



Socially and environmentally responsible procurement: A literature review and future research agenda of a managerial issue in the 21st century

Stefan U. Hoejmose, A.J. Adrien-Kirby*

Centre for Business Organisations and Society, School of Management, University of Bath, Bath, BA2 7AY, UK

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ABSTRACT

This literature review offers a rigorous approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative techniques, to examine research to date in the field of socially and environmentally responsible procurement (SERP). It identifies that the SERP literature is at a critical juncture in its development and that researchers should be aware of the literature's shortcomings and potential points of fragmentation. This is of considerable importance if the field is to become a salient issue in the wider management literature. As such, this review not only takes stock of the existing literature, but it provides a comprehensive and systematic analysis of existing contribution and their implications for practitioners. In addition, we highlight the avenues for future research, which has so far been neglected by academics, but which is critical from a practitioners and implementation perspective.

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1. Introduction

Socially and environmentally responsible procurement (SERP) is an important issue for practitioners, as it has the potential to both harm a firm's reputation (Phillips and Caldwell, 2005; Roberts, 2003) and improve its competitive performance (Carter et al., 2000; Carter, 2005; Rao and Holt, 2005). Nonetheless, SERP is still in its infancy and firm engagement with these issues is limited (Min and Galle, 2001; Preuss, 2001). As such, procurement and supply chain practitioners have yet to react in earnest (Isaksson et al., 2010).

The topic of SERP is a vital one, driven by globalisation (Millington, 2008), fragmented supply chain (Neef, 2004), and stakeholder pressure (Amaeshi et al., 2008; Walker et al., 2008; Seuring and Müller, 2008). It is therefore no surprise that the field has gained considerable attention from academics, given that it has provided a rich ground for analysis, in terms of normative, descriptive and empirical research. The existing literature has been very diverse, and researchers have acknowledged, often implicitly, the complexity and dynamic nature of SERP engagement, by examining these practices through a number of conceptual lenses, including stakeholder management (Maignan et al., 2002), power-dependency (Millington, 2008), and institutional theory (Darnall, 2006). Researchers have also provided practitioners with invaluable instrumental guidance to improve their SERP engagement (Boyd et al., 2007), but it is obvious that

implementing sound SERP practices is complicated and comes with a range of challenges at both the corporate- and supply chain-level (Pedersen and Andersen, 2006; Zhu et al., 2008).

We use this special issue of the Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management as an opportunity to complement existing reviews (e.g., Seuring and Müller, 2008; Carter and Rogers, 2008; Gold et al., 2010), and to take stock of the topics covered and methods applied in the SERP literature. More importantly, we seek to provide the most comprehensive account of methods and topics covered in the SERP literature, whilst outlining key avenues for further research. In so doing, we provide a framework for classification of major issues and review these issues in light of their methodology and themes, and thereby highlight strengths and future opportunities for SERP research.

We focus on the literature between 2000–2010. Although the field has its roots in earlier writing (e.g., Drumwright, 1994; Carter and Carter, 1998; Wood, 1995), existing literature reviews have shown that SERP is predominately a 21st-century issue (Millington, 2008; Seuring and Müller, 2008), and much of the earlier work is concerned with ethics in a broader sense, including issues such as bribery (Pitman and Sanford, 1994), corruption (Turner, 1994) and general ethical behaviour of purchasing personnel (Wood, 1995). Hence, we focus on the relatively mature part of the literature.

Our aims and contributions with this literature review are three-fold. First, we conduct a bibliometric account to assess the output and impact of the extant SERP literature. In so doing, the analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of how the SERP field has evolved, and offers a source, for researchers in particular, to examine and observe strengths and gaps in the existing literature. Second, we provide a framework for a thematic analysis of the literature, which will serve as a reference point for

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: suh20@management.bath.ac.uk (S.U. Hoejmose), adamadrienkirby@gmail.com (A.J. Adrien-Kirby).

researchers and practitioners to understand the many drivers, barriers and challenges of implementing SERP. As such, the thematic analysis highlights both the complexity and implications of implementing SERP. Third, we outline strengths and weaknesses of the existing literature, and present a research agenda with a set of recommendations for future research that acknowledges the complexity of SERP and highlights opportunities to respond to practitioners' needs.

This review proceeds as follows. We first describe the method used to collect relevant articles and analyse their content. The review continues with the bibliometric analysis of the literature following procedures described by De Bakker et al. (2005). This is followed by a thematic review, drawing upon theme identification methods as recommended by Laplume et al. (2008) in order to provide a detailed analysis of the key themes of the SERP field. We end our review with a description of the strengths and limitations of the extant literature in order to offer suggestions for future research, which respond to gaps in the literature and the challenges faced by practitioners.

2. Method and sample characteristics

To provide a thorough review of the SERP literature, a two-tier approach was used to analyse extant studies. In the first instance, the literature is subjected to a bibliometric analysis with the aim of providing a detailed overview of the literature's evolution and current structure (Nicholas and Ritchie, 1978). The thematic analysis follows in order to provide qualitative depth to the review and to identify avenues for future SERP research.

2.1. Identification of relevant literature

The papers admitted into the analysis are concerned with social and/or environmental issues within the buyer–supplier relationship of profit-driven organisations. In line with existing literature review approaches, our analysis focuses on peer-reviewed articles; hence books, book reviews, special issue introductions, editorials, forewords, and brief commentaries were not included.

An initial, exploratory reading of the literature (e.g., Carter, 2005; Preuss, 2002; Walker et al., 2008) identified a set of keywords produced at the outset. Keywords were added during the literature search in keeping with the definition of the SERP literature above. These keywords formed Boolean phrases (Fig. 1) used to search peer-reviewed scholarly journals in the English language. The search was conducted in online journal databases, including EBSCO Business Source Premier, ISI Web of Knowledge, SSRN, ProQuest and Emerald. The reference/bibliography sections of resultant studies as well as the citation maps courtesy of ISI Web of Knowledge were also consulted to identify previously undiscovered and high-impact articles.

We restricted the time period for our analysis to 2000–2010, because our review of the earlier literature was highly fragmented and much of it concerned issues around bribery and corruption of purchasing managers, and hence beyond the scope of our analysis. Our search technique yielded in excess of a thousand articles, and each paper was subsequently reviewed for title, keyword and abstract by the two authors to ensure that the content of the paper was appropriate for our analysis. A total of 188 articles were considered relevant, and each of the two authors independently analysed each article. A comparison between the authors' analyses was subsequently made and overall there was a high degree of agreement between the two authors, in terms of the articles' focus, their epistemological orientation and main contributions. Fig. 2 provides the reader with an exemplar table of how articles were categorised for the bibliometric analysis.

2.2. Bibliometric analysis

The tradition of bibliometric analysis dating from Alan Pritchard's work, "Statistical bibliographies or bibliometrics?" (Groos and Pritchard, 1969), is of interest to scholars, as it facilitates our learning of how the structure of academic study of social and environmental issues in procurement is developing by counting the number of articles that share a particular characteristic, e.g., proposition development or hypotheses testing. This paper adopts this approach to examine the evolution of the SERP literature; the differences between the study of social and environmental issues; the most notable journals contributing to the field; and "epistemological orientation", in response to De Bakker et al.'s (2005) concern of a lack of coherence in the wider field of corporate social responsibility. Fig. 3 details the 'particular characteristics' of papers categorised into epistemological orientations.

2.3. Thematic analysis

This stage of the analysis was undertaken in an inductive fashion, so as to not determine the themes a priori (Dey, 1993). Our approach uses pertinent scrutiny techniques as recommended by Ryan and Bernard (2003) to identify repetitions, similarities and differences. Following Ryan and Bernard (2003), the exact terminology used in an article was of secondary importance to the concept expressed. The large number of 'expressions' were then grouped according to the concept to which they referred (Ryan and Bernard, 2003, p: 95). An example of this includes 'top and mid-management support' being expressed as 'senior management's consent', the description of an action being 'organisationally sanctioned' or indeed as 'pressure' from the upper echelons of the organisation. In addition to recommendations made by Ryan and Bernard (2003), we also followed

SUPPL* or SUPPLY CHAIN or SUPPLIER SELECTION or INTERNATIONAL SOURCING or BUYER-SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP or
SUPPLIER-BUYER RELATIONSHIP or INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS or SOURC* or OUTSOURC* or
PURCHASING or PROCUREMENT or BUY* or DISTRIBUT* or LOGISTICS

AND

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY or CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY or BUSINESS ETHICS or GOVERNANCE or
RESPONSIB* or ETHIC* or UNETHICAL or QUESTIONABLE or MORAL or ENVIRONMENT* or SUSTAINAB* or ECOLOG* or
GREEN or POLLUT* or WASTE or RECYCLING or CLOSED LOOP or ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS or
ISO14001 or SOCI* or CHILD LABOUR or LABOUR CONDITIONS or LABOUR STANDARDS HUMAN RIGHTS or
DISCRIMINATION or CORRUPTION or BRIBERY or ETI or SA 8000 or CODE OF ETHICS or CODE OF CONDUCT

Fig. 1. Keywords used to identify relevant literature.

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