



SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT: A LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability has become a subject of increasing concern to academics and practitioners in recent years. Increasing demand for environmentally and socially responsible products and services encouraged supply chains to put increasing emphasis on sustainability. The purpose of this paper is to review research in Sustainable Supply Chain Management (SSCM) and to identify gaps in the current body of knowledge. Future research directions are also provided which may help to stimulate more intensive research in SSCM field.

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of sustainability has been widely recognized by researchers and practitioners. Ninety-five percent of the 250 largest companies in the world (G250 companies) now report on their sustainability activities and sixty-two percent of these companies offer sustainable products (KPMG, 2011). There are increasing numbers of studies that examine sustainability thought. However, since Sustainable Supply Chain Management is a fairly new concept, there is a need for more in-depth studies. Therefore, in this study a literature review is conducted aiming to reveal the gaps in the current body of knowledge and to provide a research agenda. This literature review covers sustainability definitions and sustainability research in the supply chain management field. Environmental and social aspects of the sustainability are also examined. Finally this study identifies several areas for further studies.

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

2.1. Sustainability Definitions

The most commonly accepted definition of sustainability is: “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland 1987). According to the CSCMP (Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals 2013, p.191): “Corporate sustainability refers to efforts a company makes related to conducting business in a socially and environmentally responsible manner. It contains elements including sustainable development, corporate social responsibility (CSR), stakeholder concerns, and corporate accountability.” Many of the definitions are derived from the “Triple Bottom Line” (Elkington 1997) concept. “Triple Bottom Line” is

the most prevalent concept in the literature which considers sustainability at the intersection of economic, social, and environmental goals of a firm.

The economic dimension addresses that economic needs of the stakeholders (customers, employees, suppliers, investors, etc.) are met effectively and efficiently, the social aspect is concerned with human rights and employees’ health and safety, and the environmental facet assures waste minimization, emission reduction and protection of natural resource depletion (Bansal and McKnight 2009; Krause et al. 2009). Triple Bottom Line is also generally called: People, Profit and Planet (3Ps). The intersection of these three dimensions depicts the core of sustainability.

The term “sustainability” has been defined in journals from various technical fields, such as environmental science, management and social science (Linton et al. 2007). Even though there are some common descriptions of sustainability in the literature, the concept is fairly new and there exists a divergence of definitions of sustainability in existing research (Carter and Rogers 2008; Winter and Knemeyer 2013). A list of common definitions is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Sustainability Definitions

Sustainability Definition	Author(s)	Source
Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs	Brundtland (1987)	World Commission on Environment and Development
Any state of a business in which it meets the needs of its stakeholders without compromising its ability also to meet their needs in the future	Hockerts (1999)	Greener Management International
Consumption of natural resources at a rate that can be naturally replenished and the emissions of waste at a rate that can be absorbed by nature	Dyllick and Hockerts (2002)	Business Strategy and the Environment
The possibility that all forms of life will flourish forever	Ehrenfeld (2005)	Sloan Management Review
Securing long-term economic performance by avoiding short-term socially detrimental and environmentally wasteful behavior	Porter and Kramer (2006)	Harvard Business Review
Achievement of an organization's social, environmental and economic goals	Carter and Rogers (2008)	International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management
Activities that attempt to improve the environmental performance of purchased inputs, or of the suppliers that provide them	Walker, Di Sisto and McBain(2008)	Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management
Performing well on not only traditional measures of profit but also in social and natural dimensions	Pagell and Wu (2009)	Journal of Supply Chain Management
An effort to conserve natural resources and avoid waste in operations	Pfeffer (2010)	The Academy of Management Perspectives
Intersection of economic, environmental and societal superiority	Paulraj (2011)	Journal of Supply Chain Management

2.2. Defining Sustainable Supply Chain Management

There are various definitions of SSCM. Seuring and Muller (2008, p. 1700) define SSCM as “the management of material, information and capital flows as well as cooperation among companies along the supply chain while taking goals from all three dimensions of sustainable development, i.e., economic, environmental and social, into account which are derived from customer and stakeholder requirements.” Carter and Rogers (2008, p. 368) use a similar definition of SSCM: “the strategic, transparent integration and achievement of an organization’s social, environmental, and economic goals in the systemic coordination of key interorganizational business processes for improving the long-term economic performance of the individual company and its supply chains.” Pagell and Wu (2009, p. 38) defined a sustainable supply chain as “one that performs well on both traditional measures of profit and loss as well as on an expanded conceptualization of performance that includes social and natural dimensions.” The common theme of these definitions is that they embrace a triple bottom line perspective. As seen in Table 1, earlier studies focused on just one aspect of sustainability and ignored others. Later studies’ definitions emphasized not only economic goals of the companies but also environmental and social goals.

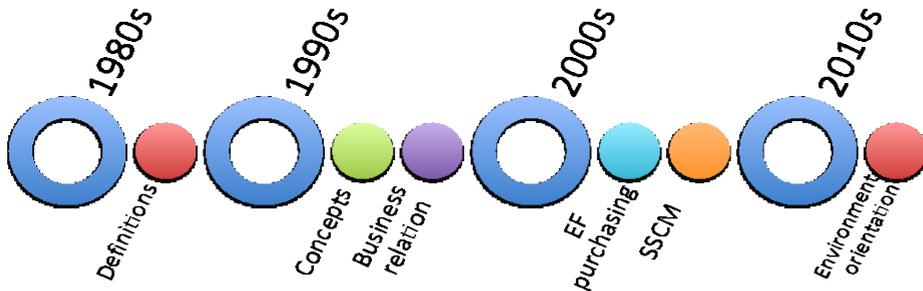
2.3. Sustainability Research in Supply Chain Context

Sustainability programs are playing an increasingly important role in planning and management within companies and across supply chains. Linton et al. (2007) provided a background in the increasing role of sustainability in supply chains. Srivastava (2007) reviewed the literature on green supply chain management and emphasized the importance of this new concept. Similarly Golicic and Smith (2013) examined over 20 years of research on environmentally friendly supply chain practices by conducting a meta-analysis and found a positive and significant relationship between these practices and firm performance. Development of sustainable products and services requires a joint effort by all members of the supply chain (Vasileiou and Morris 2006). Therefore, sustainability is more of a supply chain issue than an organizational level matter (Vasileiou and Morris 2006; Vachon and Klassen 2007; Green et al. 2012). Although the supply chain management field focuses on cost, quality, delivery, flexibility and innovation as main sources of competitive advantage (Krause et al. 2001), social and environmental sustainability are becoming additional drivers for competitiveness (Pullman et al. 2009; Ashby et al. 2012). It has been recognized that promoting sustainability is a key differentiator in the supply chain versus supply chain competition (Tracey 2004).

The adoption and development of sustainability moved from a specific organization to the entire supply chain (Tracey 2004; Linton et al. 2007) and sustainability is playing an increasingly crucial role in designing and managing supply chains (Kleindorfer et al. 2005; Srivastava 2007; Golicic and Smith 2013). Considerable amounts of research have investigated sustainability issues in the supply chain context. Early studies focused on socially responsible buying and environmentally friendly purchasing. Drumwright (1994) explored why socially responsible buying behavior with respect to the environment takes place in organizations. Min and Galle (1997) examined the effect of environmental partnerships in supplier selection decisions.

Similarly Noci (1997) provided a framework for the supplier selection procedure from an environmental viewpoint. Carter et al. (1998) demonstrated the key role that purchasing plays in supply chain management activities in order to facilitate environmental ventures. Later research investigated barriers and triggers for sustainability and provided frameworks for sustainable supply chain management. Bansal and Roth (2000) studied the motivations and contextual factors that induce environmental sustainability in firms. Bansal (2002) presented the challenges for the companies to implement sustainability practices into their operations. Dyllick and Hockerts (2002) examined three facets of sustainability (environmental, social, and economic) and discussed how sustainability can be achieved in a company. Linton et al. (2007) provided a background for the increasing role of sustainability in supply chains. Carter and Rogers (2008) introduced a framework of sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) that expands the concept of sustainability from the company to the supply chain level. Seuring and Muller (2008) offered a literature review on SSCM and outlined major lines of research in the field. Similarly, Carter and Easton (2011) reviewed SSCM literature and identified the trends in the field. Most recent studies have focused on the effects of consumers on sustainable supply chain management. Bask et al. (2013) identified consumer preferences for sustainability and their impact on supply chain management. Wolf (2014) examined the relationship among SSCM, stakeholder pressure and corporate sustainability performance. Sigala (2014) explored consumers' role in managing sustainability throughout a supply chain. The evolution of research on SSCM can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Research Background



2.4. Environmental and Social Sustainability

Companies are increasingly reporting details on their environmental performance and see sustainability practices as core to the ability of the business to grow. Integrating sustainability practices into business operations and strategy has become an opportunity for the organizations (Porter and Reinhardt 2007; D'angelico and Pujari 2010). For example, Wal-Mart's sustainability report addresses environmental sustainability issues across the supply chain, including supplier management, packaging reduction,

development of environmentally friendly packaging, and product design (Tate et al. 2010). The Vice President of Unilever, Santiago Gowland, stated that companies need to treat sustainability as a key business activity in the same way that they treat marketing, finance, culture, HR or supply chain, to continue growing and being a successful business (Haanaes et al. 2011). Cisco, HP, Gap, GE, Interface, Nike, and Wal-Mart are well-known leaders in environmental sustainability (Sheth et al. 2011). These companies pursue various environmental sustainability activities. These include creating partnerships with environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (e.g., Johnson & Johnson and Ford), donating to educational initiatives to promote environmental awareness (e.g., Disney, Walgreen), and supporting initiatives for ecological preservation (e.g. Samsung) (Jose and Lee 2007). In short, environmentally sustainable companies preserve natural resources, minimize waste, and reduce emissions (Krause et al. 2009).

Environmental sustainability issues in the supply chains have been extensively studied. These studies concentrated on energy consumption (Van Hoek and Johnson 2010; Ingarao et al. 2012), water usage issues within supply chains (Reich-Weiser and Dornfeld 2009; Aviso et al. 2011), green product development and innovation (Tracey 2004; D'angelico and Pujari 2010; Isaksson et al. 2010; Chen and Chang 2013), environmental and reverse supply chain management (Erol et al. 2010; Eng-Larsson and Kohn 2012; Kim and Lee 2012; Huscroft et al. 2013), material usage and selection (Mayyas et al. 2013; Lindahl et al. 2014), and green supply chain practices (Sarkis 2012; Perotti et al. 2012; Morali and Searcy 2013; Gimenez and Sierra 2013).

Although most previous research has examined environmental sustainability practices, the social dimension of sustainability has received little attention (Pagell and Wu 2009; Pfeffer 2010; Wolf and Seuring 2010). Many authors call for future research to examine social sustainability (Pullman et al. 2009; Sarkis et al. 2010). While environmental sustainability emphasizes the management of environmental effect, social sustainability is concerned with the management of social effect, including employees' working conditions, relationships with communities and social values (Sarkis et al. 2010). For example Wal-Mart implemented social sustainability practices in its global operations. The company helped mentally ill children in India, found homes for abandoned children in America, built schools after an earthquake in China and rebuilt homes and drinking water facilities in Africa and the Middle East (Cavusgil and Cavusgil 2012). Ben and Jerry's, Body Shop, Starbucks and Timberland are among the companies that have made both environmental and social sustainability central to their strategy (Mirvis and Googins 2006; Sheth et al. 2011).

Social sustainability is strongly connected to corporate social responsibility (CSR), which has been defined as "a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis" (Commission of the European Communities 2001, p.6). In that sense, CSR covers social and environmental matters together (Bansal 2005; Branco and Rodrigues 2006). CSR activities are more related to organizational activities such as transparency and sustainability reporting, while sustainability is a wider concept that focuses on value creation and environmentally friendly and socially-responsible production (Van Marrewijk

2003). The main difference between sustainability and CSR is that typical frameworks of CSR do not include consumers, while sustainability integrates the consumer as an important stakeholder in strategy making (Hult 2011). Therefore, compared to CSR, sustainability practices have more potential to lead to competitive advantage (Reuter et al. 2010; Hult 2011; Paulraj 2011).

While the scope of social sustainability research is wide, the most prevalent measurement system used by corporations is the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) guidelines. The social dimension of the GRI guidelines covers four main aspects: labor practices and decent work relations (employment, labor/management, occupational health and safety, training and education, diversity and equal opportunity, and equal remuneration for women and men); human rights (investment and procurement practices, non-discrimination, freedom of association and collective bargaining, child labor, forced and compulsory labor, security practices, indigenous rights, assessment, and remediation); impact on society (local communities, corruption, public policy, anti-competitive behavior, and compliance); and product responsibility (customer health and safety, product and service labeling, marketing communications, customer privacy, and compliance) (GRI, 2013). Detailed social sustainability guidelines can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Social Performance Indicators/Aspects

Labor Practices and Decent Work	Human Rights	Society	Product Responsibility
Employment	Investment and Procurement Practices	Local Communities	Customer Health and Safety
Labor/Management Relations	Non-discrimination	Corruption	Product and Service Labeling
Occupational Health and Safety	Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining	Public Policy	Marketing Communications
Training and Education	Child Labor	Anti-Competitive Behavior	Customer Privacy
Diversity and Equal Opportunity	Forced and Compulsory Labor	Compliance	Compliance
Equal Remuneration for Women and Men	Security Practices		
	Indigenous Rights		
	Assessment		
	Remediation		

Source: G3 Sustainability Reporting Guidelines (GRI 2013)

3. CONCLUSION

The current research provides a greater understanding to the current body of sustainable supply chain management literature. The literature review revealed that there is a need for more research on social aspect of the sustainability. Although environmental sustainability has been studied in the supply chain management context, research is lacking in the social aspect of sustainability (Pagell and Wu 2009; Pfeffer 2010; Wolf and

Seuring 2010). There are just a few studies though that have examined social sustainability issues (i.e., Ehr Gott et al. 2011, Simola 2012, Carrington et al. 2014). Therefore, future studies may examine the social aspect of sustainability to bridge this gap in the literature. Social aspects that are presented in Table 2 can be a good start for further research and discussion for social sustainability.

A methodological suggestion is that, although experimental methodology has been used extensively in other disciplines, it is one of the most underdeveloped areas in the supply chain management field (Tokar 2010; Waller and Fawcett 2011). There are many calls of other researchers for more behavioral experiments (e.g., Eckerd and Bendoly 2011; Thomas 2011; Deck and Smith 2013). Future studies can answer these calls for experiments with human subjects and can make a methodological contribution to the supply chain management field by utilizing scenario-based experiments in sustainability research.

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