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Research Paper

Beyond Strategy: How Do Culture, Segmentation, and Internal Alignment Drive Supply Chain Management Strategy? A Case Study Approach

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: the context of this paper focuses on exploring how supply chain strategy is considered when the organization delineates the business strategy. More specifically, we are interested in analyzing how three specific factors: culture, segmentation, internal alignment allow to operationalize the supply chain strategy into the business strategy.

Methodology: this study has two methodological stages. First, through a literature review, we build a theoretical framework to identify those elements related to the three factors that influence supply chain strategy. Second, a study case in Plasticaucho. a shoe Ecuadorian firm, is carried out to build an extended framework that identify those relevant elements in the supply chain strategy of firm.

Results: analysing the factors, the main contribution of this research is to compare both theoretical framework and extended framework to enrich supply chain strategy literature. In this way, we identified relevant elements, including the influence of public stakeholders, the prioritization of suppliers and customers, and the misalignment of objectives.

Research limitations: although the results cannot be generalized, this study may contribute to future research by drawing attention to elements that have received limited consideration in previous studies.

Practical implications: this paper may contribute to raising awareness among local firms that supply chain management should be viewed not only as an operational concern but also as a strategic issue. Moreover, given the limited number of studies focusing on Latin American firms, our findings provide a useful framework for understanding and analyzing supply chain strategy in this specific context.

Originality: in this way, we identified relevant elements, including the influence of public stakeholders, the prioritization of both suppliers and customers, and the misalignment of objectives.

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Keywords: *Supply Chain; LatAm; Business Strategy; Case study; Culture; Segmentation; Alignment*

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1. Introduction

The relationship between supply chain (SC) and strategic management is a vital area of study (Arredondo and Alfaro-Tanco, 2021; Gonzalez-Loureiro et al., 2015). Scholars have emphasized the need to integrate SC strategies into broader business plans (Stentoft and Rajkumar, 2018; Huber & Sweeney, 2007). Although SC theory has grown since the 1980s, it often remains disconnected from industrial practice (Fang et al., 2022; Sweeney et al., 2015).

This study analyzes three core factors—organizational culture, segmentation, and internal alignment, including managerial incentives—that are central to strategic SC (Arredondo, 2018). These elements have been widely studied and are recognized as essential for both internal organizational strategy and external SC relationships (Fang et al., 2022; Sadeghi et al., 2023; Van Hoek and Harrison, 2011; Van Hoek et al., 2011). While common in SC literature, there is limited understanding of how these factors interact, especially in specific industries. Some require deeper exploration across multiple organizational levels. Moreover, there is a lack of integrative analyses, as studies tend to examine each factor independently, revealing a clear gap in the literature.

This paper also focuses geographically on Latin America (LatAm). Jabbour and Teixeira (2024) point out that SC in LatAm remains under-researched and largely absent from global academic discussions. Tanco et al. (2018) echo this, noting a lack of quality and quantity in regional SC research and a significant gap between theory and practice, with few firms applying comprehensive SC approaches (Chicksand et al., 2012; Halldorsson et al., 2008).

Empirical evidence underscores the urgency for further SC research in LatAm (Jabbour and Teixeira, 2024; García-Alcaraz et al., 2023; Velázquez et al., 2018; Carneiro and Brenes, 2014; Ruiz-Torres et al., 2012). As Tanco et al. (2018) affirm, “continuous development and extension of the SC body of knowledge in LatAm” is essential (p. 425).

EJABM European Journal of Applied Business and Management
ISSN 2183-5594

Thus, this study seeks to answer the following research question:

Research question (RQ): Which specific elements related to culture, segmentation, and internal alignment contribute to the operationalization of the supply chain in the business strategy?

To address this objective, a literature review and a qualitative case study were conducted to develop both a theoretical framework and an empirical framework. The main contribution of the study, however, lies in the latter, which was derived from the empirical research.

This paper focuses on Plasticaucho case study, a shoe company based in Ecuador, representing a novel analysis of these combined factors in SC. In this sense, Blanchard (2021) calls for more practical case studies that showcase real organizations implementing new SC strategies. Similarly, Velázquez et al. (2018) stress the importance of high-impact, real-case applications in LatAm. The findings provide valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners in strategic SC and innovation management. Qualitative approaches are gaining traction for their ability to complement quantitative models and offer heuristics for improving firm's performance (Vipin et al., 2021).

This paper is structured as follows. First, we build a theoretical framework to identify those elements that most influence SC strategy. Second, a case study is carried out to define an extended framework where new elements are identified with respect to the theoretical one. Then, we discuss our findings in terms of SC literature. Finally, we conclude with managerial implications, limitations and further research.

2. Literature Review

This review analyzes three key factors—organizational culture, internal alignment, and segmentation—and their roles in shaping SC strategies within firms and external partnerships (Arredondo, 2018). It emphasizes the Latin American (LatAm) context, where SC is increasingly relevant for economic development (Blanco and Paiva, 2014), but faces serious obstacles like poor infrastructure, inefficient logistics, bureaucratic challenges, and political and economic instability (Jabbour and Teixeira, 2024; Tanco et al., 2018). Additionally, empirical research faces hurdles such as limited English

EJABM European Journal of Applied Business and Management
ISSN 2183-5594

proficiency, restricted data access, and low survey response rates (Martínez and Kalliny, 2012).

Although research touches on culture, alignment, and segmentation, studies often address them in isolation. While few studies have successfully integrated these concepts, Arredondo and Alfaro-Tanco (2019) provide one of the limited frameworks available which identifies a critical set of seven firm-level constructs essential for the successful operationalization and execution of a SC strategy.

This review integrates current knowledge on these elements and identifies gaps that demand further empirical work.

2.1. Culture

Cultural values are a central concern in operations and production management (Chipulu et al., 2014; Gambi et al., 2015). Organizational culture shapes behaviors and internal dynamics, ultimately impacting performance (Wu et al., 2011). Schein (1996) considers culture vital for organizational excellence. Barney (1986, p. 657) describes it as "a complex set of values, beliefs, assumptions, and symbols" defining firm behavior.

In SC, cultural compatibility between partners fosters integration efforts (Zulfandi and Sakir, 2021). Research has shown that organizational and interfirm culture directly influence behaviors and relationships in the SC (Golrizgashti et al., 2022; Cao et al., 2015; Braunscheidel et al., 2010; Dowty and Wallace, 2010; Ueltschy et al., 2007). Sung and Kim (2019) demonstrate how culture moderates the impact of environmental uncertainty in SC. Wütz et al. (2016) identify three key cultural elements—cooperation and information sharing, trust and commitment, and organizational compatibility—that improve SC outcomes.

Cooperation and knowledge sharing are essential in SC, and their absence can hinder integration. Trust and commitment are also necessary to build long-term, reliable partnerships (Walter et al., 2001; Mentzer et al., 2001). Wagner (2004) and Avison et al. (2004) note that high-performing organizations often align culture with strategic information systems.

In LatAm, culture significantly shapes organizational behavior. Arredondo and Alfaro-Tanco (2019) used a Delphi method to explore how internal culture influences SC

EJABM European Journal of Applied Business and Management
ISSN 2183-5594

decisions and found that cultural affinity between firms facilitates collaboration. However, experts often downplay its strategic importance, favoring operational approaches aimed at short-term outcomes. Ferreira et al. (2022) highlight how Brazil's cultural traits, infrastructure, and feedback mechanisms can hinder collaboration and prevent firms from integrating into global supply chains.

Despite growing recognition of culture's influence on SC, its interaction with internal alignment and segmentation remains underexplored. Key cultural enablers of SC integration include trust, long-term commitment, and open communication.

2.2. Segmentation

Supplier segmentation remains a debated topic (Shiralkar et al., 2022). Day et al. (2010, p. 625) argue that "segmentation plays a critical role in linking the firm's operational capabilities in supply management to exploit strategic opportunities." They emphasize the importance of relationship management but criticize the fragmented and often unaligned nature of segmentation strategies.

Early studies by Nellore and Söderquist (2000) linked product categories to supplier traits, while Svensson (2004) created a two-dimensional framework based on supplier commitment and commodity importance. Rezaei and Ortt (2013) proposed an alternative based on supplier capabilities and willingness, using fuzzy logic. Rezaei et al. (2015) applied multi-criteria decision-making and the Best-Worst Method, and Santos et al. (2017) extended segmentation through the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) in a pharmaceutical supply center.

In LatAm, segmentation must adapt to specific challenges. Carneiro and Brenes (2014) stress tailoring strategies to local conditions. Ruiz-Torres et al. (2012) highlight cultural, economic, and regulatory variables that affect segmentation. Tanco et al. (2015) point to limited supplier transparency, volatile markets, and complex regulations.

In Brazil, Viana and Sousa-Filho (2017) found that supplier base reduction, joint development, and knowledge exchange enhance SC alignment and provide relational competitive advantage—particularly crucial in industries like footwear, where innovation is key. Nevertheless, many firms in the region continue to struggle with weak supplier relationships (Carneiro and Brenes, 2014). Tanco et al. (2018) identify issues such as raw material shortages, financial instability, and long lead times.

EJABM European Journal of Applied Business and Management
ISSN 2183-5594

A Delphi study by Arredondo and Alfaro-Tanco (2019) found disagreement over whether segmentation should be defined at the strategic level or adjusted per department. Elements that support SC segmentation include supplier categorization, goal congruence, operational capabilities, relationship management, and network design.

2.3. Internal alignment

Internal alignment refers to coordination among departments like procurement, logistics, and finance to achieve SC goals (Zulfandi and Sakir, 2021). It enhances internal processes and overall SC performance (Cao et al., 2015). SC, as defined by Mentzer et al. (2001) and Stevens (1989), depends on integration across firms and functions.

Research recognizes the importance of internal alignment as a prerequisite for external alignment (Daugherty, 2011), emphasizing win-win relationships and cross-functional collaboration (Feizabadi et al., 2019). However, current literature is largely theoretical and fragmented (Skipworth et al., 2015). Ashenbaum et al. (2009) examined organizational alignment and SC governance as mechanisms to promote internal integration.

Jüttner et al. (2007) proposed a structured Demand Chain Management (DCM) framework emphasizing: (1) integration of demand and supply processes, (2) management of internal structures and customer segments, and (3) alignment between marketing and SC strategies. Santos and D'Antone (2014) later extended this model.

Feizabadi et al. (2021) argue that alignment improves performance and should be supported by effective leadership (Wagner, 2004). Incentives also play a critical role; Narayanan and Raman (2004) show that strategic incentives promote cooperation and align stakeholder objectives. Similarly, Santos et al. (2021) find that top management support is essential for aligning SC and business strategies.

In LatAm, companies often struggle to align internally due to structural issues and poor cross-functional communication (Ueltschy et al., 2007). Studies by Aldana-Bernal and Bernal-Torres (2019) and Patrucco et al. (2022) underscore the importance of social capital and professional networks. Arredondo and Alfaro-Tanco (2019) report that internal alignment tends to focus narrowly on logistics and procurement, with limited involvement from HR, finance, or marketing.

EJABM European Journal of Applied Business and Management
ISSN 2183-5594

Experts agree that SC managers should focus on internal coordination. Leadership, communication, and performance-based incentive systems are vital for achieving alignment (Avison et al., 2004; Chen et al., 2004). Internal alignment relies on elements such as cultural compatibility, incentive design, and top management engagement.

2.4. Corollary

Drawing on the findings of the literature review, Figure 1 presents the theoretical framework developed in this study, which provides the basis for the empirical research presented in Section 3.

Figure 1: Theoretical framework of influencing elements for the analyzed factors into the integration of SC into business strategy

Culture	Segmentation	Internal alignment
• Trust and commitment within the firm • Long-term relationships • Communication	• Categorization of suppliers goal congruence • Operational capabilities • Relationship management	• Incentive systems • Cultural differences • External communication • Top management support

Source: Own Elaboration.

3. Methodology

Our empirical study analyzes the role of culture, segmentation, and internal alignment in implementing SC strategy at Plasticaucho, a footwear company in Ecuador. It addresses a gap in SC research in Latin America, particularly in Ecuador, and highlights the need to better understand SC practices in the region, emphasizing the alignment of research with local challenges (Tanco et al., 2018; Velázquez et al., 2018). While most studies in the region are quantitative, there is growing interest in qualitative approaches that can improve the performance of small and medium enterprises (Vipin et al., 2021).

A case study typically involves using multiple methods and tools to collect data from various entities in a natural setting, focusing on the temporal and contextual aspects of

EJABM European Journal of Applied Business and Management
ISSN 2183-5594

the phenomenon under study, without experimental controls (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009). In the context of SC, case study methodology is ideal for exploring unstructured problems, identifying critical variables, and contributing to theory-building (Seuring, 2005; Stuart et al., 2002; Ellram, 1996). Plasticaucho, an Ecuadorian family-owned shoe company with 80 years of market presence, was chosen for this study due to its representative size, operations in multiple Latin American countries, and established strategic decisions. The company's SC manager and the availability of key managers for interviews made it a suitable case for examining the influence of culture, segmentation, and internal alignment on the operationalization of SC strategies within the broader business strategy of a Latin American firm.

2.5. Data collection and analysis

Based on Yin (2009), Table I summarizes the overall quality assessment of the case study conducted.

Table I. Overall quality assessment of case study

Test	Method	Research phase	Action
Construct Validity	Triangulation – use multiple sources of evidence	Data Collection – Research Design	Interviews (Face-to-face, with company executives at three levels of decision. Bureau – Corporate – Company. Designing three levels of interviewees reinforces the validity of data. Documents (public; private)
	Establish a chain of evidence	Data collection	The research design has been developed to ensure a match between the objectives of the research, the research question, and the consequent data gathered and analyzed. There exists a direct link, a thread, between the factors previously defined and the content of the interviews.
	Parcial study report, every stage	Composition	The supervisor was informed of each step from the design of the investigation, selection of the company, interview process, review of the documentation and data analysis.
Internal Validity	Do pattern matching (empirical to test predictions)	Data Analysis – Research Design	The design of the interviews was centered on validating the predictions expected in the selected company and if these are validated then build theory from the case.

EJABM European Journal of Applied Business and Management
ISSN 2183-5594

	Do explanation building (doing x leads to y)	Data analysis – Research Design	Establishing and validating propositions derived from the guided steps of interviews and documents analysis. Triangulation of information from interviews and an open question helped to obtain internal validity ensuring the correct relation origin – consequence
	Address rival explanations	Data analysis	Addressed in the Discussion section of the case study.
External Validity	Use theory in single case studies	Research Design	Data gathering and analysis were focused on similar criteria
Reliability	Develop case study database (documentation, narratives, notes, etc.)	Data collection	All interviews conducted by the author were recorded (audio and video) All interviews have been totally transcribed for more in-depth analysis. Company documents have been received electronically and they have been saved in individual files. All interviews where codified using Software Atlas.ti 6.2 as a tool to support and minimize errors in data manipulation.

Source: Own Elaboration

In this case study, a multiple-source data collection strategy was defined to ensure validity. The company directors granted unrestricted access to both public and confidential information, which included semi-structured interviews across various levels of the organization, the final strategic plan report, and documents outlining the company's objectives. Triangulation was used to compare data from different sources, ensuring reliability and detecting any potential biases from the interviews. The information gathered from the literature review helped shape the guiding questions for the semi-structured interviews, ensuring they would yield in-depth and valuable responses beyond predefined factors.

Table 2 shows the position and management level of the 15 interviewees. There, we can see that this sample tries to cover all the functions inside Plasticaucho.

Table II. List of interviewees

Applicants	Position	Management Level
I1	Board member // Plasticaucho General Manager	Administrative Council
I2	Corporative General Manager	Corporative Management
I3	Board Member // Supply Chain, Manager	Corporative Management

I4	Commercial Corporative Manager	Corporative Management
I5	General Manager Perú	Corporative Management
I6	Footwear Operation's Manager – Rubber and Canvas	Company Management
I7	Financial Manager and National Sales Manager	Company Management
I8	Organizational Development Manager	Company Management
I9	Logistics and Purchasing Manager	Company Management
I10	International Business Manager	Company Management
I11	Footwear Operations Manager – Leather and Division Industries	Company Management
I12	Marketing Manager	Company Management

Source: Own Elaboration

The interviews with upper management and directors were transcribed and analyzed to explore their views on SC strategy and its integration with business strategy. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns across qualitative datasets, with the researchers organizing and grouping recurring ideas, then coding them to assign relationships with the research question. This process allowed researchers to uncover underlying patterns and concepts related to SC strategy, ultimately aiming to generate findings that bridge the gap between theoretical concerns and participants' experiences.

A significant amount of primary and secondary data was collected to thoroughly understand the SC phenomenon within the company. There, we included a report with the objectives of the managers and their relation with the defined SC strategy, the incentive systems and their linkage with the fulfillment of the SC strategy and commercial information. thematic analysis.

The analysis process followed a multi-phase approach. In Phase 1, the interview transcripts were organized for thematic analysis. Phase 2 involved grouping recurring ideas from the text and applying a coding system to identify common themes.

The coding process followed an a priori approach, with initial codes derived from the constructs previously defined in the literature review. These codes guided the analysis by drawing on the theoretical concepts and frameworks identified in the literature. As the interviews were analyzed, new codes were added and existing codes were refined when emerging themes were identified. To ensure consistency and transparency, each code was clearly defined so that its application could be understood and replicated both by the researcher and in future reviews of the study.

Table III presents the final set of codes and the four code families into which they were grouped, corresponding to the factors examined in the study. The coding process enabled

EJABM European Journal of Applied Business and Management
ISSN 2183-5594

the identification and conceptualization of underlying patterns while maintaining a connection with the theoretical constructs and concepts established in the literature.

The coding criteria also facilitated data reduction by organizing the interview material into meaningful categories. Following an initial analysis of the interviews, the codes were reviewed, refined, grouped, and assigned to four families that were closely aligned with the constructs under investigation. Finally, the relationships among codes and their frequency of occurrence were examined according to their relevance to the research question.

This led to data reduction and conceptualization of patterns related to SC strategy. In the final phase, the researchers developed findings that synthesized the qualitative data with the study's research objectives. The use of Atlas.ti software helped ensure the data was rigorously analyzed to meet internal and external validity requirements, with the research process reaching data saturation and reliable results.

Table III. List of individual codes and family of codes

Family	Description	Codes related	Quotations
1	Degree of participation of SC strategy in the business strategy	Business strategic guidelines for SC Relation between business strategy and SC SC and finance SC strategy	153
2	Segmentation of providers and customers	Relation with customers Relation with providers Segmentation of customers Segmentation of providers	133
3	Culture of the organization	Culture Long-term Process SC and Finance	137
4	Internal alignment of all the firm's areas that participate in the SC strategy	Incentive programs Internal chain coordination Process	119

Source: Own Elaboration

4. Results

4.1. Culture

Finding 1. Culture and laws – culture and government

EJABM European Journal of Applied Business and Management
ISSN 2183-5594

Compliance with all laws and regulations is mandatory, regardless of agreement, as a board member explains: "... The first is the principles and values of the family translated into the way of doing business, that is, for example, we have to always respect the laws of the countries where we are operating, we cannot agree with all of them, but that is not disputed ... ". Plasticaucho has strategically decided not to do business directly with the state. A board member states: "... we cannot participate in businesses where the government is the only client of the operation; and when we have some relationship with the government we have to have certain limitations established so that the family is not involved in businesses that normally in Latin America can become a little complicated ... ". The SC Manager confirms: "... the only restriction or general premise that you have is that Plasticaucho does not do direct business with the state, that is a cultural consideration ... in the special case of the government, the cultural incompatibility issue is applied ... ". Another board member emphasizes: "... we do not want to have a degree of dependence on the state, we want to do business between private ... ".

Finding 2. Trust and commitment: the earthquake case

The 2016 Ecuador earthquake demonstrated how Plasticaucho's relationships are based on culture, values, long-term vision, and financial health. A board member recalls: "... there was an earthquake last year in our country, forced us to help those who suffered damages ...; ... some had physical losses, unfortunately some human losses also, but there we had to enter and renegotiate the payments. This renegotiation of payments took a very long time, several years to pay us, but finally they ended up paying before the renegotiated dates. And what was the concept? In those circumstances, if we had forced them to pay us, they would not have been able to do it; if we broke the relationship with these customers we lost the tentacles of distribution and we had to start from scratch. What we did was, get involved, we financed them, to many of them we went back to delivering products; because if they did not have a product to sell, how would they pay us? The result is that we have a much stronger, much closer relationship with that group of clients...".

Finding 3. Trust and long-term relationships

Long-term relationships are built on collaboration and trust, not merely business advantage. The logistics manager says: "... I believe that a collaborative environment is enjoyed, both by customers and by suppliers, it is an open door company in which suppliers are called to help us to develop our processes, sometimes we also help suppliers

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ISSN 2183-5594

to develop their products etc. etc ... " The Financial Manager adds: "... if you have that openness and, say, that transparency, inclusive, it is going to be your clients or your suppliers you also trust, because in the end many things are based on trust. If you have a culture in which you show that trust, that transparency, will make you more secure. I think that culture is a decisive factor for the general management of the chain, because based on what you project as a company, that security, that trust, will allow you to really relate to the outside ... " A board member describes trust-building as a process: "... But the attitude with which they deal with our business makes us feel in such a way that there is mutual trust, and trust, it is not something that one believes, you can't say by decree, I will trust in such, it is something that is being built ... ".

Finding 4. Communication

The Footwear Operations Manager highlights commitment and communication: "... we make the effort that each employee understands that their work is part of a whole, and that chain; then each employee does the mental exercise of, to see, their position as it connects with all that; that has commitment value because when people understand that they are part of a whole, they are more committed and that helps to break out of the silos, too ... " He also explains the communication plan: "... We have been very consistent in the communication plan, this coming Monday a board member is going to visit all the administrative employees of the company and carry out, we call it, a rendering of accounts, What does that mean?: In the strategy we do like this, in sales we do like this, in profitability we do like this, we hope to end the year in this way and also announce the new and important news of the company and people have the option of asking questions; we do that twice a year ... "

Thus, trust, commitment, long-term relationships, and communication — though not extensive information sharing — emerge as cultural pillars enabling SC integration. The strong stance on government dealings reflects a unique cultural feature likely common in Latin America given the political uncertainty.

4.2. Segmentation

Finding 5. Prioritization of suppliers and customers

Plasticaucho uses selective criteria to define strategic relationships. A board member explains: "... This cannot be done with everyone, it is not a must-do with everyone,

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ISSN 2183-5594

because it is an exercise that is going to be exhausting, one has to have good criteria to define, either by availability, because there are scarce materials in the world, or by the relevance in manufacturing costs and in the profitability of the company, with whom direct relationships are merited …". Customer and supplier segmentation differ but share the goal of improving overall chain efficiency.

Customer segmentation divides large clients (wholesalers, supermarkets) from retailers. The company aims to tailor products per customer type to optimize inventory and improve financial outcomes. The Logistics Manager clarifies: "... there are some that need more attention or less attention, involving logistics or sales only; when logistics and sales are needed to be more aligned, joint visits are made, as in the case of warehouses or department stores; in the retail and wholesale the business is so dynamic and there is such a volume of clients that there exist macro, general policies, in which we have to meet a service level and follow an established road."

Finding 6. Relationship management: financial conditions and inventory

While strategic segmentation criteria exist, operational managers have flexibility to pursue collaboration when opportunities arise. For example, Plasticaucho manages inventory in some supermarket chains, similar to Vendor Managed Inventory (VMI). The Financial Manager notes: "... there are 10 buyers who are assigned more than 1,000 SKUs each ... then we say: ... if you give us the information that is in some way our core, we have the best inventories and when you sell, we sell ..."

Regarding exports, payment terms are negotiated for mutual benefit. The International Business Manager recalls a case where a client requested extended payment days to improve joint cash flow and the request was accommodated.

Segmentation thus involves categorization, asymmetry in relationships, and operational considerations around finance and inventory, factors likely generalizable to other Latin American companies.

4.3. Internal alignment

Finding 7. Top management support

Internal coordination is crucial to SC success. Plasticaucho ensures all departments align with commercial strategy. A board member states: "... In this company nobody is unaware

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ISSN 2183-5594

how to participate in an adequate execution of the commercial strategy; in this sense, what is done is this, within the commercial strategy, there are general elements, maintaining a high availability of inventory, everyone is concerned about that; purchases having their raw materials; production making factories efficient and with good reaction capacity; logistics preparing all its operation so that the delivery trucks have availability; sales being organized in its commercial process".

Finding 8. Misalignment of objectives

Departments have distinct goals, risking silo effects. The Logistics and Purchasing Manager comments: "... each area has its own world but I believe that the people here are very open to working to achieve those objectives and there is inter-departmental support and support among managers to achieve the strategic guidelines …" To mediate conflicts, the SC Manager plays a key coordinating role, as noted: "... the SC manager knows why every word, comma and number appears in the company strategy and then what we need is proper coordination of the operation, isn't it? Because often the positions are opposed, to the plants as well as in logistics they have certain objectives, in the plants they have objectives of efficiency ... ".

Finding 9. Cultural differences

Trust built over years influences behavior. The Commercial Corporate Manager notes: "... we have reached a level of trust with the customer, they are even able to write a check or put certain values without the presence of the client and obviously they have never missed a penny, then, that kind of thing is what the company projects ... ".

Finding 10. Incentive system

The SC Manager emphasizes performance evaluation as a key alignment tool: "... what we have applied is the evaluation of the performance of the objectives, so I believe that the only way we have achieved the alignment in recent years is through the methodology of performance evaluation ... …the guidelines downloaded towards each one of the areas; and those guidelines I pass down to my people …".

4.4. Corollary

Therefore, the elements identified in the theoretical framework that support the relevance of internal alignment for supply chain integration are incentive systems, top management

EJABM European Journal of Applied Business and Management
ISSN 2183-5594

support, and cultural differences. In addition, the case study of Plasticaucho revealed a new element that was not identified in the theoretical framework: misalignment of objectives. Figure 2 presents an extended framework of the elements influencing the factor under analysis, with the elements shown in italics representing those newly identified in the empirical study.

It is worth noting that only two elements included in Figure 1 were not identified as relevant in the Plasticaucho case study: "categorization of suppliers' goal congruence" and "operational capabilities," both of which are associated with the segmentation factor. In this regard, we argue that the comparison between the theoretical framework (Figure 1) and the extended framework derived from the empirical findings (Figure 2) constitutes one of the main contributions of this study, as it highlights both the elements supported by the case study and those that emerge specifically from the empirical context.

Figure 2. Reference framework of influencing elements for the analyzed factors into the integration of SC into business strategy

Culture	Segmentation	Internal alignment
•Culture and laws •Culture and government •Trust and commitment •Trust and long-term relationships •Communication	•Priorization in both suppliers and customers •Relationship management: financial conditions and inventory management	•Incentive systems •Cultural differences •External communication •Senior management support •Misalignment of objectives

Source: Own elaboration.

5. Discussion

Next, we discuss the extended framework in relation to the existing literature to assess the extent to which the findings from the case study are consistent with, extend, or complement previous research.

Regarding culture, the new elements "culture and laws" and "culture and government" highlight the crucial role of public authorities as key stakeholders influencing supply

EJABM European Journal of Applied Business and Management
ISSN 2183-5594

chain performance. In relation to the existing supply chain literature, Ruiz-Torres et al. (2012) emphasize external challenges in Latin America's supply chains, such as poor infrastructure and geographic obstacles. Stezano (2013) propose economic policies for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in LatAm, including financial aid, technological innovation, and clustering. In our study, Plasticaucho mentioned only political concerns as an external factor, focusing mainly on internal elements consistent with Branco et al. (2014). Both perspectives agree that effective SC design and execution in Latin America demand strong individual and institutional capabilities. Some companies, like Plasticaucho, have developed these skills extensively. Recent research also notes that SC structures are fluid and influenced by political, economic, and global phenomena (Wieland et al., 2021).

The Plasticaucho case confirms the three culture-related elements identified in the supply chain literature. In this regard, the integration of supply chain strategy with business strategy appears to depend on an organizational culture grounded in two key pillars: a long-term orientation and affinity. Findings 2, 3, and 4, concerning "trust and commitment," "trust and long-term relationships," and "communication," respectively, further illustrate that a strategic supply chain perspective requires organizations to define how they prioritize and interact with suppliers and customers. These relationships are strongly shaped by the underlying organizational culture.

With respect to segmentation, the new element, "prioritization", developed in Finding 5, creates a need for varied relationship types based on affinity and strategic segmentation of suppliers and customers Cao et al., 2015). Ruiz-Torres et al. (2012) describe a shift from focusing on internal manufacturing to cross-functional integration and collaboration with external partners. Managers interviewed agree that segmentation recognizes SC components are not uniform). Plasticaucho categorizes suppliers and customers by criteria like strategic importance and affinity (Gattorna, 2006; González-Loureiro et al., 2015). Segmentation is crucial to tailor SC strategies to the distinct needs of each group, requiring different approaches to meet supplier or customer demands.

Findings also underline integrating key business processes from end users to suppliers to provide value-added products, services, and information. This confirms the importance of partner integration for successful SC (Mora-Monge et al., 2019). So, with respect to internal alignment, Findings 7 to 10 stress this factor as essential for proper SC implementation. Wong et al. (2012) highlight senior management support as vital in SC literature, which Plasticaucho confirms as key for internal SC alignment ("top management support"). With respect to "misalignment of objectives" and "cultural differences", Gattorna et al. (19911) describe the firm's inside-out strategy to meet customer needs.

6. Conclusion

Once we have highlighted the academic contribution of the paper, in this section we focus on managerial implications, limitations and further research, respectively.

6.1. Managerial implications

The Plasticaucho case highlights the importance of a culture grounded in legal and ethical compliance, long-term orientation, trust, and communication. Cultural values can guide strategic decisions, strengthen relationships with customers and suppliers, and support supply chain integration. In particular, Findings 2–4 show that trust, commitment, long-term relationships, and communication shape how the firm prioritizes and interacts with its stakeholders.

Regarding segmentation, Finding 5 shows that Plasticaucho prioritizes suppliers and customers according to availability, relevance, and profitability, while allowing flexibility in collaborative relationships. Finding 6 further shows that customer segmentation influences relationship management, financial terms, and inventory strategies. These findings suggest that effective segmentation should account for stakeholder differences, cultural values, and opportunities for collaboration. Internal alignment is also fundamental: Findings 7–10 highlight the role of senior management support, cross-functional coordination, incentive systems, and cultural awareness in overcoming silos and aligning departmental objectives with the broader supply chain strategy.

6.2. Limitations

This study has two main limitations. First, the literature review was not conducted as a systematic review; therefore, some relevant studies may not have been identified or included, which may have limited the comprehensiveness of the theoretical framework. Second, the use of a single case study limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the specific context analyzed. Future research could address these limitations by

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ISSN 2183-5594

conducting a systematic literature review and examining the proposed framework across multiple firms and contexts.

6.3. Further research

Future research should deepen the SC understanding in LatAm by providing enhanced tools and insights for companies. This involves detailed exploration of the factors studied here and adding new dimensions and case studies. A key future direction is conducting longitudinal studies to track variables over time, measuring long-term SC benefits. In summary, further case analyses are needed to enrich understanding of SC in Latin America. Introducing complementary factors and conducting longitudinal studies in pilot firms will be instrumental for advancing knowledge and practice in the region.

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