

Chapter 2

Theory and Theoretical Framework

Abstract In the extant literature, different perspectives and theories have been taken in explaining supply chain collaboration. In this chapter, we examine supply chain collaboration using the following ten theories: uncertainty reduction theory, transaction cost economics, resource based view, relational view, extended resource based view, resource dependence theory, social exchange theory, social dilemma theory, trust based rationalism, and learning and knowledge perspective. We describe and compare the relative strength and weakness of each theory in situating the phenomenon of supply chain collaboration. These multiple perspectives provide us with insights into the nature, forms, contents, and forces of supply chain collaboration. We also draw on the key concepts from theories and literature and use them to propose and develop the theoretical framework where supply chain collaboration is the central concept.

2.1 Uncertainty Reduction Perspective

The theoretical literature on supply chain collaboration is diversified representing multiple perspectives. The diverse literature reflects the versatile nature of supply chain collaboration involving a variety of motives and objectives (Barringer and Harrison 2000; Hitt 2011; Verdecho et al. 2012; Fawcett et al. 2012). This study examines supply chain collaboration from multiple perspectives: (1) technical-economic perspective, e.g. uncertainty reduction, transaction cost economics, resource based view, relational view, and extended resource based view; (2) socio-political perspective, e.g. resource dependence theory, social exchange theory, and social dilemma theory; (3) trust based rationalism; and (4) learning and knowledge perspective. These multiple perspectives provide us with insights into the nature, forms, contents, and forces of supply chain collaboration.

Uncertainty has long been viewed as a dominant contingency and is one of the underlying determinants of high transaction costs (Williamson 1975). Reducing uncertainty via transparent information flow is a key objective in supply chain collaboration (Holweg et al. 2005). Market and technological uncertainty can effectively be dealt with through partnerships where supply chain partners share information of unexpected events and developments (Verwaal and Hesselmans 2004). The intense communication between supply chain partners also reduces behavioral uncertainty (e.g., opportunism) (Wuyts and Geyskens 2005). If information is not shared between partners, non-transparent demand patterns will cause demand amplification and bullwhip effect. This leads to poor service levels, high inventories, and frequent stock-outs (Lee et al. 1997). Thus, when facing uncertainty, firms will tend to collaborate with partners in building long-term relationship.

2.2 Transaction Cost Economics

Transaction cost economics (TCE) is one of the most influential theories on IOS use and interfirm collaboration (Williamson 1975; Barringer and Harrison 2000; Nesheim 2001; Wever et al. 2012). TCE suggests that a firm organize its cross-organizational activities to minimize production costs within the firm and transaction costs within markets. According to TCE, the decision to use either vertical integration or market mechanisms depends on the relative monitoring costs that arise from bounded rationality and uncertainties due to partners' self-interest and opportunism (Kaufman et al. 2000). TCE thinks that IOS use can reduce transaction costs (e.g., monitoring costs) by specific asset investments, which diminish opportunistic behaviors (Son et al. 2005).

Williamson (1975) identifies markets and hierarchies as two modes of organizing. Collaboration emerges as the third alternative. Supply chain collaboration helps prevent the problems arising from both markets and hierarchies (Koh and Venkatraman 1991). It helps firms reduce the opportunism and monitoring costs that are inbuilt in market transactions through process integration and mutual trust, thus reduce the probability that partners behave opportunistically (Kaufman et al. 2000; Croom 2001). Supply chain collaboration also helps firms avoid internalizing an activity that they do not excel at (Harrigan 1988).

In spite of TCE's usefulness, many scholars notice its limitation. TCE is restricted to the efficiency rationale for supply chain collaboration. Supply chain collaboration may form for other reasons such as knowledge creation. In addition, organizational contexts (e.g. culture, power, dependence, and trust) that may affect collaborative efforts are assumed away (Barringer and Harrison 2000; Duffy and Fearn 2004). In reality, few supply chain collaborations are purely based on the consideration of transaction costs (Faulkner 1995).

2.3 Resource Based View

Resource based view (RBV) receives much attention in explaining supply chain collaboration. The key concepts of RBV are resources, capabilities, and strategic assets (Barney 1991). RBV argues that variance in firm performance can be explained by strategic resources, such as core competence (Prahalad and Hamel 1990), dynamic capability (Amit and Schoemaker 1993; Teece et al. 1997), and absorptive capacity (Cohen and Levinthal 1990). Firms that combine resources in a unique way may achieve an advantage over their competing firms who are unable to do so (Dyer and Singh 1998). By owning scarce resources and assets and excelling in core competencies and capabilities, firms can reach a market advantage and gain a sustained competitive advantage (Knudsen 2003). RBV claims that electronic integration by specific asset investments enables partnering firms to build competitive advantage because of their rare, valuable, non-substitutable, and difficult-to-imitate nature (Barney 1991; Knudsen 2003).

Resource complementarity or the need for particular resources is another reason for supply chain collaboration (Knudsen 2003). By investments in relation-specific assets, substantial knowledge exchange, combining complementary and scarce resources or capabilities, supply chain collaboration can create unique products, services or technologies (Knudsen 2003). Rents are generated through synergistic combination of assets, knowledge, or capabilities (Das and Teng 2000). The embeddedness of partnering firms' relational assets and the causal ambiguity are difficult for their competitors to copy (Hansen et al. 1997; Lorenzoni and Lipparini 1999; Jap 2001). Supply chain collaboration also enables firms to concentrate on their core competencies, which increase firm specific skills and realize economies of scale and learning effects, thereby improving their competitive positions (Barney 1991; Park et al. 2004; Verwaal and Hesselmanns 2004).

2.4 Relational View

The relational view (RV) complements the RBV by arguing that critical resources may span firm boundaries (Dyer and Singh 1998). Firms can earn not only internal rents (i.e., Ricardian rents from scarcity of resources and quasi-rents from added value) but also relational rents. A relational rent is defined as a supernormal profit jointly generated in an exchange relationship that cannot be created by either firm in isolation and can only be created through the joint contributions of the collaborative partners (Dyer and Singh 1998; Lavie 2006). Relational rents are possible when collaborative partners combine and exchange idiosyncratic assets, knowledge, and capabilities through relation-specific investments, interfirm knowledge-sharing routines, complementary resource endowments, and effective governance mechanisms.

Collaborative advantage is based on the relational view, which elaborates on the mechanisms of joint value creation (i.e., interfirm rent generation). It argues relational rents accrue at the collaboration level for mutual benefits. Unlike studies that acknowledge the role of both private and common benefits (Hamel 1991; Khanna et al. 1998), the relational view emphasizes common benefits that collaborative partners cannot generate independently.

2.5 Extended Resource-Based View

Conventional RBV assumes firms must own or fully control the resources to create value. In the extended resource-based view (ERBV), resource accessibility, the right to employ resources or enjoy their associated benefits, enables firms to achieve advantages. Lavie (2006) extends the RBV by explaining how interconnected firms in dyadic collaboration/alliance combine external resources and internal resource endowments to achieve competitive advantage for the focal firm. According to Lavie (2006), the competitive advantage of a focal firm participating in an alliance/collaboration includes four elements: (1) internal rent (2) appropriated relational rent (3) inbound spillover rent, and (4) outbound spillover rent. Internal rent can be extracted from the focal firm's own shared and nonshared resources. Appropriated relational rent can be extracted only from the shared resources of both partners. Inbound spillover rent is the rent generated from the partner's shared and nonshared resources through knowledge leakage, inter-firm learning, relative absorptive capacity, and internalization of the partner's practices, whereas outbound spillover rent results from the transfer of benefits from the focal firm to the partner. The combination of internal rent, inbound spillover rent, and outbound spillover rent forms private benefits for the focal firm. Its competitive advantage depends on its private benefits and appropriated relational rent (i.e., appropriated common benefits).

In contrast, collaborative advantage is joint competitive advantage and come from a relational rent, a common benefit that accrues to collaborative partners (Dyer and Singh 1998). This type of rent cannot be generated individually by either collaborative partner. In addition, Lavie (2006) model extends prior research on joint value creation in dyadic alliance by considering unilateral accumulation of spillover rents that produce private benefits.

2.6 Resource Dependence Theory

Resource dependence theory (RDT) argues that firms must exchange with their environments to gain resources (Scott 1987). It centers solely on resources that must be acquired from external sources for a firm to survive or thrive (Barringer and Harrison 2000). The need for external resources makes firms depend on others.

To successfully manage dependencies, RDT argues that firms must gain control over vital resources to reduce reliance on others and increase others' reliance on them. It means firms should try to increase their power in their environments (Pfeffer and Nowak 1996; Thorelli 1986; Barringer and Harrison 2000). Supply chain collaboration provides such a way to helping firms to reach these goals.

Extending the logic of resource dependence theory from the firm level to the supply chain level, supply chain partners as a whole are less relying on their environments through resources sharing. Firms collaborate with their supply chain partners to acquire vital resources and to increase their power relative to other supply chains. However, the power may be unbalanced between partners because of different ownership of resources. This unbalance of power may create conflicts between partners if not well managed. Min et al. (2005) suggest the powerful firm in the supply chain should meet the less powerful partner's needs in mutually beneficial arrangements to strengthen the competitive power of the supply chain as a whole. Based on RDT, IOS are the instruments that, by easily accessing partners' resources, increase the supply chain's power over other firms or chains.

While RDT has its merits, it has limitations in explaining supply chain collaboration. RDT just argues that firms have to exchange with their environments to acquire necessary resources since no firm is self-contained. Transaction costs, competence development, and learning opportunities are not taken into consideration (Barringer and Harrison 2000).

2.7 Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory (SET) extends the technical-economic perspective by examining the non-contractual based reasons for participating in an exchange (Blau 1964; Das and Teng 2002; Thomas and Ranganathan 2005). Social exchanges differ from economic exchanges in that the specific benefits of exchange are not contractually and explicitly fully specified; partners have a social bond out of social influence. Supply chain collaboration can be explained by SET with the examination of social influence (e.g., power). According to SET, power is regarded as the most important sociological aspect of an interorganizational relationship when one firm needs to influence another's decisions. The exercise of power is often referred to as influence strategies (Son et al. 2005). These influences typically involve threats, punishment, rewards, and assistance.

2.8 Social Dilemma Theory

Social dilemma theory depicts situations where an individual's rational behavior causes suboptimal outcomes from the collective viewpoint (Dawes 1980; Kollock 1998). Research on social dilemma theory has concentrated on three social motives:

(1) individualism/independence—maximizing own outcomes regardless of others; (2) competition—maximizing own outcomes relative to others; and (3) cooperation—maximizing joint outcomes. The group members' goals—cooperation, competition, and independence—determine the interaction patterns of the group members, which in turn determine the group outcomes. Social dilemma theory concentrates on the tension between cooperation and competition. It conjectures that a member in the group can get higher benefits by defecting because he can obtain a larger piece of the pie than the portion that he deserves to have (Dawes 1980). It is confirmed that a self-interest member of an alliance is more likely to defect than cooperate (Zeng and Chen 2003). In contrast, if all members cooperate, the pie grows larger and accordingly each member gains higher although the percentage accrued by each member might not change (Dawes 1980). Social dilemma theory emphasizes that a member's short-term decision can lead to the potential long-term failure of the alliance.

2.9 Trust Based Rationalism

Trust based rationalism (TBR) employs a behavioral assumption of trustworthiness, fair play, responsibility, and altruism instead of betrayal, self-interest, and opportunism. It focuses on collaboration and cooperation rather than politics and conflicts as the primary interaction modes. Trust, relationship, and social capital are the key concepts in TBR. Trust is viewed as a critical determinant in establishing a relational mode of governance structure (Kumar et al. 1998). Continuing supply chain collaboration is based more on trust and equity than on monitoring and control capabilities (Kim et al. 2005).

Social capitals and relationships between partners arise from the foundation of trust. Trust reduces transaction costs and even eliminates the need for detailed contracts and governance mechanisms (Bromiley and Cummings 1995). While opportunism may create short-term benefits, it incurs costs in the long run because it lacks of reputation and trust (Kumar et al. 1998). Trust helps supply chain partners create a win-win strategy for collaborative advantage (Kumar and Van Dissel 1996).

2.10 Learning and Knowledge Perspective

Another rationale for explaining supply chain collaboration is that firms establish partnerships to exploit opportunities for knowledge creation and organizational learning (Kogut 1988; Hamel 1991; Mowery et al. 1996; Malhotra et al. 2005). Through knowledge creation and organizational learning, firms strengthen their competitive positions (Simonin 1997; Verwaal and Hesselmans 2004). In the face of high environmental uncertainty, it is important to have access to a broad and

deep knowledge base in order to respond quickly to changing circumstances (Volberda 1998). Since great diversity of knowledge is distributed across the supply chain, collaboration provides an ideal platform for learning (Verwaal and Hesselmans 2004) and facilitates partner-enabled market knowledge creation (Malhotra et al. 2005).

Learning that takes place in supply chain collaboration can be divided into two kinds of activities: exploration and exploitation (March 1995; Barringer and Harrison 2000; Subramani 2004). Exploitation is to improve existing capabilities while exploration is to discover new opportunities (e.g., improve absorptive capacity) (Cohen and Levinthal 1990; Lane and Lubatkin 1998; Subramani 2004). How much a firm can learn through supply chain collaboration is determined by the firm's absorptive capacity, "the ability to recognize the value of new, external knowledge, assimilate it, and apply it to commercial ends." (Cohen and Levinthal 1990, p. 128). A firm's ability to learn is based on the employee quality, knowledge base, organizational culture, and the quality of IT systems (Kumar and Nti 1998).

Supply chain collaboration can also be an effective means of transferring knowledge and new technical skills across organizations. A firm may find it difficult to buy a particular skill in the marketplace because of its tacit nature (Mowery et al. 1996). It may acquire new skills and competencies by collaborating with firms that excel in that area (Barringer and Harrison 2000). However, the level of privileged information sharing needed for collaboration, in fear of risky information leakage, is not adequately addressed by the learning and knowledge theory.

2.11 Theoretical Framework

Each of the theories discussed above is useful but insufficient to capture the complexity involved in supply chain collaboration. By blending multiple theoretical perspectives, a more comprehensive picture of supply chain collaboration can be captured. In studying supply chain collaboration, a technical-economic view focuses on how IOS affects control and cost structures within the firm (i.e., production costs) and within markets (i.e., transaction costs) (Williamson 1975; Son et al. 2005). A socio-political perspective centers on how IOS and organizations interact while simultaneously taking organizational context (e.g. politics, power, conflicts, and culture) into consideration (Kling 1980; Barringer and Harrison 2000). Based on a behavioral assumption of trustworthiness rather than opportunism, trust based rationalism concentrates on trust, equity, and embeddedness rather than power and politics as the primary interaction mode in supply chain collaboration (Uzzi 1997; Kumar et al. 1998). A learning and knowledge perspective regards supply chain collaboration as partner-enabled market knowledge creation and value innovation process via IOS use (Malhotra et al. 2005).

Based on literature, supply chain collaboration consists of information sharing (Manthou et al. 2004) and process integration, such as goal congruence (Angeles and Nath 2001), joint decision making (Stank et al. 2001), joint planning (Mohr and Spekman 1994; Manthou et al. 2004), joint problem solving (Spekman et al. 1998; Stank et al. 2001), resource sharing (Sheu et al. 2006), and incentive alignment (Simatupang and Sridharan 2005), among independent supply chain partners (Stank et al. 1999; Sabath and Fontanella 2002, 1999; Simatupang and Sridharan 2002; Sheu et al. 2006). Over the past decades, firms have used IOS to develop collaborative relationships with their partners in the supply chain (Ragatz et al. 1997; Grover et al. 2002; Teo et al. 2003; Subramani 2004; Bagchi and Skjoett-Larsen 2005). Being integrated through shared information and process alignment, supply chain partners work as if they were a part of a single enterprise (Lambert and Christopher 2000).

While researchers have addressed some aspects of supply chain collaboration, they do not adequately highlight the need for collaborative communication as a critical partnership variable (Macneil 1980). Bleeke and Ernst (1993), p. xvi) argue: “The most carefully designed relationship will crumble without good, frequent communication.” Communication difficulty is a prime cause of supply chain collaboration problems. Many problems in dealer channels can be resolved by developing appropriate strategies for communication (Mohr and Nevin 1990). “As the glue that holds together a channel of distribution” (Mohr and Nevin 1990, p. 36), communication is vital to the ongoing agreement of relationships (Grabner and Rosenberg 1969) and is the most important element to successful inter-firm exchange (Mohr et al. 1996).

Another overlooked but crucial variable in supply chain collaboration is joint knowledge creation. Supply chain collaboration should involve active generation and development of knowledge for retrieval and application in managing current and future business. Joint knowledge creation involves information acquisition, information dissemination, and shared interpretation of information (Slater and Narver 1995; Johnson and Sohi 2003). At the supply chain level, it is increasingly recognized that innovation involves learning in concert with partners (Harland et al. 2004) or collective entrepreneurship (Lundvall 1992). Both suppliers and customers are important sources of innovation (Von Hippel 1988; Nesheim 2001).

The study draws on the key concepts from theories and literature on information systems, supply chain management, operations management, marketing, and strategy, and uses them to situate and elaborate the theoretical model where supply chain collaboration is the central concept. As illustrated in Fig. 2.1, the framework provides a nomological network that describes the causal relationships among IT resources, IOS appropriation, collaborative culture, trust, supply chain collaboration, collaborative advantage, and firm performance. It can be used to study supply chain collaboration from a focal firm’s perspective and test the hypotheses and structural relationships among the constructs.

The core construct of supply chain collaboration as co-creation of value consists of seven components: information sharing, goal congruence, decision synchronization, incentive alignment, resources sharing, collaborative communication, and

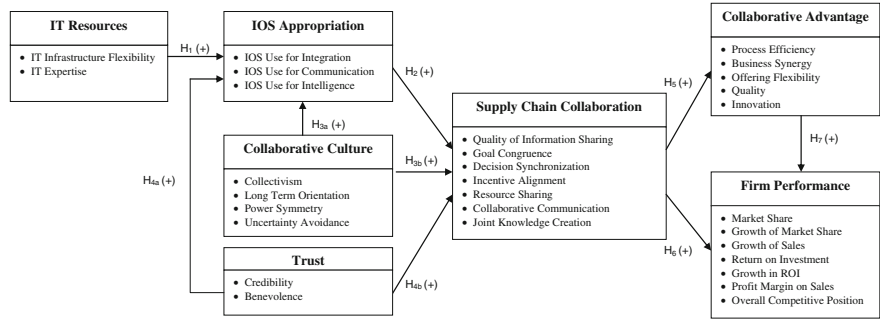


Fig. 2.1 A framework for IOS-enabled supply chain collaboration

joint knowledge creation. These seven components add values to supply chain collaboration by either reducing costs and response time, or leveraging resources, or improving innovation. Information sharing is the fundamental component; all other components are the natural extension of it. Information sharing and process integration components (i.e., goal congruence, decision synchronization, incentive alignment, resource sharing) are considered as mechanisms to reduce costs based on transaction cost economics. Collaborative communication as an indispensable variable in supply chain collaboration is largely overlooked in the existing literature. Collaborative communication can reduce conflicts and improve relationships between partners. From the learning and knowledge perspective, joint knowledge creation is a key attribute of supply chain collaboration to enhance innovation and consolidate resources.

Based on transaction cost economics and resource based view, IT resources and IOS appropriation are powerful forces to enable supply chain collaboration. The existing literature does not distinguish between different roles of IOS use in supply chain collaboration, which limits our views to recognize their contributions to supply chain collaboration. In the current study, IOS appropriation has three distinctive components: IOS use for integration, IOS use for communication, and IOS use for intelligence.

Collaborative culture is considered as another important antecedent variable with four subcomponents: collectivism, long term orientation, power symmetry, and uncertainty avoidance. Collectivism and long term orientation are identified based on trust based rationalism. Power symmetry is viewed from resource dependence theory and social exchange theory. Uncertainty avoidance is evaluated based on transaction cost economics.

In explaining the important role of trust in supply chain collaboration, transaction cost economics argues that trust mitigates the probability of a firm's opportunistic behavior, which accounts for the risk in supply chain collaboration. As a complementary explanation, trust based rationalism also identifies trust as the indispensable antecedent to supply chain collaboration. In contrast to the negative assumption of transaction cost economics, trust based rationalism argues there are some supply chain partners who take the assumption of trustworthiness rather than

opportunism in their collaboration with supply chain partners (Hill 1990; Hart and Saunders 1997). Trust based rationalism views trust rather than politics and conflicts as crucial to understanding interaction processes. Trust in itself is the key issue in IOS enabled supply chain collaboration.

Resource based view, relational view, extended resource based view, and social dilemma theories perceive collaborative advantage (i.e., joint competitive advantage) as the consequence of supply chain collaboration.

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