



Foreword

This issue of the *European Journal of Purchasing & Supply Management* deals exclusively with papers, which have been presented during the last IPSERA Conference, which was organized at Eindhoven University of Technology. Over 200 participants coming from 17 different countries showed up to engage in active discussions during the more than 40 parallel sessions and workshops.

We were invited to act as Guest Editors for a Special Issue of the Journal, a task which we have accepted with great pleasure. In close co-operation with the Editor, we selected 9 papers and invited the respective authors to make the papers suitable for publication. Since we wanted to speed up publication, we only permitted limited time to all authors. We are grateful that all accepted our (unreasonable) deadlines without too many complaints. What is more: everyone also delivered before the deadline, which made our work fairly easy.

In this Special Issue you will find the different contributions arranged around several topics: the first articles cover the ever changing business environment and how these changes affect the role, strategy and structure of purchasing and supply management. Two articles illustrate the scene that has been set by the previous articles by focusing on the changing role of purchasing in two different sectors, i.e. the health sector and public sector. Finally, the last three articles deal with the changing structure of purchasing and the information technology which is required in order to support its operations. In this way we hope that each reader will find a topic of his or her own interest. Let us now look at each of the articles in more detail.

The first article, written by Arjan van Weele and Frank Rozemeijer, on 'Revolution in Purchasing' describes the findings of a major research project conducted at Eindhoven University of Technology into the future role of purchasing and supply management in International manufacturing companies. The authors visited over 30 major companies who are to be considered leading edge in their purchasing and supply policies. It was found that most of these companies share a similar background. Most of these companies have gone through difficult times, in which the survival of the company was at stake. Stringent cost reduction was required for survival. Looking at their cost position and value chain, top management

drastically changed its purchasing policies and structures. New managers and staff were sent in (however, less in number than before), cross-functional teams were introduced and local sourcing replaced by global sourcing. In general these managers were able to move purchasing closer to the line, i.e. to get the line management more involved into purchasing than ever before. In most cases the results turned out to be satisfactory due to the fact that these companies were able to improve both leadership, motivation and performance in the purchasing arena.

The second article by Ulla Lehtinen on 'Partnerships among Finnish manufacturers' is based upon case studies among 18 subcontractors and 8 original equipment manufacturers. Partnership-relationships between manufacturers and suppliers are the core of this article in general a trend was perceived towards this type of relationship over time. The author reports different structures on how to realize a partnership relationship. However, although parties strive for more stable relationships, joint research programmes, early supplier involvement and sharing of strategic visions appeared to be rare. We feel that this outcome is in line with other research results (particularly, those reported in the UK and USA).

The third contribution comes from Chris Butterworth, who reports on the practice of British Steel on 'Supplier Driven Partnership'. Traditionally a major supplier of steel, British Steel decided several years ago to move into a more value added client strategy. In order to support their clients British Steel now engages among other things in organising supplier days (and sometimes specialist supplier days), Finite Element Analysis (FEA) in order to reduce up-front development costs and lead times, and customer specific consultancy and support activities. Usually, partnership programs are initiated from the purchasing side of large OEM's. Here, however, we have an example from a large supplier organisation who in fact based manner intends to move its customers to this kind of relationship.

The fourth article from Richard Lamming, Paul Cousins and Dorian Notman concerns 'Beyond Vendor Assessment: Relationship Assessment Programmes'. The authors feel that evaluating suppliers unilaterally does not necessarily contribute to a better understanding and relationship between

manufacturers and their suppliers. In order to make partnership programmes succeed, an evaluation of the relationship is needed both from the viewpoint of the customer and the supplier. One of the research programmes at Bath University is exactly aimed at this subject. The article describes a new relationship tool which has been developed as part of the Relationship Assessment Programme and which is now being tested.

In 'Supply Network Strategies. The Case of Health Supplies', Christine Harland provides some ideas which are in line with those of Lehtinen. She suggests that the 'supplier-tier' paradigm should be replaced by a network paradigm. In this, she has been inspired by work presented earlier by some leading researchers from Sweden (such as Hakansson and Axelsson). Her paper proposes a supply network strategy conceptual framework, providing examples from the health supplies sector.

Karin Bryntse provides an insider's view on public purchasing in 'The Purchasing of Public Services'. She does this by exploring the nature of the purchasing function in the purchasing of public services, based on empirical studies conducted in Sweden, England and Germany. Based on her findings, the author challenges the idea that the purchasing process can be seen as a sequential process, with well-defined stages from specifications to a one-point delivery. Her analysis shows that the purchasing of technical services is very much dynamic, continuous and interactive. Purchasing processes accordingly should be illustrated more as circular processes, where different phases can be activated at different points in time.

In their article on 'The 'Double Matrix' Business Process Model' Eggert Tryggvason and John Johansen present an interesting case derived from Adtranz, a subsidiary of ABB Daimler Benz and manufacturer of diesel- and electric-powered trains. As this company was confronted with changing customer demands it decided to adapt its product strategy. However, in a short time a gap occurred between the strategy which was initiated and the quality of its supplier network. The article explains how this gap occurred and what should be done to close it. In doing this, the authors

present an interesting framework, that could be valuable also to other organisations facing similar circumstances.

Walter Brenner and Volker Hamm present a highly structured view in 'Information Technology for Purchasing in a Process Environment'. Moving away from its traditional roles, purchasing and research and development become much more interrelated. Both authors conclude that currently, computer information systems for supporting this type of activity is not available (yet). They provide a framework how this type of support should be developed in the future, i.e. made available to the benefit of both buyers, researchers and developers. Clearly, as they demonstrate, the Internet will make such a development more warranted than ever.

The last article also deals with information technology in purchasing. In 'Information Technology and the Efficiency of Materials Supply' Jens Laage-Hellman and Lars-Erik Gadde shed some light on the current status of the application of Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) in the Swedish construction industry. Although the benefits of EDI have been widely advocated, application in business practice is fairly low. The authors investigated why practice lags behind theory in this area. They have identified several weaknesses and barriers, which may be relevant also for other industries and countries.

We hope that this selection provides you as a reader with a good overview of what has been discussed during the last IPSERA Conference. For us, as Conference Committee, organizing the conference was a worthwhile effort. We have learned a lot from it. We hope you will get the flavour of it from these selected papers.

With kind regards,

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