Editorial

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Biographical note: Elkafi Hassini is a Professor at the DeGroote School of Business, McMaster University. He holds PhD and MASc degrees in Management Sciences from the Faculty of Engineering, University of Waterloo. In his research, he uses mathematical models and techniques to solve business decision problems. His current research focuses on the logistics of e-tailing, joint pricing and inventory management, and supplier selection and negotiation.

1 Introduction: A global perspective on Supply Chain Management: current practices and future trends

The purpose of this editorial is to introduce a special issue that looks at current practices and future trends in Supply Chain Management (SCM) from a global perspective. We develop a unified framework for this special issue's papers and provide a perspective on future research directions in a global supply chain context. While there is a quasi-agreement among academics as to how best to manage a supply chain conceptually, in the real world, and in particular in a global context, the practice of SCM is diverse. This is best illustrated by the articles in this special issue, which recounts experiences of supply chain implementation in several different countries.

One can argue that the rise of globalisation and SCM are two faces to one coin. On the one hand, the proliferation of customs unions and international free trade agreements has helped in the emergence of global competition. Within such a competitive environment, it became apparent that efficiency and high quality are no longer sufficient for maintaining a competitive advantage. Responsiveness, the ability to offer a multitude of product types and options and to satisfy a customer order in a speedy manner, had emerged as another necessary dimension of competitiveness. With this new competitive dimension, companies had come to the realisation that coordinating with their business partners is vital for sustaining a competitive power. On the other hand, the rise of SCM programmes such as vendor managed inventory and collaborative planning, forecasting and replenishment, aided by advances in information technology, has made it possible for companies to manage extended global supply chains. Within this perspective, one would expect that researchers should give some attention to the globalisation–SCM interface. However, when examining the literature, we find that most efforts have been devoted to study SCM and globalisation as separate fields, with more emphasis on supply chain operations (e.g. Cohen and Mallik, 1997; and Souza et al., 2004). It is hoped that the

papers in this special issue will contribute to a better understanding of the globalisation–SCM interface. In particular, they shed some light on the following two questions:

1   How is SCM applied in different parts of the world?

2   Are the SCM principles universal?

2   The Annual International Symposium on Supply Chain Management

The Annual International Symposium on SCM is held each fall to bring together researchers and practitioners from around the world. The highlights of the symposium include: a collection of high quality academic papers, practitioner white papers or presentations, keynotes by renowned practitioners and academics, and panel discussions on current topics. This special issue is drawn from the academic papers that were presented during the fourth symposium held from October 4 to October 6, 2006. The First Annual Supply Chain Management Doctoral Colloquium was held on October 4, 2006, in conjunction with the symposium. It is noteworthy to mention that the last four symposia have generated eight special issues in international journal. Further information about the symposium, past and future events, can be access here www.scmsymposium.org.

3   The papers

This special issue includes six papers, the topics of which could be classified into three categories:

1   SCM principles with a focus on information sharing.

2   Global supply chain trends with emphasis on sustainability issues.

3   SCM implementation within a global context.

The latter category includes papers that report on supply chain practices in four different countries: Canada, Iran, Korea and Tunisia.

Table 1 provides a summary of the key features of the papers along four dimensions: methodology, SCM issues, global issues and contributions. Two studies provide conceptual frameworks that are based on best practices from the literature and case studies. They address the issues of current best practices and future trends, in particular the issue of sustainability through green supply chains. The remaining four studies provide the global perspective and are based on learning from actual supply chain practices in four different countries.

In the paper, 'Best practices for the implementation of Supply Chain Management initiatives', Tummala and Schoenherr develop a SCM implementation framework based on the current best supply chain practices. With each major supply chain implementation initiative (e.g. managing inventories) they associate several lower-level activities (e.g. use of postponement) and performance measures (e.g. market share), as well as higher-level beneficial enablers (e.g. supply chain visibility) and goals that are either cost- or service-based.

Table 1 Summary of key paper features

Authors	Methodology	SCM context	Global context	Contribution
Tummala and Schoenherr	Conceptual framework based on best practices from literature	Implementation Goals, enablers, initiatives, activities and performance measures	Global operations as SCM enablers for achieving the chain's goals, but importance of local operations should not be diminished	Proposes an integrated conceptual framework for SCM implementation
Marsillac	Conceptual framework based on literature and case studies	Green supply chains Reverse logistics	Local government regulations impact of foreign supply chain operations Global competition Case snapshots from automotive and computer industries	Proposes a framework that integrates concepts from green supply chains and reverse logistics into a comprehensive sustainable system that addresses both shareholders and environmental concerns
Larson and Kulchitsky	Electronic survey of survey of SCM professionals and interviews with focus groups	Information sharing	Focuses on Canadian SCM professionals	Stresses the importance of the role of information sharing within a supply chain and offers several interesting venues for future research directions
Youn, Hong and Nahm	Survey of Korean firms	Integration Partnerships Information quality and sharing	Focus on supply chain activities in South Korea	Supply chain partnerships need to achieve a desirable level of information quality before information sharing practices are widely applied
Shahidan and Netadj	Questionnaire of Iranian businesses	E-supply chain Partnership Cooperation	Focus on Iranian companies Risk of globalisation on SMEs	Proposes an e-supply chain model as means for SMEs to keep up with the pressure from large global businesses
Ben Mahmoud and Jemni	Survey of Tunisian companies. Application of the supply chain evolution framework to a select set of companies	Dairy supply chains Customer–supplier relationships Materials flow Information flow Supply chain evolution	Focus on Tunisian companies Impact of global trends on local businesses	Tunisian dairy firms have poor supply chain practices, mainly due to weaknesses of the upstream links due to the high uncertainty of the procurement process

In this framework, globalisation is viewed as an enabler of implementation initiatives. They stress the fact that for a supply chain to benefit from globalisation, careful planning and execution is required, and at the same time, the importance of local supply chain operations should not be diminished.

Marsillac addresses the issue of supply chain sustainability in the article entitled 'Environmental impacts on reverse logistics and green supply chains: similarities and integration'. The author argues that global competition and government environmental policies, within the European Unions in particular, are pushing supply chains to develop sustainable practices. She proposes a framework that integrates concepts from green supply chains and reverse logistics into a comprehensive sustainable system that addresses both shareholders and environmental concerns.

The study by Larson and Kulchitsky on 'The promise of information sharing and the peril of information overload' reports on a structural model that is statistically tested via the analysis of electronic surveys of Canadian SCM professionals. The authors stress the importance of the role of information sharing in a supply chain. They call for more research on the nature, timing and relevance on information sharing. Given their studies emphasis on the Canadian context, they suggest to take their study framework to a global level to study important questions such as: are the findings in regards to the nature and value of information sharing independent of location and how does information sharing evolve in a cross-cultural context?

In their paper, 'Supply chain partnerships and supply chain integration: the mediating role of information quality and sharing', Youn, Hong and Nahm study the role of information quality and sharing and partnership formation on the level of supply chain integration within a Korean context. One of their important findings is that supply chain partnerships do have a positive impact on the quality of information, but not necessarily on the level of information sharing. On the other hand, supply chain integration is affected by information sharing, but not information quality.

Shahidan and Netadj work on 'Integration of e-business and Supply Chain Management for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Iran' looks at how e-supply chains can help local Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) catch up with larger global competitors on supply chain practices. Although their study focuses on Iranian firms, their findings are relevant to many of the North African and Middle Eastern countries that are entering into associative partnerships with the European Union. While e-supply chain promises a short route for information sharing, as per the study of Youn et al., there are prerequisites for sharing information, such as building a partnership and ensuring that the information is of good quality. In addition, information flow has to be accompanied with best supply chain implementation practices, as per the framework of Tummala and Schoenherr, in other operations fields.

In their paper entitled 'Supply Chain Management implementation in Tunisia: an exploratory study of the dairy sector', Ben Mahmoud and Jemni use a SCM evolution framework to study supply chain practices in the Tunisian dairy sector. Taking a historic perspective, this framework divides the supply chain evolution into four stages: functional management, integrated logistics, SCM and e-SCM. It considers three major dimensions of a supply chain: customer–supplier relationship, information flow and material flow. The authors provide case studies of five companies and place them on the supply chain evolution ladder. They found that the Tunisian dairy firms have poor supply chain practices, mainly due to weaknesses of the upstream links as result of the high uncertainty of the procurement process.

4 Future trends and research directions

Based on the papers in this special issue and other literature we outline in this section some of the major global supply chain trends and possible future research questions.

- *Inter-regional comparative studies*: as per the suggestion of Larson and Kulchitsky, comparative studies to supply chain practices among different regions of the world would help foster our understanding of supply chain globalisation. Such studies would be valuable to companies that are considering expanding in different parts of the globe. These studies could be done by different authors, each in their own country, as is the case with the study by Ben Mahmoud and Jemni in this special issue which looks at the case of Tunisia, Chin et al. (2004) that looks at Hong Kong, and Mollenkopf and Dapiran that considers the case of Australia and New Zealand. Another approach is for a set of authors to use a similar methodology for different regions such as the work by Lieb et al. (1993), and subsequent studies, which looked at the role of third party logistics providers in different parts of the world.

- *Competitive intelligence*: as suggested by Shahidan and Netadj, e-supply chains could provide a means for SMEs to adapt quickly to the new realities of globalisation of supply chains. However, companies need to have the capabilities of using and analysing the potentially overwhelming volume of data that would be made available to them through e-supply chains. These capabilities are increasingly known as competitive intelligence, which, according to the Society for Competitive Intelligence Professionals, is the skill of understanding your competitive environment and using that knowledge to reach ethically sound business decisions. For an interesting overview of how this concept can be applied to supply chains see Wilkins (2007).

- *Knowledge transfer and ethical considerations*: as suggested by a study by Locke and Romis (2007), which looked at a case of two Mexican companies, it is more effective for a global company to collaborate with its suppliers and implement new management systems to improve working conditions, rather than the company having only a monitoring role. This study brings to focus two important issues:

  1 the increasing globalisation of life and working standards that bring with them a corporate responsibility to treat all its global workforce with the same standards

  2 the role of public policy in shaping global supply chain relationships, in particular the requirement that local firms have to have a minimum involvement in the global company's core competency.

- *Security*: With a global supply chain comes a greater risk that a failure of a link in the supply chain can cause. The risk is amplified because of many factors such as the complexity of the network, the possibility of inconsistent practices in different geographical locations, the difference in cultures, etc. As argued by Sarathy (2006), it critical that security issues are taken into account while designing a supply chain rather than leaving them to an after-the-fact consideration.

- *Teaching supply chain globalisation*: in the last few years, there has been an increase in university supply chain globalisation programmes, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Given the merits of participative learning on one hand, and the

complexity of dealing with a global setting, more research has to be done on what are some of the successful ways for mounting a global SCM course. In addition to case studies, that has to truly involve more than one company in a global network, there is a need for exploring the possibility of practical inter-cultural internships such as the case of Stanford University' Global Project Coordination Course (see Kopczak and Fransoo, 2000).

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