

Assessing the Corporate Obligation of Proactive Procurement of Business Services

Syeda Asiya Zenab Kazmi

PhD. Project Researcher,
University of Vaasa, Finland.
asiyakazmi@hotmail.com

Abstract

Proactive service procurement is a highly sensitive and risk prone phenomena due to being intangible in nature that requires innovative design-thinking approach by the suppliers and mutually comprehensible and acceptable by the buyers to ensure long term success and profitability of both the parties involved process. Services are affected by various factors, which should be taken into serious consideration while designing the process of service procurement. This paper, throws light on multi-factor proactive service design and its procurement process which helps in comprehending the critical nature and the significance of designing fool proof proactive service procurement framework to strengthen corporate risk management mechanism to ensure long term effective buyer supplier relationship. The study sample was taken from three European medium range enterprises engaged in energy sector businesses i.e., Mechanical and electrical products and service suppliers. The study findings highlight the multi-factor and critical nature of service offerings and its procurement procedures to suggest the serious requirement of installing systematic mechanism by the service industries to protect the interests of both buyers and suppliers through designing proactive procurement procedures (i.e., Plans and contracts etc.) for services to ensure long term profitable corporate relationships (i.e., Buyer and suppliers or Business to Business etc.). The study results revealed the following as the significant factors to be considered while designing effective proactive procurement procedures of services i.e., making right choices at the first place (Lean thinking approach), waste elimination, cost effectiveness, speedy and intelligent procurement. customer's profound satisfaction, competitive edge or advantage. This study provides real time corporate experiences and examples from the European medium range industries to demonstrate the utility and authenticity of the research findings and will therefore contribute in future, through result implementation while designing complex frameworks to strengthen and support the operations of proactive procurement of services.

Keywords: Proactive service procurement, design-thinking, multi-factor, value chain, lean thinking, corporate risk management.

1. Introduction

The world of today's instantaneous evolution in the areas of commerce and technological networking has open up avenues for pioneering products and service offerings to attract local as well as global customer base to capture maximum market share and economic growth. Such economic trend has introduced the concepts of work outsourcing and lean thinking in industrial innovative production and service offerings by implementing complex global value chains. This phenomena is carried out by the corporate leaders, not only to support and sustain in their business environment but to lead in the overall global corporate scene. The corporate services aspect, being intangible in nature, holds high level of risks (i.e., Financial and reputational) at its procurement level, due to the factors like misconceptions during the ordering stage. Hence there is a greater need and demand by present day's corporate players to develop and work with fool proof value chains, to ensure best and successfully managed proactive procurement practices. The manufacturing sector initially focused on designing and producing innovative products to attract their market base and offered maintenance services for their clients marginally as a gesture of good will to their customers. However, with the passage of time, the manufacturing companies realized the significance of using their, once called maintenance services, as being equally revenue generation activity as their main product. Hence, the manufacturing sectors taken the value added role of introducing the concept of customer's customers, in addition to their erstwhile role of producing and selling goods. This activity further created the concepts like performance partnering and value partnering. Since, the services as being intangible phenomena, attach with its-self great risks (i.e., Financial and reputational) at their procurement level, due to the misconceptions, while ordering. The companies can not only face

financial losses by faulty specification while the procurement process of “Services” but can lose their “Customers base” and “Customer loyalty” which is considered to be the irreparable losses in the modern competitive corporate world. Therefore, the modern day’s industrial supply chains are developed, keeping in view, the implementation of the best and successful procurement practices based on lean thinking to gain “Competitive Edge”. Hence, the manufacturing sector has taken the value added role of introducing the concept of customer’s customers, in addition to their previous role of producing and selling goods. This activity further created the concepts of performance partnering and value partnering. Since the services, as being intangible phenomena, attach with its-self greater risks (i.e., Financial and reputational) at their procurement level, due to the misconceptions, while service ordering stage. The companies can not only face financial losses by faulty specification while the procurement process of “Services” but can lose their “Customers base” and “Customer loyalty” which is considered to be the irreparable losses in the modern competitive corporate world. Therefore, the modern day’s industrial supply chains are developed, keeping in view, the implementation of the best and successful procurement practices based on lean thinking to gain “Competitive Edge”. Hence the aim of the current research is to unearth the modern industrial practices and trends of “service procurement” by the manufacturing companies, in addition to the ways through which the current service procurement concept facilitates the proactive business practices, on the basis of lean thinking as well as the innovative tools and methods by the modern day’s Industrial sector. The above referred facts, consequently, generated the need of strengthening the techniques like, well defined and carefully designed “Service Purchase Orders” dully supported by smartly worded “Service Contracts”. In the initial section of the paper, the author will briefly cover the literature review of the main subject areas i.e., Procurement, proactive procurement and procurement of services etc. Later, the paper will through light on selected research methodology. The study will be concluded with an in-depth analyses and discussion on the study results.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Procurement and proactive procurement

Almost all organizations (Manufacturing or the service business providers) invest at least one-third of their income on the procurement of goods and services to stay in the current day’s intense global corporate competition (Kumar, Markeset and Kumar, 2004; Brown, Wilson 2005; Zenz and Thompson, 1994; Buse, Freiling, and Weissenfels, 2001). However, the most specialized and critical is the procurement process business services, as rightly pointed out by Axelsson and Wynstra, (2002) that suggests recent trend of the companies regarding shifting their scope by indulging themselves in operations of service procurement rather than their previous trend of limiting their operations till the hard product procurement. B2B (Business to Business) Procurement has been transformed completely during the last decade. The motive behind this grand transformation is not different from the key objective of “Cost-saving” and increased level of profits, keeping in view the expectations of company’s customer base. The latest advancement in the field of Procurement is off course not other than the induction of the concept of “Proactive procurement”, established on the basis of lean and strategic thinking (Tompkins, 2010; Kazmi, 2017b) after repealing the obsolete reactive style. Companies, mostly the ones, involved in the manufacturing processes can take the help of “proactive procurement” to attain the competitive edge over the others in the market.

2.2 Procurement of services

Fitzsimmons, Noh, and Thies (1998) suggested that the organizational buyers acknowledge the procurement of business services as substantially different and more specialized than the process of procurement of tangible products or goods (Wynstra, , Axelsson, and Van der Valk, 2006). Procurement of services is considered the most complex and unique experience due to the following reasons:

- Being intangible
- Immeasurable.

The specifications can be confused with different alternatives or others difference of knowledge, perception or experiences, or the lack of sufficient knowledge about the needs of the customers or the capabilities of the suppliers etc (Kazmi, 2012b; Kazmi, Naaranoja, Takala, 2013). Hence, there is a strong need to understand the nature of services operations or activities before analyzing that why and how the manufacturing companies find it most significant to research the crux of the term “service procurement”. The procurement of service activities are always recognized as

critical and delicate affair to deal with due to its very nature of being intangible, immeasurable, sometimes unexplainable etc

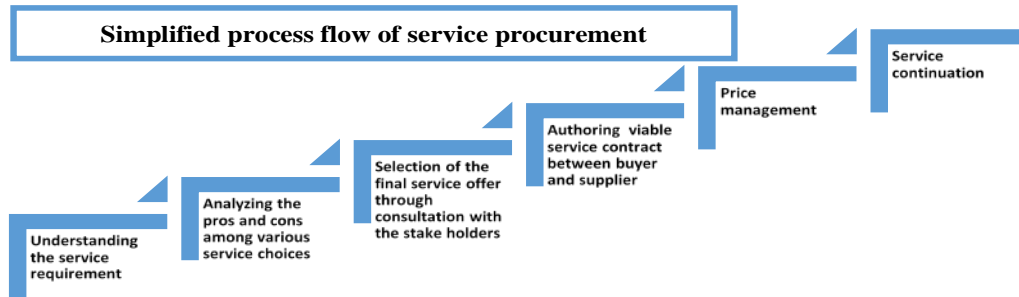


Figure 1. Process flow presenting the simplified service procurement action plan

Figure 1 above presents a simplified flow of service procurement action plan. It's critical to work carefully while ordering the services as the process involves not only the huge costs, but the time, efforts and the good will of the brand names involved in the process. To proceed further in the quest of probing the area of service procurement and its linkage with the manufacturing industries, one must understand that a service industry is basically involved in two main forms of service operations or activities which are divided into the "core service" and "supplementary service" activities (Anderson and Narus, 1995; Carman and Langeard, 1980; Lovelock, 1992). According to Ellram, Tate, and Billington (2004) the obvious differences in the services require specific and suitable supply chain management environmental support and specifically designed tools (Kazmi, Naaranoja, 2013; Kazmi, 2012a). Van der Valk (2008) rightly stressed that "to be successful at services buying, manufacturing companies should assess how services are used and differentiate their interactions with their service providers accordingly, since understanding and being able to manage the interaction with a supplier is just as important as being able to specify and contract the desired service. Figure 2 below reflects the services framework with reference to interactional dimensions

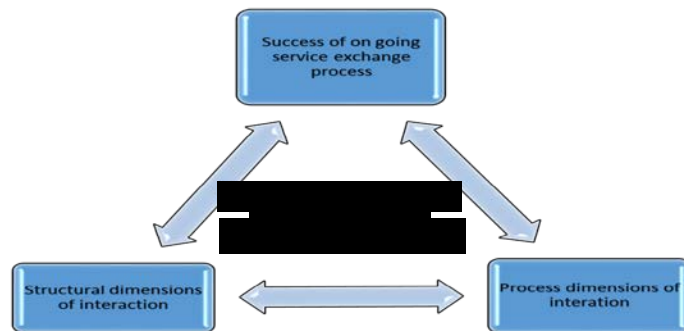


Figure 2. Presentation of services framework with reference to interactional dimensions

The initiation of a negotiation process is the significant point when two parties (e.g. a service provider/OEM and a user/customer) actually prepare to make an exchange for the mutual advantage in the form of potent service procurement agreement (Appelbaum et al., 1999; Kumar, Markeset, Kumar, 2004).

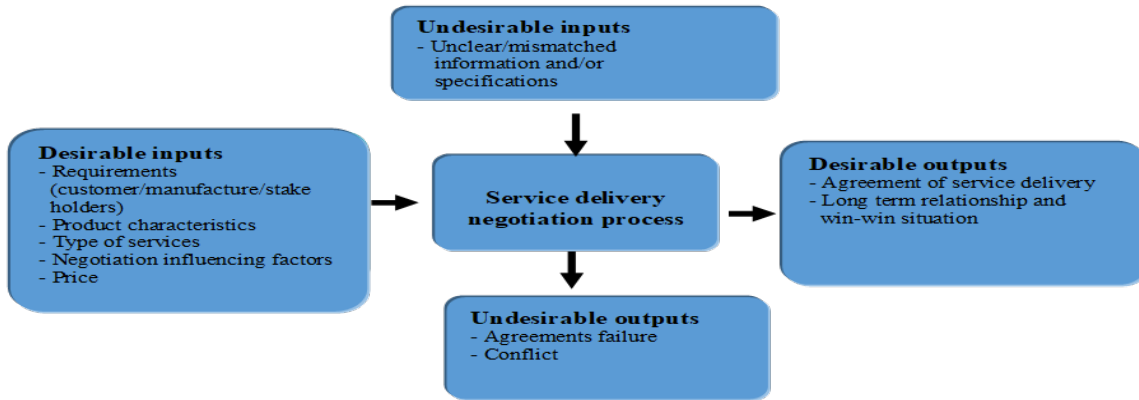


Figure 3. Reflection of a conceptual framework of service delivery negotiation process (Kumar, Markeset, Kumar, 2004)

Figure 3 above presents the basic elements in the event negotiation process flow to explain the conceptual framework of service delivery negotiation mechanism with the bifurcation of desirable vs. undesirables in puts and out puts as a road map (Kumar, Markeset, Kumar, 2004).

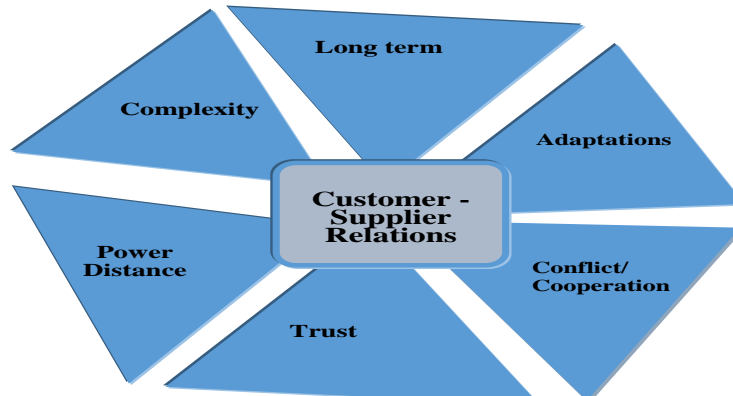


Figure 4. Characteristics of Customer Suppliers Relationships (Gadde and Håkansson, 1993)

Figure 4 above reflects the six main characteristics i.e., Complexity, long-term, adaptations, trust, power and dependence, conflict and cooperation (Gadde and Håkansson, 1993) of customer - suppliers relationships, that can make or break the entire business process.

2.2.1 Core Service Activities

The “core service activities” refer to the main service activities a firm offers as its main operation (e.g. Rayne Air) to operate and participate in its market (i.e. Airline services-traveling facility). It should be understood that these core service activities are actually those activities of that firm which can make or break the overall business of the firm depending on their performance.

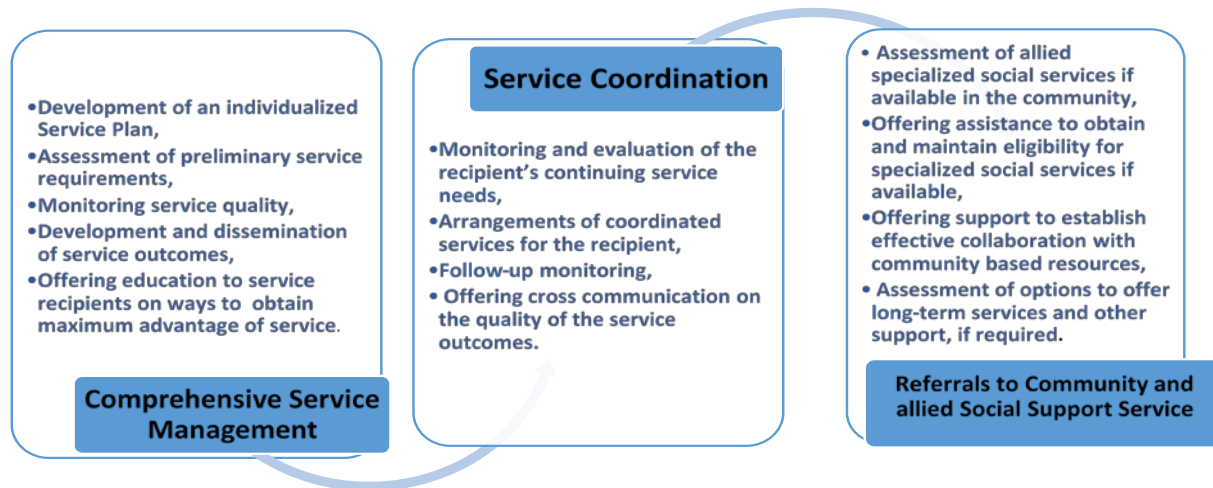


Figure 5. The characteristics of 'Core Service Activities' presentation through a process flow

Figure 5 above displays the main characteristics of 'Core Service Activities' presentation through a process flow. The companies can easily go out of business if failed in performing the core services activities. However, the Company can be rated as the market leaders if succeed in performing their core service activities (Anderson and Narus, 1995; Carman and Langeard, 1980; Lovelock, 1992; Kazmi,, Naarananoja, 2018).

2.2.2 Supplementary Service Activities

Supplementary service activities are regarded as one step extra in the journey of customer services in the form of complimentary service attached to the core service product to make the core service offer more attractive for the customers and a competitive challenge to the competitors. To define the supplementary service activities here, I will refer to an example of free travel insurance coverage for accidents to its customers when they pay for their air tickets in advance etc. Similar to goods-manufacturing firms, service activities provided by service firms essentially consist of a set of interrelated activities (i.e. the value chain). The value chain includes the design, manufacturing, marketing, and supporting service activities (Anderson and Narus, 1995; Carman and Langeard, 1980; Lovelock, 1992).

2.3 Research questions

1. What are the present trends and status of the procurement activities for the "Services" by the Manufacturing companies?
2. How conscious or serious manufacturing companies behave while undergoing their service procurement activities?
3. What are the real motivational or the considered advantages for any new age manufacturing company behind taking the decision of "proactive procurement of services"?

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample and data collection

The aim of this research is to study the service business aspect of three European manufacturing companies, identified as Company A, B and C. The company 'A' has approximately 17 core and 50 out-sourced staff members, Company 'B' has the staff strength little less than 100 employees while Company 'C' is an employee owned venture. The sample companies are engaged in separate types of product manufacturing and service offerings i.e., company 'A' is a diversified metal product and service provider and was established in late 1970's. The company's range of service offerings include edging and welding to flame-cutting and CNC machining. Company 'B' is an Electrical product

and service provider specializing in automation, designing and production of various types of control panels. Company 'C' specializes in designing, manufacturing and maintenance of industrial test systems and associated infrastructure. The selected quantitative approach is the survey methodology which is performed through workshop discussions and interview like open ended questionnaire. Assessment of the subject companies in terms of their proactive service procurement activities, real-time procurement operations and know how is carried out through qualitative research methodology.

3.2 Construction of survey instrumentation

The researcher followed the list of key contents, namely; Payment terms, product reliability, price, training and documentation, overhaul and maintenance mission, spare parts management, operational requirements, goals and scope of work as well as intention to carve out the balanced contracts by allocating the risks between the buyers and vendors and other stake holders etc. (Kumar, Markeset and Kumar, 2004; Brown, Wilson 2005; Wynstra, , Axelsson, and Van der Valk, 2006), while investigating the service delivery negotiation aspect of the sample companies. In addition, the key concerning elements, i.e., changes in the scope of service, changes in the global outsourcing business environment, changes in the legal environment, realignment of services levels with customer's business objectives (Brown, Wilson, 2005) were focused and probed as part of survey instrumentation.

4. Results and Analysis

A detailed analysis of the Case Companies A, B, and C revealed the following trends as the research findings to answer the three research questions posed in this study;

4.1 The present trends and status of the procurement activities for the "Services" by the manufacturing case companies

All the companies in the sample, are well established concerns as far as their field skills, experience and knowledge of production, processing know-how and managerial skills are concerned. However, almost all the companies still have not separated their "hard product" procurement procedures from their intangible "service products" though the companies have established proper business plans and have room for improvement in systems competencies and staff skill levels. In addition to above, the management of almost all the targeted companies are extremely conscious and concern about implementing new and innovative ideas in to their systems and working styles to attain, on one hand, the maximum level of corporate advantage and competitive edge over their competitors and on the other hand, display interest in creating loyal customer base.

4.2 The behavior of case manufacturing companies while undergoing their service procurement activities with reference to security and carefulness.

All the three sample companies showed willing to explore and develop safe and fool proof service procurement concept and framework development. The services business development and differentiation of one form of service from another is the basic idea. Targeted companies seems interested in taking more responsibility for the administration and installation of prudent test systems (i.e., for transmission of business, the system of postal service be allowed to emerge) so that the service need requirements can be conveyed effectively to the service suppliers or the contractors (Kazmi, Naarananoja, Kytola, Kantola 2016b). Such tendency ensures an easy process of service evaluation process by the buyers of the service to decide if they have been provided with the effective service orders or otherwise. To test the system for rental / leasing etc. currently being used by one of the case company is a similar effort and a new idea in the field of "Business service Procurement" concept.

4.3 The motivational factors and benefits for any new age manufacturing company behind taking the decision of "proactive procurement of services"

The study of all the case companies revealed that their management want and showed maximum level of interest for adoption of proactive approach in their services procurement procedures so that the non-core activities of the

companies (i.e., Transportation of the materials, security services of the company, people and premises etc., cleaning services, postal operations, banking and other financial services, capacity building and staff training operations, kitchen and catering services etc.) can be outsourced to minimize additional burden on the staff, companies' resources as well as from their over operational systems. One more interesting fact which was highlighted during the case companies' analyses is that the companies hire services from outside (i.e., Outsourcing) and express their additional level of satisfaction as the services providers are specialized in their work fields hence can provide new, more innovative and well-focused, good quality services at reduced costs in comparison with the situation in which a manufacturing company has managed such operations on its own. This service example can be understood in the case when a manufacturing company, mainly focused and associated with the engineering operations, hire on contract. Or outsource capacity building and training services of their company to the specialized trainers. In return, the companies will be benefited by getting their work teams trained through leadership development programs and management skills during which the management could get new vision in critical corporate areas (e.g., customer management, strategic management, organizational development and internationalization etc.) from outside while they have in-house expert engineers and related specialists with different set of knowledge base. Same is the case with transportation facilities, and the companies do not have to invest huge amount of funds on vehicles and special purpose containers and their related support facilities but can get the quality non-core services from outside and can save money, time, energy, effort and companies resources if they can evaluate the quality of the services provided by the out sourced service providers.

Almost all the companies' managements believe that the main advantages will be profitability, advancements of systems, focused approach on their core products and service efforts towards the core corporate operations hence employee satisfaction, cost reduction, waste management, in particular, the proximity, good will and permanence of the brand name be enhanced. In the light of above referred research findings the key of this research is to highlight the weak areas linked to the proactive procurement aspect linked to the service operations of the sample companies, and the requirement of timely adoption of the prudent and innovative solutions to establish strong and fool proof contractual systems to strengthen and support their manufacturing related procurement operations of services. This will enable them to combat corporate risks smartly and effectively by strengthening their weak operational areas linked to service procurement activities, due to being proactive in the first place and be able to prosper.

The analysis of the study findings, provided sufficient proof to justify the significance of service procurement through systematic planning and with the application of the valuable principles of lean thinking. During workshop discussions with the key state holders of almost all the companies, it was revealed that the service business is still to be established as a separate entity from the tangible products of the Companies. In addition, all the Companies, in the sample, agreed on the significance of outsourcing the services through the service providers and developing strong internal systems for the procurement of "business services" to avoid huge costs by wrong specifications and faulty ordering. A response by one representative of a Company involved in the research concluded; "The Company is engaged in adopting services through Sub-contracting in Decentralized way by different people. The core areas of the services are; training or educational services, consulting services, PBX management, waste management, cleaning and building maintenance, and health-related services. The main factors which are considered as important while selecting service suppliers are Reliability and cost. However, currently there is no standard process of normal competition among several providers. Furthermore, it is brought in the knowledge that the services related to "waste management" is usually taken up through the support of a written/ formal contract under the telephone care. Most of the requirements are presented to the service supplier orally, according to which the offer get accepted and the offer or the offer will be transformed in the shape of a separate agreement. In addition, the Companies usually don't go through any regress testing while selecting the service supplier. However, if the service quality does not satisfy the Customer (here in the case of manufacturing Company) the service provider will be changed later. Here, the review point is that changing the service provider after hiring him once while definitely hurts as in the form of the waste of time, money, effort as well as the opportunity costs by both the parties involved (i.e., Service provider and the service buyer). Furthermore, the data gathered from the companies, included in the samples revealed the fact that although the current available services are not separated from the hard product by the companies, on the basis of clear cut differentiation, however, key customer service concepts can be used for generating customer with suppliers relational ideas for not only the company's good will and reputation among its clients but for the financial success too. The companies are keen to

adopt the modern concept of “lean thinking” in the service procurement process to enjoy the benefits of the process which are as follows:

4.3.1 Making Right Choices at the First Place

Introducing Lean concept for service procurement have special meanings as the procurement of services always been a complex job, due to being intangible, immeasurable and sometimes difficult to explain. However, the lean process stresses more in picking up the best choices from the start, which can give the best options for the parties involved in the service procurement process, to save guard their finances, time as well as the efforts.

4.3.2 Waste elimination

Adding the lean angle can provide the manufacturing Companies a choice to avoid the wasteful activities and only pick the worthwhile ones, which will prove to be a perfect scenario in financial terms. Since the services procurement is an extremely complex process, on account of being intangible and immeasurable, so the risk of getting involved in wasteful activities while ordering or searching for meaningful activities is more common. To counter the above risk prudently, lean process will be the perfect option for going for service procurement for the Company involved in manufacturing rather any sort of business for making a profitable and wise business move and leading the market.

4.3.3 Cost effectiveness

Since Lean thinking and processes in proactive procurement operations ensures effective decision making aimed to reduce costs so the usage of this technique will surely protect the Company’s funds on various ineffective activities and wrong order placement etc. and enhance its profitability.

4.3.4 Speedy and intelligent procurement

A system well supported by Lean processes ensures an efficient as well as speedy supply chain system. A Company’s environment having lean processes in its operations reflects rapid response system and faster decision making. It may be clarified here that faster decision making and rapid responses should not be confused with the attitude reflecting no rational or logical bases behind. It actually means that “Focus on Practicality and Action” becomes the modern force in today competitive corporate environment.

4.3.5 Customer’s profound satisfaction

The principles of Lean thinking encourage reducing new product development time and expense (i.e., either tangible products or the services offered to the customers by the company). Hence, the lean thinking is extremely useful and very well regarded for making the efforts by the company to the scenarios where profitability does not suffer and brand loyalty is increased, as customers prefer to buy products and services from a perceived innovator. The concept of lean thinking encourages and supports the company to experiment new all the time for its customers and keep on enhancing the image of the brand name as a market leader in the real sense.

4.3.6 Competitive edge

Adding lean processes in the services procurement operations as well as in the overall supply chain will give a competitive edge to the Company over its competitors. A company following lean processes like maximum customer satisfaction through innovativeness, designing the products and services keeping in view of the

customers taste and convenience, creating what is needed and when it is needed etc. will help the company to enjoy the true market leader status in no time and in return strengthen its profitability manifolds.

5. Conclusion

This study has offered investigative findings to unearth the modern industrial practices and trends of “service procurement” by the manufacturing companies, in addition to the ways through which the current service procurement concept facilitates the proactive business practices, on the basis of lean thinking as well as the innovative tools and methods by the modern day’s Industrial sector. The above referred facts, consequently, generated the need of strengthening the techniques like, well defined and carefully designed “service purchase orders” dully supported by smartly worded service procurement contracts. During workshop discussions with the key state holders of almost all the companies, it was revealed that the service business is still to be established as a separate entity from the tangible products of the companies. In addition, the representatives of all the target companies, agreed on the significance of outsourcing the services through the service providers and developing strong internal systems for the procurement of “business services” to avoid huge costs by wrong specifications and faulty ordering by installing proactive procurement procedures mainly through expert brainstorming and authoring fool proof contracting to ensure effective, profitable and long-term corporate relationship between the buyer and supplier of services.

Acknowledgements

The author sincerely acknowledges the opportunity offered by Professor Tauno Kekale, study supervisor, President, Vaasa University of Applied Sciences, Finland. This research venture has made the following publication possible. The author extends her gratitude to Dr. Katri Rekola and PhD candidate Ms. Helena Happio, project partners since the study is part of the project in the field of “Subcontracting Agreements and Risk Management.

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Biography

S. Asiya Z. Kazmi, is a Post-doctoral fellow, graduated from the Faculty of Technology, University of Vaasa, Finland. Her research interests are in the areas of organization development and leadership, and new product development in addition to the academic fields namely; change management, creativity and innovation etc. Her academic and professional affiliation with multiple academic disciplines (i.e., applied psychology, Business administration, Law, Finance and Industrial Management) enables her well to combine the knowledge fields and evaluate corporate scenarios from various dimensions.