

New study advocates updating approach to teaching supply chain curriculum

11 June 2020, by Jon Niccum

"Nobody worries about the supply chain until something goes wrong," said Joe Walden, the assistant area director in analytics, information and operations management at the University of Kansas.

"Just look at the pandemic. Nobody gave the supply chain a thought in January. Everything they ordered from Amazon and Walmart and Target showed up during the holidays, and they were happy. And then, in the middle of March, all the shelves are empty."

A sudden, unexpected shift in this crucial process is one of the reasons Walden has written "Supply Chain Management Systems and Curriculum Reviews: What Are We Teaching About Supply Chain Management Systems? Do We Need to Modify Our Curriculums?" The paper advocates for conducting course and curriculum reviews in order to safeguard students in supply chain programs from being harmed by a lack of exposure to the various procedures in place.

The article appears in the *International Journal of Contemporary Education*.

"I want to get people in the industry thinking: What are we doing? What are we teaching? And is it current and relevant?" Walden said.

One of the things that prompted this research occurred when Walden came across a college program still examining a [case study](#) from 1995 involving supply chain information systems.

He said, "In 1995, I think my computer had a hard drive that was 100 megabytes. I had a dial-up modem. We were still using handwritten ledgers to keep track of inventory. When I saw that, I thought, 'You believe a 25-year-old case study is relevant?' So I'm trying to influence the industry—from both the academic perspective and a commercial perspective—to look at our curriculums to make

sure we're keeping them current and relevant."

The supply chain is defined as a network of businesses linked together to provide materials and services to an end user. Walden said that regardless of the actual definition, coronavirus has at least brought the term into the public lexicon—even if it got used during the early parts of the pandemic as a scapegoat.

"People blamed the supply chain for not being able to provide toilet paper, hand sanitizer and Clorox wipes because everybody stocked up on them in panic buying," the KU lecturer said.

Walden's article contends that the chain continues to morph as a focus of business.

"It's changed over time from looking at just the logistics of moving stuff from point A to point B, to everything from procurement to making a product to shipping that product to a distribution center," he said. "And now with the greater emphasis on e-commerce, it also involves getting it to people's front doors."

Walden calls this latest development the "Amazon effect."

"Everybody wants to buy it now and have it tomorrow," he said.

In addition to his *International Journal of Contemporary Education* article, Walden has concurrently published a related one titled "Bridging the Talent Gap. What is Being Done and What Needs to be Accomplished to Help Fill in or Eliminate the Supply Chain Management Talent Gap?" It can be found in the *Journal of Supply Chain Management, Logistics and Procurement*.

It was inspired by a study that was related to his dissertation of what should be in the curriculum for an introductory supply chain course. This research

exposed him to the reality that there remains a huge [02/00000003/art00008](https://doi.org/10.1111/ijce.v3i2.4861) talent gap.

"The 'Bridging the Gap' idea was, 'What do we need to do right now to prepare students to be the perfect candidate for a job? How can they be ready to step into a job without having to spend their first six months learning what the business is?'" he said.

Provided by University of Kansas

Raised in North Carolina, Walden spent 26 years in the U.S. Army, with an additional five years working as a contractor. Here, he developed his expertise in warehousing and distribution, which included designing a 4.2-million-square-foot distribution center in Kuwait for Operation Iraqi Freedom. He retired as a colonel.

This may explain why he frequently quotes Sun Tzu, iconic author of "The Art of War," in his supply chain articles.

"I discovered that book in a military course 25 years ago," he said. "Some of the things he wrote about from a military perspective still have applications from a [supply chain](#) perspective. In fact, if you look at the curriculum for a lot of Asian business schools, Sun Tzu is still required reading."

"The beauty of Sun Tzu is you can take a couple of words out and add something else in, and it gives you a whole new meaning for a whole new topic," Walden said. "Sun Tzu understood that the success of an overall operation is tied to the success of supply operations in 500 B.C. And we're learning that same lesson again in 2020."

More information: Joseph Walden. Supply Chain Management Systems and Curriculum Reviews: What Are We Teaching About Supply Chain Management Systems? Do We Need to Modify Our Curriculums?, *International Journal of Contemporary Education* (2020). DOI: [10.1111/ijce.v3i2.4861](https://doi.org/10.1111/ijce.v3i2.4861)

Bridging the talent gap: What is being done and what needs to be accomplished to help fill in or eliminate the supply chain management talent gap? *Journal of Supply Chain Management, Logistics and Procurement*, [www.ingentaconnect.com/content ...](http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content...)

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