

Chapter 9

Supply Chain Management and the Other Half

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ABSTRACT

Supply Chain Management operations have traditionally been a gendered career. The role of a diverse workforce, particularly women, is reexamined from the perspective of maximizing the bottom-line and profit sharing in the logistics industry. The unique and problematic diversity issues that underlie both practices and policy in the industry are discussed. These include the more obvious inequities in salaries, to the more insidious and often invisible assumptions that may underlie policy. The net result is detrimental for both business and the basic ethical imperative of equity. The narrative places the discussion of logistics business operations and decision-making in the context of the current research on gender differences, and examines possible ways to create more equitable enterprises, while maintaining and improving the bottom-line.

INTRODUCTION

The chapter examines the role of women in supply chain management, in the context of management practices, education, and HR issues. There is need for an interdisciplinary approach to review a content heavy domain such as supply chain management to avoid too much ‘inbreeding’ as

it were. A new lens often serves to shed new light on an old theme. This chapter provides just such an outlook to reassess practices and operations from a different place and perspective. It may seem a bit trivial, and/or irrelevant to discuss this area through a gender lens. However, it should soon become apparent that the field of SCM, as is perhaps all business, commerce, production, and manufacturing, is deeply gendered in ways that may impede know-how, and the bottom-line,

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besides being on the wrong side of ethical and moral imperatives. The counter-argument to the above position stems from the assumption that content areas, professional domains, and fields of expertise are neutral by definition. One can posit that it is indeed so, but only in an ideal world. In the world we live in, however, the reality is far from so. There are numbers to prove the existing disparity, however, the discussion needs to move beyond numbers to the deeper problematic that lies underneath.

The issue of gender role assignments is critical in this context. Arguably the role of women in most if not every culture has been that of a nurturer. A nurturer by definition is a secondary role. It implies care giving, support, and servicing functions. Professions such as teachers and health professionals, the nurturers, and caregivers, still constitute the bulk of workforce where women are employed. Men on the other hand, are typically not assigned to or associated with a nurturing role. Without falling into the trap of triviality, it is perhaps safe to assert that gender roles have traditionally worked along the lines of 'primary' and 'secondary' functions. Our social system frames men's work as 'primary'. Engineers, scientists, politicians, stockbrokers, and business personnel are for instance all involved in a 'primary' rather than a 'secondary' occupation. Doubtless, these are stereotypes, and there are contrary instances on either side. Having said that though, women in such roles are still an exception rather than the rule, and often battle unspoken yet deep-seated biases we do not know we have.

It is necessary to delve on this seemingly oft beaten track in a book about business process and strategy, because business forms a 'primary' occupational description. It has traditionally been the male domain, and for good reason. Commerce has formed the underlying lifeline of money, power, and control in various communities, and been fundamentally antithetical to women's traditional role in the societal schema. Today for instance, 15 of the Fortune 500 CEOs are women

(CNNMoney, 2010). However, I would venture to state that women make upwards of 80% or more of secretarial staff in those very same companies. The distinction between the primary and secondary roles is starkly visible.

The gender issue in supply chain dynamic must be contextualized along this overall duality. The statistics support the social schema outlined above. Women formed only 15% of all Supply Chain Management VP positions across the country in 2010 (Payscale, 2010). According to the U. S. Census Bureau (2010), women-owned firms accounted for only 28.7% of all non-farm businesses in the U.S. in 2007. This was a mere 6.4% of total employment, and only 4% of total receipts. Equity in position is further compounded by pay scale disparities. Salary gap as reported by Payscale (2010), for a Supply Chain Analyst for instance, can vary from \$13.00 to \$24.83 an hour for male employees, and \$15.50 to \$21.68 an hour for female employees. The variance is higher for male employees, however the mean is also higher. According to Logistics, UK, the fastest growing logistics organization in the world, the boards of the UK's 350 top companies all have more male directors than women. Almost half have no women at all. This discrepancy is reflected in the overall numbers where women hold fewer than 10% of the managerial roles in logistics. Moreover women account for a mere 22% of the logistics workforce in the UK, compared with 46% in other sectors. Helms and Guffey (1997) note that from 1980 to 1987 over three million jobs were gained by women that were previously held by men, however, the rise in jobs has not meant equality in wages, benefits and opportunities. This difference in pay and earnings is accounted for by the highly segregated nature of the labor market with women concentrated in what is generally referred to as the "secondary" labor market. Typically, the secondary market is poorly organized, consisting of low pay, low status, and part-time or temporary employment.

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