Talent Management For a Post-COVID-19 Supply Chain—The Critical Role for Managers
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INTRODUCTION

The SCM field tends to be more focused on the “what” of SCM than on the “how.” Yet the human equation in achieving SCM success is undeniable large (van Hoek et al, 2002; Meyers et al 2004). If the current pandemic environment teaches us one thing, it would not necessarily be that supply chains need improvement. Rather it would be the cruciality of supply chain manager’s efforts to cope with supply chain challenges faced by companies (van Hoek, 2020a, 2020b). What is worrisome in that context that there is a growing shortage of supply chain talent (McKinnon et al, 2017). Consultancy firm Deloitte found that <50% of respondents to a survey indicated that their team’s skills and capabilities are sufficient to deliver procurement strategies.¹ So we might face a volume and a skill challenge and the current environment may only make this a greater concern for managers.

Unfortunately, there is a surprising shortage of research on human resource management (HRM) in SCM (Hohenstein et al, 2014). Comprehensive literature reviews of SCM research on HRM (Hohenstein et al 2014; Lutz and Birou 2013) focus on HRM essential activities and techniques such as recruiting, training, and education. What they do not cover is the role of supply chain leaders and managers in HRM. Yet, McCarter et al (2005) conclude that there is a fair amount of “lip service” being paid about the importance of people in industry and that there are lots of shortfalls in talent development. This raises the question what the role of SCM executive and managers is in HRM is and how they can help address skill and volume challenges to future-proof the supply chain?

In this special topic forum, we aimed to help address these challenges and gaps. We did not necessarily receive as many submissions as we had hoped to and because we upheld the rigor and resulting low acceptance rate of the Journal of Business Logistics we ended up with only 2 papers in the STF. But these papers address key themes helping us make progress. We hope that future research will also address other relevant themes as detailed below.

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KEY THEMES AND RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Table 1 provides overview and explanation of themes and further research opportunities within those themes and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this theme.

Theme 1—The role of emotional intelligence in supply chain talent management

Ralston et al study the importance of emotional intelligence of supply chain managers in managing the modern workforce of technology savvy and digital enabled staff. They find that managers possessing higher levels of emotional intelligence are better equipped to build positive working conditions, increase retention of employees, and achieve more positive service outcomes for external customers. They also offer practical suggestions for managers to capture the “EI advantage” in the competitive labor market. The extension of this research called for in the paper includes collaborative work with managers to conduct experiments.

It can be assumed that in the (post-)pandemic environment EI will only gain importance. The extension Ralston et al’s findings would lead to the assumption that the ability to support employees through stressful and challenging periods and major change initiatives can enhance resilience widely called for. Furthermore, as the next themes will consider digitization and the future of work will likely only make EI more important, instead of less important.

Theme 2—The role of digitization

Wehrle et al find that digital technology impacts SCM executive’ roles and HRM in supportive, intensifying and changing ways. In some areas, technology may take over some of the SCM executive role, in others it may complement and in others there are key roles that squarely remain with the SCM executive. What emerges is a nuance view on the role of technology as an enabler and contributor to progress that does not excuse managers from needing to engage in HRM.

Future research called for by the authors include the consideration of cultural differences between countries and continents as well as the need for deriving strategies for managers to move toward a digitized supply chain. These suggestions return us to behavioral and managerial aspects such as those highlighted in theme 1. Additionally, the fact that the study shows a very long
The Role of Managers in SCM TMT

Table 1: Supply chain talent management research themes and opportunities and impact of COVID-19

| Theme                        | Explanation                                                                 | Selected further research opportunities                                      | Selected (post)COVID-19 implications                               |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| EI                           | In managing tech-savy and modern supply chain workforce emotional intelligence of managers impact retention, engagement, and service outcomes | Collaboration with managers in experiments                                       | EI only more crucial for coping with pandemic events and for achieving resilience |
| Digitization                 | Digital technologies impact the role of executives but in a nuanced way; they may complement, overtake, and not impact roles | Impact of cultural differences Strategies for managers to digitize Behavioral approaches to digitization in the supply chain | Digitization, widely called for to improve resilience, may be long time horizon. |
| Future of work in supply chains | Industry 4.0 will augment work, create new roles, and reduce the need for other roles. Lifelong learning expected to be essential | Growing importance of talent management in the supply chain and need for executives to create learning opportunities and make failure safe | COVID-19 is growing the need for a move to industry 4.0 but the question is if managers will “revert0020back” or accelerate the transformation after the pandemic |
| University education model   | The delivery model may need to change to support lifelong learning           | Rebalancing product portfolio, more company engagement and change of the HRM model toward adjunct faculty and faculty with industry experience | COVID-19 engagement provides a great stepping stone to experiment the education delivery model |
| University research model    | In order to support lifelong learning product development research may become more collaborative with managers | How to engage managers in research to enable their learning and how to connect research with industry learning needs more | COVID-19 presents the perfect opportunity for event-based risk research and manager engaged research and learning |

Time horizon for digitization efforts implies that while digitization is widely called for to improve resilience in the (post)COVID-19 supply chain, the actual achievement of those capabilities.

Theme 3—Talent management for the future of work in industry 4.0 supply chains

Building upon the theme of digitization, industry 4.0 is widely expected to impact the future of work in supply chains. The WEF points at the growing relevance of lifelong learning and the augmentation of jobs with industry 4.0 capabilities. While certain roles are expected to disappear, other will change and certain new roles will be created (WEF, 2018). If the future of work implies change, triggering a need to continue to learn, then the focus on talent management only becomes more important. Executives will have to create learning opportunities and make failure safe. It will also mean that executives will have to develop a “learning style” to managing; they will not know all the future of work holds but with their teams they can work together to create the future of work.

COVID-19 may have provided additional impetus for industry 4.0. With the move to working from home and social distancing, technological augmentation has become increasingly valuable and managers may have “jumped” the learning curve. Question will be to what degree managers will be tempted to revert back to “old ways” or if they will find themselves building upon new capabilities and skills, accelerating the transformation.

Theme 4—Changing the university education model

While plenty of studies consider the role of curricula design and university programs (Wu 2007; Lutz and Birou, 2013), what is the role of executives in university program development and adoption? Gibson et al (2016) point at the value of collaboration between industry and university in learning and van Hoek et al (2011) point at the value of guest lecturing. What else can executive do to inform course design and development? And how does the university delivery model need to change for the future for lifelong learning and to address skill gaps among supply chain personnel?

There are commoditization tendencies on traditional university programs ($1/day online programs) and competitive challenges from companies self-organizing seminuniversities to educate their personnel. So in order for universities to support lifelong learning in modern supply chains, the education delivery model likely needs some new SKU’s and a rebalancing of massive standardized undergrad and grad programs with some more company-engaged products and offerings that establish long-term and ongoing learning opportunities, not just 1–4 years programs. Additionally, this may accelerate changes in the university HRM model. Adjunct faculty, teaching assistants, and PhD candidates have been used as “surrogates” for teaching prepackaged courses rolled out like a mass produced product. Executive education has traditional received more of a customized approach with the best faculty engaging (and dictating high margin pricing). As we move toward lifelong learning and commoditization of university
CONCLUSION

We thank the editors of the Journal of Business Logistics for making this Special Topic Forum possible. We thank the authors and reviewers that have helped make it a reality. While there is clearly a lot more ground to cover for research to be a meaningful enabler of the bright future for HRM in SCM, we hope you will enjoy the progress made in this issue and, more importantly, we hope you will join in on the efforts to further the much needed work.

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SHORT BIOGRAPHIES

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