

Abstract number: 011-0280

Create the network you need - a Value Net Framework

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POMS 20th Annual Conference

Orlando, Florida U.S.A.

May 1 to May 4, 2009

Abstract

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Complex global supply chains are an issue for small and medium enterprises as well as for multinational enterprises. Both of them have to fight with a lack of transparency and a stuttering information flow which have negative effects on integration and communication. Our Value Net framework is a basis for analyzing global networks. It is used to detect out where potential is hidden to create value in global production. A key factor is the overcoming of barriers made by humans, like cultural, goal differences or lack of trust. Depending on the supply chain structure, the products, the production strategy and company structure, the right level of integration has to be chosen. The question is how to identify the right and important (soft) success factors. How should the network be organized and where can possible pitfalls be found?

Our here presented concept introduce some points to answer these questions.

Keywords: supply chain management, global production networks, social networks

1. Introduction

During the last decades the emerging markets, rapidly improvements in technology, the continuing search for new cost-effective suppliers, production sites and new business challenges have led to a “global production”. Global (trade) networks with complex international material, product and financial flows build a global value creating network (Hesse and Rodrigue, 2006; Abele, 2008). The dynamic world needs a flexible business, it has to be seen as an ever changing system. So far mainly either technical or organizational or social views in the topic "design and operation of global value networks" exist. Obviously an isolated view is not sufficient because the "topic" is in fact a complex system with multifaceted, interrelated, mutual dependent and dynamic factors.

The objective of the paper is to span a framework for the whole system of a global value network. We will explore potential factors effecting the operation of a global supply or production network within value creating networks. Thereby one emphasis is on human related influences and reciprocal their effects on the integration, coordination and collaboration in supply chains. First we refer to supply chains, networks and further the specific global environment. Secondly, some research about supply chain integration, human related factors, and global challenges is presented. After that we introduce the framework and some ideas how to integrate the recent research landscape to improve management and operation of global production networks. The idea to this work came from experiences in consulting and research projects about global supply chain management operation and competence distribution within a large multinational company. Since then we have spoken to managers from various companies or backgrounds and have mirrored their comments to the current scientific knowledge. Hints from practice and suggestions from theory, therefore form the basis of this paper.

2. Review of current theory

Along with globalization, at the beginning there was also the improvement of the production and their coordination along a products flow in order to calm down the well known Forrester or Bullwhip effect e.g.(Riddalls et al., 2002; Suhaiza and Premkumar, 2005; Lambert et al., 2008). The first research focuses more on logistical management. Over the time the supply chain management was “created”. To this day its content varies e.g. (Bechtel and Jayaram, 1997; Cooper et al., 1997; Simon Croom, 2000). Therefore supply chain management could be understood as the linking of all processes and/or organizations involved to produce for the (ultimate) customer (Christopher and Juttner, 2000). This chain can reach the raw material supplier (Cooper et al., 1997). Depending on this understanding, different supply chain levels can be found - from a just intra-firm to a network view (Harland, 1996). In accordance with the objective of this paper supply chain management can be understood as a wider concept, like the future schools demand driven pipeline. This concept has a emphasize on relations as well as on transactions (Bechtel and Jayaram, 1997) and it should include the successful integration and coordination of all relevant activities to moving goods from raw to a customer (Cooper et al., 1997).

Coordination, Integration and Collaboration in global supply networks

Integration and coordination are stated as key ingredients of a successful supply chain management (Shore, 2001). In order to reduce costs of integration and co-ordination activities, different strategies have been explored by several researchers. The concentration on key players, on success critical relations within chains is one feasible way (Cooper et al., 1997; Barratt, 2004). The implementation and use of information and communication systems are also widely seen as a driver and as a key to improve the supply chain systems performance

(P. Childerhouse and Towill, 2002; Suhaiza and Premkumar, 2005). Information technology can decrease transaction costs too (Levy, 2005). An increase of supply chain integration will raise the performance due to the extensive information sharing (Bagchi and Skjoett-Larsen, 2005; Jingquan Lia, 2005). Even many companies are aware of sharing (sensitive) data (Bagchi and Skjoett-Larsen, 2005) and subsequently other authors remark that only information sharing is not enough (Bailey and Francis, 2008). Additionally to information sharing, decision synchronization and incentive alignment as components of supply chain collaboration can enable better performance (Simatupang and Sridharan, 2004; Soonhong et al., 2005). Christopher and Juttner (2000) regarded the attributes of relationships as the basis of supply chain partnerships. These attributes are: partner selection and classification, training of boundary spanners, coordination of inter-personal relationships, external support and relationship monitoring. For instance long term relationships can have a positive influence on supply chain performance (Fynes et al., 2008). Consequently Barratt (2004) named trust, mutuality, information exchange, openness and communication as cultural elements of collaboration in supply chain management. Other key components are a shared vision and shared objectives that go along with cross-organizational behavior, co-ordination of logistics, the integration of strategy, structure and processes, inter-firm trust and co-operation and so on (Bailey and Francis, 2008; Fawcett et al., 2008).

On the other hand studies examined that there is a contrastive field of research. For example a long term relationship seems to be not useful all the time. Bagchi and Skjoett-Larsen (2005) presume that this limits the companies' capability to react quickly on new market signs. Another example is the shift to a cost focus supply strategy by Nissan. The market pressure contrived them to do more arm-length relationships (de Koster and Shinohara, 2006).

Furthermore R. Bruce McAfee et al. (2002) figured out that human resource strategies and culture within the firm have a positive influence on the supply chain orientation and thus on

the ability to integrate other supply chain members. To illustrate the impact of the firms supply chain strategy on information sharing and as Fisher (1997), p. 113 points out: “If we are negotiating over price, the last thing you want to do is fully share with me information’s about costs”. This can occur if there are goal differences or an intra-firm rivalry exists (Fawcett et al., 2008). People related barriers like inadequate information systems, the lack of willingness to share information, organizational boundaries, a lack of employee empowerment and inter-firm rivalry are not new. Therefore people should not be overlooked when companies invest in technology or information as supply chain enablers. People are the key to successful collaborative innovation (Fawcett et al., 2007; Fawcett et al., 2008).

Apart from this, another open question is: when does an information system lead to competitive advantages (Soo Wook and Narasimhan, 2002)? Ultimately the content of supply chain integration and also its impact on performance is not clear today (Fabbe-Costes and Jahre, 2008).

Supply chain strategy differences’ and influences

However, supply chain strategies can differ (Soo Wook and Narasimhan, 2002). For example there can be a functional or innovative product. This leads to different supply chains, either a responsive or an efficient one (Fisher, 1997). Others identify an agile or lean supply chain. Some products, like cars can also require a mixed supply chain. Vonderembse et al. (2006) call this a “hybrid” supply chain. They also connect this with a different product lifecycle and its specific needs. For example the varying requirements during the product lifecycle can lead to innovative suppliers at the beginning (e.g. before and during growth phases) and a change to more cost driven ones later in the product life cycle (Vonderembse et al., 2006; Neumann

and Riedel, 2008). These factors in total can lead to different supply chains, varying key players or different integration levels and their underlying relations.

Moreover the supply chain is not really a chain, many companies are members of different supply chains and often the “chain” has a tree-like structure (Cooper et al., 1997). Undoubtedly there is a need for a network view, like many other researches underline (Meixell and Gargeya, 2005; Srai and Gregory, 2008). The view has to be broadened from inter-firm to networks (Kouvelis et al., 2006). The complexity and specific effects, besides a dyadic view, offers more insights into how networks can work, e.g. (Cross et al., 2009), especially in a global context. To the above mentioned problems we can also add additional issues for integration and coordination and the human related challenges due to global networks activities. As one important influence for global management, different ways of developing trust can be identified (Doney et al., 1998). Cultural or mentality differences, varieties of management styles can be found (de Koster and Shinohara, 2006). The concept of information sharing is not in every case applicable (Tan et al., 2006). In addition to that the expectation of different service levels, of services offered to customers etc. may vary between countries (Harland, 1996; de Koster and Shinohara, 2006). Varieties in global supplier or customer management and management styles can also be seen. This interaction can differ depending on the company or managers home country (Smagalla, 2004; de Koster and Shinohara, 2006; Yiannis E. Polychronakis, 2006). Managers should understand country or culture related management differences. They have to be able to merge varying needs of customers and suppliers in order to manage in a way suitable for the supply chain – and specific to the requirements of the firm. People should be open to exchange opinions with all participating colleagues and partners (de Koster and Shinohara, 2006).

For example contracts are not in every countries used in the common “western world way”. In Asia it is often only a paper, underlining the willingness of working together. To cite

Hamacher (2008), p. 249: “Asian Cultures are wondering about the western fable for written rules and their assigned power and I was asked in Indonesia why we consider rules as more important than people”. Again the way of the dissolution of business relations can differ depending on the cultural situation, like Freeman and Browne (2004) explored. A suitable mode of communication in such a case has an influence to future business, eventually the chance to work together again or not.

But culture, trust, aversion to change, and willingness to collaborate are difficult to investigate and simple or precise solutions are rare. The cultural studies e.g. from Hofstede can be used to express and explain some of these cultural differences (Lutz Kaufmann, 2005; Yiannis E. Polychronakis, 2006), but they are controversially discussed and conclusions are difficult to be drawn (Lewis, 2000). Research from other fields substantiate the need for a human based view when doing business in a global environment , e.g. from the application of human resource management strategies in foreign countries (Wasti, 1998) or the need for frequent communication on technology transfer to bridge language and other differences (Stock and Tatikonda, 2000; Tukako Sunaoshi, 2005).

3. Findings and suggested solution

The chain members need to modify and tailor the items of collaborative practices that suit their unique circumstances. Companies have to figure out which collaboration practices need attention for further improvement of production operation. This implies several points a company needs to understand. The reality is that collaborative efforts add costs and bring benefits differently to the chain members (Simatupang 04). To solve some of these problems, one answer can be the alignment of the company, its supply chain and leadership style to the end consumer needs (Gattorna, 2000). The work of Srari and Gregory (2008) is useable to

model global supply networks from four points of view: network structure, material and information flow, inter-firm relationships between key players and the value structure of the product. Some of the characteristic factors for a supply network are: structure, product, coordination, roles and relationships, information flows and so on (Srai and Gregory, 2008). Other supply chain models are SCOR or the framework from Cooper et al. (1997). While SCOR focuses on the information technology integration (Bolstorff et al., 2007), Cooper et al. (1997) include also power, leadership and culture in their models. However these models do not deliver instructions or knowledge to identify with which key players a company should co-operate and at which (integration) level. The performance measurement and rating, the choice of a proper target is an open question, too. The next step is to be aware of the importance of the case-dependent existing influence factors. There should be the possibility to rank these supply chain member by different priorities. Apart from the proper determination of the decoupling point in supply chains with hybrid product structures, the correct selection of the right strategy is required and leads to better performance. Playing a double game in the supply chain, driving costs and flexibility at the same time does not work well, Fisher (1997) criticized. Current models do not include this.

By now there is no explicit or clear relation between the named factors available which are studied under the headlines supply chain management, global networks, value networks and so on. As Srai and Gregory (2008) or Cooper et al. (1997) highlight there are multiple characteristics in a global supply network to consider. The research landscape is heterogenic. The studies are difficult to condense, as mentioned by Fabbe-Costes and Jahre (2008) for the topic supply chain integration and performance. Scientific research explored different branches, companies of different sizes and power, with different structures and global spread, etc. Furthermore there are various component bodies and views from different fields of expertise within the supply chain investigations (Simon Croom, 2000). Hence it is unclear which findings can put together and which not. Some are more general case studies, other

investigate only one branch or only relate anecdotes. Just at some spots in the research landscape these factors are joined or put into an “if-then” model or a similar construct.

Some questions remain unanswered. Which collaboration level, or which level of trust (Riches, 2003) is needed? What are the key influences? Are there key people or boundary spanners (Christopher and Juttner, 2000; Riches, 2003)? How far do we have to look (Cooper et al., 1997)? Furthermore, does a different supply chain strategy following (Fisher, 1997) lead to different level of integration? What are the case-specific relevant supply chain management components? Aside from the logistical view (Kotzab and Westhaus, 2005) and with the consideration of the more “soft factors”.

Finally, which “global” influences have to be considered, in which supply chain or in other words what control switches does a global supply chain have? What are the interactions and interdependencies of the identified or already to explore factors? Thus the efficiency and effects of human related communication can be a basic influence on the production of value in a global production network. The integrated view of technical, organizational and human factors leads to a socio-technical understanding of supply chains and value networks. This socio-technical view is well known from the research of work and organizational psychologists on work systems (Emery, 1959; Fox, 1995; Pasmore, 1998).

Taking into account that several factors can play a role, we suggest a “frame” for bringing together potential factors, models, methods and findings. The term supply chain management seems to be overused (Cooper et al., 1997). The intention of global production and globalization is to create more value. So because of this, the global supply chain view should to be extended to a so called “Value Network”, figure 1.

Underlying relations between individuals affects the Supply Network

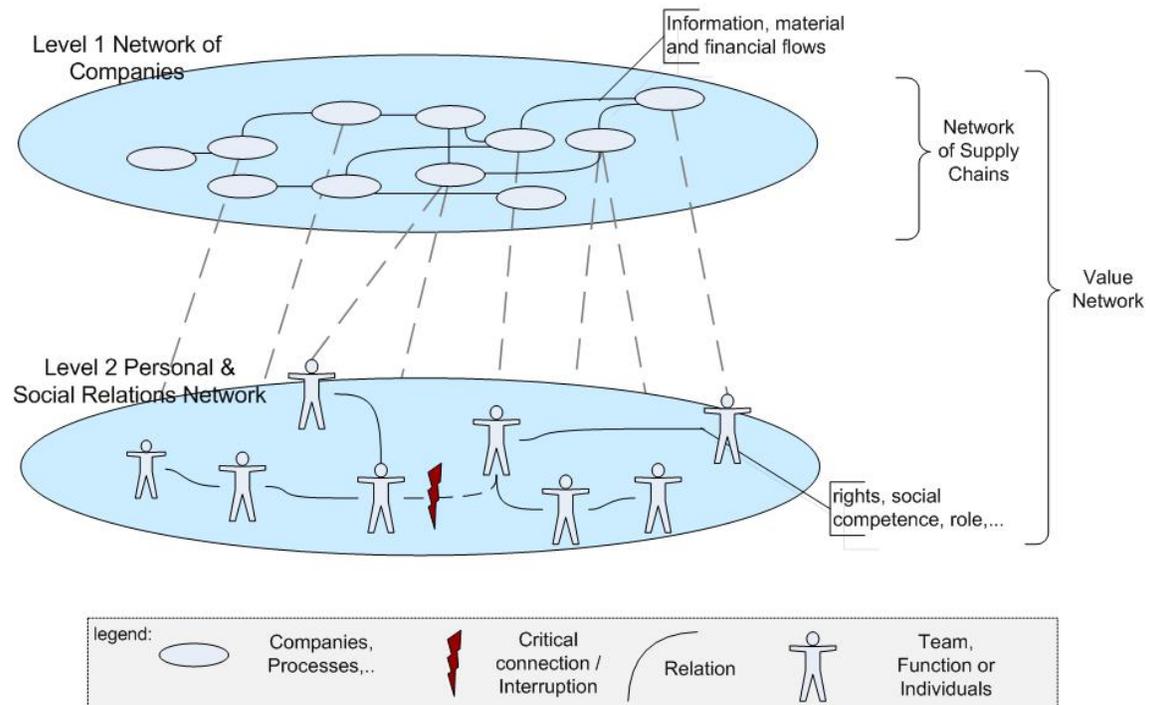


Figure 1: The Value Network frame

This Framework contains two levels. On the upper level the material, financial and information flows build the “traditional” supply chain or network. Components are companies, productions sites, processes and so on. On this second level the human interaction and relations create a hidden, “soft” or social level of the supply network, with influences on coordination and performance on the flows at the upper level. Depending on the structure and requirements from the first level the human level below will have a more or less impact. Reciprocally the existing human basis can lead to a specific “physical” network structure and integration needs.

4. Conclusions

The information demand differs depending on the supply chain strategy. In a standard product case with broad supplier availability where only an internet based connection is necessary, an electronically market or auction based B2B system can be sufficient. In another case, it could be that only a few suppliers are available or a vibrant demand wants a more close relation to drive quick information exchange. In such a situation an invisible and intangible information flow between (close related) people within intra-organizational supply network solve or prevent problems. As a practical example from managers we met “the supplier should call us (early) if he has a problem within his production, that we can early on change our production schedule”. For innovative products or parts a close relation makes sense e.g., to handle new developed processes at supplier’s side in a better way. To underline the network view need the following example is helpful, the possibility to switch to a backup supplier or change the production schedule if a (new) production of one supplier side balks. To get such information the supplier must have a trustful relation with customers, the linked firms or actors.

The depending need, levels or “pipes”/ways of the supply chain integration may differ, as depicted in figure 2. While a standardized information system will work in the same way worldwide, the people will not. The network of actors depends on the companies’ supply chain needs, strategy and market. In global business several factors such as culture can drive costs and time needed e.g., for establishing relations. If a supply chain needs more human based integration it is more strongly affected by these factors than an information technology based systems. Here it seems to be useful to depict the information flows, level and suitable ways which are chosen for the integration. In this case the method Me2Ko seems to be useful to analyze personal communications and relations (Krause et al., 2005).

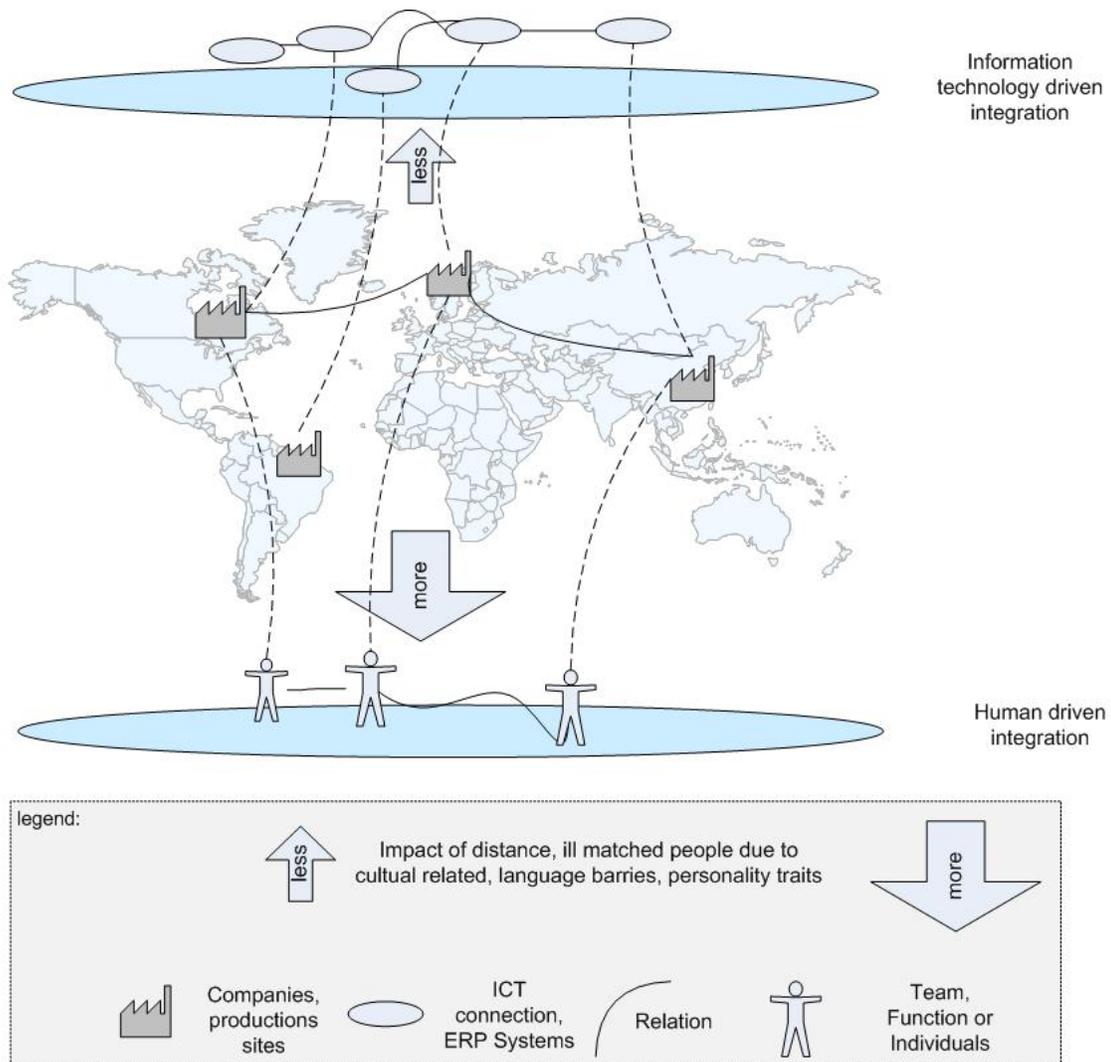


Figure 2: Impacts and surroundings to integration and information flows

In this paper we focused on of the factors influencing the basis for information exchange within the supply chain. The main idea is that a companies' surroundings like market, technology, product and competitor situation lead to a specific "supply network", as illustrated in figure 3. The company structure, organization, global spread, competencies, product lifecycle time and additionally the relations and interdependency of these factors restrict their potentiality and shaping the supply chain and strategy.

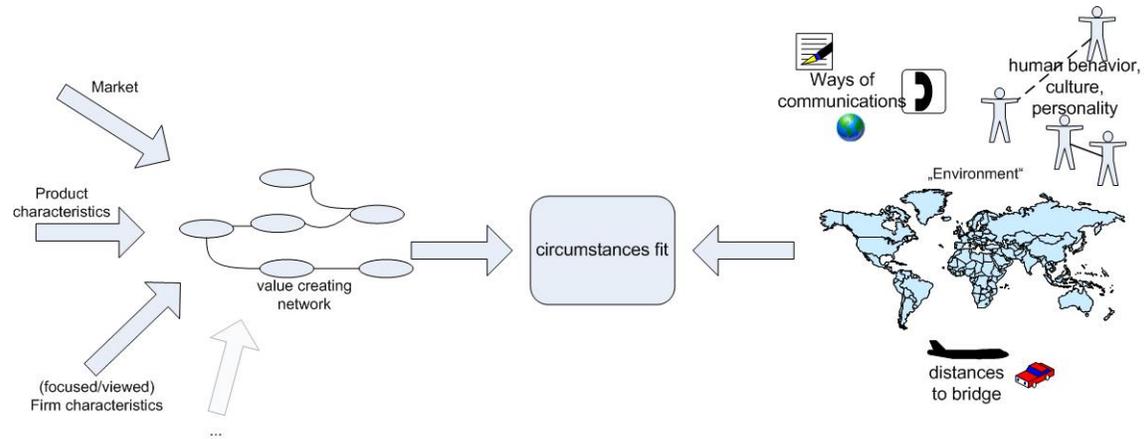


Figure 3: supply network, influences and surrounding of a global system

On the other hand the encountered influences on and of the supply chain, like level and ways of integration result in specific or individual requirements of supply chain management. The objective is now to bring the current supply chain research knowledge together, link and rate the named influences and draw a set of “if-then” situations to enhance global supply chain management, in one definite frame. With such a “tool” a company can simply identify its barriers for the needed supply chain, or can explore potential gaps for success within itself.

Further research is needed to put together the jungle of published case studies, their findings and so on in order to identify the important factors for supply chain integration. Again the research on related fields like organization, human resource or psychology seems to be a source for related topics and can provide suggestions for the supply chain management, its improvement or figuring out obstacles in current production operations - to build a consistent Value Network (framework).

Critically is the exploration of predictable statements, i.e. the true impact of integration on performance (Pagell, 2004; Fabbe-Costes and Jahre, 2008), but the clever construction of experiments might close the gap between ever changing circumstances in business practical studies and the proven scientific conceptions.

However, as a start, we have examined some parts of research and practical investigations and try now to form a framework. To this day it is still under construction. Deeper analysis of current empirical research is needed to justify relations, interactions and findings in order to emphasize management of global supply chains within global value networks.

These parts of research literature can obviously not lead to any definite answers at the moment, but they can be used as starter for the discussion on these topics and about the way they can be joined.

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