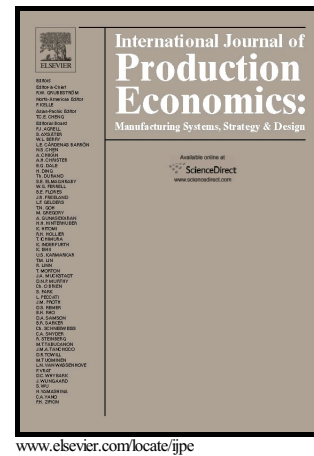


Does supply chain visibility enhance agility?

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Does supply chain visibility enhance agility?[☆]Xavier Brusset^{a,1}^aToulouse Business School, 20, Boulevard Lascrosses, BP7010, 31068 Toulouse Cedex 7, France**Abstract**

Agility is a major preoccupation for both supply chain managers and academic researchers in supply chain management. Yet, many questions remain unanswered about how best to achieve this operational capability. We study supply chain agility using the dynamic capabilities approach within the resource based-view of the firm, positioning ourselves from the vantage point of the supply chain manager. A survey of 171 French supply chain managers is undertaken and the results are analysed using factor analysis and a structural equation model. We provide insights by mapping the relationships between different managerial resources and processes and agility. These processes are grouped into three lower order capabilities: external, visibility, and internal processes. We show that external and internal managerial processes enhance agility. However, supply chain agility is not enhanced when managerial processes related to visibility are applied. Processes enhancing visibility across the chain, reliant on integrating Enterprise Resource planning and other software, tracking and tracing, reporting tools and web collaborative platforms, which other research pointed out as supporting agility, are found to be without influence on agility. On the other hand, external and internal capabilities are shown to enhance agility. We contend that some higher level processes and routines not included in the survey may explain the difference. Managerial insights and further avenues of research are presented.

Keywords: Supply Chain, agility, visibility, empirical research

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, there has been a marked shift in the focus of supply chain management. If the nineties were about aligning the actors in a supply chain in terms of objectives and collaboration, practitioners and researchers in the twenty-first century are focusing on understanding and improving the relationships between chain members (Jacoby, 2009). At the same time, markets have become ever more fickle and competition both in home markets and abroad has grown increasingly strong. Zara's performance in this environment springs to mind: its ability to overcome vagaries of the fast fashion industry by its agility is legendary (Zhelyazkov, 2011). Pressure from e-commerce, e-tailers and now m-commerce increases the need for speed and quick inventory turnover. Supply chain

managers are under continual pressure to maximise service while containing costs. Companies also need the abilities to adapt the services and goods on offer to follow consumers' changing tastes and behaviours (Stank et al., 2013; KPMG, 2012).

Supply chain managers are under pressure to instil agility in supply chains to match the speed of change and the accelerating competition in markets (Hummels and Schaur, 2012). Consulting companies, software providers and professional organisations have taken an interest in providing the necessary managerial and technological tools to enhance supply chain agility (Baird and Kilcourse, 2011; CapGemini Consulting, 2012). Agility has also become a mainstream topic for academic research as the increasing flow of articles in recent years can attest (eg, Swafford et al., 2008; Bottani, 2010; Ngai et al., 2011; Richey et al., 2012; Malhotra and Mackelprang, 2012; Liu et al., 2013; Blome and Schoenherr, 2013).

The management practices required to achieve the operational capabilities to enhance agility are treated in the

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