Matching food service products to consumer demands through product development alliances and modularisation - DTU Orbit (13/12/2018)

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An increasing number of meals are being consumed outside the home, and a new, interesting market for food producers are therefore emerging. However, meeting consumers’ demands, among others for quality, can represent a challenge, especially because producers are typically not involved in the composition of meal solutions and, therefore cannot control all processing steps and interactions with other meal components. In this project, it is proposed that cooperation between food producers on product development (product development alliances) in relation to meal solutions can improve the quality of the end product (as perceived by the consumer) and that such interorganisational activities can be further supported by modularisation – a systematic approach to translating consumer requirements into product specifications. The working hypothesis is explored through four research questions. The first three research questions each relates to one of the main research areas quality, product development alliances and modularisation, and are partially answered through published, peer-reviewed papers. The final research question facilitates a discussion of the collective findings and perspectives. The research has generated the main conclusions described below. One important precursor for meal solution quality is that the producer sets product quality goals relevant to the consumer. Furthermore, the competences applied in product development and production have to be consistent with these goals. In the case of meal solutions, this is a complex task, because there are several food producers involved, who are responsible for different parts of the product, and who all have their own priorities in relation to quality and product development. However, the consumer bases his quality evaluation primarily only on the end product – the meal solution. The quality cycle is introduced as a conceptual tool to illustrate the challenges described above as well as the potential of product development alliances and modularisation as mediators within this frame. Product development alliances can facilitate coordination of quality goals for the meal solution and its components among food producers. Modularisation can ensure the appropriateness and operationalisation of these goals in relation to consumers’ requirements, thereby supporting the relevance of meal solution quality. From a food producer point-of-view, an important synergy effect is mass customisation – the ability to combine customisation to end-user needs with economies of scale. Furthermore, the ability to create more inimitable products while still focusing on core competences it is possible for food producers to influence. The empirical work has been performed in Denmark and draws on semi-structured interviews and reversed laddering sessions with product development managers in the food industry, as well as a case study of a product development alliance. This is supplemented by a questionnaire distributed to a larger group of product development managers (with the main themes food trends, meal solutions and product development alliances), as well as data from sensory studies of interactions between meal components. Apart from the quality cycle mentioned above, the research has generated the tools listed below to be applied both in a managerial and research context: • A typology for product development alliances that describes the links between and the complexity of the end product and partner interaction in new product development. The tool can form the basis for strategy discussions on a company’s current position and future goals. • A framework for product development alliances in the food industry that describes factors of importance to the formation and success of such forms of cooperation. • The Meal Composition Approach which exemplifies the potential of applying modularisation in relation to food products and, more specifically, meal solutions. The results of this research contribute to the knowledge base on product development in the food industry, mainly regarding quality, product development alliances and modularisation, and fill several gaps in the literature. Future research should focus on further documenting the applicability of the developed tools within the context of product development alliances in the food industry with a particular focus on meal solutions.