
Editorial

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Biographical notes: Dr. Hossein Sharifi is a Lecturer in E-business and Operations Management at University of Liverpool Management School. With a number of years of industrial experience he completed a PhD study in manufacturing strategy (agile manufacturing) at Liverpool University. He is also an Associate of the Faculty of Industrial Engineering at Iran University of Science and Technology, Tehran, Iran. His research interests are in the areas of 'Lean and agile manufacturing and systems including agile supply chain and operations management', and 'E-business strategies, models and systems including e-government systems'. Dr. Sharifi has led a few successful research projects including a pioneering work in the area of agile manufacturing as his PhD study, and Alignment of Supply Chains in the Liverpool University e-Business Research Centre. He is currently a grant holder in the UK collaborative project of innovation and productivity grand challenge and is leading a study into the UK University Technology Transfer Offices. Dr. Sharifi has published widely in these areas some of which have received recognition and highly referenced.

One of the most significant challenges facing today's industry, in both fields of manufacturing and services, is how to compete in the future globalised and constantly changing markets. The issue in many ways has become of political significance for national economies and a significant challenge for businesses. It is now widely recognised that multi-disciplinary research and thought with a global perspective is needed in this area to identify the path to success and prosperity. The answer on how to respond to future challenges and proactively shape the future seems to lie in providing and possessing dynamic capabilities, a characteristic which in many circles is now known as Agility. For this to happen, the context, content, and processes for agility should be explored, understood and the relevant requirements addressed and satisfied.

The candidate field to examine the major challenges and find ways for future business improvements is the 'supply chain' which is now recognised as the unit of competition in business.

The main issue to resolve is creating the ability and intent to respond successfully and in a timely manner to changes in the internal and external business conditions by relying on an advanced knowledge base. The challenge may be addressed by rethinking the business models to reflect the forces in the business environment, developing further the physical supply chain structure and technologies for communication,

information sharing and knowledge flows between and across stakeholders, developing ways of understanding the complexity of the processes, organisational interactions, behavioural patterns and interrelationships of human agents and the systems, and so on.

This special issue of the *International Journal of Agile Systems and Management* was intended to provide yet another venue for academics to project their thoughts, ideas and experience on how emergent circumstances in the global business environment should be understood, analysed and responded to. Six papers have been accepted from the contributions to this special issue. The papers cover a relatively wide span of issues from literature based study of important research issues for Agile Supply Chain (ASC) to evidence based views on implementing ASC and to mathematical solution for addressing uncertainty in the operations. The first paper by Mathiyalakan brings together the existing literature on agility and ASC to unravel some key issues contributing to the concept of ASC which could be a reference guide for researchers in this area. The second paper by Ismail *et al.* reports a novel attempt to apply the concept of agility to the construction sector which is not a typical candidate for embracing the concept. Sun *et al.* then propose a much wanted framework for assessment of supply chain agility and how it can support the development of supply chain strategy. The model is also examined in an Aerospace supply chain to prove the concept and its practicality. Paper by Iskanian *et al.* also provides evidence from a major case study of ASC in a steel manufacturing supply chain by making reference to established models of agility and ASC. The fifth paper represents Fathian and Fekri's attempt to examine the concept of agility and the impact of Information and Communication Technology and Systems on firms' agility in a developing economy, which also suggests agility as a conclusive concept pertaining to any circumstances. The last paper by Ravi Shankar turns to a technical approach to provide mathematical solutions to the complex process of decision-making in the management of customer services in an uncertain business environment.