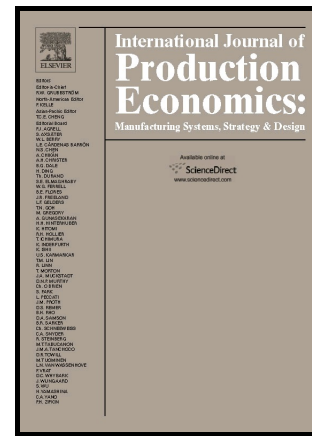


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Rethinking supply chain strategy as a conceptual system

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Abstract

Changes to the strategy, context or environment of a business unit may necessitate a revision of its supply chain strategy. However, rethinking a supply chain strategy is not an easy problem, and has no clear answer in the specialized literature. Some fundamental questions about supply chain *strategizing*—i.e., the *process of doing* supply chain strategy—have been largely ignored, while others have been answered with overly-simplistic *type-and-match* approaches of unclear validity. In this paper, we present a holistic approach to supply-chain strategizing, called *Conceptual System Assessment and Reformulation* (CSAR), developed through a series of collaborative management research projects over a decade. This paper presents the key ideas of CSAR and explains how it can be used to capture, evaluate and reformulate the supply chain strategy of a business unit. We argue that these ideas can serve as a step towards a theory of supply chain strategy. Finally, we illustrate the practical merits of CSAR by presenting the case of a large world-class corporation that used the approach as a starting point for an initiative to rethink the supply chain strategy of most of its business units.

Keywords: Supply chain strategy, strategizing, capture, evaluation, reformulation

1. Introduction

The importance of supply chain strategy (SCS) has been recognized from the early days of supply chain management (SCM). Stevens (1989) suggested that an integrated

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