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EFFECTS OF SUPPLY CHAIN COLLABORATION: A STUDY OF AUTOMOBILE MANUFACTURING COMPANIES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Researchers, consultants and practitioners are of the view that manufacturing companies should collaborate with their suppliers and customers. This paper seeks to investigate the same in the context of automobile manufacturing companies in India. This paper examines the collaborative relationship between automobile manufacturers with its suppliers and customers with the view of finding the effects of supply chain collaboration. It is based on the survey results of 192 responses received from logistics managers of various automobile manufacturing companies registered under society of Indian automobile manufacturers (SIAM). The results of the study demonstrate the positive effect of collaboration in supply chain. However, some of the barriers need to be addressed. This research is based on single industry/country, therefore generalization of the results to other industries or country may be limited. Lower logistic cost, improvement in services and increase in competitiveness are the main effects observed as a result of supply chain collaboration in automotive industry. Therefore, managers and practitioners can learn to obtain optimal benefits from this kind of relationships. The value of the paper lies in the fact that this study is an attempt to fill the large gap between case study based results and empirically tested ones.

KEYWORDS

Automotive Industry, Collaboration, Effects, Supply Chain, India.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Min et al., (2005) the concept of collaboration has been widely examined across disciplines like Psychology (Konczak, 2001; Stern and Hicks, 2000); Marketing (Gadde et al., 2003; Jap, 1999, 2001; Perks, 2000); Management (Cross et al., 2002; Sawhney, 2002; Singh and Mitchell, 2005); Sociology (Powell et al., 2005) and supply chain management (Holweg et al., 2005; Tuoninen, 2004).

In SCM review and computer science corporation (SCMR and CSC, 2004) collaboration has been cited as the most important issue. It is being increasingly promoted like "Silver Bullet" in many areas of SCM (Kampstra et al., 2006). Hence, there is no denial of the fact that collaborative practices in the logistics area have become the source of efficiency and decision-makers in the manufacturing and retailing industry have understood it.

In SCM, Collaboration is a dominant concept aimed at gaining benefits and sharing results with the trading partners (Speakman et al., 1998). According to (Bowersox and Closs, 1996; Chan et al., 2003) the emphasis on the effectiveness of Supply chain in its entirety has eliminated the boundaries of the single firms and has promoted them for collaboration between supply chain partners, leading to the establishment of strong relationships with each other. Therefore, Myhr and Speakman (2005) have described it as "A Critical linking pins, as greater specialization brings in more of integration in the overall supply chain". Taking the broader view Bahinipati et al., (2009) has defined it as "A business agreement between two or more companies at the same level in the Supply chain or network in order to allow greater ease of work and cooperation towards achieving a common objective".

In the words of Whipple et al., (2002) it means partners working together, in a trustful, loyal and mutual environment aimed at reducing costs, misuse of equipment and resources and improving performance. It is seen as a powerful instrument in achieving effective and efficient supply chain management (Fu and Piplani, 2004; Mentzer et al., 2000). Collaboration in supply chain has been conceptualized in various ways by researchers, as it can range from very shallow transactional focused to highly integrated close relations (Goffin et al., 2006); from collaborative communication to supplier development (Oh and Rhee, 2008) or from inward facing to outward facing (Frohlich and Westbrook, 2001).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Logistics collaboration in supply chain has dual effects i.e. positive and negative. In the logistics and management literature, collaboration has been linked to a wide variety of benefits like higher quality and lower costs, improved logistics services, sharing of risks and overall improvement in performance. On the other hand, the literature is also rich in examples, where collaboration has been linked to negative outcomes, like it increases the vulnerability to opportunism by the chain members; the firm can forego the chance of building economies of scale and low cost position. It may also lead to knowledge dependence leading to loss in the capabilities of building and specifying the products outsourced.

Highlighting the positive effects of supply chain collaboration, Chapman et al., (2002) has reported that true collaboration between supply chain partners may result in joint knowledge creation, expertise sharing and understanding of the other party's intentions and strategic approaches. These authors have also noted that by building collaborative relationship with supply chain partners, firms could expect improvement in revenue, costs and operational flexibility to cope with high demand uncertainties. There have been number of publications in particular promoting the benefits of collaborative approaches like lower costs, high efficiency, high profit margins, reduction in cycle times, learning and exchange of knowledge and competitive advantage over other supply chains (Bowersox, 1990; Cohen Kulp et al., 2004; Dyer and Singh, 1998; Howleg et al., 2005; Mentzer et al., 2000).

Similarly, many recent research studies have shown collaboration leading to improved supply chain performance in several core areas like sales, forecasts, information sharing, cost, inventory and customer services (Angulo et al., 2004; Barratt and Oliveira, 2001; Daugherty et al., 1999; Industry directions, Inc and Syncra Systems, Inc, 2000; Waller et al., 1999).

Further, Stank et al., (2001) has indicated that "Collaboration contributes to the excellent supply chain performance by reducing firms logistical service related costs and enhancing cash flow" (Stank et al., 2001). Collaboration has been found to reduce purchasing costs and helps in operational problem solving (Cannon and Homburg, 2001). Another study by Simatupang and Sridharan (2005) has found out that higher level of collaboration between supply chain members led to better operational performance and innovative activities, especially in various areas of logistics activities like new product development, process improvement, inventory management, transfer of technology, service delivery and capacity planning. Brady, 2003; Humphrey and Schmitz, 1996; Premaratne, 2001; observes that companies working collaboratively with a network of capable customers and suppliers provide access to resources, skills and markets not available to industry rivals. Also, it is believed that companies which are able to effectively collaborate with their suppliers and customers outperform those companies which do not do so (Christopher, 1999; Frohlich and Westbrook, 2002).

Many authors like Baratt, 2004; Fearne et al., 2006; Skjoett- Larsen, 2003; Stank et al., (1999 a, b) have provided empirical evidences supporting the benefits of collaboration in the supply chain. For example, in a global sample of 322 manufacturing companies, it was found out those manufacturers who focused on strong integration with suppliers or customers known in the literature as "Supplier-Facing" or the "Customer-Facing" companies showed improved performance across all measures. Similarly, several companies like Hewlett- Packard, IBM, Dell and Proctor and Gamble have worked closely with their partners to capture the advantages of collaboration (Barratt and Oliveira, 2001; Callioni and Billington, 2001; Dell and Fredman, 1999; Parks, 1999).

One of the finest examples of how collaborative benefits can be accomplished is that of General Motors. After struggling during the 1990s, it entered into collaborative relationship with CNFLnc (Management Company of global supply chain services) and Vector supply chain came into existence representing joint venture between CNFLnc and GM. The employees at vector were responsible for designing, implementing and managing GM supply chains components, work in progress and finished vehicles. This helped GM in focusing on their core competencies. Similarly, automakers Honda and Toyota have exemplified the collaboration enabled business model. Particularly, Honda depends upon its SC for sourcing about 85% of the value of its cars from suppliers Nelson et al., (1998). Impressive results have also been reported from the other companies too. For example K-mart while collaborating with Bell sports (a manufacturer of cycling helmets) have been able to increase sales by 20% and decrease in safety stock by more than 15%.

Some of the benefits as identified in the literature, arising from collaboration and linked to supply chain activities are presented in table 3.3:-

SUPPLY CHAIN ACTIVITIES	COLLABORATION BENEFITS
Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Less time searching for new suppliers and tendering. ✓ Easier management of a reduced supply base. ✓ More stable prices.
Inventory management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Lower stock holdings. ✓ Increased asset utilization.
Product design & New product development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Faster product development. ✓ Knowledge sharing & increased innovation capacity. ✓ Better quality following from involvement of supplier in design.
Manufacturing (planning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased product quality. ✓ Minimize supply disruptions.
Order processing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased responsiveness.
Distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Faster delivery. ✓ Flexible delivery.
Sales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Rapid access to markets. ✓ Increased market share. ✓ Improved promotional events.
Demand management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ More accurate forecasts. ✓ Joint resolution of forecast exceptions.
Customer service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Improved product availability. ✓ Improvements in lead times.

Source: Matopoulos et al., 2007 (177-186).

However, despite the positive effects of collaboration among companies, according to Krause (1999), collaborative practices are not appropriate for every business relationships. The risk of failure has been identified as one of the most important risks in collaboration which may include significant loss of investment in money, time and delay in business plans. Further, the issue of dependence has been regarded as the most complex one as companies to a greater or lesser extent start relying on other companies across a number of processes. Another negative effect of collaboration is the increase in operational complexity. For example *“a company supplying to two other companies i.e. one with whom having collaboration and other not, may end up running two separate supply chains”*. According to Das and Teng (2000), Emberson and Storey (2006), Madhok and Tallman (1998), Wittmann (2007) collaborative relationships have high instability rates and tend to fail at excessively high rates. Thus to conclude the discussion regarding the effects of logistics collaboration in supply chain by undergoing through the two streams of literature it can be said that these relationships are difficult to achieve and has not been understood well. Perhaps, Sabath and Fontanella (2002, p.24) have been able to best capture the contributions of collaboration as *“Supply chain collaboration is at the same time the most used, the most frequently mis-understood, the most popular and the most disappointing strategy that has come along to date”*.

3. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The objective of this study is to find out the effects of logistics collaboration in supply chain (manufacturer- customer, manufacturer- supplier and manufacturer-supplier-customer) in the context of automobile manufacturing companies in India.

4. RESEARCH METHODS

4.1 QUESTIONNAIRE

The method used to collect data in this research is the questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was developed in several stages. Firstly, a paper-based version of the questionnaire draft was pre tested with three subject experts and two industry experts. This was done to cross verify the contents, structure and nature of the questions asked in the questionnaire and improve validity (Mitchell, 1996). Then it was pilot tested, were it was sent to the 46 logistics managers working in the automobile manufacturing companies (registered under SIAM) in India. Based on their valuable comments, the questionnaire was further refined and after some minor design changes, a web-based questionnaire was used to collect the data reported in this paper. Due to the nature of the questions the logistics managers were identified as being the single most knowledgeable person to provide the required information.

4.2 DATA COLLECTION

The data for this study was obtained from 36 Indian auto mobile manufacturing Companies as automotive industry in India is one of the largest in the world and one of the fastest growing globally. Also, this industry has for a long time had closely linked supply chains requiring collaboration between the supply chain partners, Zirpoli and Caputo (2002). The Indian automotive industry is also suitable for survey research as this study required a large sample size. Also, due to the nature of the questions the logistics managers were identified as being the single most knowledgeable person to provide the required information. Using the snow ball sampling technique of data collection, the questionnaires (Web-based) were emailed to the suitable respondents. The overall sample comprised 288 logistics managers of which 210 responded. While, after discarding the questionnaires with incomplete information, 192 responses were found suitable for further analysis giving a satisfactory response rate of 66.6%.

5.1. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In order to analyse the data the researchers have used SPSS (Version 20) software and appropriate statistical tools. The analysis is divided into two parts. The first part describes the sample and the second part deals with the analysis based on the hypothesis on the effects of logistics collaboration across organisational variables.

A. DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

Q1.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	YES	52	27.1
	NO	140	72.9
	Total	192	100.0

The above table shows that there are higher percentages of non group of companies.

Q2.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	SMALL	129	67.2
	MEDIUM	43	22.4
	LARGE	20	10.4
	Total	192	100.0

From the table it is clear that there are higher numbers of respondents from the small size companies.

Q3.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	SOLE PROPRIETOR	62	32.3
	JOINT VENTURE	65	33.9
	PARTNERSHIP	65	33.9
	Total	192	100.0

It is clear from the above table the type of ownership is almost equally distributed, with joint venture and partnership type of ownership almost having the same percentage of respondents.

Q4.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	2-Wheelers	48	25.0
	3-Wheelers	43	22.4
	Commercial Vehicles	68	35.4
	Passenger Vehicles	33	17.2
	Total	192	100.0

From the table it is evident that large number of responses has been received from the companies dealing in commercial vehicles, followed by the two wheelers.

CROSSTAB

Size of the company * Nature of Collaboration
Count

		Nature of Collaboration			Total
		Triadic	Dyadic-Customers	Dyadic-Suppliers	
Size of the company	SMALL	40	36	53	129
	MEDIUM	26	12	5	43
	LARGE	17	3	0	20
Total		96	51	45	192

The above result clearly shows that majority of the small companies are engaged in triadic collaboration in contrast to larger ones. Since the data sample was drawn through random sample from a multinomial distribution, chi-square test was carried out and result is shown in the table below. These results indicate that statistically there is a significant relationship between size of the company and type of collaboration (chi-square with four degree of freedom = 19.416, p = 0.001).

CHI-SQUARE TESTS

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.416 ^a	4	.001
Likelihood Ratio	23.802	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	18.679	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	192		

a. 1 cells (11.1%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.69.

Nature of ownership * Nature of Collaboration
Count

		Nature of Collaboration			Total
		Triadic	Dyadic-Customers	Dyadic-Suppliers	
Nature of ownership	SOLE PROPRIETOR	22	28	12	62
	JOINT VENTURE	41	11	13	65
	PARTNERSHIP	31	14	20	65
Total		94	53	45	192

The below result shows that except sole proprietorship, joint venture and partnership prefer triadic collaboration to dyadic ones. As the data sample was drawn through random sample from a multinomial distribution, chi-square test was carried out and result is shown in the below table. These results indicate that statistically there is a significant relationship between nature of ownership and nature of collaboration (chi-square with four degree of freedom = 10.490, p = 0.001).

CHI-SQUARE TESTS

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.490 ^a	4	.033
Likelihood Ratio	10.335	4	.035
Linear-by-Linear Association	.718	1	.397
N of Valid Cases	192		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 14.53.

The below result shows that except passenger vehicles, 2-Wheelers, 3-Wheelers and commercial vehicles prefer triadic collaboration to dyadic ones. As the data sample was drawn through random sample from a multinomial distribution, chi-square test was carried out and result is shown in the below table. These results indicate that statistically there is a significant relationship between types of segment and nature of collaboration (chi-square with six degree of freedom = 23.877, p = 0.001).

Types of segment * Nature of Collaboration
Count

		Nature of Collaboration			Total
		Triadic	Dyadic-Customers	Dyadic-Suppliers	
Types of segment	2-Wheelers	21	15	12	48
	3-Wheelers	16	12	15	43
	Commercial Vehicles	48	15	5	68
	Passenger Vehicles	11	9	13	33
Total		96	51	45	192

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	23.877	6	.001
Likelihood Ratio	25.471	6	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.366	1	.545
N of Valid Cases	192		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.73.

B. Hypothesis based on effects of logistics collaboration across organizational variables.

Null hypothesis	Test	Sig	Decision
H01: There is no significant variation in the effect of collaborative practices on cost with the size of the company.	Independent Samples Kurskal- wallis test	0.452	Accepted
H02: There is no significant variation in the effect of collaborative practices on cost with the type of ownership of the company.	Independent Samples Kurskal- wallis test.	0.000	Not Accepted
H03: There is no significant variation in the effect of collaborative practices on cost with the type of segment in which the company deals with.	Independent Samples Kurskal- wallis test.	0.117	Accepted
H04: There is no significant variation in the effect of collaborative practices on services with the size of the company.	Independent Samples Kurskal- wallis test.	0.543	Accepted
H05: There is no significant variation in the effect of collaborative practices on services with the type of ownership of the company.	Independent Samples Kurskal- wallis test.	0.042	Accepted
H06: There is no significant variation in the effect of collaborative practices on services with the type of segment in which the company deals with.	Independent Samples Kurskal- wallis test.	0.004	Not Accepted

IMPACT OF COLLABORATION

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Company has Lower Cost	138	71.9
	Partner has Lower cost	54	28.1
	Total	192	100.0

More than 70 % of the respondents believe that collaboration has impacted their company in a positive way and have helped the company in reducing the cost while close to 30% respondents believe that it is their partners who availed maximum benefit out of the collaboration.

		Freq	%
Valid	Service Vis-a-Vis our partner has improved	80	41.7
	Alone received better received	48	25.0
	our service vis-a-vis customer improved	51	26.6
	Our service vis-a-vis suppliers improved	13	6.8
	Total	192	100.0

40 % of the respondents felt that collaboration has lead their company to enhance their services vis.-a-vis. their partners while close to 27% respondents believe that their company's services have improved vis.-a-vis. their customers.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Increased Cooperation	138	71.9
	Other companies got more info	27	14.1
	Little better service	10	5.2
	others	16	8.3
Total		192	100.0

A major chunk of the sample (i.e. 72%) posit that collaboration lead them to an enhanced cooperation amongst partners with efficient controlling and better service.

Surprisingly, 37% of the respondents feel that in future they won't be collaborating with their partners. Although the majority is in support of collaboration, 1/3rd denial for the same is a cause for serious concern and necessary factors need to be explored to find out the hidden causes and solutions thereof.

Q8.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	YES	121	63.0
	NO	71	37.0
	Total	192	100.0

On the basis of the benefits derived from the collaborative practices and its positive effectiveness. Most of the respondents wants to continue there collaborative relationship at the same level. Where as there are considerable number of respondents who wants that collaborative relationship should grow further.

Q9.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Same Level	115	59.9
	Grow	74	38.5
	Terminate	3	1.6
	Total	192	100.0

MANAGERIAL INSIGHTS

It is not surprising that this study pertaining to the collaborative practices in supply chain among the automobile manufacturers in India has significant effects. However, findings suggest that although the effects of collaboration have been positive and beneficial for the manufacturing companies, it is not so much encouraging for their partner's i.e suppliers and customers. Also, this study is an attempt to fill the large gap between the case based generalizations and the empirically tested once. This study makes a significant contribution in the sense that it highlights the needs for removing certain barriers and challenges which act as a deterring factor in fulfilling the cent percent goals of collaborative practices.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the findings and results of the data, it can be said that small size manufacturing companies are more inclined towards collaborative practices as compared to larger ones. Furthermore, the companies having joint venture and partnership type of ownership prefer to have more or less all kinds of collaborative relationships, which indicate that those who are already having some kind of partnerships are inclined further towards collaborative practices. Also, it has been found that after collaboration, the automobile manufacturers have been able to reduce cost and was able to provide better services to their collaborating partners, which vindicates the findings suggested by the literature. Thus, the positive effects of logistics collaboration in supply chain in the context of automobile manufacturing companies have been established, however some bottlenecks needs to be removed.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study indicates towards several potential future directions in the field of collaborative supply chain management. As this paper is based on the results of the data collected from the Indian automobile manufacturing companies, this research could be applied to different manufacturing industries in India and also across the world. Additionally, effects of collaboration might be only one important factor, which has been studied in this research. Other factors such as driving forces, barriers, role of information sharing and supply chain planning activities can be explored. Therefore, it is suggested that more efforts are required to understand the complex nature of collaborative supply chains, so that organisations gain more insights leading to their improvement in performance.

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