

From the editors: Introduction to the emerging discourse incubator on the topic of leveraging multiple types of resources within the supply network for competitive advantage

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Abstract

The *Journal of Supply Chain Management's* 2022 emerging discourse incubator looks to encourage scholars from different disciplines to develop and test new theories to advance our understanding about why and how firms should manage supply network resources for deploying competitive actions and gaining competitive advantage. To start that discourse, this issue offers three invited papers. In “Broadening our understanding of interfirm rivalry: A call for research on how supply networks shape competitive behavior and performance,” Christian Hofer, Jordan Barker, Laura d’Oria, and Jon Johnson discuss the criticality of the supply network to a focal firm’s capability in engaging competitive behaviors and the effectiveness of their rivalrous activities, which together affect the firm’s competitive advantage. Michael Howe and Yao Jin explore the relational multiplexity theoretical framework in “It’s Nothing Personal, or is it? Exploring How Relational Multiplexity in the Supply Chain Can Enhance Competitive Behavior.” In “A theoretical model on how firms can leverage their supply chain strategy through political actions,” Abhay Grover and Martin Dresner use the structure-conduct-performance and competitive dynamics perspectives to theorize about the relationship between political strategies, supply chain risk management strategy, and firm competitive advantage. These invited papers provide a solid foundation to further a discourse that explains how and why changes in supply chain networks can enable firms to rapidly introduce competitive actions such as new product innovations to remain competitive in their respective industries.

KEYWORDS

behavioral supply management, business-to-business marketing, buyer/supplier relationships

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the *Journal of Supply Chain Management's* fifth emerging discourse incubator (EDI) is to encourage scholars from different disciplines to study how the firm can leverage resources in the supply network for competitive advantage. Examples of resources that a firm could leverage in a supply network include supplier capabilities, human capital, legal resources, political resources, and information technology capabilities. Some firms have developed the unique capability to capitalize on these resources to help take competitive actions against rival firms (Ferrier et al., 1999). Firms undertake competitive actions to maintain or improve their market share in their industry because rival firms are constantly looking for opportunities to take their customers (Chen et al., 2021).

While the strategy, organizational behavior, and supply chain communities clearly recognize the important role of the supply chain in enhancing a firm's performance, it is not well understood how a firm could leverage supply network resources to better compete (e.g., Dai et al., 2015; Gnyawali et al., 2006; Hofer et al., 2012, 2022). The competitive dynamics literature has largely neglected the study of supply network resources as a potential source of competitive advantage (Chen et al., 2021), and we lack an understanding on how unequal access to external resources provides some firms with a competitive advantage (Andrevski and Ferrier (2019). In sum, there is a need for more knowledge about how supply network characteristics, internal structure and processes, and the public policy environment could influence a focal firm's competitive behavior and competitive advantage. To begin this discourse, supply chain, strategy, and organizational behavior scholars were invited to share their perspective on how supply network resources could impact the firm's ability to engage in competitive behavior with rival firms (Grover & Dresner, 2022; Hofer et al., 2022; Howe & Jin, 2022). As an example, Grover and Dresner (2022) theorize on the role of proactively shaping political and supply chain resources (e.g., lobbying in support of future regulations) to protect the firm's supply chain investments for competitive advantage purposes. Each of these teams of scholars provides a valuable roadmap for future research in this domain.

This EDI will consider submissions that can theoretically explain how firms are able to effectively manage supply network resources and stakeholders for competitive advantage purposes (Dyer et al., 2018; Gnyawali et al., 2006; Hillman et al., 2009; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). A firm's ability to leverage potentially scarce resources from its supply network is influenced by shifts in the

skills of the workforce, technological advancements, and political forces. The critical importance of leveraging these resources for creating and sustaining competitive advantage is well recognized. However, many firms are unable to successfully navigate shifts in resources to achieve competitive advantage because critical resources often reside outside of the firm's control even though they are viewed as critical enablers of a firm's competitive behavior (Chen et al., 2021; Chen & Miller, 2012).

The *Journal of Supply Chain Management* supports an interdisciplinary perspective to study why and how a firm should leverage supply network resources to create competitive advantage for several reasons. First, the relationship between supply network resources and competitive action is contingent on the effective management of workers, situational constraints, and the overall control of internal and external resources (e.g., Ajamieh et al., 2016; Andrevski & Ferrier, 2019). Thus, interdisciplinary research is needed to explain how firms should attend to these situational factors. Second, closely coupled functions within organizations often interact in influencing the speed and repertoire of a firm's competitive actions. Thus, an interdisciplinary approach could provide a deeper understanding on how the firm can mobilize these intertwined resources to gain competitive advantage.

The *Journal of Supply Chain Management* places a premium on theoretical contributions and hence strongly supports the consideration of any appropriate theoretical lens to investigate the topic of this EDI (e.g., Elking et al., 2017; Flynn et al., 2020; Williamson, 2008). Because this EDI is interested in research on how the firm's competitive action repertoire (e.g., pricing actions, new product developments, and related types of actions) leverages supply network resources and the creation of competitive advantage, one possibility is the competitive dynamics perspective (Chen et al., 2021; Chen & Miller, 2012; Gnyawali et al., 2006). The competitive dynamics perspective has not received much attention from supply chain scholars even though this is a prominent subfield in strategy (Chen et al., 2021; Grimm & Smith, 1997) and is the dominant theory used by the authors of the invited papers that introduce this EDI (Grover & Dresner, 2022; Hofer et al., 2022; Howe & Jin, 2022).

BRIEF BACKGROUND ON COMPETITIVE DYNAMICS AND FEATURED ARTICLES

Briefly, the competitive dynamics literature recognizes that many markets are in disequilibrium and that competitive actions are the key to competitive advantage. The

competitive dynamics process involves a rival firm's *awareness* of their competitor's actions, the *motivation* to react (e.g., fear of losing market share), the *capability* to respond (e.g., supply chain resources), and often the subsequent engagement in a competitive countermove (Chen et al., 2007; Hofer et al., 2022). Because it is critical that firms maintain their advantage in the marketplace, this EDI is interested in understanding how supply network resources can enable the firm to take a variety of competitive actions for creating competitive advantage. For supply chain scholars who desire a more detailed description of the competitive dynamics perspective, please refer to Chen et al. (2021). Next, the three invited papers that introduce this topic are briefly described.

SUPPLY NETWORK RESOURCES

The first invited article is by Hofer et al. (2022). They discuss the criticality of the supply network to a focal firm's capability in engaging competitive behaviors and the effectiveness of their rivalrous activities, which together affect the firm's competitive advantage. Their article helps to motivate future research that looks into the role of a supply network in shaping competitive dynamics and suggests several pathways for future research to advance our understanding of a supply network's influence on competitive dynamics. These pathways reflect three influences: (1) the influence of supply network partners on a focal firm's performance, (2) the influence of supply network resources on the competitive behaviors of a focal firm or a rival firm through affecting the awareness, motivation or capability of the affected firm, and (3) the moderating influence of supply network resources on the effectiveness of competitive behaviors adopted by either the focal firm or rival firms.

For example, scholars could further investigate how a firm with limited internal resources could leverage supply chain resources to experiment with, test, and implement new supply network structures to support the firm's engagement in competitive moves and countermoves (Chae et al., 2020; Hofer et al., 2022). Hofer et al. (2022) concluded their paper with some methodological challenges and ideas about how to overcome these challenges.

HUMAN RESOURCES IN A SUPPLY NETWORK

The next invited article by Howe and Jin (2022) explores the relational multiplexity theoretical framework (e.g., Shipilov et al., 2014). Howe and Jin (2022) discuss

how the management of multiplex interpersonal relationships (relationships with both a formal work component and an informal interpersonal component) among boundary-spanning supply chain management professionals is another key to a firm's ability to take competitive actions. It is ultimately the firm's employees that make resource acquisition and exploitation decisions that affect the firm's competitive behaviors and performance. Howe and Jin (2022) encourage the investigation of the role of boundary-spanning behavior both within a firm and across supply networks for competitive action purposes.

Howe and Jin (2022) offer several suggestions for future research at the nexus of relational multiplexity and competitive dynamics. For instance, scholars could explore how a supply chain professional's personality traits, professional and social experiences, and the situational environment influence their ability to leverage supply network resources for competitive advantage purposes (e.g., Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000).

POLITICAL RESOURCES IN A SUPPLY NETWORK

The third invited article is by Grover and Dresner (2022). They use the structure-conduct-performance (SCP) and competitive dynamics perspectives to theorize about the relationship between political strategies, supply chain risk management strategy, and firm competitive advantage. They extended Oliver and Holzinger's (2008) typology of political strategies and suggest that beyond influencing or complying with the political environment, firms may choose to moderate the political environment or stay neutral. Specifically, they developed an integrated model to explore the relationship between political actions that leverage political and supply network resources, and supply chain strategy. They then develop a series of propositions outlining how political actions can facilitate supply chain risk management strategies that protect or enhance supply network resources and hence competitive advantage.

The *Journal of Supply Chain Management's* view on the need for research at the interface of supply chain management and public policy remains steadfast (e.g., Dobrzykowski, 2019; Fugate et al., 2019; Harland et al., 2019). We concur with authors such as Grover and Dresner (2022) and Darby et al. (2020) that additional research is needed to explore how public policy at the national, regional, and local levels creates risks and opportunities for a firm's supply chain. For instance, future research could examine how the alignment of

global, national, and local public policies impacts the firm's competitive behavior (e.g., Gundlach et al., 2019; Hasan et al., 2020; Tokar & Swink, 2019).

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF FUTURE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

The motivation of the *Journal of Supply Chain Management's* fifth EDI is to encourage scholars from different disciplines to develop and test new theories to advance our understanding about why and how firms should manage supply network resources for deploying competitive actions and gaining competitive advantage. The invited papers provide guidance for identifying future research topics, methods, and potential data sources. In addition, we encourage submissions with a strong theoretical grounding and alignment with the theme of this EDI to pursue topics beyond those suggested by the invited papers.

A diversity of research methods are also encouraged for this EDI. For instance, prior competitive dynamics research has used structured content analysis of news articles to operationalize competitive actions (e.g., Ndofo et al., 2011). This approach may prove to be a good starting point in future research. Scholars should also explore recent developments including the use of RavenPack News Analytics (e.g., Connelly et al., 2019; Shi et al., 2018). There are also multiple options on how to document and analyze the relationships of different actors in the supply chain network as described by Deng et al. (2022), Gualandris et al. (2021), Modi and Cantor (2021), and Wilhelm and Sydow (2018). Likewise, we also encourage scholars to consider other research methodologies such as experiments to study how individual- and team-level relationships manifest in competitive actions and behavior. Finally, qualitative, theory-building research that develops new theories to help us understand causal mechanisms between supply network resources and firm competitive dynamics is especially welcome.

As leaders in the academy, we are well positioned to explain how and why changes in supply chain networks can enable firms to rapidly introduce competitive actions such as new product innovations to remain competitive in their respective industries. The invited papers for this EDI provide a solid foundation to further such a discourse.

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