

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Four types of studies can be called research namely, reporting, description, explanation and prediction can be called research. Cooper & Emory (1995:21) define research as a systematic inquiry aimed at providing information to solve problems. Business research on the other hand can be defined as a systematic inquiry that will provide information to guide business decision making.

Cooper and Emery contend that scientific methods in business research lags behind those of the physical sciences. The main reason being that physical scientists have been doing research far longer than business researchers. Governments and organisations have been supporting the physical sciences far longer than business research. Organisations normally support business research for one reason and that is to obtain competitive advantage. The research process that is described below, to all intents and purposes document to enable the furniture industry to obtain a competitive advantage, both nationally and internationally.

3.2 Research Methodology

3.2.1 Purpose of research:

To establish the current situation within the furniture industry in terms of the proposed supply chain models, and to assess the readiness of the industry to develop and improve on existing technology and supply chain thinking.

3.2.2 Research Procedure:

A comprehensive questionnaire (consisting of 27 questions) together with personal interviews and the author's experience in the industry was utilised to gather the data presented. The questionnaire is attached as an appendix. As the industry is extremely competitive with the gross margin on furniture being pressurised due to the prevailing lack of consumer demand, the actual acquisition of specific numerical evidence was extremely difficult. The research, therefore, concentrated more on assessing the position of the specific furniture retailers on the development of the supply chain and the implementation of research specifics in the current management of the supply chain. Ten questionnaires were sent out of which four were returned. The four that were interviewed were executives from Russells, Joshua Doore, Morkels and Lewis.

Twenty-seven questions were posed to the respective interviewees. The goal was to try and establish the current situation in the furniture industry with regard to the supply chain and the development of supply chain management as well as the importance of technology and the implementation of technology.

3.2.3 Procedural Design:

The research questionnaire was designed to produce results that are as objective as possible. The sampling that was used was dictated to an extent by the willingness of the organisations to partake in the research. Although huge interest was shown it was clear that organisations in the industry are not keen to divulge information that might negatively influence their competitive advantage. The use of a questionnaire was determined by a lack of data concerning the furniture supply chain in South Africa as well as the furniture supply chain internationally.

3.2.4 Analysis of data:

This was conducted by comparing the responses of the various respondents. The questionnaires were firstly presented to the interviewees and after completion an in depth discussion was conducted to highlight certain issues and enlighten other.

A definite flaw in the procedural design is that, due to a lack of sensitive information on the supply chain and the organisations interviewed, a misconception concerning the state of supply chain management in South Africa can be created. Although the personal experience of the author indicated the reverse the reader must be aware that discrepancies might occur. The second criterium that may be levelled is that the sample was not big enough and therefore not representative of the entire industry. The industry is, however, largely owned by four groups, these being the JD-Group (Russells, Joshua Doore, Bradlows, Giddy's & Score Price 'n Pride), the Relyant Group (Furniture City, Beares, Lubners), Profurn (Morkels, Protea) and Lewis

Stores, a non- listed organisation. The research was, therefore, able to cover the philosophy guiding these organisations and in essence incorporate the driving forces behind the holding companies.

3.3 Conclusion

The research into the one field, supply chain management, where extensive improvements are possible are, to say the least, in the embryo stage. Furniture organisations are currently poised at the edge of new paradigms and business processes that can dramatically improve the performance of these organisations. Continuous research into the supply chain for furniture retailers are needed. The research should include bigger samples and more intense dissecting methods in order to analyse the organisations in more detail and thus be able to advise on specific action steps.