

Editorial

Logistics Is about Competitiveness and More

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Stripped to its basics, logistics is about capturing competitive advantage and creating customer value, not just optimizing costs. This fundamental value proposition cuts across micro and macro units of analysis ranging from effectively monitoring and responding to changing behavior of individual consumers, to improving supply chain management (SCM) processes of firms, to efficiently connecting enterprises across the global economy.

The spreading wings of logistics research in the past two decades reflected largely the proliferation of extended enterprises, technological innovations, and transportation and telecommunications advances globally. A significant focus of logistics research in the latter quarter of the 20th century was on enhancing firm productivity and profitability, mainly through operational/tactical improvements in planning integration. But even here, scholars increasingly recognized that multi-enterprise networks were supplanting the firm as the effective competing unit [1]. The explosive growth of e-commerce in the 21st century, especially e-tailing, and the rise of smart mobile devices placed capturing and serving individual consumers as operational and research priorities. Concurrently, at the macro-level, accelerating globalization led to substantially more research interest on supply-chain disruptions and measuring logistics performance of geopolitical entities such as cities and countries as key to their trade facilitation and overall competitiveness [2].

As the analytical units of logistics research broadened, so too have the substantive topics addressed, with scholarship moving beyond traditional business issues. Contemporary environmental and social consciousness, developments in the pharmaceutical and biomedical sectors, and transformative technological innovations such as 3-D printing are generating new waves of research and substantive writings on such issues as green logistics, disaster and humanitarian logistics, bio-logistics, and alternatives to product shipping. Cool-chain, temperature-assured, and air logistics are receiving greater attention as a burgeoning worldwide middle-class desires fresh food and health-care products from wherever they are sourced. Air cargo (now accounting for 35% of the value of international trade) is simultaneously supporting globally integrated supply chains of microelectronics, fresh-cut flowers, medications, and other high-value perishables [3]. Concerns about fair trade, worker rights, depletion of fossil fuels and critical minerals, carbon emissions, and the sustainability of the entire logistics chain have come into play, shaping consumer, business, and government attitudes toward product origin, along with distance and mode of shipments. Value-influenced logistics and supply chain management are gaining significant traction as fields of research inquiry.

This traction is corroborated by Wieland, Handfield and Durach who surveyed 141 leading SCM researchers requesting them to identify the topics that they believe will have the greatest impact on the field in the coming five years [4]. “Sustainability”, which included ecological, economic, ethical, and social aspects, was mentioned the most frequently. When these thought leaders were asked what they believed should become important future research topics, sustainability/green issues once again ranked at the top.

Two transformative developments, however, will likely have the greatest implications for future logistics research and operations. The first is cloud computing as it is influencing big data and predictive analytics, the internet of things, and machine learning. This is enabling much more detailed

analyses of changing consumer behavior and more accurate and timely forecasts of potential gaps in demand and supply of desired products. The cloud also enables real-time asset visibility, tracking, and control to improve the velocity of customer response utilizing such processes as omni-channel fulfillment, while lowering total delivery costs and improving supply disruption responsiveness.

The second transformative development is the emergence of giant B-to-C e-commerce firms such as Amazon and Alibaba that are rewriting the rules of retail competition. These firms are similarly rewriting the rules of logistics competition by moving into the market domains of logistics service providers and offering comprehensive end-to-end services, including rapid long-distance delivery via dedicated cargo aircraft and last-mile delivery via drones, though the latter is still in the experimental stage. It seems just a matter of time before the likes of Google, Uber, and Virgin Galactic become players in the goods transportation and logistics services space.

With big data, machine learning, and predictive analytics becoming logistics “toolbox” essentials, and end-to-end solutions moving in-house, the human resource chemistry of logistics will have to change. A major challenge for shippers and logistics service providers will be to incorporate the “geeks” from the analytical world with their “operations guys” who have different work cultures and are not comfortable talking about the cloud, algorithms, or cognitive computing.

The issues outlined above represent the type of big-picture topics that this journal will seek to advance. Thus, along with conventional data-based hypothesis and theory testing within the full range of logistics and SCM subject areas, we welcome submissions of exploratory research and thought-generating substantive writings on emerging issues of importance to the field. We also solicit suggestions for special issues on leading edge and more traditional SCM topics. Comprehensive literature review articles and book reviews are welcomed as well.

You are therefore invited to submit your original research papers, commentary, and suggestions for special issue topics to *Logistics*. All papers submitted will be subject to editorial and peer review. An eminent international editorial board of logistics and supply chain management researchers has been appointed (<https://www.mdpi.com/journal/logistics/editors>) and will be expanded. The editorial team will be led by me as Editor-in-Chief and Deputy Editor-in Chief, Robert Handfield, Bank of America University Distinguished Professor of Supply Chain Management at the Poole College of Management at North Carolina State University, supported by Layla Zhang as Assistant Editor and the professional staff at MDPI.

A valuable feature of *Logistics* is that it is an open access journal that provides free readership via the internet that can help open up an author’s work to a much wider audience. Ultimately, the increased readership can convert into a greater number of citations for the author. Authors retain the copyright for their work and can reuse their articles freely for scholarly and commercial purposes, as long as the original publication is fully cited. There are no constraints on length of papers or charges for extra space, color images, or number of figures. As a new journal, MDPI will waive the article processing fees for papers submitted to *Logistics* in the first two years. Instructions for journal submissions are available online at <http://www.mdpi.com/journal/logistics/instructions>. We will strive to make refereeing efficient with accepted papers typically published online within ten days of approval, rendering the pre-filling of complete issues unnecessary and fostering rapid dissemination to readers worldwide. All publications are to be included in the Directory of Open Access Journals and Google Scholar with plans to be indexed in the Science Citation Index Expanded.

Rob Handfield, Layla Zhang, *Logistics* editorial board members, and I look forward to receiving your manuscripts.

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