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Organizational competencies and competitive advantage: a mass customization strategy for the furniture industry^{*}

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Abstract

This paper shows the results of a two-round Delphi survey with expert researchers on the furniture industry to identify: (1) the main organizational competencies needed to successfully implement a mass customization strategy, (2) the best mechanisms to develop each one of them and (3) their level of utilization.

Key words: strategic planning, organizational competencies, business model, Delphi methodology, organizational change

1 Introduction

After a ten-year period of growth in the 90s, from the beginning of the 21st century the furniture industry in North-America has been facing growing and aggressive competition from Asian manufacturers. This is specifically true for wood household and upholstered furniture manufacturers [13], resulting in layoffs and plant closures. In the Canadian province of Quebec, the need to react to this situation led to the creation of PARIM (PARtneriat de Recherche pour l'Industrie du Meuble) in 2005, a research partnership between universities, enterprises, private and public research institutions dedicated to the economical and technological progress of the furniture industry.

Mass customization, defined as “offering personalized products, made-to-order, delivered rapidly and with competitive costs” [2]; was identified as a business model that could potentially re-establish the competitiveness of the sector. The implementation of this vision however, requires a major and complex organizational change in companies, as most of them are traditional mass producers. To identify the specificities of this organizational change and to help overcome some of the barriers to it, this paper presents the perceptions of sectorial experts regarding mass customization in a two-round Delphi survey.

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