



An Empirical Study of the Alignment Between Manufacturing and Marketing Strategies

K.A. Weir, A.K. Kochhar, S.A. LeBeau and D.G. Edgeley

It is widely recognised that manufacturing can be a formidable competitive weapon if equipped and managed properly, and that to achieve this success a company must have the correct alignment of manufacturing and marketing strategies. The authors considered there to be a need for empirical research into the effect of such methods within industry today. Their research was based on two questionnaires: the first was sent to 319 companies looking at levels of integration, the second to 20 of the responding companies concentrating on the development process and content of their individual strategies. Known models, internal integration and formal procedures were also investigated, none of which seem to be fully functional within any of the companies contacted. It became evident that the size of the company must be taken into consideration when formulating development plans, and that communication, cross-functional teams and formal product development techniques are essential to the success of any marketing strategy. © 2001 Published by Elsevier Science Ltd.

Introduction

Intense competition in an increasingly global environment has triggered renewed interest in the manufacturing function and the contribution it can make to a company's overall competitive success. Since the seminal work of Wickham Skinner,¹ there has been growing recognition that manufacturing can be a formidable competitive weapon if equipped and managed properly, and that one key to doing this is the development of a coherent manufacturing strategy which is in line with the other functional strategies of the company. In particular, it has been proposed

Kerry Weir is a Financial Appraiser for American Appraisal (UK) Ltd., Manchester. Her Engineering Doctorate work was concerned with the integration of strategic planning in a machine tool manufacturing company. Corresponding address: Department of

that aligning marketing and manufacturing strategies can make a company more responsive to changing customer demands. However, although aligning manufacturing and marketing has been a much talked about subject in recent years in both academic and trade publications,² little empirical research has been conducted to determine what effect this has had within industry.

This paper discusses the results of empirical work carried out to determine the level of both strategic planning and integration which currently exists within a sample of UK manufacturing companies.

Strategic planning in theory

Within an organisation, strategies can be viewed at three levels, as shown in Figure 1. These three levels of strategy traditionally form a hierarchy implying a top-down approach to strategy formulation. However, in reality, the three levels overlap and influence one another; when reviewing their strategy an individual business will consult their internal functions to determine their constraints and capabilities.

The development of strategies can be thought to consist of two distinct constituents: content and process. The content of strategy refers to the choices, plans and actions, which make up the strategy, while the strategy process is the act of creating strategy, the analysis, and the organisation and implementation issues.

There is general agreement in the literature that the content of manufacturing strategy can be divided into two areas (see Figure 2). The first is the choice of performance objectives as, in order for a manufacturing function to support the corporate and business strategies, the manufacturing strategy has to make choices about what manufacturing has to be good at. Although initially it was believed that trade-offs had to be made between the different performance objectives, recently this notion has generally been dismissed with 'world class' companies now expected to be able to successfully achieve all of these performance criteria.

In addition to defining the performance criteria, manufacturing strategy must also make decisions in a number of areas. Although often the terminology differs between authors, the consensus in the literature is that there are eight manufacturing decision areas which each have to be addressed in relation to the chosen manufacturing objectives.

In contrast, there is less consensus on the areas addressed by marketing strategies. A number of common elements are discussed in the literature. Similar to the manufacturing performance objectives, marketing strategies should identify the method of achieving differential advantage (see Figure 2). Day and Wensley³ believe this is "central to contemporary strategic thinking". The key to identification of this source of competitive advantage is environmental analysis, which should highlight strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Based upon this, Marketing can identify the market segments in which the

Mechanical Engineering,
UMIST, Manchester M60 1QD,
UK.

Professor Ashok Kochhar is
Head of the School of
Engineering and Applied
Science, and Professor of
Manufacturing Systems
Engineering and Management
at Aston University. Much of
his research work is carried out
in collaboration with industry.
Corresponding address: School
of Engineering and Applied
Science, Aston University,
Birmingham B4 7ET, UK.

Stephen LeBeau is Product
Strategy and Marketing
Director of 600 Group plc. His
PhD concentrated on
interdisciplinary aspects of
marketing and engineering.
Corresponding address: 600
Machine Tool Division,
Heckmondwike, West Yorkshire
WF16 0XR, UK.

David Edgeley was involved in
the manufacture of defence
products before joining the
600 Group where he is
Manufacturing Director of 600
Lathes. Corresponding address:
600 Machine Tool Division,
Heckmondwike, West Yorkshire
WF16 0XR, UK.

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