

The analysis of cooperation with designers in selected furniture companies

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Abstract: The article presents the results of research describing the characteristics of cooperation with designers during the new product development processes. The results of survey conducted among 75 furniture manufacturing companies were illustrated focusing on the frequency of using design services, factors determining the cooperation with designers and the ways of finding new designers/design studios. The obtained data was elaborated taking into accordance for example the size of the company and realization of the long-term strategy of design development within company.

Key words: design management, furniture companies, new product development process

INTRODUCTION

Modern business environment is characterized by permanent changes of requirements and expectations of users. Enterprises in order to achieve a long-term competitive advantage must modify continually the portfolio of the offered articles (Mruk and Rutkowski 2001, Rutkowski 2006). Thus at present more and more attention is paid to those strategic tools that can enable the company the differentiation of its products and gaining the competitive advantage on the market. Design is considered to be one of the most important factors influencing company activity in this field (Trueman, Jobber 1998; Gemser, Leenders 2001; Buil et al. 2005) and at the same time allowing enterprises to achieve a market success. Nowadays it is crucial for companies to pay much attention to processes of new product development.

The aim of the paper is to conduct and present an analysis for the characteristics of cooperation with designers during the preparation and development of new products in selected furniture companies focusing on the frequency of using design services, factors determining the cooperation with designers and the ways of finding new designers.

METHODOLOGY

The performed investigations comprised economic subjects located in Poland specializing in furniture production. The examined sample of enterprises was selected on the basis of a quota selection method. It was divided into layers according to the following criteria: the level of employment and the geographical structure. In this analysis data from 75 enterprises were examined. Investigations were conducted using the survey method and direct interviews conducted at furniture manufacturers located in individual regions of Poland. Collected data was analyzed statistically with the use of SPSS 16.0 and STATISTICA 8.0 PL software.

RESEARCH RESULTS

It was decided to investigate if the existing globalization processes, and connected with them easier and faster transfer of knowledge, human resources and capital have impact on the number of foreign designers working for Polish companies. In order to gather that information, the nationality of designers creating furniture in the studied companies was defined. The results of the performed analysis showed that 37% of studied enterprises employed foreign designers or design studios. The detailed analysis, conducted within the

companies employing foreign designers, revealed that this kind of investments was chosen mainly by big companies (fig. 1). However it is worth to highlight that this group of companies included also medium, small and even micro-companies.

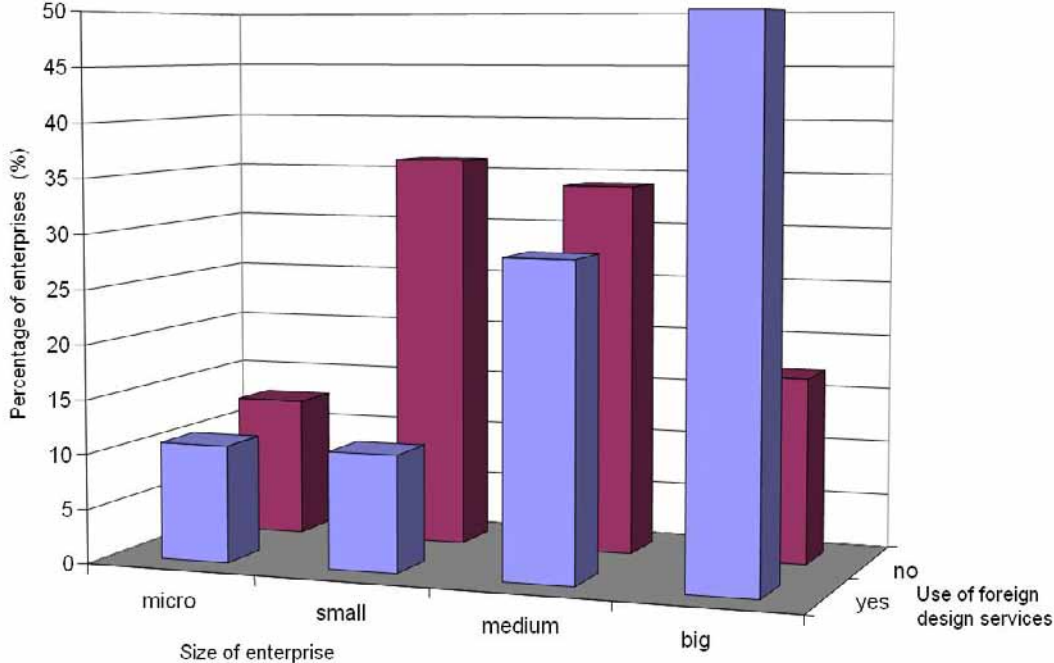


Figure 1. The structure of analyzed furniture manufacturers in terms of the enterprise size and their use of services offered by design agencies or foreign designers
 Source: Own elaboration based on conducted empirical research

Crucial information concerning characteristics of design cooperation can be drawn from the analysis of frequency of using design services. Designers were regularly employed to design furniture in 26% of studied enterprises, at the same time the similar number of units have never invested in design services (fig.2).

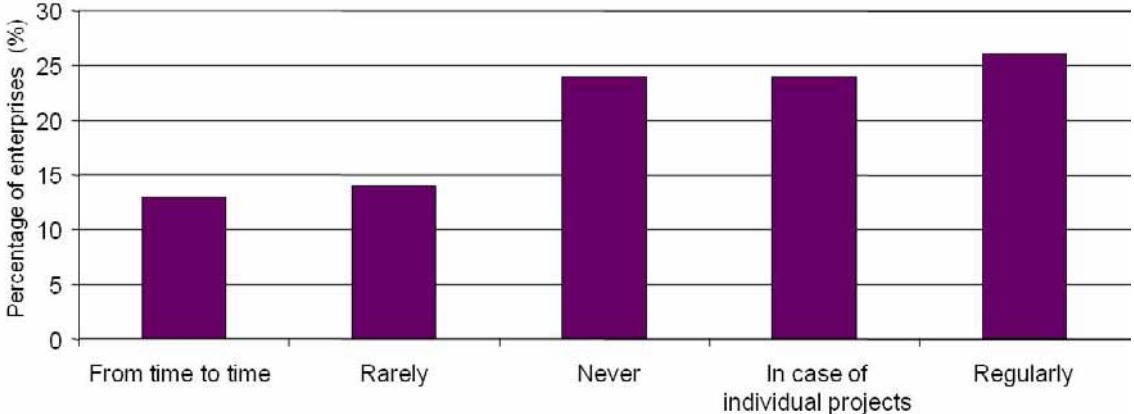


Figure 2. The structure of analyzed furniture enterprises depending on the frequency of use of design services
 Source: Own elaboration based on conducted empirical research

The detailed analysis of the situation showed that 50% of micro-companies doesn't use design services at all (fig. 3). A slightly different looks the studied aspect in small companies, since 32% of them regularly invest in employing designers. Quite surprising is the fact that 9% of big companies manufacture furniture without help of designers.

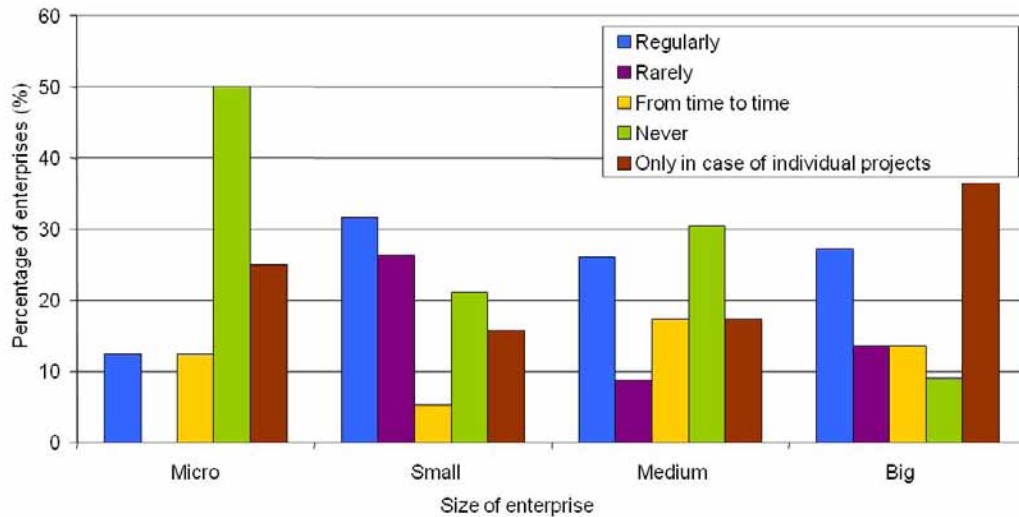


Figure 3. The structure of analyzed furniture enterprises depending on the enterprise size and the frequency of use of design services

Source: Own elaboration based on conducted empirical research

The relationship between frequency of employing designers and realization of long term design application strategy was also evaluated. To achieve this, the correspondence analysis was performed (fig. 4). Moreover apart from the mentioned variables, some additional points were taken into consideration. These points indicated variable describing the achievement of design award.

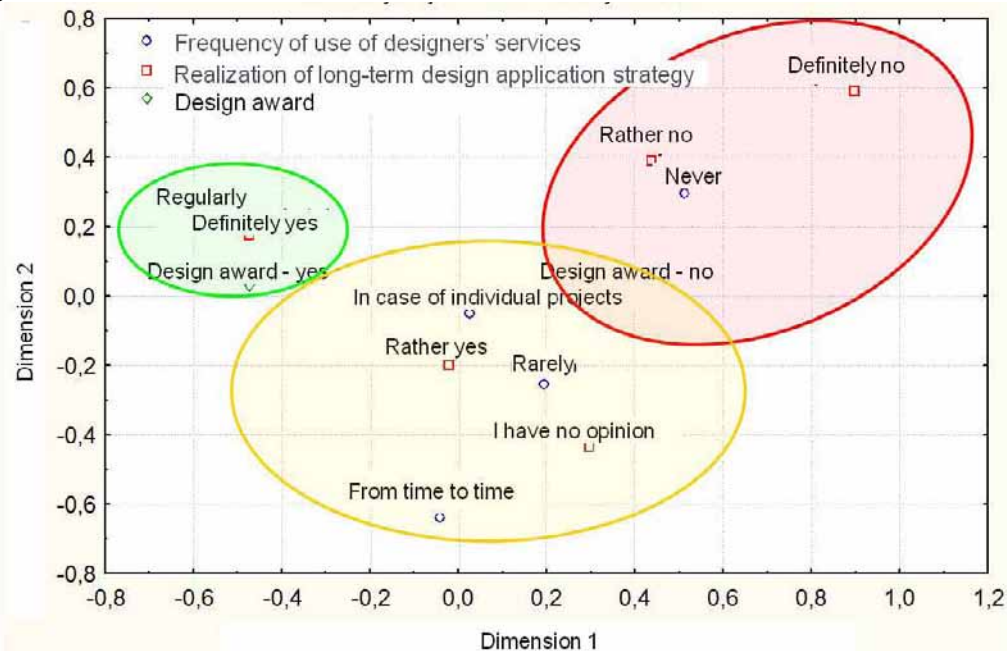


Figure 4. Presentation of results of correspondence analysis for the co-existence of variants of variables: frequency of use of designers' services and the realization of long-term strategy connected with design

Source: Own elaboration based on conducted empirical research

The coexistence of individual variants of discussed variables indicates the possibility of identifying 3 groups of companies. The first one consists of organizations realizing the design application strategy. The results of the analysis prove that in this group of enterprises, designers were regularly taking part in new product development process. Organizations belonging to this group were most likely to win awards for high design value of their products. In the second group there were companies which didn't have clearly defined vision

indicating the direction of design activity development in the enterprise (the answer” rather yes” and “it’s hard to say”). Managers of the described units didn’t have certainty concerning how often they should employ designers. These companies were using design services – from time to time, rarely or only in case of individual projects. The companies which didn’t have design strategy or vision of company development based on design activity constitute group number 3. In analyzed companies designers didn’t take part in the process of furniture creating. Taking into consideration the additional variable describing design award allowed to confirm that organizations belonging to the first defined group were the most likely to be awarded with the design prize.

For many years in Poland design was a subject that was forgotten and not very popular, that’s why there is a lack of tools enabling easier development of design activity in enterprises. One of such solutions is a data base of designers, containing data on individuals designing furniture, their portfolios and activities. With the use of such tool, companies looking for designers can easier and faster find the appropriate people. In Poland the professional data base of designers was elaborated among others in the Silesian Castle of Art and Enterprise in Cieszyn or by the Association of Industrial Designers. However the similar initiatives are still very rare. As it can be concluded from the performed research only 11% of companies used the designers database. Moreover some of them, were using the tool only to gather some information, but without the need to find a designer. Other producers, not using the database paid attention to the fact that there is a lack of information regarding application of this kind of solution. On the other hand some well known companies admitted that there was no necessity to use designer database since their working offers were very popular.

Despite the small number of companies using designers database it is worth to underline that this tool seems to be important for polish manufacturers (fig. 5). Even 69% of respondents admitted that creation of database in Poland is needed (the answer “definitely yes” and “rather yes”). On the other hand only 2 % indicated that the tool is useless, since they believed that a good designer in the value of a given company and she or he should work outside the company. However it need to be highlighted that this kind of opinions were very rare. The managers indicated instead that designers database makes contact with designer easier and enables fastening of the process of looking for appropriate individuals. Moreover the access to wide information about designers makes the decision making process easier, influencing at the same time on its quality.

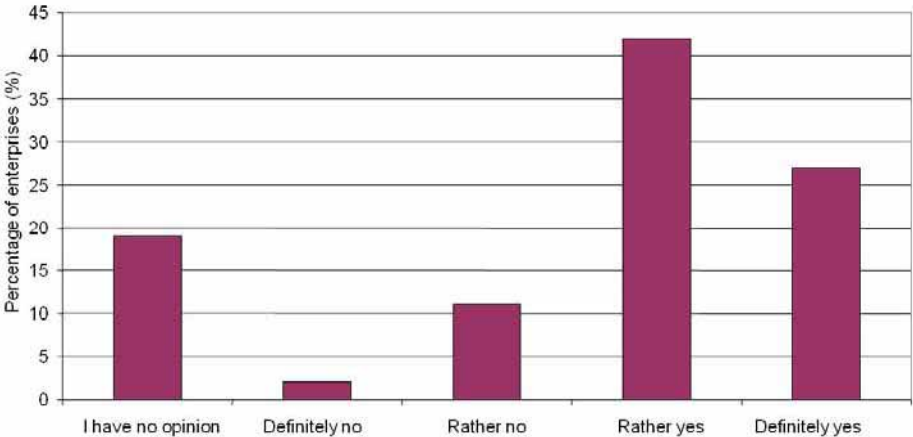


Figure 5. The structure of enterprises depending on the opinions of managers on the need to create a data base of designers

Source: Own elaboration based on conducted empirical research

The managers paid attention also to the usefulness of this solution not only for new companies, but also for these enterprises that intend to just start employing designers. These units don’t have numerous professional contacts or prior experience in working with designers. Often, they also don’t know how to find designer that will meet their requirement.

In described situation the chances that this activity will be a success are very little. Another very important aspect is that thanks to the use of database, the company can find new, talented designers, maybe still not so popular, which may become very valuable source of new ideas or even the brand mark of a given company. That's why the designer database is a good solution also for individuals looking for a job.

While analyzing the methods of finding new designers, it need to be mentioned that professional contacts were considered the most often used (fig.6). 84% of respondents decided on this form of activity. 16% of the studied companies were looking for designers giving advertisements. Only a few percent of enterprises asked design centers or technological centers for help in finding design studios or designers. The detailed analysis of the described variables indicated that all micro-companies were searching for designers only using professional contacts. Advertisements were used by mainly medium and big companies.

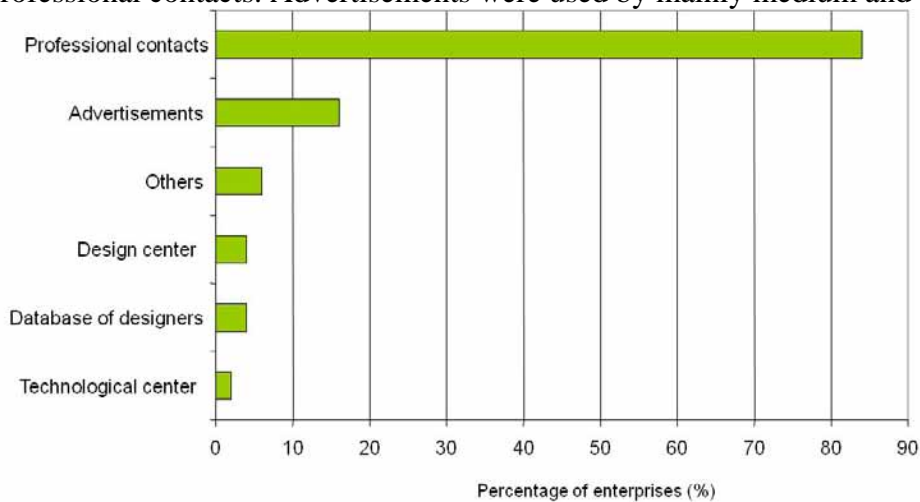


Figure 6. The structure of analyzed furniture manufacturers in view of the manner in which designers or design agencies have been found

Source: Own elaboration based on conducted empirical research

Important information concerning the cooperation with designers and applying design services can be drawn also from the analysis of decisive criteria determining the choice of designer/design studio. The results of performed research indicate that the strongest impact on the decision about choosing a designer has prior cooperation with a particular designer as well as the style of designer's works (fig.7). The price of design services was an essential decisive criterion for 37% of studied companies.

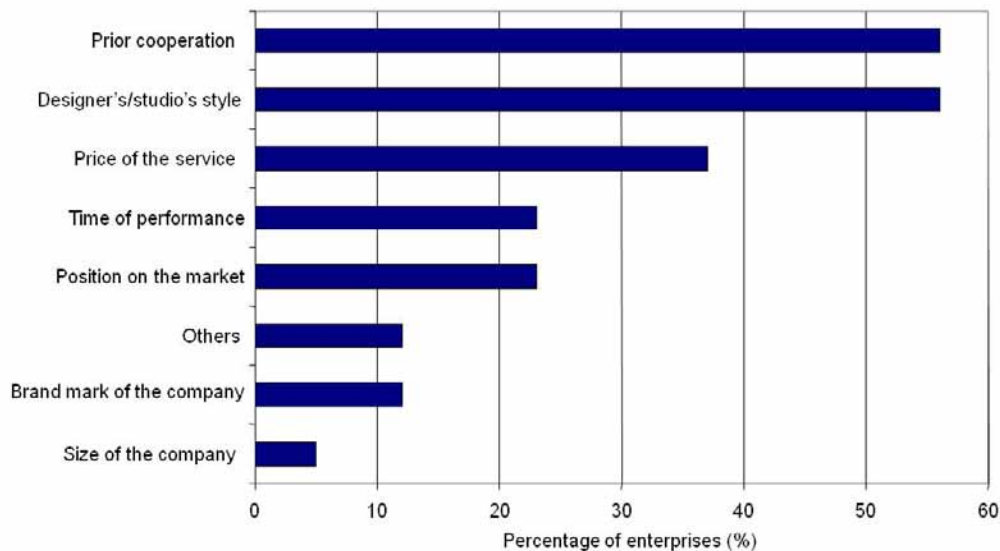


Figure 7. Decisive criteria when choosing a designer

Source: Own elaboration based on conducted empirical research

Micro-companies very making decisions about design studios based mostly on the position of a given design studio on the market as well as time needed to perform the task. The described criteria were also the most important for small companies. Big-size companies were paying attention additionally to the brand mark of design studio or designer's name. The managers indicated also that good cooperation and easy communication is very important and crucial while choosing the design company.

CONCLUSIONS

Summing up it may be stressed that in the conducted analyses it was shown that there is a need for a database of designers. This tool was evaluated as highly important for the development of cooperation with designers. Moreover the impact of the realization of long-term design application strategy on the frequency of using design services was confirmed. A considerable importance was found for the good cooperation, communication and common understanding as determinants of manager decisions connected with choosing and cooperating with designers.

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Streszczenie: *Analiza współpracy z projektantami w wybranych przedsiębiorstwach meblarskich.* Celem niniejszej pracy było przedstawienie charakterystyki współpracy z projektantami podczas procesu tworzenia nowych wyrobów w wybranych przedsiębiorstwach meblarskich zlokalizowanych na terenie Polski. Zaprezentowano wyniki badań przeprowadzonych wśród 75 przedsiębiorstw, zwracając uwagę m.in. na częstotliwości korzystania z usług projektantów, czynniki determinujące współpracę z projektantami, a także sposoby poszukiwania nowych projektantów/biur projektowych. Otrzymane dane zostały poddane analizie statystycznej, uwzględniając m.in. wielkość przedsiębiorstwa oraz realizację przez przedsiębiorstwo długofalowej strategii rozwoju wzornictwa.

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