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# 小売バイヤー組織の機能と顧客対応

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# Customer Repose on Organization's Function of Retail Buyer

# Case study on Large Retailer in Japan

## 0 Introduction

It was thought necessary to conduct some qualitative work to understand better the particular circumstances in Japan and how these might affect the buying process. In this DP interviews with retail buyers, chief buyers and some executives of several Japanese retailers are reported. The main purpose in this DP is to analyse the organization of buyers and the function of the buyer. The DP also attempts to explain how business size might affect retail buying and product development.

## 1 Case Studies of Japanese Retailers

Two types of retailer were targeted, those who could claim to be "Nation wide" retailers and "Local" retailers. A mixture of Super market retailers and convenience store retailers was also sought.

**Table §.1 Targeting interview companies**

| Super-market & Convenience store | Interview respondents |
|---|---|
| (1) Ito Yokado | Head of Planning Sector |
| (2) Seiyu | Senior Board, CEO |
| (3) Daie | Chief buyer |
| (4) Seven-Eleven Japan (CVS) | Chief buyer |

Large scale retailers tended to carry out buying in two stages: the first stage at the retailer's corporate headquarters, and another stage at their various regional headquarters. Local retailers, however, do not have this two-stage approach, buyers at a local retailer's headquarters making the final buying decisions. In light of this difference with large-scale retailers, local retailers were included as survey targets. The interviews concentrated on chief buyers or personnel responsible for a number of buyers.

### .2 Case Study 1 - Ito-Yokado Co. Ltd

Ito-YokaDO Co. was founded in April 1958. In 1961, its founder Masatoshi Ito visited the U.S. and Europe to observe their distribution industries and upon his return to Japan, he initiated the implementation of the chain store operation strategy. The company name was changed to Ito-Yokado in June 1965.

The sixty one company Ito-Yoka DO Group, led by Ito-Yokado, is built around a core of distribution businesses. These include such major chains as Seven-Eleven Japan with more than 8,200 franchised stores nationwide, the Denny's Japan restaurant chain, and Seven-Eleven, Inc., with some 5,700 stores in North America and licensed outlets in nineteen nations and regions around the globe. The Ito-Yoka DO Group's total fiscal 1999 sales exceeded 5,187 billion yen, a remarkable demonstration of sales capabilities that puts it in a class with the world's leading multinationals.

The Group is committed to developing value-added products that customers' want and achieving supply stability, supported by superior sales capabilities and a global network. The company keeps abreast of the latest information so that they can offer customers new sources of satisfaction day after day. Ito-Yokado's mission is to supply customers with various attractive lifestyle options along with providing high quality goods at reasonable prices. Such a vast range of offerings to suit diverse lifestyles is only achieved by soliciting the services, technologies and goods to satisfy each customer's needs from a wide variety of sources.

**Table.2 Performance of Ito-Yoka Do**

| | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SALES(1MILLION JPY) | 1546435 | 1547594 | 1563339 | 1508911 | 1479826 |
| PROFIT(1MILLION JPY) | 69645 | 70338 | 71203 | 51081 | 42094 |
| EMPLOYEE | 15086 | 15283 | 15908 | 16514 | 15862 |

Source: Company Accounts

### .2.1 Strategy

The major distinctive characteristic of today's consumer market is that customer demand converges on certain merchandise, and this merchandise remains in demand for only a short time before consumer preferences change. The Ito-Yoka DO Group is consequently promoting "item-by-item inventory control" whereby ePOS (electric Point of Sale) data are used daily to ascertain sales trends in detail for each item of merchandise. Through item-by-item control, the Ito-Yoka DO Group investigates how customer needs change according to the time of day, the weather, and other factors. Next, the company have formulated hypotheses about customer needs, on which basis they adjust the merchandise mix, alter displays, and develop new products. The company verifies the effectiveness of these moves once again using sales data. Through this cycle of hypothesizing, taking action, and verifying, the Ito-Yoka DO Group gains a progressively clearer understanding of customer needs.

Another characteristic of today's market is that when a popular item is sold out, customers are not satisfied with substitute merchandise. Consequently, a major factor impeding growth for retailers, in addition to losses from leftover and discarded merchandise, is lost sales (opportunity losses) stemming from low inventories. Through item-by-item control, the Ito-Yoka DO Group is striving to eliminate such opportunity losses, through timely restocking of brisk-selling merchandise.

The Ito-Yoka DO Group focuses its effort in its stores by providing customers with the value they are seeking, analysing how the company interacts with customers and how to present merchandise. In the Group's apparel and household-goods departments, they are concretely expressing value within the context of daily life by, for example, displaying merchandise in coordinated sets. In response to rising health consciousness and the increasing prevalence of single-serving meals, the company has introduced counter service for fresh foods, enabling it to offer high-quality merchandise in the exact quantity that the customer wants.

Unconstrained by conventional wisdom or past experience, the Group is aggressively promoting merchandise to the customer. To offer merchandise that meets customer needs at a reasonable price, the company is promoting the concepts of "team MD (merchandising their own brands)", "group MD", and "global MD". In team MD, it carries out every stage of the merchandising process, from product development to sales, while sharing information with manufacturers and wholesalers, among other collaborators. For example, in the development of Ito-Yoka DO's own brand of Polo shirt, information was gathered from representatives from three companies: a fabric maker, a dyer, and a textile designer who were collaborated with to develop the line of shirt.

Group MD takes advantage of the marketing abilities of the Ito-Yoka DO Group as a whole to contract with manufacturers and growers, thereby rationalizing the purchase of merchandise. Global MD utilizes the international merchandising networks of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., and the Metro Group to capitalize on product-development prowess wherever it exists in the world for creating their double shop brands.

Even within a single day, customer needs may change at any moment in response to factors as weather. In Ito-Yokado stores, they use ePOS data in addition to item-by-item control to formulate hypotheses about the relationship between merchandise sales and factors as the season, day of the week, weather, time of day, and local events. The company order merchandise based on these hypotheses and verifies their accuracy through actual sales. Using these marketing techniques, Ito-Yoka DO Group seek to develop a progressively clearer picture of customer needs and aim to zero in on customers' ever-changing needs.

Ito-Yoka DO Group also continuously tries to build individual items of merchandise into brisk sellers through aggressive marketing. For example, based on item-by-item control they adjust the sales floor's layout, quantities of merchandise displayed, and planogram; shelf-space allotments, and strive to prevent inventory shortages. By adjusting the sales floor in response to such changes in needs, they intend to create stores where new discoveries always await customers, even those who come to the store frequently.

To accurately convey merchandise "value" to the customer and create a store environment that makes shopping easy, the personnel involved in every stage from product development to sales must share information about merchandise and marketing methods. Their goal must be to create an operation as seamless as if a single person were doing both the purchasing and selling. Accordingly, Ito-Yokado personnel directly exchange information at every organizational level, from daily communication on the sales floor to Management Policy Explanation Meetings attended by executives from all Ito-Yoka DO Group companies.

In addition, supervisors (SV) assigned to each merchandise sector serve as a direct communication link between sales-floor personnel and corporate headquarters. Supervisors provide new merchandise and market information, as well as advice on matters related to formulating and verifying marketing-related hypotheses. The company believes that this multi-channel exchange of information infuses the merchandise and the sales floor with a single "intention" and works to create a store environment in which the merchandise itself seems to spontaneously call out to customers.

### .2.2 Organisation and Function of Buying System

The buying operation is managed by Buyers, Distributors, and Supervisors. The position of Distributor was newly established in 1993 with the mandate of assortment planning for rebuying items according to outlet, and the presentation of plans to each outlet. Another objective was to allow buyers to focus on their trade, i.e. the smooth collection of product, production region, and product development information.

Through the creation of the Distributor position, many of the Buyer's duties have been transferred. Originally, the Buyer undertook assortment planning (product composition, and item by item planning), and made adjustments for each outlet. With the establishment of the Distributor position, the formation and adjustment of product composition fell to the Distributor, allowing the buyer to concentrate only on item-by-item planning.

**Figure .2 Structure in Buying Department**

**Buyer**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Shirt | Suit & formal | Polo & sweaters | Skirt & Pants | Underwear |

**Distributor**

| | |
|---|---|
| Distributor on **Men's wear** | Distributor on **Ladies' Wear** |

**Supervisor**

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A store | B store | C store | D store | E store | F store | G Store | H store | I store |

The Buyer explains to the Distributor the reasons for buying or developing a product in the item-by-item plan. The Distributor then relays this information to a Supervisor, who in turn relays its content to each outlet. The Distributor receives feedback from the Supervisor in terms of sales information. With this, the Distributor settles the product composition, setting out delivery time, volume, and product composition adjusted for each outlet. The Distributor and Supervisor carry out this kind information-sharing on a weekly basis.

The Distributor uses the "vertical" item-by-item plan formed by the Buyer it to decide on a "horizontal" product composition; in other words, the Distributor plays the role of a wholesaler in putting together the product mix. The role has become more important, while the ratio of buyers to Distributors was initially two to one, the number of Distributors has increased such that now that ratio is one to two.

**Table .3 Function of Buyer, Distributor and Supervisor**

| POSITION | CONTENT OF WORK, DECISION MAKING |
|---|---|
| Buyer | Collecting and analysing Outside information |
| | Merchandising, product development and new buying (price and volume) |
| | Proposing of hypotheses on product strategy |
| Distributor | Delivery of volume to each store in product rebuying |
| | Arrangement of timing to deliver item. |
| | Improvement of ordering and delivering system |
| Supervisor | Explaining the reason for buying the products |
| | Instruction on managing each item. |
| | Feed back on in-store information to Buyer and Distributor |

### .2.3 Conclusion

While fundamentally Ito-Yoka DO has grown using a management system adopted from successful firms outside Japan, management know-how was developed independently since being brought into Japan. When the parent company of 7-11 Japan, Southerland, declared itself bankrupt Ito-Yoka DO provided its own management know-how in turning the business around.

Ito-Yoka DO uses a scientific management system based on the testing of hypotheses. With its own product management as well, Ito-Yoka DO is rare among Japanese firms in that, revolving around item by item management using ePOS, it maximizes profit through the pursuit of added value as opposed to simply maximizing sales figures. In order to do this, cost concepts must be watched at the same time. To this end, Ito-Yoka DO has moved beyond simple cost concepts to including opportunity cost concepts in its management.

In terms of buyer organization Ito-Yoka DO employs a division of labour and is increasing specialization, which in turn contributes to product development. Particularly with the establishment of the Distributor position, the opportunities for Buyers to obtain specialized product information have increased. The successful development of products under systems such as "team merchandising" have been realized through this job specialization. In terms of work content as well, Buyers have become able to concentrate on buying.

### .3 Case Study 2 – Daiei

Daiei employs a regional company system. In Hokkaido, the company system involves only buyers and no supervisors. Buyers handle complaints and suggestions from stores manager. These and their replies are conveyed by way of the merchandising director to each buyer responsible for the corresponding area. Periodic meetings between store managers and buyers are also held to deal with various issues.

**Table .4. Performance of Daie**

| | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SALES(1MILLION JPY) | 2505503 | 2470191 | 2342643 | 2204824 | 1980568 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PROFIT(1MILLION JPY) | 591 | -25828 | 1037 | 1147 | 2044 |
| EMPLOYEE | 16686 | 16929 | 15603 | 13776 | 12505 |

Source: Company Accounts

Hokkaido's regional company organization consists of: 4 divisions of soft goods (clothing & other textiles), 6 divisions of food and beverages (meat, vegetables, fresh fish, daily and ready-maid foods, beverages, fast food), and 4 divisions of hard goods (durable household goods). Each division is assigned 4 buyers who are in charge of no more than 6,500 SKU's (store-keeping units). In addition, 15 people are assigned to a headquarters' merchandise planning division.

### .3.1 Buyer's Decision-Making Process

In the buying decision-making process, the headquarters' planning division makes rough estimates regarding the type of items to be sold, item quantities, and delivery dates. A buying plan is then determined after each regional company's buyers submit stocking proposals that are based on their sales plan. Regional company buyers decide which local products to include in their inventory and send in the product codes to the headquarters' merchandise planning division. Perishable fresh foods (meats and fish) are mainly purchased locally while most dry goods are not.

### .3.2 Product Cutback (before Delisting) and Contact with Suppliers

Each regional company and each individual store handles product cutbacks. Delisting and cutback criteria are not based entirely on sales data. The balance of product selection and assortment is also considered, and even products that sell moderately well can be cut if similar products exist.

Ties with suppliers are based on manufacturer and wholesaler associations, length of association, rebates, et cetera. The buyer must be sensitive to relationships with suppliers, as well as maintaining fair trade practices by making periodic changes and adjustments.

### .4 Case study 3 - SEIYU

Seiyu was established in 1963 and by 2000 had 220 stores throughout Japan. Seiyu is the fifth-largest retailer in Japan and part of the SAISON group, a major retail, credit and development conglomerate. Besides operating a chain of Seiyu supermarkets, it runs the Family Mart chain of convenience stores, "non-brand" Mujirushi Ryohin stores and a number of other retail chains and services. Seiyu is aiming to use its extensive resources to turn itself into a new type of retailer in Japan. Seiyu will be acquired by WALMART of the U.S.A in the Spring of 2003.

**Table .5 Performance on Seiyu**

| | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SALES(1MILLION JPY) | 1004582 | 998141 | 952633 | 875369 | 832187 |
| PROFIT(1MILLION JPY) | 8502 | 5654 | 10281 | 6341 | 6608 |
| EMPLOYEE | 8208 | 7924 | 7205 | 7062 | 5901 |

Source: Company Accounts

Many of Japan's supermarket chains have been placing strong emphasis on pricing in the past year or two, believing lower prices appeal most to consumers. Seiyu, on the other hand, has concerned itself more with quality, believing value for money is ultimately more important than the cheapest prices. In that sense, Seiyu is almost going against the flow, by moving up-market rather than down. This will become increasingly obvious as the company develops new types of stores to satisfy the consumer who is moving away from famous-brand goods but still looking for style and quality.

Long experience with "non-brand" Mujirushi Ryohin, Japan's first and most famous private brand with a strong emphasis on simplicity and ecological soundness, and the increasingly close-working relationship with Seibu Department Stores give Seiyu strengths in product development at all levels. Most supermarket chains do not have strengths such as these.

### 4.1 Strategies for Future Growth

Seiyu sees itself as going well beyond its traditional supermarket chain image as it gives real form to new concepts. As a developer, it is already working on US-style shopping centres.

In small department stores under the Seibu name it will sell medium-price, high-quality products rather than the branded goods already prevalent. Seiyu has a scrap-and-build policy that will make land available for these new developments. The centres will be opened at the rate of one or two a year. One of the first, in Kokura, Kyushu, will have US retailer Toys 'R' Us as an anchor store. Seiyu is also creating a new type of store it calls a combination store, which combines the product mixes of a supermarket, drugstore and home centre. The first was opened in 1995.

Reducing operating and product costs is vital to survival and Seiyu is approaching this in a number of ways. Re-engineering working processes is the aim of its "Rainbow Plan" which uses advanced computer technology to streamline various systems and enhance communications. Increasing the purchase of products from overseas is another major priority.

The revolution in the Japanese retail environment in recent years has been far reaching, covering broad-based deregulation, changes in distribution, new concepts of retailing and changing consumer perceptions. Changes of this scale have taken decades to achieve elsewhere, but in Japanese retailing there is always something new. While it abolishes established ways of doing business, the new face of Japanese retailing is offering opportunities for innovators. But many existing retailers are also being forced to go through a painful process of re-engineering. Many owners of such stores are dealing with the situation by converting their business into convenience stores or other types of franchises.

Technological advances increasingly will enhance distribution processes and will assist manufacturers and retailers to provide the right product mix to consumers. Deregulation is likely to continue and affect other areas that ultimately will influence the retail sector. As the economic situation improves, the impetus for retailers to attract consumers will increase.

### .5 Case Study 4 - Seven-Eleven Japan

Seven-Eleven Japan is a company owned by the IY group. Although it wasn't the first in Japan to open a convenience store, it is now the largest chain. It was the first company to use ePOS data for merchandising, and the first convenience store chain to accept utility bill payments, for example all public fairs payment. Seven-Eleven Japan is the largest retailer in the country for a variety of products including magazines, soft drinks, instant ramen noodles and sandwiches. The company has also managed to achieve continued annual growth since it's founding regardless of the economic environment.

### .5.1 Distinguishing features of Seven-Eleven

The company has always been an innovator. Its introduction and rapid expansion of a computer network system in the mid-1970s enabled it to offer services such as utility bill payments. Regular system overhauls and updates have kept Seven-Eleven Japan stores ahead of their competitors. For example, data collected through ePOS terminals are used to determine what is best for customers, and up to 70% of each store's products are changed over a one-year period to keep customers interested.

The other main difference between Seven-Eleven and its competitors is one, which has not yet been exploited: the scale of its international network. Southland International, the US parent company, is now owned principally by Seven-Eleven Japan and its Japanese parent, Ito-Yoka Do. Internationally, there are more than 14,000 Seven-Eleven stores in twenty-three countries. The potential for joint purchasing and merchandising is great.

**Table.6 Performance of Seven Eleven Japan**

| | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SALES(1MILLION JPY) | 254617 | 277185 | 297993 | 327014 | 346917 |
| PROFIT(1MILLION JPY) | 105151 | 112086 | 117240 | 140150 | 147158 |
| EMPLOYEE (at Franchiser) | 2718 | 3037 | 3350 | 3660 | 3820 |

Source: Company Accounts

### .5.2 Strategies for Future Growth

With increasing discounting and the greater presence of private brands, Seven-Eleven Japan is adopting a different policy. The company is not interested in discounting as a strategic tool. It also believes that, given the choice and the right price, consumers do prefer national brands to private brands. So it is putting particular effort into team merchandising, tying up with major manufacturers to develop products for sale in its stores. The scale is still small but success already apparent. Seven-Eleven is planning to expand the scale of existing business relationships, such as that with Parker Pen, and begin new ones. The company has begun work with Southland in the US on joint efforts in merchandising and purchasing, and this is likely to expand to other countries.

Seven-Eleven has stayed ahead of the competition by making full use of technology and paying close attention to its customers. It has not been afraid to go against trends, such as that towards private brands, looking for alternative solutions with equal or potentially greater appeal.

### .6 Synthesis of the 7 case studies

The characteristics of buyer organisation on scale and functions, product strategy, assortment plan, the relationship with suppliers, information system and the delisting rule were important aspects of each case. The different characteristics of nation-wide retailers were especially apparent. The following describes how these characteristics influence organizations business strategies. On the other hand, local retailer traits are also apparent. The intrinsic buying characteristics of retail companies are more clear from analysing small scope, local retailers rather than nation-wide companies.

In buying strategies, the characteristics of stocked products and the assortment of these products are important buying issues, suggesting three groups of product: product for sales volume (top national brand products), product for margin (own brand products which guarantee a high margin with low purchasing costs), and product for assortment (to attract customers). Decision-making or rather the criteria of the retail buyer depends on the product group, margin oriented criteria or sales oriented criteria. It cold be that the type of target influences the buyer's decision criteria.

Relationships with suppliers were a significant factor. Suppliers not only provide retailers with products, but also serve as a provider of information about various products. Since retailers also entrust suppliers to produce their own brand, the scale, technical standards, and production capacity of suppliers are the primary factors that define these relationships.

When buyers build relationships with suppliers, they are, at the same time, deciding whether a supplier will be a long-term business partner or a short-term partner for the sole purpose of generating profit. These decisions are affected by how much interest a retail company has in developing its own brand.

Many companies share electronic information. Beginning with the spread of systems, such as ePOS, the rapid transmission of information between companies is developing through EOS and EDI. Through the accurate analysis of enormous amounts of customer data, retail companies will not just purchase products offered by suppliers, but new product images will be evoked. For instances, the organizations of nation-wide retailers are influenced by business behaviour strategy are examined below.

## 7 Buyer's Organizational Structure, Function and Buying Strategies

Considering the historical formation of the buyer's role in Japan, one can see a shift towards division of function, or rather, the dispersion of authority and specialization of work. In the first chain store operations, a single person would be responsible for both buying and sales, and sales demand would be reflected in the next period's buying. However, as the concept of self-service gained acceptance and more merchandise was offered through general retail businesses, the business of buying took on a more independent form. Sales and buying duties were divided up between supervisors and buyers respectively. As the number of products offered through general retail businesses continued to increase, the buyer duties became more complicated. Time originally devoted to merchandise development and finding new products was lost. This brought on a reform in the system of organization for regular buying, re-buying and new buying. In forward-thinking businesses the distributor handled repurchasing and re-buying orders and the buyer was in charge of buying new items.

Differences in company strategies have further transformed buying systems. It can be assumed that there are currently two methods of buying among retailers. The first, which is employed by Ito Yokado (IY Type), focuses on product search and development. Ito-YokaDO's buying is supported by their adoption of a more functional approach, which as mentioned above divides buying into three parts. The opposing method, utilized by Daiei and most other retail business, is more inclusive and the buying department handles all purchase-related activities.

Table .10 categorises buying in terms of strategy, volume, control, and function & system. Ito-Yoka DO's buying strategy emphasizes the consumer's needs by devoting strategic resources towards buying high quality merchandise. This method can be expressed as product development buying where the buyer's activities are concentrated on finding new merchandise. Comparatively, Daiei and most other major retailers place emphasis on costs and devote resources towards stocking merchandise at lower cost from suppliers. Accordingly, this method can be expressed as transaction-centred buying. Major retailers give priority and devote more time to obtaining favourable transaction terms rather than focusing on merchandise selection. Moreover, in the case of new product introductions, manufacturers give delivery priority to the major retailers over local businesses due to their greater buying power. In some instances, delivery to local retailers of new merchandise is not made or is significantly delayed. For this reason, it is important to local retailers to buy from manufacturers or wholesalers who can be depended on to deliver the necessary merchandise. It can be called this method supplier-centred buying.

In regard to buying volume, both major and local retailers buy in bulk through their headquarters, the former having high volume and the latter displaying intermediate volume. As mentioned before, Ito Yoka do's buying is centralized and goods for all national stores are supplied through the headquarters. Daiei's regional company system is more decentralized and buying is divided into two stages. Headquarters negotiates the initial terms and buyers at the regional level negotiate the final buying details with the manufacturers. The headquarters of local retailers manage buying and control is centralized. Ito-Yokado's buying structure is divided into three parts: BY (the buyer), DB (the distributor), and the SV (the supervisor). This can be labelled as a "function divided system". The buyer is responsible for product development; the distributor determines volume; and the supervisor consults with the branch stores. Daiei's buying system is divided into two parts, BY and SV. This buying system can be referred to as "function quasi-divided system". Compared with a "function divided system" the buyer's time is monopolized by volume decisions and other contract negotiations consequently neglecting product development. In the case of local retailers, all buying decisions are made by the buyer and can be referred to as a "function centralized system". In the case of "function divided system" "function quasi-divided system" and "function centralized system" the responsibility for goods left unsold focuses on the individual. This results in a tendency towards avoiding risk and increasingly basing purchase decisions solely on the recommendations of the manufacturer and wholesalers, thereby resulting in increased returns.

**Table 7 Organization Structure of Buyer Departments**

| | Purchasing strategy | Buying scale | Authority | Organisation & Function |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ito Yoka Do | Product development oriented buying | Large size Concentrated | Divided | Speciality BY・DB・SV |
| Daie | Trade condition oriented buying | Large size Concentrated | Divided (2stage) | Quasi-speciality BY・SV |
| Local Retailer | Supplier developing oriented buying | Medium size Concentrated | Concentrated | Generality BY |

Note: BY: Buyer, DB: Distributor, SV: Supervisor

## 8 A typology of buyer organisation

Even from seven case studies it becomes clear that the current situation in Japanese retail buying is complicated. Because of Japan's peculiar practice of complex commercial transactions, the typical buyer can become extremely busy and unable to carry out his/her normal duties, which include product development. Furthermore, the job performance of a buyer in a decentralized system is quite different compared to that of a buyer in a centralized system.

Two broad types of organisation could be identified, one focussed on negotiating prices and another broader role where day to day matters were delegated allowing the buyer to focus more on other tasks specifically new product sourcing. Where the buyer retained detailed tasks of stock allocation to stores, the time devoted to product development and to securing transaction terms appeared insufficient because of the complexity of the buyer's routine work. Ito Yoka DO has a new product development policy and buying activities are concentrated on finding products that sell. Other major retailers would have a transaction-centred policy that focuses not on product development but on developing favourable buying terms. The resulting difference in dependency on external product selection (wholesalers and manufacturers) explains the previously mentioned division in buyers' buying decisions.

**Table 8 Relationship between Orientation and Information Usage**

| | **Hi usage of store information** | **Low usage on store information** |
|---|---|---|
| New Product Development Orientated Buying Policy | **Selection by Internal Decision-Making.** | |
| Trade Condition Orientated Buying Policy | | **Selection Relies on External Decision-Making** |

Moreover, the second system of buying is more conservative and might depend more upon external rather than internal product selection. Conversely, the team system of buying could result in more shared responsibility and greater risk tolerance. Regarding the use of information, the source and type of information should be examined. Market information on what products sell could be better absorbed in the first type of organisation, where the buyer could be more involved with future product development and product policies.

In UK retail businesses there is are examples of specialised professional organization that, created for the purpose of organizational buying. Marks & Spencer in U.K. is an example of an advanced retailer in terms of the role and function of organizational buying. Its products are 100% Own Brand; and product development and buying are integrated. In a Mark & Spencer's buying committee, the position of "selector" is responsible for product evaluation in the marketplace and suggesting to suppliers product designs that do not contradict its market position. The "merchandiser" is responsible for securing pre-production raw materials from suppliers. This person ensures and negotiates product scope, size, and colour and decides on the package, sent to stores. The "technologist" evaluates the special properties of raw materials and monitors the technical specifications and method of manufacture at the production level. The "quality controller" determines and implements the product quality management system. The buyer works closely with the buying committee in order to execute the decision making process.

However despite the diversity of organisational approach most if not all the retailers interviewed emphasised certain aspects decision making directly or indirectly. The most prominent was product quality, the second price. Some emphasised low some emphasised competitiveness based on quality.

## 9 Conclusion

Retail buying in Japan is trailing behind that in the West. In the UK, characterized by strong buying power in the hands of retailers and a high level of concentration in retail and manufacturing leading retailers such as Marks and Spencer have divided their buying roles, have many buyers and make decisions on product development internally. Some Japanese retailers do the same, but most have relatively few buyers concentrating on transactional activities. However the decision making process, such as could be identified in the case studies where managers were giving quite idealised pictures of what happened in their organisations, appeared to have some things in common including an emphasis on quality and price that would probably be seen in any buying department globally.

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