

Power, Machiavellian Behavior, and Trust in Strategic Supply Chain Partnerships: An Exploratory Empirical Study

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Background/Purpose: Strategic supply chain partnerships increasingly depend on the effective management of interorganizational relationships characterized by power asymmetries, behavioral dynamics, and trust. Although power, trust, and opportunistic behavior have been extensively studied, these constructs have largely been examined independently. This study addresses this gap by investigating the relationships among organizational power, Machiavellian behavior, and trust within strategic supply chain partnerships and by evaluating an integrated conceptual framework that combines structural, behavioral, and relational dimensions.

Methods: An exploratory quantitative research design was employed. Data were collected through an online survey administered to organizations operating within the supply chains of the Impol Group in Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia. A total of 62 valid responses were analyzed. Reliability and validity of the measurement scales were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and simple linear regression were used to examine the relationships among the constructs.

Results: The findings indicate a positive relationship between organizational power and Machiavellian behavior, suggesting that organizations with greater bargaining power, stronger control over resources, and higher financial power are more likely to exhibit manipulative and opportunistic tendencies. Organizational power was also positively associated with trust. In contrast, Machiavellian behavior demonstrated no statistically significant relationship with trust. These results suggest that power may contribute not only to dependency and behavioral control but also to relationship stability and coordination within supply chains.

Conclusion: The study contributes to research on supply chain relationships by integrating power, Machiavellian behavior, and trust into a single framework. The findings suggest that trust in strategic partnerships is influenced more strongly by structural and relational factors than by opportunistic behavioral tendencies alone. The results provide valuable implications for managers seeking to strengthen collaboration, governance mechanisms, and long-term partnership performance within supply chains.

Keywords: Organizational power, Machiavellian behavior, Trust, Strategic partnerships, Supply chain management, Interorganizational relationships

1 Introduction

Contemporary supply chains operate in environments characterized by increasing uncertainty, interdependence, and strategic vulnerability, making interorganisational relationships a critical determinant of organizational com-

petitiveness and resilience. Supply chains are no longer understood merely as linear flows of materials and information, but rather as complex systems of interdependent organizations collaborating to create value for end users (Christopher, 2016; Chopra & Meindl, 2012). They involve multiple actors, including suppliers, manufacturers,

logistics providers, and distributors, whose relationships are increasingly strategic, long-term oriented, and collaborative in nature (Cousins & Menguc, 2006; Daugherty, 2011).

Under such conditions, strategic partnerships have become a central element of supply chain management, as they enable greater efficiency, innovation, and adaptability to market changes (Ireland & Webb, 2007). At the same time, these relationships are highly complex, involving the interplay of divergent interests, power asymmetries, and organizational behavioral characteristics. It is within these interactions that the key dynamics of interorganisational relationships emerge, significantly influencing the performance of the entire supply chain (Gereffi et al., 2005).

One of the fundamental dimensions of these relationships is the power that individual actors possess within the supply chain. Power does not derive solely from formal hierarchical positions, but primarily from control over critical resources, information, capital, and market channels (Cox, 2001; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Organizations controlling scarce or strategically important resources can substantially influence other partners' decisions and shape the rules governing collaboration within the supply chain (Krajewski et al., 2005). Such power asymmetries create dependency relationships that may result in either effective coordination or conflictual and opportunistic interactions (Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005).

In the literature, power in supply chains has traditionally been examined through the lenses of Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) and Transaction Cost Economics (Williamson, 1985), with a strong emphasis on controlling opportunistic behavior and reducing uncertainty. However, these approaches often overlook the behavioral and psychological dimensions of organizational action, which may significantly influence how power is exercised (Bachmann, 2001). This limitation creates space for a broader conceptual understanding of interorganisational relationships.

Within this context, the construct of Machiavellianism has become increasingly relevant. Machiavellianism refers to the use of manipulative, opportunistic, and strategically calculated behaviors aimed at achieving self-interested objectives. Originating from social psychology, it is commonly defined as a tendency toward manipulation, a cynical worldview, and a pragmatic use of means to achieve desired ends (Christie & Geis, 1970). In organizational contexts, Machiavellianism is increasingly conceptualized as a strategic organizational behavior, manifested through selective information disclosure, the creation of partner dependencies, and the use of covert forms of pressure (Musarra et al., 2022; Cox, 2001).

Understanding Machiavellian strategies is particularly relevant in supply chains, where organizations operate under conditions of incomplete information, power asymmetry, and uncertainty. In such environments, Machiavellian

behavior may represent a rational strategy for maintaining competitive advantage, while simultaneously undermining the quality of interorganizational relationships (Jonason et al., 2012; Cesinger et al., 2023). From this perspective, Machiavellian behavior should not necessarily be interpreted as deviant, but rather as an adaptive strategic response to competitive environments characterized by uncertainty, asymmetric information, and resource dependence. Such behavior may therefore emerge not only from unethical intentions, but also from structural pressures embedded within interorganisational relationships.

This raises an important question regarding the impact of Machiavellianism on one of the key relational elements of strategic partnerships - trust.

Trust is widely recognized as a fundamental prerequisite for stable and successful strategic partnerships. It is generally defined as the willingness of one partner to rely on another based on the expectation that the latter will act honestly, reliably, and in accordance with agreed objectives (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Currall & Inkpen, 2002). Within supply chains, trust reduces the need for formal control mechanisms, lowers transaction costs, and promotes collaboration and long-term orientation among partners (Bromiley & Cummings, 1995).

However, trust is often subject to various pressures, particularly in relationships marked by substantial power asymmetries. More powerful actors may exploit trust as an instrument of influence to pursue their own interests, potentially eroding interorganisational relationships (Cox et al., 2002). In particular, Machiavellian-oriented organizations may perceive trust not as a relational value but as a tool of manipulation, thereby further complicating partnership dynamics (Musarra et al., 2022).

At this point, it becomes evident that power, Machiavellianism, and trust are interconnected constructs that collectively shape the dynamics of strategic partnerships in supply chains. Nevertheless, the existing literature predominantly examines these constructs separately. Research on power primarily focuses on structural and economic dimensions (Cox, 2001); studies on trust emphasize relational aspects (Morgan & Hunt, 1994); and research on Machiavellianism largely concentrates on individual or behavioral characteristics (Christie & Geis, 1970).

Although prior studies have extensively examined power asymmetries, trust development, and opportunistic behavior in supply chains, these constructs have largely been investigated in isolation. Consequently, existing research provides only a fragmented understanding of how structural power translates into behavioral strategies and relational outcomes within strategic partnerships. This fragmentation limits the explanatory power of existing models and impedes a deeper understanding of behavioral dynamics within contemporary supply chain relationships.

This fragmentation reflects limited empirical research that has simultaneously examined these constructs, there-

by limiting a comprehensive understanding of interorganisational relationships. The absence of integrated models that simultaneously address power, behavioral strategies (Machiavellianism), and relational outcomes (trust) constrains both theoretical advancement and managerial practice in supply chain management (Bachmann, 2001).

Furthermore, existing studies rarely incorporate in-depth empirical analyses quantitatively examining the relationships among these constructs in real business environments. This is particularly problematic given that contemporary supply chains are becoming increasingly complex, globalized, and vulnerable to various risks, thereby increasing the importance of understanding behavioral mechanisms within strategic partnerships (Dolgui et al., 2018).

Against this background, the present study addresses the identified research gap through an exploratory empirical examination of the relationships among organizational power, Machiavellian behavior, and trust in strategic supply chain partnerships.

The originality of this study lies in integrating structural (power), behavioral (Machiavellian behavior), and relational (trust) dimensions into a single conceptual framework. By combining insights from organizational theory, behavioral perspectives, and supply chain relationship research, the study extends existing literature beyond traditional economic and governance-based explanations of interorganizational behavior.

This study aims to explore the relationships among organizational power, Machiavellian behavior, and trust, and to assess the adequacy of the proposed conceptual framework.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Power in Supply Chains

Power represents one of the central concepts in interorganisational relationship theory and constitutes an important foundation for understanding collaboration dynamics within supply chains. In general, power may be defined as the ability of one actor to influence the behavior, decisions, or outcomes of another actor within a relationship (Cox, 2001). Within supply chain contexts, power does not derive solely from formal hierarchical positions but primarily from control over critical resources, access to information, and market positioning.

Power in supply chains represents a multidimensional construct encompassing different forms of influence. One fundamental classification distinguishes between coercive and non-coercive power. Coercive power is based on the ability to sanction partners or threaten negative consequences, whereas non-coercive power derives from the provision of benefits, rewards, expertise, or legitimacy

(Molm, 1997). Non-coercive power is frequently manifested through specialized knowledge, reputation, or control over critical information, making it generally more acceptable and effective in long-term collaborative relationships (Lane & Bachmann, 1997).

Bargaining power refers to an organization's ability to influence the terms of cooperation and the outcomes of negotiation processes. Organizations with greater bargaining power can shape pricing structures, delivery terms, payment terms, and other critical aspects of business relationships (Ganesan, 1993). This form of power is frequently associated with organizational size, market share, and the availability of alternative partners within the supply chain.

Control over access to resources represents one of the most significant sources of power in supply chains. Organizations controlling scarce, valuable, or difficult-to-substitute resources possess substantial advantages in shaping relationships with other supply chain partners (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

Such resources may include raw materials, technologies, distribution channels, or strategically important information. According to Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), organizations become dependent on actors who control the resources necessary for their operations. The degree of dependency directly shapes power relations: the greater the dependency, the greater the power of the organization controlling those resources. This creates asymmetric relationships in which dominant actors influence the conditions of collaboration and partners' behavior.

Financial power reflects an organization's economic capacity to influence other actors within the supply chain. Organizations possessing greater financial power generally enjoy improved access to capital, stronger investment capabilities, and greater ability to absorb risks (Krajewski et al., 2005). These capabilities provide enhanced flexibility in strategic decision-making and greater influence over supply chain structures.

Resource Dependence Theory represents one of the most influential theoretical perspectives for understanding power within interorganisational relationships. The theory assumes that organizations are not self-sufficient but rather dependent on external resources controlled by other organizations (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Such dependencies create power relations that shape organizational behavior and strategic decision-making.

Another important theoretical perspective on power is Transaction Cost Economics, which examines interorganisational relationships in terms of the costs of exchanging goods, services, and information (Cox et al., 2002). This perspective assumes that organizations seek governance structures that minimize transaction costs while simultaneously limiting exposure to opportunistic behavior.

Within this framework, power derives from organizations' ability to influence the terms of transactions and

reduce exposure to uncertainty. More powerful actors are often able to design contractual arrangements that offer greater protection and advantages, potentially resulting in unequal relationships (Cuypers et al., 2021).

2.2 Machiavellianism in Supply Chains

Machiavellianism is one of the key behavioral constructs that enable a deeper understanding of interorganizational relationships, particularly in contexts characterized by power asymmetries, uncertainty, and competing interests. The concept originates in social psychology, where it was initially conceptualized as a personality trait characterized by manipulative, opportunistic, and cynical behavior aimed at achieving individual goals (Christie & Geis, 1970).

In recent years, research on Machiavellianism has expanded from the individual to the organizational level, where it increasingly appears as a strategic form of organizational behavior. Rather than conceptualizing Machiavellianism solely as an individual personality characteristic, contemporary studies increasingly interpret it as an organizational strategy, reflected in how firms establish, manage, and manipulate relationships with other actors within supply chains (Musarra et al., 2022; Cox, 2001).

In supply chain contexts, Machiavellianism refers to the deliberate use of manipulative and opportunistic strat-

egies to maintain or strengthen competitive advantage. Such strategies may involve selective information disclosure, the creation of partner dependencies, indirect pressure mechanisms, and control over access to strategically important resources.

Although such behavior may appear rational from the perspective of individual organizations, it may simultaneously undermine the quality and stability of interorganizational relationships.

An important aspect of understanding Machiavellianism in organizational settings is its dual nature as both a dispositional and behavioral construct. On the one hand, it includes internal beliefs, values, and orientations of managers or organizations, such as the acceptance of manipulation as a legitimate strategic tool. On the other hand, it manifests in concrete business practices and observable organizational behavior (Dahling et al., 2009; Cesinger et al., 2023). Within supply chains, these dimensions frequently intersect, as organizations operate through individuals who carry their values, beliefs, and behavioral patterns into the organization.

In the present study, Machiavellian behavior is conceptualized as an organizational strategy, manifested in three key dimensions: strategic manipulation, covert aggression, and opportunism (Musarra et al., 2022). The study investigates 199 ongoing vertical marketing alliances involving firms from the United States, Europe (EU), and Asia, across multiple industries (Musarra et al., 2022).

Table 1: Studies that have examined Machiavellianism in organizations, leadership, supply chains, and interfirm relationships

Study	Organizational context	Main contribution
Christie & Geis (1970)	Organizations and management	Introduced the Mach-IV scale and conceptualized Machiavellianism as strategic manipulation.
Wilson et al. (1996)	Organizations and psychology	Comprehensive review showing Machiavellianism as a strategy for manipulation and personal gain.
Dahling et al., 2009	Employees and managers	Developed the multidimensional workplace Machiavellianism scale (distrust, status, amoral manipulation, desire for control).
Noordhoff et al. (2011)	Interfirm relationships	Investigated opportunism and dark-side behaviors affecting alliance performance.
Bagozzi et al. (2013)	Organizational behavior	Examined psychological mechanisms underlying Machiavellian behavior in organizations.
Castille et al. (2018)	Leadership	Showed that Machiavellian leaders pursue self-interest through manipulation and unethical decision-making.
Bereczkei (2017)	Organizational strategy	Applied Machiavellian intelligence theory to explain strategic manipulation and competitive behavior.
Oliveira & Lumineau (2019)	Strategic alliances	Identified the importance of dark-side characteristics such as manipulation and opportunism in alliance governance.

Table 2: Recent research studies (2021 – 2025)

Study	Organizational context & sample	Main contribution
Chandler et al. (2021)	CEO Machiavellianism in family firms' strategic alliances Family firms engaged in strategic alliances	Demonstrates that executive Machiavellianism significantly influences alliance formation and long-term interorganizational relationships.
Musarra et al. (2022)	Machiavellianism in international alliance partnerships 199 vertical marketing alliances involving firms from the United States, Europe, and Asia	Extends Machiavellianism from an individual personality trait to an organizational strategic orientation affecting alliance governance and performance.
Shah et al. (2022)	Machiavellian employees and transformational leadership Employees from multiple organizations	Demonstrates that effective leadership can mitigate the negative consequences of Machiavellian tendencies within organizations.
Marbut et al. (2025)	Meta-analysis of Machiavellian leadership 163 independent samples comprising more than 510,000 participants	Provides the most comprehensive evidence that Machiavellian leadership generally undermines organizational performance, employee well-being, and trust.

Note. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that organizational Machiavellianism has evolved from being conceptualized as an individual personality characteristic to a strategic organizational behavior affecting leadership, alliance governance, knowledge sharing, ethical climate, and long-term organizational performance. While Machiavellian strategies may generate short-term political or competitive advantages, the overall empirical evidence indicates predominantly negative consequences for collaboration, trust, innovation, and organizational effectiveness.

Strategic manipulation refers to the deliberate management of information and communication to influence partners' perceptions and decisions. Organizations may selectively disclose information, conceal important data, or create an illusion of transparency to secure a more advantageous position in the relationship (Musarra et al., 2022).

Such behavior is particularly effective in environments characterized by incomplete information, where partners cannot fully verify the accuracy or completeness of the information available. Strategic manipulation, therefore, serves to shape perceived reality and direct the behavior of other supply chain actors.

Importantly, strategic manipulation does not necessarily involve direct deception. In many cases, it operates through subtle framing strategies, selective transparency, or the timing of information disclosure, making it more difficult for partners to recognize manipulative intent.

Covert aggression involves subtle, indirect forms of power enforcement that are not always immediately visible or explicitly recognizable. Such behavior may include restricting access to resources, delaying processes, selective cooperation, or creating administrative barriers affecting partner performance (Musarra et al., 2022; Cox, 2001).

From a strategic perspective, covert aggression may enable dominant organizations to exert influence while simultaneously preserving the appearance of formal cooperation and relational stability.

Opportunism is a core component of Machiavellian behavior and refers to the pursuit of self-interest regardless of the consequences for other partners (Williamson, 1985). Opportunistic behavior may include violating im-

plicit agreements, exploiting informational asymmetries, or strategically adapting behavior to situational advantages to maximize benefits.

Within supply chains, opportunism frequently emerges in long-term relationships characterized by high levels of interdependence and relational trust. Such behavior may generate short-term gains for individual firms, but simultaneously reduce relational stability and increase transaction costs over time.

Moreover, opportunism does not necessarily manifest through overt contractual violations. It may also appear through more subtle forms of self-interested behavior, such as withholding critical information, reallocating risks to weaker partners, or selectively interpreting contractual obligations.

Within supply chains, Machiavellianism becomes particularly relevant due to the simultaneous presence of three critical conditions: (1) power asymmetry, (2) incomplete information, and (3) long-term interdependence. Together, these conditions create environments in which manipulative behavior may become strategically effective while simultaneously increasing relational risk.

Organizations with greater power generally have more opportunities to employ Machiavellian strategies, as they exercise stronger control over resources and the conditions for collaboration. However, such behavior often erodes trust between partners, potentially leading to long-term negative consequences for the entire supply chain.

Understanding Machiavellianism in this context, therefore, requires integrating economic, organizational, and psychological perspectives. Such an interdisciplinary

approach enables a more comprehensive analysis of organizational behavior and its consequences for interorganizational relationships.

Within the proposed conceptual framework, Machiavellian behavior is viewed as a mechanism that potentially links organizational power and trust in strategic partnerships. Rather than assuming a purely direct relationship between power and trust, the framework suggests that organizations' behavioral strategies may influence relational outcomes.

This approach enables a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which power influences supply chain relationships. Rather than assuming a purely direct association between power and trust, the proposed framework suggests that organizations' behavioral strategies may shape relational outcomes.

2.3 Trust in Strategic Supply Chain Partnerships

Trust represents one of the most important concepts in the study of interorganisational relationships and constitutes a fundamental element of successful strategic partnerships within supply chains.

In its broadest sense, trust may be defined as the willingness of one organization to accept vulnerability based on the expectation that a partner will behave honestly, reliably, and in accordance with mutually agreed obligations and objectives (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Currall & Inkpen, 2002). In this respect, trust extends beyond formal contractual arrangements and serves as a relational mechanism that enables effective cooperation under conditions of uncertainty.

In contemporary supply chains, where relationships among organizations are frequently long-term, complex, and highly interdependent, trust is a critical determinant of stability and operational effectiveness. In addition to reducing the need for formal monitoring and control, trust lowers transaction costs, improves communication, and increases partners' willingness to collaborate and co-create value (Bromiley & Cummings, 1995). Consequently, trust is often described as the "glue" that binds supply chain partners and facilitates the functioning of the entire supply chain system.

Nevertheless, trust is not exclusively associated with positive relational outcomes. Excessive reliance on trust may also create vulnerabilities, particularly in asymmetrical partnerships where dominant actors can exploit relational dependence and reduced monitoring mechanisms. Consequently, trust may simultaneously function as both a relational asset and a potential source of strategic exposure.

Trust is a multidimensional construct that can be examined from multiple perspectives and at varying relational

levels. One of the most widely recognized conceptualizations originates with Sako (1992), who distinguishes among three forms of trust: contractual trust, competence trust, and goodwill trust.

Contractual trust is based on the expectation that partners will respect both formal and informal agreements. It represents the most fundamental level of trust and reflects the belief that the other party will fulfill agreed obligations and comply with accepted rules of cooperation. This dimension is particularly important during the early stages of interorganisational relationships, when partners have not yet developed deeper relational familiarity.

Competence trust refers to the belief that a partner possesses the required knowledge, skills, resources, and capabilities necessary to fulfill its responsibilities effectively. Within supply chains, this dimension is especially important because it reduces uncertainty regarding operational performance and service quality.

Goodwill trust represents the highest level of relational trust. It reflects the expectation that partners will act in the long-term interest of the relationship, even in situations extending beyond formal contractual obligations. This form of trust is characteristic of mature strategic partnerships and enables greater flexibility, innovation, mutual adaptation, and collaborative problem-solving (Sako, 1992).

In addition to this classification, it is also important to distinguish between trust in the partner and trust in the situation (Barney & Hansen, 1994; Rousseau et al., 1998). Trust in the partner is based on perceptions of the partner's integrity, intentions, and behavior. In contrast, trust in the situation derives from institutional structures, governance mechanisms, and formal safeguards that reduce uncertainty. In practice, both forms of trust frequently interact and jointly shape the overall level of trust within strategic partnerships.

One of the most influential theoretical frameworks for understanding trust is the Commitment-Trust Theory developed by Morgan and Hunt (1994). This theory argues that trust and commitment constitute the central determinants of successful, stable, and long-term business relationships. Trust increases willingness to cooperate, reduces conflict, and encourages long-term relational orientation among organizational partners.

Within the framework of Transaction Cost Economics, trust is often conceptualized as a mechanism reducing opportunism and the need for extensive monitoring and control (Williamson, 1985). Although Transaction Cost Economics traditionally emphasizes formal governance structures and contractual safeguards, numerous studies suggest that trust complements formal mechanisms and enables more efficient relationship management (Bromiley & Cummings, 1995).

Resource Dependence Theory addresses trust more indirectly, conceptualizing it as an outcome of stable, repeated interactions that reduce uncertainty and dependency

among partners (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). In this context, trust develops gradually through repeated exchanges and positive relational experiences.

Within supply chains, trust plays a particularly important role because it facilitates coordination among organizations operating under diverse environmental and operational conditions. Trust influences information exchange, process coordination, and the overall effectiveness of supply chain operations (Cousins & Menguc, 2006).

Contemporary developments such as globalization, digitalization, and increasing supply chain complexity further reinforce the importance of trust. Organizations increasingly depend on a limited number of strategic partners, heightening interdependence and creating a greater need for reliable, stable relationships. As supply chain networks become more interconnected, trust serves as a key governance mechanism that facilitates cooperation, reduces uncertainty, and supports coordination across organizational boundaries (Bachmann, 2001). At the same time, growing dependency on strategic partners increases supply chain vulnerability, making trust an essential factor for resilience, adaptability, and effective risk management in dynamic environments (Christopher & Peck, 2004). In such contexts, trust becomes a critical source of competitiveness, enabling organizations to respond more rapidly to environmental changes and sustain long-term collaborative performance.

Recent research further extends the concept of trust beyond traditional interpersonal and interorganizational relationships by emphasizing the growing importance of digital trust in increasingly digitalized supply chains. Digital trust facilitates secure information exchange, supports the adoption of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and blockchain, and strengthens collaborative decision-making among supply chain partners (Arunachalam et al., 2026). Likewise, recent studies identify trust as a fundamental capability underpinning supply chain resilience, enabling organizations to coordinate responses to disruptions, enhance visibility, and improve adaptive capacity in uncertain environments (Ketchen & Craighead, 2020; Wieland, 2020). Furthermore, digital trust has been shown to reinforce collaboration and organizational resilience by improving transparency, reducing uncertainty, and fostering long-term strategic partnerships (Song et al., 2025).

At the same time, trust remains a highly fragile construct vulnerable to various pressures, including power asymmetries, opportunistic behavior, and limited transparency. Particularly in relationships characterized by substantial power imbalances, dominant actors may exploit trust to pursue unilateral interests, thereby reducing relationship quality and relational stability (Cox et al., 2002).

Machiavellian behavior frequently undermines trust because it involves manipulation, opportunism, selective disclosure, and covert influence. Such practices reduce

transparency and increase perceived relational risk, thereby decreasing partners' willingness to cooperate. Conversely, high levels of trust may serve as protective relational mechanisms that limit the negative effects of power asymmetries and reduce incentives for opportunistic behavior.

In relationships characterized by high trust, organizations may perceive fewer incentives to engage in manipulative strategies because the long-term benefits of cooperation exceed potential short-term opportunistic gains. In contrast, low-trust environments increase uncertainty and may encourage organizations to rely more heavily on Machiavellian strategies to protect their interests.

Within the proposed conceptual framework, trust is a central relational construct that reflects the quality of strategic partnerships. In this study, trust is conceptualized as a broader relationship-quality construct encompassing perceptions of partnership benefits, shared values, communication quality, and relational reliability, thereby enabling a comprehensive assessment of trust and its role within interorganizational relationships.

2.4 Relationships Among Power, Machiavellianism, and Trust in Supply Chains

Based on the theoretical foundations presented above, the relationships among power, Machiavellianism, and trust may be understood as a dynamic system of interconnected constructs jointly shaping the nature and quality of strategic partnerships within supply chains. Power, as a structural element, determines the distribution of influence among actors; Machiavellianism, as a behavioral construct, defines how this power is exercised; and trust represents the relational outcome of these interactions. Such integration enables a more comprehensive understanding of interorganisational relationships that extends beyond traditional one-dimensional perspectives (Cox, 2001; Bachmann, 2001).

Existing literature provides extensive insights into each construct; however, these constructs are rarely examined as components of an integrated relational system. Research on power primarily focuses on dependency structures and control over resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), often neglecting behavioral aspects of power use. Conversely, studies on trust emphasize its role in stabilizing relationships and reducing uncertainty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Bromiley & Cummings, 1995), while paying limited attention to how power asymmetries and strategic behavior influence the development of trust. Machiavellianism, which may serve as an important connecting mechanism between these constructs, remains relatively underexplored in supply chain relationship research (Musarra et al., 2022;).

Importantly, power itself is not inherently negative. Its effects depend on the strategic orientation and behavioral intentions of dominant actors. However, power asymmetries create structural conditions that increase both the opportunity and the perceived rationality of manipulative behavior.

Organizations with greater control over resources and decision-making processes may therefore be more inclined to employ Machiavellian strategies to preserve or strengthen their competitive position.

According to Resource Dependence Theory, organizations that control strategically important resources gain greater power and, consequently, an increased ability to influence the behavior of other actors (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). In such circumstances, dominant organizations acquire greater capacity to shape collaboration rules, control information flows, and create partner dependency relationships. Nevertheless, this influence is rarely exercised directly; instead, it manifests through specific behavioral strategies. One such strategy is Machiavellianism, as reflected in manipulation, selective disclosure of information, and opportunistic behavior (Christie & Geis, 1970; Cox, 2001).

On this basis, it may be assumed that the greater the organizational power, the greater the capability and opportunity to employ Machiavellian strategies. Organizations with stronger bargaining power, superior access to resources, and financial dominance may create conditions that facilitate manipulative and opportunistic practices because they experience lower dependence on partners and greater control over relationship structures. This interpretation is also consistent with Transaction Cost Economics, which assumes that actors operating under conditions of incomplete information pursue self-interest and may exploit advantageous positions to maximize benefits (Williamson, 1985; Cuypers et al., 2021).

Based on these theoretical foundations, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1:

Greater organizational power within the supply chain positively influences Machiavellian behavior in strategic partnerships.

Machiavellian behavior subsequently produces important consequences for the quality of interorganizational relationships, particularly regarding trust. Trust is fundamentally based on expectations of honesty, transparency, and reliability (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), whereas Machiavellianism operates in the opposite direction. Manipulation, covert aggression, and opportunistic behavior reduce relational transparency and increase perceived risk, thereby decreasing trust between partners (Musarra et al., 2022).

Research suggests that perceptions of opportunistic behavior directly reduce willingness to cooperate and increase reliance on formal monitoring mechanisms (Bromi-

ley & Cummings, 1995). More recent studies confirm that opportunism remains one of the primary barriers to trust development in strategic partnerships, although its role has evolved in increasingly digital and interconnected supply chains. For example, Wieland (2020) argues that inter-organizational trust is a critical capability for supply chain resilience because it reduces perceived relational risk and enables partners to respond collaboratively to disruptions rather than relying exclusively on contractual safeguards. Similarly, Ketchen et al. (2020) demonstrate that trust facilitates rapid information sharing, joint decision-making, and coordinated responses during supply chain disruptions, whereas opportunistic concerns encourage organizations to invest in costly monitoring and control systems.

Recent research also highlights the growing importance of digital trust. Arunachalam, S. et al. (2026) show that digital trust supports secure data exchange, technology adoption, and collaborative governance in digitally integrated supply chains. Their systematic review concludes that transparency, cybersecurity, and data reliability substantially reduce perceptions of opportunism and strengthen long-term collaboration. Likewise, Song et al. (2025) report that digital trust enhances collaboration, organizational agility, and supply chain resilience by reducing uncertainty and encouraging partners to share strategic information.

Evidence from strategic alliance research also supports these conclusions. Musarra et al. (2022) demonstrate that organizational Machiavellianism increases the use of power and learning anxiety while reducing collaborative learning, ultimately weakening alliance performance. Collectively, these studies indicate that contemporary trust research has shifted beyond viewing trust merely as a mechanism for reducing transaction costs toward recognizing it as a strategic capability that supports resilience, digital collaboration, innovation, and sustainable inter-organizational relationships.

Partners who perceive manipulative or unfair behavior tend to become more cautious, which limits openness in communication and reduces long-term relational commitment. Although Machiavellian strategies may provide short-term advantages, they often lead to long-term negative consequences for partnership stability.

The negative impact of Machiavellianism on trust may be particularly pronounced in strategic partnerships characterized by long-term interdependence, where relational stability depends heavily on transparency, reciprocity, and mutual commitment. In such contexts, even subtle forms of manipulation or opportunism may significantly undermine the perceived quality of the relationship.

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2:

Machiavellian organizational behavior undermines trust in strategic supply chain partnerships.

Power itself should not necessarily be interpreted as

inherently harmful. Previous studies have shown that power may facilitate coordination, stability, and efficient relationship management within supply chains (Cox, 2001). Organizations possessing greater bargaining power and stronger control over critical resources may be better positioned to establish long-term relationships and create favorable conditions for collaboration. Consequently, power may contribute positively to trust between strategic partners rather than undermine it.

Based on these theoretical considerations, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3:

Organizational power positively influences trust in strategic supply chain partnerships.

3 Methodology

3.1 Participants and Sampling

The study was conducted among organizations operating within the Impol Group's supply chain network. Potential respondents included suppliers, distributors, manufacturing companies, and logistics providers located in Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia. Data were collected using an anonymous online questionnaire distributed via e-mail, personal business contacts, and the internal Impol network.

Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and the anonymity of their responses. Data collection took place between April and May 2026. A total of 163 individuals accessed the survey link, of whom 81 initiated the questionnaire. However, 19 respondents discontinued participation before completing the survey and therefore provided insufficient data for the intended analyses. These partially completed questionnaires were excluded from the main analyses.

The final analytical sample consisted of 62 fully completed questionnaires. All reliability, validity, correlation, and regression analyses were conducted using these complete responses. Variations in sample size reported for demographic variables reflect occasional nonresponse to individual background questions and the use of all available responses for descriptive purposes.

The final sample comprised respondents from various organizations engaged in supply chain activities. Detailed information regarding respondents' demographic characteristics and organizational positions is presented in Table 4. Ta

3.2 Instruments

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on previously validated measurement scales. All

items were assessed using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). The questionnaire was designed to capture respondents' perceptions of organizational power, Machiavellian behavior, and trust within strategic supply chain partnerships.

Organizational power was operationalized through three dimensions: bargaining power, control over access to resources, and financial power. These dimensions were derived from research on power relationships, resource dependence, and supply chain governance. Trust was operationalized through dimensions reflecting costs and benefits of partnership, shared values, and communication quality. These dimensions were adapted from established research on interorganizational trust, relationship marketing, and strategic partnerships. Machiavellian behavior was measured through three dimensions: strategic manipulation, covert aggressive behavior, and opportunistic tendencies. The measurement of Machiavellianism was adapted from previous studies examining Machiavellian behavior and opportunism in organizational and interorganizational contexts.

The questionnaire consisted of 53 observed variables grouped into the corresponding dimensions. All measurement scales were adapted from previously validated instruments and adjusted to the context of strategic supply chain partnerships.

Such adaptation was necessary because the original scales were developed in different organizational, managerial, or behavioral settings and therefore required modification to reflect interorganizational relationships among supply chain partners. The wording of selected items was adjusted to ensure conceptual relevance, clarity, and applicability to buyer-supplier relationships while preserving the original theoretical meaning and content validity of the constructs.

Furthermore, the original measurement items were reviewed and contextually adapted to the business environment of organizations operating within the Impol supply chain network. Particular attention was devoted to maintaining semantic equivalence and ensuring that the items accurately reflected the realities of strategic partnerships, resource dependencies, information exchange, and collaborative decision-making within supply chains.

Higher scores indicated higher levels of the respective constructs. To enhance methodological transparency, Table 1 presents the operationalization of the constructs, their dimensions, and the primary literature sources on which the measurement items were based.

Table 3: Measurement Constructs, Dimensions, and Literature Sources

Construct	Dimension	Main Source(s)
Organizational Power	Bargaining Power	Cox (2001); Ganesan (1993)
Organizational Power	Control Over Access to Resources	Pfeffer & Salancik (1978)
Organizational Power	Financial Power	Cox (2001); Krajewski et al. (2005)
Trust	Costs and Benefits of Partnership	Morgan & Hunt (1994)
Trust	Shared Values	Morgan & Hunt (1994); Sako (1992)
Trust	Communication and Relationship Quality	Curral & Inkpen (2002); Bromiley & Cummings (1995)
Machiavellian Behavior	Strategic Manipulation	Musarra et al. (2022)
Machiavellian Behavior	Covert Aggressive Behavior	Musarra et al. (2022)
Machiavellian Behavior	Opportunism	Dahling et al. (2009); Williamson (1985)

Note. The measurement items were adapted from established scales in the literature and adjusted to the context of strategic supply chain partnerships. Adaptations primarily involved modifications of wording and terminology to reflect interorganizational relationships among supply chain partners while preserving the original conceptual meaning of the constructs.

3.3 Data Analysis

Prior to analysis, the dataset was screened for completeness and consistency. Of the 81 respondents who started the questionnaire, 62 provided complete responses to all key measurement items and were retained for further analysis. The remaining 19 cases were incomplete questionnaires, resulting from respondents discontinuing participation before completing the survey. These cases were excluded from the inferential analyses using a listwise deletion approach. No imputation procedures were applied.

Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize respondents' characteristics and the distributions of the observed variables. Demographic statistics were based on all available responses, resulting in minor variations in sample sizes across demographic variables.

To assess the reliability and validity of the measurement scales, Cronbach's alpha coefficients, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and indicator loadings were examined. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients, while convergent validity was assessed using AVE values and item loadings.

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine associations among organizational power, Machiavellian behavior, and trust. Subsequently, a simple linear regression analysis was performed to assess the relationship between organizational power and trust. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the relatively small sample size ($N = 62$), the analyses focused on descriptive statistics, reliability and validity assessments, correlation analyses, and simple regression rather than testing more complex

causal models. All statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 30.

4 Results

4.1 Sample Characteristics

The study included respondents from organizations operating within the Impol supply chain network in Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia. Due to occasional missing values, the number of valid responses varied slightly across demographic variables.

Regarding company size, the largest proportion of respondents represented small enterprises (32.1%), followed by micro and medium-sized enterprises, each accounting for 24.7% of the sample. Large enterprises constituted 18.5% of the respondents.

With respect to industry affiliation, trade and distribution companies represented the largest group (39.7%), followed by manufacturing companies (37.2%). Service companies accounted for 15.4% of the sample, whereas logistics companies represented 2.6%. The remaining respondents operated in other industries.

Concerning organizational position, sales professionals constituted the largest group of respondents (44.2%), followed by top management (18.2%) and middle management (16.9%). Procurement specialists accounted for 7.8%, while operations and logistics personnel represented 6.5% of the sample.

The respondents were generally experienced professionals. Nearly half of the respondents (45.5%) reported

more than 21 years of professional experience, whereas 26.0% had between 11 and 20 years of experience. Approximately one-quarter of respondents had less than 10 years of work experience.

In terms of supply chain position, most respondents represented supplier organizations (63.2%), followed by

distributors (19.7%) and manufacturers (14.5%). Only a small proportion of respondents were employed by focal firms (2.6%).

Table 1 presents the demographic and organizational characteristics of the respondents.

Table 4: Characteristics of respondents

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Company size (N = 81)		
Micro (1–10 employees)	20	24.7
Small (11–50 employees)	26	32.1
Medium (51–250 employees)	20	24.7
Large (251+ employees)	15	18.5
Industry (N = 78)		
Manufacturing	29	37.2
Trade/Distribution	31	39.7
Services	12	15.4
Logistics	2	2.6
Other	4	5.1
Respondent position (N = 77)		
Top management	14	18.2
Middle management	13	16.9
Procurement	6	7.8
Sales	34	44.2
Operations/Logistics	5	6.5
Other	5	6.5
Professional experience (N = 77)		
< 3 years	4	5.2
3–10 years	18	23.4
11–20 years	20	26.0
> 21 years	35	45.5
Position in the supply chain (N = 76)		
Supplier	48	63.2
Manufacturer	11	14.5
Distributor	15	19.7
Focal firm	2	2.6

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated to provide an overview of respondents' perceptions regarding power, Machiavellianism, and trust. Overall, respondents reported moderate to high scores across the examined constructs.

4.3 Reliability and Validity Assessment

The reliability and convergent validity of the measurement scales were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), indicator loadings, and average variance extracted (AVE). The analysis was conducted on the cleaned dataset, with missing values excluded on a construct-wise basis. The number of valid cases, therefore, varied slightly across constructs.

As shown in Table 5, most constructs demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.672 to 0.937. Although the Costs and Benefits of Partnership dimension showed a slightly lower alpha value ($\alpha = 0.672$), its composite reliability exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency. All remaining constructs exceeded the recommended reliability threshold.

Composite reliability values ranged from 0.821 to 0.955, exceeding the recommended minimum value of 0.70. In addition, AVE values ranged from 0.525 to 0.841, all above the recommended threshold of 0.50. These results indicate adequate convergent validity of the measurement scales.

Following the assessment of reliability and convergent validity, item loadings were examined to evaluate the contribution of individual indicators to their respective measurement scales. All indicators demonstrated satisfactory loadings exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2022). The obtained values ranged from 0.78

to 0.96, indicating that all items contributed adequately to the measurement of their underlying dimensions. Consequently, no indicators were removed from further analyses.

The reliability and validity results supported the adequacy of the measurement indicators and justified proceeding with the assessment of relationships among the higher-order constructs.

4.4 Correlation Analysis

Descriptive statistics indicated relatively high levels of trust among the respondents ($M = 5.824$, $SD = 0.680$), moderate perceptions of organizational power ($M = 4.601$, $SD = 0.948$), and somewhat lower levels of Machiavellian behavior ($M = 3.989$, $SD = 1.292$).

Correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive association between organizational power and trust ($r = 0.620$), indicating that organizations possessing greater bargaining power, stronger control over resources, and superior financial capabilities tended to report higher levels of trust within strategic partnerships. Organizational power was also positively associated with Machiavellian behavior ($r = 0.315$), suggesting that organizations with greater bargaining power, stronger control over resources, and superior financial capabilities may be somewhat more inclined to employ strategic manipulation, covert aggression, and opportunistic behavior.

In contrast, Machiavellian behavior showed virtually no relationship with trust ($r = -0.050$), indicating that manipulative and opportunistic tendencies do not substantially influence trust in strategic supply chain partnerships. Overall, the findings suggest that organizational power, Machiavellian behavior, and trust represent interconnected but empirically distinct dimensions of strategic partnerships.

Table 5: Reliability and convergent validity of first-order constructs

Construct	N	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Bargaining Power	64	0.851	0.895	0.630
Control Over Access to Resources	65	0.798	0.870	0.575
Financial Power	65	0.829	0.880	0.595
Costs and Benefits of Partnership	65	0.672	0.821	0.536
Shared Values	65	0.871	0.919	0.739
Communication and Opportunism	65	0.766	0.846	0.525
Strategic Manipulation	62	0.937	0.955	0.841
Covert Aggressive Behavior	62	0.883	0.920	0.744
Opportunism	62	0.824	0.886	0.663

Table 6: Indicator loadings of first-order constructs

Construct	Number of items	Range of loadings
Bargaining Power	5	0.94–0.96
Control Over Access to Resources	5	0.79–0.92
Financial Power	5	0.81–0.94
Costs and Benefits of Partnership	4	0.78–0.88
Shared Values	4	0.88–0.95
Communication and Opportunism	5	0.76–0.90
Strategic Manipulation	4	0.89–0.96
Covert Aggressive Behavior	4	0.84–0.93
Opportunism	4	0.80–0.91

Table 7: Correlations among higher-order constructs

Construct	1	2	3
1. Power	1.000		
2. Machiavellianism	0.315	1.000	
3. Trust	0.620	-0.050	1.000

Table 8: Pearson Correlations and Significance Levels Among Power, Machiavellianism, and Trust

Relationship	r	p	Interpretation
Power – Machiavellianism	0.315	0.013	statistically significant positive relationship
Power – Trust	0.620	< 0.001	statistically significant, strong positive relationship
Machiavellianism – Trust	-0.050	0.700	no statistically significant relationship

Note: Pearson correlation coefficients are reported. Statistical significance was evaluated at $\alpha = .05$.

Table 9: Hypothesis Result

Hypothesis	Result
H1	Supported
H2	Not supported
H3	Supported

Correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between Power and Machiavellianism ($r = .315$, $p = .013$), indicating that higher levels of power are associated with higher levels of Machiavellianism. Power was also strongly and positively related to Trust ($r = .620$, $p < .001$). In contrast, Machiavellianism was not significantly associated with Trust ($r = -.050$, $p = .700$), suggesting no meaningful linear relationship between these constructs.

4.5 Relationships among Power, Machiavellian Behavior, and Trust

The exploratory analysis revealed meaningful associations among the three higher-order constructs. Organizational power was positively associated with Machiavellian behavior, indicating that organizations with greater bargaining power, stronger control over resources, and superior financial capabilities tended to report higher levels of

strategic manipulation, covert aggression, and opportunistic behavior. This finding provides preliminary support for the assumption that structural power may create conditions favoring the emergence of Machiavellian strategies.

The relationship between Machiavellian behavior and trust was negligible. Although the theoretical framework assumed that manipulative and opportunistic tendencies would undermine trust, the empirical findings did not provide evidence to support this assumption. This suggests that trust within strategic supply chain partnerships may depend on broader relational and contextual factors extending beyond behavioral strategies alone.

In addition, organizational power exhibited a statistically significant positive association with trust ($\beta = 0.471$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 38.4% of the variance in trust ($R^2 = 0.384$). Organizations reporting higher levels of bargaining power, resource control, and financial power also tended to report higher levels of trust within strategic supply chain partnerships. These findings support H3 and suggest that power may function not only as a source of asymmetry but also as a mechanism that promotes coordination, stability, and relationship quality.

The findings indicate that power, Machiavellian behavior, and trust should be viewed as interconnected dimensions of strategic partnerships. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the relatively small sample size, these findings should be interpreted with caution and corroborated in future studies with larger samples and more advanced analytical approaches.

5 Discussion

The present study sought to provide a more comprehensive understanding of strategic partnerships in supply chains by integrating structural (power), behavioral (Machiavellian behavior), and relational (trust) dimensions within a single conceptual framework. In doing so, it addressed the fragmentation identified in prior literature, in which these constructs have predominantly been examined separately. The findings should be interpreted with caution, given the relatively small sample size and the study's exploratory nature.

The findings are broadly consistent with the assumptions of Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) and Transaction Cost Economics (Williamson, 1985), suggesting that organizational power creates conditions that may facilitate the use of Machiavellian strategies. Organizations with greater bargaining power, superior access to resources, and stronger financial capabilities may have greater opportunities to engage in strategic manipulation, covert aggression, and opportunism. These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing that power asymmetries represent an important source of behavioral strategies aimed at preserving or strengthening

competitive advantages (Cox, 2001; Musarra et al., 2022). Consequently, the results suggest that power influences interorganizational relationships not only through structural mechanisms but also through behavioral processes.

Contrary to expectations derived from Commitment-Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), Machiavellian behavior exhibited virtually no relationship with trust. The findings suggest that manipulative and opportunistic behavior may not be the primary mechanism by which power affects relationship quality. One possible explanation may lie in the characteristics of the investigated supply chains. Since many respondents represented organizations engaged in long-term, stable business relationships, repeated interactions and accumulated experience may have mitigated the detrimental effects of opportunistic tendencies. In such environments, trust appears to depend on broader relational and contextual factors rather than solely on the presence of Machiavellian strategies.

Furthermore, the positive relationship between organizational power and trust supports H3 and suggests that power asymmetries do not necessarily undermine relationship quality. On the contrary, organizations possessing greater bargaining power and stronger control over critical resources may be better positioned to establish stable relationships and promote collaboration among supply chain partners.

Importantly, the findings suggest that power itself should not necessarily be interpreted as inherently harmful. Although power asymmetries may increase opportunities for manipulative behavior, organizations possessing greater power also tended to report higher levels of trust. This finding indicates that power may simultaneously function as a mechanism for coordination, stability, and value creation within supply chains. Such an observation is consistent with Cox (2001), who argued that the consequences of power depend primarily on how it is exercised.

From a managerial perspective, these findings highlight the importance of transparency, communication, and shared values in maintaining relationship quality. Rather than attempting to eliminate power asymmetries, managers should focus on developing collaborative governance mechanisms and fostering long-term orientations among supply chain partners. Sustainable competitive advantage is therefore more likely to emerge from trust-based relationships than from short-term opportunistic gains.

Taken together, the findings indicate that power, behavior, and trust should not be examined in isolation, as their interaction yields a more comprehensive understanding of strategic supply chain relationships. Although the expected negative impact of Machiavellian behavior on trust was not supported, the findings provide evidence that power, behavior, and trust constitute interconnected dimensions of strategic partnerships and should therefore be examined within an integrated conceptual framework.

6 Conclusions

The present study explored the relationships among organizational power, Machiavellian behavior, and trust in strategic supply chain partnerships. By integrating structural, behavioral, and relational dimensions, the study addressed an important gap in the existing literature, in which these constructs have largely been investigated independently.

The findings indicate that organizational power was positively associated with Machiavellian behavior and with trust within strategic supply chain partnerships. However, contrary to theoretical expectations derived from Commitment-Trust Theory, Machiavellian behavior showed virtually no relationship to trust. These results suggest that trust in strategic partnerships is influenced more strongly by structural and relational factors than by opportunistic behavioral tendencies.

These findings contribute to the literature by providing a more integrated perspective on the interplay between structural conditions, behavioral tendencies, and relational outcomes in supply chains. The study further suggests that power asymmetries do not necessarily undermine relationship quality and that trust appears to depend primarily on broader relational and contextual factors rather than on Machiavellian tendencies alone.

From a practical perspective, the findings imply that organizational power should not be regarded as inherently detrimental. Managers should focus on developing collaborative governance mechanisms based on transparency, communication, and shared values. Long-term orientation and relationship quality appear to be more important for sustainable competitive advantage than short-term opportunistic gains. Strengthening trust-based relationships may therefore contribute to greater supply chain resilience and long-term organizational performance.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional research design does not allow causal relationships to be established with certainty. Second, the relatively small sample size and the focus on organizations operating in Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia limit the generalizability of the findings. Third, the study relied on self-reported perceptions, which may be influenced by common method bias and subjective interpretations, both of which cannot be excluded.

Future research should employ larger, more heterogeneous samples, longitudinal designs, and additional behavioral constructs to deepen understanding of the mechanisms linking power and relationship quality in strategic supply chains. Furthermore, future studies could examine the role of contextual factors, such as organizational culture, governance structures, and environmental uncertainty, in shaping the relationships among power, Machiavellian behavior, and trust.

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Moč, makiavelistično vedenje in zaupanje v strateških partnerstvih oskrbovalnih verig: eksplorativna empirična raziskava

Izhodišča/Namen: Strateška partnerstva v oskrbovalnih verigah so vse bolj odvisna od učinkovitega upravljanja medorganizacijskih odnosov, za katere so značilne asimetrije moči, vedenjska dinamika in zaupanje. Čeprav so moč, zaupanje in oportunistično vedenje v literaturi obsežno proučevani konstrukti, so bili večinoma raziskovani ločeno. Namen raziskave je zapolniti to vrzel s proučevanjem povezav med organizacijsko močjo, makiavelističnim vedenjem in zaupanjem v strateških partnerstvih oskrbovalnih verig ter ovrednotenjem integriranega konceptualnega modela, ki združuje strukturne, vedenjske in odnosne razsežnosti.

Metode: Uporabljen je bil eksplorativni kvantitativni raziskovalni pristop. Podatki so bili zbrani s pomočjo spletne ankete, izvedene med organizacijami, ki delujejo v oskrbovalnih verigah skupine Impol v Sloveniji, na Hrvaškem in v Srbiji. V analizo je bilo vključenih 62 veljavnih odgovorov. Zanesljivost in veljavnost merskih lestvic sta bili ocenjeni s Cronbachovim koeficientom alfa, kompozitno zanesljivostjo in povprečno pojasnjeno varianco (AVE). Za preučevanje odnosov med konstrukti so bile uporabljene deskriptivna statistika, korelacijska analiza in enostavna linearna regresija.

Rezultati: Ugotovitve kažejo na pozitivno povezanost med organizacijsko močjo in makiavelističnim vedenjem, kar nakazuje, da organizacije z večjo pogajalsko močjo, močnejšim nadzorom nad viri in večjo finančno močjo pogosteje izkazujejo manipulativne in oportunistične vedenjske vzorce. Ugotovljena je bila tudi pozitivna povezava med organizacijsko močjo in zaupanjem. Nasprotno pa med makiavelističnim vedenjem in zaupanjem ni bila ugotovljena statistično značilna povezanost. Rezultati nakazujejo, da lahko moč prispeva ne le k ustvarjanju odvisnosti in vedenjskemu nadzoru, temveč tudi k stabilnosti odnosov in učinkovitejšemu usklajevanju dejavnosti v oskrbovalnih verigah.

Sklep: Raziskava prispeva k razumevanju odnosov v oskrbovalnih verigah z integracijo organizacijske moči, makiavelističnega vedenja in zaupanja v enoten konceptualni okvir. Ugotovitve kažejo, da na zaupanje v strateških partnerstvih močnejše vplivajo strukturni in odnosni dejavniki kot zgolj oportunistične vedenjske težnje. Rezultati imajo pomembne praktične implikacije za managerje, ki si prizadevajo krepiti sodelovanje, mehanizme upravljanja ter dolgoročno uspešnost partnerstev v oskrbovalnih verigah.

Ključne besede: *Organizacijska moč, Makiavelistično vedenje, Zaupanje, Strateška partnerstva, Management oskrbovalnih verig, Medorganizacijski odnosi*