Relationship in a fair trade market: how to create and manage value

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Abstract

In this paper we analyze the way to create and manage value in a relationship between a banana company and its partners in a fair trade market.

In the fair trade market a successful business requires some attention for and collaboration from employees, customers, suppliers, communities, and shareholders. Also, some degree of commitment is required from multiple partners to carry on in business and a greater commitment to achieve new levels of performance (Giovannucci and Koekoek, 2003; Henderson, 2008).

Our paper examines fair trade bananas and presents the case of Agrofair Company which trades in bananas worldwide using the brand name “oké”. These bananas carry the label of Max Havelaar, the Netherlands member of Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (Acronym: FLO). The label is the world’s first International Fairtrade Certification Mark.

We use previous research on strategic management (Porter, 1985, Barnay 1991; Barnay and Barney and Hansen, 1994), value creation in relationships (Ricardo, 1821; Smith, 1937; Kothandaraman and Wilson, 2001), and moral conception of the firm to study value creation in a fair trade market. We focus on previous works during four years on fair trade bananas (Coulibaly and Sauvée, 2010; Coulibaly, 2008) to analyze the way to create and manage value in a relationship between a banana company Agrofair and its partners. We elucidate the way to create value and we identify the potential sources of conflicts in the transactions. In a fair trade market we show how partners’ actions are conducted to help each actor even though they intend to make a profit. In this context, the fair trade market represents one of the markets which allow value creation by respecting the principle of fair relationships.

Keys words: Value, relationships, fair trade market
Introduction
A successful business requires some attention and collaboration from employees, customers, suppliers, the communities, and shareholders. Some degree of commitment is required from multiple partners to carry on in business and greater commitment to achieve new levels of performance. This degree of commitment appears in the fair trade market based on fair relationships between actors in developing countries (producers) and developed countries (distributors, consumers, etc.). One relationship is focused on an active desire to alleviate another’s suffering.

Furthermore, for a business to reach higher levels of performance, and at times merely survive, diverse partners have to collaborate about transactions with the firm. They have to participate in these transactions. All partners must save the world, the economic model, to mobilize the energies of many who are either unwilling or simply are unable to donate resources to the betterment of others.

This paper illustrates these ideas with the fair trade movement. In particular, it examines fair trade bananas and presents the case of Agrofair which trades in bananas worldwide using the brand name “oké”. These bananas carry the label of Max Havelaar, the Netherlands member of Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (Acronym: FLO). This label is the world’s first International Fairtrade Certification Mark.

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I. A way to create value?
Value creation is connected to the activities and to the mission of the organizations which exchange within the relationship. In a fair trade market, we present activities and mission of the organizations studying the fair trade bananas.

1. Activities
In a fair trade market consumption of fair trade bananas is raised (appendices 1). So companies exchange with other organizations to develop a product combining their brand with a fair trade brand (appendices 2). The “Fairtrade” brand is at the heart of the fair trade bananas and in the relationship between organizations and consumers.

1.1 Fair trade brand
A fair trade brand guarantees social conditions: the direct purchase by consumers, a minimum price, and the long term relationships between producers and buyers and the respect of human rights (minimum social security, refusal of child labor, etc.). Environmental criteria are added to social criteria: decrease in the use of pesticides and artificial fertilizers, waste recycling, prevention of water pollution.

A brand represents one of the main resources in this market. For example in the sector of fair trade bananas “Fairtrade\(^1\)” represents a brand which conveys a fair trade concept and its image is recognized by consumers and distributors in the world:

\(^1\) Since 2008, a fair trade association Max Havelaar and its partners decide to use “Fairtrade” as a label and to represent the association.
“Some distributors accept only to sell their products when they are labeled Max Havelaar. It is the same reaction for some partners who say that if bananas or fruits are not labeled Max Havelaar we cannot sell them as Fairtrade” (Interview with GD, AgroFair France, June 2007). So to deliver a product to the client, owners of the brand (banana brand and fair trade brand) exchange with external partners to realize the transaction. In the following part, we develop this relationship in a fair trade market.

1.2 Relationship in a fair trade market

In a relationship, all of the organizations investigate ways to create value. Value is defined as “relationships of a firm’s market offering and price weighed by the consumer against its competitor’s market offering and price” (Kothandaraman and Wilson, 2001: 380). Each organization uses their own resources and reinforces these resources combining with their partner’s resources. Indeed, according to the resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik 1978) critical resources of the organizations depend on external partners. So organizations rely on their external stakeholders (Berman and al. 2006: 5-6) and they cooperate to create value such in network relationships (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995).

In a fair trade market, we distinguish two types of partners: direct and indirect partners. Direct partners who are producers, distributors, certification and control organizations (FLO and FLO certified2), and consumers, exchange about the product and the fair trade concept (for example a fair trade banana). Indirect partners help direct partners to improve life conditions in developing countries and to regulate the relationship: government, voluntaries, etc. In a relationship each partner plays a key role. So, for fair trade bananas, a fruit company Agrofair is connected to a fair trade association Max Havelaar which receives a government subsidy (public subsidy), a private subsidy (charities organizations) and others sources of funding “60 % of the profit of Max Havelaar provide by subsidy” (Interview with JD, Max Havelaar, 2007).

Max Havelaar helps the organizations of the producers: “we have received a lot help around the world to realize our project, for example from FIDA: International funds for development” (Interview with ZLK, Sitraka, May, 2008). We note that “the revenues of the fair trade association Max Havelaar derives from royalties paid by organizations which commercialize fair trade products, about 2000 products” (Interview with SG, Max Havelaar France, January 2009). These funds are transmitted to the control organization (FLO) to reach fair trade goals and to help producers in developing countries. The financial resources of the banana company Agrofair result from the selling of the fair bananas and some subsidies.

Moreover in the market, the different departments of the organization exchange information concerning production and communication strategy: “in Agrofair, we have many departments, one department takes care of the producers, doing whatever they have to do with the production, another department is logistic, sales is another department : marketing, of course there are other departments. Marketing works mainly directly with the marketing department of Max Havelaar”. We do things together, like the fair trade week; (...) the day before yesterday we had a common meeting with Max Havelaar from other countries, so it’s a strong relationship…” (Interview with KDK, AgroFair Netherlands, October, 2007).

Also, the fair trade association Max Havelaar organizes annual meetings with all of the partners to promote the fair trade products: “Meeting with license owners (about 190 companies) representing companies which commercialize fair trade products” (Interview with SG, Max Havelaar France, January. 2009). During the meeting, they discuss communication strategy as well as contracts between partners in develop and developing countries.

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2 FLO (Fair trade Labelling Organizations) makes the control, FLO cert delivers certification.
To develop partners relationships and attract consumers, the fair trade association Max Havelaar prepares each year a fifteen day long conference in some countries such as France, the United Kingdom, Canada, (“Fifteen of the fair trade”) to communicate and promote the fair trade concept (Interview with SG, Max Havelaar France, January, 2009. In this way, partners in fair trade markets focus on some key resources: brand image (quality of bananas, food safety) and communication strategy on a fair trade concept: respect of producers, environment. We notice that resources are critical to manage organizations (Barney and Hansen, 1994) and to reach their objectives, organization needs financial and technical resources (Porter, 1985) and all the members commit themselves to maximize profit. This is one way of value creation.

Now we will analyze how value is created in the relationship (what leads to create value?).

2. Mission in a market

The mission is defined as concrete actions and plans of the organization to achieve their main objectives, it can be considered as a firm’s intentions (Ndofor and Levitas, 2004: 691). Two things define the mission of the company: client and product or service (Macdonald and Pichette, 1995).

Previous research, show that an organization engages in a relationship with other organizations for different reasons: to exploit market opportunities, to face competition, to share common interests with other organizations, to improve its activities or profit (Porter, 1985; Prahalad and Hamel, 1990), to help others, to serve society (Weber, 1947), etc. Based on previous works, we note that business organizations bring about interactions between labor, capital (relation with partners), client (sold product or service) and natural resources (Smith, 1937). So when the client has agreed to pay a high price, capital reaches a high value. Also this negotiated price is distributed among labor, capital and land. In an inter-organizational relationship the objectives of partners centre on the same mission. How is this mission explained in a fair trade market?

A fair trade is a regulated market in order to reduce disparities between North and South: “Fair trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers especially in the South. Fair trade organizations, backed by consumers, are engaged actively in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade” (FINE³, 2001). So the fair trade represents: “an alternative approach to conventional trade that aims to improve the livelihoods and well-being of small producers by improving their market access, strengthening their organizations, paying them a fair price, and providing continuity in trading relationships” (Giovannucci and Koekoek, 2003: 38).

In this context, organizations aim to allow the production of fair trade products in developing countries and to sell this product in developed countries. This consists in balancing the business of fair products between actors in the North and in the South, to resolve difficulties related to the production and the marketing of the products and to protect the environment.

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³ FINE is an informal association of the four main Fair trade networks: F (Fair trade Labelling Organizations: FLO), I (International Fair Trade Association represented now by World Fair Trade Organization: WFTO), N (Network of European Worldshops: NEWS) and E (European Fair Trade Association). It was created in 1998.
In the case of the fair trade bananas, bananas are bought to producers by distributors and consumers. Bananas respect fair trade regulations so the fair trade banana is a differentiated product. The main goal of the organizations is to put together their tangible and intangible assets to create superior value for the customer.

So, in a relationship between a fruit company “Agrofair” and its partners in a fair trade market, Agrofair not only delivers its traditional bananas but also fair trade bananas. The company exchange, buys bananas directly to producers in developing countries or with ripeners in developed countries and sells these bananas to the final consumers via some supermarkets, groceries, etc. Agrofair commercializes fair trade bananas using its brand name “Oké” with a fair trade brand name “Fairtrade”.

Organizations in this market sometimes share common objectives: “sometimes we have a common interest in the marketing, we can create promotions together, sometimes AgroFair supplies retailers. It was important that we had a direct connection with the retailers” (Interview with KDK, Agrofair Netherlands, 2008). “The interest is not only to buy and to resell, the interest is to have a common project, to accept the requirements that the customers can have” (Interview with AB, Az Méditerranée, mai 2008).

To achieve the mission, standards and norms are instituted by partners in the relationship. Certification rules, contracts, licenses, norms (ISO: International Organization for Standardization), and cooperation allow them to apply standards.

The system of labeling in a fair trade market represents a set of contracts (contracts and standards) between three types of actors: producers in developing countries, control organization (FLO) and partners in developed countries (buyers, ripeners, distributors, consumers). Standards rely on specific requirements: health and safety of the workers when they are exposed to particular dangers. The calculation of the guaranteed minimum price is fixed respecting environmental rules (Max Havelaar France, 2008).

Also, there is a “license holder” contract in which a fair trade association authorizes a company to commercialize its product with a brand (or label) “Fairtrade”. It against part, the company paid royalties to the association related to a control organization (FLO). Also, FLO realizes the control, give certification to producers which respect roles. Then, FLO controls and gives certification to the producers who respect the rules: “A firm qualifies to have the Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International (FLO) gives its product the fair trade label when: respecting standards, no firm can qualify if it uses forced labour” (Henderson, 2008: 62). But when a contract is not respected by producers, it is possible to suspend or do a decertification. Then ripeners are controlled by FLO inspectors according to a volume (bought and sold).

So to apply standards, a fair trade association Max Havelaar collaborates with producers to determine a minimum price of purchase for each raw material. A fair trade association also checks that the minimum price covers the production cost while considering environmental protection. It is also necessary that the minimum price covers the elementary needs of the producers such as food, hygiene, education, health, etc. (Max Havelaar France, 2008).

In addition, there are negotiations between producers and buyers to finance producers activities. So, sometimes producers can ask buyers to advance up to 60 % of the price of their future harvest. This advance financing allows the producers to avoid having recourse to money lenders to finance their activities (Max Havelaar France, 2008).

A control organization FLO cooperates with all of the partners to validate standards. For certification, FLO cert makes sure that producers received remuneration (wages), that products include a guaranteed minimum price and that the development subsidies which should help producers to improve their living conditions is paid (FINE). So to carry out their checks, FLO inspectors visit cooperatives and plantations each year to make a report which is transmitted to the certification committee (representatives of the producers, of the importers
and of the national associations). Afterwards FLO verifies the activities of the importers, exporters and transformers to make sure certified products are present throughout the chain.

After explaining the way to create value in a relationship and the role of the mission to reach value, now we will focus on the characteristic of the value created.

3. Organizational value

Value creation in a relationship originates from human nature for an engagement (Weber, 1947), to satisfy an ambition in life, to win, to contribute in an organization (through power) and to reach an organizational goal (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). So to give a sense to one life and to help others, members of an organization direct its action in some way and work with other organizations. In this context, a set of rules sometimes represents the means to access power (Weber, 1947) and relationships among partners and their mission allows us to identify the way to create value. The value of the organization depends on transaction between different services, people (human resources, sales, etc.) and it is linked to human nature, rules in society.

In a fair trade market value is related to a key concept “sharing equal profit between producers and all of the partners” (FINE). According to Giovannucci and Koekoek (2003: 32-33), a fair trade market gets additional profits from the producers, advantages such as high prices and access to a new market. So a Fair trade concept allows us to improve natural resources and direct access to markets, increasing rural labor and reducing financial technical risks for the producers.

In the fair trade market, value relies on the key concept “to realize equal benefit for producers and all of the partners”. So value is represented by:
- Security for clients: price and quality of fair trade bananas which respect fair trade conditions;
- Increase of the profit (for organizations);
- Veracity (culture and distribution of bananas are in accordance with fair trade market);
- Respect standards and norms in a fair trade market.

In this market, costs will be less high by reducing middle men in the chain, by buying bananas directly from producers selling to final consumers a product which respects environmental rules. Also, if the client is ready to pay, there is a valuation and finally money for the company. That way value can help organizations to reach their mission.

In the first part of our work, we showed that relationships in a fair trade market are a source of value creation; however some limits can occur. In what follows, we will discuss these limits and the way to resolve them.

II. Potential sources of limits in the relationship

We distinguish general kinds of factors impinging on relationships such as “irritants” (Macdonald Pichette, 1995). Irritants provoke and motivate inappropriate behavior. Others elements (individuals, organizations or customary behavior in an entire industry) resist effective participation in a relationship. Limits in relationships rely on irritants and activities among partners in the fair trade market. First, we characterize limits and then we identify potential solutions.

1. Irritants

Irritants represent elements that incite people to carry out actions against the organizational mission. Most often they are related to job description and defective policies.
1.1. Job description

Within an organization a typical defect in job description that can motivate unethical behavior is when the scope of responsibilities does not correspond to the real power. So the capacity to exploit resources and to reach objectives is limited and the incumbent is not always able to deliver the goods, although it may be evaluated by the degree to which they are delivered.

Something similar happens in the relationships around an Agrofair Company in a fair trade market. To subscribe to (or to join) a fair trade market all organizations must adapt their proper conditions to a fair trade concept; collaborate with all of the services of each organization, to follow a control organization rules. Also, these organizations must exploit their resources in new conditions: adapt marketing strategy, common communication around the concept, new regulations, no pesticides, and no pollution.

For example, a fair trade banana company “Agrofair” employees must adapt to new conditions in all departments in each country where Agrofair is implanted (appendices 3). There are a lot of responsibilities; it is necessary to manage marketing strategy and communication with all of the partners in a market (producers, distributors, consumers and their old partners).

So irritants can appear with the lack of correspondence between responsibilities and power during the exploitation of resources by employees.

1.2. Defective policies

When policies are established within an organization but opposite to organizational values, deficiencies emerge. Another limitation can come from the company being unable to reach its objectives because there are some constraints (environmental constraints, governmental constraints, time, and unrealistic goes). Some problems (which hinder objectives) concern obstacles, when the organization decides to make a change: to change the set up the departments, to impose sanctions when results are not better, high bonuses.

In a fair trade market defective policies are linked to: policy, environmental norms and fair trade regulations:
- Complexity of contracts: to respect numerous standards and social and environmental constraints.
- Rigid application across many differing products: the same contracts (standards) in a fair trade market for all of the products (coffee, tea, fruits, etc.). However each sector of the products is specific.
- Poor comprehension and application of the standards: it can be difficult for producers in developing countries to apply really environmental norms related to the lack of training, problems of adapting restrictions to their situation. Furthermore, some distributors refuse to sell fair trade bananas without packaging, nevertheless this situation not respecting environmental rules.
- Very numerous contracts in the fair trade market: lead to execution and negotiation costs. Partners spend time reading and finding agreements about contracts.

Focusing on fair trade bananas; we identify some limits which appear during transactions:
- Climatic conditions: problems of producing bananas.
- Differences in the price of bananas in supermarkets, public restaurants, etc.
- Failure to respect norms regarding the quantity and the quality of chemicals products.

All partners take some decisions to cope with these irritants.
2. How partners can work against these limits

To reduce (or resolve) these irritants partners must negotiate a program based on training, control, political decisions. This consists in changing company policies to face irritants: to reinforce policies for training, to set the foundations of a coded conduct for transactions, to control employees through the human resources department, executives. In a fair trade market, the different actions rely on marketing strategy and standards.

2.1. Common marketing strategies

All of the partners (the fair trade association Max Havelaar, the banana company Agrofair, the producers, the distributors and the control organization FLO) adopt a common communication strategy to promote fair trade products: communication on TV, radio, academic conferences, governmental conferences.

Organizations in developed countries aim to increase their actions in developing countries (living conditions of the producers) and to convince consumers to buy fair trade products: “make a special marketing event which facilitates action towards developing countries, give trust to the consumers: correct information on the product, show on the product the various components of the price of fair trade bananas” (Interview with JM, Max Havelaar France, October, 2007).

The future objective of the fair trade association Max Havelaar is to mention on the products (bananas) information which evokes the Fairtrade concept: “The minimum price guaranteed for the fair trade product, the price perceived by the producers covering their spending, the bonus of the fair trade which allows social financing, environmental and technical projects.” (Interview with JM, Max Havelaar France, October, 2007).

In general, a fair trade association aims to work with all of the partners to satisfy consumers: “Max Havelaar aims to work in synergy with all industrialists who are the users of « fair trade » because it estimates that the final consumer does not always know what the minimum price paid to the producer corresponds to. Also, this ignorance of the consumer originates from the lack of explanation in the display of the price by the industrialist” (Interview with JM, Max Havelaar France, October, 2007).

All of these actions are realized because there are informal relations among partners based on trust: “we have no direct agreement, in speaking terms we have meetings together and of course if we see a chance to start with Carrefour for instance and Max Havelaar has already with Carrefour, then it’s good if we sit together and discuss, because it’s also beneficial” (Interview with KDK, AgroFair Netherlands, October 2007).

2.2. Reinforcement of the standards and contracts

To reinforce current standards and contracts, partners must review some rules and norms; reduce constraints, and adapt regulations and standards to diverse products. Then, the price of the fair trade product is adapted for all of the distributors.

These last years, there have been many exchanges in the fair trade market to integrate producers in the process of decision-making (increase the numbers of decision-makers among producers); to adapt standards to the environmental norms: “The producers through their continental networks (members of FLO) are consulted, it is not absolutely sufficient, they must become an essential part of the system, they must not only be consulted but manage a part of the operations. That means tomorrow, it is necessary to have employees for the South and by the South….part of the work, the information about the market, etc. Not everything can be managed by Westerners in the North who are based in Germany, in France, in the United States, it must be balanced" (Exchange with CA, FLO, in May, 2008).

The partners in the relationship aim also to create a link between producers and consumers: “It is also a question of succeeding in moving closer producers and consumers: " What seems
to us essential in the future, what is the main stake, is not simply guarantees, but the
connection between producers and consumers, we must propose new tools for producers and
consumers, so that the consumers understand who producers are, where they are going, what
their plans are, what their ambitions are, what their desires are; as for the producers, it is
necessary to understand who the consumers are, what they want, what are trends, what we
want to see, to listen to or not; and what can both do, to have simple and direct relations. We
are going to open six months of discussions with stakeholders around these new bases and we
have our extraordinary general assembly in December which will validate the reform of the
architecture of the system” (Exchange with CA, FLO, in May, on 2008).

In addition, partners plan to increase actions with the European Commission even if these
actions are difficult to realize: “I think that it is important for fair trade organizations to go to
the European commission, make sure that it considers more within authorities such as WTO
(World Trade Organization), exactly the subject of fair trade. But the European Union is
ready to put up a fight with the WTO (World Trade Organization. I do not know if it is ready
to…” (Interview with PL, FAO, May 2008).

Finally, the reinforcement of legitimacy is perceived as the road to success in building
relationships in a fair trade market: “Our legitimacy will be in big sectors and we must
demonstrate that it is possible, that we can resolve the challenges and the risks identified in
Santiago, fair trade can represent a big part of the significant world trade, not 1 %, but it can
represent 10, 15, 20 % of the world trade for a sector of coffee, cocoa, banana without
negotiating on our fundamental principles, and we think that it is in this way that virtuous
outcome with all the actors who lobby the international authorities” (CA, FLO May 2008).

Conclusion

Some organizations aim to make a profit selling fair trade products to consumers. These
organizations decide to respect environmental rules in the world because this is perceived as a
good action. Their passion is to change the vision of their organization and the conditions of
poverty (of many producers in developing countries). So their actions are conducted for a
compassionate reason even though they intend to make a profit. Indeed these organizations
must make a profit respecting a Fairtrade concept “share equal profit”. This concept implies
some constraints: environmental rules and norms are based on restrictive conditions
(standards and contracts), collaboration between different organizations in the world
(developed countries and developing countries). The relationships create some limits on the
fair trade market which are barriers to creating value for each partner. Reinforcing and
adapting to environmental conditions and consumers demand that (using new marketing
strategy, new standards), all the partners in the fair trade market take some actions to reduce
these limits, to pursue their mission and create greater value.

Bibliography

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Interviewees

GD, Manager of the company AgroFair France.

JD, Sales services of the association Max Havelaar France

ZLK, Technical adviser to the producer’s organization, Madagascar

SG, Manager of the food markets, Max Havelaar France

KDK, Sales Director, AgroFair Netherlands

AB, Manager (quality service) of the ripeners organization ‘Az Méditerranée’
Appendices

Appendices 1: Activities in a fair trade market (the case of bananas)

Total sales volumes (kg 000)

FOB value paid and Fairtrade premium (US dollars, 000)

### Volumes of marked products (in ton)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Products</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>15 779</td>
<td>19 872</td>
<td>24 222</td>
<td>32 747</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>1 226</td>
<td>1 512</td>
<td>1 965</td>
<td>2 411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bananas</strong></td>
<td><strong>36 641</strong></td>
<td><strong>51 336</strong></td>
<td><strong>80 640</strong></td>
<td><strong>101 586</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocoa and chocalat</td>
<td>1 656</td>
<td>2 643</td>
<td>4 201</td>
<td>5 041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>1 164</td>
<td>1 960</td>
<td>3 065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honey</td>
<td>1 038</td>
<td>1 164</td>
<td>1 240</td>
<td>1 431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juis of fruits</td>
<td>1 387</td>
<td>1 533</td>
<td>4 543</td>
<td>7 806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>1 384</td>
<td>1 676</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Max Havelaar
Appendices 2: A banana brand «oké » in a fair trade market

Appendices 3: Distribution of the Agrofair’s partners and products in the world

Source: Agrofair