



Knowledge and cultural diffusion along the supply chain as drivers of product quality improvement

The illycaffè case study

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to widen the knowledge base on supply chain learning by exploring and explaining how an enterprise can compete and win in the international market by integrating quality management practices along its supply chain and, above all, by becoming the coordinator in a supply chain learning (SCL) network.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors conducted an exploratory case study on a group operating in the coffee market that is universally recognised for the high quality of its products: illycaffè.

Findings – This paper illustrates and explains how the illycaffè Group implements, competes and wins in the international market because of its exemplary business strategies, its focus on the competitive priority of quality, and consistent and integrated supply chain management practices that are sustained by an innovative approach: the diffusion of knowledge, know-how and a culture of excellence in coffee quality along the entire value chain. The authors find that the diffusion of a culture of quality orients supply chain learning towards the continuous improvement of product and service quality, and above all, improves results by encouraging an emergent behaviour across different actors that creates a shared culture.

Research limitations/implications – The exploratory nature and use of a single case study are the major limitations of this research. Nevertheless, this study may serve as a significant starting point for future research and analysis related to supply chain learning strategies.

Originality/value – The illycaffè case study contributes to the literature on quality management and on supply chain management suggesting how an enterprise can improve product and service quality using a sustainable SCL strategy based on knowledge/know-how diffusion and a shared culture along the entire supply chain.

Keywords Product quality management, Supply chain learning, Case study, Supply chain management, Quality management

Paper type Case study

