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**Title of the dissertation: “SMEs’ Model of Managing Multiple Relationships with Business Customers”**

Ph.D. thesis deals with the small and medium sized enterprises which are the subject of the B2B market. Although the literature contribution related to the B2B market is generally fewer than the B2C one, the B2B, whose total deals’ value overcome the B2C, is the main market scenario in the world. SMEs, especially in Italy, mainly shape it and their importance is shown from all detectable macro statistical data of major available portals such as ISTAT, Statista.com, European Commission, and the others.

The scientific literature indicates that maintaining and developing customer relationships is a key factor in the success of enterprises on the B2B market (I. Snehota, R. Fiocca, A. Tunisini, H. Håkansson, D. Peppers, M. Rogers, M. Costabile, C. Rossignoli, F. Ricciardi, F. Buttle, P. Joseph, WD Cannon, J. Perreault, D. Woodburn). This fact is confirmed by empirical research. For example, the annual SAFE survey, focusing on European SMEs, highlights that acquiring a new customer is seen as a major problem, and therefore retaining existing customers becomes a strategic objective for SMEs. In parallel with this well-known issue, there is a lack of practical solutions to help SMEs achieve their goal of successfully building customer relationships in the B2B market. The works of Mc Donald are an exception, but they only partially solve this problem. Filling this research gap, in the form of building a model of effective customer relationship management by SMEs, has become the aim of the dissertation.

The doctoral thesis consists of an introduction, five chapters, discussion, and conclusion. The main issues discussed in the theoretical and descriptive part are the role of SMEs, especially in Italy, the characteristics of the B2B market and the importance of relationships in the B2B context, customer segmentation by relationship level and customer relationship management. To develop a new relationship management model, research was carried out on a sample of Italian SMEs that have been operating on the market for decades and are well positioned. The SMEs that were included in the sample differed from each other in terms of industry, size, turnover and target customers. As a consequence, the customers and/or suppliers were different and generally, given their transaction history, should not have known each other. The surveyed companies had two types of customers in their portfolios: end users (companies that bought to ultimately use the product) and members of the sales channel (companies that bought products for resale).

The empirical analysis has been run on the data collected from the ERP (and, when possible, the CRM) of the seven sampled SMEs, involving more than 350 of their customers (the most important ones by Paretian class). Moreover, also primary research has been conducted, in which dozens of salespeople,

consultants, area managers, business developers, CEOs and professionals who manage the relationship on a daily basis has been surveyed. They have been asked to provide responses aimed at measuring the relationships. Data collected from the surveys, have been analyzed using Qlik View© technology, generating the charts used for the data visualization of the data analyzed.

Finally, the results of own research have been discussed in terms of assessing relationship management and developing a model that could help SMEs in this process. The discussion has made it possible to identify a gap that had not been taken into account in previous studies on customer relationship management, consisting in the simultaneous existence of many, sometimes chaotic, relationships between the analyzed SMEs. In order to fulfill it, a management model has been developed using the PSO model (people, systems, organizations) allowing for the management of many, diverse relationships. In conclusion, the path leading to building the model is presented and its essence is shown, while emphasizing the contribution that this research brings to both management theory and practice. It consists in the fact that the application of the model in practice enables SMEs to develop by building long-term relationships with the customers while at the same time reducing the costs of managing them.