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Editorial: Congratulations to IJLM on its first 30 years

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# Editorial: Congratulations to *IJLM* on its first 30 years

## Introduction

*The International Journal of Logistics Management (IJLM)* was established in 1990 by the now legendary Professors, Doug Lambert of Ohio State University and Martin Christopher of Cranfield University. In these professors' opinion, more in-depth research on logistics management was needed (Liao-Troth *et al.*, 2012) as well as a more international approach.

The claim of this editorial is that these opinions are as timely as ever. With the emergence of big data and disruptive technologies, the focus of research in logistics has become quantitative; however, knowledge on the social aspects of logistics management – in-depth knowledge – is still needed. In fact probably more now than ever, as business worlds are transforming due to the same technologies. In addition, knowledge of the international aspects of logistics management is still in demand. Around the time of the birth of *IJLM*, globalization became “the talk of the town” and has been so until recently. Logistics and supply chain management really contributed to making “the world flat” (Friedman, 2005) and it felt good to be a part of that movement and being the “beautiful discipline” (Fawcett and Waller, 2013). Now re-regionalization of supply chains seems to be happening due to geo-political changes. It is therefore time to investigate the change of directions of former global supply chains and the management implications they have.

There is therefore still plenty of need for *IJLM* but it is also the time to reflect a little bit on the history and the way forward for the journal. The following first outlines the brief history of the management of *IJLM* to honour those who have worked hard to make the vision of *IJLM* a reality. Next, I present my idea of the identity of the journal today with the understanding that this idea will – and should be – challenged by the *IJLM* community. However, it will also give the same community and potential newcomers a better idea of what *IJLM* stands for and is looking for. Then, you can read my take on the opportunities outlined by Liao-Troth *et al.* (2012) on *IJLM*'s 20th anniversary. Finally, the editorial is wrapped-up.

## The management of *IJLM* – a brief overview

As mentioned above, Lambert and Christopher established *IJLM* in 1990 and it is the youngest among the trio of established logistics journals – *The International Journal of Physical Distribution* was established in 1971 and the *Journal of Business Logistics* in 1978 (Liao-Troth *et al.*, 2012). In 2005, Emerald Publishing took over the journal. Lambert and Christopher continued their editorship until 2008, when Professors Matthew Waller and Chandra Lalwani from University of Arkansas, USA and University of Hull, UK, respectively, took over the reins. Waller handed over his co-editorship to Scott Keller of the University of West Florida in Pensacola, in 2010. Lalwani continued his service to the journal, between 2013 and 2015 in conjunction with Professor John Mangan of Newcastle University, UK. Dr Benjamin Hazen, Air Force Institute of Technology, USA, who had served with Lalwani as co-editor since 2015, took over as sole editor in 2016. Hazen continued until the end of 2017 when he established a new journal with Emerald. I took over from 2017 as the sole editor and the first editor from outside the Anglo-Saxon world. However, the editorial policies are the same and the international aspects of logistics management are still at the centre of the journal's *raison d'être*, now more than ever.

Under Emerald, *IJLM* became electronically available, starting in 2006. Articles were downloaded nearly 24,200 times that year. Also in 2006 *IJLM* published three issues and



20 articles as against 15 the year before. From 2017, four issues per year with 60 articles were published. In 2018, articles were downloaded around 180,000 times.

*IJLM* was ISI indexed in 2011 (now by Clarivate Analytics). It started with a modest 0.841, went up and down but with an increasing trajectory. The latest score, from 2017, was 1.776 with a five-year impact factor of 2.437. In 2011, CiteScore by Scopus was established and again, the start was relatively modest with 0.89. At the end of 2018, however, this score was 3.36; ergo more than tripled. The KPIs for *IJLM* have been steadily increasing. For now, the main obstacle is the UK-based ABS AJG ranking list that downgraded *IJLM* from a two-star to a one-star journal in 2010 despite other national ranking lists upgrading it (McKinnon, 2017). As the criteria for awarding the number of stars in the list are somewhat unclear, it is a mystery that a journal with a thorough scholarly review-process and that has carried a citation factor index since 2011 (and doubled it since then) is still a one-star journal (<https://charteredabs.org/academic-journal-guide-2018/> accessed January 2, 2019). Other logistics management journals have, unfortunately, the same kind of problem. My hope and wish is that the British Chartered Association of Business Schools will rethink their approach to logistics management journals in general, and *IJLM* in particular, as the implications of a low score are damaging for a discipline that is the foundation of modern supply chain management and flourishing in practice.

*IJLM* has solid roots in the UK due to Professor Christopher's base at Cranfield University, and hopefully they will grow even stronger in the future. According to Liao-Troth *et al.* (2012), the first special issue from the International Symposium on Logistics (ISL) held in the UK was published in *IJLM* in 1994. Since then there has been a close connection between this symposium and *IJLM*. The symposium has its home at the University of Nottingham's Business School but every other year it is held outside of Europe. These close ties make an international outreach beyond the UK and USA easier. In 2018, a relationship between the CSCMP European Research Seminar was established, not least to keep up a good connection to the US community and develop knowledge of the journal further afield than just continental Europe. To enhance this connection, Editorial Advisory Board meetings have been held in conjunction with the CSCMP Edge conference. *IJLM* will, in future, seek to establish closer connections to the journal's audience and research communities around the world. The Senior Associate Editors, appointed for the first time in 2018, will help develop these ties to communities around the world.

### The identity of the journal

A discussion of how logistics is distinct from supply chain management has taken place for decades and it still seems to be difficult for many to differentiate between the two. The term supply chain management was introduced in the consultancy literature at the beginning of the 1980s (Christopher and Holweg, 2011) and turned up in the academic literature shortly afterwards, inspired in large part by the Japanese production system movement (Ellram and Cooper, 1993). Conceptual clarification of the difference between logistics and supply chain management was, however, first made by Cooper *et al.* (1997) in "Supply Chain Management: More Than a New Name for Logistics." Emphasis was placed on logistics being one function among others to be integrated through supply chain management processes. Still, in 2004, Larson and Halldorsson reported a survey of logistics experts, including academics, that came up with four types of understanding of the relationship between logistics and SCM. These were the traditionalist where SCM is a subset of logistics; re-labeling where SCM is just a new name for logistics, the intersectionist where logistics is one function among others among the integrating SCM staff and finally, the unionist which sees logistics as being a subset of SCM. In their *Journal of Business Logistics (JBL)* discussion paper, Lambert and Enz (2015) stick to the 1997 understanding of logistics as a function and emphasize the role of logistics management and its importance in academia and practice.

*IJLM* adheres to the differentiation between logistics and supply chain management also emphasized by Fawcett and Waller (2013) and Zinn and Goldsby (2014) in their editorials

for *JBL*. The latter see inventory as the basic artifact of logistics and they replicate the CSCMP definition of logistics as being “[...] that part of SCM 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” (p. 25). Here, we see logistics as a part of supply chain management that has to do with the flows of physical goods. The Intersectionist and Unionist approaches will both work for *IJLM*, but *IJLM* articles will, on the whole, relate to “flow and storage of goods, services, and related information” as pointed out in the definition above. Nevertheless, taking the “big picture” of the supply chain into account is very often necessary and makes logistics management research interesting.

As “[L]ogistics is essential in bridging the physical gap between sources of supply and points of demand” (Zinn and Goldsby, 2014, p. 25), logistics management connects to transportation. *IJLM* is not, however, a transportation journal as such, but whenever transportation is perceived as a part of logistics management – and preferably – the overall global supply chain, *IJLM* gladly offers itself as a research outlet.

### Development of research topics

Logistics as a discipline is closely linked to practice and society. Whatever happens in the world around us will most likely affect the management of material flows and the institutions that embed them. Therefore, research topics will, to a large extent, be dictated or inspired by the surrounding environment. For concrete advice on research topics, Swanson *et al.*'s (2018) article “An analysis of supply chain management research by topic” is helpful. Good advice on research on relationships can also be found in Daugherty (2011), but always look for articles suggesting research agendas.

More generally, the question is – as always – whether our theoretical frameworks are fit to capture present changes and transformations. For example, much of our supply chain management thinking is strongly inspired by the development of the Japanese production system and their organization as we experienced it in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Ellram and Cooper, 1993). We also see that in Mentzer *et al.*'s, 2001 definition of supply chain management, long-term relationships and cooperation among companies are essential elements and supply chains are depicted as linear. It has served us well. Carter *et al.* (2015), however, challenge this linear way of thinking about supply chains by transposing a complex adaptive system approach to supply chains and suggesting that these chains are, in fact, networks consisting of nodes and links. With new technologies where information can be shared in real-time and relationships can be changed quickly due to agility, this will probably often be a more accurate way of understanding supply chains. Therefore, the question is, is this the foundation of a new SCM paradigm and equivalent to the so-called eco-systems? If the answer is yes, what implications will that have for management and not least for logistics management? Here, I think that the systems concept that is sometimes a “curse” – because boundaries of logistics and SCM systems are not easily set (Zinn and Goldsby, 2014) – may actually also be the “blessing” we need to develop new approaches to logistics and supply chain management. To support this proposition, please see Nilsson and Gammelgaard (2012), who talk about complexity thinking where a social systems perspective – in contrast to the more mechanistic SCM ideology – is discussed. Including human actors in supply chain systems thinking may open the discipline for more people-based studies of logistics and supply chain strategy – as for example in theory of management and strategy as practice. A discussion about our theoretical and paradigmatic foundations and in particular the implications of any theory and paradigm for logistics and supply chain management will always be welcome in *IJLM*. Let us have more critical thinking – as the best of the academic virtues – in our field so that we will always be relevant for enlightening and solving practice problems and continue to be the “beautiful discipline.”

## Dealing with opportunities and challenges of *IJLM*

In their analysis of the content of the first 20 years of *IJLM*, Liao-Troth *et al.* (2012) laid out four opportunities for the future of the journal that are, at the same time, ever-present challenges of *IJLM*. These were: timely and relevant topics; grounding research in theory; methodological rigor; and expanding the understanding of the role logistics and supply chain management plays around the world. In the following, I will address how *IJLM* will seek to deal these opportunities in the years to come.

Timely and relevant research topics will continue to be at the very centre of *IJLM*. As Liao-Troth *et al.* (2012) noted, being a bridge between theory and practice was founding goal of the journal. They further request authors to always ask themselves about relevance of their research. I completely agree with this point as with their suggestion of anticipating future developments of the discipline by looking beyond it. Davis (2014) is aligned with this position in claiming that important research is what makes a difference to practice. She also seems to be worried that the discipline often gets carried away with applying general theories from strategic management literature. In a guest editorial, she says that “managers are struggling to understand the implications and ramifications of various supply chain organizational structures, whereas scholars in the field continue to devote the most attention to supply chain strategy.” *IJLM* would like to see more research on exactly these aspects of logistics and supply chain management especially in the form of middle range theorizing (Stank *et al.*, 2017). Further, *IJLM* wants to be a part of the “beautiful discipline” (Fawcett and Waller, 2013), so if ever in doubt about the relevance of your topic, the UN Sustainable Development Goals may give you direction. Politicians may be hesitant to support them, but practice seems to understand the importance of them very well. More research on sustainability issues is needed and, hopefully, measures of sustainability of all kinds will be a natural and integrated part of logistics and supply chain management.

Grounding research in theory is important for most empirical research. Certainly qualitative studies, such as case studies, require a solid theoretical base. Theory testing, theory development and theory elaboration all need a close link to theory. Here, I will use the opportunity to inspire future authors to look into the discipline itself for middle range theory (Stank *et al.*, 2017). General – or grand – theories will of course always be important but to preserve a discipline that delves deeply into the inner workings of logistics management, middle range theory is needed.

Methodological rigor is of course a “must” in any scientific journal. Referring to Mentzer’s work on research methodology, Liao-Troth *et al.* (2012) state that rigor simply means use of appropriate theory and methods to ensure that conclusions rest on a sound scientific base. No one can disagree with this. They further encourage the use of multi-method approaches to strengthen generalizability and validity. In some research, this will be relevant, but not necessarily in all cases. Thoroughly working with only one method may be sufficient to make a sound conclusion. However, *IJLM* will be greatly interested in research that seeks to expand our methodological toolbox, especially for qualitative research. Action research has been published since around the birth of *IJLM* through Lambert’s work with the Global Supply Chain Forum (Lambert and Enz, 2017). However, in logistics and supply chain management, it is seldom used and that may be wrong. Our sister discipline, purchasing and supply management, has recently taken a step in that direction by publishing – for example – the article “Time to get real: The case for critical action research in purchasing and supply management” by Meehan *et al.* (2016). Of course, the challenge of action research is both to connect to theory (and not just practical problem solving) and to supply the time and competence needed to work with practice. It is not an easy task, but *IJLM* will prefer, at any time, a solid piece of action research to a superficial multi-method study. Where other academic journals increase requirements for data and statistical tests, *IJLM* increases requirements for qualitative research in order to strengthen relevance and learn from practice. This may also be the way to create more interesting

research (Davis, 1971). As claimed by Davis (1971), great research stimulates interest. This can, for example, be done by questioning “taken-for-granted” knowledge of both theory and practice. And going into depth in a qualitative study is maybe the best way to of doing that or at least the start of doing so.

Understanding the role of logistics and supply chain management around the world is a top priority of *IJLM*. Until now, this has been emphasized by strengthening the traditional relationships with research communities around CSCMP and ISL. This is, however, the most challenging of *IJLM*'s tasks. Research communities in regions and continents not so frequently represented in *IJLM* (and other logistics journals) work hard to help solve logistics and supply chain problems of high relevance to their countries. Such studies are, though, not always in the forefront of scientific knowledge of the discipline and therefore have a hard time being published. I am sure that colleagues in these regions find that unfair at times. To them, my advice is to keep a keen eye on the discourse in the journals to detect the research agendas of the discipline. And if possible, send representatives to international conferences and/or team up with colleagues who follow and know about the developments of the discipline. My hope is that *IJLM* in the future will be much stronger on this score. As the editor, I will do my best to visit as many of the *IJLM* communities at meetings and conferences around the world as time allows. However, you may also ask any of the associate editors with different geographical backgrounds for advice regarding the research agenda. To refer to Liao-Troth *et al.* (2012, p. 25) again on this point: “As a leading international logistics journal, the door is open for research from logistics and supply chain academics around the world.”

### Wrapping up

*IJLM*, the “little sister” of the big logistics management journals, is turning 30. Should not she be mature by now? Absolutely, and I think she is, particularly when it comes to the artisanship of scientific research. However, here I will use the opportunity to mention that in *IJLM*, vigour is just as important as rigour. Capturing new topics in logistics management practice, being relevant to theory and practice and taking chances, particularly in use of qualitative methods, should be the hallmark of *IJLM*, now and in the future. The Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard is known for saying “Life must be lived forwards but understood backwards” (my translation) which often is interpreted as saying it would have been better to understand life forwards with experience we, though, do not have. In logistics and supply chain management, that is being transformed as we speak, it is tempting to look and search for future solutions and discard what is behind us. However, as claimed with reference to this citation, by another Danish philosopher and psychologist, Svend Brinkmann, on Danish television on the evening of January 1, 2019, life should be lived backwards. As I understood this modern philosopher, being only forward looking in the search to create solid footings in a world of rapid change runs the risk of human beings losing their balance altogether. I tend to agree with Brinkmann – let us not forget the strengths of past ideas, as we will need them for building the future. Not as the past, but with a solid foundation to build on and from where we can tell which ideas are still suitable for the present and the future and which are not. In this anniversary volume, you will see some invited papers that seek to set a direction for the future of *IJLM*; with these you will see the life of *IJLM* lived forwards but understood backwards. With this approach, I trust that *IJLM* will continue be a part of a solid foundation for future research on logistics management.

Congratulations to *IJLM*, its authors, reviewers, advisory board members and past editors on their first 30 years!

**Britta Gammelgaard**

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