

Chapter 11

A Journey Through Possible Views of Relational Logic

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Abstract This chapter discusses how the relational logic is one of the most interesting and profitable management paradigms to understand firms' behaviour and to foster value co-creation processes.

The relational view and the resulting relational inter-subjective dynamics are critical success factors for corporate governance capable to mobilise different involved actors' resources. However, the importance of a system perspective of relational dynamics is only recently discussed in the current doctrinal debate. Therefore, our goal is to contribute in bridging this gap by reinterpreting, in a system key, the issue of relations. Methodologically, the authors have carried out a review taking a system vision, in order to conceptualize an original interpretative model. The interpretative model that we call "Enterprise Relational Vision" (ERV) is based on the following assumptions (pillars): Relationality and autopoiesis, Dissemination and definition, Sense and cohesion, Training and decision formulation, Co-creation and regeneration, Resources and competitiveness, Leadership and viability.

Keywords Relational logic • System view • Stakeholders • Value creation

11.1 Introduction

During the 1990s of the last century, a multidisciplinary group of researchers belonging to the University of Salerno and adhering to system thinking promoted the development of an "observational perspective" aimed at outlining an "interpretative model" of entrepreneurial social phenomena, able to better understand the complexity of their governance and to give the right emphasis to their inner "relationships". The appliance of the so-called relational view to the observation of complex socioeconomic phenomena has spread over the last decades. In

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particular, it has been applied to some specific subject areas such as *the relational theory of society* (Donati 2004), considered the emerging paradigm of modern sociology, or *the relational theory of happiness* (Bruni and Zamagni 2004). In business studies, the *relational logic* represents one of the most interesting and profitable management paradigms; thus, it represents a fascinating research perspective, capable to foster the understanding of firm behaviour. In managerial domain, marketing studies have some sort of “primacy” in accepting the relational perspective (Berry 1983), especially when dealing with the interpretation of business-to-business (Håkansson 1982; Håkansson and Snehota 1995) and business-to-consumer (Grönroos 1983; Grönroos and Gummesson 1985) markets. In the current competitive scenarios, the appliance of the relational view represents a critical success factor for managerial decision-making, being able to enhance critical aspects such as values, culture, identity, sharing, and cohesion. In fact, both doctrine and managerial practice consider the relations between companies as strategically important (Håkansson 1982). This importance derives from their significant contribution to the joint creation of value for market (Normann and Ramírez 1994), the creation of economic capital (Vicari et al. 2000), the achievement and sustainability of competitive advantage (Dyer and Singh 1998; Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998), as well as the definition of innovative approach to business development. Therefore, the resulting relational inter-subjective dynamics can be read as relevant socio-economic phenomena, able to mobilise in a synergistic way the resources of different involved actors’ in order to foster mutual/shared value creation processes. The relational vision is also in line with the theories recently emerged in Service Research, such as Service Dominant Logic (Vargo and Lusch 2004) and Service Science (Maglio and Spohrer 2008), that focus on the importance of service, seen as the basis of the exchanges among the actors participating in co-creation processes.

To offer a better interpretation of complex social phenomena, a system perspective of relational dynamics is needed in the analysis of relational enterprises. However, this perspective has recently interested the current academic debate. Therefore, this work is aimed at entering in this research stream, providing an “interpretative model” able to read the issue of relations according to a system approach.

The authors defined this interpretative model “Enterprise Relational Vision” (ERV). It represents an original observational perspective of entrepreneurial phenomena and puts emphasis on the importance of intangible resources linked to skills and competence, those contextual relations aimed at developing the company’s and its knowledge capital, the responsible involvement of stakeholders in value co-creation processes and the trust in the relationship.

In terms of methodologic approach and to conceptualize an original interpretative model, drawing on a system vision, the authors have carried out a review of main academic contributions related to different scientific domains useful to their conceptualizations. The followed approach has attempted to integrate the recent system theory, including the Parsons and Luhmann’s “Social System”, the Beer’s

“Viable System”, the Capra and Luisi’s “Systems of Life” and the Maglio and Spohrer’s “Service Science”.

This chapter discusses the possible views related to the relational logic, which, despite its multifaceted analysis enhances the relationship between two parties: the *Ego*, as the decision maker that assumes a central observational position in the system, and, the *Alter*, as a part of the interpersonal relationship network of the *Ego*. Each of the following views is discussed as resulting from multiple theories that, despite they were created in different times and, perhaps, with different aims, could be combined to better explain all possible features of the relational logic.

Those views are:

- *Relationality and autopoiesis*: the relational nature of communication processes constitutes and supports firms, which are considered an autopoietic social system.
- *Dissemination and definition*: the reticular structure and its emergent system arise from the *Ego* (decision maker) and take place in the specific enterprise context, which represents a “relative portion” of the general environment (ecosystem). Drawing on the dual perspective of structure and system, company is built upon the constructive observation of an *Ego*.
- *Sense and cohesion*: company is considered a system with a symbolic sense, represented by value co-creation. The sense of belonging stems from a complex mix of rational and emotional factors.
- *Decision formation and formulation*: in terms of complexity of problems, the decision-making seems to be quite complex where the decision power tends to be shared and spread among different roles, that are all *Alter* (entities in relation with the *Ego*).
- *Co-creation and regeneration*: value co-creation, internal to the relational network that represents the organizational pattern of a system, allows the autopoietic regeneration of resources at the roots of its viability.
- *Resources and competitiveness*: the competitiveness of a social system is strictly related to the ability in gaining the needed resources establishing collaborative relationships, i.e. relationships which frame them.
- *Leadership and viability*: the Governing Subject guarantees the relational harmony, which is characterized by the environmental dynamism. Therefore, its continuous guidance is fundamental in facilitating communication processes, which ultimate goal is the viability of the social system.

The following sections delve on a wider exposition of the above-mentioned considerations.

11.2 The Origin of System Thinking

Reading the firm according to a system perspective cannot ignore the “System Thinking” and the related “System Theory” as well as their most recent advancements.

In particular, the system thinking originates from Greek philosophy and in particular from Aristotle and the early Pythagoreans conceptualization, whose reflections focused on the dichotomy between the shape and the substance of things. These concepts root on the difference among components (substance) and relationships (shape).

The General System Theory was born in the middle of the last century thanks to some scholars coming from different scientific domains (mathematical, biological and sociological) and striving for confrontation, the progressive enrichment of the knowledge about common and shared meaning of system and combining different perspectives of analysis due to their different disciplinary backgrounds. This initiative comes from the concept of system, coined by Von Bertalanffy (1968) and defined as “a set of elements interacting with each other”. This definition offers a reinterpretation and an adaptation to the investigation and the analysis which can be conducted in each specific discipline. Another element fundamental to the understanding of the general system theory can be identified in the reasons of its emergence. The system approach has been defined to counteract the tendency of natural processes toward entropy that is toward the disruptive disorder (Pardi 1998); recently aggravated by the emergence of the complexity that deeply affects the rationality of decision-making processes. Reading a phenomenon according to a system perspective leads the seeking for an order that can be applied to the analysis of any organization and can foster the achievement of a functional equilibrium over time (Pels et al. 2014; Mele et al. 2010).

Based on the most recent advancement of system thinking, some alternative types of “systems of life” (Capra and Luisi 2014), antithetical if compared to “mechanical systems”, can be identified:

- Biological systems (which we define “living”);
- Social systems (which we define “life”).

Due to the increasing complexity, both of these can be considered “cognitive” systems, when able to self-organize (Ashby 1962), or “cybernetic” systems, when equipped with their own self-regulating mechanisms (Wiener 1948; Beer 1989) and, in any case, able to interact and co-evolve with the broader “ecosystems” in which they are embedded. Consequently, different dimensions of life can be observed; thus, this general paradigm shift lies on the different metaphors that illustrate the scheme of life: “from machine to network”.

11.3 Relationality and Autopoiesis

The term Autopoiesis refers to the ability of internal regeneration, which characterizes all the systems of life, notwithstanding their specificity.

In social systems, the autopoiesis is based on “communication”; thus, the living networks of human society are considered as “communication networks” (Luhmann 1984), while biological systems exchange molecules, social systems exchange ideas, information, knowledge, skills (i.e. intangible resources) in their communicative relations networks (Capra and Luisi 2014).

If biological systems produce and nurture a material boundary (cell membrane), social systems produce and nurture a non-material boundary (cultural, worth, utilitarian) which constrains the behaviour of its members (Luhmann 1984). Therefore, the autopoiesis refers to life maintenance; thus, a (biological or social) system stays alive as long as it is able to regenerate itself.

In our view and in line with Service Dominant Logic, “services” are analogous to the molecules of biological organisms (Vargo and Lusch 2004), i.e. resources integrated and delivered through relationships.

Finally, the cognitive ability (cognition) represents the system ability to interact with the environment profitably, not necessarily “smart”, as well as the ability to co-develop harmoniously (Capra and Luisi 2014).

In sum, the (biological and social) systems of life are characterized by the following substantial similarities:

- The importing of several forms of general energy from the environment (e.g. air, light, climate in its meteorological, social and economic meanings);
- The gaining of specific nutritional resources from the environment (alimentary or economic, material or immaterial);
- The elaboration and transformation of resources through “metabolic autopoietic processes” (chemical or communicative) self-organized into “networks”, in which basic element (molecules or services) are exchanged through “relationships”;
- The creation of new energy (biological and socioeconomic) which, in turn, generates “viability” and, ultimately, supports “life”.

The firm completely assumes its natural dimension of social system just under a specific condition, that is the emergence of reticular interconnections among its components that can be considered “relational”, being oriented to the collaboration (Pellicano 1994).

According to our view, Luhmann’s social autopoiesis is completely realized, if “communication” takes the features of a “circular dialogue”, which is empathic and, consequently, relational (Bateson 1979; Pellicano 1992). In other words, following the logic at the roots of molecular exchanges typical of biological autopoietic processes, the development of a relational network (enabled for resource exchange) represents the core element of those mechanisms that led to the on-going regeneration of firms’ viability. Therefore, the disposition toward a

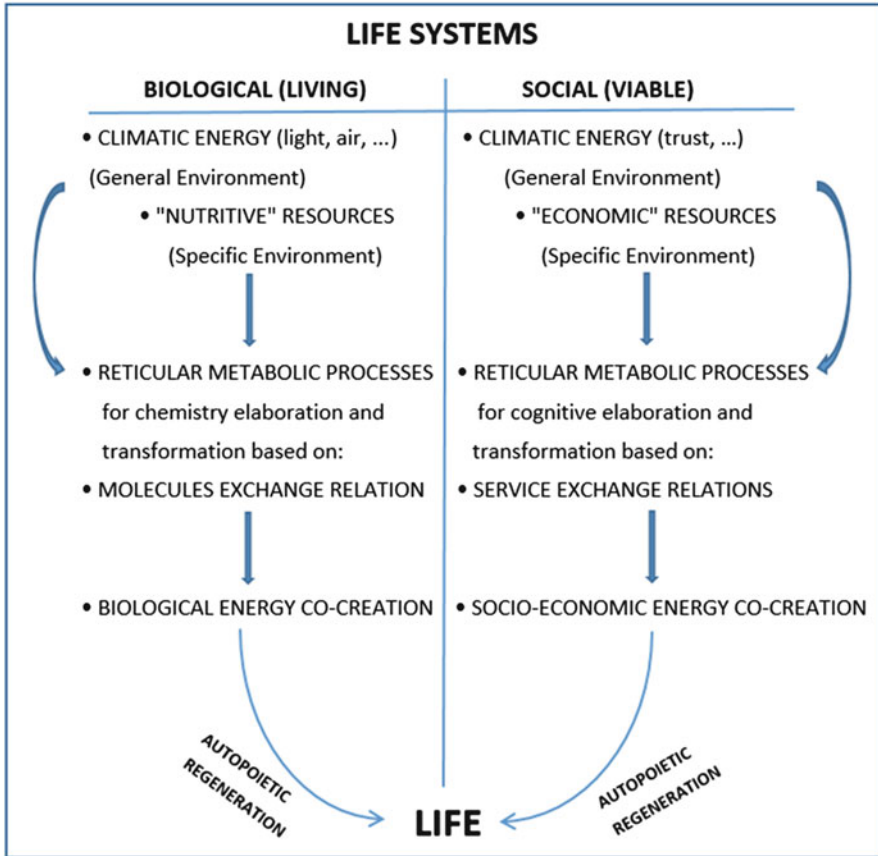


Fig. 11.1 A comparison of life systems

respectful and constructive dialogue, supported by strong internalized “values and ethical principles”, represents a clear expression of the “wisdom” of those viable firms that aim at surviving (Pellicano 2005) (Fig. 11.1).

For the purpose of our study, we consider essential to achieve a conceptualization of the nature and the meaning that we attribute to the term “relation”. Primarily, it should be underlined that relations are included in the broader category of rapports, which, according to their structural sense, are defined in terms of connections, while according to their systemic meaning, are defined as interactions.

Contention and exchange are the two the main forms that rapports can assume. In the first case, we refer to the category of antagonistic rapports based on a win-lose logic, which, following a degenerative path, evolve in destructive rapports based on lose-lose logic. In the second case, rapports can be occasional (or powered by an exchange based on a mere economic convenience), symbiotic (when the dependence of a subject on another one characterizes the exchange) or explanatory. We define a rapport “relation” just in the latter case, because it roots on a

“synergistic” exchange that emphasize the collaborative nature and the disposition towards temporally long-lasting rapports. Specifically, relations arise from the structural connection among two or more parties, which, at a system level, evolve towards interactions, characterized by a common and collaborative path that is resonance (Beer 1989).

Drawing on a cybernetics perspective, the elements on which a system is built up are combined in a mutual interaction, whereby the action of an element on another implies a response (feedback or reply) of the latter towards the former. Therefore, it possible to assume that these two elements are linked by a “feedback belt”. The belt binding the element A to the element B is defined “positive” (relational), because a variation in the value assigned to A makes a similar change to the value assigned to B (Wiener 1948).

Focusing on the meaning that an integration logic gives to exchanges, some issues related to the subjects involved in the entrepreneurial action arise. According to the relational logic, an exchange generally involves two types of actors: (1) the *Ego*, which is the decision-maker that assumes a central observational position within the system; (2) the *Alter*, which is, for example, an interpersonal relationship network of the *Ego*.

Which is the object of active exchanges between these parties?

The answer is in the resources commonly understood as involved in the process of value creation (Fig. 11.2).

The system offers to each actor a value output generated by relational interactions, which represents an incoming resource for the subject, who holds and potentially bears resources. Consequently, in an input/output exchange, value and resources represent two sides of the same coin.

By resorting to a metaphor, the actors can be considered as islands that share the same sea, which represents the common environment. It is evident that islands should not be isolated, so they build bridges, which are the more or less stable links among them. The bridge represents the structural connection that should be

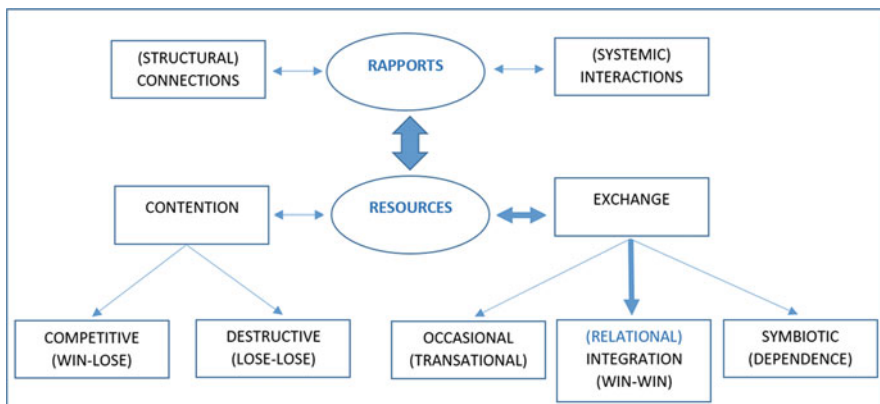


Fig. 11.2 From connections to relations

animated by those interactions aimed at fostering resource exchange and, consequently, value exchange. Therefore, interactions are neither than activated relations. Drawing on our interpretive framework, integration is considered as a dynamic process, being not limited to a mere structural connection, but implying a synergistic action based on of win-win logic.

The structural connection expresses a condition of relational consonance, according to which subjects establish between themselves an infrastructural or communicative bridge that fosters the emergence of a mutual dialogue. However, to be sure about the existence of relations, it is necessary to prove if and how the related infrastructure is used. According to a structural perspective, the emerging of non-occasional interactions (e.g. not based on exchanges justified just by a simultaneous and short-term convenience) is considered desirable. Indeed, in this case, they tend to assume the form of a transaction and not of a relation. In fact, within relations, long-term value exchanges occur when resources are added to the process, nurturing a value offer (resource exiting in the system), which can be considered as an incoming resource. Therefore, relations are exchange interactions able to integrate resources. They also differ from competitive interactions, which are characterized by the lacking of exchange activities among actors, because each of them tries to influence the competitor in order to damage him/her or gain an advantage. Finally, relations cannot express binding links because of a dependence condition; thus, dependence forms tend to sooner or later collapse. Consequently, relational interactions are paths of synergistic resonance, characterized by a forward-looking perspective. Moreover, they are projected and stable over time, mainly because they are non-occasional (Vicari 1991) and expression of a high collaborative “commitment”. Ultimately, none of those relations are based on a mere economic convenience and none of them generate (degenerate) specific form of dependence. Thus, they are always collaborative and dynamically resonant interactions characterized by a long-term perspective.

11.4 Diffusion and Definition

Maturana et al. (1985) stated “Everything is said by an observer”. The above-mentioned expression assumes particular relevance in system thinking studies, implying a fundamental assumption according to which system is neither an organic and conceptual construct nor an objective and realistic representation of reality, being, on the contrary, a “way of observing”.

According to our view, firm is not the observer (Vicari 1991), but it is its “central” component, considered as singular or plural sub-system organizational units.

From its (active and creative) observation perspective, the *Ego*, lacking of its own resources (except for knowledge and competences), considers its interlocutors (*Alteri*) as (tangible or intangible) resource holders, useful or necessary to nourish the complex process of value co-creation that gives meaning to the emerging

system. Hence, the specific context represents that portion of environment that the observer perceives as directly belonging to his/her firm (Golinelli 2010), being animated by a number of interlocutors, who participate in developing a complex relations' network aimed at exchanging resources (Barile and Polese 2010). Drawing on previous consideration, ignoring the rapports of dependence because of their inherent pathological nature that depends on the degree of mutual involvement, the exchange rapports can be considered as both transactions, when based on the research of short-term economic convenience, and reports, when based on a collaborative logic characterized by a strategic and potentially system projection. Some *Altera* are perceived as the most relevant and hopefully closer (to engage and emotionally retain); others are recognized as far as they are characterized by a predominantly utilitarian interest.

The separation among them cannot be imagined as a clear line of distinction, but rather as an area or a perimeter band characterized by high mutability.

The relational logic allows at the same time the gradual expanding, internalizing and integrating of the specific context, transforming stakeholders into co-makers and engaging them into a value co-creation process (Pellicano 1994; Normann and Ramírez 1998). The above-mentioned considerations make necessary to rethink firm's intangible borders, which are identified as a social system. The definition of system results from the formation of a boundary between the inside and the outside, which arises from the needs of the observer, who, when constitutes its systemic identity, has to necessarily distinguish it from the surrounding. Each identity presumes the formation of a difference that Luhmann (1984) considered "not ontological", but semantic because dependent on the operations (relations for resources/services integration) that foster the system in maintaining and reproducing over the time its reticular structure with respect to outside (autopoiesis).

The autonomy of the system from the environment (self-reference, self-organization and autopoiesis) can be explained assuming the vision according to which the system contains all the elements (resources and relationships) necessary for its survival (closed co-creation circuit).

The social systems organizational and functional autonomy is twofold:

- The aptitude of the system in conditioning the environment (no longer considered crucial);
- The aptitude of the structure (relational network) with regard to the decision maker influence (conscious guide), which is quite similar to what happens in biologic systems (particularly in human beings) when a relationship between mind and body occurs.

Figure 11.3 depicts the relationship among the firm and its environment. In particular, the general environment contains the specific context, in which are contained both the relevant *Altera* and the *Altera* characterized by utilitarian interests. The most relevant *Altera* are highly integrated in firm; thus, we represent them close to the observer, posed at the centre of the whole system.

According to the relational logic, a company draws on resources within its specific context (subjective), while the general environment (objective) plans it

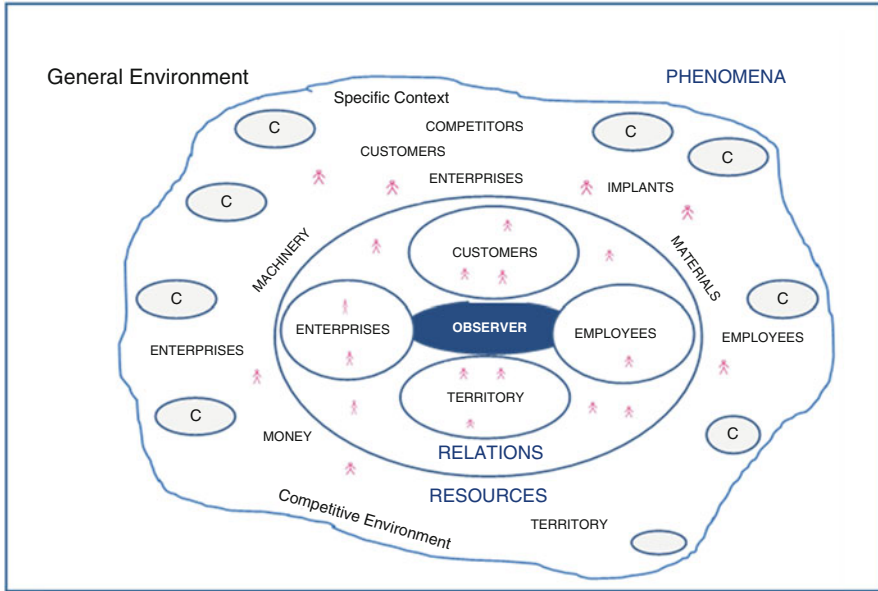


Fig. 11.3 The firm and the environment

on the Observer Subject (*Ego*) perception of threats or opportunities. Even in this case, it is important taking into account the real nature of relations which turn around company and can be potentially considered as a resources holder. However, on one hand, there are those who act according to an occasional need and to exclusively achieve a short-term economic convenience, without any particular interest or involvement in firm. On the other hand, there are those that aspire to cooperate showing their relational attitude. However, as argued below, the simple willingness does not identify the nature of relational network as systemic.

In this direction, the system integration, even if based on the sense of belonging, takes also into account the principle of accountability. Nevertheless, it is not a unidirectional responsibility of company, for example with regard to social stakeholders, but a reciprocal responsibility. Therefore, if there is a responsibility of the *Ego* towards its interlocutors, there should also be a responsibility of the interlocutors towards the company and its governance. If an interlocutor (*Alter*) shows a cooperative attitude, he/she is open to support the company towards a more effective, efficient and sustainable development. In sum, it allows company to be more viable and to nourish the conditions needed for reiterating over the time synergistic value creation processes. Hence, the subjects related to the observer (e.g. customers and suppliers) can be considered “part” of the enterprise system (Barnard 1939) only if they develop an intense and responsible sense of belonging (which respects the principle of commonality toward a purpose); thus, they link the satisfaction of current and future expectations (influence) to the viability of the system itself. However, they can be considered as “components” of the enterprise

system not as people, entities or financial resources holders (skills and expertise become “services” in trade), but as relational *Altera* of the Observer Subject (*Ego*). In other words, their belonging to the system depends on the loyalty and the disposition in mutually feeding the relation.

The clusters indicated in the figure do not refer to all actors, but just to loyal ones. In terms of companies cluster, some insights arouse from the empirical evidence found out in local production systems, characterized by extensive and pervasive cooperative dynamics, which, in the Italian model, led to the conceptualization of the fourth capitalism (Bonomi and Rullani 2005).

The inclusion of the system theories in business and management studies is currently central in systemic sociology (based on the approach of Luhmann), making it possible to overcome the traditional concept of “organized structure.”

The structure from which the system emerges is relational and reticular, whereby it is possible to consider company as a network of relations in action, emerging from the structuring of communication flows. Its immaterial border should be read as a mutual and coincident (between *Ego* and *Altera*) membership perception (Pellicano 2002), e.g. considering the co-maker (*Altera*) role in value co-creation processes driven by the Observer Subject (*Ego*).

11.5 Sense and Cohesion

Social systems are interrelated with biological systems, but differ from them because the former are established and organized according to the “sense” (Luhmann 1984). Even if individual players are biological organisms, social systems are mainly presented as non-organic entities, held together by symbolic processes, capable of providing decision-making information and mutual orientation criteria.

Drawing on the above-mentioned considerations, we define the sense as a “symbolic resource” that makes the mutual understanding and communication (relational) possible and plausible.

When an order or social cohesion does not realize, the actors perceive symbolic resources as not stable forms of meeting or communication (relations) capable of making comparable mutual expectations. When forms of meeting or communication do not arise, each actor (*Ego* and *Altera*) maintains his/her own expectations, depending on the contingency of the moment or characterized by a psychological unintentional nature. This is known as “double contingency mechanism” (as mutual between *Ego* and *Altera*) described by Parsons (1951), which has been overcome by the “symbolic media of interchange”—e.g. a common “sense”—essential to enoble a social system.

The media communication aims at reducing the double contingency. The symbolic media, among which Parsons places money, influence, power and affection, play the role of arranger, establishing and codifying those expectations, which can become reciprocal and, consequently, relational.

According to the relational logic and in light of Service Science (SS) (Spohrer and Maglio 2008), the media or fundamental communicative code is identified in the “service”, whereby value co-creation represents the “common sense” that ensures the social cohesion within the system. In other words, the viability of service systems depends on the ability of its governance to create and develop mechanisms for value co-creation, based on a continuous mediation of stakeholder’s expectations (Spohrer et al. 2008) in a service logic, which represents the application of skills of a part for the benefit of another (Vargo and Lusch 2004).

Hence, in a broad sense, the function of codes such as money, power, scientific truth, service, love and so on, represents the technique that makes (relational) the communication accessible and available, fostering the formation of a non-ephemeral social order in economy, politics, academic life, personal and business relationships.

A system is characterized by the ability in maintaining a social order, possible thanks to a “glue” that puts and keeps together the different elements. Many authors focused on this “glue” highlighting different positions. According to Durkheim (1893), the social order of the systems is guaranteed by “solidarity”, which is a rule set antecedent to contract rules; on the contrary, Hobbs (1954) and the English utilitarianism school stated that the this “glue” can only be represented by “personal interest”.

We believe that a “sense” system arises when its members are able to give a shared meaning of their interactions; thus, the relational view is specifically based on for the strive to achieve a common sense. According to system theory, in a company the glue should be assured by the basic elements, such as values, shared rules, utilities and interest.

Actors can have relations because they deeply feel the ethical value of sympathetic reciprocity, follow rules, or (above all), finally, believe they can better meet their specific interests by taking part to an interpersonal relations system. The common—and systemic—purpose cannot be a mere sum of the interests of each component of the system, but what gives a meaning to a common interaction is a totally shared aim, the system viability and survival.

According to the relational logic, the rising of a common sense among participants (*Ego* and *Alter*) can be read in the light of autopoietic processes of value co-creation and resource regeneration. Whereby, subjects are joined together because they consider themselves as co-makers and, consequently, an active part of the interaction processes in which they participate, at the same time, both as suppliers (that is bearers of own resources) and as users of the new resources rising from systemic interactions. They are conscious that, if they predispose themselves to actively and responsibly participate in co-creation processes, they can also contribute to generate a value which they benefit in order to obtain a greater utility. The joint action directed by a shared sense (co-creation) develops a systemic membership that led *Alter* to feel more and more connected to the system as integrated parts. Membership, which ultimately induces loyalty, serves to better engage *Alter*, gradually increasing the quality of relational balance (Barnard 1938), in terms of contributions-rewards. It is quite simplistic (i.e. more realistic)

to generally believe that the development of membership is mainly based on individual utilitarianism (tangible and intangible benefits) and not on the responsibility towards society (as enterprises are social commons). However, these reflections need to be read according to the greater or smaller geographical spread of shared ethical values of social responsibility.

Therefore, the “widespread engagement” (Freeman et al. 2007) among the interlocutors is possible only if a high adhesion and cohesion is developed among them, implying both emotional aspects (solidal responsibility) and utilitarian conveniences (benefits). Therefore, the participation is due to both “love” and “calculation” (Pellicano 1994).

11.6 Decision Formation and Formulation

Decision Making process is usually defined as a complex and dynamic process aimed at elaborating, focalizing and formalizing a potential strategic orientation (Casali et al. 2016). However, according to our view, this definition needs to be enhanced by the influence of relational logic. In particular, in Decision Making is possible to define two main moments, such as:

- “Formation” of strategic choices, the synthesis of which is represented by the focus of visions emerging from an inter-relational and interdependent dialectic (Game Theory): these visions should be implicitly shared among all members of the enterprise system, considered relevant by the *Ego*. Therefore, the strategic elaboration is ultimately the result of a Multiple Decision Maker (MDM).

In forming decisions, the interest of recipients, for whom decisions are taken, is important. In this sense, firm can be considered a “nexus of interests” since interlocutors (*Alter*) of “Decision Formulator” (*Ego*) completely manifest their nature as stakeholders and their influence over system, if conceived according to a viable system view (see Fig. 11.4). However, a conscious diffusion of decision-making power should be supported by an equally widespread assumption of responsibility, related to the destiny of enterprise system.

- “Formulation” of the most important strategic choices of the *Ego*, to which is reserved the role of main actor of the whole decision-making process. This moment represents the end of an articulated dynamic characterized by an *Ego* responsibly, engaged in researching a better-weighted consensus or systemic resonance. This requires the constant coordination of negotiations among parties, bearer of their legitimate interests and of the subsequent expectations to search for a synthesis which, in accordance with the specific relational balances (contributions vs. gratification), can determine the maximum possible degree of systemic resonance.

Therefore, we can state that the systemic resonance represents the synthesis of two fundamental drivers: (1) the relational consensus expressed by the *Alter*, and

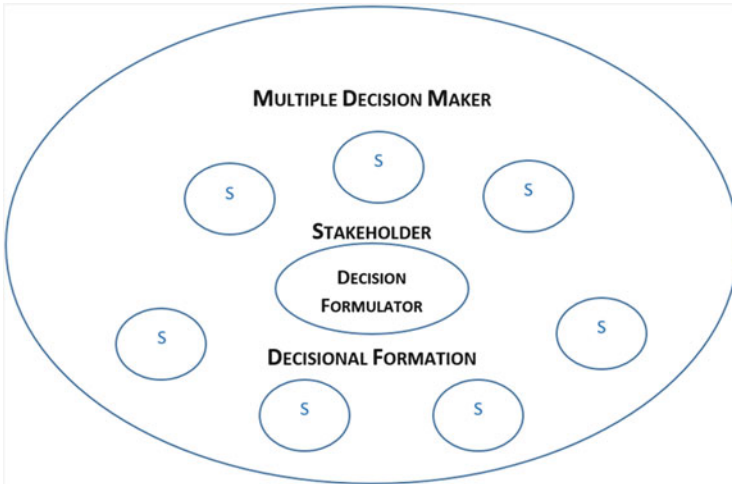


Fig. 11.4 Relational decision making process

(2) the perceived relational relevance attributed by the *Ego* to each cluster of stakeholders. The weighting of the first driver respect to the second one leads to reflect about how the search for consensus of the *Ego* is not absolute, but relative, because related to the search for the best balance among the competing interests that express the level of relevance perceived by *Alter*.

In summary, the *Ego* constantly looks for the consensus of *Alter*.

The final step is the focalization of the vision, consisting in its formal deliberation from which the resulting responsibilities of the formal governmental entity come out.

The corporate governance of a relational firm definitively corresponds to the described coordination and decision-making orientation activity.

11.7 Co-creation and Regeneration

Service Science (SS) points that, according to a relational logic (and in a network), resources are not something to “exchange” but rather something to commonly “use”. In this regard, it is important to remember that SS is built upon the Service Dominant Logic (SDL) which provides a new way to look at the world in terms of entities (resource integrators), which normatively (“lawful”) interact to co-create value (Vargo and Lusch 2004). SDL’s eleven foundational propositions begin with the premise that service is the fundamental basis of all the exchanges. Consequently, SS defines the service as a value co-creation phenomenon that occurs when service system entities interact according to those value propositions that drive the application of competence for mutual benefit. Consistently, the

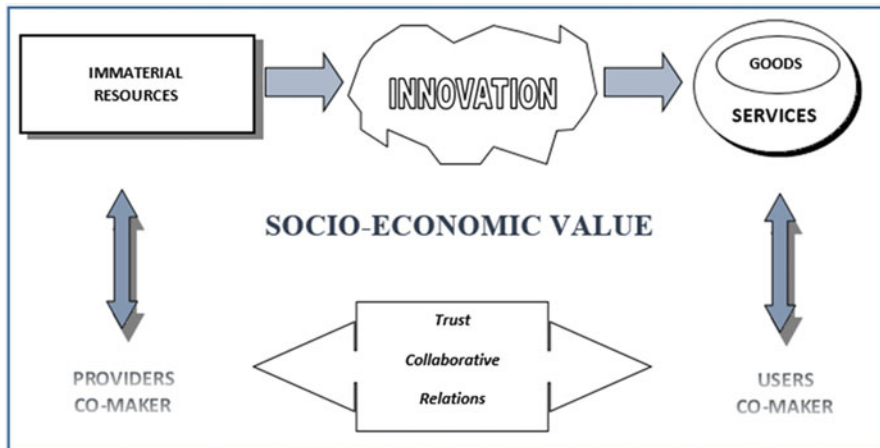


Fig. 11.5 Systemic value co-creation. Source: Pellicano (2002)

autopoietic nature of firm (social organism) leads to believe that internal relational processes (self-referential from a purely operational point of view) determine the “resource” regeneration. Briefly, in activated relations network, resources are integrated to generate new resources (Vicari 1991).

In light of this, enterprise system can be read as a complex bundle of processes which, starting from the subjective resources integration, co-create, as a result of inter-subjective actions, value in its plural (social, economic, equity, etc.) dimension, in the form of service proposition conceived as knowledge, skills, abilities and availability exchange.

Hence, the system stays viable thanks to an appropriate level of satisfaction (of their expectations) and the consensus of the various related (more or less relevant) subjects; thus, such a consent allows continuous resource feeding and regeneration, conceived as viability nourishment (see Fig. 11.5).

The interpersonal dynamics of creation and regeneration, now supported by the ICTs typical of the “social economy”, represent the “sense” of being together of relational enterprise actors and constitute a closed circuit, since everything is inside the system (Pellicano 2002).

The emerged considerations, according to which value co-creation feeds collaborative and trust-based relations, lead to reflect about the progressive dematerialization of the processes that generate value.

The phenomenon originates from the economy of immateriality, which incorporates both the factors of production and the value proposition of company that tends to absorb not only a growing amount of scientific and technological knowledge (Rullani 1989), but also a relational dimension even more important in terms of economic value (Ciasullo 2010).

On a closer inspection, a network can be considered as a control mode of relations in which cooperative interactions, driven by common goals and converging interests arise and are stabilized over time (Barnard 1938).

According to a competence-based relational vision, collaborative logic underlying networks precisely responds to the need of aggregating and integrating knowledge and expertise. Thus, enterprise is conceivable as a network of mostly self-organized relations through which knowledge, dynamically transformed into skills, is transferred in processes and value propositions as part of a learning network logic, aimed at enhancing intelligence in network involving all organizational units belonging to the value network. Therefore, this vision, grounded on know-how-induced interaction and cooperation processes, is far from an interpretation of skills development based on endogenous efforts (Ciasullo 2010).

According to the relational vision of enterprise, co-creation exhausts within the enterprise system (in a sort of closed circuit) since resource suppliers (co-makers) are also users of the respective co-creation processes activated in the system (Normann and Ramírez 1998).

The development of this perspective, summarized by the relational logic, was originally (Pellicano 2002) focused on the following aspects:

- The dematerialisation of business economy, for which service logic becomes dominant in any business, market and society;
- The importance of intangible resources, linked to skills and competences, built together with stakeholders and not gained from the market, in accordance with the well-known passage from the property to the resource availability;
- The emphasis on contextual relationships aimed at developing the shared capital and enterprise knowledge capital;
- The participatory and responsible involvement of stakeholders in the processes of value co-creation even in their direct interest;
- The qualification of the generated value as a complex of specific value propositions in the plural, social and sustainable economy;
- The crucial role of trust in relation reproduction (Vicari 1991).

The described ideal-typical model of relational enterprise, essentially in line with the assumptions underlying the SDL (Vargo and Lusch 2004), counteracted with the ideal type of ‘transactional enterprise’, which is based on the exchange of material resources (G-Logic), realized through transactions and negotiations driven by a short-term economic convenience, grounded on the power (Pellicano 2002).

Therefore, the founding element of relational logic is the transition from the specific context to the relations (see Fig. 11.3) in the inter-subjective relationships among enterprises. The relational level highlights the need to go beyond “one-shot” exchanges (Reficco and Vernis 2010), typical of a conventional market logic. The B2B (Håkansson 1982; Morgan and Hunt 1994), marketing report (e.g. Sheth and Parvatiyar 2000), service (Grönroos 1991; Gummesson 2002; Gummesson and Polese 2009), interaction and network approaches (for example, Håkansson and Snehota 1995) and SD Logic (Vargo and Lusch 2004; Lusch and Vargo 2006) converge toward the need to overcome the traditional transactional logic, to adopt

what we define the relational logic, which extends its application to all business relations existing between the Governance Entity and its interlocutors. This implies an extension of marketing, whereby: “Marketing has to change because society is changing” (Fabris 2008). In such a direction, firms should develop a continuous dialectic confrontation able to exceed the reference market to spread toward the broader society.

It is suggested that an important setting for the relational logic can be envisaged in the logic of value co-creation related to the concept of “many to many” defined by Gummesson (2004) that highlights some significant features. Hence, according to the relationship marketing and SD Logic, the many to many describes a model (meta-system) based on the meeting/collaborative and co-creative comparison between two systems: on the one hand, the supply system (in other words, the system of several service providers); on the other, the system of demand (i.e. the system of several service users). As mentioned before, the innovative element of this perspective consists in the search for a collaboration between the two systems aimed at increasing synergy satisfaction of mutual expectations. However, what the relational logic wants to highlight is that in the relational enterprise logic the active relation network leads to the emergence of a unique system among all related subjects.

Indeed, the “many to many” logic, reinterpreted according to a relational view, considers both many resource suppliers and many value propositions users as co-makers of a single systemic co-creation dynamics, although divided into several processes. More precisely, the co-makers of a closed-circuit co-creation logic, play, at the same time, the role of suppliers, resource holders, users and recipients of the value involved in the offers directed to them, which they have contributed to create and which they conjointly assume the responsibilities for.

The relational dynamics based on “many to many” logic echoes the concept of “ecosystem services”, introduced by the SD logic and understood as “self-sufficient and self-regulating systems including actors that integrate resources linked by shared institutional logics and mutual value creation through service exchange” (Vargo and Lusch 2011; Lusch et al. 2016).

Outside enterprise system, there are other systems with which there is no exchange relation and co-creation activity. In particular, it is possible to identify:

- A general environment systems which generate influences (i.e. threats and opportunities);
- Other enterprise systems which, when there is a high degree of commonality of relevant resources, engage in a negative conditioning of competitors’ relational skills.

According to the above-mentioned considerations, it is possible to state that SS and the relational logic have different purposes and exploratory fields:

- Service Science adopts an “objective” observational perspective, describing socio-economic macro phenomena such as the ecosystems in which actors (according to the many to many logic service systems such as customers,

suppliers, bidders, employees and so on) live together, collaboratively and co-creatively interact.

- The relational logic adopts a “subjective” and perceptive observational perspective, that is the vision of a subject defined *Ego* (entrepreneurial) which, by observing the surrounding environment, extracts and defines its specific scope (or resource field) and its relational system (with *Alter*).

The enterprise system, resulting from the central subject (*Ego*) perception, obviously appears immersed in a general ecosystem.

11.8 Resource and Competitiveness

Enterprises, being basically viable social organisms should feed constantly in order to survive, as like as any other living biological organisms.

The nourishment arises from material and immaterial resources that *Ego*'s interlocutors (*Alter*) hold. Companies are involved in a competitive struggle to gain these resources, which are scarce and strategically relevant. To this end, the *Ego*, in this case considered as decision maker, promotes and develops an “organizational action” (Thompson 1967; Weick 1968) consisting in forming and cultivating the “relational network”, which precisely represents the organizational pattern of enterprise system.

A better quality of relations fosters the reduction of the “environmental” dependence (Salancik and Pfeffer 1978) or the negotiating power of the firm actors, who, sharing a common sense making (Weick 1995), develop a high engagement and sense of belonging to the system.

To re-read competitive dynamics according to a relational view, it is possible to refer to two concepts:

- (a) The relevance of interlocutors;
- (b) The commonality of interlocutors.

Two attributes characterize the relevance of interlocutors: (1) the criticality, e.g. the importance of the resources that the interlocutor held and allocate; and (2) the influence, expression of the interlocutor's ability in acquiring and re-appropriating resources, which defines restrictions dictating behavioural rules directed to the firm. In other words, the influence represents the interlocutor ability in appropriating adequate value margins, e.g. a highly positive balance in terms of contribution to value creation.

In sum, the criticality of relationship is due to all possible solutions to a problem and to the set of all the components needed for solve the problem itself. In particular, there are two types of criticality:

- Relation criticality;
- Resource criticality.

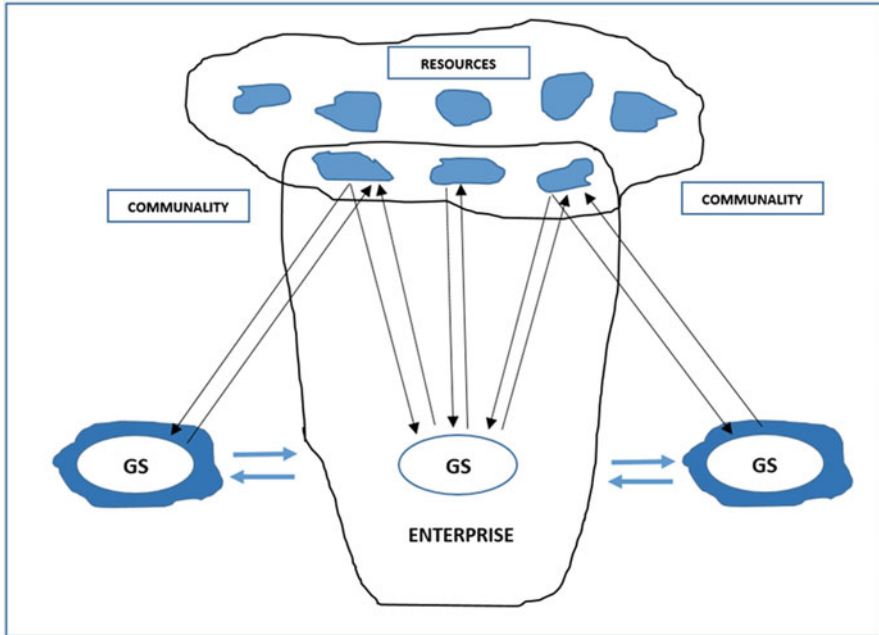


Fig. 11.6 Competitive dynamics

It is possible to state that the criticality represents the eliminability degree of an interlocutor, minimal when both the criticalities are maximum (see Fig. 11.6).

The commonality of interlocutors gives a sense to their perception, making them significant. On a closer inspection, this characteristic is considered innovative, because its application to the definition of potential competitors, being the most of them perceived as relevant interlocutors, having the higher degree of commonality. Therefore, the degree of commonality is directly proportional to the number of common interlocutors.

The competitiveness of relational firm would be rooted on interlocutors and on their ability to be more satisfying, than other competitors. Therefore, the competitive action needs for competitors’ resources, affecting their ability in surviving and thriving.

The ability of competing companies to have “relatively” satisfied interlocutors is directly related to the existence of common relevant interlocutors; thus, this ability can be expressed by the following equation (Della Piana 2010):

$$\begin{aligned}
 & S(A) > 1 \quad V.C.(A) > V.C.(B) \quad PS(A) > PS(B) \\
 & S(B)
 \end{aligned}$$

A and B = Two companies that have common relevant interlocutors;
 S(A) = Satisfaction of stakeholders common to A and B respect to company A;

S (B) = Satisfaction of stakeholders common to A and B respect to company B;
 C. A. (A) = Competitive Advantage of A; C. V. (B) = Competitive Advantage of B;

S. P. (A) = Survival Probability of A; S. P. (B) = Survival Probability of B.

The relationship between competitors is “mediated” by the interlocutors’ (*Altera*) satisfaction; so, there is no direct relationship of exchange between competitors, because the survival is based on the indirect influence of the reciprocal viability conditions.

According to this approach to competitors’ identification, the degree of dangerousness of the competitors would be precisely explained by the degree of commonality of relevant interlocutors. It follows that two or more firms can be considered competitors if they share, at least, one interlocutor perceived as relevant. Therefore, the survival of system is also due to the aptitude to collaboration, which represents a prerequisite to compete effectively.

The aptitude to collaborate with interlocutors, perceived as actors belonging to the reticular relational structure, is mainly due to their nature; thus, their being co-makers of differentiated value co-creation processes represents the basis upon which the ability to compete (aimed at feeding the vitality with the resources) with other entrepreneurial systems is built. At the same time, competitive successes reinforce the sense of belonging and the collaborative intention of the actors belonging to the entrepreneurial system.

Metaphorically, profitable partnerships and competitive capacities represent the two pillars, which dynamically allow company to develop paths of viability (Pellicano 2002). Thus, the competitiveness of a company depends on the resources available in a given environment and on the Governance Subject’s ability to look for those resources needed for nourish the firm. These latter resources are limited and, therefore, strongly disputed. In other words, the resources are not sufficient for all that need or desire to achieve them. For this reason, the firm *Ego* looks for *Altera*, e.g. interlocutors with whom to establish relations.

Following this perspective, firm ultimately made up in decision maker and its interlocutors, the resource holders involved in value co-creation processes.

Such a competitive dynamic is the “communality”; in other words, competitors are business companies that share the same resource power. The more the community is strong, the greater is the competitive pressure exerted by the competitor perceived by the enterprise *Ego* as “direct” and therefore more dangerous. The relationship existing among competing firms is not based on exchanges, but on a negative mutual conditioning.

If resources are not enough to feed all systems, the interactions can be either competitive or cooperative. Hence, the competitive game becomes a struggle for survival.

Ultimately, relational firm, thanks to its disposition towards the development based on the integration with its own context, gains a higher competitive advantage and higher viability, as well as the ability in dealing with the daily struggle for material resources and intangible assets, which are limited and fiercely disputed (Pellicano 2002).

11.9 Leadership and Viability

Enterprise system, considered as an integrated relation set, requires some sort of “coordination of behaviours” (Vicari 1991) which can be partially accomplished by *Ego’s* enterprise. Moreover, just in simple business realities, the (substantial) decision maker coincides with the (formal) *Ego*, e.g. with the top management (single, chief and board) which is a direct expression of the ownership. In complex socio-economic systems, the role of a decision maker (*Ego*) is quite complicated, because of the potential presence of numerous organisms that can still play a role of influential advisers, despite they not have a formal role in the organisational governance. Therefore, the relational logic requires a conceptual review of firm leadership view, whereby a relevant action of the decision maker is the communication. The ability in communicating is expressed in the aptitude to cultivate relations with interlocutors-co-makers, facilitating largely self-regulated value co-creation processes and fostering the autopoietic resource regeneration feeding the viability of the system and its consequent survival (Pellicano 1994; Pellicano and Perano 2007).

The decision maker is responsible for the harmony, ensuring firm survival, but it cannot be considered the only responsible for this success. The role of decision maker “should be considered a basic strategic guidance, a language, a culture, without planning, but communicating and involving”; thus, the decision maker has to learn how to facilitate interpersonal relations, fostering communication without directly managing it (Pellicano 1994).

The central element of an enterprise system is the decision maker, because of its leading role. However, today leading a company, understood as sense relational system, assumes different meanings. According to our view, the decision maker should play the role of relational enabler or facilitator. From its observational perspective, the decision maker continuously oversees and controls the evolutionary dynamics, knowing that more interactions smoothly develop, more the company keeps in harmony, e.g. in optimum condition to regenerate the conditions of its viability. Therefore, the relational logic, in harmony with the theory of viable systems (Beer 1989), enhances the role of the *Ego* in useful and well-defined reading key.

The awareness about the decision maker harmonizing function—in the fundamental relation among firm structural aspects and the environment in which it is immersed (Brunetti 1997)—is in line with the evolution of business strategies studies (Mintzberg 1985).

The proposed systematization contributes to identify the survival as a cause and, at the same time, as an effect of circular and cyclic processes of resource incorporation and skill and knowledge enhancement, being the incorporation the logical starting point for renewing the resources released by the counterparts.

The cycle of entrepreneurial viability (Pellicano 2004) starts from the provision of basic capabilities created into the enterprise network. Through strategic and organizational learning processes, the interaction ability arises from many actor-

provider's ability in generating knowledge (Senge 2006) that, if properly exploited, brings out the distinctive competencies on which building up a non-ephemeral competitive advantage (Prahalad and Hamel 1990).

First of all, this advantage is the result of the consensus expressed by actors-users, who, in the described dynamic, are not mere recipients of company's value proposition, but co-makers of value, co-responsible for the satisfaction of their own needs and expectations. Furthermore, it should be considered that users' consent (resource holders) always arises from a comparative assessment that they express comparing the enterprise value proposition with those of direct competitors. Getting a non-occasional consent is a prerequisite that leads the decision maker's interlocutors to release their resources to the firm. The stabilization of relations, thanks to the loyalty of sub-system actors to the system (depending on the viable system perspective), allows the incorporation of new resources in the enterprise structure, which become available for the decision maker's guidance action. In this way, the cycle of viability is virtuously concluded, allowing the regeneration of the structural set of basic capacities. The relational logic also involves an extension of the "satisfaction" view, which tends towards an overall relational dimension. Consent must be differential, in order to lead the satisfied interlocutors to release resources; in other words, the value proposition has to be perceived not only adequate to the expectations, but the best if compared to those of competitors. Only capturing this perception of relative greater satisfaction, that is the differential consensus of the interlocutor, it will be possible to get resources. The released resource, as long as not trivial, should be incorporated; thus, according to a relational perspective, this means that interlocutor's loyalty arises from the stabilization of the underlying relation. The methods to stabilize a relation go beyond the use of monetary hard levers, creating emotional and sentimental ties consistent with service experience (see Fig. 11.7).

The establishment and strengthening of such ties act as a deterrent to potential unfaithfulness of co-makers and should build a barrier to competitors' disruptive actions, which have a high influence on the dynamics of value co-creation. This happens because they plan to get the differential consent of these relevant subjects considered relevant in value co-creation dynamics for the quality of the resources they held resources.

The activated and stabilized relations represent the barriers to competition, e.g. actions pointing to avoid that systems of competitors could obtain the advantage related to the acquirement of the same resources. Concluding, the competitive advantage is buildable and defendable only if the cycle is closed and constantly regenerated.

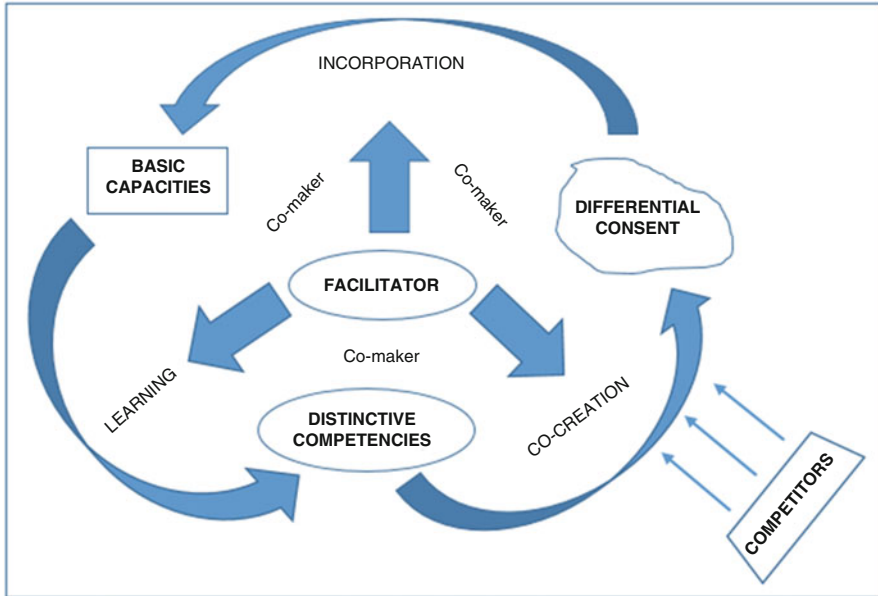


Fig. 11.7 Viable resource regeneration

11.10 Conclusions

This chapter highlighted the existence of seven possible approaches to the relational logic, which cover multiple facets of this topic. First, the concepts of *relationality and autopoiesis* refer to the relational nature of communication processes that constitutes and supports decision makers, being considered as an autopoietic social system. Second, *dissemination and definition* contribute to better understand the emergence of a system from the structure and as a result of the relational action of the *Ego* in the specific context, which is a “relative segment/divide” of general environment (ecosystem). Third, *sense and cohesion* consider a company as a system with a symbolic sense, represented by value co-creation processes and a sense of belonging arising from a complex mix of rational and emotional factors. Fourth, *decision formation and formulation* reflect problems’ complexity, clarifying that decision-making seems to be even more complex, being the decision power shared and between *Ego* and *Alter*. Fifth, *co-creation and regeneration* delve with the value co-created within the relational network and representing the organizational pattern of system, which allows through the autopoietic regeneration of resources the flowing and fostering of its viability. Sixth, *Resources and competitiveness* describe the firm competitiveness as a system linked to the ability in acquiring resources thanks to the establishment of collaborative relationships. Seventh, *Leadership and viability* look at the decision-maker as the guarantor of the relational harmony, characterized by environmental dynamism. Therefore, its

Table 11.1 The roles that actors play in the three moments of entrepreneurial dynamic

Moments/ actors	Definition	Decision	Realization
Ego +	Observer/builder	Focalization/ (Formulation)	Facilitator (guide)
Alter =	Relational interlocutors	Stakeholders (supra)	Co-makers (subsystems)
Processes	Enterprising (systemic building— constitutive)	Visioning (decisional formation)	Acting (value creation)

constant control is fundamental in facilitating communication processes, with the ultimate goal of making the firm system able to stay viable. Finally, as results from the discussion of the above-mentioned different views, it is possible to connect the different roles that the main actors (*Ego* and *Alter*) can play with the three key processes of firm life arising from actors' interactions: constitutive, decisional and value creation.

As showed in Table 11.1, firm governance emerges from the joined dynamic made up of visioning and guidance.

Even though the relational logic is unified, it cannot be attributed exclusively to the decision-maker, being characterized by two meaningful components. First, the focus of strategic addresses that involves both the *Ego* and *Alter*; second, the exclusive role of the decision-maker as the responsible part involved in the relationship.

In conclusion, all the topics previously discussed contribute to define the foundations for the Enterprise Relational Vision (ERV) that emphasizes the role of firm's relationships in better managing the heterogeneity and complexity of the current business environment (Pellicano 2002).

The systematization of the ERV offers some practical and theoretical implications. The theoretical implications enable the enrichment of management literature, supporting new insights for the pre-existent relational view (Donati 2004; Bruni and Zamagni 2004; Pellicano 2002) and for Service Research theories (Vargo and Lusch 2004; Spohrer et al. 2007; Barile et al. 2010; Wieland et al. 2012).

In terms of practical implications, the definition of an original interpretative model let to clarify the dynamics within an integrated relational system. The interpretative model can be also seen as a suitable guideline for the governance, extremely useful for the decision makers.

Lastly, this chapter represents an initial contribution to the understanding of the broad and complex research area focused on relational logic, providing seven pillars. Further research is also needed to better examine those characteristics, analyze their possible connections and investigate other possible characteristics connected with relational logic.

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