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Maciej Szymczak, *Ewolucja łańcuchów dostaw [The Evolution of Supply Chains]*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Poznaniu, Poznań 2015: 186, ISBN: 978-83-7417-866-2

Benefits from the integration of supply chains are the reason why the problems of their function and development have become a very important dimension of economic analysis and practice in the management of big international corporations. Due to contemporary market conditions, achieving a competitive advantage does not exclusively result from the rivalry between individual enterprises but, above all, from their collaboration in creating efficient and effective supply chains. An increasing awareness that those problems are of key importance in achieving and sustaining competitive advantages has caused much interest, which is confirmed by the many books and publications. One of them is a scientific monograph by Maciej Szymczak, entitled „The evolution of supply chains”. Although the author’s earlier publications prove that he is an unquestioned specialist in the field of international logistics and global supply chain management, one could ask the question: Is there a need for another monograph on this subject and to whom is it addressed?

Answering the first part of this question, it is worth mentioning that the subject, in contrast to majority of the publications available, is narrowed down to the problems concerning the evolution in the structure and functioning of supply chains. Moreover the evolution is treated in a complex manner as a process of change occurring in time and leading to higher levels of maturity, excellence and efficiency. It focuses on the subject of international evolutions involving very complex supply chains which is an unques-

tionable asset and a feature that distinguishes M. Szymczak’s book from the great majority of earlier publications. An additional argument proving the originality of the monograph is the proposal and credence of the hypothesis that information technologies are a key driving force which makes it possible to devise new business models which can be implemented by the supply chains. Worth mentioning is the fact that the hypothesis is not entirely new. A five-level Compass Model (Manguistics Model) devised by a firm from the IT-consulting branch has already been known for several years. According to this model reaching successive phases in the evolution of supply chain depends, above all, on the applied technologies of collecting, processing and transferring information [Witkowski 2010: 73–75; Simchi-Levi, Kaminsky, and Simchi-Levi 2000: 243–244]. It must be admitted, however, that the chosen information technologies illustrated in Chapter Five, which are necessary to enter the successive phases in the process of the evolution of supply chains are entirely different from those included in the five-level compass model. In contrast to that model the author omits the role of traditional business IT systems and applications, such as the MRP, MRP II, ERP, and CRM. Instead he points to the significance and driving force of transition in successive stages of the evolution of supply chains: cloud computing, mobile technologies chosen and the Internet of things. The latter, having the most prospects for the future and therefore being the most debatable of the information technologies mentioned, is understood

as a network of physical objects constituting a structure within the frameworks of which the objects can exchange data. To understand the role and to assess the applicability of the innovatory, or even more futuristic IT solutions, the reader should have a fundamental knowledge of traditional information technologies which are applied in the creation and function of supply chains. M. Szymczak's book is not an easy read for beginners in management. Nevertheless, it may undoubtedly be a very useful repository of knowledge for those who specialize in logistics, supply chain management and university students of more advanced years in economics or technology faculties. The book is also very useful reading for senior managers who make an effort to raise the supply chains they manage to higher levels of efficiency, maturity and excellence.

The monograph is not very large but its structure comprises six chapters. In order to acquaint the reader with fundamental information on supply chains management, Chapter One presents a standard review of theoretical achievements as widely discussed in the related literature. Undoubtedly in order to limit the size of the book there is a concise and superficial description of the origin, evolution and assumptions of the concept of supply chain management. Chapters Two and Three contain considerations which are much deeper, discussing the causes and directions of the evolution of global supply chains. M. Szymczak gives an apt diagnosis of the main causes of the evolution of supply chains, paying special attention to external factors connected with the process of globalization, changes in the expectations of purchasers and progressive use of technology in contemporary society. The logical cause-effect analysis in this part of the book is supported by numerous arguments in the form of statistical data.

On these grounds the author formulates a bold thesis about the fading significance of effectiveness as a factor of the competitive advantage of global concerns. In his opinion the current evolution of supply chains should include aspirations towards:

- flexibility of operation,
- responsiveness to changes in customer needs,
- resilience to all kinds of turbulence.

Despite a positive evaluation of this part of the book, I have some doubts as to whether the exclusion the process of the striving for cost leadership is justified. In the industry-end stage branches, and particularly in the extraction and processing of raw materials, it will always be the key factor in market success. I consider that a proper starting point for the determination of contemporary directions of evolution would be the classical division into effective chains for functional products and flexible chains for innovative products as proposed by M. Fischer in [1997].

Chapter Four is entirely devoted to the presentation of the author's set of models, indicators and measures and the monitoring and evaluation of the process of striving for supply chain excellence. Although the set proposed does not exhaust all the possibilities for the application of models and instruments for the improvement of organizational structures and processes in supply chains, its contents have significant value in their application. In particular managers who are the initiators or leaders of international supply chains could find it possible to apply the proposed solutions. Chapter Five concerns the opportunities of using information technologies at individual stages of the evolution. The sixth chapter contains exemplification of the described phenomena and regularities on the basis of examples chosen from business practice. These are both presentations of the solutions at the level of

strategic management and concrete solutions of an operational character in hybrid and self-organizing supply chains. The described examples include retail networks of Internet giants, such as Amazon or the supply chain of computer maker Lenovo. Even if some thematic threads concerning the origin and future directions of the evolution of supply chains illustrated in the first and the last chapter of the book may raise some objections because they do not present the current state of knowledge fully. However with the full reasons for the justification of the theses put forward by the author, he provides the reader with an opportunity to broaden his/her knowledge by making use of a carefully selected bibliography. Lists of the most important current publications are placed after each chapter and the introduction to the monograph.

The contents of the final part of the book prove that the author is fully aware that the views and conclusions concerning the direction of the evolution of supply chains presented are burdened with much subjectivism. This results from the chosen methodological paradigm which

assumes that the analysis of the literature and case studies taken mainly from the perspective of the implementation of innovation in information technologies is correct. That is why the concluding remarks of the book contain many questions and postulate further research work. In this way M. Szymczak determines new directions and dimensions for the analysis of the processes of the evolution of global supply chains. The book is an interesting and valuable publication which enriches the knowledge of the function and development of network organizations in the global economy.

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Aims and Scope

Economics and Business Review is the successor to the Poznań University of Economics Review which was published by the Poznań University of Economics and Business Press in 2001–2014. The Economics and Business Review is a quarterly journal focusing on theoretical and applied research work in the fields of economics, management and finance. The Review welcomes the submission of articles for publication dealing with micro, mezzo and macro issues. All texts are double-blind assessed by independent reviewers prior to acceptance.

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