PREFACE

Writing this book has been like a long and pleasant journey. Four years ago on a skiing holiday two of the editors, Björn Axelsson and Finn Wynstra, set out the basic framework of a book addressing strategic change in purchasing. We had met so many purchasing managers as well as managers in other positions, particularly CEOs, who claimed that they realized the very important role purchasing and supply management should play in today’s and future organizations. Managers outside the purchasing function asked primarily the ‘what’ question: what should one do to be best able to leverage the opportunities for competitive advantage that are inherent in a professional purchasing organization? The purchasing managers, especially the chief purchasing officers (CPOs), thought they knew. Instead they asked the ‘how’ question: how can one make the desired improvements happen? This book addresses primarily the latter question, but the first one will also – indirectly – be dealt with.

We designed quite early on the basic ideas and structure of the book. We thought that we had a substantial load of material for most of the areas, and that with some effort over a period of one to two years or so, we should be able to finish the project. Time went by and a lot of other things happened.

At the same time, we realized that the material we had and our own abilities to address the very broad field we wanted to cover were limited. To be honest, we did not have the level of in-depth knowledge needed in all the areas we wanted to include. As a result, we invited distinguished colleagues to stand by our side and together with us create the contents. We wanted to add a ‘purchasing flavour’ to chapters on for example strategic change, leadership, the utilization of information and communication technologies (ICT), the role and reactions of individuals affected by processes of strategic change and so on. The experts thus took responsibility for the specialized content as such and we added the purchasing flavour.

Later, it turned out that we also could benefit from someone in a better position than us to help with this adaptation and connection to the practitioners of purchasing. Dr Frank Rozemeijer, with an academic background and several years of consultancy experience, particularly in relation to creating and managing change in purchasing and supply management, came to our aid. Frank’s all-round expertise made him a perfect complement to the two original editors.

These measures turned out to be very fruitful. We are now able to present a book with, first of all, a much deeper specialist knowledge in the various fields that we could not cover by ourselves. Secondly, we have been able to harvest from many
richer opportunities to make the connection to practice. Altogether, this means that we actually ‘walked the talk’ of strategic sourcing.

Still, we made the conscious decision that at least one of us editors should be actively involved as author in every chapter. This way we have been better able to keep our initial ideas alive and to better integrate the content than is normally the case in edited books. We know from research that complex services (such as writing a book chapter fitted to a certain set of ideas) can hardly be bought through market-like ‘transactions’. They need to be dealt with as high-involvement, interactive processes. By having our intentions and fields of speciality meet with those of our writing partners, we tried to gain synergies. Again, we tried to be true to our basic beliefs in sourcing methods and to act accordingly.

It has been a pleasant and interesting journey, with interesting and pleasant companions. Even though we have invited several co-authors from outside the purchasing field, many of them are within the field, albeit with different subfields of expertise. There are a number of natural meeting places for academics involved in a certain research area. In connection with for example the annual IPSERA (International Purchasing and Supply Education and Research Association) and IMP (Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group) conferences, we have been able to set up meetings and coordinate our efforts. Thus, the project has made important moves forward in such places as Enschede (the Netherlands), Budapest (Hungary) and Catania (Italy).

In addition to this we have had meetings with selected groups of authors in Stockholm and Jönköping in Sweden, and in Eindhoven, Rotterdam and Dordrecht in the Netherlands. The two original editors have also met at that initial skiing place at Idre in Sweden and later at Blidö in the archipelago of Sweden. The final meeting with all three editors took place in a cottage in the Ardennes in Belgium. This way we have not only had an intellectual journey, but also a physical one, full of new impressions and insights.

To conclude, we should express our appreciation to the many partners involved in the whole project.

First of all, we would like to thank all co-authors for their great work and pleasant collaboration along the way: Henrik Agndal, Ethel Brundin, Jens Hultman and Leif Melin from Jönköping International Business School, Anna Dubois from Chalmers Technical University, Tony Fang from Stockholm University (all Sweden), Fraser Johnson and Michiel Leenders from Richard Ivey Business School, London, Ontario (Canada), Pieter Bouwmans (Nedtrain Consulting), Arjan van Weele from Technische Universiteit Eindhoven, and Marc Reunis and Sicco Santema, from Delft University of Technology (all the Netherlands). You made the journey into a real learning experience for us.

Also we would like to thank all the other kind and cooperative colleagues and practitioners who have willingly shared their insights with us. We have also benefited from the knowledge and support of our ‘everyday’ colleagues, especially Finn and Frank’s colleagues from RSM Erasmus University and Björn’s colleagues from Stockholm School of Economics and Jönköping International Business School, but also all other colleagues in our field: from your publications,
from our discussions in relation to conferences such as the annual IPSERA and IMP conferences, dissertation exams and so on.

Several CPOs and CEOs have been interviewed and had interesting dialogues with us on these matters during this process. We thank you for your generosity in sharing your experiences and ideas with us.

Last but not least, we gratefully acknowledge the financial support we received from ERPS (the European Centre for Research in Purchasing and Supply) in Vienna, Austria.

Finally, we really hope that we have managed to produce an inspiring and insightful book on this very relevant and important topic. We hope that CPOs, CEOs, CFOs and other managers in today’s organizations, will be able to relate to it and find it useful. We also hope that our colleagues will find it a necessity to have, read and use the book, for example in their teaching. It should fit well into MBA classes as well as advanced MSc courses in purchasing and supply management/strategic sourcing and maybe also in courses and other events addressing issues of strategic change.

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