

CONCEPTUAL ARTICLE

Aligning operant resources for global performance: An assessment of supply chain human resource management

R GLENN RICHEY JR. AND CHADWICK B HILTON

Management and Marketing Department, The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL, USA

MICHAEL G HARVEY

University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS, USA and Bond University, Varsity Lakes, QLD, Australia

LAUREN SKINNER BEITELSPACHER

Marketing and Industrial Distribution, University of Alabama at Birmingham, Birmingham, AL, USA

MERT TOKMAN

Department of Marketing, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA, USA

MIRIAM MOELLER

Department of International Business, University of Queensland, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The intent of the paper is to develop the service marketing logic (S-D logic) strategy that is centered on service as a means to differentiate global strategy from those of competitors. The context of the paper is to examine S-D logic in global supply chains. **Design/Methodology:** The paper is a theory driven conceptual piece. **Findings:** Globalization emphasizes complex interconnected systems, while S-D logic emphasizes the importance of leveraging operant resources in order to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Both S-D logic and globalization apply in the supply chain context. This paper focuses on the global supply chain and the importance of leveraging service based operant resources. Because the focus of management has shifted from a domestic to a more complex, three-dimensional network, it is critical for practitioners and researchers to understand how to optimize service based operant resources in the global marketplace. **Practical Implications:** Because the focus of management has shifted from a domestic to a more complex, three-dimensional global network, it is critical for practitioners and researchers to understand how to optimize service based operant resources in the global marketplace. We suggest that in this dynamic marketplace, both globalization and S-D logic are required to fully explain supply chain performance. Specifically, we suggest that managers develop a global 'supply-chain management' perspective allowing for the key operant resource – human capital – to create synergistic partner relationships and customer experiences resulting in

*superior performance. **Originality/Value:** This is one of the first (if not the first) paper that examines S-D logic in a global context. This move forward from the domestic orientation of many/most of the recent literature provides the foundation for future global research into the S-D logic.*

Keywords: operant resources, supply chain management, human resources, service-dominant logic

INTRODUCTION

An unfortunate product of developing narrowing streams of inter-organizational relationship research is that a very limited research stream has addressed the human capital/personnel relationship issues associated with global supply-chain management (exceptions being: Boles, Johnson, & Barksdale, 2000; Gruen, Summers, & Acito, 2000; Hewett & Bearden, 2001; Iacobucci, & Ostrom, 1996). Grounded in the traditional research of the 1990s relationship marketing logic, most of the extant inter-organizational relationship studies have focused on relationship quality rather than on the consequences or mechanisms of global supply-chain manager success and their failures in 'resource' bound global relationships.

One major issue in international research and practice is that effective managers are difficult to identify (Bartlett, Ghoshal, & Birkinshaw, 2003; Earley & Peterson, 2004; Javidan & House, 2001; Moynihan, 1993; Pucik & Saba, 1998; Harvey, Mayerhofer, Hartmann, & Moeller, 2010). To make the transition from economies of scale to economies of scope (e.g., global), management must leverage human capital almost to the breaking point in order to succeed in the hypercompetitive global marketplace (Harvey, Griffith, Kiessling, & Moeller, forthcoming). Global human capital (e.g., the combination of management talent/assets with a global mindset) is rapidly becoming the metric by which global organizations are measuring their present but more importantly, future ability to compete in a global context).

As supply chain's work to develop service excellence, they turn towards collaboration. Collaboration is defined as two or more companies sharing the responsibility of exchanging

common planning, management, execution, and performance measurement information (Daugherty et al., 2006). Such collaboration is particularly necessary in countries that frequently manage with a virtual network (Harvey & Novicevic, 2002; Harvey, Novicevic, & Garrison, 2004, 2005; Harvey & Richey, 2001). These unique types of assignments have major consequences for the human resource management team in global organizations. Therefore, alternative pools of candidates have to be developed to insure an adequate supply of global supply-chain managers (Harvey & Richey, 2001).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the service related importance of the human resource, namely the global supply chain manager. First, we employ service-dominant logic (S-D logic) as a theoretical base to analyze global supply-chain management resource issues. Next we examine different types of supply-chain service supported skills, knowledge, and abilities that global supply-chain managers need. Finally, we assess the impact on global service based relationships using a variety of different categories of supply-chain managers for different environmental contexts.

The ultimate purpose of this research is to discuss the importance of global supply chain managers as operant resources and assess the role they play in generating improvements in international market performance. Today's turbulent economy consistently reinforces a global message – *suppliers and customers are increasingly motivated by value*. This value generation is not always created by dramatic price changes. Increasingly suppliers and customers are inspired by the value created by the service side of a market offering (Sheth & Sisodia, 2006) beyond the core product. Today's global

managers must adopt S-D logic; this paradigm shift will require them to focus on leveraging their operant resources to achieve sustainable competitive advantages via their service offerings (Lusch, Vargo, & O'Brien, 2007). Because shifting customer and supplier demands place more emphasis on the services surrounding the product than the physical product itself, global managers are forced to refine their entire spectrum of service competencies. Yet, in an increasingly chaotic economic climate, global managers often focus on short run decisions and do not utilize their resources fully. Therefore, it is highly critical that researchers and practitioners alike recognize the value of a framework that details the benefits of long-term focus on using global supply chain managers as operant resources.

SERVICE-DOMINANT LOGIC

Since the publication of the service-dominant logic (S-D logic) article (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a, 2004b), several new research domains have emerged in the marketing discipline. While a large part of these new studies focuses on co-creation of values (Etgar, 2008; Chunyan, Bagozzi, & Troye, 2008; Dong, Evans, & Zou, 2008), others have focused on participation of the suppliers in value creation through technology partnerships and branding (Richey, Tokman, & Dalela, 2009; Ballantyne & Aitken, 2007). However, the majority of this research still overlooks the importance of the human resources. It is the manager who manipulates technology and defines and creates value; without the manager there is no service delivery.

A key theoretical contribution provided by S-D logic is the emphasis on service and the importance of *operant* resources in achieving sustainable competitive advantage (Madhavaram & Hunt, 2008; Ngo & O'Cass, 2009). Constantin and Lusch (1994) originally conceptualized operant resources as those that produce impacts and outcomes on other resources; operant resources are typically intangible like

organizational core competences and culture and evolve in time. S-D logic distinguishes *operant* resources (i.e. the global manager) from *operand* resources (i.e. computer systems). This suggests that value creation is primarily a result of maximizing operant resources (i.e. the global manager).

Madhavaram and Hunt (2008) further analyze operant resources and develop a hierarchical order. This hierarchical order includes basic, composite, and interconnected levels of operant resources. As firms go from basic to interconnected levels of the hierarchy, they increase the value (cost of acquisition, time needed to develop/imitate) of their resources as well as the sustainability of their competitive advantages (Table 1).

Basic operant resources are viewed as the lower-level resources that 'form the building blocks of higher-order operant resources' (p. 70). At this level the operant resources are observed independently from other resources as the fundamental units of exchange – such as specialized employee skills and knowledge (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a, 2004b). Composite operant resources are viewed as 'a combination of two or more distinct, basic resources, with low levels of interactivity' (Madhavaram & Hunt, 2008, p. 70). In other words, somewhat unrelated (i.e. non-interactive) basic operant resources should be brought together to form composite operant resources. Finally, interconnected operant resources are viewed as interaction of highly related resources that strengthen each other's capability in assisting the firm to create value for its target customers and preferred suppliers. Therefore, specialty global managers that have dynamic resources such as a superior service climate, trusting and committed customers, and highly responsive suppliers will likely have a competitive advantage. In this situation, all three of the aforementioned dynamic resources are inter-related. Madhavaram and Hunt's (2008) hierarchical order details that as firms utilize their

TABLE 1: HIERARCHY OF OPERANT DOMESTIC/GLOBAL RESOURCES

	Domestic operant resources		Global operant resources	
	Tangible	Intangible	Tangible	Intangible
Stage 1: Basic operant resources	Physical facilities	Skills of key managers	Global brand identity	Lack of liability-of-foreignness
	Warehousing/retailing institutions	Commitment to organ. goals	Global channels of distribution	Willingness to relocate (expatriates)
	Unique technology	Stability of TMT	Global service capabilities	Market presences/share
Stage 2: Composite operant resources	Investment in R&D	Brand identity	Global product launch process	Global strategic orientation
	New product development process	Unique market segmentation	Globalization of marketing &/or organization	Global knowledge management
	Market segmentation product positioning	Market positioning	Technological competence	Price setting capabilities
Stage 3: Interconnective operant resources	Product/brand identity	Customer satisfaction/loyalty	Global computer network	Development of global mindset
	Advertising/promotion	Marketing positioning	Manufacturing options in various countries	Pluralistic management orientation
	Vertical/horizontal integration	Learning/absorption	Computer/channels networks	Strategic alliance(s)

basic resources to form composite and eventually interconnected operant resources, they enhance the sustainability of their competitive advantages. This, in turn, increases the cost of acquisition of these resources for the competitors as well as the time required for competitors to develop/imitate these resources. The assertion that interconnected operant resources possess the highest levels of inimitability and non-substitutability parallels Dierickx and Cool's (1989) interconnectedness of asset stocks concept – essentially explaining which resources are more likely to produce sustainable advantages. The suggestion is that single (basic) and/or independently accumulated multiple resources (composite) are more susceptible to imitation than those interactive resources that reinforce each other.

Dynamic capabilities and operant resources

Global dynamic capabilities theory (GDCT) has traditionally focused on organizational level resources (i.e., internal factors semi-permanently linked to the organization, such as top management team, financial capabilities, unique management skills and the like) providing the firm with a unique competitive posture (Barney, 1991; Dierickx & Cool, 1989; Wernerfelt, 1984). Recently, however, researchers have demonstrated that idiosyncratic inter-firm linkages can be a source of relational rents and competitive advantage (Conner, 1991; Conner & Prahalad, 1996; Dyer & Singh, 1998; Wright, Dunford, & Snell, 2001). GDCT theorizes that the accumulation of valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable, and organizationally specific resources

creates a competitive advantage resulting in above-normal returns (Barney, 1991; Peteraf, 1993; Wernerfelt, 1984).

Global dynamic capabilities theory of the firm can be divided into two categories: (1) relational (i.e., outcomes of the relationships between a firm and key external stakeholders, including distributors, global managers, end customers, other strategic partners, etc.); and (2) intellectual (i.e., the types of knowledge a firm possess about the environment, such as the emerging and potential state of market conditions and the entities within; Murphy & Zbojnik, 2004; Srivastava, Shervani, & Fahey, 1998). Market-based assets include: brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Shocker et al., 1994), customer satisfaction (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Yi, 1990), and the management of strategic relationships (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Bucklin & Sengupta, 1993).

Market-based assets become of particular strategic importance when competing in the global market arena, particularly when the countries in which the firm is competing are significantly different culturally, economically, and in a regulatory sense (i.e., emerging markets such as India, China, and other countries in South East Asia; Sinkula, Baker, & Noordewier, 1997). Having both relational and intellectual knowledge that other competitors do not have provides an organization with a platform from which unique strategies can be derived and modified on a continuous basis (Ramaswami, Bhargave, & Srivastava, 2004; Srivastava, Fahey, & Shervani, 2006; Srivastava et al., 1998). Researchers have started linking human-capital management to the MBV of the firm examining how these assets play an important role in gaining/maintaining global competitive advantage in environments like SCM (Murphy & Zbojnik, 2004).

The utilization of global inter-organizational marketing relationships has become a strategic priority for many global organizations (Day, 1994). Having global managers that can develop committed relationships is viewed as one of the most durable advantages in hypercompetitive

global markets due to the fact that they are difficult for competitors to understand (i.e., implicit in nature), to copy, or to displace (Day, 1994a, 1994b). As a result, marketers are adopting the perspective that customers and supply-chains are not simply the objects of marketers' actions; but rather, they are assets that must be cultivated and leveraged (Hunt & Morgan, 1995). These assets are the foundation of the MBV of assets that arise from the commingling of the firm's traditional internal assets with entities in its external environment (Srivastava et al., 1998). This continuous modification of strategy and the combination of RBV and MBV form the GDCT.

Global dynamic capabilities theory addresses the creation of difficult-to-imitate combinations of resources (both internal [RBV] as well as external [MBV] to the organization), including effective coordination of inter-organizational relationships, on a global basis that can provide the organization with a competitive advantage (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). GCCT has two primary components: (1) developing systemic global coherence (i.e., think globally) while recognizing the unique features of each country's environment to facilitate customization of individual country strategies; and (2) adaptation, integration, and reconfiguring of internal and external assets to match individual strategic opportunities (i.e., act locally) in the global marketplace (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Peteraf & Bergen, 2003; Teece et al., 1997). GDCT is derived from a firm leveraging its internal and external assets which in turn enhances its power in its global inter-organizational relationships. This enhanced power enables firms to coordinate inter-organizational activities and respond rapidly and flexibly, to global market opportunities and the resulting competitors' strategies (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece et al., 1997).

A central thesis in supply-chain management is that the chain itself is only as strong as its weakest link. This being said, global supply-chain

managers must spend a significant amount of time selecting partners with good strategic fit. In inter-organizational relationships, strategic fit is defined as a high level of agreement or consistency (strategy and/or structure) between two interacting organizations (Birkinshaw, Toulan, & Arnold, 2001). Strategic fit has been identified as a dynamic capability key to gaining competitive advantage (e.g., Datta, 1991; Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1988). When selecting supply-chain partners, global supply-chain managers may improve fit by acquiring capabilities through the partnership itself. In two firms, for example, seeking to develop the effective management of technological resources as a capability, one would expect the fit to improve as the technological readiness of each partner converges, potentially yielding a partnership or dyad-based capability. This type of fit is considered a strategic-interactive fit for the interaction of firm technological readiness (Drazin & Van de Ven, 1985).

Global dynamic capabilities derived from the combined RBV and MBV elements of the firm in conjunction with the more recently included market strengths of global organizations which focus on firm-level resources (internal factors semi-permanently linked to the organization). These capabilities arguably provide the firm with a unique competitive posture (Barney, 1991; Dierickx & Cool, 1989; Wernerfelt, 1984). The global dynamic capabilities perspective argues that capabilities are more substitutable across different contexts as well as the equifinality (i.e., unique combinations of internal and external resources), thus rendering inimitability and immobility irrelevant to sustain competitive advantage (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). As such, the global dynamic capabilities perspective is directed at the implementation of key resources, as opposed to the ownership of the resources themselves. In today's highly competitive business environment, inter-organizational relationships are viewed as a key strategic resource upon which a

firm can develop its global dynamic capabilities (Peteraf & Bergen, 2003).

Asset specificity refers to those assets that are directly tied to a specific business relationship and that have no alternative use (Peteraf, 1993; Williamson, 1979, 1985). Examples of such assets include: physical assets, such as special handling equipment, or knowledge assets, such as knowledge to perform an activity (e.g., procedures, methods, etc.; Dyer & Singh, 1998; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). Peteraf (1993) argues that the RBV is fundamentally concerned with the internal accumulation of assets with asset specificity. The RBV identifies both the individual and combined value of resources that can be amalgamated into a variety of combinations to provide an organization with global dynamic capabilities (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000).

Both S-D logic and GDCT view (operant) resources as dynamic capabilities of a firm that produce effects in other resources and therefore their utilization contributes directly to value creation (Lusch et al., 2007). S-D logic's differential views of *operant* and *operand* resources stems from the earlier studies of economists like Penrose (1959) as well as the works of resource-based theorists (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990; Barney, 1991; Day, 1994a, 1994b; Hunt & Morgan, 1995). These economists discussed the changing role of resources as facilitators and organizational capabilities rather than inputs (Penrose, 1959). Their remarks opened new paths for resource and capability based theorists who suggested that the role of resources and capabilities are of great importance in creating superior value for the marketplace, and in achieving sustainable competitive advantage over competitors (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990; Barney, 1991; Day, 1994a, 1994b).

RESOURCE LEVELS AND THE GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGER

This study focuses on internal (organizational) and external (relational) resources. Internal operant resources are intrinsic to the organization.

For the purposes of this research, we have chosen to examine customer orientation and service culture as two internal resources related to market performance. These constructs were chosen because of their strong association and impact on the service level the firm is able to offer. External operational resources focus on the relational aspects that the global managers are able to cultivate with their suppliers. Governance mechanisms and collaborative communication were chosen as two relational resources related to market performance. This study suggests that the development of both internal and external operant resources is critical for the firm to offer a comprehensive service offering and improve overall market performance; not only does the firm have to have a strong internal orientation, but it also must work with suppliers who help them maintain this orientation.

Internal operant resources

Customer orientation is defined as, 'the set of cross functional processes and activities directed at creating and satisfying customers through continuous needs assessment' (Deshpande, Farley, & Webster, 1993, p. 27). Customer orientation is a primary component of market orientation, along with competitor orientation and interfunctional coordination (Narver & Slater, 1990). Customer orientation implies that a firm puts the customer's interests first and places the highest emphasis on exceeding customer expectations (Deshpande et al., 1993). Customer orientation is examined at the organizational level as it is a construct that must permeate all levels of the organization in order for it to be successful; it implies that organizations will gain a sustainable competitive advantage by understanding and meeting the needs of their customers, and in the business to business context, understanding and meeting the needs of their customers' customers (Deshpande et al., 1993).

Customer orientation is a critical basic operant resource, especially for global managers. Global managers must understand their

customers' needs better than their competitors in order to enjoy success in today's competitive marketplace. In today's increasingly value-driven economy, global managers' customer orientation will help them understand what benefit packages to develop with the customers to co-generate value (Lusch et al., 2007). Building an orientation that focuses on customer needs and wants is critical to the continued success of global firms. Global organizations have to differentiate themselves based on their services that support their core products in order to maintain a competitive advantage (Brady & Cronin, 2001), and the likelihood of offering appropriate services for the right target markets will increase when the customers are centered in the value creation process.

Global managers often find it difficult to differentiate themselves by product assortment alone, and increased competition is thus motivating global managers to focus more strongly on service quality (Bolton, Kannan, & Bramlett, 2000). The quality of services that global managers use to support their merchandise offering is shown to be a critical component for continued growth and increased customer loyalty (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). Additionally, some researchers argue that one key factor enabling global organizations to gain/maintain competitive advantage is the capability to deliver high quality service to customers consistently (Carman, 1990).

Service involves the organization's abilities to meet the customer's needs from multiple perspectives. Thus, service culture for a global organization (within a supply chain) is defined as an organizational climate where the goals and values of the firm are focused on service excellence through development of frontline and back-end (supply chain) competencies (see Skinner, 2007). Service culture is derived from multiple literatures. First, market and customer orientation suggest that a culture conducive to understanding and responding to the needs of the customer will lead to increased customer value (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater,

1990). Second, because of the S-D logic paradigm shift, a need to examine exchanges from a service-centered perspective is prevalent (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a, 2004b). Service culture is an internal characteristic that global managers must develop in order to position themselves to implement service ideals throughout the organization, and, therefore, it should be viewed as a critical basic operant resource for global managers.

When an organization's culture is focused on service excellence, benefits can be reaped by both the frontline service employees and the partnering suppliers. Frontline service workers usually spend a significant amount of time working directly with customers. For these employees, working in an organization centered on service excellence can have a positive impact due to service policies and provisions that favor the customers. When organizations surround their employees with customer friendly service policies and provisions, the employees tend to enjoy higher levels of job satisfaction, commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors (Donavan, Brown, & Mowen, 2004). Moreover, partnering suppliers would also benefit from global managers' service excellence focus by enhancing their own logistical service quality, gaining access to global managers' supply chain technologies, and by developing a reputation in the marketplace as a preferred supplier (Richey et al., 2009). Thus, it is expected that an enhanced service culture should lead to improved market performance.

External operant resources

Communication among channel partners involves creation and exchange of messages between firms (Holden & O'Toole, 2004). Collaborative communication is critical to the success of inter-firm relationships because it improves partnering firms' abilities to share critical information with each other. Communication quality, in the global supply chain literature, is a significant component of information transfer

and building trust among global supply chain managers. Communication quality 'includes such aspects as the accuracy, timeliness, adequacy, and credibility of information exchanged' (Mohr & Spekman, 1994, p. 138). Within a global context, quality communication is significant if the supply chain expects to achieve the goals of the partnership.

Mohr, Fosher, and Nevin (1996, p. 103) conducted a study to 'examine the possibility of using communication to manage channel relationships in order to enhance outcomes'. Their research found that collaborative communication increased supplier and dealer satisfaction and perceived coordination with the manufacturer. In this study, we define collaborative communication as the two-way exchange of information between firms and their suppliers in an open and frequent manner. Thus, collaborators develop channels where information can flow between the two parties openly and frequently and employees are encouraged to participate in this flow of information as both senders and receivers in a dynamic organizational capability thereby creating a basic operant resource for the global managers.

The relationships between suppliers and global managers must be strong in order to develop service competencies between firms. In order for a global firm to be able to compete in today's turbulent economy, it must be able to develop collaborative relationships with its suppliers. One of the foundations of this collaborative relationship is communication. Communication among channel partners allows for better forecasting and planning (Kumar & van Dissel, 1996). Communication and responsiveness allow for more information exchange in order to expedite products quickly to stores. This allows global managers to have products on-hand to meet the needs of the consumers. Open communication among channel partners allows for more expedient conflict resolution (Kumar & van Dissel, 1996), specifically with product returns and product defects (Daugherty, Myers, & Richey,

2002). Ultimately, focusing on collaborative communication with key suppliers will help the global organization in responding to customer service issues.

Interconnected operant resources

Top management support

Management operates through various strategic activities often classified as planning, organizing, leading/motivating, and controlling (Van Egeren & O'Connor, 1998). The act of planning forces top management to make decisions about the future, both immediate and distant. The act of organizing requires that management makes optimum use of resources in order to effectively and efficiently carry out plans. Management must also possess both leadership and motivational skills, in order to get employees on board with plans. The more top management supports the goals of a service-centered organization, the more successful the organization (Van Egeren & O'Connor, 1998). Top management is responsible for setting the tone of the organization (Hoffman & Hegarty, 1993). In other words, if top management is ambiguous or indifferent about an emphasis on service, both frontline and back-end service employees in global organizations will receive that message and react accordingly. Therefore, top management support is a critical basic operant resource for global managers.

Organizational culture is often found to be strongly correlated with top management support. The goals and precedence set by top management set the tone for the culture of the organization (Hofstede, 1980). Both customer orientation and service excellence focus are important parts of successful global managers' organizational cultures that can be reinforced by top management support. Top management must play a critical role in the utilization of these basic operant resources like customer orientation and service culture. The stronger the role of top management, the more likely these resources will be utilized appropriately.

As it is with the internal operant resources, top management's support of utilizing external operant resources is also critical in a global organization's success. For instance, Pujari, Peattie, and Wright (2004) suggest that top management support is a key driver of environmentally friendly new product development partnerships with suppliers. Similarly, Lee, Lee, and Kwon (2005) posit that when supplier incentives are reinforced with management support, service organizations are more apt to adopt new technologies to be used in their frontline. Moreover, Soderquist and Motwani's (1999) case study on a French automotive supplier company concludes that management support was a reinforcing factor for the relationship between supplier quality management and positive market outcomes for the automotive firms. The aforementioned studies suggest that top management must play a critical role in the utilization of external operant resources. Both collaborative communication and effective governance mechanisms are examples of external operant resources that can benefit from top management support. For instance, a supportive management would be proactive in providing its employees with much needed communication tools and motivations to cultivate two-way communications. Similarly, a supportive management would be more flexible with reinforcement of its written contracts to enhance socialization with suppliers (Heide & Miner, 1992).

Relationship quality as reinforcing operant resource

In order for firms to remain competitive, they must develop long-term relationships with their stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, employees and competitors (Lambe, Spekman, & Hunt, 2000). Trust and commitment are two highly inter-related concepts that stimulate a relational bond between business to business customers and provide opportunities for collaboration (Kumar & Sheer, 1995). In discussions of supply chain orientation (a firm's internal propensity towards accepting supply

chain management) trust and commitment are the most often mentioned variables for supporting intra-network collaboration (Min, Mentzer, & Ladd, 2007). Thus, we posit that relationship quality is a composite operant resource formed by the combination of a global trust in and commitment to a supplier.

Trust is the belief in an exchange partner's 'reliability and integrity, credibility and benevolence, and word that an obligation will be fulfilled' (Lambe et al., 2000, p. 217). Trust assures members in a relationship that the other members are competent and can be relied upon to meet their obligations (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and has been shown to be an indicator of relationship strength across a multitude of settings (Geyskens, Steenkamp, & Kumar, 1998; Kumar & van Dissel, 1996). When supply chain partners develop trust with one another, this decreases perceptions of risk, thus encouraging future transactions and investments (Handfield & Bechtel, 2002).

Relationship commitment is also important in developing collaborative relationships. Commitment is crucial to achieving meaningful outcomes to both parties involved in the relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Relationship commitment is typically an implicit (mutual understanding) rather than an explicit (formal contract) pledge of relational continuity (Richey et al., 2008). Parties in relationships that are founded on relational commitment are more likely to cooperate with one another and are less likely to leave the relationship (Anderson & Weitz, 1992). Because each supply chain partner has a mutual commitment to the relationship, they are able to better work together to meet customer needs and achieve profitability (Anderson & Weitz, 1992).

When a firm's global relationship quality with its main suppliers is high, the organizational resources would have stronger impact on market performance (cite). Trusted suppliers would not only help global firms identify the appropriate organizational values and objectives for the global

managers' target customers but would also help them implement the plans necessary to attain the objectives. In the case of customer oriented global managers who focus on service excellence, the expectations are such that the global organization truly understands its customers' needs and can respond to such needs with superior service performance in order to achieve greater market performance. However, global managers cannot provide a superior service by themselves unless their organization is vertically integrated up-channel. For those global managers who are not vertically integrated, the quality of their service delivery efforts depends on their suppliers' efforts. For instance, Davis-Sramek, Mentzer, and Stank (2008) suggest that suppliers' order fulfillment success has a significant impact on end user's loyalty to global managers. Moreover in a study of 400 customers and 304 suppliers, Gil et al. (2008) conclude that superior logistics service quality provided by suppliers results in improved higher levels of customer satisfaction loyalty to the global manager. As these studies empirically suggest, suppliers play a critical role for global managers to walk-the-walk in regards to service superiority in order to secure customer loyalty. Therefore, high quality relationships with suppliers have a reinforcing effect on the relationship between internal operant resources and global managers' market performance.

Better quality relationships with suppliers also strengthen the global organization's ability to socialize and communicate collaboratively with key suppliers. Several studies in marketing channel relationships suggest that effective communications, trust, and commitment are highly inter-related constructs that reinforce each other (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Mohr & Spekman, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Moreover, research on inter-firm relationship governance mechanisms indicates that collaborative communication and socialization are relational resources that complement each other (Lawson et al., 2009; Cousins & Menguc, 2006; Wathne & Heide, 2000). Therefore, we posit that interconnected

operant resources are formed when a global firm combines its good quality supplier relationship resources with collaborative communication and effective governance mechanism – and when utilized, these interconnected operant resources result in enhanced market performances (see Figure 1).

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN GLOBAL SUPPLY-CHAINS

The personal characteristics of supply-chain managers’ cultural heritage and past experiences directly affect their ability to effectively interact with others in a foreign context. Early researchers identified a myriad of personal characteristics and traits that were thought to be important to interacting with others in a complex foreign environment. A partial listing of these traits includes: (1) Task motivation; (2) Supportive of group task; (3) Social nearness/friendliness; (4) Social and interpersonal skills; (5) High energy level; (6) Desire/motivation others in a social/professional context; (7) Reputation and track record; (8) Position, industrial, and organizational knowledge; (9) Inner motivation; (10) Intelligence; and (11) Emotional balance (e.g., intelligence) and control (Bass, 1990; Briscoe & Schuler, 2004;

Boudreau, Ramstad, & Dowling, 2002; Kotter, 1988). The relative influence of each of these elements becomes of paramount importance when analyzing effective leadership of others in a complex foreign environment.

Which elements are held in highest esteem in a host culture influences the host country nationals’ acceptance of the supply-chain manager. If the manger does not understand the differences in managing in another culture and/or inter-organizationally, it is possible that the wrong attributes will be used when attempting to lead host country nationals in supply-chains.

The issues of personal attributes and/or traits of the supply-chain manager become critical when examining supply-chain manager’s capabilities in various cultures. What traits are valued and how does the supply-chain manager influence others in different cultural settings? The composition of personal characteristics necessary for the supply-chain manager to lead should be carefully designed before sending a successfully proven manager from one culture to another (Hofstede, 1980, 1993). In addition, communications and leadership training should be aligned with the host country’s culture to help ensure effective

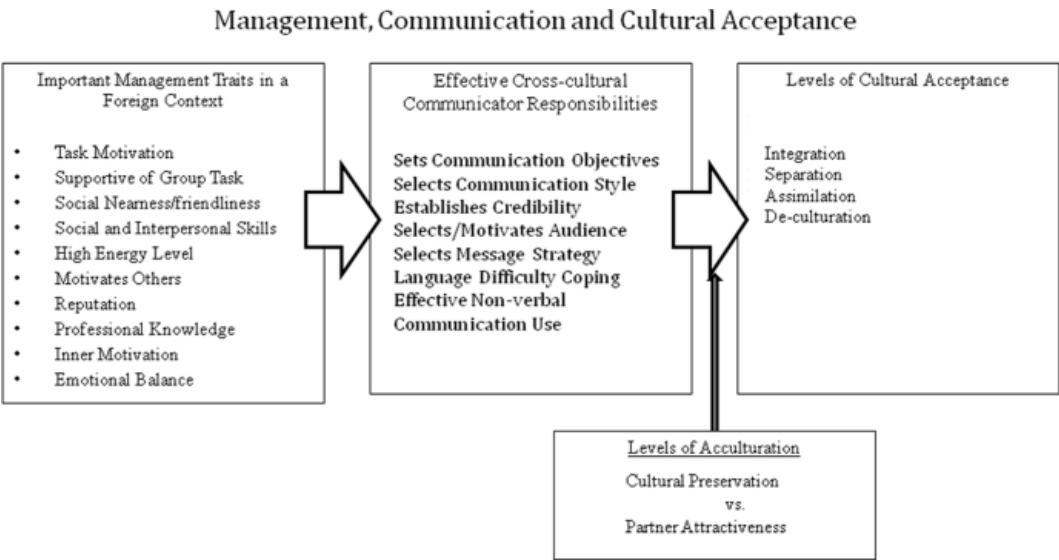


FIGURE 1: AN OPERANT RESOURCE MODEL OF GLOBAL PERFORMANCE

leadership. The rules that govern different social relationships play a significant role in the supply-chain manager's ability to lead counterparts in supply-chain relationships in the host countries. The rules of behavior in a host country can be concerned with interpersonal relations and rewards and relative to the tasks that the supply-chain manager is attempting to accomplish through his/her contacts in other supply-chain organizations (Argyle, Henderson, Bond, Iizoka, & Contarello, 1986; Kiessling, Harvey, & Garrison, 2004).

These differences in interaction rules are most evident in Eastern cultures when compared to the supply-chain managers from the West. For example, Eastern cultures typically place more emphasis on rules of compliance with authority that perpetuate participating interaction that have a lasting impact on the day-to-day interactions of the supply-chain manager with his/her counterparts in the channel (e.g., long-term group goals are supported over day-to-day interactions of individuals). Therefore, supply-chain managers in these cultures need to recognize their role and not expect assistance from individuals or groups relative to short-term personal goals or requests of the supply-chain manager (Kiessling et al., 2004; Srivastava et al., 2006; Zander, 1983).

Intercultural communication capabilities of supply-chain managers become a prominent personal intercultural skill that these managers need to develop during their global assignments. An effective cross-cultural communicator is responsible for the following:

- (1) The supply-chain manager sets realistic communication objectives in a timeframe relative to the culture;
- (2) The supply-chain manager selects communication style-telling, selling, consulting and participative/interactive styles that can be used to varying degrees in difficult cultures depending on cultural attitudes toward authority and the level of collectiveness in the culture;
- (3) The supply-chain manager assesses and enhances credibility-rank in the organization, personal

goodwill, expertise, image or attractiveness, and values and standards that should all influence cross-cultural communications;

- (4) The supply-chain manager selects and motivates audiences, assesses the composition of the group being communicated to and makes adjustments to cultural integrity and size;
- (5) The supply-chain manager selects a message strategy that is appropriate for the topic (e.g., matching of message and medium, such as, face-to-face, written, electronic mail, as appropriate for the communication) as well as the level of formality of the communication (i.e., informal, formal);
- (6) The supply-chain manager overcomes language difficulties – which language, use of second language, rate of speech, and attention to local language customs; and
- (7) The supply-chain manager uses effective nonverbal communication behaviors – body language, space around the speaker, greeting behaviors, and general demeanor communicate a message to the audience. (Hall, 1961; Harris & Moran, 1990; Moran & Stripp, 1991; Munter, 1992, 1993; Kiessling et al., 2004; Earley & Peterson, 2004)

An integral component of leadership is the ability of the supply-chain manager to effectively communicate with subordinates. This becomes a difficult task when culture backgrounds are dissimilar and the supply-chain managers do not know the cultural nuances exhibited in a culturally heterogeneous group. Communication skills are frequently the hallmark of the effective supply-chain manager. Without this basic skill, expatriates have little chance of effectively leading host country nationals.

The effective global supply-chain manager also has to have the ability to adapt to cultural settings effectively and acculturate to the host country. The ability to adjust to the cultural setting of the host country may be a function of the supply-chain manager's willingness to relocate and the manager's level of training in cultural flexibility

(Brett, Stroh, & Reilly, 1993; Briscoe & Schuler, 2004; Earley & Peterson, 2004; Nauman, 1993; Noe & Barber, 1993; Ondrack, 1985). If the supply-chain manager lacks the motivation to relocate, his/her ability to represent the home country organization – the manager's impact – will likely be substantially reduced. Two basic dimensions of acculturation have been identified as essential for supply-chain managers to understand, cultural preservation and partner attractiveness. Cultural preservation gauges to what degree the expatriate maintains the cultural frame-of-reference or adjusts the cultural framework to incorporate dimensions of the new culture. Whereas partner attractiveness is the level of acceptance of cultural norms based on the personal relationships formed with host country nationals (Briscoe & Schuler, 2004; Tung, 1993; Bryan, Joyce, & Weiss, 2006).

Given the two dimensions of acculturation, the level of acceptance of a new culture varies: (1) integration/pluralism – mutual appreciation for contribution of each culture; (2) separation – each group disdains the culture of the other (Rieger & Wong-Rieger, 1991); (3) assimilation – the adaptation of the supply-chain managers behavioral patterns and norms to those of the host culture (Cox & Finley-Nicholson, 1991); and (4) deculturation – each culture retains its distinct set of norms and behaviors but does not hold the other culture's standards in disdain. Selecting the most appropriate acculturation stance becomes a difficult choice for supply-chain managers in host countries and can dramatically influence their ability to manage as well as their acceptance by and effectiveness with counterparts in the global supply set of organizations.

The rate of cultural adjustment of the supply-chain manager may also influence the managers' ability to effectively provide leadership during the global assignment. Effective intercultural performance is contingent upon 'fitting' the supply-chain manager's background to the assignment's culture in order to provide a mental road map for leading host country nationals. There are three levels of cultural adjustment that supply-chain

managers must make to become effective during their foreign assignments: (1) adjustment to non-work environment – the external economic/cultural setting as well as providing supports/assistance to spouse and family; (2) adjustment to interacting with host-country nationals, both in the job context (e.g., subordinates, peers and superiors), and in the general public (e.g., regulators, bankers, suppliers, and customers); and (3) adjustment to the assigned position referring to the learning of new requirements of the job, particularly if the position represents a promotion. The key is ability to adapt to the organizational climate, infrastructure, and physical settings (Black & Gregersen, 1991a, 1991b; Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1992; Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 2001; Kiessling et al., 2004).

The characteristics of an individual supply-chain manager are pivotal in successfully fulfilling a leadership role in a multicultural supply-chain. These qualities may vary from what is expected of a manager in his/her home country. Beyond the mental/physical attributes necessary to lead in a foreign assignment is the ability to communicate across cultural boundaries and, at the same time, adjust to the new cultural setting. Flexibility, likely gained through past multicultural experience, in dealing with the host nationals, the organizational context, and the demands of the external environment necessitate a very self-confident individual. Without this positive self-image of confidence in adjustment to cultural demands, the would-be supply-chain manager becomes mired in self-doubt, lack of understanding, and culture shock that will reduce his/her leadership capabilities (Javidan & House, 2001).

DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to extend Madhavaram and Hunt's (2008) hierarchical order of operant resources to the global organization. First, the effects of four basic global organization operant resources were examined – two internal resources including customer orientation and service culture as well as two external

resources including collaborative communication with suppliers and effective governance mechanisms. Out of the four basic operant resources examined, only collaborative communication was identified as having a significant positive impact on global managers' market performance. Two implications can be deduced from these results: (1) global managers' need to put a big emphasis on communicating with their suppliers openly, frequently, and clearly in order to produce good results for their customers in the marketplace, and (2) basic operant resources – even some of the most critical ones like customer orientation and service culture – do not always lead superior performance by themselves in the global world.

The second step of our model examined the impact of interconnected operant resources on global managers' market performance by combining the basic operant resources with operant resources like top management support and relationship quality with suppliers. This logic supports Madhavaram and Hunt's (2008) claims that the utilization of interconnected operant resources produces superior results to the independent utilization of basic operant resources in most cases. For instance, top management support strengthens the relationship between all four basic operant resources and global managers' market performance. Relationship quality, on the other hand, only reinforced the impacts of internal operant resources but not external ones. While this finding is surprising, it can be potentially explained by the fact that collaborative communication with suppliers is already a strong driver of performance, and it could not have been achieved without a good relationship between the two firms. In other words, a high quality relationship is an inherent part of the collaborative communication process, and, therefore, collaborative communication is probably a construct reflecting an interconnected operant resource. Another intriguing conclusion of the paper centers on the lack of a significant outcome concerning global governance mechanisms.

Since global managers are looking up-channel at their often larger business partners, it is possible that they have a limited ability to deploy effective governance mechanisms. Perhaps they are trapped into selecting from only a limited group of supplier options. Moreover, the supplier may limit socialization opportunities for legal, ethical, or just competitive reasons. Considering these potential factors, the question *can global managers deploy effective governance mechanisms* certainly is an avenue ripe for future investigation.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings of this study imply that dynamic intangible resources are at the heart of creating value for the customers and achieving superior performance. This finding is in line with S-D logic's view of the operant resources. Moreover, it can also be deduced that utilizing operant resources in such a way that they can reinforce each other, i.e. by developing interconnected operant resources (Madhavaram & Hunt, 2008), firms can increase the likelihood of achieving superior results. Therefore, it is important to recognize that S-D logic is in fact an inter-related approach that complements resource-based theories like resource-based view of strategic management (Rumelt, 1984; Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991, 1995) and Resource-Advantage Theory of marketing competition (Hunt & Morgan, 1995; Hunt, 2000).

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