

SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT

SUPPLY CHAIN GOES GLOBAL



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By Leslie Faughnan

The hugely significant emergence of China and the Far East in the last

two decades serves to emphasise the fact that global manufacturing today is as much dependent on smart supply chain management as on the actual plant, raw materials, machines and tools. Many experts are coming to the view that, at least conceptually, modern supply chain management (SCM) is the primary business function, with the actual production now a sub-set that can take place anywhere.

That much is certainly true, and the primacy of SCM becomes more apparent when production of components and even products takes place in more than one location. It is reinforced by the emergence of outsourced contract manufacturing, again with perhaps more than one supplier. There are major international brands with no manufacturing plants, notably in the fashion and clothing sectors but also in electronics.

Cisco is a world giant with no plants while all major electronics vendors outsource key components and finished products. Some even contract out their product design, with contract manufacturers working to a design concept and brief and even to a consumer price point. Two Irish leaders in this contract manufacturing field are PCH in Cork and Advanced Innovations in Limerick.

Clearly we are now in a new era of supply/demand planning, and the management of product manufacturing, distribution and sales. "The strategic importance of SCM is recognised by all global cor-

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is more common in 'modern' industries like electronics or retail multiple than in traditional sectors."

The NITL study, now ongoing for over a decade, also suggests that the biggest single obstacle to excellence can be the failure of senior management to recognise that SCM has become so important. "It has become much more, and much more important, than controlling the simple physical transport and storage of goods," said Sweeney.

"SCM today is a boardroom priority, and not just a loading bay activity. We used to talk about the 'lean enterprise' and then of 'world class manufacturing'. Those concepts and practices are still valid but today it is world-class SCM that characterises the most successful global brands in all sectors," he said.

It is also significant that businesses in contract manufacturing are masters of SCM, and use the most advanced systems with constant innovation and development. With multiple clients and multiple sources of supply, production and fulfilment, they understand how to control and integrate the complex information flows in 21st century SCM, Sweeney said.

"That depends on smart ICT but it also emphasises the new importance of skills in the actual design, planning and execution of supply chains. In fact supply 'chain' is almost a misnomer today because the many relationships are much more like a web of business entities, systems, logistics and products."

In this new context, Sweeney said NITL is playing a key role through its range of modular learning programmes that aim to equip supply chain professionals with the many competencies that are necessary to meet the evolving challenges.

porations and, increasingly, by smaller enterprises even in local markets," said Edward Sweeney, director of learning at the National Institute for Transport and Logistics (NITL) and a recognised international expert.

"More interestingly, the importance of SCM in differentiating enterprises from their competition and simply doing business better is being recognised. It has certainly permeated Irish industry, although a longitudinal study we are engaged in suggests that best contemporary SCM practice