

The Supply Chain Differentiation Guide

A Roadmap to Operational Excellence

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Preface

The supervision of value adding networks involving several companies has been drawing a lot of attention in research and practice for over a decade, under the concept of supply chain management. There appears to be a broad consensus with respect to the central guiding principle of supply chain management, which encompasses the integration of materials, goods, and information flows across multiple value chains, and the alignment of all value adding activities with the requirements of consumers. However, in companies of different sectors and sizes, there is still considerable potential for reducing costs, increasing performance, improving quality, increasing flexibility, and improving risk management by means of supply chain management. A major reason for the discrepancy between the perceived and actual relevance of supply chain management can be seen in the challenge of identifying and selecting which initiatives as well as actions should be executed in the supply chain management context. This is especially the case for small- and medium-sized companies. However, a trend that affects multinational companies as well as small- and medium-sized enterprises is the rapidly changing and diversifying character of customer needs. Some companies in the consumer industry, nowadays, offer customization approaches even for goods perceived as commodities by most customers. Furthermore, enterprises in the plant and machinery building industry are forced to invent new business models, since their customers demand the opportunity to purchase the production capacity, know-how, and innovation instead of buying an investment good. Modern supply chain management offers a solution for such a market requirement: supply chain differentiation.

Supply chain differentiation means the simultaneous operation of several supply chains for effectively and efficiently dealing with customer needs. It is an undeniable trend, especially in supply chain management practice. While some market leaders already have implemented a differentiated supply chain, many other companies struggle in even identifying suitable approaches for analyzing whether or not a differentiated supply chain is an appropriate solution for their company. The work presented here, *The Supply Chain Differentiation Guide*, offers approaches for investigating such issues in a holistic and integrated manner. The book covers a wide range of subjects and provides an overview of topics relevant to supply chain management as well as supply chain differentiation. The Inova

Management AG has already successfully applied the *Supply Chain Differentiation Guide* in its consulting practice. I am confident that the *Guide*'s readers will find suggestions and inspirations for improving supply chain management in their own companies.

St. Gallen, Switzerland, September 2012

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