting dependence should help business relationship related parties in accepting fair managing solutions and hammering means, which ensure effective cooperation environment.

The research maintains some restrictions. Professional service group is very heterogeneous, therefore separate service providers and clients' interdependence and trust research outcome might be more precise. The number of questionnaire study respondents is not sufficient; therefore outcome does not reflect entire clients' estimation.

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Abipusė priklausomybė ir pasitikėjimas plėtojantis verslo santykiams: Lietuvos profesionalių paslaugų teikėjų ir klientų požiūrių skirtumai

Santrauka

Paslaugų teikėjo ir kliento santykiai, kaip tyrimo objektas, nėra naujas. Jie nagrinėjami įvairiais aspektais. Pavyzdžiui, Polese ir kt. (2011) nagrinėja paslaugų kultūros ir santykių valorizacijos ryšį, Damkuviene ir Balčiūnas (2010) analizuoja pastangų, santykiams palaikyti, įtaką santykių rezultatams, Davis (2009) atskleidžia, kad teikėjo ir kliento sąveika turi didesnę įtaką tvariems santykiams, nei laikymasis nustatytų procedūrų, Žvirelienė ir kt. (2009) nagrinėja vartotojų išlaikymą per teikėjo - organizacijos - vartotojo santykių prizmę, Radziszewska-Zielina (2010) atskleidžia partnerystės santykių lygio ir sėkmės ryšį ir t. t. Straipsnyje pristatomo tyrimo naujumas pasireiškia dviem aspektais: 1) nagrinėja abipusės priklausomybės ir pasitikėjimo dinamiką verslo santykių raidos metu; 2) tiria ne vien kliento o abiejų, verslo santykiams susietų pusių, profesionalių paslaugų teikėjo ir kliento požiūrius. Kadangi abipusė priklausomybė ir pasitikėjimas susieja du verslo subjektus, tai tyrimo mokslinę problemą formuluojame taip: *ar arba kuo* skiriasi profesionalių paslaugų teikėjų ir klientų požiūriai į abipusės priklausomybės ir pasitikėjimo kaitą, plėtojantis verslo santykiams. *Straipsnio tikslas* – išryškinti profesionalių paslaugų teikėjų ir klientų požiūrį į abipusės priklausomybės ir pasitikėjimo kaitą verslo santykių raidoje. Tikslui pasiekti suformuluoti šie uždaviniai: 1) atskleisti galimas abipusės priklausomybės formas ir intensyvumo lygį; 2) identifikuoti pasitikėjimo tipų įvairovę verslo santykių metu; 3) palyginti abipusės priklausomybės ir pasitikėjimo veiksmus, atsirandančius skirtingu verslo santykių plėtros metu. Uždaviniams įgyvendinti buvo taikyti mokslinės literatūros analizės, *focus* grupės ir anketinės apklausos metodai.

Pirmoji straipsnio dalis skirta teorinės medžiagos analizei apie abipusę priklausomybę ir pasitikėjimą. Mokslinės literatūros analizė leidžia teigti, kad abipusė priklausomybė gali būti *visiška* (plg. angl. *Total*), kai stipresnis subjektas „spaudžia“ silpnesnį ir dėlto santykiai gali tapti neproduktyvūs ir *sąlyginė* (plg. angl. *Relative*), kai pasireiškia verslo subjektų galios vienas kitam lygio skirtumai (Gelderman, 2003). Dėl šios priežasties, verslo subjektai tam tikrose srityse tampa priklausomi vienas nuo kito. Abipusė priklausomybė skatina ilgalaikių bendradarbiavimo santykių tobulinimą ir sumažina verslo subjektų oportunistinę elgseną (Huo ir kt. 2011). Abipusė priklausomybė gali pasireikšti įvairiomis formomis: išteklių, veiklos, veikėjų (Todeva, 2006), proceso ir rezultato (Ma Dubé, 2011), užduočių, tikslų ir atlygio (Sambasivan ir kt., 2011). Priklausomybė gali būti techninė, laiko, žinių, socialinė, ekonominė/teisinė (Svensson, 2004). Abipusė priklausomybė skatina verslo subjektų pasitikėjimą vienas kitu. Iš pasitikėjimo apibrėžčių įvairovės galima išskirti du bendrus komponentus: 1) vieno subjekto lūkesčius arba įsitikinimus kito subjekto atžvilgiu ir 2) vieno subjekto pasirengimą/ketinimus priklausyti nuo kito subjekto. Pasirengimas/ketinimai grindžiami tikėjimu, todėl ši priklausomybė nepavers ketinusojo pažeidžiamu (Dicky ir kt., 2007). Lūkesčiai gali būti susiję su kompetencija, patikimumu (Svensson, 2004), kongruencija, gebėjimais, atvirumu (Mishra, 1996), geranoriškumu (Mayer ir kt., 1995). Ketinimai paklusti/priklausyti, susiję su draugiškumu, orientacija į partnerį (Svensson, 2004). Pasitikėjimas siejamas ne tik su individualiais, bet ir su rezultatu bei jo pasekmėmis (Starnes ir kt., 2010). Skirtingos verslo situacijos lemia pasitikėjimo tipų įvairovę: išskaičiavimu grįsta pasitikėjimą (Paul McDaniel, 2004; Kim, Prabhakar, 2004); identifikavimu grįsta pasitikėjimą (Hernandez, Santos, 2010), pažinimu ir poveikiu grįsta pasitikėjimą (Holste, Fields, 2010; Huutori, Iivonen, 2004), geranoriškumo pasitikėjimą (Dyer, Chu, 2000); institucinį pasitikėjimą (Sydow, 1998; Babiliūtė-Jucevičienė ir kt., 2012); proceso metu besiformuojantį pasitikėjimą (Sydow, 1998.); kompetencija grįsta pasitikėjimą (dar vadinamą ir eksperto pasitikėjimu) (Paul, McDaniel, 2004; Heffernon, 2004; White, 2005).

Antroje straipsnio dalyje pateikiamas empirinio tyrimo dizainas: paaiškinama tyrimo logika, pristatomos respondentų grupių imtys, respondentų charakteristikos, aptariamas *focus* grupės protokolas ir anketos klausimynas.

Trečioje straipsnio dalyje pateikiami tyrimo rezultatai. *Focus* grupės, kurią sudarė profesionalių paslaugų įmonių atstovai, diskusijos rezultatai rodo, kad esama abipusės profesionalių paslaugų teikėjo ir kliento priklausomybės: teikiant paslaugą juos sieja ištekliai, procesas ir rezultatai. Diskusijos dalyviai neigė, kad klientas visada daugiau priklauso nuo teikėjo, nei teikėjas nuo kliento. Jų nuomone, situacijos versle susiklosto įvairiai, todėl vienais atvejais daugiau priklausomi klientai, kitais – teikėjai. Respondentų nuomone, jų atstovaujama įmonių priklausomybė nuo kliento skirtingose situacijose igauna rinkos (atsiliepiamai apie teikėją), peraugančios į ekonominę (klientų skaičius, veikiamas teigiamų/neigiamų atsiliepimų), žinių (įvardytos problemos *aprupinimas* kliento žiniomis) ir laiko (nerealūs paslaugos atlikimo terminai) dimensijas. Abipusė teikėjų ir klientų priklausomybė, kaip ir jos asimetrija, priklauso nuo profesionalių paslaugų pobūdžio. Išanalizavus *focus* grupės diskusijos rezultatus galima teigti, kad verslo santykių raidos metu yra sudėtinga išskirti atskirus etapus. Santykiai dinamiški, jų raida priklauso ne tik nuo profesionalių paslaugų teikėjų, bet ir nuo klientų įmonių verslo situacijos. Ankstyvuosiuose, kitaip tariant *pritraukimo* (plg. angl. *Engaging*) ir *prisijungimo* (plg. angl. *Aligning*) santykių plėtojimo etapuose, vyrauja pažinimu, o vėlesniuose – žiniomis grįstas pasitikėjimas. Verslo santykiuose neišvengiamai išryškėja ir geranoriškumo pasitikėjimas.

Apklausos rezultatai rodo aiškiai vyraujančią klientų priklausomybę nuo teikėjų. Tai liudija ir problemos, su kuriomis susiduria profesionalių paslaugų klientai, t. y. paslaugų teikimo terminų nesilaikymas, vengimas ištaisyti padarytas klaidas, kliento problemų ir jo veiklos nesupratimas ir kt. Santykiai su nauju teikėju, kitaip nei su nuolatinio, didina kliento priklausomybę nuo teikėjo. Iš keturių vertintų kliento priklausomybės nuo profesionalių paslaugų teikėjo grupių, mažiausiai (tai reiškia didžiausią priklausomybę) įvertinti ekonominės/teisinės priklausomybės teiginiai (teikėjo paslaugų teikimo terminai, kainos ir kokybės lygis, netesybos nustatytos sutartyje – 1,74 balo iš 5 galimų; teikėjai laikosi sutarties su kliento įmone sąlygų – 2,03 balo) ir žinių priklausomybės teiginiai (profesionalų paslaugos turi būti individualizuotos, atsižvelgiant į kliento poreikius – 1,95 balo; teikėjai turi reikalingą informaciją ir žinias, kad suteiktų tinkamas paslaugas kliento įmonei – 2,08 balo). Klientų nuomone, verslo santykių *pritraukimo* etape pasitikėjimą teikėjo įmone lemia jo reputacija, ekspertizės sritis, veiklos skaidrumas. *Prisijungimo* etape, be teikėjo reputacijos, pasitikėjimui įtaką turi pažadų laikymasis, derinimasis prie kliento poreikių, atsakomybė už klaidas. Santykių *įtvirtinimo* etape (plg. angl. *Deepening*), pasitikėjimą teikėjo įmone lemia atvira komunikacija, lankstumas, pagarbus elgesys su klientu. Apklausoje apie partnerystės santykius dalyvaujančių respondentų nuomone, jų įmonės ryšių su profesionaliais paslaugų teikėjais neturi, bet šiame etape pasitikėjimui būtų svarbi atvira komunikacija, atsakingumas, dėmesys klientų lūkesčiams.

Lietuvoje veikiančių profesionalių paslaugų įmonių ir klientų empirinio tyrimo rezultatai rodo daugiau skirtumų, nei panašumų tarp požiūrių į abipusę priklausomybę ir pasitikėjimą. Panašumas yra tas, kad sutampa ir profesionalių paslaugų teikėjų, ir klientų požiūriai į tai, jog ankstyvuosiuose santykių tobulinimo etapuose, vyrauja pažinimu grįstas pasitikėjimas. Abiejų tiriamųjų grupių nuomonės sutampa ir dėl geranoriškumo pasitikėjimo: reikšmingesnio vaidmens teikiant profesionalias paslaugas jis neatlieka. Skirtumai atsiranda vertinant, koks pasitikėjimo tipas vyrauja santykių įtvirtinimo metu. Profesionalių paslaugų teikėjai šiame etape nurodo vyraujančią, žiniomis grįstą pasitikėjimą. Klientai akcentuoja kompetencija grįstą procese besiformuojantį pasitikėjimą. Profesionalių paslaugų teikėjų ir klientų požiūrių skirtumai pasireiškia vertinant abipusę priklausomybę. Teikėjai, verslo santykiuose įžvelgia ir abipusę priklausomybę, ir jos asimetriją, t. y. klientai akcentuoja tik priklausomybę. Skiriasi ir priklausomybės dimensijos: profesionalių paslaugų teikėjų priklausomybė nuo klientų dažniau igauna rinkos ir ekonominę/teisinę, klientų priklausomybės nuo teikėjų – ekonominę/teisinę ir žinių dimensijas.

Raktažodžiai: *abipusė priklausomybė, priklausomybė, pasitikėjimas, verslo santykiai, profesionalios paslaugos, teikėjai, klientai.*

The article has been reviewed.

Received in February, 2013; accepted in April, 2013.