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**Economic Sociology on OM Field: An Emerging Agenda**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to analyze the concept of Economic Sociology (ES) and its current usage in Operations and Supply Chain Management studies. Based on a qualitative approach, we have examined articles and papers about sociology and operations management. Although the findings of this paper are still preliminary, it offers an initial understanding of the Economic Sociology field, its classical references, as well as its key conclusions and contributions. Furthermore, it gives an overview of empirical studies that used the economic sociology to study Operations and Supply Chain Management.

## **1. Introduction**

The most popular theoretical approach in studying operations management has been the theories of Transaction Cost and of Competitive Advantage, either Porterian analysis or resource-based approach (Pilkington and Fitzgerald, 2006, Burgess, Koroglu and Singh, 2006). As a consequence, there is a possible exhaustion of operations studies due to the use of the same theories, what some authors call "*doing more of the same type of research will most likely produce more of the same order of results*" (Burgess, Singh and Koroglu, 2006 p.721). The aim of this study is to present an exploratory approach to the concept of Economic Sociology, its current usage as well as possible opportunities for research within the Operations and Supply Chain Management field. Based on a qualitative approach, we have examined articles and papers about sociology and operations management.

This paper is relevant when studying “operations” not only because it provides a review of the literature, but also once it presents a new theoretical approach, rarely used in OM studies. In accordance with Kilduff’s (2007) concerns about the contribution of this method, this study sums it up in pragmatic way, encouraging the production of new integrative insights, important to provide the reader the possibility of having a broader view of Economic Sociology (Lepine and King, 2010).

The main contributions of this paper are: (i) to provide an initial understanding of the Economic Sociology field, its classical references, as well as its key conclusions and contributions; and (ii) to offer an overview of empirical studies that used the economic sociology to study Operations and Supply Chain Management.

This paper is structured in seven sections. Firstly, it analyses the history and the concept of economic sociology, as well as its current branches. Then, it details the methodological procedures used in this study and presents the state of the art of this theoretical approach in Operations and Supply Chain Management. We conclude showing future research opportunities.

## **2. Economic Sociology – Theory History and Concept**

According to Swedberg (1993), the idea of economic sociology was already present in Max Weber’s studies since Weber focused on analyzing the polarization between the historical and theoretical approaches in economic investigations, what was later called as “a war of methods” (*Methodenstreit*). The findings of Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx

and Karl Polanyi were extremely important to a better understanding of the social structure of exchanges; these authors demonstrated that the economic sphere is independent from the social sphere, opposite to the classical economists' beliefs (Granovetter, 1985).

By definition, the economic sociology is understood as the usage of the structure of references, variables and forms of sociological explanation in complex activities related to production, distribution, exchange and consumption of scarce resources and services (Smelser and Swedberg, 1994). Nowadays, the economic sociology significantly contributes to organizational analysis, by offering an overview on how the economic actors, despite their interests, are influenced by the interaction and the social structure. Consequently, there are diverse issues on the agenda when one assumes that the economic arena is made up of many social mechanisms, such as trust, cooperation and competition (Swedberg, 1993).

The so called New Economic Sociology is not only the sociological treatment of economic variables, but it also includes the construction of a systematic body of knowledge formed by questions that create a debate and divide the actors in groups. Based on Max Weber's (1949) writings, Swedberg (2004, p. 7) states that: "*the economic sociology studies both the economic sector in society (economic phenomenon) and how this phenomenon influences the rest of the society (economically conditioned phenomenon) and the way the rest of society influences them (economically relevant phenomenon).*"

Nevertheless, when economics and sociology are studied together, it is perceived a greater scope of interests and methodological innovation. If, until the 1980s, economic sociologists had focused on institutions and paid close attention to issues related to control, sanctions and rules, in the last two decades, gender, social networks and culture have become key elements in the analysis.

The first milestone of the American New Economic Sociology can be found in the papers of Mark Granovetter, specifically with the development of the term of embeddedness, originally used by Karl Polanyi (1980). Granovetter was also responsible for making the networks analysis as an approach to economic sociology more common. It has been seen as an influence of his teacher Harrison White, author of *Markets from Networks* (2001).

According to the current stream of the new economic sociology (NES), organizations and markets are social constructs that vary depending on the institutions and the context and are placed in different production systems. The NES emphasizes the investigation of actions and collective enterprises, social roles, norms, and sanctions. Furthermore, it studies the modifications in institutional arrangements that shape historical and economic ties as well as social networks that are established by social workers in a given market sphere. According to Granovetter, the focus of the Economic Sociology is neither on the curves of supply and demand nor on the price consideration as the only source of information in a market, as in economics; it does not focus as well on the legal framework that supports market transactions, as in economic law.

Understanding the relationship between economic action and social structure is the key to comprehend the work of Granovetter (1985), who uses the concept of embeddedness to demonstrate how social relations affect economic behavior and institutions. From an embeddedness point of view, the actors have an aim within the social relations system. The author highlights that economic action and results are affected by the actors and the structure of the network. The enmeshment of economic actions in social relations (power, sociability, friendship, approval, trust) is a critical variable for economic agents to make a decision, modifying the way preferences and rationality are discussed.

The studies of Granovetter have been the basis for further developments. On one hand, some authors aimed at identifying possible types of embeddedness; whilst Hess (2004) recognized three basic types (societal, network and territorial), Törnroos and Halinen (1998) identified six different types (social, technological, market, political, temporal and spatial). On the other hand, others authors, like Zukin and DiMaggio (1994), planning on expanding the original concept, incorporated cognitive, cultural and political dimensions.

Moreover, several authors use the idea of embeddedness as a possible approach to social networks (Borgatti and Foster, 2003). Others, in turn, try to link truths about weak ties with different conceptions of embeddedness and / or make use of the analysis method of networks, which was heavily used by Granovetter to study the embeddedness in social relations (Burt, 1992; Lin, 2001).

The European economic sociology, less known in Brazil, the papers of Laurent Thévenot, Luc Boltanski, Michel Callon, and Pierre Bourdieu, who introduced key

concepts for this approach, such as habits, field, capital and interest. Whereas Boltanski and Thévenot draw attention to the analysis of traditions that guide economic actions (justification standard models), Callon and Bruno Latour focus on science and technology, developing a theory of actors and networks (actor-networks-theory) (Swedberg, 2004).

### **3. Current Stream**

Since 1985, markets economic sociology has been studied in a different way and, in a broad sense, it can be split in three streams:

- a) Social networks or structuralism: Mark Granovetter and Harrison C. White are the main exponents, but Ronald Burt - methods, competition; Wayne E. Baker - stock exchange, advertising market; and Brian Uzzi - textiles sector - can also be included.
- b) Institutionalism: mainly the papers of Neil Fligstein. It focus on explaining how cognition and action are defined by market rules, power and norms.
- c) Performativity: key authors are Michel Callon, Fabian Muniesa and Donald MacKenzie - financial models, social definition of price, credit. It assumes that economic action is a result of calculation processes, technologies and tools employed by social actors in markets, such as economic theories.

Two other streams can be identified: (1) the culture approach to business and market organizations. Different authors can be included in this category, such as Viviana Zelizer, Mitchell Abolafia (social aspects of a stock exchange daily life), Paul DiMaggio & Walter Powell (organizations, culture, networks, Internet), and Lynette

Spillman (business associations, culture); and (2) the approach developed at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies in Germany, which combines markets types and aims at summing up the findings of the aforementioned branches.

In this approach, Jens Beckert and Wolfgang Streeck (2008) analyze how problems in coordination can be solved in the market exchange process and how specific solutions can affect the contours of economic transactions in terms of efficiency and distribution. For both authors, three markets coordination problems can be distinguished: goods and/or services evaluation, competition structure and achievement of cooperation between actors in a conflict of interests. According to them, companies and regulatory bodies play a crucial role in shaping the market: as a result, studying these institutions is extremely important for markets sociology.

In accordance with it, Guido Möllering (2007, 2005) points out that markets cannot solely be defined as an interaction place between buyers and producers. Regulatory organizations such as government agencies, trade unions, professional bodies and business associations also play an important role in the constitution of the market social structure.

Another important author within Max Planck is Patrik Aspers (2009, 2007, 2005, 2001), who also focuses on the social constitution of markets and on the link between economic sociology and other disciplines. Moreover, he reviews the papers of classical authors such as Weber, Simmel, Veblen, Marshall, Pareto, Parsons, Schütz, and even Nietzsche. Cornelia Woll, who studies lobbies, businessmen and business association in France, must also be mentioned.

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Thematic synthesis</b>
Mark Granovetter	Unemployment (1973), social networks, trust, social construction of markets (electricity and high technology), business groups, ethnic groups and businesses, associations, corruption (2007), finance companies in Silicon Valley (2009), the notion of building social (1992, cited in Berger and Luckmann)
Neil Fligstein	"Architecture" of markets, state, military defense, the creation of the Internet, corporations in the U.S., EU and market structure and the dissemination of the SE, debates with Bourdieu and Boyer (2001)
Richard Swedberg	Review of classics, markets, economic interest, banks, financial scandals, social vision of entrepreneurship; Economic Sociology of Law; dissemination of SE (2005)
Harrison White	Reproduction of markets (1970, 1981, 1992, 2002, 2008), price and quality; critical neoclassical
Viviana Zelizer	Markets (1988); childhood, insurance, privacy, social meaning of money, ethics and economics (2008)
Jens Beckert	Ordering markets, uncertainty and economic action, lottery and fiscal redistribution; classics, market regulation of wine; edition in early 2000, International Encyclopedia of Economic Sociology (together with Milan Zafirovski)
Patrick Aspers	Rescue classics, making of markets, fashion photography, standard and status markets, revising Fligstein; approach with other disciplines (2001, 2005, 2007, 2009)
Wolfgang Streeck	Business associations and workers (1981), the dynamics of capitalism and state in Germany, work and family, and political economy approaches to the Sociology of Markets (2008)
Michel Callon	Markets and economic theory (Economics as a discipline and Economy as an activity); networks.

Table 1: Major authors of Contemporary Economic Sociology: a thematic synthesis

Source: Adapted from Fontella (2009)

As the table 2 illustrates, the papers of Uzzi (1997) and Granovetter (1973, 1985, 1992 and 2005) are the most important in the area.

<b>Title of paper</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Journal</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Total citations</b>
The Strength of weak ties	Granovetter	American Journal of Sociology	1973	4171
Economic-action and social-structure: The problem of embeddedness	Granovetter	American Journal of Sociology	1985	4092
The sources and consequences of embeddedness for the economic performance of organizations: The network effect	Uzzi B	American Sociological Review	1997	899
Economic institutions as social constructions - a framework for analysis	Granovetter	Acta Sociologica	1992	136
The impact of social structure on economic outcomes	Granovetter	Journal of Economics Perspective	2005	124

Table 2: Authors and main papers

Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from ISI Web of Knowledge

The interest for economic sociology has significantly grown in the last few years. Figure 1 shows that quoting of the papers of Granovetter and Uzzi have increased considerably.

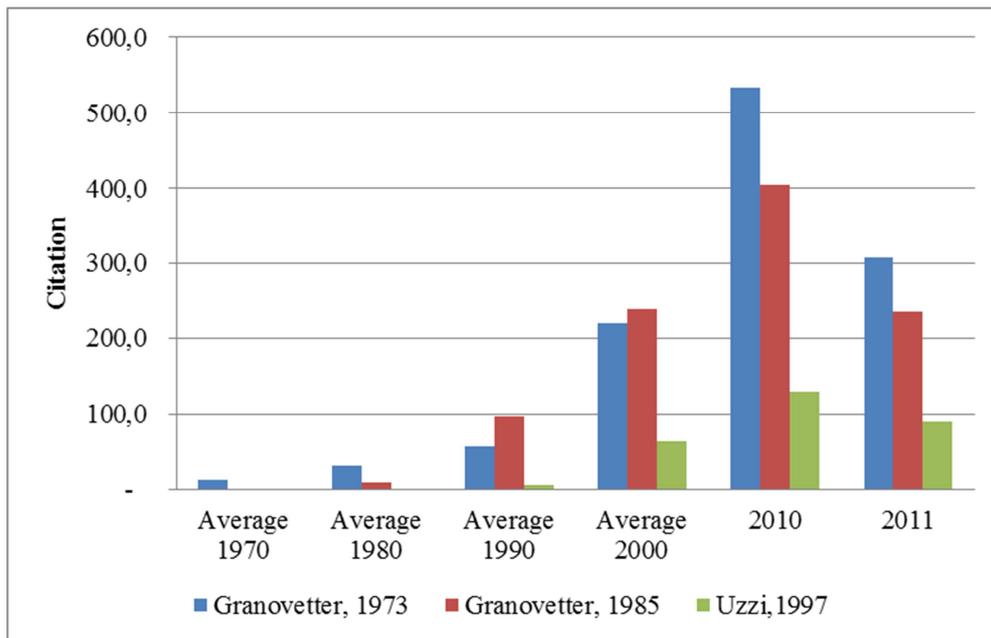


Figure 1: Evolution of quotation from Granovetter and Uzzi papers

Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from ISI Web of Knowledge

#### 4. Research Methodology

The research methodology adopted in this study was a descriptive and explanatory bibliometric analysis. To meet the aim of this study, it was developed a survey based on the following keywords: "economic sociology" + "supply chain", "economic sociology" + "operations." The preliminary research was initiated by searching the top ten “operations” journals listed by Meredith et al (2011) and other academic journals that cover the topic of “research operations” in its editorial liner. The authors also included other journals listed on EBSCO website, using the same keywords. The summary of the journals searched is presented in Table 3 and the full list of papers can be found in Appendix A.

<b>Criteria for including into the database</b>	<b>Journal</b>	<b># Papers</b>
Meredith et al (2011)	Journal of Operations Management	7
Meredith et al (2011)	International Journal of Production Research	0
Meredith et al (2011)	Manufacturing and Service Operations Management	0
Meredith et al (2011)	International Journal of Operations and Production Management	0
Meredith et al (2011)	Journal of Business Logistics	0
Meredith et al (2011)	Transportation Science	0
Meredith et al (2011)	Journal of Supply Chain Management	7
Meredith et al (2011)	International Journal of Physical Distribution and Logistics Management	0
Meredith et al (2011)	International Journal of Logistics Management	0
Authors decision	Decision Sciences	1
Authors decision	Industrial Marketing Management	20
Authors decision	Organization Science	6
Authors decision	Management Science	1

Table 3: Evolution of quotation from Granovetter and Uzzi papers

Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from ISI Web of Knowledge

Despite the clear possibility of using this approach in theoretical studies of operations and supply chain management, it is clear that few writers have explored this in their studies. In the next section, a detailed analysis of the results of this research is presented, assessing the level of usage of this theoretical approach on operations and its current contribution.

## **5. The Sociology of Economic Studies in Operations and Supply Chain Management**





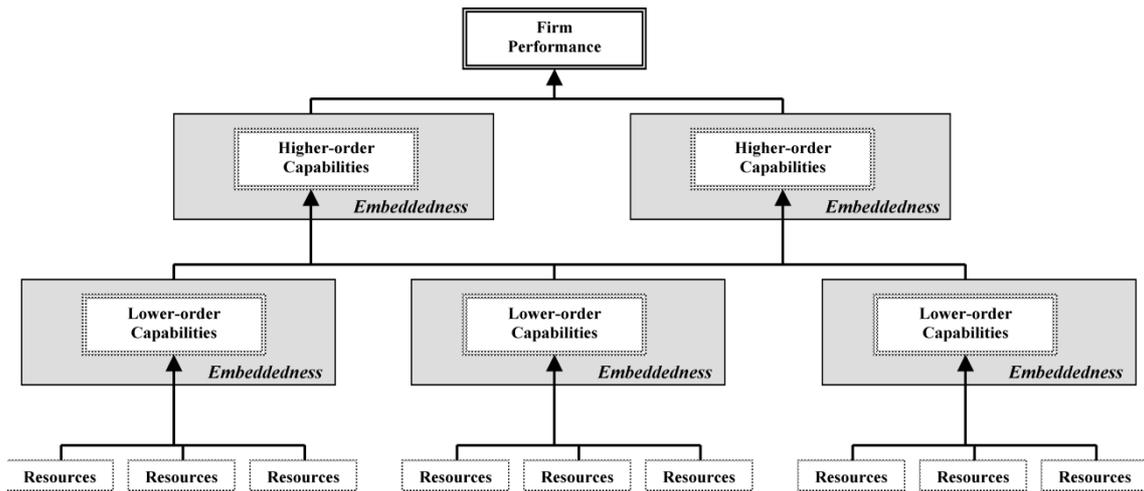


Figure 3: Embeddedness and organizational capabilities

Source: Slotegraaf and Grewal (2007)

To assess the topic “embeddedness with suppliers”, Koufteros et al. (2007) raised questions from the literature review and validation with executives, reaching issues that take into account the time of the relationship (“our firm has been building a long-term relationship with its suppliers”); level of involvement (“our firm has been involved in developing partnerships with its suppliers” and “our firm has been involved in developing its suppliers”); and cooperation (“our firm has been creating a cooperative relationship with its suppliers”). The flow chart developed by the authors is presented in Figure 4.

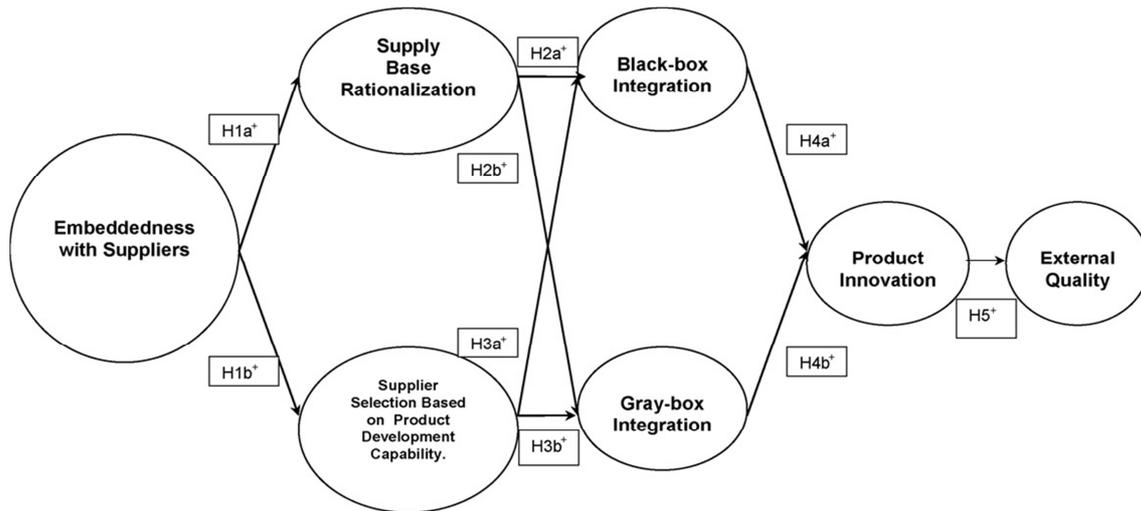


Figure 4: Model using embeddedness with suppliers as a pre-condition for innovation and quality

Source: Koufteros et al. (2007)

The paper of Oke and Walumbwa (2008) used the strength of ties as a mediator between power and performance. For the achievement of the "strength of ties," the authors took into account the following issues:

- (a) Goals similarity: "I believe that the members of this network work towards attaining similar goals";
- (b) Interest in continuing the relationship: "I would be interested in continuing my relationship with other members of this network, even after the project ends" and "Even if we had other options, we would remain in this network";
- (c) Conflict: "There is very little friction between the participants";
- (d) Closeness level between the actors: "Our relationship with the other members is best as close and personal" and "There is a good working relationship between the members of this network".

The flowchart developed by Oke et al (2006) is shown in Figure 5.

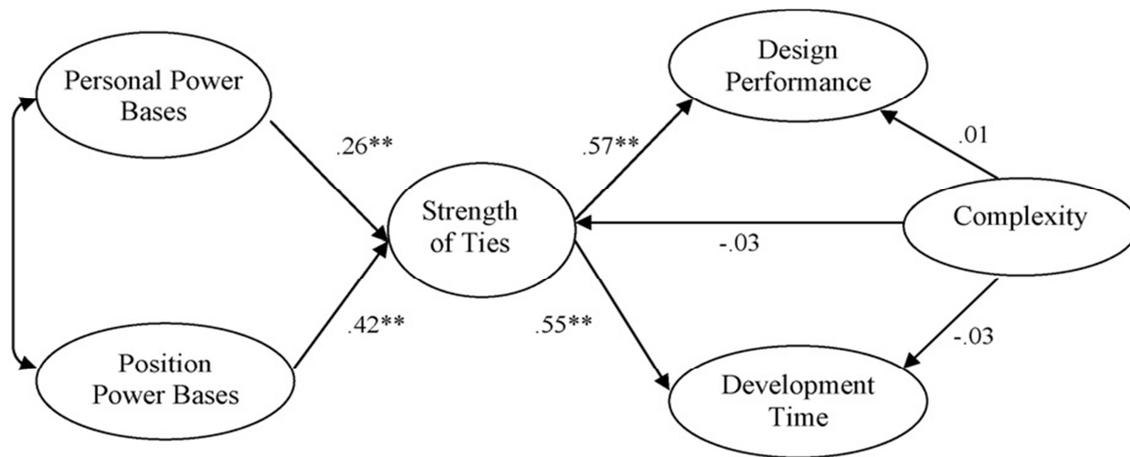


Figure 5: Model using the strength of ties as a mediator between power and performance

Source: Oke and Walumbwa (2008)

## 7. Conclusion

The use of different perspectives of organizational analysis provides new analytical and methodological basis for understanding the dynamics of organizations and the redirection of organizational studies (Sacoman Neto and Truzzi, 2002). Such approach is relevant because of the ambiguity and contradictions found in “operations” studies. The initial aim of this study was to explore the concept of economic sociology and its widespread usage in operations and supply chain management. To this end, this research initially explored the origins and theoretical conceptualization of said approach, identifying its classical as well as its current references.

It has been perceived that when applying the theory in operations and supply chain management studies, the papers examines the relationship between the parties, developing ways to make the embeddedness and the strength of ties possible.

This paper is relevant for “operations” studies since it provides more than a simple review of the literature; it presents an organized view on a theoretical approach rarely used when one is studying operations. In accordance with the concern raised by Kilduff (2007) on the contribution of such methodological approach, this study synthesizes the approach in a pragmatic theoretical fashion and encourages the production of new integrative insights, which would provide the reader with the possibility of having a broadened view of economic sociology (Lepine and King, 2010).

A worrying fact is the conflicted view of the economic sociology with other theoretical approaches, such as social capital theory, exchange theory, theory of networks, thus making the analysis of economic sociology superficial. However, this situation creates the opportunity for a deep and detailed exploration of this theory. This paper’s main contribution is a preliminary understanding of economic sociology, its classical references, assumptions and main constructs, thus providing an overview and a source of reference to the empirical studies of operations and supply chain management, which had employed this theoretical approach.

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## Apendice A:

Authors	Year	Journal	Paper title	Main discussion
Handfield e Nichols Jr.	2004	IMM	Key issues in global supply base management	Analysis of buyer organization efforts to manage international suppliers base. Emphasis on human factor to establish a positive relationship in order to reach superior performance
Ling-ye	2004	IMM	An examination of the foreign market knowledge of exporting firms based in the People's Republic of China: Its determinants and effect on export intensity	Conceptual framework of knowledge drivers of foreign markets - Social Capital perspective
Kjellberg and Helgesson	2006	IMM	Multiple versions of markets: Multiplicity and performativity in market practice	Framework to analyse multitheoretical influences of market analysis
Rinallo and Golfetto	2006	IMM	Representing markets: The shaping of fashion trends by French and Italian fabric companies	Ethnographic-descriptive paper - through different theoretical lens.
Bradley, Meyer and Gao	2006	IMM	Use of supplier-customer relationships by SMEs to enter foreign markets	SME and global suppliers development.
Brennan	2006	IMM	Evolutionary economics and the markets-as-networks approach	Compare market as network vs industrial marketing and economic evolution
Azimont and Araujo	2007	IMM	Category reviews as market-shaping events	Qualitative-descriptive approach: evaluate meetings between makers, customers and distribution
Möller and Rajala	2007	IMM	Rise of strategic nets — New modes of value creation	Qualitative descriptive approach - typology of business networks creation
Mouzas, Henneberg and Naudé	2008	IMM	Developing network insight	Explores cognitives networks

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Lukkari and Parvinen	2008	IMM	Pharmaceutical marketing through the customer portfolio: Institutional influence and adaptation, Industrial Marketing Management	Suggests that institutional discontinuities balances entrepreneurship and environment.
Westerlund and Svahn	2008	IMM	A relationship value perspective of social capital in networks of software SMEs	Why some relationships are more important than others: Social Capital perspective
Mouzas and Ford	2009	IMM	The constitution of networks	Analysis of networks and public organizations relationships
Paswan and Wittmann	2009	IMM	Knowledge management and franchise systems	Franchising and its networks
Järvensivu and Möller	2009	IMM	Metatheory of network management: A contingency perspective	Networks categories upon interorganizational relationships.
Cova, Prévot and Spencer	2010	IMM	Navigating between dyads and networks,	Explores the unit of analysis on networks studies: dyads or networks
Storbacka and Nenonen	2011	IMM	Scripting markets: From value propositions to market propositions	Concept of perfect market should be innappropriated for several studies. Co-criation and capabilities perspectives
Yang, Zhou and Jiang	2011	IMM	When do formal control and trust matter? A context-based analysis of the effects on marketing channel relationships in China	Analysis of the role of ties, formal controls and confidence.
Leung, Chan, Lai and Ngai	2011	IMM	An examination of the influence of guanxi and xinyong (utilization of personal trust) on negotiation outcome in China: An old friend approach	Chinese negotiation, cultural issues, internationalization challenges.
Lin, Huang, Lin and Hsu	2011	IMM	How to manage strategic alliances in OEM-based industrial clusters: Network embeddedness and formal governance mechanisms	Formal mechanisms of governance and embeddedness of network.

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Koufteros, Cheng and Lai	2007	JOM	“Black-box” and “gray-box” supplier integration in product development: Antecedents, consequences and the moderating role of firm size	Antecedents of buyer-supplier relationship - exploration of suppliers' embeddedness.
Krause, Handfield and Tyler	2007	JOM	The relationships between supplier development, commitment, social capital accumulation and performance improvement	Long term commitment - Social Capital perspective
Rabinovich, Knemeyer and Mayer	2007	JOM	Why do Internet commerce firms incorporate logistics service providers in their distribution channels?: The role of transaction costs and network strength	Buyer-supplier relationship - e-commerce. TCT, Networks theory and Economic sociology
Oke, Idiagbon-Oke and Walumbwa	2008	JOM	The relationship between brokers' influence, strength of ties and NPD project outcomes in innovation-driven horizontal networks	Power issues.
Liu, Luo and Liu	2009	JOM	Governing buyer-supplier relationships through transactional and relational mechanisms: Evidence from China	Matched survey - 225 buyer-supplier pairs - exploration of simultaneous use of TCT and socio-relational perspective - Competitive advantage
Autry and Golicic	2010	JOM	Evaluating buyer-supplier relationship-performance spirals: A longitudinal study	Longitudinal study: 323 relationships - Focus: cycle link and dynamics of relationship power and performance (buyer-supplier)
Oke and Idiagbon-Oke	2010	JOM	Communication channels, innovation tasks and NPD project outcomes in innovation-driven horizontal networks	Evaluates innovation and communication by studying power of relationship ties.

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Wagner, Coley and Lindemann	2011	JSCM	Effects of Suppliers' reputation on the future of buyer-supplier relationships: the mediating roles of outcome fairness and trust	Confidence on collaborative projects has a strong influence over future buyer supplier relationships. Justice and reputation.
Choi and Kim	2008	JSCM	Structural embeddedness and supplier management: a network perspective.	Structural embeddedness alligned to suppliers setup as a key to supply networks, should support new guidelines to manage vendor lists in a proper way.
Buddress and Dass	2007	JSCM	Evaluating Prospective e-Providers: An Empirical Study	Economic Sociology and RBV to identify, prioritize and stablish criteria to users satisfaction. Cluster + ANOVA, sample of 103 organizations.
Li and Choi	2009	JSCM	Triads in services outsourcing: bridge, brigde decay and bridge transfer	Manufacturing - buyer acts as a bridge between suppliers and customers. On service field, the relationship structures are different.
Hunt and Davis	2008	JSCM	Grounding supply chain management in resource-advantage theory	Explores if purchasing should be a competitive advantage for a firm.
Ramalingam and Rauh	2011	Management Science	The Firm as a Socialization Device	Framework to discuss market efficiency and comparisson of the model within SE
Maurer, Bansal and Crossan	2011	Organization Science	Creating Economic Value Through Social Values: Introducing a Culturally Informed Resource-Based View	Economic Sociology + RBV to explain cultural elements and its impacts of firm value
Hirsch	2000	Organization Science	Cultural Industries Revisited	Economic sociology to explain cultural issues and business opportunities
Gulati, Sytch and Tatarynowicz	2010	Organization Science	The Rise and Fall of Small Worlds: Exploring the Dynamics of Social Structure	Exploration of social and economic issues on coloboration networks creation and its evolution

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Shipilov, Li and Greve	2011	Organization Science	The Prince and the Pauper: Search and Brokerage in the Initiation of Status-Heterophilous Ties	Economic Sociology and Feedback Theory to explain drivers to select network partners.
Bernades	2010	Decision Sciences	The effect of supply management on aspects of social capital and the impact on performance: a social network perspective	Based on social networks perspectives, this study explores relational embeddedness and investigates the role of management on process. Sample: 204 organizations