

# Knowledge Management Practices in Supply Chains: A Literature Survey

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**Abstract:** Nowadays, competition is more among supply chains (SCs) than between individual firms. So, knowledge is a critical resource that has to be managed properly not only in single companies but also across SCs. Managing knowledge within a SC can help companies to promote better use of resources and achieve better value for customers. From a knowledge management (KM) perspective, this implies a shift of focus, from traditional intra-organizational KM practices to inter-organizational KM. However, on this issue, the current KM literature is very varied, and studies have taken completely different directions. There is a lack even of basic definitions and classifications, as is the case of the notion of KM practice and its application to the case of SCs. The existing literature surveys (for example, Bhosale and Kant, 2016, Pérez-Salazar et al., 2019, Cerchione and Esposito, 2016) provide fragmented views, and a unified vision or perspective on this topic has not emerged so far. This study proposes a systematic approach to the KM literature on supply chains. A systematic literature review was performed, and a descriptive analysis of the selected papers was presented to show the most importantly covered or uncovered topics in KM-SC aspect. More than 800 papers indexed in international citational databases (i.e. Scopus and WoS) published in the last 20 years were selected and analyzed, and their content classified. Some of the points that emerged are particularly important: a) the definitions and classifications of KM practices that are or can be adopted in SCs, which proves to be a problematic issue in the literature; b) the main processes that are detected for KM in SCs, and those that, although important in principle, are still understudied; and c) the importance and trend of researches in the inter-organizational KM practices in SCs.

**Keywords:** Knowledge management, KM practices, Supply chain, KM processes, Literature Review

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## 1. Introduction

In the current knowledge-based era, knowledge is a critical resource and firms need to manage it in its own way. Though the issue of how companies should plan their knowledge management (KM) activities is still a debated issue, recognition of KM as a strategic element of today's companies is increasing (Bolisani et al., 2017). Besides, competition nowadays is more among supply chains (SCs) than between individual firms. So, knowledge has to be managed properly not only in single companies but also across SCs. Managing knowledge within a SC can help companies to promote better use of resources and achieve better value for customers. From this perspective of KM, it implies a shift of focus from the traditional intra-organizational KM to inter-organizational KM. The focus of this study is also on inter-organizational KM, specifically on KM in SC perspectives. This is because, firstly, competition is among SCs than between individual firms (Li et al., 2006, Attia, 2015, Shakerian et al., 2016). Secondly, knowledge on SC connections has to be managed in its own way (Rodríguez-Enríquez et al., 2015, Thomas et al., 2017). Moreover, inter-organizational KM is less studied than intra-organizational KM (Cerchione and Esposito, 2016, Thomas et al., 2017, Lim et al., 2017). When we say KM in SC perspectives, it's to mean systematically managing knowledge resources in collaboration with SC partners, which includes mainly acquisition of knowledge from suppliers and customers, joint knowledge creation and problem solving, and sharing knowledge with proper protection among the SC members.

Increasingly, scholars see the development of a knowledge-based SC as an opportunity to achieve better value for customers (Wadhwa and Saxena, 2005). Moreover, Samuel et al. (2011) state that managing knowledge within SCs can help companies promote better use of resources and it is a critical element in information intensive and multi-cultured enterprise environments. Though SC management (SCM) and KM are two main streams of study in recent years, very few works have dealt with the link between these two topics (Samuel et al., 2011). During the past 20