

Logistical Excellence: Its Not Business As Usual

Resource-based theory and strategic logistics research

Resource-based theory

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The need for theoretical development in logistics and the strategic repositioning of the discipline have been suggested as major challenges for logistics researchers (Stock, 1990). Despite recent advances made by logistics, the requirement for further theoretical development on the strategic role of logistics remains a key priority (Mentzer and Kahn, 1995; Stock, 1996). Today's turbulent competitive environment mandates that a firm must have agility in the marketplace to survive and succeed. Therefore, logistics has become an increasing area of strategic concern for firms (Bowersox *et al.*, 1995, 1992; Bowersox *et al.*, 1995; Michigan State University Global Logistics Research Team, 1995; Stalk *et al.*, 1992). Acknowledging the dramatic changes in the economy, which has become more information intensive, more global and more dependent on technology, several authors, both inside and outside the logistics discipline, have indicated the importance of logistics as a source of sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) (Achrol, 1991; Day, 1994; Porter, 1985; Stalk *et al.*, 1992; Webster, 1992).

Borrowing and adapting theories from other fields is a beneficial and commonly-used way rapidly to elevate a discipline's level of theoretical development (Stock, 1995). Nevertheless, the influence of strategic management on logistics has been mainly restricted to and constrained by the work of Porter. Consequently, over the last 15 years of theory development in strategy research has been largely neglected in the strategic logistics literature. Surprisingly, despite the call for more theoretical and strategically oriented work in logistics, the resource-based theory (RBT) of the firm and the related capabilities approach – which represent a dominant stream of research in strategic management over the last decade – have not been prominent in the logistics literature.

We believe, that the "capabilities approach to strategy" and the underlying resource-based theory of the firm have, at least, implicitly influenced recent work in strategic logistics (see, for instance, the Michigan State University's Global Logistics Research Team's 1995 report). However, no clear exposition of the approach has been provided in the logistics literature.

We propose that the RBT has the potential to be applied to important areas of logistics research (i.e. the relationship between distinctive logistics capability and SCA, the role of logistics in strategic partnerships and outsourcing and the interface of logistics with marketing and other functional areas). The purpose of

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