



Vision 20/20: Preparing today for tomorrow's challenges

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ABSTRACT

This special issue includes five of the best papers presented at the 20th IPSERA conference. This conference was organized by Maastricht University and took place in Maastricht, The Netherlands. The conference theme was: 'Vision 20/20: Preparing today for tomorrow's challenges'. In this editorial we discuss the future challenges in Purchasing and Supply Management and how one can prepare for these today. We make use of the concept of weak signals to detect a number of emerging future trends. All abstracts of the 110 conference papers were analysed using text mining and tag clouds. Also we introduce the five papers that were selected by the conference reviewers and track chairs as the best papers of the conference.

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1. Introduction

In 1992, IPSERA started as a small-scaled conference in the UK. Now, 20 years later, the conference has evolved into one of the largest international conferences on Purchasing and Supply Management (PSM hereafter). It is tempting to give an overview in this editorial on how we evolved from almost scratch to the academic discipline that we are today. Indeed, we have come a long way, from where PSM was considered to be an operational function, to today where more and more people perceive PSM as a strategic contributor to firm success. PSM serves a key role in helping suppliers contribute directly to the competitive advantage of the buying firm. However, this transformation from operational towards strategic is already well known and discussed in JPSM. For a good example, see [Wynstra \(2010\)](#), who provided us with an excellent overview of fifteen volumes of JPSM. In this editorial, we will take a different perspective; we will look at where we currently are and what the future might bring to us. Often we are so consumed with what we are doing today, that we forget to think about tomorrow's challenges. Think a moment about how the world might look like 20 years from now? Will there still be academic journals, or do we share our research findings and publish primarily through open access websites? What about social media; how will that change the PSM profession? Will Brazil, Russia, India and China (the BRIC countries) lead the global economy? Will there be enough oil, water and other resources for all our needs? Will Neuroscience change the way we do research in PSM? Are we living in a better

world? It is easy to ask the questions, but very difficult to come with solid answers.

A few years ago the article "How will Procurement have changed by 2082?" was published in *Supply Management* ([Ellinor, 2007](#)). Although it is extremely challenging to look 75 years ahead, different futurologists and academics were consulted to see what they predicted for the future and what it might hold for the purchasing profession. It was expected that by 2082 almost all procurement activities will be done by artificially intelligent machines and a new breed of young independent "deal shapers" who control access to market and supplier information. Also, there will be new business models based around closely connected networks of companies (including buyers, suppliers and other partners) competing against other networks. Purchasing as a function will not exist any longer. Instead, collaborative inter-organizational teams will plan across the value network to optimize total end-to-end cost, value and risks. Whether this will become reality in 75 years is difficult to say, but it is clear that we may expect more collaboration internally across hierarchical levels with different business functions, as well as externally with suppliers and customers.

2. About the Conference

This special issue of JPSM contains a selection of the best papers presented during the 20th Annual IPSERA Conference. The conference attracted 210 academics and practitioners from 19 different countries to Maastricht University (The Netherlands) to present the results of their research oriented toward the theme: *Vision 20/20: Preparing today for tomorrow's challenges*. In total,

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110 papers were presented during the conference (34 competitive papers, 73 working papers and 3 practitioner papers).

Vision 20/20 refers to the normal visual acuity of the human eye. In the expression, vision 20/20, the numerator refers to the distance in feet between the subject and the chart (20 feet or about 6 m) while the denominator is a reference for the size of the letters and the distance of the lines between letters, expressed in millimeters. For the conference, Vision 20/20 was translated into how clearly we view our current situation based on the past 20 years and how clearly we view the next 20 years. It is our belief that by looking back and forward we would be able to identify new research areas and contribute to solving some of the challenges that PSM professionals will be confronted with in the future.

IPSERA 2011 was dedicated to take a look into the future, so we welcomed papers focusing on a diverse range of PSM topics. A great deal of the papers challenged participants to re-examine their perceptions of PSM's future and to take notice of the lessons learned from the experience of the past 20 years of IPSERA conferences. Within the overall theme of the conference we defined 20 specific topics. These topics resulted from a short survey amongst the participants of the annual Workshop for Purchasing Researchers in The Netherlands (WION). During this workshop about 30 Professors, PhD's, lecturers and researchers presented their latest research and discussed topics of common interest. We invited all participants to answer the question: What do you consider as the most important future hot topics in Purchasing and Supply Management? We received many good suggestions. For our call for papers we clustered and summarized them into a short list of 20 topics (as listed below).

1. Innovation: using suppliers as a source of competitive advantage
2. Developing collaborative buyer–supplier relationships
3. Aligning sourcing strategy with business strategy
4. Engaging internal stakeholders in sourcing activities
5. Human Resources Development (HRD) in PSM
6. Reverse Marketing: how to become a customer of choice for your key suppliers?
7. Corporate social responsibility and impact on the supply chain
8. Value Chain Management
9. Supply Risk management
10. Value based sourcing
11. Performance based contracting
12. Organizing the future PSM function
13. Insourcing and outsourcing

14. Managing the services supply chain
15. Purchasing and SCM in the Health sector
16. Supply network management
17. Supply Chain Finance
18. Public procurement and public–private collaboration
19. Purchasing leadership
20. Return-on-Purchasing: do investments in purchasing pay off?

When we plot these topics in their corresponding phase in Van Weele's (2005) PSM development model, it becomes clear that these topics correlate with the more complex and integrated stages 4, 5 and 6 (see Table 1). Despite the critique that one can have on these PSM development models (Ramsay and Crom (2008)), they are nonetheless useful—not only in terms of classifying organizations in terms of their current position, but especially for helping to determine, in a systematic way, the possible directions for future change in PSM (Rozemeijer, 2008). Over the past 20 years much research has been done on PSM topics that are related to the first three stages of PSM development model (e.g. ordering, securing availability, commercial tendering, supplier selection, purchasing process, negotiation, supplier reduction, contracting, global sourcing, purchasing synergy). Based on the input from the WION workshop, we expect that for the next 20 years, the research agenda will be more related to the challenges and issues that are related to the last three stages (e.g. collaborative buyer–supplier relationships, Reverse Marketing, CSR, Value chain management, Supply risk management, Value based sourcing, Performance based contracting, Insourcing and outsourcing, Managing the services supply chain, Supply network management and Supply Chain Finance). In these last stages, PSM is a business driven function aimed at supporting the business strategy by using suppliers as a source of competitive advantage (T1). Top management will critically review whether their investments in PSM do pay off (T20). In order to pay off, PSM strategies need to be fully aligned with the business strategies (T3), requiring high levels of internal stakeholder and supplier engagement (T4).

How will we organize PSM in the future? This is difficult to say, but it is inevitable that organizational structures and teamwork initiatives need to adapt to the future PSM strategies (T12). One thing is clear—PSM organizations will become more complex. In the future, we believe that different knowledge and skills will be demanded from PSM professionals, managers and leaders (T19). In order to recruit, develop and retain the future PSM professionals, we may expect that there will be more attention for Human resources development in PSM (T5). Finally, it is expected

Table 1
The conference topics and their position in the purchasing development model (Van Weele, 2005).

Stage 1 Transactional Orientation 'serve the factory'	Stage 2 Commercial orientation 'reduce price'	Stage 3 Purchasing coordination 'savings through synergy'	Stage 4 Internal integration 'reduce total cost of ownership'	Stage 5 External integration 'supply chain optimization'	Stage 6 Value Chain integration 'total customer satisfaction'
Ordering	Commercial tendering	Contracting	Engaging internal stakeholders in sourcing activities	Supply Chain Finance	Value chain management
Securing availability	Negotiating	Supplier reduction	Aligning business strategy with sourcing activities	Supply Risk management Managing the services supply chain CSR impact on Supply Chain	Value based sourcing Insourcing & Outsourcing Innovation Supply network management
	Supplier selection Purchasing process	Purchasing synergy Global sourcing	Performance based contracting	Developing collaborative buyer supplier relationships Reverse Marketing	

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