
Editorial

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Biographical note: Ramakrishnan Ramanathan has taught basic and advanced courses on Operations Management, Supply Chain Management, Optimisation Theory, Data Envelopment Analysis, Simulation, Energy and Environmental Economics, Transport Economics, among others. His research interests include operations management, supply chains, and, economic and policy analysis of issues in the energy, environment, transport and other infrastructure sectors using techniques such as optimisation, decision analysis, Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) and the analytic hierarchy process. He has authored two books, one on Indian Transport and another on DEA. His research articles have been accepted and appeared in several prestigious journals such as *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*, *Int. J. Operations & Production Management*, *European Journal of Operational Research*, *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *Energy Policy*, *Journal of Environmental Management*, *Transportation Research*, *Socio Economic Planning Sciences*, *IEEE Transactions on Systems, Man and Cybernetics*, and *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*.

Agility is an increasingly important requirement for organisations to stay ahead of competition and survive in the modern competitive market place. Agility is the ability of organisations to thrive and prosper in a competitive environment and to respond quickly to rapidly changing markets and customer needs. Flexibility to cope with uncertain demand and responsiveness to meet demand fluctuations are essential requirements of agile organisations. This is often achieved by designing elastic structures and capabilities to adjust with changing market conditions (Adeleye and Yusuf, 2006). Agile performance often goes beyond individual organisations as the agility of individual organisations is affected but could be complimented by supply chain partners (Swafford, Ghosh and Murthy, 2006). Agility is also closely related to the concept of lean manufacturing (Katayama and Bennett, 1999). More often, studying the performance of an agile organisation or supply chain helps in increased clarity at the conceptual level leading to newer and innovative strategies for improving agility.

This special issue focuses on the performance and strategy aspects of agile organisations and supply chains. It features five papers on this theme. Fashion industry provides a perfect setting where agility could offer a definite competitive edge. Agility issues of this industry are the subject of the first paper of this special issue. This paper by Fujita develops a quantitative framework to model agile strategies in organisations working in the fashion industry. Optimal stopping theory is used to identify product

introduction strategies. Using suitable assumptions, a mathematical programming model is developed that maximises the net present value to a retailer of regularly introducing products into the market. The maximisation problem is then solved using calculus and with the help of a graphical approach. Certain useful properties of the resulting optimal agile strategies are explored further, and illustrated using a simple numerical example. The framework developed in this paper could provide a foundation to more complex analysis and to different industries.

The next three papers adopt case study approaches to identify the roles of different components of organisations/supply chains in improving agility. Information Technology (IT) is often seen as an enabler of agility by providing flexibility and responsiveness in many industries. The role of IT, especially in globalisation context, is explored in Paper 2 by Ekman and Angwin using a quantitative survey research methodology. They have found that IT is a strong enabler of strategic agility in software and services sector, and its role varies in other sectors. They have also found that the effects of IT varied more across sectors than across regions. Given the complexities associated with information requirements, automation and sophistications developed in today's supply chains, the role of human capital in acquiring the knowledge required to handle them for improved agility becomes very critical. This aspect is explored in detail in Paper 3 by Butcher through exploratory case studies. He has found evidence for the critical role played by knowledge workers in contributing to the adaptability, responsiveness, agility and resilience of supply chains. Procurement is an important component affecting agility of organisations/supply chains. The impact of innovative procurement policies in improving the agility of a public sector supply chain in the construction industry is presented in Paper 4 by Khalfan and Oyegoke with a case study of a local council.

Paper 5 from Towill and Christopher analyses the role of the related concepts of agile and lean, and the decoupling point between the two in different business environments. Drawing on their past experience and literature, they compare and contrast the two concepts, and develop a theory linking the two. They conclude that applicability of the two concepts (or their combinations termed as agilean or leagile) to design of the supply chains is contingent upon specific demand and supply conditions.

Papers in this special issue were refereed by at least two reviewers, and have gone through at least one round of modifications. I wish to thank all of the reviewers for their contribution to the review process. I hope that the review process has been beneficial to the authors whose manuscripts have not been accepted for publication. Finally, I would like to thank the Editor-in-Chief of this journal, Professor Yahaya Yusuf, for inviting me to edit this Special Issue.

References

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