Given resource constraints, companies cannot afford improving everything at the same time. Strategic group membership can be a valuable means for understanding the impact of choices companies make regarding which practices to implement. A sample of 63 Danish companies was divided into four distinct manufacturing strategy groups based on their competitive priorities. The groups consisted of 1) those that had a very high emphasis on low price; 2) those that had the highest emphasis on quality, but also high emphasis on delivery reliability and some emphasis on price; 3) those with high emphasis on delivery speed and delivery reliability; and 4) those with high emphasis on design and innovation. The first three groups had been identified in previous studies, while the last group was new to research but not surprising given the geographical sampling frame of this paper and the emphasis of industrial design in Denmark.

Each of the strategic groups performed very well in the performance area identified as their main competitive priority. The most interesting findings pertain to the manufacturing practices emphasized by the strategic groups. The group emphasizing low price had the most emphasis on JIT, TPM, and TQM activities, perhaps implying that these companies need to focus on all three areas in order to perform well. On the other hand, those companies emphasizing delivery priorities had high emphasis on JIT, but relatively less emphasis on TPM and TQM. Surprisingly, the group emphasizing design and innovation had the best delivery speed performance, even though it was not strategically important, and poor quality, even though it was the second most important priority. The conclusion is that these companies may not be very good at executing their manufacturing strategy, and/or the framework historically used for analyzing manufacturing strategy may need to be refined.

The overall findings support prior research and also provide new insights about the manufacturing activities needed to achieve various objectives.