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E-Supply Chain Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Competing in today's environment is to compete between supply chains. Organisations strive for lower costs and respond rapidly to changes in the market. E-supply chain is one of the current approaches for achieving competitive advantages.

However, implementing e-supply chains is subject to additional constraints. Information asymmetry and government influence are the two distinguished factors on the e-supply chain implementation strategies in business economy.

KEYWORDS: E-Supply Chain, Supply chain, Marketing, Business.

INTRODUCTION

Supply chain in simple words means sequence of partners/members/intermediaries engaged or involved to supply & manage the flow of manufactured products to the ultimate customers. These partners/members/intermediaries are known as channel functionaries encompassing suppliers, manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers and the ultimate customers. These members collaborate and work together by forming a chain (to ensure the goods to the markets (customers) known as supply chain. Supply chain is often known as all the parties/channel members involved in satisfying the end customers. The APICS dictionary defines the term supply chain as either the "processes from the initial raw materials to the ultimate consumption of the finished product linking across supplier-user companies", or as the "functions within and outside a company that enable the value chain to make products and provide services to the customer. Supply chain management often refers to the entire supply activity of the firm. A supply chain refers to a chain which links elements of the manufacturing and supplying processes from raw materials to the end customers. The supply chain typically crosses organisational boundaries. Recently, supply chain has been defined more practically as a connected network with organisations, resources, and activities of creating and delivering various values in the form of both finished products and services. Recent years have witnessed the worldwide adoption of Internet technology for achieving cost savings, improving customer service, promoting innovation and taking advantage of new business opportunities (Wagner et al., 2003). Studies indicate that technology diffusion among knowledge intensive SME's have been difficult (Ramsey et al., 2005). Chapman et al. (2000) argue that SMEs are considerably lagging behind against their larger counterparts in using Internet related facilities in business operations. Other studies have found that SMEs are only half as likely to be using email; and for micro companies the figure is even worse. Sato et al. (2001) cite the main obstacles in adopting e-business as technical, as well as managerial and cultural. Thong and Yap (1995) argue that technical knowledge and attitudes of the CEO have a strong impact on successful technology adoption. Additionally, Culkin and Smith (2000) suggest that poor understanding of the relevant laws (e.g., intellectual property) is perceived to be a major hurdle to adoption.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF E-SUPPLY CHAIN

An e-supply chain is defined as a highly integrated supply chain with electronic links based on the Internet. An e-supply chain has been viewed as the physical dimension of e-business. The e-supply chain is typically implemented through the use of standard, off the-shelf software packages. More and more firms accelerate to implement their supply chains in a web-based manner in an effort to lower their operating costs and attain a fast response to the market condition changes.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The importance of web-based technologies to support company e-supply chain operation is widely acknowledged by academics and practitioners (Porter, 2001). Evidence from the literature suggests that where technology is considered the main determinant for e-business adoption, many companies have adopted e-business without thinking through its operational and behavioural impacts that subsequently led to failures (Dutta and Biren, 2001). The subsequent subsections review the works of various authors – believed by the present authors – that have had a major influence in developing the operational and behavioural perspec-

tive in this discipline. E-technology in e-supply chain enables information to be readily available and easily dispersed among the supply chain members for speeding up various logistics management activities such as order exchange, inventory management, and delivery schedules (Grossman 2004). This allows for greater integration and collaboration across e-supply chains (Cagliano et al., 2005). Increased information exchange enhance supply chain integration, that lead to developing relatively stronger relational ties among the supply chain members. The key factors influencing Internet technology adoption within a supply chain are classified as internal and external environments, firm and individual conditions, and domestic and international involvement (Moini and Tassar, 2005). There are other studies that examine the perception of management towards IT adoption. E-business adoption is measured by the extent to which Internet technologies are diffused in routine activities and processes of a business. This would facilitate customer-facing activities, including product or service sales, distribution, after sales support, product testing, and market research. Researchers have outlined organisational factors as important determinants for e-business adoption. The key factors identified include characteristics such as size, industry type and business scope (Zhu et al., 2006). Information orientation and technological innovation could significantly reduce information asymmetry and significantly influence e-business adoption. However, there is very limited research addressing the relationship between information orientation/asymmetry and technological innovation/integration on e-business adoption (Hsieh et al. 2006).

IMPLEMENTING E-SUPPLY CHAIN STRATEGIES**Strategic enterprise systems**

This unit exemplifies an enterprise that has internal information asymmetry to overcome with a need for internal integration more than external integration. A manufacturer that makes most of its components and sub-assemblies in-house can be classified under this case. The manufacturer needs an internal integration so as to ensure the smooth flow of its information. The e-supply chain implementation strategy for this situation is to implement a comprehensive internal system for planning and execution, such as ERP. The challenges that the firm may encounter with are that of internal changes and limited resources.

Operational external systems

This unit exemplifies an enterprise that has mostly external information asymmetric to overcome with a great need for external integration and a limited need for internal integration. A manufacturer whose components and subassemblies are mostly provided by external partners, and product's assembly can be done in-house belongs to this class. In such a situation, the manufacturer needs to create sophisticated linkages with external partners in order to optimize its external value chain while is not concerned with internal integration. The firm can gradually expand the supply chain functionality to more strategic functions like collaborative planning, forecasting, replenishment, and integrated CRM

Government support strategic external systems

This unit demonstrates an enterprise that has the same external integration need of an e-supply chain as those firms in the cell of operational external systems cell. However, the firms in this case are comparably small in sizes but large in numbers. For each firm, it is inefficient to create operational external linkages separately. But for the entire value chain, an industrial alliance linked by an e-supply chain may lead to great efficiency.

Strategic external systems

A firm in this unit has information asymmetry mainly externally, and, therefore, may mainly need external integration with limited internal integration. However, this firm differs from the firm in the previous unit because it is able to more effectively integrate its external partners into the supply chain. There are mainly two cases of this situation. One is that the firm has made only marginal investment in legacy supply chain planning software or if its legacy supply chain planning software has run out of its useful life. And the other is that the firm already has some valuable installed IT infrastructure. In transitional economies, the former situation is more popular. The e-supply chain implementation strategy for firms falling in this unit is to seek supply chain integration with external partners in strategic areas like collaborative planning, forecasting, and replenishment, collaborative product design, and integrated CRM.

Government support strategic extended enterprise systems

Firms in this case have information asymmetry both internally and externally. Therefore, it needs an e-supply chain solution to incorporate both internal and external integration. Unfortunately, the firms in this cell are comparably small in sizes but large in numbers. But there exists strong regulation in the market and the government may exert great influence on firms. The e-supply chain implementation strategy for this situation includes roles of two parts. One part is that of enterprises whose role is to focus on internally integrated e-supply chain system building. The other part is that of government whose role is to regulate and provide support to alliances that is similar to that played by government in the cell of government support strategic external system.

Strategic extended enterprise systems

The firm in this case has information asymmetry both internally and externally. Therefore, it needs an e-supply chain solution to incorporate both internal and external integration. Moreover, the firm in this cell has high ability to integrate business partners into a sophisticated e-supply chain system. The firm can take two ways to integrate its internal operations and supply chain system — either through an off-the-shelf integrated software package or through a customized solution that integrates best-of-the-breed software packages and ports its output over a Web interface, as done by the electronics manufacturer.

CONCLUSION

E-businesses, e-supply chain management needs to be given strategic importance. A successful business collaboration is the result of human interactions, which can be supported by IT, but not to be replaced by IT. This is important as the traditional e-business model is usually developed on the backbone of technological infrastructure, and 'people' related issues can be easily buried under the overwhelming emphasis on technological details. Technology, however, is not the most critical factor in improving supply chains. Businesses must consider relevant attitudinal issues to allow e-technology to be accepted and diffused in the supply chains. Companies strategies can be further improved by adopting new management thinking such as core competence with regards to, for example, their technology capability, or managerial processes, and develop an efficient supply chain representation by exploiting the best fit capabilities of the participating companies. Thus, e-supply chain presents a faithful and meaningful business strategy now-a-days.

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