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Purchasing abroad: a typology of buyers' attitudes within global SRM Findings from exploratory interviews

Abstract

The increased importance of purchasing as a strategic function has intensified global sourcing. This paper, which reports on findings from twenty three exploratory interviews, explores how the purchasing activity may be affected when performed within international networks. First, it is argued that firms purchasing abroad have to develop and implement strategies and processes within a global approach toward their supplier relationship management (SRM). Second, a typology that distinguishes between four categories of purchasing managers' attitudes, namely experimentalist, responder, strategist and opportunist (adapted from Freeman and Cavusgil's, 2007) is suggested. Finally, the paper discusses alternatives that may lead to a more efficient SRM in the international context which can be described here as preparing to face the changing environment and to deal with complex situations.

Keywords: Attitudes, Purchasing, SRM, Typology.

Achats à l'international et gestion globale de la relation fournisseurs: une Proposition d'une typologie comportementale Résultats d'une étude exploratoire

Résumé

La dimension stratégique des achats a intensifié la sélection de fournisseurs à l'échelle mondiale. Ce travail de recherche explore l'impact du contexte international sur l'activité achats en s'appuyant sur les résultats de vingt trois entretiens exploratoires. Nous postulons tout d'abord que les entreprises achetant à l'étranger ont intérêt à élaborer et à mettre en œuvre une approche globale de la gestion de la relation fournisseur (SRM) tant en termes de stratégies que de processus achats. Deuxièmement, nous proposons une typologie qui distingue quatre catégories d'attitudes des directeurs d'achat en contexte international, à savoir l'expérimentateur, le répondant, le stratège et l'opportuniste (adapté de Freeman et Cavusgil, 2007). Enfin, la discussion présente les alternatives contribuant à rendre la SRM plus efficiente, ce que nous définissons ici comme la préparation de l'entreprise à faire face aux évolutions de l'environnement et à gérer des situations complexes.

Mots-clés : Achats industriels, Attitudes, SRM, Typologie

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Introduction

The globalisation of markets was initially based on the concept of convergence of consumer tastes and preferences, leading gradually to a standardized and universal offer (Levitt, 1983). At the organisational level, Johanson and Mattsson (1988) define globalisation as *"a process that essentially can be defined as an already highly internationalised firm increasing integration of its activities and its resources between different geographical markets"*. In 1990, Ohmae extends the concept to the whole process of value creation. Globalisation deals with management integration on a global scale when an organisation is setting up its strategy - research and development, purchasing, production and sales, investment. It should thus be analysed on both strategic and operational levels. Recently, a link was established between the globalisation of markets and the reorganisation of commercial activities (Mattsson, 2002). The author argues that the emergence of global supply chains requires a reorganisation of internal structures and of relationships between trading partners within distribution activities. In regard to procurement activities, the global vision is also taken into account. A strategy of selecting suppliers worldwide -global sourcing strategy- is shown to help maintain a competitive advantage (Trent & Monczka, 2002; Kotabe & Murray, 2004). Similarly, a global purchasing strategy has a positive impact on business performance (Quintens et al., 2006). Despite this research, including more measures of internationalisation, and particularly of performance, Freeman and Cavusgil (2007) argue that the attitudinal dimension of organisations' international orientations is still little studied. However, it is important to both identify and analyse the behaviour of top managers as they directly influence the attitude adopted at the organisational level in addressing the internationalisation of activities through their vision and decisions (Caligiuri et al., 2004). The effectiveness of a global sourcing strategy is not only based on top management commitment and business capabilities, but also on structures and processes (Petersen et al., 2000).

In this perspective, the aim of the present paper is to understand current managerial practices dealing with purchasing abroad and the changes involved by this orientation. The research question addressed is: do purchasing managers have different approaches to their activity on foreign markets, how can they be identified, and what are the characteristics of their global supplier relationship management – global SRM- ?

First, the concept of global SRM is explored and shown to be a process consistent with international developments in organisational and technological ways. Second, the methodological choices are presented: twenty-three qualitative exploratory interviews guided by the conceptual framework of the interaction model but focused only on the purchasing manager's vision of the internationalization of his/her business. Third, a typology of buyers' attitudes within global SRM is suggested and alternative strategies are discussed: behavioural change or process adjustment?

1. The intensification of global SRM

Should the world scale for designing and organizing purchasing strategies and processes be considered? The different aspects of supplier relationship management in strategic and operational terms are first explored, and then the impact of globalisation on this activity is demonstrated.

1.1. The different dimensions of SRM

SRM refers to all the activities that a company uses to set up and develop its supplier base as part of its procurement strategy. Purchasing managers must coordinate different levers in order to contribute to the achievement of strategic objectives, including cost rationalisation. In this perspective, **SRM can be defined as a process that extends from the definition of a strategy to operational activities of trade and communications**. This means information exchanges between different actors within and outside the organisation. Within the firm, teams of buyers often work with engineers and technicians from quality or engineering departments in order to study the feasibility of products to buy. Outside the firm, information exchanges with the trading partners might be technical - characteristics of the requested products or commercial data on prices, purchasing conditions, etc.-. These exchanges involve the use of technologies, including the development and implementation of software solutions to facilitate trade between the company and its suppliers. The functions sought in these tools focus on managing the search for suppliers, tendering and procurement, orders and contracts. In this paper, **two dimensions of SRM have been focussed on: (1) a "process" orientation that reflects the different stages of the procurement process and requires the implementation of tools for information flow and (2) a behavioural approach that includes resource reorganisation to optimize the procurement strategy.**
The rich academic literature on supplier management shows the diversity of the concept: portfolio models to classify the purchased products (Kraljic, 1983) or relationships with suppliers (Olsen & Ellram, 1997; Bensaou, 1999), methods of supplier selection (Bhutta & Huq, 2002), global perspective of sourcing (Kotabe & Murray, 2004), assistance to the development of suppliers (Johnsen & Ford, 2006). The strategic contribution of purchasing has also been analysed (Gadde & Hakansson, 2001; Caniell & Gelderman, 2005; Quintens et al., 2006). Lysons and Gillingham (2003) underline that "purchasing" often lacks a clear definition because it can be associated with other fields of study such as supply chain management. They suggest viewing purchasing as "supplier management" defined as *that aspect of purchasing concerned with rationalising the supply base and selecting, coordinating, appraising the performance of, and developing the potential of suppliers*. The purchasing process conceptualised by Van Weele (2004) provides a four-stage sequence of operations: exploration of potential sourcing markets and selection of suppliers, selection of products to be purchased, negotiating and contracting, monitoring and evaluation of suppliers. Ellegaard (2006) argues that purchasing is an "umbrella covering a variety of activities." The purchasing structure referring to strategy, infrastructure and to the organisational aspect is the main concept that supports five other elements of the process: network management, including supplier selection and global sourcing, negotiating and contracting, measuring supplier performance, product development process and supplier relationship management.

From an operational point of view, purchases can be classified according to their recurrence: direct purchasing for restocking, new purchasing related to a new business or developing a new product. They can also be classified according to their nature. Portfolio models (Kraljic, 1983; Olsen & Ellram, 1997; Bensaou, 1999) have clearly established categories of products and suggested varied behaviours depending on the nature of the purchases: non-critical, leverage, difficult or strategic purchase. The current BtoB purchasing practices tend towards "bi-polarisation" (Malaval, 2005). Simple tenders - non-strategic components, referenced in

catalogues - may involve nothing more than repeat purchasing and imply simple transactions via appropriate software applications. Complex tendering could involve finding long term partners, suppliers that might fundamentally commit one organisation to another. The purchasing process of often tailor-made products subject to specifications and drafting of contracts is then more relevant to project management requiring the implementation of specific technologies into the enterprise information system. This first point is concluded by arguing that SRM should be considered as a process by which an organisation manages its suppliers under the pressure of cost rationalisation while making the purchasing activity on foreign markets predictable and renewable. This task is carried out at different levels including (1) the identification and selection of suppliers –sourcing-, (2) acts of purchasing giving rise to contracting, and (3) order management for complex or repeated purchases - procurement-.

1.2. Impact of globalisation on SRM

The globalisation of markets has become a reality that provides a framework for trade. It refers to the economic integration process that helps make countries interdependent due to the free movement of goods, capital, people, technology. At the microeconomic level, a global approach means that a firm decides to look at the world scale to develop and implement its business strategy. How do purchasing departments integrate this global dimension?

Two types of changes - technological and organisational practices- affect purchasing. First, changes in the international environment concern the remoteness of supply sources, for different reasons. The first one is the price competitiveness of new suppliers, especially Asian and Indian ones. All products incorporating a high proportion of labour are available at low cost. The second reason compensates for the loss of many skills of the European continent such as electronic component manufacturing. Foreign suppliers are not only inevitable but also reliable because they have acquired the technologies necessary to meet the needs. On these new sourcing markets, risks of misunderstanding are greater than on the domestic market: language barriers, problems with specifications or non compliance, etc. The formal procurement process designed for the domestic market is no longer operating on geographically and culturally distant markets. Attitudes and practices of foreign contacts differ from those of domestic suppliers with whom a company is accustomed to work. It becomes increasingly difficult for trading partners to know each other well (Samiee and Walters, 2003). Market surveying and trend anticipation are an inherently difficult task, which is complicated at the international level by geographical separation of markets, cultural distance and asymmetry of information (Skarmeas et al., 2008). Gadde and Snehota (2000) recommend adopting a differentiated approach to maximize relationships with suppliers. Depending on the nature of their activity, the category of purchase and the context in which they operate, firms are indeed bound to manage different types of relationships.

All these research works point out that the remote location of suppliers is now generating additional risks and uncertainties and that it requires re-organisational changes. Purchasing managers would then make the most of incorporating the world scale to optimize SRM. Several studies have shown that a global sourcing strategy can help optimize the competitive advantage (Trent & Monczka, 2002; Kotabe & Murray, 2004). Quintens et al. (2006) develop the construct of global purchasing strategy and demonstrate the positive impact on business performance. The behaviours of managers are also analysed in terms of globalisation. Nummela et al. (2004) argue that a global mindset contributes to the success of the internationalisation of small and medium enterprises. In the cited research work, "global" is used both at the organisational level – purchasing department activities - and at the individual level – manager's behaviour -. As previously shown, sourcing and purchasing are two dimensions of a more aggregated strategic level: supplier management. Considering the whole supplier relationship management within the lens of global vision is therefore suggested. This

requires identifying current purchasing behaviour and bringing about change if necessary, as well as redefining existing purchasing processes.

Secondly, the constant development of technology makes plethoric the supply of tools to put you in touch with distant suppliers and to manage transactions: ERP, emarket places and software solutions for e-sourcing, e-purchasing, e-procurement. E-sourcing is the most tested and deployed solution. Technically, it is an application to prepare specifications, consult online offers, participate in auctions, as well as manage and archive suppliers. It can be qualified as a project management tool that goes beyond simple monitoring of on-line auctions. E-procurement allows for online orders - usually for repeated and indirect purchases from an e-catalogue. The purchasing firm can follow one or all of its suppliers which gives managers more visibility on total expenditure in order to optimize the procurement processes internally and externally by searching for cost reduction. E-procurement has recently become the topic of much research (Carter & Monczka 2005; Nagle et al. 2007) and is a current project in many large groups. E-purchasing refers to orders via electronic market places and reverse auctions. Finally, decision-making softwares are aimed at restoring data from various sources in reports highlighting spending more than performance.

Internet, therefore, offers many opportunities for e-SRM and the use of software solutions can be understood as a facilitating practice. But implementation of such technologies does raise many difficulties. Supplier and buyer must be involved in the deployment of tools so that everyone can benefit from cost savings and productivity gains (Deeter-Schmelz et al., 2001) The approach in this technological dimension of SRM is once again to consider the world scale and integrate the practices of remote suppliers to design and implement tools that will support information exchange.

2. SRM within international context: an exploratory inquiry

2.1. Conceptual framework

The aim of the study was to explore how organisations seeking new sources of supply abroad organize or reorganize their purchasing activity. The main outcomes were on the one hand to confirm the pre-assumed impact of international context on managerial practices in terms of procurement strategies and processes, and on the other hand to identify technologies adopted to communicate with distant suppliers. The conceptual model used as a theoretical framework for the survey is based on the IMP group model of interaction (Hakansson et al., 1982) that identifies four elements to represent relationships between trading partners: parties involved - buyer and supplier-, the process of interaction, the atmosphere of the relationship and business environment (see Figure 1). In this scheme, an analysis from the buyer's perspective is conducted.
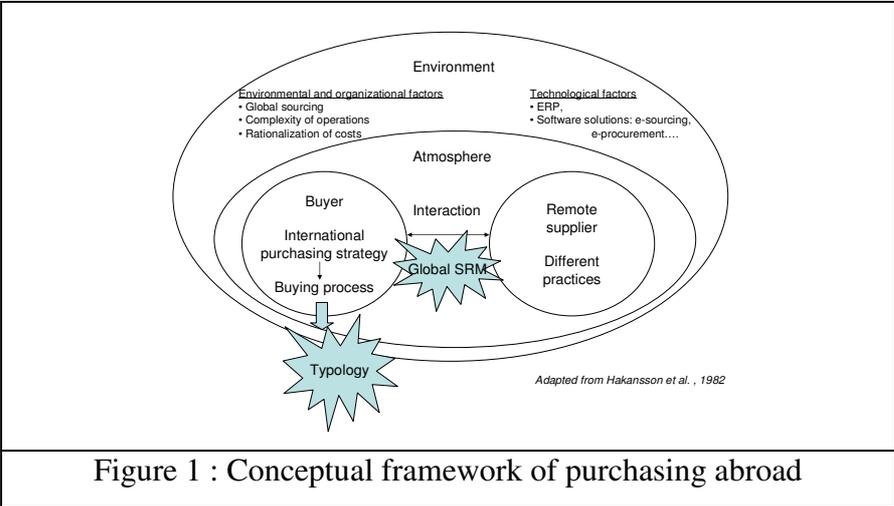

Figure 1 : Conceptual framework of purchasing abroad

2.2. Methodology

The observation of management practices required interviews with experienced professionals -"experts" – having a comprehensive view of purchasing activities to identify behavioural dimensions relevant on international markets. The concept of expertise qualifies individuals as "having a global view of problems and able to combine multiple sources" (Blattberg & Hoch, 1991). The global mindset is a construct developed by Nummela et al. (2004) and used by Freeman and Cavusgil (2007). They identify four elements that may contribute to the success of internationalisation: global orientation, international entrepreneurial orientation, international orientation and global mindset. Global orientation refers to managers' positive attitude towards commitment on foreign markets in regard to their international vision and pro-active behaviour. International entrepreneurial orientation reflects their propensity to take risks and innovate. International orientation refers to managers' ability to perceive the differences between domestic and foreign markets. Finally, global mindset comes from their personal characteristics - initial training, career and foreign languages among others-. Managers with this openness towards international affairs are more willing to accept psychic distance (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). They are less resistant to changes and have a positive attitude about the internationalisation of business.

Starting from this theoretical background, a sample of twenty-three international-purchasing experts was set up. "Top managers" were contacted; they were working as purchasing manager or procurement manager within firms engaged in the import of products - raw materials, components or finished products-, i.e. having already initiated the internationalisation of production purchases. To ensure the expertise of the respondents, key decision makers of various profiles were chosen for interview, namely people of different ages, different training - mainly engineering and business training - and different career paths to reflect the variety of industrial purchasing. During the interviews, these respondents were noted to present the personal characteristics and global mindset described by Nummela and al. (See Appendix 1: Profile of interviewees).

Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted face to face at the workplace of the respondents. Eight interviews were conducted by telephone due to geographical remoteness. Each interview lasted over 30 minutes depending on the availability of respondents. The interview protocol was not communicated in advance to respondents, unless requested by them, which occurred in three cases (see Appendix 2: interview protocol). The conceptual model has provided us with the four topics to be discussed: international environment, the parties, the atmosphere of the relationship, and interaction in the purchasing process.

Data collected represent a 150-pages corpus. The first stage consisted of a lexical reading assisted by the software "Alceste" for significant time saving (Helme-Guizon & Gavard-Perret, 2004; Fallery & Rodhain, 2007). Alceste is a software designed to reflect the internal organization of a speech. It automatically generates a descending hierarchical classification that allows the emergence of categories. The interpretation of the classes is based in a first time on the most typical graphic characteristics. It is then necessary to revert to the most significant verbatims which are proposed by default by Alceste.
From our corpus analysis, Alceste suggested four types of attitudes. For each category, the most significant words have been identified and the correspondence factor analysis (CFA) gave a graphical representation that is presented in the next section. The second stage of treatment consisted of a manual thematic analysis to give meaning to previous results. The aim was to interpret the categories according to a grid suitable for purchasing-abroad situations. For structural axis, the two main SRM dimensions described above, namely orientation process and orientation behaviour were chosen. Results of this content analysis are presented as a typology of attitudes adopted by managers within a global SRM context.

3. A proposed typology for an efficient SRM: behavioural change or process adjustment?

Doty and Glick (1994) argue that "in contrast to classification, a typology does not provide decision rules for classifying organisations but identifies ideal types and represents a unique combination of organisation characteristics that will determine the outcome". Freeman and Cavusgil (2007) have used this tool to understand the phenomenon of accelerated internationalisation of born-global firms. They identified four managers' entrepreneurial attitudes facilitating accelerated internationalisation: the responder, the opportunist, the experimentalist and the strategist. This typology is based on two axes. The first one is the degree at which to consider the trading partner in the relationship: other-oriented behaviour versus the search for one's own interest - self-oriented behavior -. The second axis is the manager's personal involvement in the interaction: significant and direct or indirect and weak. According to these criteria, the strategist is characterized by a collaborative behaviour contributing to the sustainability of key relationships. In contrast, the responder, the opportunist and the experimentalist working on short term are looking for competitiveness and business interest. The four types of attitudes, however, contribute to developing and accelerating internationalisation (see Appendix 3).

Based on this theoretical framework, an adaptation of this typology to the specific situation of purchasing on foreign markets is suggested here. Do purchasing managers have special characteristics qualifying their behaviour abroad and the processes they use? The typology lens allows underlining the diversity of attitudes towards internationalisation of the purchasing process. It is also a grid to suggest recommendations that could contribute to make SRM more efficient.

The typology presented here discriminates purchasing attitudes within international context by two main dimensions: other-orientation and process orientation. Freeman and Cavusgil define other orientation as "a collaborative behaviour designed to feed all the relations and preserve the long term." This type of behaviour was also identified during our interviews. The scale of this axis describes the vision of the relationship by purchasing managers. Some of them view operations on foreign markets as opportunities to seize according to their needs, and are thus self-oriented. Others include sourcing and supplier selection in the long term. They might even integrate suppliers into the design of components and support them in improving their productivity: they are other-oriented. Both types of approaches co-exist depending on the maturity of the purchasing function within the firm and the human and financial resources allocated to the development of collaborative activities.

Process orientation is not mentioned in the work of Freeman and Cavusgil. It is a step that we suggest to take into account the different tools adapted to the stage sequence of purchasing. The scale of this second axis, therefore, reflects the level of use of technologies to support sourcing and procurement operations. In some interviews, the focus is clear with the use of words such as "tools, cost, time."

The two axes define four categories of purchasing behaviour in an international context and with a vision of global supplier management (see Figure 2).
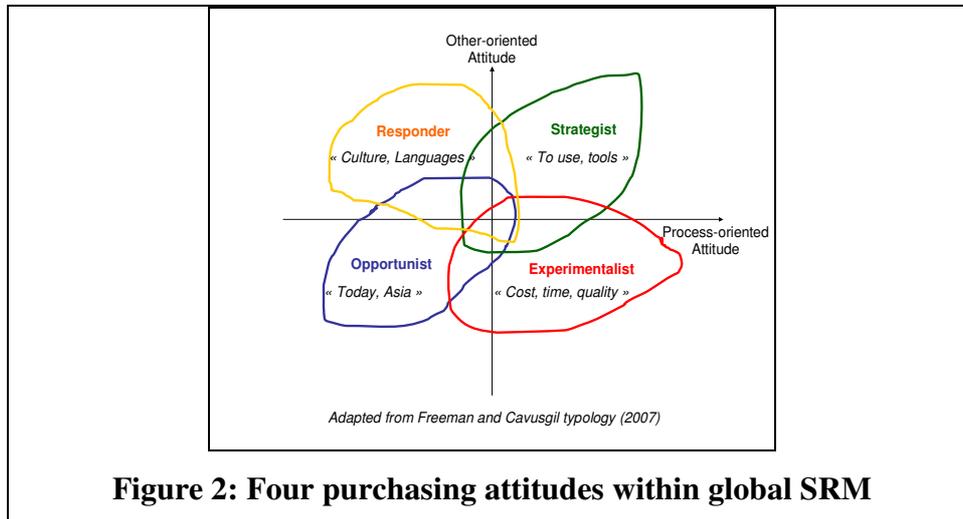
Figure 2: Four purchasing attitudes within global SRM

Experimentalists are the largest group (45% of the sample used), followed by responders (26%), strategists (14%) and opportunists (13%). A synthesis of the main characteristics of purchasing managers' attitudes is given in the following table (see Table 1).

Experimentalists are clearly focused on procurement process standardization. They look for formal procedures while having three main concerns: (1) cost reduction through low cost country exploration, (2) time control, so that the product development cycle and time to market could be as short as possible and (3) requirements for quality, generally in detailed specifications. Experimentalists believe that the success of the procurement process depends on the ability of foreign suppliers to meet their requests. Therefore, they need to control the relationship to ensure they get what they ordered and it goes through a process adjustment rather than behavioural change.

Responders are oriented towards the discovery of new markets which is highlighted by the use of words like "culture", "languages". Sensitive to cultural differences, they are able to adapt their behaviour to unforeseen or unexpected situations. However, working abroad is not a target. Call to foreign suppliers is done if necessary. This result confirms the Freeman and Cavusgil's: responders are oriented towards domestic market. In this case, reducing the buyer-supplier distance is based on behavioural adaptation.

Strategists intend to create and maintain long-term relationships. "We take between 6 months and one year to qualify a new source in Europe, we will take up to 18 months or 24 months on international purchasing" (interview 6). They consider purchasing strategy as a contribution to the overall performance of the firm. To achieve this, they need to know about individuals and organisations and practice supplier base segmentation. Their approach is based on the advanced use of technology and value creation comes from learning at both organisational and behavioural levels.

Opportunists put their self-interest first. They consider the purchasing process on the short term and they can switch suppliers according to responses to their needs.

Table1: Purchasing managers' attitudes within international context

Type	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4
Category	Experimentalist	Responder	Strategist	Opportunist
Share	45,6%	26,3%	14,2%	13,8%
Interview N°	2, 8, 14, 15, 22	1, 5, 16	18, 19, 21, 23	7, 9, 13, 17
Significative presence (Khi2 >0)	Product, Cost, Price, Quality, Control, Délai	Culture, Languages, Different, Difficulty, International	Specifications, Tendering, Bidding, Tools	Today, Africa, Asia,
Significative Absence (Khi2 <0)	English, Culture, Difficulty	Product, Price, Today	International, Culture, English	Product, Quality, Duty
Verbatims	*"we try to create an atmosphere of trust, long term in the relationship" (interview 2)* *"it really depends on the products you want to buy… if they are products that are labour-intensive, yes then it becomes very interesting" (interview 8)* *"it might cost you 10% of the price, so you still gain 20" (interview 14)*	*"each country, each region has its own characteristics" (interview 1)* *"we have different approaches, different ways of going about negotiations" (interview 5)* *"you should never underestimate the cultural difference… we won't have the same way of approaching a contract" (interview 16)*	*"it really saves time because the electronic platform is a tool that allows for the rationalisation of the tendering process and in particular, the analysis and perusal afterwards" (interview 18)* *"the answer goes through a good part of the supply board" (interview 19)* *"you tender to a local sourcing office… you submit your plans, technical specifications, they will then look for the best suppliers" (interview 21)*	*"personally, I make my international purchases by creating offices where I can hire locals" (interview 7)* *"Today, Asia and India are countries that are particularly attractive for cost and labour reasons." (interview 9)* *"I think you should really know China before starting and a lot of agents have gone there" (interview 13)*
International environment	Existing opportunities	Cultural distance	Fournisseurs compétents partout dans le monde	Comparaison des avantages par pays ou zones géographiques
Players	Looking for a win-win situation	Cultural training	Looking for supply expertise	Uses local and intermediate support
Atmosphere of the relationship	Long-term path Creation of trust	International if necessary Organise know-how	Long-term path Support to the suppliers	Short-term path
Interaction and buying process	Feasibility analysis Quality audits Process formalization	Understand how they function Set down appropriate regulations	Segmentation of supply board Systematic use of technology	Make transactions operational

Limitations and future research

Limitations in qualitative work mainly concern the research design, the quality of the sample and the process of analysis. We have made every effort to position our empirical research within existing framework – interaction model – and previous literature on global SRM. We have also tried to provide details of the research methodology through the description of our sample and analysis process. Nevertheless our investigation would need to be confirmed among more sectors of activity. And the assisted software analysis could be strengthende by a deeper thematic study, especially comparing similar cases, focusing on SMEs for example.

Conclusion and implications

From a theoretical viewpoint, our framework represents a step towards the integration of personal characteristics within organizational buying theories in B2B. The findings support the earlier work of Freeman & Cavusgil (2007) who started to fill the gap focusing on managers of born-global firms. We think that this behavioural perspective might be a fruitful topic for future research on relationships because it incorporates the suppliers' sphere. Specifically, the research has shown that organizational buyers behave according to their "orientation" which might not only offer an interesting perspective on buyer-seller interactions but also on the competitiveness of the purchasing process.

From a managerial viewpoint, it is important to be sensitive to the complex and forward looking exploration process of international purchasing. Global SRM has now become inevitable. Some adaptation is required to cope with international environment changes and with the complexity of processes. This paper contributes to the enrichment of knowledge on SRM in three ways: 1) it focuses on international purchasing, 2) it highlights the different attitudes of purchasing managers, and 3) it suggests some ideas for change. The main result is that SRM effectiveness is not only based on behavioural capabilities to manage unexpected situations, but also on the use of all resources - structures and processes -. The four categories of attitudes are all focused on improving the purchasing process in coherence with international developments. But the implementation of new SRM practices is different: better organisation and use of resources lies at the intersection of behavioural change and process adjustment.

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Appendix 1: Interviewees' profile

Interview	Individual	Age	Sex	Sector	Large company (LC) or SME (number of employees)
1	ET	58	Male	Pharmaceutical Industry Medication and vaccine manufacturing	LC
2	CD	38	Female	Commerce Furniture commerce and manufacturing	LC
3	RL	45	Male	Metal processing industry Hydraulic drilled block manufacturing	SME (140)
4	ES	40	Male	Telecommunications Telecommunication solutions for businesses	LC
5	HG	42	Male	Plasctic processing industry Plastic manufacturing	LC
6	PLB	40	Female	Automobile Non-licensed vehicle manufacturing	SME (150)
7	ML	58	Male	Telecommunications Manufacturing of automatic switching equipment	LC
8	FB	34	Male	Automobile RV manufacturing	SME (150)
9	PB	50	Male	Industrial equipment industry Mixer manufacturing	SME (250)
10	ML	55	Male	Pharmaceutical Industry Medication manufacturing	LC
11	JFC	55	Male	Agri-foodstuffs industry Vegetable processing	LC
12	JJT	34	Male	Inter-business commerce Finished plastic goods trade	SME (15)
13	ER	38	Female	Leisure equipment industry Mobile home manufacturing	SME (250)
14	JT	43	Male	Agri-foodstuffs industry Vegetable processing	SME (50)
15	LR	44	Male	Office supply industry Manufacturing of writing supplies	LC
16	PJ	57	Male	Sport equipment industry Equipment manufacturing	LC
17	PG	40	Male	Nautical industry Pleasure craft manufacturing	LC
18	TGL	35	Male	Energy Production and distribution of electricity	LC
19	PLL	57	Male	Pharmaceutical Industry Medication and vaccine manufacturing	LC
20	LC	51 ans	Male	Metal processing industry Metal binding manufacturing	LC
21	CDZ	29 ans	Male	Automobile Equipment manufacturing	LC
22	TH	43	Male	Distribution industry	LC
23	CT	28	Female	Energy Services for energy production	LC
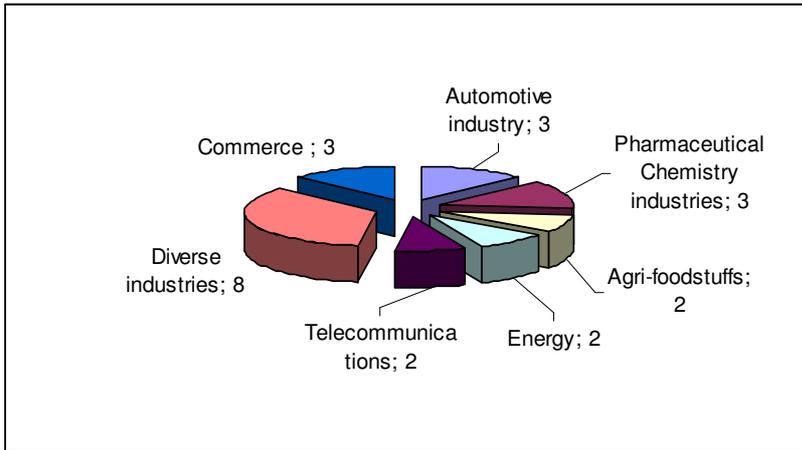
Appendix 2: Interview protocol

1) Environment

For you, what are the specificities of international business?
What are the difficulties/barriers met with in the international context?

2) The players

Could you specify your mission as purchasing manager?
Who are your foreign suppliers? Where are they located?
Do they seem "nearby" or "remote" ?

3) Relationship Atmosphere

What tactics have been put in place to avoid communication difficulties?
What level and type of dependence do you have on foreign suppliers?
How implicated do you expect them to be?
What particularities of the atmosphere are you most concerned about?
What are your objectives in the case of a steady relationship? (reduction of costs, uncertainty)?

4) Interaction and buying process

For the buying process in your business, what place does technology have: Internet/ Extranet/ EDI / Markets/ Tel –SMS?
For you, what are the possible uses of these technologies for your mission?
Do you think your interlocutors have enough IT knowledge?
Do you think IT has an influence on your buying strategy?

Information on the business

Size of the business: number on payroll/ total turnover/ purchasing turnover
Degree of internationalisation: % purchasing turnover to imports
Maturity in international purchasing: as needed, as part of sourcing strategy, worldwide buying locations

Interviewee profile
Age, Function, Training, Length of service in buying