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THE BUYING BEHAVIOUR IN THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1973 at the Berlin marketing workshop Orla Nielsen presented his first version of a model of Industrial Buying Behaviour. Based on further literature studies, deductions and empirical research the model has later been revised, as it is now presented in his book of 1985.

In short "The Box Model of Organizational Buying Behaviour" presents a systematic framework for describing the buying behaviour for any product in any (groups of) Company (companies), (Fig. 1)

The three important dimensions are: 1) Buy Classes (as known from Faris, Robinson and Wind, 1967), 2) A division of the Buying Process into four levels (General Buying Decision, Concrete Buying Decision, Selection Decision, and Technical Purchasing Decision), and 3) Factors influencing the Buying Behaviour systematized into four categories (The Webster and Wind classification, 1973).

It is argued that although the decision process may vary and contain more or fewer stages than 4, and also may not exactly follow the "analytical" logic (from level 1 through 2 and 3 to 4), decisions relating to each level will always have to be taken As these levels are chosen so that they may each be said roughly to correspond to a particular marketing strategy (1: market expansion, 2: system sales strategy, 3) product and company competition strategy, and 4) company competition strategy), a syste-

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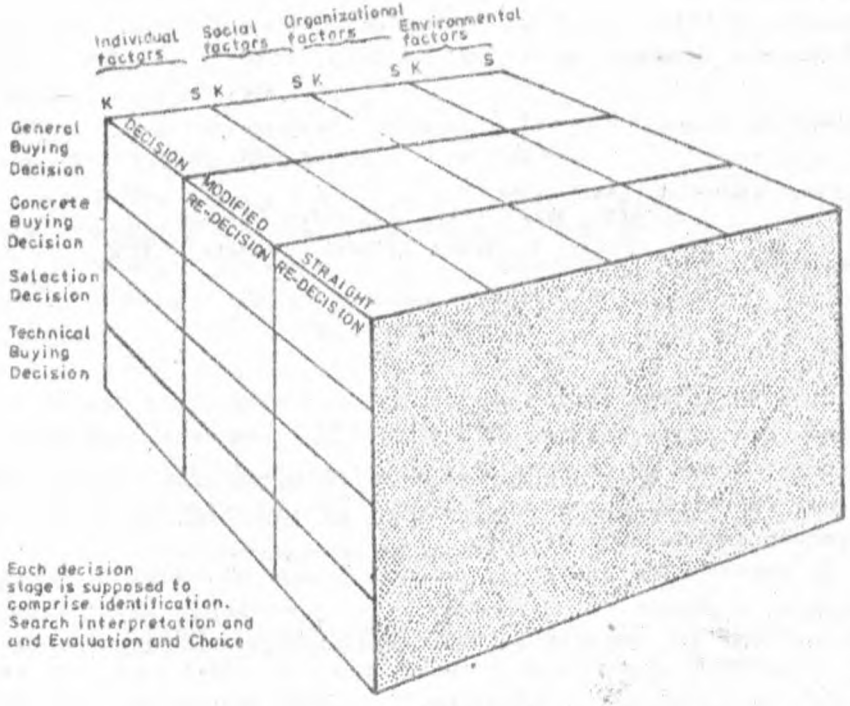

Fig. 1. The Box Model of Industrial Buying Behaviour (Orla Nielsen 1973)

K - factors influencing the basic buying pattern, S - situational factors influencing the specific buy

matization of the buying behaviour in this fashion will prove advantageous to marketers.

As regards dimension 3, it is further argued that for a given product at a given point of time the buying behaviour will develop as a result of the influence of a basic buying behaviour pattern (evolved through the historic development of the company and the individuals' experiences), and of the effect of situational factors. A key concept is the buying center, and the hypothesis that at each decision level exists a corresponding decision group. Further, it is hypothesized that the organizational division of work in the company creates the basis for being automatically (responsibility area) or appointed (expertise) member of one or more of these decision groups, and also influences the members' actual buying behaviour (defending and/or

promoting the interests of their particular responsibility area with due respect to the "company goals", and the threats/possibilities perceived according to the values of situational factors).

For a marketer it is then essential to establish knowledge of the general buying behaviour pattern of his markets (segments, group of companies, particular individual companies), and the existing competition, in order to choose his marketing strategy, and to evaluate the influence of situational factors so that the best marketing tactics may be applied.

During the visit of Tomasz Domański and Elżbieta Guzek (Łódź University) a mutual interest developed as regards making a cross cultural study of industrial buying behaviour. It was agreed to conduct an empirical research in one company in both countries. The purpose is to disclose possible structural differences and similarities between the buying behaviour of two reasonably comparable companies operating in the Polish and Danish environment, respectively. In order to facilitate the comparison it was further agreed to apply the Box-model as a frame of reference. The final object of the project is to write a co-authored article on the results. This presentation of the Danish research describes one step towards realising this common goal.

2. CHOICE OF COMPANY

Considering the objective of the research it would clearly be preferable to investigate identical companies in the two countries. This proved of course impossible. In order to have the research done fairly quickly, we satisfied ourselves with restricting the choice to the furniture industry, and to a fairly large company in each country.

The choice in Denmark was D and K Furnitures, situated near Copenhagen. The company was founded in 1882, and through all the years it has always emphasized the manufacture of furniture of advanced design (D), and of high quality (K) standards. The assortment is neither broad nor deep, consisting of chairs, tables and hall stands with rather few product lines and variations. Every model is designed by an architect, and the target markets are public institutions and companies in the private sector, however, consumers also buy a fairly large part (about 30-40%).

The company employed in 1986/87 220 people (170 workers and 50 staff). The turnover was about 20 million US $. 40% went to export markets.

D and K Furnitures is now owned by a Danish holding company, which took over in 1979. The Holding Company employed in 1986/87 about 6000, and had a turnover of around 1 billion US $. The Holding Company applies a diversification policy, and owns companies producing a wide range of different products. 8 of there belong to the furniture industry, and manufacture furniture, which to a certain degree both complement and compete with the assortment of DK Furnitures. DK manages two of these companies.

Since the takeover the leading managers have rather often been replaced, being either transferred to other positions in the Holding Company or leaving altogether. The organization chart may be sketched as follows:

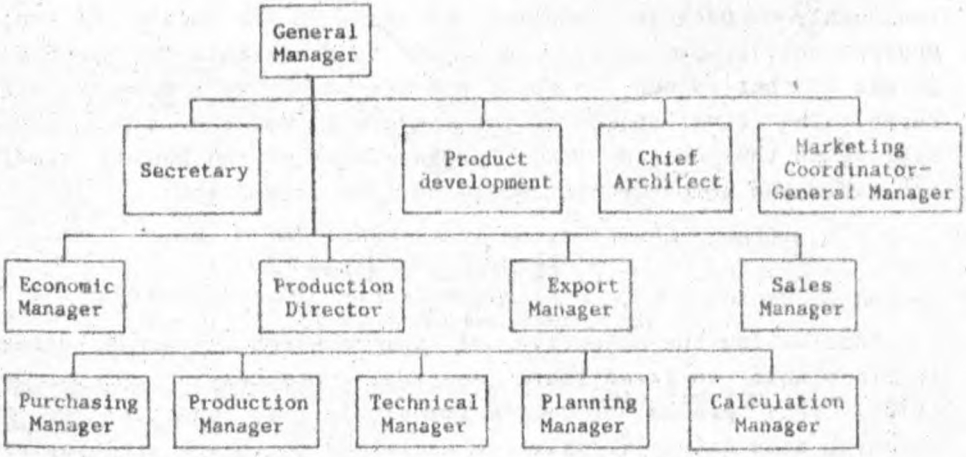

Fig. 2. Organization chart of DK Furnitures

The General Manager, the Production Director, the Managers of Sales. Exports and Economics, and the Chief Architect form a managing group, in which important subjects are discussed at weekly coordination meetings. The same persons are also members of a product committee, where they discuss and decide on subjects related to product strategy (product development, new product proposals, etc.) every month.

A technician group takes care of the studies of technical matters, which are necessary in order to facilitate the final decisions of the product committee. "Born" members of the techni-

cian group are the Production Director, the General Manager and the Purchasing Manager. Every technician group is led by a Development Coordinator (an architect, who also serves as a secretary to the group), and is supplemented by relevent development experts from the technical department.

The responsibilities of the individual managers are easily deducted from their titles. The Chief Architect coordinates relations with the architects who have designed the models, and also those, who present new ideas. He is furthermore responsible for company stands at fairs and exhibitions.

3. METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES AND CHOICES

To apply the Box-model as a frame of reference during the actual research, and in the final description of the results are two different problems.

Each interview began with the respondent's own explanation of his general tasks and responsibilities. This initial description led to questions concerning his general role and involcement in work related to the firm's purchases. The influence of the model meant that we looked for information on strategic decisions (e.g. investments and product development), and also - but depending on the initial task description we put questions more directly related to purchasing and/or relations with suppliers. Each interview also contained questions aimed at discovering the respondent's and others' roles in relation to particular purchases, which we had chosen after an introductory interview with the Purchasing Manager. These examples were: 1) A purchase of a CNC-wood processing machine (hereafter called the IMA-machine), which was rather expensive and meant a considerable step towards modernization of the production facilities. 2) The product development case of choosing a new colour range for a very important chair model in the assortment. 3) The purchase of plywood, which is continually used in the production of a large part of the assortment, and finally 4) the relations with sub-contractors.

These examples were chosen as representatives of the different buy classes, the fourth, however, was supplementary in this respect reflecting the make-or-buy decision.

In this manner we tried to ensure the information needed to apply the model for the theoretical reconstruction of the compa-

ny's buying behaviour without simultaneously unduly influencing the respondents to think/react/conform to the model.

The respondents were the General Manager, the Production Director, the Chief Architect, and the managers of Sales, Exports, Purchasing, and Economics, respectively. Each interview took 1 1/2 - 3 hours. To a certain extent, we may be said to have applied the snow-ball technique in the choice of respondents. All members of the buying centers have been interviewed, except those who have a well known and limited role according to several statements.

As regards the question of securing the reliability of the information, we have taken several steps. Both authors have conducted all the interviews, alternately one being "in charge", and the other asking supplementary questions. Both took notes, and the one in charge wrote a report on the interview which was then acknowledged/corrected by the other. The report was then sent to the respondent for confirmation. Additions/corrections were made after which the report may be said to reflect to the satisfaction of the respondent his perception of the respondent's own role and activities as well as the general procedures and the involvement of others. However, it does not necessarily reflect the "reality". To obtain further insight we also collected additional material in written form (company budgets, rules, procedural descriptions, request for quotations, offers, etc. The problem related to applying the model to the description of the results involves an editing of the information. By piecing all the interviews and additional material together, including cross checking, we made a draft showing a rather detailed description of the buying behaviour systematized according to the four decision levels. This draft, which may be perceived as the author's picture of the "total reality", as it to a certain degree contained our hypotheses formed on sometimes inconsistent information, was then discussed with the company representatives, and after corrections accepted as a satisfactorily sound representation of the behaviour of the firm.

Finally, this draft formed the basis for the concluding theoretical reconstruction, which follows in the next section. It is an abridged and slightly more edited version of the detailed draft, so the company's acceptance of the validity should still hold good even though this acceptance cannot be seen as anything more than that the appliance of the model has not resulted in a

picture, which is in conflict with their self-understanding. The concluding brief discussion of the results in relation to the underlying hypotheses of the model design is purely our own responsibility, and the validity of the conclusions rests with our own conscience.

It is left to the reader to judge whether this way of presenting the empirical results supplies a useful and understandable picture of a company's buying behaviour, and the possibilities of inferring relevant marketing decisions for a company trying to sell to the firm in question.

In this publication both individual sets of results from the Polish and Danish part of the project are presented. It seems evident that the problems of securing both an identical understanding of concepts and model, and obtaining comparable descriptions of buying behaviour in companies operating in rather different political, cultural, etc. settings, are not easily overcome. We feel though that it is worth a try, so that the results of the combined efforts may be presented at a later occasion.

4. RESULTS

4.1. THE GENERAL BUYING DECISION

The budget procedure may be said to consist of two different parts. One reflects the expectations and decisions as regards the continued company activities, and the other deals with the implications of new strategic decisions.

The first part is organized as a "build-up" procedure, and the work starts approximately 3 months before the new financial year begins. From the Holding Company the Economic Manager receives views and expectations for the coming year as regards pertinent areas (e.g. economic developments and market conditions in DK, EEC, USA, etc., exchange rates, wages, etc.). These are forwarded to the department heads together with the realised company figures for the preceding three quarters of the current, and the fourth quarter of the previous year. The department heads establish the budget figures. For the production department the Production Director acts as a coordinator for the five sub-departments. The budgeting of production costs also involves the foremen. The sales managers build their figures on estimates from the salesmen. Both sales managers and the Production Direc-

tor correct the combined estimates by applying a bias control. One Sales Manager expressed the belief "that the salesmen tend to be too optimistic". The production costs are partly derived from the sales estimates, and as the Production Director has experienced a bias towards underestimation of the sales figures - "They tend to be cautious when promising results" - he also corrects them. He has been employed for one and a half year only, so the belief in the necessity of bias-correction must have been aquired through either studies of preceding years' figures or "the internal drums of the company culture".

In accordance with the normative theory of micro economics budgetting starts with the "bottle-neck" of the company. This is normally the sales budget. However, the preceding year in this company presents an exception. A combination of optimistic expectations as to sales possibilities (especially on the US-market) experienced shortcomings of the production facilities, and consequently, the production capacity, resulted in the choice of the production facility budget as the key area, from which the other budgets were derived in the usual fashion.

Exact "documentation" of materials needed to manufacture the different models does not exist for all of them. Accordingly the need is calculated by applying some sort of "thumb rules" (accumulated experience). However, at the moment they seem to contain one or more systematic faults, resulting not only in shortage of materials from time to time, but also in false inventory figures. Often, this creates a need for sudden rearrangements of production plans, and it also disturbs the efforts of the purchasing department to secure smooth and problem-free relations with suppliers.

Not surprisingly, the recognition of this problem has resulted in a "strategic decision" to implement a computer integrated manufacturing system (including production planning (also customer orders), purchasing, inventory planning, cost calculation, etc.). Implementation has just begun, but - as pointed out by both the Production Director and the Purchasing Manager - the real problems are not solved before the "documentation" is developed. (The system is supplied by another member of the Holding Company. It is a so-called 4th generation system, and has been perhaps "chosen" because the Holding Company may have wished to promote sales of the system on the free market through establishing a reference customer).

In the autumn of 1987 the experienced shortcomings of the production facilities led to a strategic decision to modernize towards a more advanced technological set up. It was recognized that it would be a long term project, and basing on calculations on profitability and production volume a 3-4 year machinery investment plan was outlined. This plan was developed after investing 2,2 million Danish crowns in a CNC-wood processing machine for the manufacture of rectangular table-tops (the IMA-machine), which was purchased in the financial year 1986/87.

In the plan for 1987/88 a rather detailed list of investments totalling about D. Kr. 6,7 mill. (more than 900.000 US dollars) has been included. Two important groups of investment are buildings/installations, and machinery. The arguments for investing are generally renewal and/or replacement of more or less worn out machinery.

It is worth noting that the Board decided against investing in the machine area (and also against a couple of cars for salesmen) thereby more than halving the budget. There seems to be a rule (for the time being?) that investments shall not exceed the depreciation total.

In the plan were also mentioned another two CNC-machines totalling about 0,7 mill US $ in order to inform the Board that the management had worked on these projects, and expected to apply for acceptance of the investments at the beginning of 1988. Presumably, the Board's acceptance of these plans has not been obtained yet. The chairman has not been interviewed, so the reasons cannot be explained. However, it has been disclosed that the implementation of the IMA-machine has necessitated considerably higher follow-up investments than anticipated, and also that the expectations of sales an the US market proved to be too optimistic. Consequently, the capacity limit of the machine has not nearly been challenged. Provided that the Holding Company demands (in general) self-financing member companies and limits access to the general loan market, these experiences may explain the postponement(?) of the planned machine investments.

It is a rule that no investment can be made unless it is authorized in the final budget. The General Manager has however an amount of about 3-5% of the total investments at his disposal.

Another strategic decision area deals with new products (models), and product development. Company tradition (and policy) demands that every model of the assortment is designed by an

architect. The architects are paid through royalty arrangements. Several-also internationally-famous architects have contributed to today's assortment. The models created by one architect (NN) represent alone about 70% of the company turnover, a fact presenting a serious problem to the product committee as regards finding new succes models, as even classics cannot be expected to live forever.

It is also a tradition, to which the company adheres strictly, that the architects (or their heirs) have the right to veto proposed changes of a model. For instance, the company has just introduced a new colour range for the NN chair, which has been accepted by the widow. Some years ago, she refused a similar proposition and consequently, the company was forced to continue marketing the old colour range until now. It is a belief that in order to stay in the public eye as a modern design/quality company it is necessary to present some new models and/or modern versions of old models every year at the important exhibitions.

Still, the company seems to feel secure that the company image among actual and potential furniture architects is sufficiently positive to attract their interest in having their models manufactured by D&K. The management seems to rely on rather limited efforts directed at "the world of architects" (e.g. architect schools, architectural media) to uphold the image, thereby securing an inflow of ideas among which the product committee may choose possible "winners". It is fairly seldom that the company itself takes the initiative by inviting an architect to design a model in an area, which may favourably supplement the existing assortment. In the last four years, only two out of ten accepted product ideas owe their realization to an internal initiative. Fairly often the ideas of architects for a new design originate in winning a contract for furnishing a new (large) building (e.g. a town hall, a hotel, office building of a corporation etc.). The reasons for architects to contact D&K may in these incidences very well also be the company reputation for quality manufacture, and ability to supply in time.

For new product ideas, the product committee is principally involved twice. First, it is a question of accepting the idea as worth developing i.e. "green light" for development costs. Second it concerns the decision of whether or not to put the model into production. The role of the Chief Architect is to preserve the high design standards (chief ideologist), the sales departments

present their view on expected turnover, and the management group decides on the budgetary implications.

As regards product changes (development), we have mentioned the deciding influence of the individual architect. The influence is definite, when the change is proposed by the sales departments (in order to support the marketability or to present some sort of advances in the D&K design at exhibitions), or by the production department in order to facilitate a more economic and/or smooth production process. When it is a question of accomodating special requirements in relation to particularly large specific orders, the architects are not quite so consistently asked. The frequency of such special requirements may in turn, however, inspire the sales departments to "officially" promote the idea of a product change. Additional inspiration belonging to the same class are situations, where the competition supplies e.g. chairs to DK-tables or vice versa.

A decision to accept or reject a new or changed model/design does never rely on the results of a market research among the potential customers. "People never know what they want until they see it". When noting this attitude, it is necessary to note simultaneously that a decision to incorporate a model into the assortment does not in itself imply large production costs, but manufacture of the necessary machine tools and production of a few copies for exhibition, only. The company's production technology is so to say a mixture of series production and production to order. This means that whenever possible, different parts are made applicable to several models (e.g. one type of table legs may be applied to different table tops), thereby implying series production of parts, and order production relating to the assembling of models for each specific order. "Real" production of a new model then depends on the incoming orderflow. (This is always slow at the beginning. One cannot decide whether a new model is a success or a failure in less than 3-4 years).

Consequently, the budgetary implications of these decisions are based on uncertain prognoses necessitating a close follow up of incoming orders, and flexibility as regards production planning. (Note the decision to implement the computer integrated manufacturing system).

Summing up, it may be concluded that purchases of any kind presuppose a budget decision. Nothing can be purchased unless one or (for investments) both of the following conditions are

fulfilled: 1) The particular budget - responsible individual has available resources on his budget, and the competence to authorize the purchase. 2) The particular purchase is directly mentioned in the budget and/or an investment request is granted by the Board.

Several company policy decisions govern the buying behaviour. E.g. purchases of buildings, rebuilding costs, cars, machines and office furniture costing more than 1.500 US $ must always be confirmed by the General Manager. This is also the case for repairs and the like as well as costs for developing brochures and other advertising materials amouting to more than 7.000 and 3.000, respectively. Between 1500 and 7000/3000, authorization by the relevant department head is sufficient. As regards purchases of raw materials, etc., for manufacturing the following rules apply: less than 35.000 US $: The Purchasing Manager, 35.000-85.000: The Production Director and the Purchasing Manager, and more than 85.000 and for frame contracts covering 6 months or more: The General Manager.

The budget procedure as such is routinized. Budget elements related to continued activities are partly derived (sales-production-purchases (last year being an exception)) partly influenced by the departments' wishes to establish a sufficient ability to ensure their contributions to the common goal (e.g. securing good working conditions, flexibility, safe-guarding their interests, etc.). The Economic Manager and the General Manager coordinate the elements and develop a total plan thereby trying to strike a suitable balance between the efforts to gain optimal (satisfactory) profit, and the acceptance of a minimum of organizational slack to ensure friction free and smooth employee activity.

As regards investments, the department heads present lists of wishes to the General Manager. Each wish is more or less substantiated, and a minimum of research has been done in order to point out a specific type of investment, which is believed to represent a sensible solution to the problem identified, and the expected costs. Negotiations between the General Manager and the department heads tend to reduce the lists considerably.

If the General Manager is in doubt of having the support of the chairman of the Board, the two discuss the proposals before the Board meeting. This negotiation may further reduce the list.

Product strategy decisions' budgetary implications are incorporated in the plan.

Finally, the plan is presented to the Board. The Board's reactions are determined by their general impression of the plan's compliance with the strategic goals - given the economic and market conditions. If the impression is positive, the members seem primarily to be concerned with: 1) Deviations from the results of the previous year, 2) Recommendations, which are extraordinary compared to the usual practice, and 3) Realization of maximum (satisfactory?) profit while simultaneously securing the ability to meet the anticipated demand for liquid assets - especially by discussing possible savings (cuts in the investment budget).

Except for investments and product development costs, which at this "General Buying Decision" level are to be classified under New Buy, the budget decisions are a mix of Modified Rebuy and Rebuy. As most budget items demand some considerations, and very few can be characterized as in any way "automatic", a classification under Modified Rebuy may be the most appropriate.

For each investment the decision group at this level consists of the department head and the General Manager, occasionally, probably also of other members of the managing group, and finally the Board (especially the chairman). Employees of the relevant department may very well play the part of influencers.

For product decisions, the decision group consists of the members of the product committee and the architect (and the project customer - when the product idea is developed for a particular project).

For the budget in general, very many play a mixture of influencer/decider roles at the different steps of the procedure. For instance, the department head may be the decider in cases, where his superior(s) does(do) not interfere. At the last step, however, the Economic Manager acts as coordinator ("Buyer role"), the General Manager is also partly "buyer", but primarily decider together with the board (especially the chairman).

4.2. THE CONCRETE BUYING DECISION

As mentioned in the preceding section an investment request presupposes a prior research including a clear definition of the need, and the recommendation of a possible solution. The work is done at this level of the total decision process.

The existing facilities and the expected future demand on capability and capacity are invariably the starting point for con-

sideration. Current problems are solved by creative application of existing facilities, but with increasingly bigger difficulties and costs (also as regards repairs and maintenance). Problems mature over time and result in an increased demand for more "sensible" and "future safe" solutions.

Influencers during this period are the workers, the foremen, etc., and also others (with an accepted expert knowledge as regards technical matters). For instance one of the sales managers who has a technical past, had several critical remarks on the technological set up, when he first made a tour of the plant. It is not impossible that thereby he sowed one of the seeds that later grew to the development of the modernization plan). Decisions to improve the working environment and reduce pollution by installing diverse devices are strongly influenced by the (expected) demands of the authorities.

The responsibility for defining the needs for machinery, etc. rests with the Technical Manager, the Production Manager, and the Production Director. Their prime sources are visits to exhibitions and fairs, of which the yearly fairs at Hannover and Milano are highly regarded. Moreover, they receive sales material from Danish agents of foreign manufacturers, and also salesmen make calls from time to time. The Production Director is quite critical towards sales presentations. "I am looking for solutions to particular problems, they try to interest me in their machines". Therefore, he considers it fortunate that the company has found a machine dealer with great technological knowledge and ability to identify with the prospective customer's problems. This dealer is often consulted and supplies most of the needed machinery. In this industry there seems to be a general "understanding" that all sales of foreign machinery are made through Danish dealers with the possible assistance of foreign manufacturers local agents. For the company, this particular dealer is their trusted connection with the market, and for most purchases (except for straight rebuys, which are not typical for investments), he is involved in the provisional definition of the need and the introductory descriptions of possible solutions (e.g. the IMA-case).

For large investments like the IMA, it is possible to enter into direct negotiations with the foreign manufacturer. In that particular case the need was initially defined as to find a technologically advanced solution to a specific part of the produc-

tion process for table tops, which would satisfy high quality demands, and eliminate a "bottle-neck" without creating a (too) extreme excess capacity. This and visits to the two fairs mentioned above as well as sales material from different manufacturers created the basis for developing the initial demand specifications.

The General Manager follows such processes "at a distance". Especially new technology decisions are discussed with the workers' spokesmen, and the cooperation committee is always informed of an investment request.

In the IMA-case, an examination of the market possibilities disclosed 5 different makes to be relevant. Three were immediately rejected (two, because the construction did not seem to guarantee an output within the stipulated tolerances - the construction being evaluated as not sufficiently solid. One, because it was far too expensive - being "the Rolls Royce" among the possibilities).

A test production (always financed and paid by DK to avoid dependency) was arranged with both the possibilities left, and yielded satisfactory results. On that basis the investment request was written and confirmed by the Board.

Probably, this description may be considered typical for new buys (initially low technological knowledge and a relatively high investment) in this area.

When the development of new products or product changes have been decided by the Product Committee, the "Technician group" takes over. The group develops specifications for materials and parts, and designs the production process. Their final recommendations are confirmed by the Product Committee.

In the group, there is by no means just talk about finding solutions to pure technical problems. Conflicting attitudes of a more basic type such as e.g. the question of settling disputes on the make or buy decision, may cause heavy arguing as at any time this really reflects the problem of the lines along which the company's own production department is to develop. Among some of the managers there are some doubts as to the viewpoint of the production department to (be at least able to) "do everything themselves". The result of the make or buy decision does not, however, affect the fact that when specifications are determined, it is the job of the Purchasing Manager to purchase materials or, as the case may be, to find sub-contractors for the supply of parts or even ready-made models for sale through DK.

When it concerns finding a sub-contractor for the manufacture of a new model, other parties may influence the identification of possibilities (e.g. the sales managers and the chief architect, who may gain (or already have) pertinent information from their sources (salesmen and architects, respectively)).

If sub-contractors are involved, the knowledge of the production department and/or that of a special metal-workshop (which is maintained partly for this reason, partly to be a production reserve, if sub-contractors cannot fulfill delivery promises) is utilized in order to develop specifications and insight into the relevant production processes so that a sufficient basis for the future price negotiations can be developed.

The range and depth of the company's technical know-how affects its behaviour. For example, in the case of finding a new colour range for the NN-chair, an architect was chosen to do the job. No technician in the company had the necessary expertise, so it was the architect, who chose a supplier with sufficient laboratory equipment to do the experiments. For the same reasons, new types of textiles would imply an identical problem solving process.

Different types of wood for the production of a particular model may also be considered by the Product Committee. However, in such cases the company technicians have the know-how to do the experiments, and to finalise the work of specification.

The Technician Group does never include the architect, who has conceived the new model. A fact, which is not highly regarded by the Chief Architect. "Much creativity is lost this way", he claims. Other parties seem to have the impression that involving the architect might hamper the process "as he would always want to evaluate yet another version of his brain child". The architect has still, however, the final power to veto or accept.

It can be concluded that for materials, parts and sub-contractors, the decisions regarding what to buy and to which specifications are made at this level of the total decision process, and always presuppose the decisions of the Product Committee (at the level of the general decision) to develop new models or product changes. The decision group is primarily the Technician Group, but as the case may be, the necessary expertise may be supplied by people from outside, e.g. potential suppliers or possibly consultants. The decisions may be classified as new buys or modified rebuys, depending on the initial know-how. When decisions

nave been made, they are valid "until next time", and are consequently guiding rebuys (at the selection decision level) in the intermediate period.

4.3. THE SELECTION DECISION

For modified rebuys, and especially new buys of capital goods (machinery, etc) the selction decision is intertwined with that of the concrete buying decision. The more so, the lesser the initial know-how is. Principally, the key persons of the decision group are identical with those at the preceding level. It is the Production Director alone (or supported by the Technical Manager and/or the Production Manager), who chooses and negotiates with prospective suppliers. The Purchasing Manager is not involved in the purchase of machinery, although he may be a valuable source of knowledge as regards possible supplier alternatives, if such a need is recognized. Still, he seems to keep himself well informed about what is going on (e.g.: The IMA-case).

However, there are other influencers. Any new purchase of machinery, particularly when it implies a new technology, involves changes for the people engaged in the relevant (parts of the) production process. Consequently, it is an accepted routine that the relevant foreman discusses the matter with his men (cf. also the meeting with the workers' spokesmen, and the cooperation committee being informed). The maintenace man may also have a valuable opinion to add. The procedure supports the establishing of choice criteria, and also - which is important - it creates an understanding and possibly pre-acceptance of the necessity of, or the technical/competitive advantage gained, by the planned investment.

The IMA-case may again illustrate. However, in this section we shall be concerned with the choice criteria, the applied decision models, and how the final choice was made. The initial know-how of the types and ranges of technological solutions to the well known part of the manufacturing of table tops was low. The search for possible solutions seems therefore guided by what may be termed "soft data", i.e. general (and favourable) impression of the likely supplier candidates positions as advanced manufacturers of wood-processing machinery. Possibly, also generally negative attitudes to some specific companies affected the more or less conscious decision to exclude them. The initial search

does not - according to our interviews - appear to be complete in any way (e.g. covering all European suppliers). What is more it seems to be aimed at just finding a "reasonable" supplier (in the sense that the investment should appear satisfactorily economical and provide an efficient technical solution), so that the necessary data for the investment request could be acquired. The first three were all rejected on the basis of just one criteria. Left of the five were two candidates, where tests had yielded satisfactory results for both, and as the price, the capacity and other features were much alike, and the informational needs for the investment request were met, the search could be viewed as succesful. If both tests had not yielded satisfactory results, the search would probably have been exparded until two possibilities had been identified. A final choice between at least two, seems to be company policy for investments of this type and size.

As regards the final choice in the IMA-case, qualitative, not measurable, supplementary criteria were applied. They were after-sales service, support during the implementation, education of personnel, etc., but seemingly, all combined together into company images as perceived through the contacts with engineers during discussion of the technical problems. For the rejected one, probably also a general attitude (including suspicion as to the ability to keep promises) to suppliers from the country in question. In fact, one of the respondents (who had not himself been directly involved) suggested that the IMA-machine was preferred by the key persons at a very early stage, and that negotiations with the rejected company were never really serious. This view was not substantiated by the other interviews, however, it might quite well be true.

When modified or straight rebuys of machinery are made, the company relies on the machine dealer, and the make of machinery is chosen from his assortment, or what he can procure ("which is practically everything"). As DK considers the dealer an extremely competent technical problem solver, there seems to be no doubt that the machine dealer plays an important role (in this case "the buyer role"). The perceived importance of the problem and the amount involved indicate the probability of the Production Director, the Technical Manager or the Production Manager being actively engaged in the choice process. The less important the more probable it is that the choice is made by the relevant department head.

As regards the choice decision for another new buy product, the colour range for the NN-chair, the architect knew what he wanted, no one had expertise, so he chose the partner for the experiments (which was confirmed by the Product Committee). The principal criteria would then have been the expected high probability of obtaining the colour range wanted. In our interviews no one has mentioned price considerations at all. It can be explained though by the fact that the supplier was known to DK, and also - as stated by the Purchasing Manager - sufficient knowledge exists within the firm to evaluate if the final stipulated price for the new colour range is justified.

The choice of suppliers and/or the choice of an actual lot of a particular good (e.g.: Plywood) is entirely the responsibility of the Purchasing Manager. He purchases what is specified, and his choices are governed by the usual criteria like price and secure delivery on time. Secure delivery probability is evaluated through references. If a company cannot supply a quality, which matches specifications, it is simply not considered relevant. When specifications are not exact (and objectively measurable), which may very well be the case, e.g. in connexion with wood, he is supported by a foreman with considerable experience (34 years). The Purchasing Manager, having acquired 11 years of experience himself, does not find the support a necessity, but certainly useful, as the foreman knows more about applying the wood to different stages of the production process. This means that a lot, which the Purchasing Manager would be apt to reject, may still be accepted (although at a lower price). Negotiations also involving terms treated at the level of the technical decision - will have to be finished with an acceptable result, before the deal is closed.

To evaluate what is acceptable, the Purchasing Manager takes care to be generally well informed about the relevant market possibilities. Search for new suppliers is made - but seemingly to a rather limited extent. He employs his personal "network" (asks e.g. a colleague known to have visited a Yugoslavian wood fair, if something interesting has turned up). He also plans his itinaries for visits to suppliers so that additional companies can be inspect and perhaps added to the list of acceptable suppliers.

Particular problems arise with suppliers, who have exclusive wrights to their products. For instance this is the case with the

current supplier of textiles. If this supplier should be replaced by a new one it would imply a total shift of the textiles applied to all the relevant assortments of DK. With DK's dependence on acceptance of the architects for (nearly) every change of the models, the in-supplier is in an extremely favourable position in the relationship. A fact, which has also triggered an unwarned price increase a short time ago. In such a case the General Manager will be (and was) involved in the subsequent negotiations (which ended in a compromise). This experience strengthened the General Manager's wish to have "double suppliers". The supplier may, however, have a strong internal ally in the Chief Architect, who is responsible for innovations of this kind being the decider for planning the company's presentations at exhibitions. He seems to be rather enthusiastic about the supplier's capability and the range of assortment offered.

The search for new sub-contractors develops out of two principally different reasons: 1) the inclusion of a new product in the assortment, and 2) the capacity of an in-sub-contractor too limited to meet the demand. The search method is the same in both situations, but the latter creates additional problems in the negotiation phase, because DK wishes to preserve good relations with the existing sub-contractor. (One such case was encountered during the interviews. A tricky situation arose, because it was not possible to find an additional sub-contractor, who could/would supply at the same (low) price as the usual sub-contractor. The negotiations made him accept the difference). Another difficulty in the process of searching for an additional sub-contractor for a particular model is the question of documentation, which has been mentioned before. In one case, e.g. one sub-contractor has manufactured a model series for 30 years, no documentation exists, so in reality the sub-contractor is the only one, who knows exactly how the model is manufactured. "So how can you find another supplier?", the Purchasing Manager asked. Employing a second sub-contractor also involves an investment in machine tools, which may be rather costly. The result is that although the General Manager wants "double suppliers" for all important products, it is not yet - by far - a reality. (Cf. also, what was earlier written about the efficiency of production planning).

The search for new sub-contractors is aimed at presenting no more than three, and not less than two possibilities to the Gene-

ral Manager. Again the Purchasing Manager utilizes his knowledge of the market and his personal network, possibly, sometimes inspired by members of the Product Committee, who may - more or less accidentally have come across relevant subjects for closer investigation.

The deciding choice criterion to be considered in the final stage is that the prospective sub-contractor's output meets the quality specifications. When the choice involves a company, with which there is no former experience, a trial production or a trial solution of a particular difficult technical problem is always arranged (at the expense of DK).

This rule implies an advantage on the side of both in-suppliers and "known" suppliers, it probably also indicates that the search begins in the known area, and is not expanded unless it is necessary to obtain at least a choice between two.

Sometimes, but not always, the potential sub-contractors' production facilities are inspected before consideration of a trial production. Criteria are not just the technical ability, but also the behaviour of the personnel, economic resources (in cases of contracts, where it is necessary to ensure that the supplier is able to finance the production). Ability (and past history in this respect) to keep delivery promises is evaluated with the assistance of references. Generally speaking it is a question of the "quality of the future partnership". If this is judged satisfactory (sometimes with the help of the technical department), the final choice is the result of "cold calculations" of the total costs (including price, transport costs, etc.) of the co-operation between the company and the sub-contractor.

Relations with in-sub-contractors do not appear to be broken unless absolutely unavoidable. There seems to exist a general acceptance within the company of the fact that when time, effort and costs have been invested in building a partnership, it is not to be abolished, even when major problems like not being able to supply in time crop up. The attitude of the sales departments is e.g. that the company should finance the establishment of buffer--inventories rather than terminate the relationship.

4.4. THE TECHNICAL BUYING DECISION

For investments in machinery, the Production Director is the principal negotiator, in any case if the investments are new-buy

types and/or the amount is considerable. (Cf. the rules for confirmation). The starting point is a standard-contract, originally "designed" by the Purchasing Manager. As a rule the contract covers the following points:

1) Exact specifications of what is to be purchased/supplied (often described in an enclosure showing drawings, etc.) and e.g. that seller must guarantee observance of environmental/fire preventional and other demands of the Danish authorities.

2) Price (including not necessarily "just" the machinery in question, but also the installation, dismantling of old machinery, the costs for leasing a crane, and other machines or materials needed).

3) Security provisions (e.g. that the seller not later than ... after signing the contract buys a bank guarantee of X% of the sales price to cover seller's obligations until y months/years after confirmed and accepted delivery).

4) Delivery clauses (Conditions for the validity of the price agreement (paragraph 2) and the precise date for the time when the machinery must be ready for operation).

5) Delay clauses (penalty calculated as a percentage of the price and depending on the length of the delay, not caused by force majeure, and the rights to annul the contract, if an agreed time limit is exeeded, and the parties cannot agree on a new date).

6) Conditions for accepting delivery.

7) Special clauses related to acceptance of delivery e.g. documentation proving that the demands from official authorities are complied with).

8) Payment e.g. 25% when the contract is signed, 45% when all materials for installation are at buyer's place, 20% when installation has been completed, 5% when ready for operation, and finally 5% when document for acceptance in accordance with paragraph 6 is issued).

9) Guarantee (duration and specifications as to what is covered).

10) Changes of the contract (typically, changes can only be made, if both parties agree, and only in writing).

11) Authority e.g. that the seller must only accept written instructions from buyer's representatives).

12) Publication e.g. that seller is allowed to publish the contract - or parts of it- only, if the buyer accepts and has acknowledged the contents of the planned statement).

13) Conditions for transfer of the contract (usually a statement expressing that transfer is not possible without consent of both parties).

14) Inspection and maintenance (can be quite detailed, covering e.g. seller's ability to supply spare parts for λ years, demands for seller's assistance with repairs etc., and penalties for breach of contract).

15) Education (of buyer's personnel, and how its mode).

16) Disputes and how to settle (often referring to internationally accepted rules).

Assistance from legal experts of the Holding Company might be required, but usually such expertise is employed only if disagreements evolve. After the deal is closed, i.e. the contract has been signed by both parties, the Purchasing Manager handles the transaction phase, provided he has a sufficient command of seller's language. If not, someone else will be appointed to do the job.

For materials and parts, which are continuously demanded (e.g. plywood), and also sub-contractors, corresponding contracts are needed. In these cases the Purchasing Manager is the negotiator (cf. the rules for confirmation). The contract will usually be open for renegotiation once a year and covers a period of minimum 6 months. Special quality demands may create a need for inspection and acceptance of each separate lot. To reduce financing costs the contract also usually specifies that the product made for DK stays with the seller (at his cost and risk) until called for by DK.

Contracts with sub-contractors follow much the same lines. The duration of the contract is indefinite, however the earliest date for cancellation within a specified time limit will be stipulated. The product is specified (drawings, etc., and also a "reference model" accepted and marked by both parties). The expected volume demanded by DK, and the corresponding capacity to be held available by the sub-contractor are also stipulated and create the basis for the price and payment agreements (which may involve a down payment as DK's contribution to financing the manufacture of the model in question). The sub-contractor purchases the necessary materials, and if he also supplies the machine tools, DK will reserve the right to buy them, if so wished. During the contract period the seller can increase his price, usually within the limits of raised costs for materials and wages plus a certain percentage. If the price increase exeeds this limit, DK may terminate the contract at the end of the current contract period.

DK has been mostly choosing small sub-contractors thereby positioning themselves as the strongest partner in the relationships. Simultaneously, a risk is introduced of not being able to supply DK customers in cases of sudden growth of the demand or when the capacity of a sub-contractor is threatened by an equally

sudden break-down of key machinery. There is no doubt that this policy combined with the pressure from the sales departments puts the Purchasing Manager into a position, where his ability as "trouble shooter" may be heavily challenged. To nurse the good relations the General Manager occasionally visits the sub-contractors.

Finally, it should be mentioned that all invoices are controlled by the economic department on a day to day basis.

5. THEORETICAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1. THE BUY CLASSES

The Buy Class distinction introduced by Ch. W. Faris, P. I. Robinson and Y. Wind (1967) has been widely accepted in the international litterature on organisational buying behaviour. Some critical comments have been made, notably by R. Hill and T. Hillier (1977). They maintained that the distinction was not very useful to a marketer, whose product would meet all three buy classes in a market consisting of old and new users, and very often also users purchasing it for different purposes (e.g.: OEM or end-users, etc.). This critique is not in itself serious though, because if a market can be divided into segments showing the three different types of behaviour, this would certainly be relevant to marketing decisions. However, there remains the fact the Buy Class distinction was originally based on an empirical research of thousands of transactions, but in three companies, only. Possibly, P. J. Robinson et. al. have never meant the concepts as generally valid descriptions, but to be perceived as a relevant distinction of the buying behaviour in any individual company. This corresponds with the rather "loose" definition of the buy classes, where the deciding criteria for the realised (or chosen) new buy, modified rebuy or straight rebuy behaviour are the perceived uncertainty (and need for evaluating alternatives), and the degree of experience in the company as related to the particular purchase, and - as a corollary - the need for information. As the values of these criteria dimensions vary from company to company, straight rebuy may not necessarily imply an identical buying behaviour.

But even when the concepts are used to describe the behaviour

in one company, difficulties arise. They stem from the fact that the concept of "routine" is easily associated with the Buy Classes. "Clearly, a New Task may entail policy questions and special studies, whereas Modified Rebuy may be more routine, and a Straight Rebuy essentially automatic" are the words of P. J. Robinson et. al. (1967). In our case, we have e.g. classified the decisions regarding new products and product changes as new buys, irrespective of the fact that they certainly contain routines as regards the decision steps to be taken, the composition of the buying center, and to some degree even the principal roles of the buying center members. But, however, the decision process is long and complex, important to the company, and perceived as risky. These factors have then decided the classification.

Finally, it must be stated that the Buy Classes ranging from completely new decisions to completely automatic re-ordering. As the border lines are not exactly defined, and possibly cannot be, it follows that the actual classification done in a given empirical research is the judgement of the analyst, and as such the Buy Class distinction does not meet the traditional demands of a positivistic theorist as regards operationality, validity, etc. Even with these reservations in mind, we still believe that the use of the concepts is justified due to their ability to communicate principal behavioural differences in very few words.

5.2. THE DECISION PROCESS

The internationally most often cited model of the decision process is the Buy Phase model, also introduced by Ch. W. Faris, P. J. Robinson and Y. Wind. It contains the following 8 phases:

1) Anticipation or Recognition of a problem (Need) and a General Solution	5) Acquisition and Analysis of Proposals
2) Determination of Characteristics and Quantity of Needed Item	6) Evaluation of Proposals and Selection of Supplier(s)
3) Description of Characteristics and Quantity of Needed Item	7) Selection of an Order Routine
4) Search for and Qualification of Potential Sources	8) Performance Feedback and Evaluation

It has long since been established through in-depth research of actual purchases (e.g. by the IBB-group in the early 80'S)

that the process may contain several loops, and that particularly for new buys, the actual process is better described as an incremental process, where each step necessitates problem identification, search, evaluation and choice. As mentioned in the introduction it is the contention of the Box Model (as stated already in ON, 1973) that it is relevant to perceive the decision process as consisting of four levels at which different types of problems are resolved by corresponding decision groups, which combined are the buying center.

Fig. 3 shows a diagram of the different decisions we have met in this research.

The figure indicates, as has been shown in section 4, that investments (I), and product development (D) result in different behavioural patterns. Investments are infrequent, and the actual behaviour will be very much dependent on the purpose of the investment. Contrary to this are decisions related to product development, and consequently, the decision process is clearly organized (Product Committee, Technician Group, etc.). The same applies to the budgeting procedure. The figure also summarizes that

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>New Buy</th><th>Modified Rebuy</th><th>Straight Rebuy</th></tr>
<tr><td>GBD</td><td>Investments (I)
Product Development (P)</td><td colspan="2">Budgeting</td></tr>
<tr><td>CBD</td><td colspan="2">(I) a) Request for investment
b) Choice of type
(P) Product specifications
Design of production process
(M) Make or buy | (M) Additional sub-contractors</td><td>Rules (authorization and budget responsibility)</td></tr>
<tr><td>SBD</td><td colspan="2">Negotiation
choice of company (or companies)</td><td>Selection of particular lots</td></tr>
<tr><td>TBD</td><td colspan="2">Negotiation
final choice of company - contract</td><td>Ordering</td></tr>
</table>

Fig. 3. Decisions of DK related to purchasing

in this case the different levels can be shown to contain separate types of problems/decisions. As regards the three levels where no distinction has been made between new buy and modified rebuy the explanation is that situational factors will determine the buy class, except for the question of "additional sub-contractors", which according to its nature must always be a modified rebuy.

The positioning of "Rules" as a concrete buying level/straight rebuy may be discussed. The rules reflect purchasing policies, which direct the behaviour of the employees. As they apply to the "normal" activities of the company, they are placed under straight rebuy, but changes in the rules would od course be "modified re-decisions".

Fig. 4 shows the corresponding decision groups. (I), (P), and (M) indicates Investments, Product Development, and Make or Buy decisions, respectively. The people mentioned in brackets are possible members of the decision group depending on the situation.

	New Buy	Modified Rebuy	Straight Rebuy
GBD	(I): DH, GM, Board (Managing Group) (P): Product Committee Architect (Project Customer)	DH (and employees of the dep.t) EM, GM, Board	
CBD	(I): TM, PM, PD Spokesmen Cooperation committee (GM, Machine Dealer) (P): Technician Group (M): GM, PUM, PD (Coordinator, development people)	(I): TM, PM, PD Workers, foremen (Machine Dealer) (authorities) (P): Technician Group (M): PD, PUM, (GM)	GM, (Board)
SBD	(I): PD, (TM, PM, workers, maintenance, Machine Dealer) (P): PUM (Technical support) (M): PUM (network)	(I): PD, Machine Dealer (TM, PM) (P): PUM (Technical support) (M): PUM (network)	(I): PD (or TM od PM) Machine Dealer (P): PUM (crisis: GM)
TBD	(I): PD (experts from Holding) (PUM handles the transaction) (P, M): PUM (GM)	(I): PD (PUM) (P, M): PUM	(P, M): PUM

Fig. 4. The Decision Groups of DK

(DH: Department Head, GM: General Manager, EM: Economic Manager, TM: Technical Manager, PM: Production Manager, PD: Production Director, PUM: Purchasing Manager)

As can be seen, the decision groups at the different levels are not identical, although overlaps occur. The message to the marketer is clearly that depending on his choice of strategy, he

should not only address different problem types, but also communicate with different sets of people.

Compared with the Buy Phase model, which per se deals with purchases, the Box Model also takes into consideration the behaviour that leads to identification of purchasing problems (strategic decisions and budgeting), and as a corollary the make or buy decision problems are contained in the description.

5.3. EVALUATIVE CRITERIA FORMATION AND DECISION HEURISTICS

The evaluative criteria formation and the applied decision heuristics are especially important to the marketer. The evaluative criteria at the level of the general buying decision are related to the possible solutions' impact on reaching company goals, at the next level to the quality of the solution to technical problems, at the third to both technical and commercial and at the fourth to commercial problems (i.e. the relationship with the vendor). But perhaps apart from the formation of evaluative criteria by the technician group regarding product specifications, when it comes to negotiating a contract - they do not seem to be completed (i.e. cover all relevant points) but rather so many are developed, as are necessary to make a decision. For example, in the IMA-case, the decision heuristic seems to be a satisficing conjunctive judgemental rule (See: Kristian Møller, 1981), but moderated in so far as all criteria applied in the final choice are not formulated at the time, when the first possible suppliers are excluded. For the final choice new criteria were continuously developed until the supplier could be chosen, so the decision heuristic in that phase is perhaps best described as the lexicographic choice rule.

These results are interesting to compare, P. J. Robinson with Ch. W. Faris, and Y. Wind's notion of "Creeping Commitment". They say: "As Buy Phases are completed, moving from phase 1 through phase 8, the process of "Creeping Commitment" occurs, and there is diminishing likelihood of new vendors gaining access to the buying situation" (op. cit. p. 14).

The association of the concept is that this "creeping commitment" occurs more or less unconsciously as an unavoidable consequence of the phase decisions. Our research shows that although the number of possible vendors is reduced through the process, it is perhaps better to perceive this as a result of a conscious

wish to simplify the choice problem by - as fast as possible - reducing it to the minimum number of choice possibilities, which company policy has determined for the particular purchase type. Also the division of the decision problem into political/strategical, technical and commercial decision problems corresponding to the decision levels (1, 2, 3-4), may be seen as a simplification of a complex problem by separating it into "simpler" problems. This compares well with "The Theory of the Firm (R. Cyert, J. March, 1963), and is one more argument in favour of the four decision levels of the Box Model.

5.4. BUYING CENTER AND DECISION GROUPS

The concept of "simpler" problems attains especially meaning when it is connected with the composition of the decision groups. The notion would be that a complex problem is best solved by delegating parts of it to people who have the relevant expert knowledge. In a functionally organized company, like DK, this indicates that the managers of the relevant functions (departments) will be "born" members of one or more decision groups, and be responsible for deciding whether sufficient expert knowledge is available. If not, experts will be called either from the company itself or from outside.

When examining the decision groups in DK, this seems to be generally true. Also other research results (O. Nielsen, 1982 and 1984) favour this hypothesis. Consequently, knowledge of the organization types (or division of work) of buyer companies should help the marketer to deduce the probable composition of the decision groups/buying centers. Perhaps it also indicates that research into the interdependency between organization types and composition of decision groups/buying centers should receive even more attention then it has been given so far in the organizational buying behaviour literature.

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ZACHOWANIE SIĘ PRZEDSIĘBIORSTWA W PROCESIE ZAKUPU
(przykład branży meblarskiej w Danii)

Celem artykułu jest analiza postępowania przedsiębiorstwa przy zakupie środków produkcji na przykładzie jednego z producentów mebli w Danii. Analizę przeprowadzono przy wykorzystaniu koncepcji "Box Model" opracowanej przez jednego ze współautorów (Orla Wielsen). Autorzy szczegółowo omawiają metodykę i wyniki przeprowadzonych badań empirycznych - studia te powinny posłużyć do przeprowadzenia dalszych studiów porównawczych dotyczących postępowania przedsiębiorstw z tej samej branży w różnych krajach.

Podstawowym kryterium podziału materiału i opracowania wyników badań są poszczególne poziomy procesu decyzyjnego - typy decyzji zakupu. W części końcowej, w oparciu o literaturę i własne badania empiryczne, Autorzy przeprowadzili dyskusję teoretyczną i przedstawili własne wnioski dotyczące także pozostałych elementów modelu i ich znaczenia z punktu widzenia marketingu, w tym szczególnie "klas zakupu", procesu podejmowania decyzji zakupu na tym rynku, kryteriów oceny podejmowanych działań na poszczególnych poziomach decyzji i roli poszczególnych uczestników w procesie zakupu.