‘SELLING’ TO INDUSTRIAL BUYERS

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ABSTRACT
The overt purpose of this paper is to examine the role of selling in business to business markets. To this end, the development of the industrial buying and selling literature is examined via the development of the buying centre concept and the IMP. The covert purpose becomes to propose a link between the subsequent denial of the role of emotion (‘non-task’ behaviour) in the purchasing literature, and the denial of a role for the unique, and unpredictable, contributions that individuals make.

A theme that emerges is the number of topics that the post buying centre literature avoids; the roles of friendship; personality and charisma; hospitality and corruption; and individuals placing career before company.

It is finally suggested that ‘individualism’ in industrial buying is an inevitable form of ‘organisational slack’. 

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1. INTRODUCTION

Underpinning the literature on how industrial organisations buy is the assumption that industrial purchasing is a rational, normative, iterative process. The literature has subsumed the more personal, individual process of ‘selling’, adopting instead the concept of ‘industrial marketing’ or ‘key accounts’. There appears to be agreement that the traditional techniques of selling – pitching, negotiating and closing - are relevant only to personal selling (Ford et al. (1998:278); industrial selling is lengthy, complex, logical and process driven, and therefore devoid of the vagaries of personal performances.

The intention of this paper is examine the treatment of selling in two industrial purchasing literatures: those of the buying centre and the IMP. The former treats purchasing as an internal matter, the latter as embedded in the organisation’s network position and external inter-linkages.

1.1 Business to business versus consumer selling

O’Shaughnessy, (1972:33) notes the longer term orientation of industrial selling, as does Rackham (1991) who goes on to note that. ‘Major sales… demand decisions of a higher order from customers, decisions which involve high levels of risk for the buyer, and which are often taken in the absence of the seller’. Turnbull (1990:78) notes the greater importance of interpersonal communication in industrial markets, attributing it to the need of both parties for greater volume and quality of information.

Lustgarten (1975) has pointed out that industrial buyers unlike consumer buyers are not ‘atomistic’. His study of the impact of buyer concentration particularly in manufacturing adds the perspective of buyer differentiation, in the sense that industrial markets are often small enough for individual transactions to be important. ‘In general, fewness of buyers indicates that the quantity taken by each purchaser has a significant influence on market
price. Oligopsony, analogous to oligopoly, would make buyers conscious of the potential impact of their own bids to purchase on the bids of other buyers (Lustgarten, 1975:126). The significance of his observation in this context is that it adds a heightened appreciation of the stakes involved in business to business marketing. Hakansson, Johanson, & Wootz, (1977) similarly note that in such markets there are commonly small numbers of large, important customers and that therefore they cannot be treated as undifferentiated. This logic leads Bonoma and Johnston (1978) to a precise conclusion. ‘Because of the importance of each industrial buyer, the purchasing agent is often reached through the most effortful and cost-intensive of marketing moves, personal selling’.

1.2 Emotion and industrial purchasing

In consumer marketing, the generation of emotion in some instances of the buying process is recognised, for example in ‘distress’ purchases, and ‘pre and post purchase anxiety’. The presence of emotion in industrial purchasing perhaps reflects not only the underlying stakes, or risks involved, but also the human elements of person to person communication, trust, and commitment. Hakansson & Snehota (1995:118) suggest that, ‘A relationship is to a large extent built on personal contacts between people from buying and selling units or companies’. They reinforce the point later, ‘While treating companies as actors, it has to be kept in mind that they act through individuals. Their behaviour therefore reflects the constraints and mechanisms that impinge on the behaviour of individuals’ (1995:193).

Individual qualities of self respect, self esteem and self-preservation are involved on both sides of the buying decision. The stakes are high as selling is a ‘winner take all’ situation, with no prizes for second place. More formally it has been observed that in sales, ‘... the marginal return to a higher degree of aptitude is substantial (since a slight advantage in
salesmanship makes the difference between all of the sale or none of the sales’ Reder, cited in Siegfried, Blitz, & Round, (1995:284)

1.3 Research note
The literature that examines selling in industrial arenas appears to split broadly between American, survey based work, and IMP primarily case study based work. It should be recognised that both research approaches will differ in issues tackled, and the findings produced, however it is suggested that the interpersonal and dynamic nature of selling may present particular methodological, and particularly ethical, problems. Funkhouse (1984:17) notes that where academics have researched selling their findings have actually been of limited usefulness to people who sell for a living. ‘In general, empirical behavioural science is at a disadvantage in studying the selling process because selling is interpersonal and dynamic, and therefore it is inaccessible to accepted research methodologies such as surveys and experiments. Surveys can provide static descriptions of respondents’ beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, knowledge, and feelings regarding selling situations but cannot capture the dynamics of the process. Experiments must employ standardized messages and instruments for proper control and therefore apply better to mass communications than to interpersonal communications’.

2. BUYING CENTRES
The literature on buying centres originates with Robinson, Faris, & Wind’s (1967) model of industrial buying behaviour. The model of industrial buying that is most commonly referred to is Webster and Wind’s modification of the original in 1972 (a, b). This model has been proved to be very robust by numerous researchers; Jackson, Keith, & Burdick, (1984), Jackson & Sciglimpaglia, (1974). However this last pair of
researchers whilst concurring with the overall taxonomy of the model argued for increased attention to vendor influences, the subject matter of this paper.

The contribution of Webster and Wind’s general model was to provide a framework within which to examine the complex intra-firm industrial purchasing decision process. External influences are recognised, however, in the form of the environment, specifically, ‘environmental determinants of buying behavior’, but these are portrayed in the flow of the model as preliminary. The environment, which includes suppliers, appears as subject to mediation by the remaining sequentially ordered variables: organizational determinants of buying behavior; buying centre (group) interpersonal determinants of buying behavior; individual participants.

However much of this environment (government, trade associations, professional groups, other firms or social institutions) represents ‘givens’ for many buying organisations. In seeking to present a ‘generic’ model of how all organisations buy, Webster and Wind have had of necessity to downplay the unique factors that influence how ‘individual’ organisations buy. For many firms, vis a vis their competitors, much of Webster and Wind’s environment can be discounted as being shared by, and applicable to, all competing organisations. It could be argued that, in spite of the logic of the ‘internalisation’ of buying that the model is striving for, the most dynamic and proactive environmental determinant is likely to be the selling functions, (however named) of suppliers and potential suppliers. Such an interpretation is much closer to the adaptations and influence work of the IMP group.

To summarise, the assumptions within such a model are that: there is a sequential process that can be mapped; that the decision process is ostensibly rational; and that it is predominantly internal. It is likely that the focus of the model - mapping what is happening within the organisation - leads it to underplay the role of boundary spanning personnel, principally
purchasing and sales. Campbell (1990) made similar criticisms, suggesting the model’s complexity and attempted inclusiveness defeated its practical application. Evidence of the above assertion - that the focus of Webster and Wind’s model is internal - is provided by their own statement that the key element in organisational purchasing is the (internal) authority structure. The role for a supplier in such a model, is reactive rather than proactive.

The emphasis in the early buying centre work on the internal aspects of industrial purchasing (as opposed to the external, i.e. supplier influence strategies or later IMP work on network embedded relationships) drew upon a study by Strauss (1962). He focused on the fact that purchasing had lateral relationships with other departments. Such that, efforts to expand (or maintain) its role within the decision making process, had to be supported by political tactics, as the purchasing function itself, had no inherent hierarchical authority. A later influential study by Patchen (1974), in supporting the complexity of the internal decision making process reinforced the internal focus within the literature. Patchen found an average of 15 persons were mentioned by his respondents as having been involved in any way in each purchasing decision (1974:202), and overall found ‘strikingly little agreement’ on who had the most ‘influence’ on the purchase or the supplier. O'Shaughnessy, (1977), provides a necessary rejoinder, ‘Not all participants have an equal voice’.

2.1 The influence of Wind and Webster’s model on industrial selling
It is argued here that Webster & Wind had three major influences on subsequent work on purchasing, beyond the intended, that of developing the DMU concept. The first was the downgrading of the role and importance of individual sales personnel. The second was the professionalisation of purchasing by association. The third, providing a framework whereby, in concert with deductive methodologies, emotion,
sentiment and human 'cussedness' could be written (or factored) out of the buying process.

2.1.1 The death of the sales person

Wind and Webster were the start of a process that effectively 'writes out' the salesperson, substituting instead depersonalised 'marketing activity', Bonoma & Johnston, (1978:214) noted the phenomenon. 'By studying the purchasing agent or 'buying centre' within the buying organization it is felt possible to gain an understanding of the industrial buying process. The seller somehow gets left out of the process'. Another pair of early observers were Cunningham and White, 'This approach [Webster and Wind’s] surprisingly fails to emphasise the strong marketing influence of the supplier companies themselves' (1973/4: 191). In the IMP approach, the importance of supplier sales 'schemes', are downgraded by the blurring of buyer/seller, customer-supplier boundaries (Ford et al. 1998:278). The IMP approach disallows the ability of a scheming or manipulative supplier to direct a customer's business goals (1998:120-1), as 'master plans' are subject to the complex interactions of the wider network.

Whilst the model identifies critical variables, perhaps comprehensively, it does underplay the mediating effects on those variables of boundary spanning personnel. In reality, there is not an 'environment', there is an environment as perceived by external facing employees (principally purchasing), and as portrayed by sellers. Hakansson, Johanson, & Wootz (1977:323) recognise this limitation, in their work on supplier influencing strategies, that whilst buyers will see through deliberate inadequate information (lies), suppliers can instead manage perceptions through influence tactics. Heide and John (1990) came up against the methodological problems raised by this phenomenon of 'gatekeeping' boundary personnel, finding that firms typically establish one person as the focal point for a supplier relationship. 'Almost everyone else is involved on
only a partial basis.... In effect, the distribution of knowledge in this context renders an intra-firm multiple informant strategy virtually infeasible' (1990:31). From Heide and John's work (on OEM's) it would appear that in their sample at least, organisation's relationships, are heavily mediated by individuals.

Spekman, (1979), notes Purchasing's important role in the acquisition, importation and processing of information crucial to the firm's survival, but stresses the importance of perception and mediation. He states that a boundary role person '...is also a role sender - an influence agent - attempting to influence the decisions and behaviors of those individuals with whom he interacts'.

2.1.2 The implications of viewing purchasing as embedded in a decision-making unit: purchasing as a dispassionate profession

It is argued here that what actually happens in the post organisational buying model literature, the 'internal' model of purchasing, is that purchasing is embedded into organisational processes. By Patchen's study in the mid-70s, the role of individuals was swapped for demonstrating the internal complexity and multi-faceted nature of the buying decision. Acknowledgement of the role of vendors (vendor's agents: salespeople) was swapped for 'academic' debate about the relative role and importance of purchasing versus other (internal) departments, notably engineering: Jackson & Sciglimpaglia, (1974); Spiro, Perreault, & Reynolds (1977).

A relationship could be suggested between the increasing use of 'survey' data to research industrial buying and selling in the USA, and the removal of emotional issues from the research. A comparatively rare non-IMP, non-quantitative paper, (Leigh & Rethans, 1984), examined buying roles using cognitive script theory. However whilst their work appears to map out basic scripts in buyer/seller interaction, it could be argued, that they ignore their most important finding. In requiring groups of buyers to write down
exactly what they would do in an important negotiation with a
salesperson, they find that contrary to buyer training and everything
purchasing textbooks expound, the buyers opened on the major item price,
and then negotiated the 'extra' dimensions last. They do not examine why
such 'non-rational' behaviour should occur.

The argument suggested here is that the embryonic profession of
purchasing, flattered by attention from other academic disciplines, and in
need of legitimisation, was happy to ditch previous associations with
emotionality and sales person ingratiation (see Feldman and Cardozo,
(1969:79). Purchasing fled this reputation it is argued, adopting being
portrayed as a discipline critical to the overall effectiveness of the
organisation, and embedded firmly within it, legitimacy confirmed by
occasional 'lateral' conflicts with other departments. Better this
professional vision than as a clerical function of dubious origin and overly
friendly with the 'opposition' in the form of sales people. Such an
interpretation would appear to contradict certain observers’ views, which
find the buying centre concept a setback for the 'power' and internal status
of an individual purchaser. Brand states the viewpoint, that the popular
interpretation of the DMU concept, 'cuts the Buyer down to size,...'
(1972:25). The difference between the two opposing views rests on two
subjective assessments: firstly, of how much stable power and status the
purchasing function had achieved. Secondly, whether such status should be
externally based on suppliers’ perceptions, or internally based on legitimate
authority within the organisation.

Purchasing as a service to other departments, as buyer for other
departments, could not aspire to traditional professional independence.
Professions by definition are independent, not critically inter-linked with
that of another role, as were purchasing and sales. Evans (1968) had noted
that ‘role partners’ in other organisations tend to develop for those
functions that are on an organisation’s boundaries (such as purchasing). He
concluded that, therefore resulting behaviour in those boundary functions may not necessarily be based on the norms of the focal organization.

This assertion, of the need for distinctness to complement professional aspirations is partly because of the boundary spanning, and consequent exposure to external influences, nature of the purchasing function. However, as part of the drive for professional status purchasing could make two important breaks with the past. Firstly, to cast aside the previous close links with sales personnel (which would also appear to sever links to corruption, 'whim', and influence). Secondly, it could adopt an organisational role that could start the 'gentrification' process by embedding purchasing concerns as rooted firmly within the organisation, not a side show or appendage. The potential rewards being aggrandisement by association.

2.1.3 The de-personalisation of the buying/selling process
The original Webster and Wind model placed great emphasis upon non-task factors: personal values and needs, informal, off-the-job interactions, methods of personnel evaluation, the impact on the environment on values and 'norms'. They are also explicit that '...any given set of variables will have both task and non-task dimensions although one dimension may be predominant' (1972:13).

It is explicit then that individual sentiments, the role perceptions and expectations of individuals, and by implication, the capabilities of individuals, are a major influence within the organisational buying decision. After all, they concluded, 'In the final analysis, all organizational buying behavior is individual behavior' (1972:18). Bonoma and Johnston (1978:54) recognised this, '... the major factors influencing the industrial purchasing decision are social ones, not rational economic ones. Friendship and reputational factors are the two most often cited by experienced managers'.
Further proof of the emotionality prevalent in industrial purchasing is provided by Harland (1994:54), but from a different perspective, that of the training of purchasing agents, which has been (until recently), inherently adversarial. ‘However, there are severe doubts about the validity of the traditional assumptions about the ‘rational‘ industrial buyer. The buyer was encouraged to take an adversarial position to its suppliers using a variety of negotiation techniques to gain control over sales representatives (see for example England 1967, Westing, Fine & Zenz 1976 and Lee & Dobler, 1977) to gain the best deal …’. In part, Webster and Wind’s work can be seen as a reaction against the perceived corruption and emotionality of purchasing (Shoaf 1959, Sawyer 1959, cited in Brand, 1972).

Brand (1972) noted reciprocal trading which rarely appears in the literature, but which is known to occur. Two issues are intertwined here, the omission of subjects due to their nature, and the more subtle omission of subjects due to the research methodology issues they raise. Brand implies that only those involved ‘in the practical cut and thrust’ of the sales negotiations are likely to be aware of the ethics involved. (1972:42). There is also a non rational factor commonly labelled charisma involved, as Ramsey (1995:137) notes, which the individual buyer or sales person alone can employ. Charismatic individuals, ‘...appeal in some way to the personal psychological needs of individuals in exchange relations and, through the generation of personal wants, alter the attractiveness of the associated exchanges’ (1995:137).

It is suggested that the IMP approach does not explicitly acknowledge such issues as reciprocal trading, corruption, hospitality or charisma, preferring to lump them under the headings of routines and institutionalisation. From this perspective, the IMP world appears very prim, sober and detached, its boundary spanning personnel impassive, even-handed, impartial; no-one enjoys anything, no-one detests anything,
no-one puts self before company. More formally, there is not the organisational slack, 'payments to members… in excess of what is required to maintain the organization' that Cyert & March (1963:36) identify as an organisational necessity.

Three intertwined strands have emerged – depersonalisation and Bowdlerisation, the removal of the sales person (and supplier influence), and professionalisation. The next section seeks to examine in detail two contributory streams to this analysis: the unique features of boundary spanning roles and the downplaying of 'non task' factors in favour of organizational factors.

3. BOUNDARY SPANNING ROLES

Criticising the IMP approach for underestimating the role played by boundary spanning individuals may be seen as ignoring frequent references to individuals in the IMP literature, but it is argued that these are almost always at a strategic level. Ford (1990:54-5) writes 'The development of relationships can also be considered as a problem of strategy and organisation'. He points out that IMP research indicates that industrial companies are more likely to invest marketing resources at the operational than at the strategic level. Perhaps, he suggests, because of their more immediately apparent results: such that many companies are better staffed in the sales areas than more strategic areas such as market planning or development. An alternative view to Ford's is that sales organisations place greater value on boundary spanning personnel, as industrial sales (and perhaps relationships) are not simply a matter of 'strategy and organisation'. In a recent study in an industrial distribution channel, Zemanek (1997:65) reaffirms the importance not only of the individual but of the boundary spanning role.
The increasing network orientation of the IMP, and its grappling with managing within networks (Ford et al. 1997, 1998) to a large extent negates and explains away this paper's focus on individuals. However, it is perhaps still true to assert that it is at the level of the individual that an organisation could still dictate strategy through its 'own deliberations, choices and actions alone...' and not through ‘...the corresponding commitment, acquiescence, initiatives and counter-moves of others’ (Ford et al. 1998:275).

Perhaps this is the point to turn to a sales practitioner, owner of an industrial company. Reichard, (1985:129) tells us that, ‘...you must sell a buyer on the company and on the salesperson before any sale can be made’. He has very explicit company rules about respecting boundary-spanning roles. ‘Salespeople should not try and go around initial contacts. They need to work through purchasing agents and eventually gain access to the other decision-makers, with agents’ blessings’ (1985:128). Reichard has a sales programme that involves inviting potential suppliers to his firm’s base where they are wined and dined, he is explicit about the motives. ‘The trip to headquarters not only gives us the opportunity to sell other decision makers in a company on doing business with us, it also lets us make the initial contacts look good. These are the people who recommended the visit to the others, and we don’t let them down’ (p129). Afterwards, he is confident that one objective of the sales programme will have been fulfilled. ‘We have made the initial contact look good in the eyes of his or her superior’ (p131).

Reichard could not have done more to please the political purchasing aggrandisers of Strauss’s 1962 study. What he is recognising is the vital role that purchasing plays in feeding ‘perceptions’ into the targeted organisation. Pettigrew (1975) discovered intense manipulation of the information reaching decision-makers in a study of the purchase of a major computer system. Purchasing’s ability to influence internal perceptions, to
Qualify and disqualify suppliers (the ‘unofficial’ process of qualification is found in Cunningham and White (1977), and Luffman (1974)), is a major gatekeeping role for the entire organisation. We should note a symmetrical role and responsibility for sales personnel, in that they feed perceptions both forward to the customer and back, to their own organisation.

Turnbull (1990:81) examined the information flows between organisations, noting that personal contacts enhance the transfer of ‘soft’ information, and other IMP figures such as Cunningham and Wilson stress the importance of personal contacts. O'Shaughnessy, (1977) had argued there is more to such communication. ‘Of course ‘want goals’ and ‘beliefs’ do not always come along fully developed... It is because customers may be unaware of needs, have only a vague idea of the exact function to be performed, or have ill-founded or unsure beliefs that marketing persuasions and salesmanship have a role to play’. The IMP approach does not appear to allow for the ‘manipulation’ as opposed to ‘adaptation’ of information that can be used in sales interaction. Note for example Spiro and Perreault’s (1979) findings, that sales personnel use varying influence attempts, according to the situation and obstacles encountered in the sales environment (1979:350). However, Turnbull does stress that information exchange is enhanced face-to-face, and that evaluation takes place (1990:81).

The sales process is itself interactive, although there may be an underlying script based upon previous experience, however the performance itself can be improvisational. Ford (1980), wrote of buyer and supplier adaptations, but these were not at the level of the sales person’s interaction (although his use of the concept of ‘distance’ is relevant). Specifically, Ford does not appear to acknowledge individual sales peoples skills in ‘gently invading’ customers through the exchanges they have: sales people would attach much greater significance to ‘getting in first’ and ‘getting in early’. Blois (1997) draws out how much more unique the
exchange between salespersons and buyers is, by pointing to its potential to monopolise a relationship (to the advantage of the buyer, or more usually salesperson, as an individual with transferable skills). The response of suppliers is to overlay or duplicate the contact staff relationships. However, ‘This is difficult for the staff themselves and, more importantly, the customer may find such a high degree of contact irritating as well as questioning the costs so incurred’ (Blois 1997:380).

The point being disputed with the IMP approach (represented here by Turnbull) is the greater emphasis given here to the abilities of particular sales people to adapt, shape and formulate the buying organisation’s ‘need, market and transaction uncertainties’. To summarise this section, both purchasing and sales perform boundary-spanning roles, there are also purchasing situations that lend greater influence to these boundary-spanning roles. The role that purchasing plays in the qualification process can be manipulated (for whatever motives) due to its gatekeeper status. This process is paralleled in the sales person’s command (potential monopoly) of the relationship with the supplier. In the business world, industrial salespersons can change organisations, and their employers have to be aware of this. On one level, sales personnel manage their sales managers. Wall and Adams (1974:406) note sales people’s awareness of this, and their knowledge of their ability to feed insufficient or spurious information, into their own organizational system.

4. LOYALTY AND FRIENDSHIP

Whilst the management of impressions is associated with consumer marketing, Hersey, a psychologist, argues industrial sellers use it. He concludes that as a relationship is embarked on, seller tactics change from initial impression management to longer-term impression management, utilising extensive pre-call planning (1988:49-54). A view that Hakansson
& Snehota (1995:196), appear to support. 'Companies will be treated as actors not because of them having some unitary goal that makes monolithic the behaviour of the various individuals belonging to the company but mainly on the grounds that in business relationships companies are *attributed* [italics added] identities by those they interact with'.

The case for the importance of the individual in business to business marketing is supported by the stress placed by some on a sales person's ability to *lose* a sale; Funkhouse, (1984:23); Thompson & Evans (1969). Such writers argue that failing to understand the stage the buyer is at (rationally or emotionally) will lose the sale. The significance of this observation here is that it points to an interpretative ability on behalf of the [good] salesperson that is not acknowledged in addressing sales as an extension of marketing strategy. Thompson and Evans are recognising that sales personnel have to have the ability to think on their feet. Sales personnel – at their best are responsive, empathetic and interpretative: they rely on feedback. They do have scripts, but good sales personnel should be far more attentive to the dynamics of the encounter before them. Support for this view is found in the work of Spiro & Perreault (1979), on the salesman's use of influence with the customer. The case for spontaneity is suggested by the variations they found. Wilson (1993) emphasises the skills employed in complex sales (where the purchase will impact upon a range of processes within the buyer's organisation), in appreciating wide ranging need implications.

Evans (1964) investigated whether seller/buyer similarity influenced the sale (admittedly in consumer marketing). He found some evidence, but overall concluded that the successful sale was situationally determined by the interaction between prospect and salesman. The 'interaction' was more important than the particular characteristics of one or the other party to the interaction. Webster writing in (1968) rejected the existing three theories of selling effectiveness: the salesman's characteristics and traits, the
salesman’s actions, and the prospect’s needs. ‘...there are some complex ways in which salesman characteristics and actions combine with prospect characteristics and action to determine outcome’. The IMP agree with Webster’s dismissal of the stimulus-response school of selling in industrial markets (Brennan & Turnbull (1993:175)). However, the IMP approach does not seem to place the value upon the process of the sales interaction that Webster recognised in the face-to-face encounter. Finally, one should note both the commission/bonus reward structure used to remunerate representatives and the speedy turnover of unsuccessful representatives. These factors point to the sales role as more than administering in person, the ‘sales’ element of either organisations’ marketing or relationship strategy. Crosby et al. (1990) conclude that the cumulative effect of past sales is less a determinant of future sales opportunities than is the quality of the customer-salesperson relationship developed through previous sales interactions. Once again, the importance of the individual is re-asserted.

Many commentators have noted the presence of extensive loyalty in industrial markets, Cunningham & White found loyalty was further accentuated by the purchasing company’s need to achieve standardisation of ‘machines, spares and operator piece work rates’ (1973:194). Crosby, Evans & Cowles, (1990:71) note the important impact a sales person’s ‘account penetration or cross selling’ can have, creating economic investment in the relationship and higher switching costs. Elg & Johansson (1997:380) suggest that firms are more conservative in their relationships than a simplistic interpretation of opportunism or would suggest.

Closely related to loyalty is the issue of friendship. Hakansson, and Wootz, (1979:29) acknowledge that a certain supplier or buyer can work his way into a respective customer and in time develop a more favourable position compared with other companies. They do not mention friendship explicitly, but mention institutionalisation, that: ‘routines, ceremonies, and
even myths', evolve which simplifies exchanges (1979:31). However, Bonoma and Johnston (1978:54) observe that friendships maintained by purchasing agents are ‘... important and very often ignored or even denied in traditional treatments. ... [buyers]... frequently buy from supplier friends or individuals whom they get along with very well’. They suggest that instead of bypassing competitive bidding, a buyer may work with a ‘friend’ to get him competitive. ‘This may also involve writing specifications unique to the supplier friend’.

The practitioner Reichard develops another emotional angle on the buyer-seller relationship that does not appear in academic accounts, that of reluctance to end relations with existing suppliers: an emotional response. ‘No one likes to tell an existing supplier that he’s placing his business elsewhere. A prospect might want to do business with you, but he might resist breaking off with his present providers’ (1985:131).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The industrial marketing literature it has been argued, under estimates the importance of individual buyers and sellers as specific individuals. It is suggested that emotional responses should not be viewed as aberrations but as ever present and ever necessary inter-organisational slack. That is to say, within an interaction sellers adapt to specifics of the interaction, not to a marketing or relationship management strategy. Funkhouse (1984), summarises it. ‘Specific persuasion tactics and messages must arise out of the momentary situation’. The IMP view appears removed from this spontaneity, for example (Hakansson, et al. 1977:330) stress organization design in order to control the process of building up relationships with customers.

In rejecting a stimulus-response view of selling, (which Webster and Wind had also done, in 1972), it is suggested that the IMP approach and the
buying centre literature over sanitise and de-humanise the process. Pettigrew’s (1975:17) conclusions come to mind. ‘Generally, the results may be understood as a reaffirmation of the strain of thought … which emphasises the role played by ambition, competitiveness, status, security seeking and power in structuring the outcomes of industrial purchasing decisions’.

REFERENCES


