PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVES ON
SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT AND LOGISTICS: A STUDY FROM POLAND AND SWITZERLAND

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ABSTRACT

Purpose
The focus of this paper is the evolution of supply chain management (SCM) and logistics and the relationship between these concepts. Its purpose is to generate deep insights into practice, particularly in relation to the fundamental issue of how practitioners from different industrial and geographical contexts define the supply chain, SCM and logistics.

Design/methodology/approach
The paper adopts an inductive research approach. Qualitative empirical data was collected through in-depth interviews among managers from four third-party logistics providers, four retailers and four manufacturers based in Poland and Switzerland. The semi-structured interview guide is based on a previous study by Lummus et al. (2001). The data collected during the interviews is contrasted with insights from existing research about the supply chain, SCM and logistics.

Findings
The findings suggest that there are context-dependent differences between practitioners' understanding of the supply chain, SCM and logistics. This variation mirrors to some extent the plethora of orientations and emphases evident in the academic definitions of these terms, which have been proposed in recent decades.

Research limitations/implications
The authors use the concept of refined replication in operations management research. This allows us to build upon previous research in order to test the current understanding of SCM theory among professionals. The sample is limited to Poland and Switzerland.

Practical implications
Practitioners benefit from differentiated insights into the contemporary understanding of and linkages between the terms supply chain, SCM and logistics. Moreover, they are sensitized for context-specific variations in the meaning of these concepts.

Keywords: supply chain, supply chain management, logistics, definitions, practice.

1. INTRODUCTION

A plethora of supply chain management (SCM) and logistics definitions have been developed over the years (Stock and Boyer, 2009). The fact that many definitions exist may limit management's understanding of the concept and the practical effectiveness of its application (Ross, 1998). Researchers note a great deal of confusion regarding exactly what SCM involves, lack of consensus on SCM definition, and highlight the necessity for clear definitional constructs (Croom et al., 2000; Mentzer et al., 2001; Kathawala and Abdou, 2003; Lambert, 2004; Burgess et al., 2006; Mena et al., 2013). Moreover, Carter et al., (2015) emphasises that there is a need to clearly define a theory of supply chain (SC) and differentiate it from existing definitions of SCM. There is less debate in the extant literature about the meaning of the word logistics. Nonetheless, given that one of the principal antecedents of SCM is the field of logistics, this paper explores practitioner perspectives in relation to three terms: SC, SCM, and logistics. It does so with a particular reference to the linkages between the three terms.

Following this introduction, a literature review provides an overview of the evolution of SCM and logistics and the relationship between them. Then the rationale of the present study is explained and the specific research objectives are set out. Next, the methodology employed during the empirical investigations is described. After a presentation of the results, the key outcomes of the research are discussed. The paper concludes with an outline of the main contributions and some limitations of this study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides an overview of the existing literature on the terms SC, SCM, and logistics. It culminates in the development of the research objectives, which lie at the heart of the present study.

2.1. Evolution and definitions of supply chain and supply chain management

The term SCM was originally introduced by management consultants in the early 1980s (Oliver and Webber, 1992). Since then a plethora of SCM definitions were developed. These were subject to comprehensive reviews (Bechtel and Jayaram, 1997; Mentzer et al., 2001) with a work by Stock and Bowyer (2009) examining 173 definitions of SCM that have appeared in the literature.

Certain definitions – for example that of the Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals (CSCMP) – are widely cited in the literature. It defines SCM as follows (CSCMP, 2017):

> Supply chain management encompasses the planning and management of all activities involved in sourcing and procurement, conversion, and all logistics management activities. Importantly, it also includes coordination and collaboration with channel partners, which can be suppliers, intermediaries, third-party service providers, and customers. In essence, SCM integrates supply and demand management within and across companies.

This definition by CSCMP is the working definition of SCM adopted in this paper.

More recently, Carter et al., (2015) propose that in order "to have meaningful theories about managing the supply chain, we need to have a theory of the supply chain itself". The

following characteristics of the SC were emphasized: network, complex and adaptive system, relative to a particular product and agent, physical and support chain, and bounded by a physical fuzzy horizon.

2.2. Evolution and definition of logistics

Clearly, one of the principal antecedents of SC and SCM is the field of logistics. Dictionary definitions of logistics tend to emphasise its military context (Lummus et al., 2001). Over time the application of logistics has moved into the mainstream business arena and numerous definitions of business logistics have been proposed. Most refer to the physical movement and storage of materials. The CSCMP definition of logistics is used in this paper (CSCMP 2017):

> [Logistics is] "that part of Supply Chain Management that plans, implements, and controls the efficient, effective forward and reverse flow and storage of goods, services and related information between the point of origin and the point of consumption in order to meet customers' requirements."

This definition explicitly places logistics as a subset of SCM. However, other authors have noted deviating perceptions to this in practice. The next subsection explores different perspectives on the relationship between SCM and logistics.

2.3. The relationship between SCM and logistics

There are a number of schools of thought regarding the relationship between SCM and logistics. Larson and Halldorsson (2004) identified four conceptual perspectives on SCM versus logistics. Schematic representation of the perspectives contained in their paper is shown in Figure 2.1.

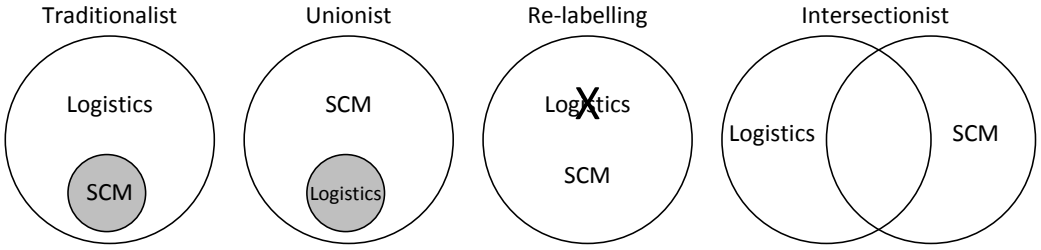


Figure 2.1 Perspectives on SCM versus Logistics. Source: Larson and Halldorsson (2004)

The traditionalist school positions SCM in logistics. The re-labelling perspective simply renames logistics to SCM. The unionist perspective treats logistics as a part of SCM. Finally, the intersectionist perspective is described as follows by Larson and Halldorsson (2004, p. 21):

> "The intersection concept suggests SCM is not the union of logistics, marketing, operations management, purchasing and other functional areas. Rather, it includes strategic, integrative elements from all of these disciplines."

While each of these approaches is valid in its own way, a scan of other literature indicates that the unionist view is the most widely adopted by scholars. The empirical evidence of Lummus et al. (2001) and Sweeney and Bahr (2015) suggests a similar perspective amongst practitioners.

2.4. Divergence of theory and practice

Confusion and ambiguity with regard to definitional constructs about SC, SCM and logistics may be related to the lack of a robust theoretical foundation (Fawcett and Waller, 2011; Carter et al., 2015). This raises questions about the divergence between theory and practice (McKinnon, 2013; Tang, 2016; Toffel, 2016).

At present there is certainly no universally agreed upon unified theory of SC and SCM (Halldorsson et al. 2007; Carter et al., 2015). This may be due to the fact that the development of the SC and SCM as an applied discipline has been largely practitioner-led, with theory largely following practice (Lambert and Cooper, 2000; Voss et al., 2002; Frankel et al., 2008; Goldsby and Zinn, 2016; Thomas et al., 2011). The comprehensive literature review of Chen and Paulraj (2004, p. 150) noted that "practitioners are far from mastering SCM". Some authors have noted that turning the SCM ideas into practice is not easy and that it has so far received more lip service than accomplishment, except in a few leading edge companies (Leenders et al., 2002).

In short, there is evidence to suggest that there are "substantial gaps between theory and practice" (Storey at al., 2006, p. 769). This raises important questions concerning the impact of SC and SCM theory in practice. The aim of this paper is to gain comprehensive insights into practice, particularly in relation to the fundamental issue of how practitioners define the key terms and phrases (i.e. SC, SCM, and logistics).

2.5. Development of research objectives

To gain insights in the application of the terms 'supply chain', 'supply chain management', and 'logistics', the authors conducted interviews with managers from four third party logistics providers (3PLs)/distributors, four retailers and four manufacturers based in Poland and Switzerland. Selected countries significantly differ in terms of political systems and culture (Chudzicka-Czupała et al., 2013), but both have a thriving logistics industry (ITJ, 2013; Rolbiecki and Książkiewicz, 2015). Interviewing practioners adopts the lesson of Geertz (1973, p. 5) who stated that "if you want to understand what a science is, you should look in the first instance not at its theories or its findings ...you should look at what the practitioners do". It also responds to the many calls in the literature for the generation of deep and rich insights into phenomena associated with the adoption of SCM and logistics practices through the use of more qualitative research designs (see, for example: Mangan et al., 2004; Guinpero et al., 2008; Stock et al., 2010). This work is to a large extent a replication of the work of Lummus et al. (2001) and Sweeney and Bahr (2015). As such it reflects calls for more replication studies (Neuliep 1991, Evanschitzky et al., 2007).

Although this research adopts a similar approach it also refines previous works by differentiating between SC and SCM. Previously no clear distinction was made, which does not seem to reflect latest research (Carter et al., 2015). In addition to that contingency factors are considered in order to gain differentiated insights in the meaning of three terms depending upon context of industry and country (Donaldson, 2001). Lastly, this research is cross-cultural (Poland and Switzerland) while previous research by Lummus et al. (2001) and Sweeney and Bahr (2015) focused on a single country, USA and UK respectively.

Based on the above the specific objectives of this research are:

1. To generate differentiated insights in the use of the terms 'supply chain', 'supply chain management', and 'logistics' in practice; and,
2. To compare practitioner perspectives on the terms 'supply chain', 'supply chain management', and 'logistics' with the body of academic knowledge.

3. METHODOLOGY

The following section discloses the methodological approach, which was applied to obtain insights in practitioner's perspectives on SC, SCM, and logistics.

3.1. Data collection

As noted above, the interview sample comprised four 3PLs/distributors, four retailers and four manufacturers, based in Poland (PL) and Switzerland (CH). Table 3.1 presents industry (3PL – logistics and transportation, MAN – manufacturing, RET – retail), and company details such as annual sales and the number of employees. Companies represented in this study are large enterprises in their respective countries, and as such they're more exposed to supply chain thinking. Interviewees are coded based on the country code, industry, and a sequential number. For example, the 3PL respondents from Poland are denoted as PL-3PL-1 and PL-3PL-2, while retailers from Switzerland are denoted as CH-RET-1 and CH-RET-2. Manufacturers are denoted as PL-MAN-X and CH-MAN-X (where X is 1 or 2). This sample of companies handles a wide variety of product groups thus enabling the authors to generate a breadth of perspectives.

Individual respondents were senior managers or directors with responsibility for supply chain and logistics management issues. Each was sent a copy of the following four questions to consider for their upcoming interview:

- How do you define the supply chain (SC)?
- How do you define supply chain management (SCM)?
- How do you define logistics?
- How are these areas (i.e SC, SCM, and logistics) related?

Focussed (i.e. semi-structured) interviews were then carried out with each respondent. Interviews were conducted in the respondents' native language (Polish or German) by bilingual authors of this paper. Communicating with the interviewees in their own language allowed respondents to "fully express themselves", helped in establishing a "good rapport", and lastly enabled the interviewer to interpret the interviewee's statement with "cultural understanding" (Tsang 1998, p. 511; Welch et al., 2006). Interviews were recorded and transcribed, with relevant sections translated into English.

Table 3.1 Interviewee characteristics

Company	Industry	Annual sales (millions of £)	Number of employees
PL-3PL-1	Logistics and transportation	74	233*
PL-3PL-2	Logistics and transportation	86	1,800
PL-MAN-1	Manufacturing	994	1,446
PL-MAN-2	Manufacturing	676	4,134
PL-RET-1	Retail	5,816	39,341
PL-RET-2	Retail	478	3,928

CH-3PL-1	Logistics and transportation	573	3,850
CH-3PL-2	Logistics and transportation	6,635	44,131
CH-MAN-1	Manufacturing	501	2,500
CH-MAN-2	Manufacturing	491	4,001
CH-RET-1	Retail	21,782	100,000
CH-RET-2	Retail	1,211	3,700

Note: Remaining PL-3PL-1 workforce has self-employment contracts not captured in official employment statistics, estimated to be in total of 2,500-3,000 persons.*

3.2. Data analysis

Regarding interview transcript analysis, Easterby-Smith et al. (2008) describe two approaches: content analysis and grounded analysis. The overall approach in this study involved a combination of both methods, thus integrating their strengths and mitigating their shortcomings. The transcript analysis employed by the authors (as shown in Figure 3.1) involved four main stages in distilling the raw transcript data into information that was analysed based on comparing and contrasting the main issues set out by respondents.

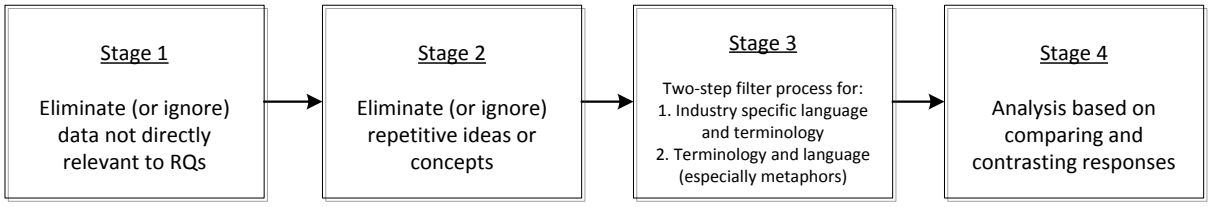


Figure 3.1 Transcript analysis process

4. RESULTS

This section presents the results from the qualitative empirical analysis. Apart from an overview of the practitioners' understanding of the terms SC, SCM, and logistics, the perceived linkages between the three constructs as well as the relevance of different contingency factors are explored. Table 3.2 and 3.3 quantitatively summarize the interview outcomes based on the number of mentions.

4.1. Supply chain

The majority of the respondents regarded the SC as a network by either specifically mentioning it or describing it as a 'group of companies' (PL-3PL-2) or a 'structure' (CH-3PL-1). Interviewees CH-3PL-2 and CH-MAN-1 referred to the SC as a 'connection' while PL-3PL-1 put emphasis on linkages between companies. One respondent, PL-3PL-2, described SC in terms of integration and cooperation and referred to the elements of logistics tasks, i.e. the right product, place, time, quality, and costs (cp. Rutner and Langley, 2000). Several practitioners' orientation about the SC (PL-RET-1, PL-RET-2, CH-3PL-1, CH-MAN-1, CH-RET-1) was based on the logic of a classic 'buy-make-move-sell' network (New, 1997). Three respondents (PL-3PL-1, CH-3PL-2, and CH-MAN-2) indicated the relevance of goods, information, and financial flows in SCs. Moreover, some interviewees (PL-3PL-1, CH-MAN-2, and CH-RET-2) made a reference to the overall objective of the SC – i.e. adding value.

The geographical origin only seems to be a weak differentiating factor for the varying SC understandings among practitioners. Respondents from Poland and Switzerland define the SC as a network, group, or structure. Similarly, the emphasis on SC flows becomes evident in the responses from both countries. However, there is a noticeable difference in the way Swiss interviewees describe the SC by describing it as a value chain. This term is not used by respondents from Poland except for PL-3PL-1, who notes that SCs ultimately 'add value'.

Industry-specific differences concerning the perceptions of the SC especially become apparent between 3PLs and retailers. More than retailers, logistics service providers tend to associate SCs with flows of goods, information, and financial means, as well as the occurrence of connections or linkages. In contrast to that, retailers put a greater emphasis on the agents of the supply chain (e.g. suppliers, manufacturers, and customers) compared to the 3PLs.

> *Proposition 1: Practitioners predominantly define supply chains as networks. Swiss firms are more likely to associate supply chains with added value than Polish firms. Logistics service providers are more likely to associate supply chains as connections or linkages than retailers. Retailers are more likely to associate supply chains with the nodes of the network than logistics service providers.*

4.2. Supply chain management

Different respondents characterized the management element of SCM with words such as 'collaboration' (PL-MAN-2), 'decision making' (CH-3PL-1), 'governance' (CH-3PL-2, CH-MAN-1), 'steering' (CH-RET-1). The more solution-oriented aspects of SCM were described with terms like 'execution' (CH-RET-2), 'troubleshooting' (PL-3PL-1), and 'solving issues' (PL-3PL-2). One informant (CH-MAN-2) defined SCM as 'demand network management', which highlights the strong focus on the fulfilment of customer requirements. A similar emphasis on the goal of SCM to get goods to the market was noted by PL-MAN-2.

The informants from Switzerland especially stressed the strategic dimension of SCM, e.g. by associating it with governance. In contrast to that, the respondents from Poland put a greater emphasis on the operational facet of SCM, such as problem-solving.

The representatives of logistics and transportation industries (3PL) stressed the practical aspects of SCM – i.e. troubleshooting, decision-making, solving issues, and operational tasks – more than the respondents from other sectors. Interviewees with a manufacturing background (MAN) highlighted SCM's focus on the management and fulfilment of customer demand. The retailers (RET) seemed to have the broadest understanding of SCM as they emphasised the strategic as well as the more operational aspects of SCM, such as cooperation, the management of processes, as well as the steering of supply chain flows.

> *Proposition 2: Practitioners predominantly perceive the strategic nature of SCM, which involves governance and coordination. Polish firms are more likely to associate SCM with operational tasks whereas Swiss firms are more likely to acknowledge the strategic elements of SCM. Logistics service providers are more likely to associate SCM with operational tasks than manufacturers and retailers. Manufacturing firms are more likely to associate SCM with a strong customer orientation than logistics service providers and manufacturers.*

4.3. Logistics

All respondents considered logistics to be primarily concerned with the movement and storage of products. PL-RET-2 and CH-3PL-2 specifically emphasised returns and disposal as part of logistical processes (reverse logistics). PL-3PL-1 and PL-MAN-1 focused on logistics as a process of moving goods from A to B or from supplier to customer. This narrow focus was broadened by five respondents (PL-MAN-2, CH-3PL-2, CH-MAN-1, CH-RET-1, and CH-RET-2) who referred to logistics as flows of goods, materials, and information.

An exceptional definition of logistics was given by PL-3PL-2, who defined it as "the art of smoothly and reliably connecting processes and companies'. This perception corroborates with emphases given by CH-RET-1, who called logistics the 'logic behind supply chain'. Furthermore, CH-MAN-2 noted that logistics is steered or operated in silos, which suggests that logistics organizations tend to be rather independent from an organization's other functional areas.

The respondents from Switzerland seem to have a broader understanding of logistics than the interviewees from Poland. While the Polish respondents predominantly associate logistics with flows of physical goods and materials, the Swiss informants additionally tend to acknowledge information flows.

No striking differences between the perceptions on logistics could be found between the three analysed industries. Hence, there seems to be a relative consensus on the meaning of the term logistics among practitioners from the logistics, manufacturing and retail sector.

> *Proposition 3: Practitioners predominantly associate logistics with the movement and storage of goods and materials. Polish firms tend to associate logistics with goods and material flows. Swiss firms tend to have a broader understanding of logistics than Polish firms by associating it with goods, material, as well as information flows.*

Table 4.2 Summary of definitions for supply chain, supply chain management, and logistics

Term	Definition	Country		Industry			Total
		PL	CH	3PL	MAN	RET	
Supply chain (SC)	SCs are networks	4	4	3	2	3	8
	SCs are "buy-make-move-sell" networks, they encompass the processes or sequences of events from the initial source to the final customer	2	3	1	1	3	5
	SCs are connections, linkages or structures	1	2	2	1	0	3
	SCs comprise goods, information, and financial flows	1	2	2	1	0	3
	SCs are value chains, they seek to add value	1	3	2	1	1	3
Supply chain management (SCM)	SCM involves coordination, governance, decision-making or steering	0	5	2	2	1	5
	SCM involves execution, troubleshooting or problem solving	2	1	2	0	1	3
	SCM focuses on fulfilling customer requirements (e.g. getting goods to the market)	1	1	0	2	0	2
Logistics	Logistics is primarily concerned with the movement and storage of goods	6	6	4	4	4	12
	Logistics refers to the flow of goods, materials, and information	1	4	1	2	2	5
	Logistics deals with returns and disposal	1	1	1	0	1	2
	Logistics is the logic behind the SC, it connects processes and companies	1	1	1	0	1	2
	Logistics is operated or steered in silos	0	1	0	1	0	1

4.4. Relationship between the supply chain, supply chain management, and logistics

There is a plethora of opinions among practitioners regarding the relationship between SC and SCM. The majority of the respondents – particularly those from Switzerland – allude to SCM as being a superordinate construct and note that SCM encompasses the SC. However, CH-3PL-1 noted that the SC "is the basis for SCM" and that "SCM builds up on the supply chain", suggesting that "if there is no supply chain there is no need for SCM". It becomes evident that the Polish interviewees particularly stressed SCM's role of linking business

processes in the SC. Furthermore, one informant (PL-MAN-1) used the terms SCM and SC interchangeably without making a distinction in meaning.

The responses regarding the linkage between the terms SC and logistics point toward a uniformity of opinions on this subject. All respondents refer to logistics as the active element connecting the SC and highlight the movement of goods and materials from A to B or from supplier to customer. According to CH-RET-1, "80% of supply chain is logistics while the rest comprises logistics-external areas such as finance, controlling or risk management." The informants from Switzerland emphasize that logistics realizes those processes in the SC, which involve goods. In contrast to that, the Polish respondents rather tend to highlight logistics' role as a link between the different agents of the SC. No notable differences in the responses concerning the relationship between SC and logistics could be found for the analysed industries.

Most respondents view the relationship between SCM and logistics from a 'unionist' perspective (cp. Larson and Halldorsson, 2004). For example, CH-RET-2 expressed: "there is a major link among logistics and SCM, since logistics is a subarea of SCM." Four respondents (PL-RET-1, CH-3PL-1, CH-MAN-1, CH-MAN-2) have a stance that is in line with the 'intersectionist' perspective of Larson and Halldorsson (2004). Finally, PL-3PL-1 suggests that SCM and logistics are "when it comes to practicalities […] the same thing". Hence, one of the twelve interviewees follows an understanding of SCM and logistics that reflects the 're-labelling' perspective (cp. Larson and Halldorsson, 2004). Striking differences emerge when it comes to comparing the attitudes toward the linkages between the two terms in the two countries. Polish respondents predominantly hold a unionist view, with one interviewee representing a re-labelling and one taking an intersectionist view. The practitioners from Switzerland are equally split between the unionist and intersectionist perspective. Furthermore, the results indicate that there does not seem to be a unified industrial-internal understanding of the relationship between SCM and logistics. 3PLs have the most divergent views: while most logistics service providers take a unionist perspective, some also assume a re-labelling or intersectionist view. Manufacturers (MAN) are equally split between unionist and intersectionist views. The unionist view is dominant among the retailers (RET), with only one retail firm holding an intersectionist view.

> *Proposition 4a: Practitioners predominantly consider SCM as a superordinate construct to the supply chain since it manages the business processes in the supply chain. Swiss firms are more likely to perceive SCM as a superordinate construct to the supply chain than Polish firms. Polish firms are more likely to perceive SCM as a construct that connects business processes in the supply chain than Swiss firms.*
>
> *Proposition 4b: Practitioners predominantly consider logistics as the active element in the supply chain, which realizes processes associated with physical goods. Swiss firms are more likely to perceive the supply chain as a superordinate construct of logistics than Polish firms. Polish firms are more likely to perceive logistics as a means that physically links the agents of the supply chain with each other than Swiss firms.*
>
> *Proposition 4c: Practitioners predominantly consider SCM as a superordinate construct to logistics, whereby logistics is a subarea of SCM (unionist view). Swiss firms are more likely to perceive SCM and logistics as distinct but partially overlapping concepts (intersectionist view) than Polish firms. Retailers are more likely to hold a unionist view than logistics service providers and manufacturers.*

Table 4.3 Summary of linkages between supply chain, supply chain management, and logistics

Terms	**Linkage**	**Country**		**Industry**			**Total**
		PL	CH	3PL	MAN	RET	
SC <> SCM	SCM manages (e.g. plans and steers) the SC and is therefore superordinate to the SC	0	6	2	2	2	6
	SCM manages the processes between the SC elements (i.e. the companies in the SC)	5	0	2	1	2	5
	The SC is the physical connection of SCM	0	2	0	1	1	2
	SCM comprises all of an organization's SCs, the SC is part of SCM	0	2	0	2	0	2
SC <> Logistics	Logistics moves goods between the SC elements and hence links the SC elements (i.e. the companies of the SC)	5	0	2	1	2	5
	Logistics is a subarea or component of the SC and realizes all processes in the SC that involve goods	0	4	2	1	1	4
	SC is the physical foundation of all goods flows whereas logistics executes the physical goods flows	0	2	0	1	1	2
	SC covers organizational and interorganizational processes whereas logistics is limited to processes dealing with incoming and outgoing goods	0	1	0	1	0	1
SCM <> Logistics	SCM is a broader concept that includes logistics as well as e.g. planning and control, HRM- and, IT-related topics	4	3	2	2	3	7
	SCM and logistics are different but partially overlapping concepts since SCM uses logistics to move and store goods	1	3	1	2	1	4
	Logistics is operationally-oriented whereas SCM comprises strategic tasks	1	2	0	3	0	3
	SCM and logistics are practically the same	1	0	1	0	0	1

5. DISCUSSION

The outcomes of the empirical analysis suggest that not only in academia the terms SC, SCM, and logistics as well as their interrelationships are understood in various ways, but also in practice. Practitioners' perceptions on the three constructs not only differ to some extent from established academic definitions, but also tend to depend on the firm-specific context, with country and industry being relevant contingency factors.

In line with the contemporary understanding of SCs as networks formed by nodes and links (Carter et al., 2015), the overriding majority of the practitioners acknowledges the network character of SCs. Logistics and supply chain executives oftentimes consider the SC as the processes or sequence of events that links the initial source to the final customer. The comprehension of the SC as being comprised of different process linkages that connect the SC agents mirrors SCM research, which maps SCs based on the members of the network and the types of business process links between them (e.g. Lambert and Cooper, 2000). The finding that logistics service providers associate SCs rather with connections or linkages whereas retailers tend to emphasise the nodes of the network suggests that practitioners understanding is influenced by their firms' role in the SC. Logistics companies constitute the interface between dispatchers and recipients by moving physical goods from A to B. Hence, the 3PLs establish a certain link through their services. In contrast to that, the core business of a retailer is to sell goods or services to customers via different channels. It can therefore be imputed that the product assortment (and thus the choice of suppliers) as well as channel management (and hence the choice of potential target customers) have a stronger influence on a retailer's perceptions than the linkages between different SC agents.

The practitioner interviews also reveal a relative homogeneity of responses on logistics and its role in the SC. This corroborates the conclusions drawn by Lummus et al. (2001, p. 429), who state that "there is general agreement on what logistics entails". However, Lummus et al. (2001) note that logistics is generally viewed as within one company. The firm-internal focus of logistics does not become evident from the comments of the interviewees. Only one respondent's comment may allude to this by noting that logistics is "operated or steered in silos". It is possible that with the rising awareness about SCM, firms have increasingly turned to also view logistics from an inter-organizational perspective.

While practitioners' understanding of logistics seems to be relatively similar across countries and industries, more diverse perceptions on the terms SCM and SC can be found. Since one respondent even used the two constructs interchangeably, without making a distinction in meaning, it may be concluded that confusion concerning the meaning of the terms exists. The need for a clear differentiation between the SC and SCM is also highlighted in the academic literature, such as Carter et al. (2015). Potential reasons for the heterogeneous perspectives on SCM and the SC among practitioners could lie in the limited practical value of a clear-cut distinction as well as in the novelty of the terms compared to logistics.

Differences between the responses from the two analysed countries with regard to the meaning of SCs, SCM, and logistics may be explained by country-specific variations in the curriculum and/or a different level of exposure to supply chain thinking. For example, the percentage of foreign trade on Switzerland's gross domestic product is higher compared to Poland. Hence, it can be expected that Swiss firms tend to have more complex supply chains due to more international linkages and thus feel a greater need to pursue SCM. Moreover, cultural differences may have an impact on practitioners' views on the SC and related topics. For example, the greater long-term orientation in the Swiss culture compared to the Polish culture as outlined in Hofstede's dimensions (cp. Hofstede, 2017) could explain why Swiss

firms put a greater emphasis on the strategic character of SCM while Polish firms rather tend to stress its operational tasks.

6. CONCLUSION

The objective of this research was to generate novel, differentiated insights in the use of the terms ‘supply chain’, ‘supply chain management,’ and ‘logistics’ as well as their interrelationships in practice. To this end, the views of practitioners in manufacturing, third party logistics, and retail have been solicited through a series of focussed interviews based on a refined and extended template of Lummus et al. (2001) as well as Sweeney and Bahr (2015).

The findings suggest that there is especially a lot of variation between practitioners’ understanding of SC and SCM. Differences in definitions are also noticeable when comparing the comments from Polish and Swiss respondents as well as from representatives of different industries. Apart from indicating a certain divergence between theory and practice, these variations mirror the diversity of orientations and emphases evident in the many academic definitions that have been proposed in recent decades. Moreover, the findings suggest that different industry- and culture-specific orientations on SC-related terms may hamper mutual understanding among practitioners as well as potentially between academics and practitioners. Scholars and practitioners are hence advised to clarify their comprehension of relevant operations management terms to avoid misconceptions. Additionally, this research may stimulate discussions on an international harmonization of the curricula in the field of SCM and logistics. It can be imputed that country- or even institution-specific differences in the teaching agenda not only increase the theory-practice-gap but also provoke misunderstandings among practitioners.

In reflecting on the validity and reliability of this research, the four qualitative criteria recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) have been adopted – credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The credibility criterion stipulates that the results of a qualitative study should be credent from the perspective of the participants in the research. This issue was addressed to some extent by inviting interviewees to comment on summaries of the research findings. The limited sample size employed in the present research is not intended to be definitive and hampers transferability. However, the use of the focussed interview methodology enabled the inductive development of a number of propositions. The process of continuously relating the empirical findings back to the literature helped in this regard. Dependability emphasizes the need for the researcher to account for the changing context within which the research occurs. In this regard, the authors documented the entire focused interview process, from design through to analysis and feedback. Confirmability refers to the degree to which others could confirm the results. Future work should build on the findings of this research using a combined inductive/deductive approach based on methodological triangulation.

In a next step, the propositions shall be empirically tested using a larger survey of companies. Furthermore, the cross-cultural context will be strengthened by including practitioners from other European countries in the sample. Future studies about practitioner perspectives on SC-related terms could also analyse the role of other contingency variables, such as firm size or the position and educational background of the interviewee.

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