



Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny  
we Wrocławiu

WROCLAW UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS  
FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT

**Tomasz Wilczyński**

**RELATIONAL INSTRUMENTS FOR SHAPING COOPERATION  
BETWEEN MEAT PRODUCERS AND RETAIL CHAIN  
DISTRIBUTORS**

Doctoral dissertation abstract

Research supervisor:

**dr hab. Anetta Pukas, prof. UEW**

Wroclaw 2023

## PhD THESIS SUMMARY

In recent years, the company's cooperation has become an area of scientific research, which includes numerous publications by Polish and world authors. The richness of those involved in research, together with the diversity of the researched issues, applies to a different range of complexity of cooperation issues for both science and practice. While the development of inter-organizational cooperation allows enterprises operating competitive for unknown reasons, not all enterprises benefit from this. The very concept of cooperation for the supplier and the recipient may mean something completely different, which is the different effects of cooperation of the company in the supply chain, and at the same time different state and level of market competitiveness achieved by these companies. As such, buyer-seller cooperation is a complex dyadic relationship of delivering and delivering to the buyer. In cooperation in the distribution of products or services, these two units and functions in these units are interdependent, and the degree of this interdependence determines the partnership of the cooperating parties. Interacting and creating a relationship between the supplier and the buyer, in the normal course of the transaction in the distribution channel, is done using tools that shape the action and then influence it. The task of producers and distributors is therefore to define such tools and the effects of their use, which may result from the cooperation itself, achieving partnership and achieving market success for both the supplier and the buyer.

How to check the market effectiveness of producers in the higher market is burdened with social officials and challenges related to the Covid 19 pandemic, the decision caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, or global inflation. These conditions facilitate access to sources, interrupted supply chains, lack of security and stability in inter-organizational cooperation. In addition, the meat industry, which is used for research as part of the work, and its economic assessment, and at the same time high dependence on the relevant macro and microeconomic factors, in particular its complexity and sensitivity to changes. The activity of a producer in this industry is determined by the aid function, animal activity and profitability of breeding, changing nutritional trends among products and other factors that have no influence. Manufacturers, apart from the challenges resulting from the functioning of the company, are determined to find effective tools and tools that work to build a competitive advantage on the market, not only with product and price offers, but also with added value offered in cooperation with business partners. The importance of the relational paradigm in management science defines inter-organizational relations as a strategic and invisible enterprise resource, as a result of which resources easily acquired, sharing, sharing, benefit is too special and special in the

acquisition, which did not solve depreciation in the way that traditional economic creation of production as described by Ford et al. (2003). Causal independence brings benefits that aid generation can cause inter-organizational relationships that use these invisible resources to isolate themselves and gain the needed competitive advantage.

Combining relations with the category of cooperation with a study explored in the literature already at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, e.g. by Bowersox (1990), Gerwin and Meister (2002), who describe the joint activities of organizations, emphasizing that they create team activities of clients with management to be motivated by a clear need to develop the enterprise, convergence of interests of the parties, cooperating partners and cooperating parties for both cooperating parties of the relationship. How to Achieve Barry & Terry, (2008), Sharma, (2017) relationship value is a business outcome and the primary goal of anyone who engages in an exchange. The process based on the interaction of mutual interactions and links between producers, intermediaries and products as a result of market changes has developed in the school of marketing with the characteristics of interaction-economic and marketing relations. The development of relationship marketing achievements resulted in, among others, Customer Relationship Management CRM technologies.

Started by L.L. Berry's (1983) concept, which defined CRM as attracting, maintaining and strengthening customer relations, aroused great interest of researchers around the world (e.g. M. Christopher, Ch. Grönroos, E. Gummesson, A. Parvatiyar J.N. Sheth, P. Kotler), as well as in Poland (e.g. E. Frąckiewicz, E. Rudawska, M. Nowak, M. Mitreğa and other authors).

The evolution of marketing and knowledge of inter-organizational relations in the supply chain also influenced the development of the concept of Quality Relations QR, Leonidau et al. (2021), define the quality of relations as a tool that improves the results of an organization, which in the long period helps to develop a sustainable competitive advantage. The results of research conducted by Mitreğa and Katrichis (2010) suggest that the quality of the relationship increases the propensity of the business customer to provide recommendations and focus on purchases, while reducing the propensity to look for an alternative supplier. Inter-organizational relations, shaped by the participants of the distribution channel, is a phenomenon that does not occur automatically, but is intentionally created by them during mutual interactions. Therefore, cooperation in the supply chain requires companies to take a new look at organizational activities, which, according to the authors of Soosay, Hyland and Ferrer (2008), leads to the need to look for sources of a long-term relationship based on cooperation. The usefulness of the concept of supply chain collaboration (SCC) according to the author of De Leeuw (2009) results from the fact that no single company is able to independently and effectively compete in modern

markets. Moreover, according to Christopher (2011), one cannot compete with others acting in isolation.

In practice, cooperation in the supply chain is considered as a process where two or more companies formally commit to sharing responsibility when exchanging information, planning and managing activities, which allows creating synergies between all members of the supply chain and thus achieving greater mutual benefits, than companies achieving these benefits individually.

Authors Skjoett-Larsen et al. (2007) argued that increased and long-term cooperation in the supply chain occurs only at a higher level of involvement of the cooperating parties, which leads to partnership. The authors of Ryciuk and Nazarka (2020) identify the necessary factors before the partnership expected by the cooperating parties takes place. The authors called the “preceding elements” or “cooperation facilitators” instruments with the hallmarks of success, namely: trust, loyalty, pursuit of common goals, conflict resolution, joint planning, forecasting, commitment, communication, interdependence and adaptation. The authors state that it is important to understand the factors that influence the development of successful relationships. The analysis of the literature on the subject allows for the conclusion that building relationships, cooperation and partnership between enterprises achieved in the distribution channel are related categories, and relational instruments are the determinant influencing their condition. According to the authors of Hogan, Lemon, Rust (2002), relational instruments play the role of resources that can be used on an equal footing with other company resources, the use of which affects the achievement of a competitive advantage. However, the literature presents different theoretical conclusions and different assumptions regarding the functioning of relational mechanisms, and the current state of knowledge differs significantly from the state that could be considered saturated and research verified. As a result, there is no consensus among researchers. on the structure and conditions of the formation of permanent and beneficial exchange relationships, and the exploitation of relational resources is even recommended as a desirable cognitive context for contemporary research. Thus, an exploratory **research gap** was identified regarding the lack of a clear definition of relational instruments and their structure affecting the cooperation of enterprises. Therefore, it becomes necessary for the dissertation to define, select and interpret such relational tools that create and strengthen cooperation between producers and retail network distributors, thus creating additional value for companies in the field of partnership.

It should also be added that the review of the literature indicates that the previous empirical research in the area of relations in distribution channels focused on verifying how the use of

specific relational tools and their interconnections can be important for improving the level of relations or cooperation between enterprises, as described by Yeh (2016), Zhu et al. (2017), Dolci et al. (2017), Zhang et al. (2016), Wong et al. (2009), Szwejczewski et al. (2005). In the conducted research, the authors most often analyzed only selected tools, without examining sets of many relational activities resulting from various current management concepts and their mutual impact. Similar conclusions were reached by the authors Bonatto, Martins de Resende and Pontes (2020), who, after reviewing the literature out of 103 articles exploring the topic of relationships, determined that only five authors refer to three relational tools, while other authors examine only one or two instruments as separate attributes. According to the authors, this state of affairs leaves much room for further research on relational instruments in the context of the use of modern management concepts and their use in shaping cooperation in the supply chain. Thus, a research gap of an explanatory nature was identified. Therefore, the aim of filling this **research gap** is to select and examine such concepts that have the greatest impact on cooperation and partnership, and which is presented too narrowly in the literature.

In this context, it is also important that the previous scientific research focused rather on exploring the issue of the impact of the relationship from the perspective of the buyer (also an individual customer), with an emphasis on how the supplier's resources and competences can be used to increase the expected value of the buyer, and the main the researchers' concern focused on what value could be transferred from the supplier to the buyer. Meanwhile, the views of buyers and suppliers/producers on relational instruments may be different, as reported by Terpendi et al. (2008); Liu et al. (2009); Wacker et al. (2016), Salam (2017). Also, inter-organizational cooperation does not always turn into partnership, and the divergence of goals and mutual expectations of the cooperating parties often leads to the complete termination of cooperation. Thus, another **research gap** of an explanatory nature was identified regarding the lack of empirical verification of the use of a set of relational instruments from the perspective of the producer as a participant in the distribution channel.

Also, few empirical studies select relational instruments by presenting their expected configuration in relation to the market conditions prevailing in a given industry and environment. Therefore, an exploratory gap can be noticed in relation to the types of relational instruments, as well as their proper selection in the context of specific distribution channels (e.g. in the meat industry), as described by the authors Pilbeam et al. (2012), Özlen and Hadžiahmetović (2013). Therefore, and based on the theory of trust and commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), it is necessary to indicate relational activities (relational instruments) affecting inter-organizational cooperation and partnership in distribution channels of the meat industry,

giving research the value of contextualization, i.e. consideration in a broader scope – here industry.

Anticipating and constantly searching for new solutions in the areas of the relational paradigm seems necessary for the development of science in the discipline of management and quality sciences, as well as market practice, the more so that the process of changes and their impact on the operation of modern enterprises is currently highly dynamic, and sometimes unpredictable. The identified research gaps allow the formulation of the research problem of this dissertation, which is: determining the meaning and impact of relational instruments on cooperation and partnership between meat industry producers and retail network distributors.

**THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE WORK** is a theoretical exploration and empirical explanation of the impact of relational instruments on the cooperation of meat industry producers with retail network distributors in the distribution channel, as well as determining the impact on partnership as an effect of this cooperation.

**The author also formulated the detailed goals of the work, which are:**

1. Identification of theoretical concepts in the field of management sciences, allowing for the explanation and definition of relational instruments affecting the shaping of inter-organizational cooperation in the distribution channel.
2. Arrangement of terminology in the area of relations, cooperation and partnership at the interface of two enterprises in the distribution channel.
3. Determination of external and internal conditions of cooperation of producers and network distributors in distribution channels in the meat industry.
4. Identification of the impact of relational instruments on the cooperation of producers and retail network distributors in the analyzed industry.
5. Determining the impact of relational instruments on partnership as a result of cooperation undertaken by producers and retail network distributors.
6. Indicating the practical use of research results and proposing directions for improvement to producers in the field of shaping relationships, cooperation and partnership.

During the implementation of the main objective of the work, the achievements of management science in the field of resource theory RBV (Resource-Based View) were used, as well as marketing with particular emphasis on the relational approach, which influenced the selection by the author of the work and the use of CRM, QR and SCC concepts in research as having theoretical and empirical potential. As a result of the literature exploration, the lack of

empirical research showing the impact of relational instruments resulting from the concept of customer relationship management (CRM) on the cooperation of enterprises in the supply chain (SCC) was noticed, which was also emphasized by Grönroos (2004). Closer association with the supplier may lead to closer cooperation, as described by Tuten and Urban (2001). The combination of customer relationship management in terms of increasing the level of customer satisfaction and loyalty, with supply chain functions in the perspective of relationship marketing will allow for efficient and effective cooperation, as Thongrawd and other authors wrote (2020). According to the authors, organizations should think not only about delivering a product, but also about maintaining long-term relationships with the company, which is why defining the relationships between these two concepts becomes highly interesting and opens up a field for research, creating a new look at the problem from the perspective of the impact of relational instruments on cooperation producers of the meat industry with retail network distributors.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to put forward the following **research hypothesis**:

**H1:** Relationship instruments in terms of (1a) relationship quality and (1b) customer relationship management have a positive impact on cooperation in the distribution channel.

The authors' J. Mohr and R. Spekman (1994) research, influential for the issue of relations, and the flagship research, prove that the "partnership attributes" named by the authors, defining the set of relations, behaviors, processes and efforts taking place between organizations, influence the gradually achieved partnership as a result of cooperation. Although it is a time-consuming process, buyer-seller relationships often provide a solid basis for partnership development, although to address more specifically the specific preconditions needed for successful partnership development there is a need for research in this direction, as argued by Ploetner and Ehret (2006). On the other hand, research by the authors of B. Maheshwari, V. Kumar, U Kumar (2006) referring to inter-organizational cooperation in the distribution channel, making the partnership dependent on the impact of several relevant instruments in relation to a given period of science, hence the update of research both verifies this state and selects necessary tools for partnership. In addition, the authors argue that there is a strong significant positive relationship between relational instruments defined as assets and the success of the partnership. It is therefore necessary in this work to consider partnership as a result of the direct impact of specific relational instruments (for comparison with indirect impact), which makes it necessary to put forward the second hypothesis:

**H2:** Relationship instruments in terms of (2a) relationship quality and (2b) customer relationship management have a positive impact on the partnership being built.

Inter-organizational cooperation in the literature of the subject plays a significant role as an area of research, as evidenced by the number of available publications, in which the authors mainly explore the direct dependence of cooperation on inter-organizational relations, or pay attention to the system-wide identification of benefits. The authors Sander de Leeuw and J. Fransoo (2009) prove that close, direct cooperation in the supply chain can lead to inertia in business relations, while the authors M. Caoa, Q. Zhang (2011) prove that cooperation leads to close coupling between partners in the supply chain. In turn, research conducted by the author of Chicksand (2015) proves that the interdependence between the cooperating parties positively affects the partnership and its future state, while the abuse of power in cooperation demotivates the parties in the process of striving for partnership.

Research on relations and partnership between enterprises, although rich in the theoretical layer, largely marginalizes the impact of cooperation on the creation and success of partnership, and none of the encountered studies has empirically recognized the mediating role of cooperation between relational instruments and partnership, especially from the perspective of a meat industry producer. In order to check whether cooperation can act as a mediator between relational instruments and partnership, it is necessary to put forward further research hypotheses:

**H3:** The impact of relational instruments, in terms of relationship quality, on partnership is mediated by cooperation in the distribution channel.

**H4:** The effect of relational instruments in terms of customer relationship management on partnership is mediated by cooperation in the distribution channel.

Guided by the characteristics of the research problem and bearing in mind the implementation of the main objective of the work and the specific objectives, the following research methods were used in this dissertation: in the first part of the work, of a cognitive nature, studies of both Polish and English-language literature were conducted using a critical analysis of existing literature research, and bibliometric analysis. The literature review used the electronic databases EBSCO, SCOPUS, WEB of SCIENCE, GOOGLE SCHOLAR, the European Statistical Office Eurostat, Statista, the Central Statistical Office, Agroskop, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. In order to achieve the aim of the work and verify the formulated research hypotheses, the project of own research was undertaken in the second - empirical part of the work. The development of assumptions regarding the subject of the research concerned the conceptualization of the research model, which was based on a theoretical model (initial model and extended model) allowing for the identification of the impact of relational instruments on



cooperation and partnership, as well as checking the impact of the mediating role of cooperation.

With regard to exploratory perspectives, the constructs of relationship quality and customer relationship management were used in the operationalization of variables to conceptualize relational instruments, as well as the construct of cooperation and the construct of partnership. Embedding this research in the perspective of a resource school and its paradigms, as well as relationship marketing, taking into account its evolution, influenced the adjustment of theoretical models to the changes taking place in recent years and the development of knowledge. As a result, it allowed to create a research model that best takes into account these changes and refers to the causality of phenomena at the organizational level. Quantitative research was used as the research method, and the research tool was an interview questionnaire with an explicit purpose of the research.

The subjective scope of the empirical research covered producers operating in the meat industry, who in their current activity cooperate with retail network distributors by supplying them with goods (meat and meat products). Regardless of the type of capital (Polish, foreign or mixed capital) and the area of the producers' activity (national or international activities), the research covered only enterprises present in Poland and operating only in the meat industry, which determined the territorial scope of the research. The time range of the research (theoretical and empirical) is 2018-2023.

The subject of the work undertaken determined its literary and empirical character, and the structure of the work consists of five chapters of the work.

**The first chapter**, with a theoretical perspective, in accordance with the subject of the work, focuses on the issues of cooperation between enterprises in distribution channels and its specificity. The chapter presents the essence and characteristics of distribution channels, describes the functions and nature of distribution channels, and existing divisions resulting from the development of distribution and entities operating in it. In addition, the concepts of distribution channels were discussed, the most important from the point of view of work and knowledge development, i.e.: the value chain concept, the ECR (Efficient Customer Response) concept, the SCM (Supply Chain Management) concept, the SCC (Supply Chain Collaboration) concept, the SCD (Supply Chain Disruption) concept, the SCR (Supply Chain Resilience) concept, and the agile supply chain concept Agile Supply Chain).

The author also presented the specificity of shaping the cooperation of enterprises in the distribution channel of food products, and defined retail network distributors.

**The second, theoretical chapter** focuses on relational instruments and their role in shaping the cooperation of producers and retail network distributors in the distribution channel. Starting from the relational paradigm, the author presents the development of modern management and emphasizes the changes regarding the importance of relations between cooperating organizations. In this part of the work, the author conceptualizes the construct of relational instruments using the concepts of CRM (Customer Relationship Management) and the concept of RQ (Relationship Quality) as the foundations of meaning. This part of the work also defines and presents partnership as an effect of relations and cooperation in the distribution channel.

**The third chapter** is a chapter characterizing the meat industry in Poland and the entities operating in it. The global and local conditions of the functioning of the meat industry, the role and importance of producers and retail chain distributors as participants in the distribution channel were presented. The author paid special attention to the current contexts determining the functioning of the meat industry in the country and on international markets. The author also presented Polish and global scientific research on this industry. The next chapters four and five are of a methodological and research nature.

**The fourth chapter** presents the conceptualization of theoretical models (M1 and M2 models) created on the basis of a critical analysis of the literature. In the further part of the chapter, the research hypotheses were formulated and the assumptions of the research model were presented. The constructs of the research model and the operationalization of variables were also conceptualized, which determines the methodical and effective conduct of own research.

**The fifth chapter** contains an empirical verification of the research model using the own research project. The purpose and scope of the research as well as the stages and methods of the research procedure are presented. The results of research on the state of the examined endogenous, exogenous and mediation variables were also presented. The author also presented an analysis of the impact of relational instruments on cooperation and partnership, as well as an analysis and assessment of the mediating role of cooperation in the research model. This was used to verify the hypotheses. In the data analysis, the author of the work used, among others, the strategy of parcelling observable variables in terms of latent variables, cross-sections of descriptive statistics, psychometric assessment of latent variables as components of the SEM structural model, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). At the end of this chapter and the dissertation, the author presented the conclusions of the research, and defined the guidelines for the development of knowledge and directions for further research in the field of management

sciences. Managerial implications have also been formulated, aimed at showing producers from the surveyed industry directions for improvement in the field of shaping relationships, cooperation and partnership.

## **RESULTS OF THE DISSERTATION**

The main purpose of this doctoral dissertation was the theoretical exploration and empirical explanation of the impact of relational instruments on the cooperation of meat industry producers with retail network distributors in the distribution channel, as well as determining the impact on partnership as an effect of this cooperation.

In order to achieve the main goal of the work, specific goals were also defined, which were systematically implemented as a result of creating individual chapters of the work.

**The first specific objective** of the work was to identify theoretical concepts in the field of management sciences, allowing for the explanation and definition of relational instruments affecting the formation of inter-organizational cooperation in the distribution channel. The author's critical literature review and bibliometric analysis showed that the issue of distribution and related categories, such as cooperation in the supply chain, is also becoming a current topic in scientific research of an interdisciplinary nature. It also allowed for the conclusion regarding the selection of concepts relevant to the subject of the work, with research potential that facilitates the explanation and definition of the category of relational instruments. In the work, the author presented the most important concepts from the point of view of the subject matter and the development of knowledge affecting the functioning of enterprises in the supply chain: the value chain concept, the ECR (Efficient Customer Response) concept, the SCM (Supply Chain Management), the SCC (Supply Chain Collaboration) concept, the SCD (Supply Chain Disruption) concept, the SCR (Supply Chain Resilience) concept, and the agile supply chain concept Agile Supply Chain. Finally, choosing the key concept of cooperation in the supply chain SCC (Supply Chain Cooperation), having the greatest cognitive value.

Collaboration in the supply chain is always accompanied by relationships, and those companies that best manage these relationships win the entire market competitive advantage. In order to explain and define the relational instruments affecting the shaping of inter-organizational cooperation in the distribution channel, the following concepts have also been selected in this dissertation: CRM (Customer Relationship Management) and the quality of QR (Quality relations), which create the basis for the author's conceptualization of relational instruments. Based on the assessment of scientific achievements, the author in this dissertation organized the

theoretical discrepancies and views of various researchers and assumed that relational instruments, according to his/her own definition, are relational tools affecting the state of cooperation and partnership of the enterprise. These tools, as a result of the changing business environment and different needs of recipients, create sets of relational competences, the use of which affects the achievement of a competitive advantage or partnership as a result of cooperation. In addition, the definition of relational instruments also bears the hallmarks of originality, thus creating additional value for the world of science and practice.

**The second specific objective** of this work was to organize the terminology in the area of relations and cooperation at the interface of two companies in the distribution channel.

In the literature on the subject, the concept of shaping cooperation (between the supplier and the recipient, or the recipient and the supplier) is presented as a complex process, and the effect of using tools in the form of relationships is not always predictable. Relations between enterprises, in addition to the complexity of adjusting the structural and procedural side of cooperation, constitute an invisible connection created at the point of contact of cooperation between enterprises. As a result of the narrative review of the literature on the subject, it can be concluded that relationship-based cooperation is shaped by various relational instruments, and their selection does not always determine successful cooperation. In this dissertation, the author also pointed to the current state of knowledge by organizing the terminology in the field of partnership. Partnership of entities in the distribution channel enables enterprises not only to develop and use key competences in the scope of a specific set of offers, technologies or processes, but also ensures the security of cooperation, while maintaining the independence of enterprises. Compared to the usual buyer-seller relationship, mutual commitment is not limited to a clearly defined series of transactions, but to the development and nurturing of future business opportunities. Depending on the partner's objectives or other factors, the partnership may be short-term or permanent. Based on the literature, four stages of partnership development have also been defined: identification of strategic needs, partner assessment and selection, partnership implementation, and partnership reassessment and transformation, which can be important for both producers and distributors.

**The third specific objective** of the work concerned the external and internal conditions of cooperation between producers and network distributors in distribution channels in the meat industry. As it results from the analysis of this industry presented in the paper, the functioning environment of both the supply and demand side is an extremely complicated mechanism with a high degree of unpredictability and numerous changes. Despite the large number of companies operating in the meat industry, the increasing export of Polish meat, the industry is constantly

exposed to internal or external factors directly affecting its development. The challenges for the Polish meat industry result from interpenetrating threats consistent with the characteristics and problems of the industry, namely:

- the inflow of foreign capital caused by a fragmented supply structure, which results in numerous takeovers in the industry,
- built competitive advantage of producers who, using vertical integration, have continuous and predictable access to the raw material,
- competition of large international enterprises with small or medium-sized family enterprises,
- moving consumers shopping in local independent stores to the sales channel represented by retail chain distributors,
- low level of profit earned in the industry with high capital involvement causes delays and payment backlogs,
- tendency for consolidation in the industry caused by differences in the size of enterprises, available capital, know-how or profit,
- occurrence of animal diseases, which radically changes the situation in the entire meat industry,
- changing consumer trends,
- political decisions of individual countries regarding the development or inhibition of the meat industry unexpectedly change the situation with the availability of raw materials.

As a result of the empirical research carried out in chapters 4 and 5, the **fourth specific objective** of the work was achieved, in terms of identifying the impact of relational instruments on the cooperation of producers and retail network distributors in the analyzed industry, and the fifth specific objective of the work, which concerned determining the impact of relational instruments on partnership as an effect of cooperation undertaken by manufacturers and retail chain distributors. The implementation of the main goal of the doctoral dissertation and the specific objectives 4 and 5 required verification of the research hypotheses, and the adopted and applied research procedure allowed the formulation of the following conclusions:

1. In the light of the conducted research, the obtained results allow us to consider **hypothesis H1** "Relationship instruments in the field of (1a) relationship quality and (1b) customer relationship management have a positive impact on cooperation in the distribution channel" as **positively verified**.

2. **The tested hypothesis H2** "Relationship instruments in the field of (2a) relationship quality and (2b) customer relationship management have a positive impact on the partnership being built" according to the results of empirical research can be considered **positively verified**.

3. As a result of the conducted empirical research, the **hypothesis H3** that was put forward: "The impact of relational instruments on the quality of relationships on partnership is mediated by cooperation in the distribution channel" has been **positively verified**. In the surveyed companies, the impact of JR "Quality of relations" on the PT construct defined as "Partnership" is effected indirectly through C "Cooperation". This relationship is defined as JR → W → PT.

4. As a result of examining the indirect relationship in the **hypothesis H4** "The impact of relational instruments in the field of customer relationship management on partnership is mediated by cooperation in the distribution channel", the tested hypothesis was **positively verified**.

In the tested hypothesis, the mediation effect alone did not lead to the complete exclusion from the direct path model, because the impact of the IRM factor "Customer Relationship Management" takes place both in the context of a direct impact on "Partnership" - PT, and through "Cooperation" - W.

In the next part of the work, the main conclusions from the implementation of the individual goals of the doctoral dissertation are presented, and the originality of the solutions to research problems is indicated.

On the basis of the conducted empirical research, the practical use of the research results was indicated, and directions for further improvement in the field of shaping relationships, cooperation and partnership were proposed to producers, which is the implementation of the sixth detailed objective of the work. This doctoral dissertation raises a very important topic from the point of view of practice in the field of cooperation between enterprises in the supply chain, in which retail chain distributors both in Poland and in the world play an increasingly important role, causing consumer migration from the traditional distribution channel to a modern distribution channel. Therefore, the ability of producers to cooperate with retail network distributors as participants in the distribution channel guarantees the development of both companies in the future.

Noteworthy in this work is the original combination in empirical studies of the impact of various relational instruments resulting from two concepts, namely the quality of relations (QR) and the concept of customer relationship management (CRM) and their impact on cooperation in the supply chain (SCC), and partnership. To the best of the author's knowledge, no study analyzing the proposed set of interrelated research constructs has been carried out so far, which introduces the **hallmarks of originality**.

The added value of the work is also its interdisciplinary nature, because the issue of shaping cooperation and relationships in the distribution channel concerns multi-aspect issues undertaken in the achievements of marketing and logistics management.

The work has an additional **application value** due to the selected industry research context. This means that in this respect it became possible not only to identify that the meat industry, as an area of research, is extremely rarely explored in the area of cooperation and relations, but also to indicate and propose managerial implications. The meat industry is characterized by high dynamics of changes resulting from the need to make every day purchasing decisions by consumers, while the knowledge about the flow of goods delivered to the retail network distributor is dispersed throughout the supply chain, so there are many reasons for frequent contacts and inter-organizational relations. A helpful tool in the process of synchronizing inter-organizational decisions is the introduction of individual common goals of ongoing projects, as well as definitions and measures of individual processes, which will enable communication that is equivalent to the cooperating parties, and at the same time will affect the synchronization of decisions and better market effects. Commonly set and implemented cooperation goals, new initiatives, along with developed relationships during the cooperation period, can become a source of long-term partnership between meat industry producers and retail network distributors.