

## ETHICS IN SUPPLY CHAIN

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Today, supply chain management is a well recognised area of academic debate. It has an international presence, with both practitioners and academics alike recognising that it's an important area of management. An ethical supply chain is paramount to the success of modern business. Through fair and ethical interaction with suppliers, wholesalers, retailers, customers and the industry at large, aims to promote ethical supply chain. Ethics may be considered as standards or norms that distinguish between right or wrong and good or bad. This paper aims to highlight the conceptual framework of ethical supply chain with its effective role in present business besides its importance in supply chain management. It also portrays the benefits derived by adopting ethics in supply chain management.

**Key Words:** Ethics, Supply chain.

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## **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 functionalities 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. Whilst it is interesting to note that many authors do not like the term, SCM has been adopted by the global academic community, despite several attempts to advance the debate and offer new terms such as pipeline management, network sourcing, demand management and value stream management (Christopher, 1992; Croom et al., 2000; Farmer and van Amstel, 1991; Hines et al., 1999; Lamming, 1993).

Ethics can be interpreted as principles and standards that guide behaviour in the workplace. It simply means following moral values, code of conduct for doing work or business. Ethics sometimes stated as conscious and deliberate actions for attaining goals. It is the basic principles of correct behaviour. Furthermore, ethics in business is the way in which the individual behaviours affect the decision-making of an organisation. Ethics is playing a vital role in the modern business world today as business success/failure depends upon the adherence of ethics formulated. Ethics provides a route for long term business success.

Ethics is the study of the standards of conduct that distinguish between right and wrong. Although almost every company has some form of supply management ethics policy, the extent of deployment of these policies with supply management decisions can differ significantly (Murray, 2003). In addition, some authors do not make a hierarchical distinction between the terms “business ethics” and “social responsibility” (Beauchamp and Bowie, 2001; De Treville et al., 2004; Velasquez, 1982) and use both terms interchangeably.

Ethics in supply chain contributes a lot for business survival as ethics in supply chain means following up of set rules, principles, moral values, code of conduct by all the members/parties (suppliers, manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers) to achieve common goals and objectives. Together when these supply chain members adheres to commonly formulated standards and norms contributes to sound, strong and ethical supply chain management. Today's competitive business focuses on delivering value to the customer as it aims at providing products and services that are more valuable compared to its competitors. Contrary to the focus on customer value, the supply chain with the help of which business operates today is widely recognized as acceptable and supportive if the supply chain follows ethics in their constructs (Christopher, 1992; Cox, 1999; Croom & Romano, 2000; Anderson and Katz, 1998; Giunipero and Percy, 2000 Carroll, 1979, 1991 and Goldman et al., 1995). The growth of ethics in supply chain aims to improve profitability, customer response & ability to deliver value to the customers and also to improve the interconnection and interdependence among channel partners. Due to expansion of market from domestic market to global market, the customer demands low priced goods, faster delivery, higher quality products or services with increase in variety, with these competitive factors, the vital role of ethics cannot be ignored in the present era (Bernstein, 2005). According to Towil and Christopher, the end customer in the marketplace today is determined by the success or failure of adoption of ethics in supply chain management practices. They stated that getting the right product, at the right price, at the right time to the customer does not only improves competitive success but is also the key to survival and is the result of following up of sound supply chain ethics. Even previous researches explored the importance of integrating suppliers, manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers and customers with one knot i.e. ethics which leads to supply chain integration (Frohlich & Westbrook, 2001; Handfield, 2006 and Clinton & Closs, 1997) so as to obtain flexibility, effectiveness, acceptability, commitment and speed. Addressing ethics in supply chain management practices will assist the business to come up with enhanced level of supply chain responsiveness in competitive business marketplace.

### **CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF SUPPLY CHAIN ETHICS:**

Traditionally, only trivial and secluded parts of SCM and supply chains have been addressed from an ethical perspective (Moberg, 2003; Geraint, 2003; Kidd, 2003; Carter,

2000; Cooper et al., 1997 and Stainer, 1997). However, Svensson and Baath (2008) introduce and describe an empirical framework of SCM ethics. It does not explicitly address the situation of large companies – i.e. those widely well-known business organisations in the marketplace and society – to monitor and manage the corporate actions and behaviour of other companies in their supply chains. Commonly recognizable companies may be more exposed to criticism and ethical dilemmas due to expectations in the marketplace and society of them being good corporate citizens. The transparency of their supply chains is an aspect that becomes valuable to examine.

Ethical supply chain management encompasses conventions and set of interactive policies with all upstream suppliers and downstream customers. This emphasis on the entire supply channel has given description of ethical supply chain management as all of the activities involved with set principles guidance and rules in producing and distributing products or services “from the supplier’s supplier to the customer’s customer”. By adopting ethical supply chain perspective, firms focus on working with their immediate suppliers and customers to satisfy the end-customers’ requirements. Firms have been able to establish competitive advantages in their markets by actively managing their supply chains for gaining competitive position. (Cox, 1999). Carroll’s (1991) and Carter & Jennings’s (2004) defines ethical supply management as managing the optimal flow of high-quality, value-for-money materials, components or services from a suitable set of innovative suppliers in a fair, consistent, and reasonable manner that meets or exceeds societal norms, even though not legally required (Giunipero et al., 2001; Reck and Long, 1988; Giunipero et al., 2005 and Giunipero & Handfield, 2005).

### **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

The existing literature portrays the magnitude of adoption of ethics in supply chain management. Its imperative role cannot be disregarded in the present cut throat competitive world. Along with the benefits of increased channel efficiency and responsiveness, the development of collaborative supply chain practices has generated a host of ethical considerations as companies are working closer than they ever have before. With the development of ethical perspective in recent years in the supply chain, the operating environment of many businesses has fundamentally changed. Raw materials suppliers, manufacturers, third-party specialist providers and customers work more closely than ever before to streamline and coordinate the fulfillment process for goods and services. By adopting a systems view of ethics in the entire channel, which is commonly known

as ethical supply chain, these organisations are able to realize the efficiencies promised by the vertically integrated firms. The development of ethics in supply chain management signals an expansion of focus from “classic” logistics outward to several tiers of suppliers and customers. The literature in the area of supply management has begun recently to investigate ethical issues in supply chain relationships (Turner et al., 1994). These issues contribute to supply management reputation and performance. Much of the previous research discussed the underlying values and debated managerial responsibilities, such as corporate governance and institutional ownership, (Handfield & Baumer, 2006; Johnson & Greening, 1999) and examined ethical antecedents; stimuli that precede the ethical decisions and the environmental conditions that strengthened or weakened the likelihood of ethical decisions’ occurrences. Examples of such antecedents include personal demographics of the purchaser, top management actions and support, presence of a code of ethics, periodic policy reviews, the amount of training that a buyer receives, sanctions against unethical behavior, the length of time that the buying firm has had a relationship with a supplier, and the level of coordination that the buying firm has with a supplier (Chonko & Hunt, 1985; Cooper et al., 1997; Hunt et al., 1984; Turner et al., 1994; Carter & Jennings, 2002; Wright & Ferris, 1997; McWilliams & Siegel, 2000; McGuire et al., 1988 and Waddock & Graves, 1997). In fact, there has not been any explicit research dedicated to SCM ethics. At best, only minor and isolated parts of SCM have been addressed from an ethical perspective (Moberg, 2003, Geraint, 2003; Kidd, 2003; Carter, 2000; Cooper et al., 1997; Stainer, 1997), e.g. Lummus et al. (2001) and Mentzer et al. (2001) focus specifically on the definition of SCM. Ho et al. (2002), Giannakis & Croom (2004) and Chen & Paulraj (2004) take a strategic management perspective to address theory development in the SCM area. Likewise, New (1997) provides a thematic overview of the SCM ethical literature. Some of the reviews are narrowly based along functional lines; for example, Skjoett-Larsen’s (1999) review is focused on the ethical logistics discipline whilst Larson and Halldorsson’s (2002) review is based on the purchasing literature. As yet, there does not appear to be a review that has considered the SCM area from a broader ethical organisational perspective. There is somewhat overlapping endeavours and research efforts in literature related to SCM ethics, the intentions of which are to point out the ethical and sustainable areas of corporate actions and behaviour, such as: SCM ethics (Svensson & Baath, 2008), corporate social responsibility (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002), sustainable supply network management (Young & Kielkiewicz-Young, 2001), supply chain environmental management

(Lippman, 1999), green purchasing strategies (Min & Galle, 1997), environmental purchasing (Zsidisin & Siferd, 2001), green marketing (Crane, 2000), environmental marketing (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995), environmental marketing management (Peattie, 1995) and environmental product differentiation (Reinhardt, 1999), anti-climate change management (2008b), reverse logistics (Zikmund & Stanton, 1971), sustainability labelling schemes (De Boer, 2003), environmental management (Hoffman, 2000), life-cycle assessment (Welford, 1999), sustainable supply chain management (Svensson, 2007), and ISO-14000-certifications (ISO, 2007).

### **ROLE OF ETHICS IN BUSINESS:**

Berenbeim (2000) cites three trends as substantiation of the growing importance of ethics in business: the globalization of markets and the need for core values and principles that are universally applicable, the acceptance of these values and principles as part of the corporate governance and the improved ethical literacy of senior managers. Studies have recognised that having an ethical code does have a positive impact on the ethical behaviour of organisations (Adams et al., 2001; Somers, 2001; Schwartz, 2001; Stohs and Brannick, 1999; Ferrell and Skinner, 1988, McCabe et al., 1996; Pierce and Henry, 1996 and Wotruba et al., 2001). Other studies have found the various facets of business ethics (Ford et al., 1982; Clark & Leonard, 1998; Mathews, 1998; McKendall et al., 2002 and Svensson & Wood, 2004) – both internal and external. Robin and Reidenbach (1987) develop a multidimensional scale for improving evaluations of business ethics, while Shelby et al. (1989) develop a corporate ethics scale. In particular, business ethics considers the gap between the ethical values of corporate behaviour/business operations and the marketplace's/society's perceptions of the ethical values of corporate behaviour/business operations. Corporate ethics, on the other hand, has an internal emphasis. In particular, corporate ethics considers the gap between the management's ethical behaviour and the employees' perception of the management's ethical behavior in business operations. SCM-ethics is of crucial importance in today's business practices. For example, the revelations of transgression by well known companies have once again led society to focus on the practices of its major corporate entities. The business practices of these companies have now led to them becoming infamous, such as: Enron, Worldcom, Arthur Andersen and Parmalat. In Sweden, a number of companies have confronted ethical concerns in the marketplace and

society, such as: HM, IKEA, Skandia and Systembolaget. In each one of these situations, the point of interest focuses on the incredulity of society at the unethical and in some cases illegal behavior that has been revealed. Therefore, business ethics are gaining importance in the present era.

### **ROLE OF ETHICS IN SCM:**

SCM ethics appears to be of crucial importance in today's corporate actions and behaviour in ongoing business operations (Svensson & Baath, 2008). The transparency of SCM ethics may be of additional, and most likely highly essential, value to the widely recognizable and leading companies in supply chains. In Scandinavia, a number of well-known companies – such as Ericsson, HM, IKEA and Nokia – have been confronted with ethical dilemmas in the marketplace and society caused by other companies in their supply chains.

The importance of establishing and maintaining an ethical transparency between levels in supply chains may contribute to enhance companies' monitoring and endeavours throughout the supply chain as a whole. Changes in supply management are driven by a changing business environment; increased globalization, technological advances, internet-based systems, and increased demands by upper management. Today's business environment creates high demand for a skill set required for excellence in the profession. These demands lead to the evolution of supply management from an administrative function to a strategic one. There are several potential reasons for the importance of transparency in SCM ethics. For example, it may prevent companies from having ethical dilemmas caused by other actors in their supply chains. These actors may be other companies (e.g. suppliers' suppliers or customers' customers and so forth) with whom the companies are not necessarily directly engaged in business in their supply chains. As a matter of fact, these other companies are often anonymous and may rarely be recognised by the general public in the marketplace and society. Even, Wood's (2002) partnership model also provides a foundation for a conceptual framework of ethics in SCM. It consists of four levels of commitment to ethical values and practices, namely: ethical culture, to and from staff and shareholders, ethical organisational artifacts, and ethics in the marketplace. Therefore, it is vital that firms employ ethical values & practices and contribute entirely to the goals of the organisation.

## **BENEFITS OF ADOPTING ETHICS IN SUPPLY CHAINS:**

Ethics in supply chains plays a vital role. The major benefits derived by adopting ethics in supply chain are:-

- It helps in generating trust among supply chain partners.
- Only those parties/members are involved in chain which are in favour of adopting and implementing ethics.
- Augments need of the hour, as everyone want to have relationship with that business which is ethically and morally sound.
- Assists in developing strategic supplier partnership, customer relationship, information sharing and supply chain responsiveness.
- It provides a competitive edge in the present cut throat competitive world.
- Aids in identifying, sustaining and maintaining sound relationships with upstream and downstream members.
- Adoption of ethics also means that the firm is environment friendly which again plays a significant role in modern era.
- Their lies transparency in doing business.
- An ethical firm can differentiate its products on the basis on value systems and culture adopted in manufacturing the products.
- Avoid behaviours or actions that may negatively influence, or appear to influence, supply management decisions.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The outcome of this paper reveals few principal theoretical and managerial implications for scholars and practitioners. For scholars, the introduced conceptual framework of SCM ethics provides a seed of theory generation that may underpin further research into the role of ethics in SCM. This is an area of research that is so far fairly unexplored in literature. A principal strength of the introduced framework is the emphasis on different perspectives of ethics in SCM expressed as levels of orientations, such as relationships, channel structures, industries and the overall environment of societies. Another principal strength is that it provides guidance to different areas of data collection, such as at specific and general levels, internal and external



ones. In consequence, it connects micro and macro levels of the role of ethics in SCM in theoretical and managerial settings. For practitioners, the conceptual framework of SCM-ethics provides guidance regarding the corporate width or narrowness of their current ethical commitment. This will become rather obvious whether a company has limited or extensive dedication and attention to ethical concerns in the context of SCM. The framework highlights the role of ethics that may be obscured by the lack of different perspectives stressed in current practices. What areas of values and principles are addressed? Internally, what influences values and principles, and are they documented? What are the current weaknesses and strengths, and how are the corporate values and principles communicated within the company? Externally, similar questions may be raised to highlight not only the external influences of corporate values and principles and how they are communicated, but also current and potential threats and opportunities. In sum, a crucial lesson to be learned is that the role of ethics in SCM requires the consideration of different perspectives in order to avoid blinkers and myopia in theory or practice. It is not just a concern towards suppliers and customers, but also a concern regarding the industrial and societal levels. If partial engagement reigns, weaknesses in values and principles may convert into threats, while strengths may not be converted into opportunities.

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