Improving Supply Chain Management through Human Resource Practices. Empirical Evidence from Pakistani SMEs

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ARTICLE DETAILS

ABSTRACT

This research scrutinizes the critical effect of human resource practices on the competitive advantage of supply chain management. It is proposed that HR practices positively affect supply chain management success of small medium enterprises (SMEs) in Pakistan but ignores the relative importance among different factors about organizational performance. Survey responses of 100 were collected via simple random sampling from the manufacturing and services sectors of SME in Pakistan. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to measure the fitness of the measurement model, and subsequently, the structural model was used to test the hypotheses. The findings show that all HR practices are positively related to the improvement in supply chain management as perceived by the employees of the concerned SME organizations. Since the research has integrating by providing valuable visions and understandings for improving the supply chain management by executing these HR practices. So, manufacturing and services industries must focus more on these practices and give new concentration when dealing with their relevant organization to get upper hand over competitors. Results of this study would also be helpful for HRM managers especially in less developed countries that are, Pakistan who intend to improve supply chain management through the implementation of these practices.

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1. Introduction

To gain a competitive advantage in the growing market place complexity every organization wishes to have a sufficient supply chain management, and this desire makes it inevitable (Fabbe-Costes & Jahre, 2008). But it is found hard for the management researchers and scholars to remain successful in the
effective execution of HR practices for the improvement of principles of supply chain management (Deshpande, 2012). The area of HRM and SCM in almost all business settings are dealt with as a distinct discipline despite their interlinkage (Qasim & Hamza, 2016). Human resource is deliberated to be an integral part of every organization, and a vital role is also being performed by supply chain management to develop organizational performance (Qasim & Hamza, 2016). Significant chain system is formed in the organization due to the integration of both HRM and SCM (Harvey, Fisher, McPhail, & Moeller, 2013; Schuler, Jackson, & Tarique, 2011). Talented and competent employees are found to be a great source of edge for those organizations which have a worldwide supply chain system. SCM is a central concern for human resource management scholars to attain sustainable development and empower the dynamic milieu internationally (Sweeney, 2013).

Meanwhile, HRM has obtained more attention to improving supply chain management because human plays a vibrant part in managing the logistics process (Qasim & Hamza, 2016). To improve supply chain performance, skilled human resource can be dug out who provides competitive edge (Barnes & Liao, 2012). Thus, those employees who have skills, knowledge, coped with leadership qualities and adequately trained can manage efficiently to progress the firm’s performance (Schuler et al., 2011). In the past few decades, it has been digging out from the brief review of literature that very scant studies have been made so far on the relationship of HRM and SCM (Qasim & Hamza, 2016). In China, the recent study in SCM also identified that HRM practices has a significant relationship with logistic service operations but crucial problem with this relationship is the lack of competent human resource that further cannot be ignored. (Kam, Tsahuridu, & Ding, 2010). HRM practices actively contributed to the rise of supply chain success (N. R. Khan, Taha, Ghouri, Khan, & Ken, 2013). Likewise, SCM has been examined to have both a direct and indirect effect on HRM practices.

Conversely, a very insufficient amount of studies are on the surface which stated the relationship of both these strategies certainly in the field of small and medium-sized enterprises (N. R. Khan et al., 2013). Business atmosphere in Pakistan is also facing the challenges of higher risk and a greater extent of uncertainty (N. R. Khan et al., 2013). Increase in the inflation and slow movement of economic growth further deteriorates the growth of SMEs. The role of SMEs in the economic prosperity of country is leading and crucial (Ali & Shah). SME’s contributed a considerable amount to the business life cycles in the developed world, but on the other hand, its growth in a developing nation like Pakistan depends on the financial crisis (Ali & Shah). In the recent past, Pakistan's SME sector have also adopted the strategies of HRM and SCM to improve their performance overall (N. Khan, 2011). In a nutshell, these practices are still in use in SME but under one department having no emphasis on how to bring improvement in organizational performance (Qasim & Hamza, 2016). Though, there is no such interdependent idea of HRM functions in SCM (Schoenherr, 2009). So, it can reasonably consider that HRM effect on SCM is an unexplored area and this gap needs to be filled. This study is an attempt to address the challenges that SME’s faces regarding HRM practices to improve SCM in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province Pakistan. The core aim is to examine the hurdles so that HRM managers, policymakers and researchers take prompt actions to improve the supply chain management for SME’s growth.

2. Literature Review
In industries, competitive advantage is the reason due to which amalgamation of human resource and supply chain management strategies got established. Henceforth, the merger of both these strategies will make organizations able to improve their performance and will enhance the supply chain management principles positively (N. R. Khan et al., 2013). In developed countries, several studies have been conducted in diverse working environments which show a strong relationship between HRM and SCM (N. R. Khan et al., 2013). SME sector prevalent in Pakistan is entirely different from the SME in the industrialized world. Almost maximum numbers of SME’s are not formally documented as a mean of tax evasion. Pakistan is carrying a unique culture regarding SME’S/organizations in which businesses are not ready to share information with others (N. R. Khan et al., 2013). Even these businesses are also
reluctant to upload information on their websites, so it is hard for researchers to gather the actual data via interviews. Less research has been conducted relating HRM with SCM specifically in the context of Pakistani SMEs. (N. R. Khan et al., 2013). The researcher has found four key HRM dimensions that affect SCM.

**Relationship of Human Resource Management Practices and Supply Chain Management**

HRM practices are broadly recognized as premier factors that contribute to organization performance and success (Ding, Kam, Zhang, & Jie, 2015). Present-day organizations are interested in inviting talents to accomplish their business mission. According to Ojokuku (2012), poor HRM practices have negative effect on employees’ perception pertaining job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Organizations can perform betterly if effective utilization of HRM practices i.e. recruitment and selection, training & development, performance management and compensation management is carried out (Fey, Morgulis-Yakushev, Park, & Björkman, 2009). Researchers explain HRM as a tactic used to utilize human resources effectively to gain organizational objectives (Lee, Lee, & Wu, 2010). A significant degree of research has revealed the positive correlation of HRM practices with firm’s performance (Birdi et al., 2008; Fong, Ooi, Tan, Lee, & Yee-Loong Chong, 2011). While, implementing better HR practices can produce effective HRM outcomes and positively contribute as well in the improvement of SMEs in developing countries (Zheng, O'Neill, & Morrison, 2009). According to Ding et al. (2015) a positive association of HRM practices like recruitment & selection, training & development, employee participation and performance appraisal has been found with both the firm and market performance. Another study of Fong et al. (2011) also gave similar results regarding the relationship of these HRM practices with performance of both service and manufacturing organizations in developing countries. While on the other hand, supply chain management can be termed as managing multiple entities directly involved in the flow of products, services and information from producer to end user in such a way to create value for the final end user (Bell, 2013; Stock & Boyer, 2009). SCM network comprises of specific functions or activities including purchasing, production, logistics, marketing and customer service (Stock & Boyer, 2009). SCM is looked as essential to organizations as a whole business strategy and is vital to its utilization as a competitive weapon (Bell, 2013).

This research concentrated on the effect of four dimensions of HRM practices i.e. recruitment & selection, training & development, performance appraisal and leadership on SCM in SME’S. Less research has been conducted on HR practices in Pakistan (Rahman, 2012). On the other hand, Jamil (2011) summarized that Pakistani economies and businesses are facing recent progress of globalization and free-market internationally. Such hurdles are encountered by adopting HRM practices in Pakistan. However, this concept is in a transition phase in Pakistan to manage and retain their employees in concerned organizations.

**Recruitment and selection**

Recruitment can be termed as the method when a considerable number of candidates with relevant proper qualification are invited timely for a job in the organization (Lee et al., 2010). While selection, on the other hand, termed as method of selection of an individual from a group candidates best matched both the specific job and organization (Lee et al., 2010). Most of the researchers have found that recruitment and selection tend to be one of the core challenges in the world, specifically in the field of SCM and logistics (Kam et al., 2010). A proper recruitment and selection method to attract the right people for the right job should have the ability to enhance a firm’s SCM process. Competent SCM personnel have growing international demand. Firms are attracting highly skilled employees and recruited them consequently to ensure organizational performance (Qasim & Hamza, 2016). According to Gibson and Lorin Cook (2003) found that selecting talented SCM professionals positively impact firm performance.

This demonstration leads us to our first proposition:

HI: recruitment and selection has a positive impact on supply chain management in SME
Performance Appraisal

Performance appraisal has been assumed an efficient tool for enhancing employee job performance and linking that performance with to attain strategic organizational objectives (Cheng, Dainty, & Moore, 2006). Performance appraisal can be used to motivate employees to come across a new expectation of firms to improve overall supply chain management (Cheng et al., 2006). According to equity theory Adams (1965) employees perceived equitable treatment, they are more likely to be satisfied and motivated to perform better. A performance appraisal system offers a fair basis for devising equitable reward process which enables employees to feel that their performance should be justly rewarded (Birdi et al., 2008). In the same way, Cooke (2005) reported that the problematic performance appraisal system is significantly negatively related to firm’s performance. Menon (2012) conducted a study which found that performance appraisal used to identify reward allocation and fair procedures has significant association with customer satisfaction in the supply chain management. This discussion leads us to our second hypothesis:

H2: performance appraisal has a positive impact on supply chain management in SME

Training and Development

Training and development is also considered as one of the important HR practices that encompass training of employees, career improvement and organizational development (Qasim & Hamza, 2016). Excellent job performance can be achieved by giving training programs to the concerned employees that are already attached to the supply chain management process. These training sessions than making employees upgraded and aware of how to excel their capabilities and skills for a specific position (Qasim & Hamza, 2016). Moreover, N. R. Khan et al. (2013) in his research also corroborated training and development as valuable asset contributing effectively in the success of SCM. For professional development, global managers should focus on SCM training and development practices to ensure effective profile skills (Harvey et al., 2013). Due to the absence of alignment with competencies the recent training and development programs have failed to get the aim of developing SCM professionals in a practical way (Ellinger & Ellinger, 2014). However, it has been reported repeatedly that those industries/organizations who stressed on training their human resources subjected to be effective in improving the SCM process (Gowen Iii & Tallon, 2003). A likely number of researchers Ding et al. (2015) and Menon (2012) have recognized that training and development assistance in problem-solving, team building and leadership and proved empirically that it enhances and improves the practices of SCM. Several researchers opine that those organizations that do not focus on training and development of their employees, they will not observe any effectiveness in the improvement of SCM process of organizations (Menon, 2012; Qasim & Hamza, 2016)

This debate precedes us to our third proposition:

H3: training and development has a positive impact on supply chain management in SME

Leadership

The top leaders in every successful organization have played a vital role in launching creativity and innovations. Such creativity and innovations comes through quality development, employee motivation and training support. Such initiatives also need allocation of resources (Das, Paul, & Swierczek, 2008). It is also the prime responsibility of the top management to properly inform the employees of the organization from both the mission and vision and take steps to improve and organize quality aims and objectives and take further improvement steps for enhancing SCM constantly (Rashid & Haris Aslam, 2012). Several studies have urged that top management leadership have an essential role in bringing quality enhancement and effectiveness in SCM practices (Kaynak & Hartley, 2008). In order to bring quality in measurement and performance among the multiple entities of SCM, top management needs to manage and plan quality assurance throughout the supply chain being considerate of internal organizational efforts (Rashid & Haris Aslam, 2012). In this respect leadership, i.e. top management of the concerned firm's outlines the association with the business partners in the same supply chain (Robinson & Malhotra, 2005). To confirm product improvement efforts top management needs to play a crucial role in supply chain assimilation to assist this process and cherishing a culture that expedites
consistent development, and co-operation without hurdles with the SCM system (Ou, Liu, Hung, & Yen, 2010).
This debate leads us to our fourth proposition:
H4: leadership has a positive impact on supply chain management in SME

3. Research Framework

![Research Framework Diagram]

Figure 1: Research framework of the study

4. Research Methodology
Managers of various SME’s of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are assumed to be the target population of this study. A sample size of 100 respondents was collected through simple random sampling from manufacturing and a service sector of SME’S, employing a survey method. The primary data was gathered from the respondents to investigate the impact of HR practices on supply chain management. Data were further analyzed by using AMOS-SEM-23 version to measure the direct effect of the independent variables on the dependent variables. AMOS was also used to analyze the measurement model for constructs reliability; validity and model fitness and hypotheses were also tested with the help of the structural model. All the survey items used to measure the constructs of the study were taken from studies of Ding et al. (2015) and Qasim and Hamza (2016).

5. Data Analysis and Results
AMOS 23 version was used to further analyze the data of the study. The already collected data has been checked for outliers, but no outliers were found as such in the data. In order to find out the reliability and validity of the variables of the study confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed. Factor loadings, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) has been given in Table 1.

| Constructs                        | Items   | Factor Loadings | R²    | CR (Above 0.6) | AVE (Above 0.5) |
|----------------------------------|---------|-----------------|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Recruitment and selection        | RS1     | 0.70            | 0.49  |                |                 |
|                                  | RS2     | 0.80            | 0.64  |                |                 |
|                                  | RS3     | 0.74            | 0.55  | 0.829          | 0.510           |
|                                  | RS4     | 0.74            | 0.54  |                |                 |
CFA was employed which involved 20 items of five constructs i.e. recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, leadership, training and development and supply chain management. The estimation of CR for all the variables falls in the range of acceptable limit which is 0.70 to 0.90 as proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981) confirming appropriate reliability. For the assessment of the measurement model validity both convergent and discriminant validity was identified. All the AVE values for the variables of the study are higher than 0.50 establishing sufficient convergent validity for the model (refer Table 1). Whereas, discriminant validity of the model was identified by employing squared inter-construct correlations (SIC) and AVE values of variables. All AVE values of variables at the diagonal of the correlation matrix were higher than the SIC values of each construct. Table 2 shows that satisfactory convergent and discriminant validity is achieved for measurement model of research study.

|                | RS5 | 0.57 | 0.32 |
|----------------|-----|------|------|
| **Performance appraisal** |    |      |      |
| PA1            | 0.61 | 0.37 |
| PA2            | 0.57 | 0.33 |
| PA3            | 0.62 | 0.39 |
| PA4            | 0.51 | 0.26 |
| PA5            | 0.67 | 0.45 |
| PA6            | 0.63 | 0.39 |
| **Training and development** |    |      |      |
| TD1            | 0.70 | 0.49 |
| TD2            | 0.79 | 0.62 |
| TD3            | 0.65 | 0.43 |
| TD4            | 0.53 | 0.28 |
| TD5            | 0.61 | 0.38 |
| TD6            | 0.67 | 0.45 |
| **Leadership** |    |      |      |
| LD1            | 0.55 | 0.30 |
| LD2            | 0.73 | 0.54 |
| LD3            | 0.62 | 0.38 |
| LD4            | 0.80 | 0.63 |
| **Supply chain management** |    |      |      |
| SCM1           | 0.70 | 0.49 |
| SCM 2          | 0.71 | 0.51 |
| SCM 3          | 0.64 | 0.42 |
| SCM 4          | 0.72 | 0.53 |

Table 2: Squared inter-construct correlations (SIC)

|                        | R &S | PA  | T &D | LD  | SCM |
|------------------------|------|-----|------|-----|-----|
| **Recruitment and selection** | 0.88 |      |      |     |     |
| **Performance appraisal** | .633 | 0.88 |      |     |     |
| **Training and development** | .582 | .510 | 0.79 |     |     |
SEM has been used to simultaneously test the regression pathways and develop an empirical model suitable for the research study. The brief findings of the structural model are shown in Table 3 and represented in Figure 2.

|                | .366 | .378 | .326 | 0.58 |
|----------------|------|------|------|------|
| Leadership     |      |      |      |      |
| Supply chain   | .355 | .453 | .328 | .347 | 0.80 |
| management     |      |      |      |      |

Table 3: Model fit statistics

|                        |        |
|------------------------|--------|
| Chi-square (CMIN)      | 339.140|
| Degree of freedom (DF) | 266    |
| CMIN/DF                | 1.275  |

Figure 2: Structural Model with Findings

To evaluate the goodness of model fit, four measures of the absolute fit index i.e. ratio of chi-square to a degree of freedom ($\chi^2$/df), goodness of fit index (GFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and root mean square residual (RMR) has been used in this study. Three measures of the incremental fit index were used in this study. These measures are normed fit index (NFI), comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI). The values of these indicators are $\chi^2$/df = 1.275, GFI= 0.906, RMSEA =0.033, RMR=0.050, NFI=0.875, CFI=0.970 and TLI=0.966 respectively. Both the values of absolute fit indices and incremental fit indices are within the acceptable range. Therefore, it is summarized that the proposed model of the research study fitted well to the data. For detailed findings see Table 3.
As a whole, the model presented satisfactory explanatory power of variance based on the squared multiple correlations (r²) of each variable in the model.

6. Hypotheses Testing
In this study, four main hypotheses were developed to measure the associations among the constructs.

The first hypothesis was developed on the positive effect of recruitment and selection on supply chain management. The finding presented that beta coefficient (β=0.58, P<0.001) from recruitment and selection to supply chain management was found positive and significant and also empirically supported by the data. The second hypothesis was developed as performance appraisal has a positive impact on supply chain management. The result presented that beta coefficient (β=0.37, P<0.001) from performance appraisal to supply chain management was identified positive and proved statistically significant. The third hypothesis was developed as training and development has a positive impact on supply chain management practices. The result indicated that the beta coefficient (β=-.533, P<0.792) from training and development to supply chain management was examined negative which means that if the organization doesn't fulfill training and development programs and strategies for the human resource managers and employees, definitely it will not affect supply chain management practices. The last hypothesis was developed as leadership has a positive impact on supply chain management. The finding displayed that path coefficient (β=0.85, P<0.001) from leadership to supply chain management was found positive and proved empirically significant.

| Hypotheses statement of path analysis | Path coefficient or β-value | P-value | Results on Hypothesis |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------|-----------------------|
| H1: Recruitment and selection has a positive impact on supply chain management | 0.58 | 0.001 | Supported |
| H2: Performance appraisal has a positive impact on supply chain management. | 0.37 | 0.001 | Supported |
| H3: Training and development has a positive impact on supply chain management | -.533 | 0.792 | Supported |
| H4: Leadership has a positive impact on supply chain management | 0.85 | 0.001 | Supported |
7. Discussion
This study has to integrate enormously to understand HRM practices and SCM problems and its evolving need in the worldwide competitive markets. After going through the literature deeply we have recognized that over the past two decades HRM and SCM have been researched profoundly. Such emerging vibrant business atmosphere has produced several demands for supply chain profession (Harvey et al., 2013; Richey, Tokman & Wheeler, 2006; Sweeney, 2013). Those organizations and industries who will implement these strategies will result in developments in SCM while other lacks it. To understand the idea of recruitment and selection problems various process and techniques with the aim of seeking better practices are encouraged. Due to deficiency of HR professionals, it has made critical for SME’s in Pakistan to train and improve lower staff. According to Qasim and Hamza (2016), this is a quite crucial problem for small and medium enterprises in limited resources to continue training and development programs for their employees and managers. Very few numbers of organizations send their employees and managers to in-country institutes for training and abroad and get fruitful results in improving SCM. The finding of training and development has an insignificant and negative impact on SCM which indicates unlike developed countries; Pakistan have no such resources to offer proper training in SME sector. Without training the staff eventually, become demotivated with having no skills and knowledge and trying to switch to other organizations. By doing this, companies suffer a lot and resultantly their supply chain management affected. Leadership and effective performance appraisal also play a vital role in improving supply chain management issues. It means that effective performance appraisal engages and rewards those employees who are at a high level of performance. While leadership such as top management help their organization in achieving goals and objectives and further improve SCM with their fruitful decisions and managing human resources.

8. Conclusion
This research aims to examine the impact of HRM practices on improving supply chain management success in the SME sector of Pakistan. It is proved empirically that all HRM practices have a positive effect on SCM. The results of this study are in congruence with the findings of the previous researchers such as Ding et al. (2015) and Qasim and Hamza (2016). This study has theoretically added a model in which two major disciplines were combined such as HRM and SCM.

Furthermore, this model can be used for both manufacturing and service industries in SME’s. This study has identified the importance of HRM practices i.e. recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, leadership, training and development connected to SCM. So, SME’S and industries need to focus more on these HRM practices and give extra concentration when managing their organization. This research also provides useful insights for increasing the SCM success by adopting such kind of HRM practices that will undoubtedly offer an edge over competitors. Nowadays, most of the developing countries are implementing HRM practices to compete locally and globally. Hence, adequate tactics must be assumed at a national level to lift the national economy through the SME sector. In the last, it is proposed for the managers and employers of the SME to adopt HRM and SCM functions in a way to improve organizational performance.

9. Research Limitations and Future Research
Firstly, this study was cross-sectional in nature, and survey method was used but in future longitudinal research design should be followed. Secondly, this study covered only the effect of four dimensions on SCM, but future researchers can also uncover other aspects of HRM practices. In the last, the present research study has gathered empirical data from SME sector of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan and it can be hardly generalized to other industries. So, future researchers may examine this study in different organizational settings to further validate these results.
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