HR and Behavioural Issues – Vital Tactics in Supply Change Management

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Abstract

The spectrum of supply chain is branded by a global spread in which communications and interactions are increasingly taking place through technology interfaces across multiple transacting firms viz. suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, and retailers which pose complex management issues and challenges. Current literature on supply chain management focuses mainly on logistics, operations, information technology, and marketing. There is dearth of research in the human resource management, or the "people factor" in supply chains. Strategic management of the human resources is important to contribute to the overall performance of the supply chain and therefore the entire organization. Thus, the present paper makes contribution by examining the ways in which human resource management relates and contributes to supply chain management and functioning. It highlight the effects of organizational culture on supply chain collaboration, workforce diversity in the supply chain, competency profiles of successful supply chain professionals; skills, capabilities and other job requirements for employees working in the supply chain; supply chain behaviour / employee attitudes and their correlates in the supply chain; gender differentials; leadership in the supply chain; training and development of effective supply chain professionals/ trainers; customer service; and managing change in supply chain.
Key Words: Supply Chain Management, Human Resource Management, Behavioural Issues.

Introduction

Whilst putting a glance on today's workplace scenario it is evident that business globalization has triggered the need to search for the right human resources to drive lean organizations forward and sustain business performance in dynamic market situations. Supply chain management involves the planning and management of all activities involved in sourcing and procurement, conversion, and all logistics management activities (Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals, 2007). The supply chain environment is characterized by a global spread in which communications and interactions are increasingly take place through technology interfaces. It is said that all work in the supply chain function takes place outside the direct vision of any supervisor (Bowersox, Closs, & Cooper, 2000). Interactions across multiple transacting firms (namely suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, and retailers) pose complex management challenges.

Therefore, supply chain function in organizations has evolved significantly and become quite uncertain and complex in recent decades as a result of globalization and technological changes. At the same time, efficiently and synergistically managing the supply chain can be a considerable, untapped source of competitive advantage (Ketchen & Hult, 2007). Effective management of the supply chain therefore demands excellence in managing its human resources. Strategic management of the people that work in the supply chain is important to contribute to the overall performance of the supply chain and therefore the entire organization.

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There is plethora of research available with the supply chain management literature on the typical areas viz. logistics and operations fields, information systems, information technology, and marketing. Further, focussing on the fact that supply chain management accentuates the efficient and effective flows of materials and information within and between the organizations; there is dearth of research in the field of human resource management, or the "people factor" and the behavioural issues in supply chains.

The present paper makes contribution by addressing the entire range of HR and behavioural issues including leadership geared specially towards the supply chain to better understand the unique behavioural characteristics and the role it plays in broader organizational effectiveness and competitive advantage. It highlights the effect of organizational culture on supply chain collaboration, workforce diversity in the supply chain, competency profiles of successful supply chain professionals; skills, capabilities and other job requirements for employees working in the supply chain; supply chain behaviour/ employee attitudes and their correlates in the supply chain; gender differentials; leadership in the supply chain; training and development of effective supply chain professionals/ trainers; customer service; and managing change in supply chain.

At the outset, it is important to examine the ways in which human resource management relates to supply chain functioning. From the researches done so far, we can see two types of relationship between human resource management and supply chain management. Primarily, it i the application of current human resource management theories and practices within firms in the management of their supply chains, which also includes organizations that rely upon their supply chains as a source of competitive advantage. Secondly, the deliberation of human resource management activities across firms in a supply chain, which requires the supply chain partners of the firms to adopt certain HR best practices, and the voluntary reconfigurations of HR practices so as to facilitate productive relationships across organizations and Industrial establishments (Koulikoff-Souviron & Harrison, 2007).

Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals asserts that Supply Chain Management encompasses the planning and management of all activities involved in sourcing and procurement, conversion, and all Logistics Management activities. Importantly, it also includes coordination and collaboration with channel partners, which can be suppliers, intermediaries, third-party service providers, and customers.

Supply Chain Management integrates major business functions and business processes viz. logistics Management activities; manufacturing operations; drives coordination of processes and activities with and across marketing, sales, product design, finance & information technology in order to transform the business model into a more cohesive and high performing one.

The supply chain function has developed from concentrating only on the individual parts of the supply chain like storage and transportation to an active integration with the full supply chain, and also its role has shifted from being a common cost centre to a complicated strategic competitive role.

Recent Trends in Human Resource and Behavioural issues in Supply Chain Management

Amidst an ever changing global scenario, international market and trade, global security, global economy, border-crossing requirements etc. impact the supply chain sector, and are expected to continue to do so over the coming years. The factors in strategic HR that affect supply chain operations include increasing complexity; financial/cost pressures; increasing speed and quality

expectations; organizational culture; workforce diversity in the supply chain; competency profiles of successful supply chain professionals; skills, capabilities and other job requirements for employees working in the supply chain; supply chain behaviour/ employee attitudes and their correlates in the supply chain; gender differentials; leadership in the supply chain; training and development of effective supply chain professionals/ trainers.

Considering the fact that, increased customer expectations in terms of speed and quality, and enormous pressure from competitors place an increased focus on competency profiles, skills, capabilities of successful supply chain professionals; and customer service. As a result, the association between supplier effectiveness, supply chain performance, and customer service has become crucial, and suppliers need to improve their collaboration with retailers and customers in order to respect instantaneous delivery requirements.

The ever changing complex technological advancements are the important gizmos for a company to respond to ever-increasing customers' demands. Small and medium-sized organizations cannot often afford the latest advanced technologies required to remain competitive in their respective markets and often end up with acquisition and mergers. Consequently, there has been a pervasive increase in the number of outsourcing services, as well as their dependence on contemporary information system services.

Leaders and successful supply chain professionals who are driving forces behind managing supply chain behaviour/ employee attitudes and their correlates in the supply chain and the resulting information management requirements are identified as key business drivers currently impacting the supply chain function.

The present paper throws light to the following trends in Human Resource Management in Supply Chain.
- The effect of organizational culture on supply chain collaboration
- Workforce diversity in the supply chain
- Competency profiles of successful supply chain professionals
- Skills, capabilities and other job requirements for employees working in the supply chain
- Supply chain behaviour / employee attitudes and their correlates in the supply chain
- Gender differentials
- Leadership in the supply chain
- Training and development of effective supply chain professionals/ trainers
- Customer service
- Managing change in supply chain

The Effect of Organizational Culture on Supply Chain Collaboration

Organizational culture and the education and training of employees must be taken into consideration to facilitate supply chain collaboration and success. An organization's culture is a combination of many influencing factors like nationality, type of industry, the task the organization performs, the people working in the organization, and information technology. There are two dimensions that are critical to an organization's functioning and survival as well as connected to an organization's culture i.e., a firm's information technology and people using that technology. Each organizational member of a supply chain brings to the coalition a unique culture. These various chain-member cultures are akin to sub-cultures that exist within many large firms in their various internal functions viz. manufacturing, engineering, and purchasing. Consequently, the differences in organizational cultures can either be a bridge or a barrier when supply chain partners form an association.

Additionally, the firms' cultural compatibility is very important and must be deliberated in the supply chain collaboration, because those chain cultures directly and indirectly affect supply chain performance. The employees of any organization or industrial establishment can be equipped with the necessary skills and vision of educating one another through knowledge and skill sharing only after supply chain personnel gauge the compatibility of the potential chain partners and form supply chain alliance.

Organizational Culture as a Supply Chain Facilitator

Fawcett, Magnan, and McCarter (2005) interviewed 51 senior−level supply chain managers across five channel positions and concluded that that management of people is crucial to supply chain integration, and is improved through an accommodating organizational culture. Senior management has the responsibility to cultivate a work environment where experiment, take risks, and solve problems; and where constant, life-long learning and the sharing of knowledge is the expectation. Although information gathering and sharing is important for a supply chain to sustain effective operations, it is the gathering and sharing of new knowledge that allows firms to remain competitive, and ultimately the supply chain to remain competitive. If individual supply chain partners are not able to change information into knowledge and manage knowledge flow, then the supply chain alliance will not be able to produce the synergy necessary to effectively compete against other supply chains. To have such a synergistic environment, managers must be able to work with and leverage their employees so that information is transformed into processes and knowledge learned and shared.

Workforce Diversity in Supply Chain

Workforce diversity refers to the makeup of the employees who work within the facility. Diversity in the workforce can include gender, ethnicity and age, as well as other identifiable demographics. Bordas (2008) reported that with companies now employing people of every race, nationality, religious background, and age group, she says, it is good business practice to incorporate the practices and values of diverse cultures in a respectful and productive manner. Bordas (2008) further concluded that multicultural leadership encourages an inclusive and adaptable style that enables a wide spectrum of people to actively engage, contribute, and tap their potential.

Alston (2012), the executive director of workplace diversity for Johnson Controls reported that companies which show a commitment to workforce diversity have a competitive edge as its indicative of the alignment with their company values. More recently, Layton executive director of Supplier Diversity at Johnson Controls (2012) asserted that one is more likely to win the customer's business, if there is commitment to diverse supply chain. For example, IBM's have an incredible history of maintaining a diverse supply chain. Four years before the establishment of the National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC), the company established a global supply chain diversity program in 1968 followed by the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) 29 years before. Being the first IT company to conduct more than $1 billion of business with diverse suppliers in the U.S., IBM set an example that fostering diversity is the right thing to do for the business as well the society. A diverse supplier foundation not only provides talent, it also inserts stability throughout the supply chain and promotes economic growth in local communities as well.

Skills and Competency Requirements for Successful Supply Chain Professionals

Supply chain management aims at controlling the upstream and downstream relationships with suppliers and customers in order to deliver superior value in the market finally at least cost to the supply chain as a whole. In this regard, T-shaped' manager model is gaining acceptance for defining the skills and competencies of supply chain professionals in the whole supply chain process.

A T-shaped leader has a specific functional specialisation i.e., background in inventory management and also has a strong understanding of the different activities that take place across the end-to-end supply chain process. To be a successful supply chain professional, team leader must also have an understanding of all the other activities that are involved in converting an order into cash. Therefore, the supply chain integrator must have the technical know-how of the relevant information systems technology, costing tools such as Activity Based Costing, and appropriate planning frameworks such as Sales and Operations Planning (S&OP). In addition, he must be capable of recognising and managing the sources of complexity in their supply chain; and must also have an understanding of the tools and techniques of the recent Business Process Re-engineering and Six Sigma methodologies.

Murphy and Poist (1991, 1994) suggested that the senior-level logistics manager needs to be proficient in three skills categories namely: business skills, logistics skills and management skills. In their survey of executive search firms, logistics practitioners and logistics educators, management skills emerged as the most important of the three categories, followed by logistics skills and then business skills.

Gammelgaard and Larson (2001) posited a three-factor model of SCM skill areas for executive development and other programmes aimed at logistics managers: interpersonal/managerial basic skills, quantitative/technological skills, and SCM core skills. They also stressed the importance of good communications skills for today's logisticians, both upward and downwards communication within the organisation, as well as being able to communicate across functions and organisations so as to coordinate SCM. The consensus view across studies of supply chain managers would appear to be that respondents regard themselves as 'managers first and logisticians second' with requisite skills and competencies sets that comprise general management skills and competencies and specific logistics/ supply chain skills and competencies (Mangan et al, 2001).

Supply chain management entails a 'horizontal' organisational orientation where traditional businesses are organised on functional lines with strong hierarchical underpinnings. The managers working here have typically been trained in very specific areas viz. marketing, production management, accountancy, etc. Their upward movement in the organizational hierarchy is based on their increasing capability in their narrow respective functional areas. Christopher (2004) concluded skills required for future supply chain managers as wide and varied, with an emphasis in particular on interpersonal and communications skills.

Gender Differentials

Only very few studies have taken gender into account in the analysis of modern supply chains. Park and Krishnan (2005) reported that women approach decision making differently from men which directly affects supply chain management. These recent findings highlighted the fact that almost 40% of ISM (Institute for Supply Management) members consist of female managers and they have already increased to 70% in 2010.

Hirsch, Schank and Schnable (2006) investigated women's and men's labour supply to the firm within a structural approach based on a dynamic model of new monophony. Using methods of survival analysis and a linked employer-employee dataset for Germany, it was found that labour supply elasticities are small (0.9-2.4) and that women's labour supply to the firm is substantially less elastic than men's (which is the reverse of gender differences in labour supply usually found at the level of the market).

Maertens and Swinnen (2009) examined the gender implications in modern supply chains wherein they conceptualized the various mechanisms through which women are directly affected. Empirical findings suggested that modern supply chains may be associated with reduced gender inequalities in rural areas. It was reported that women benefit more and more directly from large-scale estate production and agro-industrial processing, and the creation of employment in these modern agro-industries than from smallholder contract-farming.

Although these studies identify important gender-related aspects of modern supply chains, they each deal with different issues and lack representative survey-based evidence to support their conclusions. There is a need for a more comprehensive view on the gender implications of modern supply chains and for better empirical evidence to quantify the effects.

Leadership in Supply Chain

Multicultural leadership encourages an inclusive and adaptable style that enables a wide spectrum of people to actively engage, contribute, and tap their potential (Bordas, 2008). Bordas further concluded certain steps that supply chain professionals can take to help them make the transition to a multicultural leadership model.

Nurturing Synergy Effect – By fostering 'We' feeling among the employees rather than 'I' feeling can lead to group welfare, unity, and harmony. Every business will benefit from employees who identify themselves as part of a team, work together and create a synergy effect, thereby making the entire company a great success.

Knocking down the leadership structure - In successful organizations, CEOs and the top officials view themselves as just another part of the company and consign value in the expertise and innovative thinking of their employees. Flattening the leadership structure will help employees feel more appreciated and motivated.

Fostering Team work – In spite of the fact that employees and managers have outward similarities, every employee, manager, or executive is unique. Successful businesses are those that learn to accept small differences and help people work together and grow for the betterment of the organization. Consensus building is a great way to strengthen any company's work environment.

Reducing conflict among employees by encouraging team spirit – Among others, one way to minimize conflict is encouraging people to view each other as relatives. Just as viewing other members of a society as part of a larger family might lessen the likelihood of war and fighting, cheering employees to view one another in this same way and to seek out resolutions to their problems.

Channelizing employees towards the company vision - Many organizations have a motto that is meant to inspire employees and assure customers that only the highest-quality product or service would be provided to them. In order to develop a company vision that truly reflects the diverse attitudes of employees, it is important to listen to different points of view, communicate in an open, give-and-take fashion, and welcome new ideas, thereby channelizing the energies of the employees towards a common company's vision.

Tapping the potential of a changing workforce – Potential in the form of consumer base, and citizenry requires leadership approaches that vibrate with and are representative of the diverse cultures that make up today's societies. The convergence of the leadership principles of diverse cultures with more familiar business practices can create a socially responsible environment.

Training and Development of effective Supply Chain Professionals/Trainers

A learning organization is characterized by members who are continually gaining knowledge, effectively managing it, and enhancing their capabilities to aid the organization in adapting to dynamic environments and remain competitively superior over competitors (Senge, 1998). Senge (1998) furthering this idea asserted that as supply chain partners (individual organizations) become learning partners, the supply chain then becomes a "learning supply chain" that is able to use knowledge to attain its purposes and remain competitive in dynamic markets. In order to turn information into knowledge and manage that knowledge effectively, for supply chain partners, education and training of employees becomes a key.

Supply chain education and training imparted to the employees enhances their vision and understanding of the purpose and benefits of SCM. Further, resistance for change from the employees, especially when change requires yielding up control, exposing weakness or valuable information to others, and changing one's mindset makes the training and development of employees all the way more vital. SCM requires a change in day to day decision making strategy, practices, and human interaction implying that people will have to change their mindset and behaviour. Rather than forcing the people to change; their passions must be channelized to manifest in making the supply chain succeed.

Fawcett, Magnan, and McCarter (2005) in their research interviewed 51 senior−level supply chain managers across five channel positions and concluded that education is needed to create a vision and understanding of SCM as well as to empower people at all levels to become actively engaged in integration and improvement initiatives.

Supplier evaluation and selection, negotiation, systems thinking and analysis, team building and management, trade-off analysis, quality control, benchmarking, problem solving, computer (basic programs to web design), new product development, relationship management, process improvement and integration, brand management, customer service, costing—ABC, target, and six sigma, outsourcing and the use of 3PLs, process integration, cycle time reduction, and value analysis/value engineering are few skill sets that are most important for a supply chain manager.

The most effective training approaches include rotation programmes, workshops and seminars, computerized training and simulations, learning through experimentation, knowledge sharing, professional certifications. Combination of the two or more approaches usually adopted by the best performing organizations can instil a sense of purpose and vision while providing a set of skills that can add immediate value.

Customer Service in Supply Chain Management

Customer service in supply chain management implies the relationship between the organization and its customers. The source of customer information is the Customer service. It also provides the customer with real-time information on scheduling and product availability through interfaces with the company's production and distribution operations. Following steps are used by the successful organizations to build customer relationships:
▪ Deciding mutually satisfying goals for organization and customers.
▪ Establishing and maintaining customer rapport.
▪ Fostering positive feelings in the organization and the customers.

Supply chain management is directly related to a company's customer service. By having a great customer service, a company can have a competitive edge over others.

Good supply chain management heightens a firm's customer service by permitting a company for three things:

- Delivering products to customers faster and with greater precision.
- Tracking shipments to guarantee they arrive at their destination safely.
- Maintaining optimal inventory levels in stock to balance the supply and demand.

These three strengths aid a firm in building relationship of trust with the customers. Fulfilling the promises and exceeding expectations of the customers from time to time, a company enhances the chances of its consumers to keep coming back to the company more likely and even refer their friends to it. As economic conditions improve and consumers cautiously increase their spending, company can put itself in an ideal position by optimizing its supply chain management.

Managing Change in Supply Chain

In order to compete and expand the market share, companies progressively use their supply chain with investment and number of activities in this area remarkably on the upswing. Recent upgrades in technology and process at forward-thinking companies clearly indicates the wide acceptance of supply chain excellence as an element of overall business strategy. Hiatchi Consulting (2009) reported **six key trends** causing significant impact and change to supply chain design and performance.

Demand Planning

Many companies have moved away from focusing efforts on plant-level production planning and implementing more of a demand-driven focus to manage demand more efficiently, as sources and capacities for manufacturing have augmented. The demand-driven approach creates a more customer-focused mindset without sacrificing operational efficiency, significantly improves demand planning and management efforts and help overall costs and customer service efforts in the industrial establishments. Additionally, advanced demand planning systems and proper strategies help discover data and recognize trends suppressed in a company's information systems.

Globalization

The way business is managed and transacted globally, even on the most local levels has been dramatically impacted by globalization mainly the improvements in communications. No area of a business is affected more by this drift to a global business environment than the supply chain viz. manufacturing, distribution, sourcing of materials, invoicing and returns have all been significantly impacted by the increased integration of a global customer and supplier base, and many companies found that existing processes are not adaptable enough to this new business environment.

Increased Price Pressures and Competition

As a consequence of persistent commoditization of many products, companies need better ways to distinguish themselves in the global market. In order to continually compete with the commoditized products, significant cost improvements with supply chain re-design and technology needs to be done. Companies are looking to their supply chains in two ways to help counterbalance this trend. Firstly, they are checking the ways to reduce cost and are creating a more efficient value chain to remain cost competitive. Secondly, companies are looking at ways they can provide value-added services to meet the demands of more sophisticated customers.

Outsourcing

Outsourcing parts or all the activities of a supply chain is beneficial for the companies to keep up pace with the current business scenario. Companies are attaining additional synergies by outsourcing all or parts of their supply chain with marketplace improvements around information media and systems; cost and quality of global manufacturing and distribution; and product design capabilities.

Summarized and more Complex Product Life Cycles

Currently, mainstream clients are beneath the pressure to develop innovative products and bring them to market more rapidly, while minimizing cannibalization of existing products, which are still in high demand. In order to meet the needs of customers and consumers, companies need to embark on more efficient product lifecycle management processes commonly known as PLM. It comprises of heavy emphasis on managing new product introduction, product discontinuation, design for manufacturability and leveraging across their entire product and infrastructure characteristics. Product lifecycle management processes and technology majorly help companies design products that can share common operations, components or materials with other products, thereby reducing risks of obsolescence write-offs, increasing cost leverage on the purchasing of key materials and ensuring that infrastructure investments are optimally utilized. Moreover, implementation of this also improves company's time to market, a company can shield itself against the risk of an unexpected cost increase, a poor new product launch, an spontaneous obsolescence write off and can enhance the overall customer perception of the company as an effective innovator.

Closer Integration and Collaboration with Suppliers

With the development of supply chains, there is a move toward more powerful alliance between customers and suppliers which goes beyond connecting information systems to fully integrating business processes and organization structures across companies that encompass the entire value chain. The final goal of this alliance is to increase visibility throughout the value chain in an effort to make better management decisions and to ultimately decrease value chain costs. Having the right infrastructure including the tools, processes and organizational structure in place, this collaboration provides core personnel throughout the value chain with the information needed to make business-critical decisions with the best available information.

Summary

To bring to a close, the "people factor" or the strategic management of the human resources is important to contribute to the overall performance of the supply chain and, therefore, the entire organization. The present paper highlighted the ways in which human resource management relates and contributes to supply chain management and functioning. It throws light on the effects of organizational culture on supply chain collaboration, workforce diversity in the supply chain, competency profiles of successful supply chain professionals; skills, capabilities and other job requirements for employees working in the supply chain; supply chain behaviour / employee attitudes and their correlates in the supply chain; gender differentials; leadership in the supply chain; training and development of effective supply chain professionals/ trainers; customer service; and managing change in supply chain.

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