
Responsible purchasing practices: Role of the pro-active supply chain

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Abstract:

The RESPECT project aimed to develop innovative methodology and tools to help key stakeholders drive change in the way purchasing practices are operated in supply chains and global markets. It explored and tested an approach inspired by open innovation to facilitate collaboration among buyers, suppliers and consumers. The project adapted and designed vocational training content and good practices through activities in two pilot countries - Turkey and Bulgaria - and tailored them for the apparel and footwear industries in global markets.

The project started with the observation that aligning purchasing practices with CSR has not been achieved yet in most supply chains around the world. Stakeholders often miss the knowledge and practical tools to fill the existing gaps.

The complexity of global supply chains requires a more balanced power and more collaboration between stakeholders. Suppliers need ways to better express themselves and communicate about good practices; Consumers seek to be better informed and have opportunities to influence the process; finally, Buyers often lack information on what good practices look like and seek new tools to reach a higher level of corporate responsibility.

The RESPECT project, supported by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission, has been designed to drive change in the current supply chain pattern and offer an innovative approach to foster stakeholder collaboration and contribute to improving purchasing practices.

Keywords: responsible purchasing practices; supply chain; supplier; buyer; consumer; training; Lifelong learning; Leonardo da Vinci

Contribution type:

Presentation of a tested training and support solution towards buyers and suppliers, developed by the RESPECT Leonardo da Vinci project (www.responsible-practices.eu), to foster responsible purchasing practices and innovative relationship in the supply chain, by reinforcing driving role of suppliers and support from consumers in terms of source of innovation into products and services, and in terms of relation to products and consum'actions.

*** Problem: What specific innovation management problem does the submission tackle?**

The RESPECT project deals with attitude/behavioural change of buyers and suppliers in their role of implementing more responsible purchasing practices.

Until now in the global market, price-cutting has been the key driving force to the detriment of sustainable and well-being practices in most of the cases.

This price-cutting mind-set reduced suppliers in a closed and narrow production role where they are squeezed-on-demand and have to produce à-la-minute without giving them any room for initiative. Even worse, this buyer-supplier relationship often naturally leads to workplace issues such as labour standards violation (like long working hours and overtime, wage issues, health and safety issues, etc.) and lack of environmental care, which result in fragile economy/living conditions or bankruptcy and de-structured local economies and industrial basins.

*** Description: How does this presentation tackle the problem?**

The RESPECT project aims at developing an innovative methodology, tools and training modules to help suppliers and buyers improve purchasing practices and their impact on workplace standards. The two-year pilot project explores (ending September 2013) and tests an approach that facilitates collaboration between stakeholders (buyers-suppliers-consumers) and creates solutions through communication of good practice cases. To develop this training and support action (under the Leonardo da Vinci European programme within the Lifelong Learning programme), the RESPECT project has been working on a sector in which the supply chain is subject to fast speed changes with pressure due to lead times, consumer needs and strong end-price influence, the textile sector (footwear, clothes ...). In order to convince buyers to go towards more responsible purchasing practices, the RESPECT project went through different steps and actions to strengthen the process and have solid outcomes. Among the actions, the project:

- Conducted an initial survey through an on-line questionnaire in English, Bulgarian, Turkish and Chinese to get a first overview of the status of the purchasing practices issue. This questionnaire was disseminated to key buyers in this sector thanks to the FLA network and to suppliers in Bulgaria, Turkey and China.

- Using the results of the initial survey, tuned the initial training needs analysis and process approach of the supply chain by designing and conducting qualitative surveys with selected groups of Suppliers in Bulgaria and Turkey. The RESPECT project also conducted a large consumer survey to position consumers' role in supporting good practices thanks to the collaboration of an innovative and engaged Buyer, "Patagonia".
- Collected good practice cases from some active suppliers to illustrate possibilities of innovation (technical and social), their impact on quality and sustainability and how they could as well benefit to buyers (in terms of lead time, regularity, faster understanding of buyer needs, contribution to environmental issues, contribution to CSR reporting for buyers in their supply chain...).
- Developed tailor-made training content for Suppliers (based on the needs identified in the various surveys) and planned test and pilot training seminars in Bulgaria and Turkey for Suppliers and Buyers.

*** Originality: What are you saying that is new that has never been said before?**

The RESPECT project proposes an innovative approach toward Buyers by empowering Suppliers and including Consumers into the purchasing process. This innovative training approach also aims at giving more room to Suppliers into the production and innovation processes (making them more aware of their role, power and responsibilities in the process).

*** Interest: Why precisely will this interest an audience of innovation management experts?**

Results of the RESPECT project present an interesting approach and several case studies supporting behavioural change in global markets and global supply chains. It also represents the starting points for Suppliers to become aware of their role in the supply chain that goes beyond their mere production-on-order position. The RESPECT project also constitutes an eye- and mind-opener for Suppliers and Buyers towards new collaborative and innovative practices.

*** Background documents:**

- Transfer of innovation and experience from previous projects and RESPECT partners – cf www.responsible-practices.eu
- "Web 2.0: les consommateurs responsables au cœur de la supply chain textile" – Research thesis by ATANI Maeva, 2012, Escem Grande École

- "Perspectives on Suppliers Innovation" published by Imperial College Press, 2012, edited by Alexander Brem (University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany) & Joe Tidd (University of Sussex, UK).
- "Open Innovation 2.0: Sustainable Economy & Society - Stability. Jobs. Prosperity", Digital Agenda of the European Commission - <http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/open-innovation>
- "Connecting the Dots Between Consumers, Consumption & Sustainability: The External Face of Unilever's Sustainable Living Plan" – by Aman Singh, published on CSRwire.



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