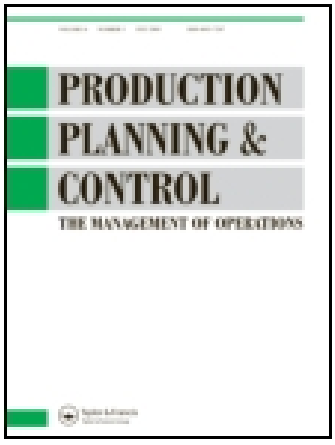

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Strategic management of global manufacturing networks

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BOOK REVIEW

Strategic management of global manufacturing networks, by Friedli Thomas, Mundt Andreas, and Thomas Stefan, Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, 2014, 271 pp., 83.19 € (hardcover), ISBN 978-3-642-34185-4

Unlike many other books on manufacturing or supply chain strategy, the authors' aim is to explore strategic management challenges around global manufacturing networks. Based on the theoretical underpinnings and selection of concepts, however, the book can be described as covering production strategy development and design set in networks. It does not really explore the implementation or management of such production networks. This is not necessarily a bad thing, since the latter would require inclusion of a whole range of different theories and possibly unnecessarily complicate things, but it does reduce the management element.

The authors provide a good description of the theoretical transition from focus on the manufacturing site to networks, covering unit roles and requirements to support a given production strategy and dealing with the issues of design and coordination in various forms. This also includes the relationship to well-established tools and concepts, such as lean and TQM, which provides a bridge between strategic and operational considerations. As such, the authors have done a good job in presenting relevant concepts and theories and placing them in the context of networks. It should be noted that these concepts and theories presented are not always critically approached, but rather described on face value and then discussed in context. This makes sense if the reader seeks understanding of applications rather than of the concepts themselves. Also, there are numerous case examples included throughout the book. It is commendable that these are not simplified for illustrative purposes, but instead retain sufficient details to be interesting and a worthwhile read, interesting even for those that are familiar with the concepts or theories discussed.

In terms of content and structure, the book follows a logical progression from theory to application, with plenty of examples thrown in. There are also useful diagrams scattered throughout the book. After the typical introduction where objectives and reasons of interests are presented in Chapter 1, Chapters 2 and 3 discuss concepts around production management. The approach to cover the transition from single site to network works well since it enables greater understanding for how the theories and concepts that are originally designed for single site use can operate in a supply or network context. The following three chapters (4–6) cover different aspects of network management, including strategy and design. Issues around control, such as configuration, coordination and standardisation of the network provide worthwhile insights into common problems that arise in production networks. The concluding chapters then provide a brief summary (Chapter 8) and a supplement for practitioners (appendices). The last chapter, in particular, may be quite useful for the teaching of MBA or for student assignments. Overall, it all comes together nicely, making the book both a pleasant and informative read.

There are also a few shortcomings. With few exceptions, focus is on production networks, but not particularly on global ones. This may make sense conceptually, since few of the theories presented explicitly explore the global aspect, but rather are applied on multi-site networks to varying degrees of extent and complexity. But it also means that the particularities of global networks and associated implications for both theory and practice are marginally featured in the book. On a related note, the authors have explicitly focused on manufacturing networks and operations in developed countries. It would have been interesting if issues arising for networks including or wholly operating in developing countries were included, especially since many actual supply chain networks do so. Conceptually it may not make much of a difference, but in application it may have. Certainly, for discussion in class, such expansion of regional cover would be most beneficial. One may also point out that the service dimension is poorly represented in the book, which is coherent with the overall scope but also somewhat limiting given the increased importance of services in extended supply chains or networks. Of course, these things may matter less for readers that are interested in the strategic considerations around networks per se as the book does cover it well, but others may find it useful to add additional sources to their set readings.

Given the book's content and approach, in my opinion, the book is best suited for either a postgraduate level course focused on production or supply chain strategy or an advanced undergraduate level course. In both cases, additional readings may be required. For use as the sole or key reading in a course, the book would

preferably have a more theoretical critical stance as well as greater explanations as to how the various theories differ. But as part of a reading list, the book really does deliver. Personally, I found the book to be an excellent source for key concepts and their application and the numerous and detailed industry examples are both illustrative and enjoyable to read.

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