The impact of supply chain alliance on customer satisfaction

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Abstract

This paper is going to review of the alliances with suppliers in several categories, namely, the content of development, and strategic of supply chain alliances. The objectives need to into alliance metrics and should be feedback from customers. The aim of this paper is to consider forms alliance and customer service theory and its philosophy. In addition to this, the literature review will explore the evolution of supply chain management strategy alliances and how it aims to fulfill customer satisfaction. The first section of this research focuses on the evolution of supply chain strategy alliances. In the second section, the main point will be in identifying customer service satisfaction. The following sections will identify networks, communications, and partnerships that are employed between the supply chain alliance and the customer. In the final section will be conclusion with supply chain alliance and customer satisfaction in supply chain channel.

Keywords: Supply chain management, supply chain alliances, Customer service

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the strategic importance of integrating suppliers, manufacturers, and customers (see Duclos et al., 2003; Childrehouse et al., 2003) in maintaining a competitive edge in business. Businesses have to consider their global reach as it is important, especially for reaching the global market as it will be more profitable and help them grow faster (Christopher and Peck, 2003). In a global economy, with a rapid product cycle, capital constraints and advances in technology, no one firm has the full ability to maintain and grow its market share. In addition to this, alliances have been the frequently focus of research studies because they offer an attractive choice for the traditional arrangements of running a good business from the perspective of customer satisfaction. The aim of this paper is to outline and to confer literature dyad supply chain alliance and customer satisfaction.

The main points will be as follows:

- Investigate the conception and viewpoints of supply chain alliances
- Explore the philosophy from the supply chain alliance to customer service
- Evaluate whether supply chain alliances are effective in providing customer service
- Describe the underlying motives for customer satisfaction
- Consider theoretical perspectives
However, from the supply chain alliance to exam the customer satisfaction also reflect on partnerships, communications, and networks literature in relation to suppliers’ alliances in supply chain management (SCM).

2. The impact of supply chain alliance

With increased levels of global competition, marketing should benefit from alliances, and the alliance partners being able to provide greater knowledge that will place the alliance in a stronger competitive position when compared to the situation of the individual company in its targeted market.

However, businesses are complex entities that requiring significant resources and time to develop effectively. Companies are challenged to enter new markets, fill strategic gaps, and increase technological capabilities. In addition to this, Love and Gunasekarn (1999) argued that the key to importing customer satisfaction and acquiring a competitive advantage is from learning alliances.

The first section review of the alliances with suppliers in several categories, namely, the content of development, strategic and integrated supply chain alliances. The objectives need to into alliance metrics and should be feedback from customers.

The review is for suppliers’ alliance to develop and how to operate more efficient strategic alliances. Also the strategic of supply chain alliances are significant for strategic alliances, as a coalition of two or more organizations to achieve strategically significant goals and objectives are mutually beneficial.

The extend the description of management thinking by arguing that the strategic alliance concept, integrated of strategic alliance, the reason is the supply chain alliance has been the subject of much research recently. Hence, the satisfaction customer’s commercial and corporate advantage over competitive tender. Scholar are questioning early theoretical assumption concerning supplier’s alliance and customers the difficulty of alliances and linked. The stress will be to show the relationships of the supply alliances to the customers, choice of strategic alliance partners and the communication between suppliers and customers, investigate alliance networks estimation are important being considered in the remainder of this paper.

2.1 Supply chain alliance

Gulati et al., (1994) argued that alliance activity is no longer on the edge of corporate strategy. However, alliance formations have been increasing at about 25% per year since 1985 (Mol, 2000). From 1987 and 1992, the Booz Allen and Hamilton study indicated that over 20,000 new alliances were formed with a growth of 25% in just one year (Harbison and Pekar, 1994). In addition to this, Hunt and Morgan (1994) said that by the 1990s marketing professionals and scholars were able to identify a business from its foundation of relationships and exemplified by the greater than before use of strategic alliances. For example, IBM engaged in over 400 alliances in their home country and abroad in 1995 (Day, 1995). Furthermore, Coopers and Lybrand surveyed 400 companies, finding that 55% indicated they were presently drawn in to at least three strategic alliances (Fedor and Werther, 1996). Cravens et al., (2002) highlighted that between 1996 and 1998 alone, 20,000 inter-organizational alliances were formed.

Recently, the critical point is the market increase in using strategic alliances as a business
instrument. And the strategic alliances take place everywhere as a result of economic globalization.

2.2 A strategic of supply chain alliance

The concept of a supply chain, first suggested in 1985 by Houlihan (Cooper and Ellram 1994), who suggested that management is “all difference processes and activities that produce value in the hands of the ultimate customer” (Lummus et al., 1998, p. 49) and that supply chain management is “the process for building improved and stronger upstream and downstream business linkages”(McAfee et al., 2002, p.1). Other definitions include: “how to integrate and perform logistics and manufacturing activities” (Pagh and Copper, 1998, P13), or more generally it is accepted to be the collaboration among the supply chain partners (see Sanders and Premus, 2002).

In addition to this, Supplier alliances have in recent years become more and more important to both buyers and suppliers to assist them respond to sharp competitive pressures. The cooperative relationship may help them achieve a competitive advantage. Buyer interest in alliances is typically driven by efforts to reduce prices, increase supply dependability, and influence supplier quality and delivery schedules (Ellram, 1995). Companies looking to make their supply more efficient and develop close ties with suppliers, for certain purchases, determine that long relationships are more preferable for an alliance.

According to Currie (2000), three major forces influence the formation of alliances between organizations: globalization, deregulation, and consolidation. Mandal et al., (2003) suggests that to improve a strategic alliance it best that managers conduct a pre-alliance planning exercise to point the finger at the compatibility of the business goals of their partners, settle on a method of completion, and state the key challenges that may arise throughout the alliances period. This planning should provide managers with a perspective on deciding how an alliance can benefit their organization.

Strategic alliances on the other hand are an agreement between two or more independent firms. For example, telecommunication organizations could form an alliance for an international joint venture, or an alliance can be established between a banking organization and software supplier. In addition to this, Segil (2000) suggested that revenue may not be approached in these types of arrangements but that the main position may help them establish or maintain market leadership.

Conversely, Perks and Easton (2000) believed that organizational marketing perspective identify market exchange based strategic alliances in the form of resource exchanges and being competitor based. All companies are involved in supply chain networks; even though this does not mean that they manage them effectively. Cox et al., (2004; p410) findings demonstrate that only rarely is such a sourcing approach possible. The idea that future business success will be based primarily on competition between companies and their supply chains is more agile.

It is one of the most important decisions for many manufacturing organisations as they reduce their supply chain cost for improved productivity and profit (Matthews, 2000). Increasingly, make-or-buy decisions have an enormous strategic implication. This has become even more of a prominent situation given the difficulty of the purchasing and supply environments. More specifically, Hoyt and Lee (2001) discussed the evolution of outsourcing and the resulting strategic implications, from the viewpoint of a particular industry.

The challenged the basic notion of the integrated management is to redirect the traditional
stress on functionality to focus more on process achievement. Gattorna and Walters (1996; p21) also pointed out that an important element in the development of supply chain management concerns the channel strategy and the alliances and partnerships that are created within the channels, which enhance the channel’s effectiveness. It seems clear, therefore, that considerations of supply chain management has made a significant contribution to sourcing practices, with the idea that future business success will be based primarily on competition between companies and their supply chains is somewhat over blown. Carr and Smeltzer (1998) recognised the integration of strategic purchasing by developing an empirical definition that emphasises integration. Some researcher definitions of the consistent sourcing processes tend to define strategic purchasing as an integrated process (see Anderson and Katz, 1998).

This highlights that the supply chain is a mixture of processes, which integrates the raw materials that are manufactured into the final products, before they are delivered to their customers. This is based on a basic statement originating from the managing of organisational operations, which in turn can be traced back to channels and systems integration research during the 1960s and more recently work on information management and inventory control. The chain usually implies a line, where relationships connect from one link to the next. However, there are two problems with this. Firstly, not all goods run along the direct line’s chain. For example, Dell’s monitors are shipped with its computers. Secondly, the information flow is managed to gain a competitive advantage in the supply chain but it does not always flow sequentially. In fact, information that is shared with many nodes at once results in faster and quicker supply chains. The nature and the direction of the linkage are unclear in this definition.

Lee and Whang’s (2001) critical integration cannot be completed without a tight linkage of the organisational relationships between companies. Mockler (2001) said that the success of any supply chain integration is on the close cooperation that is motivated by mutual benefit. Strategic alliances have become one of the most important organizational forms in modern society and are well-known tools available to and used by international business management. Ordinary definitions suggest that strategic alliances share compatible goals, strive for mutual benefits, and accept a high level of common dependence (see Kale et al., 2000). According to Tyler and Steensma (1998), alliances are not just limited to one-way transfers of know-how, such as licensing and marketing agreements but are arrangements where partners share their expertise and output. Clarke-Hill et al., (1998) recognized that a strategic alliance is a partnership of two or more organizations that achieve strategically significant goals and objectives that are mutually beneficial. They argue that a strategic alliance is different from other types of collaborative arrangement because they take place in the context of a company’s long-term plan and seek to improve an organization’s competitive standing in either their domestic or international markets.

2.3 The Ineffective Alliance

The alliances are difficult (Anand and Khanna, 2000) and often lead to a poor performance. The Economist in 1999 showed a 60% dissolution rate for inter-organisational alliances between 1992 and 1995. However, most research indicates failure rates between 50% and 80% (Dyer et al., 2001). One research (CMA Management, 2000) found that only 39% of alliances met or went alliance opportunity.

A better known reason for failure is the observation gap between expectations and results. It is important that firms engaging in a new alliance to avoid "Love at first sight" (Ring, 2000) and to focus on their objectives.

Elmuti and Kathawala (2001) identified the following problems facing alliances:
● Fight of culture and "incompatible personal chemistry"
● Lack of harmonisation between management teams
● Differences in operating events and the attitudes among partners
● Strategic alliances might create a future local or global competitor
● Lack of clear goals and objectives, a lack of trust, and opportunistic behaviour
● Performance risks as a result of external, market and internal factors

Based on another study, Zineldin (2000) offers the following dark sides of alliances:

● Strategic alliance relationships can be resource-demanding
● They require experience in working together with new partners, which will probably put considerable demands on the management’s time, efforts, and energy, which may lead to neglect in running the organisation’s core activities.
● Sharing activities with others means giving up control over one’s own resources, which seems to be more or less an automatic effect of close relationships.
● Power and dependence can also be viewed as conflict sources.

There are many functioning problems. Zineldin and Bredenlow (2003) said that Strategic alliances often fail and referred dissatisfaction with the alliance relationship. The failure rate of strategic alliances is about 70% (Kalmbach and Roussel, 1999) and this failure rate is beginning to be discussed in business periodicals. Finally, a Strategic alliance is attractive but it is not simple or easy to create, develop, or support.

3. Customer satisfaction

3.1 Clarification of Customer Requirements

The aims of alliances is to augment a responsibility to ensure efficiency, so the chain members must be able to quickly identify and remove the constraints and ensure that they can continue to precisely meet changing customer requirements (Simatupang, et al., 2004). In addition to this, Frederick Ross (1998, pp280) stated that organisations have to understand the needs of the customers first, as well as the high-quality processes that are capable of continuously delivering value-added solutions to the marketplace. Nisel (2001) agreed that the importance of satisfying consumer needs is the vital goal for business success. In addition to this, that the supply chain management term has been used for almost 20 years and has been defined as the integration of activities that procures materials, transforms them into intermediate goods and final products, before delivering them to customers. The point of firms that bring products or services to the market has been called the supply chain (Heizer and Render, 2001).

Lee and Amaral (2002) supposed a “right supply chain” aims to perform well on both their costs and services, from an operational viewpoint. Zairi (1999) suggested that supply chain management consists of value-adding and optimisation in the use of all available resources, materials, people, technology, and information for the benefit of the end customer. Supply chain management focuses on lowering costs and delivering a high volume of the defined services (Stonebraker; Liao; 2004, pp1041). As Chopra and Meindl (2004) recognised the effort the supply chain expends in filling out the customer’s request. The objective of a supply chain is to maximise the overall value generated, such as faster delivery, improved quality or reduced costs, with the primary purpose for the reality of any supply chain being to satisfy customer needs.

Bowersox (2002) identified that in today’s global economy, supply chain arrangements compete with each other for customer loyalty. The argument is that the public does not benefit
across the board from supply chain efficiency. In addition to this, the flow of goods can be best visualised as moving through a supply channel, passing from one component part of the channel to another before finally reaching its destination point --- the customer.

Lee (2004, pp 653) discussed the issue of organisational learning and how an organisation can produce customer satisfaction, from the point of view of added value. Customer service should be placed in a strategic marketing context, which means that marketers can develop a high quality customer service policy and that the organisation can put a customer response system in place, to ensure that customer service is seen as being customer orientated.

3.2 An Exploration of customer satisfaction

On the other hand, dissatisfaction can result in complaints, harmful word-of-mouth, and the customer never returning again (Blodgett et al., 1995). Then again, customer complaints are essential for successful service recovery (Tax et al., 1998).

Unfortunately, some dissatisfied customers do not complain because they do not know where and how to do so or feel embarrassed about the attention (Tax and Brown, 1998). The greater than before convenience of being able to contact customer sales representative via e-mail, mobile phones and toll-free numbers might encourage customers to complain more. In addition to this, this is only one view of customer relationship management (CRM) being heavily dependent on information technology (IT) support and software development. The original focus of these systems was to be a customer communication process that was designed to supplement the disadvantage of a company’s inward-facing IT process. Moreover, it is argued that the use of technological support to handle complaints will lead to more efficient service recovery systems (Tax and Brown, 1998).

Alternatively, Chen and Popovich (2003) argued that CRM technology links the front office, sales, marketing and customer service, to the back office, the financial, operations, logistics and human resources functions with the company’s customers. J.Baker (2003) highlighted that CRM has been focused on more in recent years. It has long been recognised that marketing requires a deep understanding of customers’ business processes and indeed of their value creation processes. The achievement of this change must begin with the identification of the interlinking roles of CRM and SCM processes. The purpose of managing CRM and SCM in an integrated way is to enable the organisation to become more agile in its response to demands.

4. The connection between SCM and CRM

The business process integration of CRM and SCM further helps companies to manage and service a customer profitably, to ensure that the insights gained from customers at the front end of the business planning process are transformed into profits throughout the planning efficiencies in the supply chain (Z.Zeng A., and K.Pathak B., 2003). For example, a strongly integrated CRM and SCM solution allows companies to bring the service management business process to life, promoting the management of everything from call centre operations and field services, through to service delivery and inventory management. It is true that CRM and SCM integration allows companies to translate fluctuations in the demand chain and changes in market circumstances to capture the CRM system into a real-time optimisation in the supply chain. This is achieved by integrating the operation and order planning and the demand and supply planning capabilities of the SCM system. This solution further enables organisations to effectively manage customer opportunities, based upon the capabilities of an organisation’s supply network.
Z.Zeng A. and K. Pathak (2003) believed that integration is achieved by being based upon the functionality of the active CRM, ERP and SCM systems (Z.Zeng A., and K.Pathak B., 2003). By maximising informational capability, companies are offering the best value products to their customers (The White House, 2000).

The real challenge, suggested by Green (2001), is that collaborative supply chain business practice involves deeper relationships than the traditional forms of business communication. In addition to improving collaboration and planning, Tjader said (2004) this firms can also foster much-needed cooperation and develop innovative products for the marketplace.

CRM has the advantage of providing improvements to the supply chain, as firms have moved to a new model that emphasises the matching of the degree of customer care with the particular customer and the customer’s real needs for a service. In a business to business (B2B) situation, most of the customers will be large, fully developed accounts that are looking to automate or improve the way they transact their business with the suppliers (Poirier and Baure, 2000). Customisation has been the common practice in B2B markets for many years. Suppliers often make adaptations to suit the needs of their customers, with it also being true that customers make adaptations to suit their suppliers (Buttle, 2004). Certainly, Mchugh et al., (2003) suggested that in a world for meet consumer tastes, fast spreading technology, a rise in fixed costs, and growing protectionism, more collaborative relationships with suppliers are a critical instrument for serving customers in a global environment.

This point is a unique aspect of CRM, in that it is a value-added activity through which mutual interdependence and collaboration between suppliers and customers takes place. Finally, with electronic ordering and Internet commerce, it is being established for traditional product offerings, especially in B2B marketing (Parvatiyar and Sheth, 2002). Existing CRM will be a key element. It is predicted that two factors will influence the future state of B2B CRM. The first is customer partner information disclosures. However, to acquire that information, customers and partners must be willing to make it known. The other factor will be the global economy, which will affect corporations’ ability to invest and will therefore control customer buying power. New business-to-business (B2B) loyalty programs have appeared in the telecommunications industry, industrial suppliers and technological product sectors. Capizzi and Ferguson (2005, pp73) pointed out that the new technologies are finding fertile grounds for innovation and productivity gains within the marketplace. Smart cards, RFID, real-time point-of sales (POS), wireless, the worldwide web and the third generation of loyalty “rules engines” all enter the 21st Century with proven cases of success that enable some form of reward and recognition.

Companies are now trying to join their CRM activities and customer insight information with their upstream operations in their supply chain. The supply chain can be increasingly responsive, meaning that the sales forces and frontline employees are connected with the right data in the supply chain. By integrating CRM with SCM, companies will be able to deliver customer-configured products. Ultimately, it is about the movement of quality information through the whole supply chain.

4.1 Networks within supply chain alliances and customers

Christopher (1992) said the supply chain is a network of organisations that is involved, through upstream and downstream linkages, in the different processes and activities that produce value in the form of products and services in the hands of the ultimate customers. Some researchers point out that integration can improve the supply network (Xu et al., 2002).

In addition to this, global supply chain networks do their best to support their strategic objectives in different countries by playing different roles (Chopra et al., 2004, pp101). Mills
et al., (2004) said that supply chains and networks can also be viewed from an even higher strategic perspective, whilst scholars like Fine (1998) have focussed on how the dynamics in supply chains leads to power shifts between suppliers and OEMs. Further, SCM should also consist of the analysis of the strategic positioning of new firms and the supply networks made possible by the trends of increasing product standardisation, rapid communication and globalisation. These trends have enabled firms to achieve greater success. However, Porter (1994) argued that if companies fail to recognise the relationship between the functional strategy and external pressures, they will eventually end up with non-competitive production systems, as the essence of strategy formulation is coping with competition. Thus, the linkage among activities should be extended outside the firm to encompass the activities of suppliers, channels, and buyers. In light of this, Harland et al., (1999) proposed the term “supply strategy” in addition to "supply chain management”. The reason was to broaden the concept of the supply network from operations management to strategy planning, and extending the scope of the study beyond the material and information flows, to include the operational process strategy.

From the late 1980s researchers took an even broader view of “supply networks", not only concentrating on the actual material and information flow but also on product development and collaborative learning. The best example is the comparison of the Japanese, European and US American Automotive industry in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Womack et al., 1991).

4.2 Communication between suppliers and customers

This commitment is a key success factor for achieving supply chain integration, with trust being the origin of the development in such a commitment. Min (2001) said that an alliance is based on the integration of commitment. Also, G Kwon and Suh (2004) agreed that a successful supply chain appearance is based on the commitment surrounding the supply chain partners.

Commitment is an effective factor where a business customer continues to purchase from a particular supplier because the customer values the relation it has with the supplier (Abdul-Muhmin, 2002). The inter-organisational relationships trust has been calculated at length, not only as a challenge for the supply chain but also because trust can add considerably benefit the long-term constancy of an organisation. Also, this argument suggests that the effective coordination of the supply chain is built on a foundation of trust and commitment.

However, Short (2002) said that the Internet has changed business commitments. Effectual supply chain planning is based on the sharing of information and the trust between partners and is an important requirement for successful SCM (G Kwon and Suh, 2004). Most companies developing supply chain technology are only getting a small separation of those benefits that are promised. It is not that a company doesn’t trust the technology (Sherer, 2005). In contrast, a partnership with high trust would enjoy open communication and a willingness to take risks. In addition to this, a company in a high-trust relationship are not afraid to share all their information and believe in the content of the information received. A limitation should be noted here, in that the sharing of information and plus point specificity could be used as tools to enhance the level of trust (Abdul-Muhmin, 2002). When supply chain members have a relatively balanced dependency and a high degree of trust, the information flow in the supply chain will be effective. Tjader (2004) pointed out that this, in turn, increases the speed and quantity of the information transfers, and enhances the truth and transparency of the supply chain operation.

The commitment required to develop and sustain an alliance does, however, mean that they typically involve less than one percent of a buyer’s supplier base (Hendrick and Ellram, 1993), and having less than ten partners is not uncommon (Vollmann and Cordon, 1998). Given the
impact a partner can have on an alliance’s success, partner selection is important (McCutcheon and Stuart, 2000).

4.3 The partnership within the supply chain alliance and customer

Ramsay (1996) explained that: “… the buyer’s commitment normally would be expected to include the adoption of the supplier as a single source and therefore increase its switching cost… Suppliers are generally free to form partnership without giving up their other customers… So partnerships entail an increase in supply risk for buyer and a potential net transfer of power to the supplier.” Another forceful reason for the confrontation towards partnering is that purchasers moving to a single-sourced position lose their sourcing freedom and competitive advantage, without the supplier suffering a commensurate reduction in its freedom to sell to a variety of customers. In addition, Ramsay (1996) further suggested that the purchasers who are already single-sourced from their previous partnership development will tend to increase the advantage specificity of the supplier relationship with their partner, and thus both increase the switching costs of any re-sourcing attempt, which reduces their power.

As Thorne and Wright (2005) commented, the relationship between partners in supply chain management education and learning are considered as a strategic alliance. The challenge with supply chains is that there is seldom an assured long-term relationship with the customer-suppliers. This discourages any development of customer-suppliers, who may default to other service providers at any time. However, Ramsay (1996) said that the effect of forming a partnership relationship is to ensure a close match between the supplier’s sales arrangement and the purchaser’s requirements. In addition to this, there are some services in which customer-supplier development can be accomplished in an effective manner.

Undoubtedly, the goal of a ‘partnership’ is a customer-supplier link within supply networks. Despite recognition of the need for partnerships, it is helpful to understand the difficulties in order to gauge how the benefits of a “partnership” might be achieved. Additionally, organisation can work with limited strategic suppliers in order to maintain their collaborative relationships and also to replace the global competition in its supply chain.

Tjader (2004) referred to the ‘trust factor’, suggesting that sharing information is the key to assuring that decisions can be made as soon as the demand is realised, showing that knowledge management is a strong benefit for the value chain in Business. Within the integrated supply chain, trust must be development not only between a single alliance, and link within the supply chain, but also among multiple partners located across the supply chain. Moreover, initiate firms must be able to trust not only their supplier but also their supplier’s suppliers. In turn, the selection of the supply chain partner often requires an in-depth evaluation of multiple criteria to identify the long term possibility for an alliance relationship.

Partnerships tend to be more effective when they have compatible product or service lines, share similar cultures and can help fill strategic gaps in either capabilities or offerings. Successful alliance partners also learn how to manage the termination of the relationship.

5. Conclusion

Shared information between supply chain partners and customers can be fully leveraged through process integration. The co-operation in the supply chain is becoming more common for focusing on managing competencies and contracting out all other actions. Finally, a greater faith on suppliers and alliance partners has become critical.

The current literature on the supply chain management area synthesised both management learning and development. The literature is multifaceted and because of these different
contributions to the body of information, there is a lack of the application of management learning to management practice.

The study has tended to overlook the growth, evolutionary aspect of inter-organisational dealings, preferring to highlight the necessary elements needed to begin an alliance and the outcomes for customer satisfaction. The main research gap is why suppliers only focus on customers; the suppliers have to take their partners to be good alliances for customers’ satisfaction. To address this gap, recent research has begun to consider the impact of the broader social, deterministic communication of the character of change. From this review, it has deduced that the literature on the topic of alliances has focused mainly or how to form alliances and the resultant benefits from customer satisfaction. Essential for this issue and largely unmentioned is the understanding of how alliance relationships develop over time.

However in today’s competitive and high-technological age, the market has become more agile, so it can not only focus on the gap between suppliers and customers. In addition to this, the suppliers are more important for businesses and they can also support or design new products and services for customers.
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