

# POWER IN LARGE BUYER–SMALL SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS IN SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAINS

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## 1. Introduction

With the growing concerns over the sustainability and ethicality of business practices, supply chain (SC) relationships have become an even more critical business dimension. Companies increasingly face pressure to account for the malpractices of their suppliers and sometimes their suppliers' suppliers. As supply networks have become more complex, firms are faced with the challenge of how to manage their SC relationships in order to mitigate the reputational and operational risks that can emerge from unethical and unsustainable practices (Krause, Vachon, & Klassen, 2009). Companies looking to become more sustainable have to consider how they can achieve social and environmental goals through the entire SC.

In previous studies, there is a strong emphasis on the importance of relationships, and especially collaboration, between SC partners to foster the achievement of sustainable goals in the SC (e.g. Gold, Seuring, & Beske, 2010; Seuring & Müller, 2008). Although the collaborative paradigm has been advocated by many academics as the best way to achieve sustainable goals, it is not the only way to approach the question of how to manage buyer-supplier relationships in sustainable supply chain management (SSCM). In traditional supply chain literature, a significant amount of work exists that has looked at the concept of power in buyer-supplier exchange (Cox, 2004a; Oliver, 1990).

The role that power plays in buyer-supplier relationships is typically perceived as being negative\* and remains under-explored in SSCM research. In this study, we make a novel contribution by adopting a power perspective to better understand how buyer-supplier relationships are managed in sustainable SCs. Understanding the power dynamics between collaborating parties could provide a potential explanation for the drivers

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and barriers to SSCM, and to identify what constitute suitable working relationships to achieve sustainability related goals. Our study addresses the following research question:

- How do power dynamics influence SSCM?

The paper starts by introducing the concept of power as conceptualised in Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, 2003) and its relevance for understanding buyer-supplier relationship in SSCM. Next, we discuss the criticality of buyer-supplier relationships in SSCM and show how power dynamics affect SSCM implementation. The methodology section describes our case study and how data analysis was conducted. Finally, we discuss the preliminary findings, and research and managerial implications are raised in the conclusion.

## **2. The concept of power: definition and relevance for SSCM**

The concept of power is contested (Chicksand, 2009; Ireland & Webb, 2007) and has been variously defined and measured in inter-organisational relationships (Ramsay, 1996). In this section, we define power using Resource Dependency Theory (RDT) and show the applicability of the theory for studying buyer-supplier power in SSCM. Several authors have deplored the limited amount of empirical work explicitly extending RDT (Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003) and argued that RDT needs continued exploration in order to remain relevant (Singh, Power, & Chuong, 2011).

### *2.1 Defining power: a resource dependence perspective*

Power is commonly defined as the ability of an actor to influence another actor's behaviour; including making them do something that they would not have done otherwise (Lukes, 1974). From this definition we can consider two important characteristics of power: it is a relative and emerges from the specific context of a relationship; and, it is expressed as a way of managing the relationship (Chicksand, 2009; Cox, Ireland, Lonsdale, & Watson, 2002; Frazier, 1999).

RDT provides a useful framework to understand inter-organisational relations. It states that no organisation is self-sufficient and therefore firms will seek to enter a relationship to be able to access resources they need to achieve their organisational outcomes. Inter-organisational relations are formed to manage interdependence between organisations (Paulraj & Chen, 2007; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Singh et al., 2011). Power can

be understood in terms of the degree of dependence experienced by the parties in the relationship (Ramsay, 1996). There will be power imbalance (asymmetrical interdependence) if firm A is more dependent on firm B than B on A. Power depends on the criticality of the resource (commercial and operational importance) and the availability of alternatives to source the same resource (scarcity) (Chicksand, 2009; Cox et al., 2002). Not all inter-organisational relations are characterised by power imbalance, i.e. when levels of mutual dependence are equal; and not all situations of asymmetry will be characterised by the same level of imbalance (Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005). RDT provides a useful framework to understand power dynamics in inter-organisational relations and offers predictions with regards to actions organisations will take to manage dependence in terms of power use or power restructuring (Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005).

## *2.2 Power in buyer-supplier relationships*

While a number of authors have discussed the advantages of long-term collaboration and partnering to buyer-supplier relationships (e.g. Spekman, Kamauff Jr, & Myhr, 1998), an understanding of power dynamics can help explain barriers to such relationships. It has been argued that in a situation of power imbalance, the dominant or powerful organisation is likely to exercise its control and influence over the other party and act to maintain its power, whereas the weaker or more dependent organisations are more likely to comply and follow the requirements to continue accessing the resources (Kumar, Scheer, & Steenkamps, 1995; Zhu, Sarkis, Lai, & Geng, 2008). The power differential provides an opportunity for the powerful firm to act opportunistically (Frazier, 1999; Ireland & Webb, 2007), and for instance seek to make agreements that will favour their own interests or encourage suppliers to make the majority of investments (Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005; Cox, Chicksand, & Palmer, 2007). Powerful organisations are likely to resist entering long-term collaboration, as it would signify a loss of power due to an increase in dependence (Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005; Ramsay, 1996). Less powerful organisations might be reluctant to collaborate with powerful organisations as they may not benefit from the exchange and become over-reliant on a specific organisation.

Unequal power clearly raises concerns with regards to the fairness of the sharing of risks and rewards in the relationship. It might be too idealistic to think that increased collaboration will lead to an equal share of commercial and efficiency achievements (win-win), particularly in chains dominated by powerful buyers (Cox & Chicksand, 2007). Awareness of the specificities of the business ties and relative power is key to developing suitable value creating strategies (Chicksand, Ramsay, & Rehme, 2011).

### 2.3 Relevance of power in SSCM

While a large part of the literature on SSC relationships emphasizes notions of trust, commitment and partnerships, it seems to underestimate the role of power. Previous research seems to be focused upon the positive (trust, information sharing) rather than the negative (power, control, compliance) aspects of relationships in SSCs. In our view, relational exchanges in a SC context are complex and it is too idealistic to describe them based solely on trust and collaboration, and expect equal sharing when power remains an underlying component of these relationships (Belaya, Gagalyuk, & Hanf, 2009; Cox & Chicksand, 2007).

The impact of power on the creation and sharing of value and risk in buyer-supplier relationships is very relevant to SSCM, as it concerns the creation of not only long-term economic but also social and environmental value through inter-organisational business processes (Carter & Rogers, 2008; Markley & Davis, 2007). The transformation of the SC into a sustainable SC raises concerns about investments/ costs and the management of risks between the different members of the SC (Pagell, Krumwiede, & Sheu, 2007; Vachon & Klassen, 2007). Organisations are therefore faced with the question of how to manage their SC relationships to achieve sustainable goals. Power, as defined by RDT, can help researchers and managers to understand the choices of modes of governance to manage sustainability along the SC. RDT has been applied to SSCM in a limited context previously, to explain variations between firm sizes in SSCM (Zhu et al., 2008), and to explore the relationship between large corporations and SMEs, which have often limited capabilities to engage extensively in SSCM (Lee & Klassen, 2008; Pedersen, 2009). In this study, we adopt RDT to explore large buyer-small supplier relationships in SSCM.

## 3. The criticality of buyer-supplier relationships in sustainable SCM

### 3.1 Definition: SSCM as relational and change practice

There is no consensus on the definition of SSCM. We adopt the definition by Carter and Rogers (2008) because it provides a comprehensive understanding of SSCM and has been widely used and adapted by other authors in the field. They define SSCM as:

‘The strategic, transparent integration and achievement of an organization’s social, environmental, and economic goals in the systemic coordination of key interorganizational business processes for improving the long-term economic performance of the individual company and its supply chains.’ (p. 368)

SSCM often focuses on the connection between and role of supply chain members (Spence & Bourlakis, 2009; Wolters, 2003). SSCM is also concerned with change management, and the evolution in organisational practice to address emerging sustainability issues and to respond to external pressures (Fabbe-Costes, Roussat, & Colin, 2011; Seuring, Sarkis, Müller, & Rao, 2008). It has been shown that buyer-supplier relationships are crucial in determining an organisation's ability to adapt and respond to change, in particular with regard to sustainability (Brammer, Hoejmose, & Millington, 2012; Hoyt & Huq, 2000).

### *3.2 SSC performance: creating value and managing risk*

The idea that supply chain performance is key to long-term business success (Burgess, Singh, & Koroglu, 2006) has become even more relevant when considering the advancement of sustainable business agendas. SSCM has been viewed as a way to gain competitive advantage as well as achieve greater performance (Hall & Matos, 2010; Markley & Davis, 2007) through the incorporation of the three dimensions – economic, social and environmental – of the triple bottom line (Carter & Rogers, 2008; Seuring & Müller, 2008). Simpson and Power have shown that supply relationships have a strong influence on performance improvement and that they 'may present a key way for business to influence the sustainability of products and services' (2005: 66). SSC performance also concerns the effective management of risks in the SC, where the nature and quality of relationships plays an important role to mitigate reputational and operational risks (Carter & Rogers, 2008; Foerstl, Reuter, Hartmann, & Blome, 2010).

### *3.3 Implementing SSC practices: collaboration vs. compliance*

Deciding how to best manage a SC relationship should be guided by the intended or desired outcome of the process (Cousins, 2002). In the context of SSCM, this means managing relationships in order to achieve greater economic, environmental and social value. Many authors in the field have adopted a collaborative perspective on the management of SSCM relationships. For example, SC partnership and greater integration enhances the adoption of environmental technologies and results in an optimised use of resources (e.g. Vachon & Klassen, 2008). Supply chain performance improves as a result of increased trust and efficiency (e.g. Verghese & Lewis, 2007). Greater collaboration on SSCM improves dialogue, trust and relationship quality, and constitutes an intangible asset that contributes to superior performance (e.g. Alvarez, Pilbeam, & Wilding, 2010).

There has been a strong focus in SSCM literature on the actions of large corporations, who benefit from more resources at hand to address su-

sustainability issues, and are more exposed to external pressure (Zhu et al., 2008). When ethical dilemmas arise in a SC, large multinationals are often held responsible for the behaviour of their suppliers. In order to minimise the risk incurred by a scandal in their SC, large companies put pressure on their suppliers to adopt codes of conducts and more sustainable business practices (Hall, 2001; Mollenkopf, Stolze, Tate, & Ueltschy, 2010). This can be challenging for smaller suppliers who fail to access the necessary capabilities (Lee, 2008; Pedersen, 2009).

Rather than viewing such imbalanced SSC from a collaborative paradigm, this is an example of the relevance of understanding power in SSC relationships, and how imbalanced buyer-supplier relationship are coordinated to achieve sustainability.

### *3.4 Small and Medium Size Enterprises in SSCM*

There is little research to be found in SSCM specifically taking a smaller firm perspective. Most studies have considered issues related to the adoption, development and implementation of sustainable practices in the SC from a large, high profile, firm perspective (Pedersen, 2009). While it is recognised that sustainability is understood and addressed differently by large corporations and small companies (Russo & Perrini, 2010), the contribution of SMEs to the sustainable development agenda remains widely unexplored (Walker & Preuss, 2008).

A particularly interesting area is the way in which large organisations work with SMEs to implement SSCM. As mentioned earlier, it is often the case that large companies will put pressure on SMEs to comply with their sustainability requirements (Amaeshi, Osuji, & Nnodim, 2008; Hall, 2001; Lee & Klassen, 2008). Several authors have argued that larger firms have comparably more power than small firms to stimulate sustainable practices along their SCs (Ciliberti, Pontrandolfo, & Scozzi, 2008). Furthermore, SMEs are seen as having less capabilities and resources to address sustainability issues and will consequently face difficulties to respond to the pressure from their customers, let alone to implement their own SSCM agenda (Lee & Klassen, 2008; Pedersen, 2009).

Given that SMEs represent a substantial part of the UK's and more widely, the EU's economic fabric, their potential contribution to the sustainable agenda is not negligible. We have shown that there is an existing knowledge gap around the role of SMEs in SSCM and this paper contributes to developing our understanding of their role in SSCM, especially in the context of a relationship with a large buyer firm where power is a critical dimension.

### *3.5 Power in food supply chains*

This study was conducted in the food sector, which lends itself to a power perspective on SC relationships. Research in food SCs has shown that there is often an asymmetric distribution of power and that buyer-supplier relationships in this sector tend to be buyer-skewed, with a power advantage for the 'large' buyer, e.g. food manufacturer or supermarket (Fearne, Duffy, & Hornibrook, 2005; Hingley & Lindgreen, 2010). Power is embodied by the focal firm, which coordinates the overall supply network. The influence and control exerted by dominant companies has been described as 'buyer-driven (-ness)' and used to explain governance mechanisms and structures of food chains (Gereffi, 1994). From a sustainability standpoint, food SCs are particularly critical with regards to sustainable development as they are embedded within distinctive social, economic and environmental processes (Maloni & Brown, 2006; Thompson & Scoones, 2009). This shows that the question of power in food chains is central in understanding the mechanisms at play in the implementation of sustainable practices (Cox, Chicksand & Palmer, 2007.).

### *3.6 Extending RDT to buyer-supplier relationships in SSCM*

Having highlighted in the previous part the relevance of RDT to understand buyer-supplier relationships in SSCM, we acknowledge it has some limitations. First, RDT fails to explicitly distinguish between coercive and non-coercive power use, where the former may impair the achievement of sustainable goals, while the latter may be viewed as a positive influence in the context of a SSC e.g. as a mechanism to achieve compliance (Ireland & Webb, 2007). Second, when considering relationships in SSCM, all dimensions of the triple bottom line (economic, social and environmental) need to be taken into account, which may alter levels of dependence and the actions that an organisation may take in response to these dependencies. Finally, the RDT model shows that relative power has an impact on the share of surplus value (Chicksand, 2009; Cox, 2004b) and therefore helps explain the degree of mutuality in a relationship. Applying the RDT model in the context of SSCM requires thinking about what sharing of value means when it comes to sustainability. Specifically, gains may be expressed in terms of social and environmental value as well as economic value, and evaluating the sharing of investments/costs and risks might also be relevant in this case.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Background to the case

In this paper, we report on the findings from a study, which started in October 2011, with a multinational company in the food industry. The project investigates the implementation of SSCM between a large customer and their small agricultural suppliers in the UK. We refer to the customer as large compared to the suppliers due to the differences in the scale of their operations and their respective revenues. As a multinational food and drinks company operating worldwide, the customer had a net revenue of approximately \$58 billion in 2010, while their agricultural suppliers are primarily family-owned businesses operating solely in the UK with revenues ranging from tens of thousands to a few million pounds. In recent years, the multinational has been quite proactive regarding sustainability initiatives and has set itself a number of ambitious targets. While the multinational has embraced the 'journey to sustainability' (Milne, Kearins, & Walton, 2006) within its corporate strategy, it cannot achieve these ambitious targets on its own.

We adopt a case approach that involves a combination of different methods (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Shah & Corley, 2006) including collection of strategy, environmental and CSR documents from organisations in the SC, participant observation and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. We have chosen a qualitative case study approach because we seek to explore the relational dynamics around the implementation of SSC practices, and therefore require a more in-depth and holistic approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Case study research is viewed as a particularly suitable research strategy in the food sector as it allows capturing details, meanings and social embeddedness (Hingley, 2005; Matopoulos, Vlachopoulou, Manthou, & Manos, 2007). This case study provides insights into the complex social processes of SSCM as embedded in their context (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2003).

### 4.2 Research methods

Twenty-six semi-structured interviews were conducted with 9 agricultural suppliers of the same product, 13 employees from the multinational company and 4 external stakeholders. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and more than 2 hours. An interview protocol was developed around a number of topics to allow participants to express their perspectives on the nature and quality of the relationship and the development, implementation and monitoring of SSC initiatives. The protocol aimed to encapsulate the main dimensions of power and dependence as highlighted in RDT as



well as explore the manifestations of power in the management of the relationship around sustainability. The main advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they allow for both focus and flexibility and thereby, ensure that interviewees had as much freedom to develop their answers as possible. Table 1 provides examples of interview questions.

*Tab. 1 - Examples of interview questions*

<b>Power/Dependence</b>	How critical is this supplier/buyer in the overall production process? How much does the relationship with this supplier/buyer affect your environmental and social performance?
<b>Relationship Management</b>	Are there any sustainability standards or initiatives within the contract? How are they monitored? Could you describe how decisions are made about the planning, development and implementation of sustainability initiatives? Do you invest specifically in this relationship in order to facilitate the implementation of sustainability initiatives?

### 4.3 Analysis

In most cases interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed. Attention was paid to produce reliable and accurate transcripts, which were sent back to the participants in order to receive their final feedback. We analyse the data and theory in an iterative comparative process to make sense of the social complexities of SSC and contribute to developing empirical knowledge (Kaufmann & Denk, 2011). An initial list of themes was developed from the interview questions, based on the literature, and additional themes were added as they emerged from the data. Transcripts were coded using the initial list until no new themes were found. Having agreed on a final list of analytical categories, the authors analysed the data independently and then compared their findings in an effort to measure agreement and increase reliability. When analysing the transcripts, guided by our research question, we seek to explore the existence and expressions of power dynamics in the relationships, and therefore focused on two issues:

- 1) The nature and criticality of the relationship for both buyer and suppliers.
- 2) The manifestation and application of power in the implementation of sustainable practices in the SC.

## 5. Findings and discussion

From the initial interview findings in our study, there seems to be evidence of an existing power imbalance between the large customer and SME suppliers or growers. It is interesting to investigate how this imbalance

ce manifests itself and affects the management of their relationship around sustainability issues.

In terms of commercial dependence and criticality, there are several indications that the buyer is in a dominant position compared to the agricultural growers. Interviewees mentioned the lack of alternatives to supply their agricultural products, which results in a high level of dependence on the buyer. This lock-in is reinforced by the capital requirements of growing their crop. The buyer has more flexibility regarding their supply base, with more than 100 growers producing the crop. Buyer dominance also transpires from the accounts about contractual arrangements and tense price negotiations. Despite the fact that most of the relationships have been ongoing for several decades, contracts have been signed every year and there has been a push from the buyer to drive prices down. The reduced supplier base (8 grower groups) initially appears as a move towards more collaborative relational mechanisms with a smaller number of suppliers with a closer connection to the buyer. However, it has also allowed the buyer to exert more operational control over these dedicated suppliers through for example quality requirements, vendor assurance audits and transfer of operational responsibilities to the growers (e.g. washing of the crop).

When relating our findings about power imbalance to SSCM, it appears in the interviews that the large buyer has been using this powerful position to advance their sustainability agenda with the growers. For instance, one grower states that in terms of sustainability goals, they 'tend to be more the recipients of [the buyer's] expectations'. In parallel, the terminology employed by members of the agro team within the multinational company confirms the idea of a 'push' for sustainability and the necessity for the suppliers to comply with requirements. Power dynamics are also reflected in the unequal sharing of investments and risks in relation to sustainability (e.g. storage investments required from the growers, climate change risks for growers). This is reinforced by the lack of alignment between the commercial ('more forensic on costs') and the sustainable agenda of the buyer, and suppliers have a challenge to find the necessary resources to comply with the sustainability requirements.

All the suppliers interviewed have expressed their desire to see greater demonstration by the buyer of the mutuality of the relationship and greater recognition of the specific efforts they make and difficulties they face to address sustainability issues. Unequal power has had consequences on how sustainability goals have been defined in the SC, with little consideration for the growers' perspective and expertise. This has had a negative impact on the suppliers' feelings about the quality of the relationship with the buyer.

The use of power by the large buyer to push their sustainability agenda has resulted in resistance amongst the suppliers, and led to a lot of uncer-

tainty for the buyer in terms of whether they will achieve their sustainability goals (e.g. carbon reduction). For instance, the buyer faces uncertainty regarding the accuracy of the environmental data they require from the suppliers, and find it difficult to move beyond minimal levels of compliance. There are signs suggesting that the inclusion of sustainability in the relationship has led to a restructuring of dependencies, with the large buyer having become reliant on their suppliers to achieve their sustainability targets. As noted by the head of the agro team in relation to sustainability goals: ‘it is not us delivering because we are not farming anything, we don’t farm things’. This highlights the fact that the growers have a privileged access to the natural environment that the buyer does not have as well as, deal with critical social issues such as seasonal/temporary labour hired during harvesting season. The growers are therefore very critical for the buyer in terms of environmental and social sustainability in the SC.

These initial findings corroborate our view that power in terms of dependence is relevant to understanding buyer-supplier relationships in SSCM. Analysing the findings in light of the power literature confirms that the existence of power imbalance can help the powerful organisation drive sustainability in their SC. For instance, more dependent organisations become obligated to comply with their requirements and invest specifically in the relationship. This can be viewed as attempts by the focal firm to drive its own interests while bearing a smaller share of the risks and costs. We also show that it is necessary to re-evaluate the levels of dependence between players when considering sustainability. The organisation that is more powerful in commercial terms may face increasing dependence when it comes to accessing and controlling environmental and social resources, which are critical to achieving SSC goals. This supports our previous argument on how RDT may be extended to account for not only economic but also environmental and social dimensions of the relationships.

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper contributes to developing our understanding of the relational dynamics of SSCs. In particular, it is possible to identify two main contributions made by this article. First, the article adopts a power perspective to studying SSC relationships and specifically uses RDT to critically analyse buyer-supplier relationships in this context. This is a novel contribution to the field, as power has not been used in SSCM to explore buyer-supplier relationships.

Second, the article provides empirical evidence to support and extend the current RDT model. The findings presented in this paper must be considered as work-in-progress as not all interviews have been analysed and

the researchers are still conducting data collection. Nevertheless, our initial insights seem to support RDT in explaining how commercial dependence can foster compliance, and how the dominant player can use power to drive sustainability in the SC. We identify the role of non-coercive power use in SSCM, which can be viewed as a form of leadership. The findings suggest that the evolution from a commercially focused relationship to one that encompasses sustainability issues may result in a change in the levels and nature of dependencies.

From a managerial perspective, the discussion presented in this paper about the impact of power dynamics on the implementation of SSC practices may contribute to developing a better understanding of what constitute more effective ways to manage imbalanced buyer-supplier relationships to achieve sustainable goals. In addition, there are a number of implications regarding the position of SMEs in SSCM. Our study confirms that size does not matter when it comes to power in SSCM. SMEs working with large companies have a critical role to play to ensure that sustainability goals are met as they represent the key link to access and manage environmental and social resources. It is important that managers realise the power and responsibility held by small firms in order to develop and coordinate appropriate risk and value sharing strategies. Only then will SCs become truly sustainable.

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## **Abstract**

This study adopts a power perspective to explore sustainable supply chain relationships and specifically uses Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) to critically analyse buyer-supplier relationships. In addition, further empirical evidence is provided extending the RDT model in this context. The concept of buyer-supplier power is explored through a qualitative study of a multinational FMCG company and agricultural growers, in the UK food industry, who work together to implement sustainable practices. The study highlights that dependence is relevant to understanding compliance in sustainable supply chains. We also show how power influences players and the sharing of sustainability-related risks and value. From a managerial perspective, the study contributes to developing a better understanding of what constitute more effective ways to manage imbalanced buyer-supplier relationships to achieve sustainability goals.

## **Riassunto**

Questo studio studia le relazioni finalizzate a migliorare la sostenibilità nella supply chain dal punto di vista del poter contrattuale in tali relazioni. Più specificamente esso utilizza la “resource dependence theory” per analizzare criticamente le relazioni cliente-fornitore e fornire evidenze empiriche circa l’applicazione di tale modello teorico. Il concetto di poter nelle relazioni cliente-fornitore è esplorato attraverso uno studio qualitativo svolto su un’azienda multinazionale operante nel settore dei beni di largo consumo e una serie di piccoli produttori agricoli del settore alimentare nel Regno Unito che lavorano insieme per realizzare iniziative di sostenibilità ambientale. Lo studio evidenzia che la dipendenza è un elemento rilevante per comprendere la conformità nelle supply chain sostenibili. Lo studio mostra anche come il potere influenza le strategie degli attori e la condivisione rischi e del valore connessi alla sostenibilità. Dal punto di vista manageriale, lo studio contribuisce a migliorare la comprensione delle modalità più efficaci per gestire lo squilibrio nelle relazioni cliente-fornitore per raggiungere obiettivi di sostenibilità.

**Jel Classification:** L14, L22, L66, M11, M14, Q56

**Keywords (Parole chiave):** sustainability, power, buyer-supplier relationships, qualitative (sostenibilità, potere contrattuale, relazioni cliente-fornitore, studio qualitativo)

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