Editorial

Britta Gammelgaard

Copenhagen Business School,
Solbjerg Plads 3,
DK 2000 Frederiksberg,
Denmark
E-mail: bg.om@cbs.dk

Supply chain management is about organising, designing and controlling material and associated information flows from raw material supplier to end-user. The purpose of these activities is to meet customer requirements for bringing the right product to the right place, in the right quality and the right amount at the right time. These logistics virtues are the basis of supply chain management, which includes issues of building relationship across the supply chain in addition to logistics. The purpose of these activities is efficiency and effectiveness for the supply chain as a whole. In order to fulfil these goals, coordination of supply chain activities across internal business functions as well as company borders is necessary. Collaboration, information sharing, integration and long-term commitment are considered as prerequisites for efficient and effective supply chain management.

Supply chain management has become increasingly important with the globalisation of industry. First, the ever more geographically disperse production systems require integration of sourcing, production and distribution activities, often on a global basis. This takes substantial supply chain management skills. Furthermore, globalisation has contributed to an increased significance of time and place as competitive weapons in industry. To be first with new products globally may be of major importance for survival in the longer run. And as the time and space parameters are the very essence of supply chain management, supply chain management consequently plays a larger role now than before. This development is reflected in new business models focusing on bringing products to the customers in new, innovative and efficient ways. One such business model is the so-called agile supply chain (Christopher, Lowson and Peck, 2004), which is built on the case of the Spanish fashion retailer Zara, which markets new collections more than 12 times a year. This has become possible via new information technology and flexible supply chain partners. Dell Computers' business model has also become widely known as a new way of reaching customers directly via the internet, thereby circumventing the traditional retail sector (Margretta, 1998). This model is most often termed as mass customisation. It offers customers the possibility of co-designing, and thereby individualising, their product via the internet.

Today, the literature on supply chain management is, however, highly focused on structural issues, whether governance structures or structures of supply chain processes and networks. Only rarely are the actual change processes or processes that create change or innovation in supply chains the focus of attention. Furthermore, contemporary supply chain literature has huge difficulties in comprehending the people issue. The dominant

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open system's approach is most often understood as a rather mechanical system, focusing on links between organisational entities rather than the individuals actually running the systems. The aim of this special issue on supply chain learning and change is therefore to highlight and emphasise learning as a driver for supply chain change and development. To date, far too little work has been done within this area, which has huge implications for competition and profits in the longer run. This special issue will hopefully contribute to a focus on learning issues in an inter-organisational setting, and also place the topic higher on the research agenda within the discipline. The four papers selected for this special issue address inter-organisational learning and inter-company and individual learning in a supply chain setting. The papers are presented below. It is my sincere hope that not only supply chain management professionals learn from these papers but also they may disseminate knowledge of this highly complex and fascinating field to other management areas.

1 Learning to integrate: supply chains re-conceptualised

The authors of this intriguing paper, Clements and Sense, point out that the usual way of understanding supply chains as linear feedback systems is not well-suited to facilitating supply chain learning. Moreover, learning is seen as a driver for the necessary integration of processes that the supply chain discipline is recommending in practice. As an alternative, the authors propose an application of the model of the communities of practice to the field of supply chain management. This model is built on the theory of situated learning, saying that learning takes place in social interaction. In other words, situated learning means that learning is not primarily a matter of cognition, but rather a matter of cooperation and collaboration in various social settings. Such a social setting could very well be a supply chain, or a supply community, as the authors suggest we term this kind of community of practice. The outcome of the application of a supply community model is not only improvement of supply chain processes *per se* but also new and non-linear supply chain relationships, as the individual supply chain entities now relate to entities other than their immediate customers and suppliers. This could in itself be the basis for even more supply chain learning. The theoretical implication of applying this learning theory to supply chain management is thus a change in the basic notion of the supply chain.

2 Benchmarking operations to promote learning: an internal supply chain perspective

A driver for learning and change is benchmarking. Through the longitudinal case study of a benchmarking process in an internal supply chain, the authors of this article, Benton, Binder and Egel-Hess, present a model of a benchmarking-learning architecture suited to enhancing learning in supply chains. This model points towards several management processes and skills needed to implement change in supply chains. This provides a high-level of support for the recommendation given by Stock (1997) to apply new theories to the supply chain discipline, and it also emphasises the need for leadership and a focus on people processes.

3 Visualisation for systems learning in supply chains

Recent research on defining skills and competencies for the supply chain managers point out that supply chain managers need to be able to 'see the big picture', i.e. create mental models of supply chains and logistics flows. Lindskog, Abrahamsson and Aronsson, the authors of this article, propose a visualisation tool for creating such mental models of logistics systems. This tool assists and teaches the individual supply chain player to survey the increasingly complex logistics and supply chain systems caused not at least by globalisation. In a real-life setting, these authors propose that nobody can have a full overview of the consequences of various incidents and decisions made throughout the supply chain.

4 An innovative SCM programme structure: broadening the SCM skill set

Enhancement of the ability of seeing the big picture is also what this paper authored by Okongwu suggests as a necessary skill for the future supply chain managers. In the design of a new SCM programme, he therefore proposes a matrix programme structure focusing on vertical functional issues on the one hand and horizontal process approaches on the other. The proposal is based on a thorough literature review of the discussion of logistics and supply chain skills and competences as well as a comparative analysis of industry demands from SCM graduates. Surprisingly, the industry demand analysis did not show a significant difference in the way practitioners perceive logistics vs. supply chain management, which led the author to learn more towards the literature in the new design than he had anticipated. Interestingly, this article thus emphasises research as well as the role of educational programmes as drivers for learning and the future development of supply chain management.

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