

# Preface

This book examines how smaller manufacturing enterprises have internationalized their operations from 1974 to 2009, a period of 35 years. During these years, academic researchers and management consultants have discussed internationalization across many levels of management with little definition of what internationalization is and how it impacts managerial decision making. Few of these discussions concerning internationalization have involved a long-term look at the phenomenon. In addition, most of these discussions have generally focused on larger enterprises that led the internationalization efforts. Only a few researchers and consultants have considered smaller manufacturing enterprises and the fact that many of these enterprises were forced to internationalize their operations.

Many of the smaller enterprises that, over time, were required to enter the competitive world of international markets are manufacturing their own unique products, contributing to the development of new technologies, and introducing major innovations that help their large customers compete more effectively and efficiently in the global marketplace. Smaller manufacturing enterprises are unique; they tend to operate in a single local environment subject to economic, political, and social conditions that give them a unique character. This is particularly true in the U.S. state of Wisconsin.

This book reports on the authors' special opportunity to follow a large number of smaller manufacturing enterprises in Wisconsin for over 35 years — an opportunity to study them from a distance and close up — by interviewing their managers and getting their responses to a series of surveys. With willing managers of Wisconsin smaller manufacturing enterprises, we discussed how they make decisions, how they plan, what strengths and weaknesses they have, and how they look at

the outside world of international markets. They willingly cooperated by contributing their time and we thank them. They want to remain anonymous in order to protect the identities of their enterprises.

For many of these managers, their primary focus was on manufacturing a quality product at a competitive price. They are engineers, scientists, or entrepreneurs who started their enterprises because they believed that they could contribute something to society. They also believed that they had something new to offer and that they could stimulate industrial progress. Many of them have done just that. Sometimes, they complained that academics and consultants do not understand them. They are not just any small- or medium-sized enterprise; they are different because they manufacture real and significant products.

Internationalization of their operations is frequently not considered as a mainstream management issue. Smaller manufacturing enterprises are concerned with engineering and scientific issues that require rational and objective decision making. For many of them, internationalization is a secondary concern that surfaces only when environmental conditions around them change — when competition forces them to sell their products in foreign markets or to source for supplies wherever they can purchase them economically.

The authors of this study had the opportunity to interact not only with Wisconsin smaller manufacturing enterprises, but also with similar enterprises in other countries — the Czech Republic, Denmark, and Sweden. It became clear early on that there are many similarities among smaller manufacturing enterprises in other countries.

However, one fundamental difference became clear in our information gathering: European managers tended to be much more open about their operations and strategies at the time of the interviews. The Danish and Swedish managers were much more willing to discuss complicated and sometimes challenging issues concerning their management styles, and we very much appreciate their openness. Both the Danish and Swedish research cases represent real companies and the managers' names. The Czech managers were more cautious, perhaps because they are relatively new to the ways of scientific research. We thank them all.

This research is not intended to be definitive on how smaller manufacturing enterprises internationalize their operations. Rather, we hope that it will provide an interesting look at how smaller manufacturing enterprises approach the world of international commerce, how they prepare themselves for it, and what really draws them into it. We hope that not only students of international management will benefit from our research, but that engineers and scientists will also gain a more comprehensive perspective on what it takes to internationalize their smaller manufacturing enterprises.