

Leveraging Commercial Logistics Resources for Humanitarian Aid

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ABSTRACT

There is great need for humanitarian logistics to ensure that people affected have the supplies they need in order to survive. Numerous humanitarian organizations strive to coordinate the provision of humanitarian aid but often lack the logistics resources, expertise, or relationships necessary to efficiently and effectively move and deliver humanitarian aid products to the victims in need and other end beneficiaries. Commercial logistics companies can assist with logistics resources for humanitarian relief but it is unclear what would motivate a logistics company to provide that support. The organizational behavior and humanitarian logistic literatures are reviewed to propose a research model and develop a survey instrument.

Keywords: humanitarian, logistics, 3PL, partnering

INTRODUCTION

Efforts to improve the provision of humanitarian aid have positive effects both in economic and human terms. Recent increases in global population, the expectations of aid recipients, increased pressure from donors and the increased severity of natural disasters ensure that the demand for moving relief supplies to where they are needed will continue to rise [1] [2] [3].

Humanitarian logistics is “the process of planning, implementing and controlling the efficient, cost-effective flow and storage of goods and materials as well as related information, from the point of origin to the point of consumption for the purpose of meeting the end beneficiary’s requirements” [4]. Humanitarian logistics supports the need for both disaster relief and continuous aid work. Disaster relief efforts address natural disasters and other sudden onset calamities that often receive coverage in the press. No less important are the ongoing continuous aid work that address global health, and slow onset events such as famine, drought, and plagues.

Improvement to the logistics function in humanitarian relief is of particular interest as logistics costs make up 80% of the annual expenditures of most humanitarian aid organizations [5]. Additionally, donors are pushing for better performance and more transparency so there is great benefit in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian logistics functions [3] [2]. Commercial logistics functions have benefited from research and intentional investments to improve efficiency and effectiveness while humanitarian logistics functions are said to be lagging behind their commercial

counterparts [6]. Humanitarian practitioners and researchers have called for the application of commercial supply chain management philosophies and techniques to humanitarian operations in order to improve response effectiveness and cost efficiency [7]. These factors combined motivate the need for actionable research that can help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian logistics.

However, transferring commercial logistics knowledge to the humanitarian sector is complicated [8]. The humanitarian logistics space has inherent differences that make direct application of commercial practices difficult [9]. Unique aspects of humanitarian logistics include uncertainty in timing, demand, and location of needs, the often absence of infrastructure following a disaster, the decoupling of material and financial flows, dynamic organizational structures, a lack of performance measures, and the absence of a clear “voice of the customer” and profit motive focus [1] [8]. Those differences suggest that innovative solutions are needed to blend commercial and humanitarian logistics practices.

Large humanitarian aid agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Red Cross and World Food Programme are building their internal logistics expertise through contracts with logistics service providers (LSPs), establishing their own internal logistics staff, and investing in their own capital equipment. However, hundreds if not thousands of NGOs providing critical developmental and emergency relief do not have internal logistics resources and expertise, nor can they afford the necessary investment.

MedWish International (www.medwish.org), a Cleveland-based not-for-profit organization, has great expertise in gathering, sorting, and preparing shipments of donated medical supplies and equipment. The 7.0 magnitude earthquake that struck the island nation of Haiti required that MedWish seek logistics expertise to provide an immediate small shipment of sutures, followed by 10 shipping containers of medical supplies, and subsequent shipments of 2-4 containers per week for the next two months. Like many NGOs, MedWish International had the necessary programmatic expertise to support their mission - to gather and process in-kind medical donations - but logistics expertise to coordinate complex expedited global transportation was beyond their capabilities. A LSP stepped in, volunteering their expertise to arrange the shipments. The moves required both the LSP’s truck and ocean container resources integrated with the NGO’s in-country contacts to ensure that the goods were accepted at Haiti’s severely overtaxed port, expedited through customs and delivered to the appropriate medical facilities.

Private sector supply chain infrastructure and excess capacity can also be used for humanitarian efforts. Following the landfall of Hurricane Katrina in the U.S, Walmart was recognized for its efforts using its own vehicles and employees to transport critical supplies into the U.S. southeast and additionally donated 25 vacant facilities for use as shelters and other emergency facilities [10].

These exchanges between commercial and humanitarian organizations have the opportunity to benefit both organizations. The humanitarian organization benefits from the commercial logistic provider’s knowledge, resources, and relationships. Benefits to the commercial logistics provider can include positive media exposure, improved employee morale, and applying their knowledge to new situations that expand their agility [11].

This study reviews the organizational behavior and humanitarian logistics literatures to propose a research model identifying the actions and outcomes for commercial logistics service providers (LSPs) that engage in supporting humanitarian aid organizations and, furthermore, to develop a survey instrument to evaluate what motivates LSPs to support humanitarian relief efforts. In the

following sections, we examine relevant theoretical lenses and propose our research framework, then introduce research methodology, and conclude with a plan for piloting a survey.

THEORY

There are a range of reasons that a for-profit organization would engage in humanitarian aid. From a self-interest perspective, the company may be attempting to protect their assets, gain market share through reputational effects, or improve their appeal to stockholders [12]. The company may have altruistic goals related to being a “good corporate citizen”. Actions of companies which serve a social benefit that is not required commercially come under the frame of corporate social responsibility (CSR) [13].

CSR research identifies four categories of activity for companies, economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic [14]. The economic and philanthropic categories are of particular interest in this study. The economic category recognizes that CSR activities may affect the economic performance of the company via commercial aspects including increased revenues and tax benefits. The philanthropic category goes beyond the legal and fiduciary responsibilities of company to recognize altruistic actions. Collectively these activities have been attributed to the need for businesses to have a stable environment and an effective workforce [15]. This interdependence between business and society creates a situation where businesses may act in ways that are socially responsible but may or may not be directly attributed to their bottom line.

When the expected outcomes are attributed to the organization’s corporate social responsibility activities, “doing good” leads to positive outcomes for the organization. Companies who have moved toward more socially responsible actions emphasize the value of maintaining the triple bottom line which includes not just profit but also people and the planet [16].

Leadership Engagement

Social entrepreneurs are individuals who are committed to making a positive difference on society [17]. They may start not-for-profit organizations or they may be involved with for-profit companies that maintain a balance between their commitment to profit and their communities. Some companies are founded with the understanding that they have a role to play in society above and beyond products and services [18]. Patagonia embeds its CSR position in their mission statement and is known for their commitment to environmental and social causes beyond the manufacture and sale of clothing.

Research finds that key individuals in an organization influence CSR policies [19]. The CEO and top management team are particularly relevant to the implementation of an organization’s CSR policies [20]. Furthermore, organizations use long-term incentives to motivate the CEO to improve CSR performance [21].

Those actions by leaders influence the employees of the organization. CSR and ethical actions by leadership are found to positively impact employees and encourage them to engage in socially responsible behaviors [19] [22].

P1: Social entrepreneurship is positively associated with firm CSR benefits

Philanthropic Activity

Employees as well as external stakeholders pressure businesses to demonstrate social responsibility [23]. Social responsibility can be demonstrated through corporate donations, matching of employee donations, and in-kind donations of goods and services. In response to the 2004 tsunami, Danone, donated and distributed food through its own network as well as through the World Food Programme. Similarly, Wipro and HCL donated their food products and sent their employees to help with the removal of debris [23].

These good deeds, when publicized, impact customer loyalty and trust, investor decisions, shareholder wealth [24] [25] [26]. These customer oriented benefits are enduring even in the presence of certain types of negative information regarding the company [27].

P2: Corporate philanthropic activity is positively associated with firm CSR benefits.

Employee Engagement

Beyond the company donating their resources, engaging employees directly in socially responsible activities can impact the firm. Employees who are involved in CSR activities are more likely to speak highly about the company than those who are not involved [28]. Positive feedback from the community also encourages the employees to identify themselves with the organization which impacts their likelihood to engage in socially responsible behaviors [22].

P3: Employee engagement is positively associated with firm CSR benefits.

Internal Communication

Internal stakeholders may also benefit from communications about the company's CSR efforts. Internal CSR communications have been identified as a powerful (but under-utilized) method for improving the company's image with its own employees who benefit and may then share the message with external stakeholders [28]. The trifecta for employee benefits include increased employee motivation, improved opinion of the company, and improved retention [29].

P4: Internal communication is positively associated with firm CSR benefits.

External Communication

Another motivator is the public image that is established by strategically communicating CSR activities to a broad range of external stakeholders. A strong communication plan for CSR activities helps the firm maximize the benefits of the activities by generating goodwill which contributes to the company's positive self-image [28]. Companies often use their website to present themselves as socially responsible via press releases, reports, links to other webpages, special statements, and audio/video links [30].

These external communications directly impact external stakeholders but also indirectly impact internal stakeholders when positive feedback from the community makes employees "feel good" about working for the company [22].

P5: External communication is positively associated with firm CSR benefits.

Firm Benefits of CSR Activities

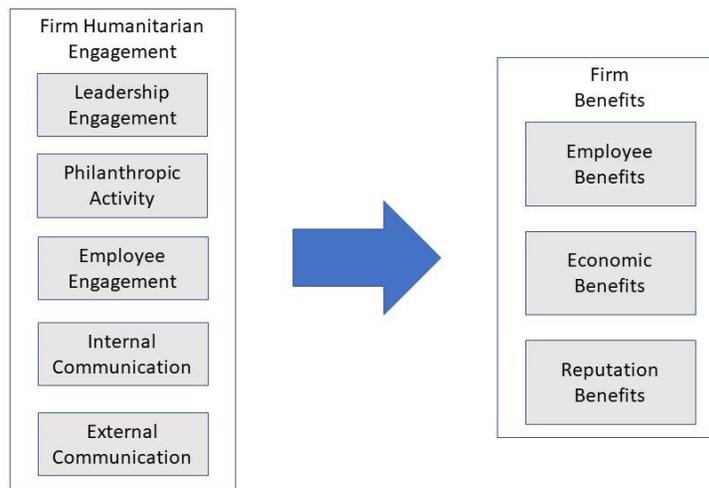
Reputation literature identifies the value of companies engaging in activities that improve their reputation for “doing good”. The positive reputation established ex-ante helps mitigate the negative consequences when crises occur [31]. Indirectly, CSR activities influence consumer’s perceptions of company’s products [32], their intention to purchase those products [33], and their loyalty to the company’s products [27]. CSR investments generally benefit the geographic region where the company operates and invests [34].

Engaging in humanitarian efforts can be driven by the organization’s desire to affirm the values stated in their mission [23]. Externally, this enhances its image and reputation which can impact sales and recruitment efforts related to employment [35]. Investors may directly consider social responsibility when determining their equity investments [18]. Indirectly, investors are found to consider CSR activities as an indicator of the company’s fairness which sets and expectation of how fairly the investor will be treated in the future [24].

Internally, these actions have been associated with improved employee satisfaction, performance and retention [29]. Specifically, communications regarding CSR activities are shown to positively impact employee engagement (productivity, decreased attrition, and increased internal reputation) [36].

Financially, the firm can benefit from tax deductions by tracking their costs associated with CSR activities and identifying them as expenses or, depending on how they were distributed, as charitable donations [18].

Figure 1: Theoretic Model of Firm Motivators and Outcomes



CSR in the Humanitarian Aid Context

Commercial entities respond when disaster strikes. Recovery support for the 2004 Tsunami brought record levels of corporate cash contributions, employee matching contributions, and in-kind donations [23]. Interestingly, in-kind contributions went beyond donating supplies and included

lending leadership personnel and logistics staff [23]. This can be a significant benefit to relief agencies as research has shown that they do not have an adequate number of logisticians on their staff and that training is often lacking [37].

A recent study of the relationships between LSPs and NGOs found that commercial firms provide access to resources, knowledge, training, and specific services (freight forwarding, customs, and transportation) [38]. This is in addition to cash and in-kind donations for disaster relief [12].

LSPs have strategic resources beyond cash that can be beneficial in an emergency. Specifically, logistics companies have technology, knowledge, experience, inventory, processes, facilities, manpower, and equipment that humanitarian aid organizations often lack. As companies approach CSR in ways that leverage their strengths, it can be a source of opportunity, innovation, and competitive advantage [34].

METHODOLOGY

Private sector organizations can engage directly with NGOs to assist in the provision of humanitarian aid or they can work with existing intermediary organizations. Due to the differences in organizational culture between for-profit and not-for-profit organizations, developing partnerships can be difficult. One NGO noted that developing a relationship with a corporate partner can require 12-18 months of effort [23].

The American Logistics Aid Network - ALAN (www.alanaid.org) is non-profit organization that seeks to connect LSPs who wish to help in times of need with NGOs who have limited resources. In addition to directly serving NGOs, ALAN connects LSPs with companies such as Home Depot, Lowes, and Wegman's who have goods to donate but are unable to transport these goods to where they are needed. ALAN's web portal serves as a clearinghouse where NGOs post their urgent needs including warehouse space, transportation, material handling equipment, and expertise. Companies can then review these requests and assist where their capabilities and competencies best match current needs.

ALAN was established in 2005 in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. During the aftermath of Katrina, there was an enormous response in terms of humanitarian aid but a lack of effective distribution, coordination, and transportation to deliver the aid to New Orleans from across the country. A group of industry professionals established ALAN after seeing the issues with the response to Katrina, and by 2008 the system was fully in place to respond to Hurricane Gustav. Working primarily in the U.S., ALAN participating organizations helped respond to Hurricane Irma, Hurricane Maria, and Hurricane Harvey which devastated the U.S. southeast and the Caribbean, and Hurricane Florence.

ALAN partners with many LSPs and governmental organizations within the United States. They have established relationships with all regions of the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) as well as many state agencies. ALAN's relationships are primarily collaborative with FEMA and state agencies, as ALAN partners typically do not get involved with transporting for FEMA or state agencies. There is coordination between ALAN and the FEMA/state agencies to ensure there is no duplication of effort. ALAN also partners with many commercial logistics companies on a regular basis, such as Saddle Creek Logistics and Kane is Able. Additionally, ALAN has relationships with a multitude of industry trade groups such as the Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals (CSCMP), APICS, and the Global Cold Chain Alliance (GCCA).

Pilot Survey

Based on extant empirical research, the authors developed a survey instrument to evaluate organizational humanitarian actions and the perceived benefits of those actions as provided in the research model (Figure 1). The proposed survey instrument is included in the appendix and is currently being evaluated by industry and academic subject matter experts before being introduced to an aid intermediary for distribution to their constituents. The authors anticipate that preliminary results from the survey will be available for presentation at the conference.

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APPENDIX

	Item	Source					
Humanitarian Engagement	With regard to your work location, to what extent do you agree with these statements?		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Employee Engagement	1. My company encourages employees to be advocates of charities of their choice.	Shafiq et al. 2014					
	2. My company encourages employees to be advocates of charities the company has identified to support.	Shafiq et al. 2014					
	3. My company encourages employees to engage in activities for charities during work time.	Shafiq et al. 2014					
	4. My company compensates employees when they participate in charity events on paid time (work release).	Shafiq et al. 2014					
Philanthropic Activity	1. My company provides financial support to non-profit organizations.	Shafiq et al. 2014					
	2. My company matches employee donations to charities within the community.	Shafiq et al. 2014					
	3. My company has personnel dedicated to managing philanthropic activities.	New scale					
Social Entrepreneurship	1. Company leadership is strongly committed to supporting charitable causes.	New scale					
	2. Company charitable activities are a grassroots effort driven primarily by the employees.	New scale					
	3. My company has a long tradition of engaging with charities.	New scale					
	4. Having a positive social impact is part of the mission of my company.	New scale					
	5. Company leadership and employees volunteer and serve together in sponsored events.	New scale					
Communication	1. My company regularly provides information to our external stakeholders about our charitable activities.	Shafiq et al. 2014					
	2. My company communicates regularly with non-profit organizations about how we can be involved in their work.	New scale					
	3. My company regularly provides information to our employees about our charitable activities.	Du, Bhattacharya, Sen 2010					
Firm Benefits			Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Employee Benefits	1. Employee turnover is lower for my company compared to similar companies.	New scale					
	2. People seek employment with my company because of our charitable work.	Sen et al 2006					
	3. Most of the employees participate in charitable activities.	New scale					
Firm Financial Benefits	1. Charitable activities have opened new business opportunities.	New scale					
	2. The costs of participation in charitable activities are captured for accounting and tax purposes.	New scale					
	3. My company has a budget and plan for charitable contributions.	New scale					
Community Benefits	1. Our charitable efforts positively affect how the outside community views my company.	Dawkins 2004; Du, Bhattacharya & Sen 2010					
	2. Our charitable activities build goodwill in the community.	Kramer 2002					
	3. Our charitable activities positively effect our reputation.	Sen et al. 2006					
Company Specific Questions			Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
How often does your company:	1. Provided supply chain related services and/or expertise to non-profit organizations at no charge.	New scale					
	2. Provided supply chain related services and/or expertise to non-profit organizations for a reduced cost.	New scale					
	3. Provided supply chain related services and/or expertise to non-profit organizations as part of our normal billing rate.	New scale					
Control Variables							
	Firm Ownership (public or private)	Shafiq et al. 2014					
	Unionized workforce (yes/no)	Shafiq et al. 2014					
	Single location firm (yes/no)						
	Respondent's Role (Sr Ldrshp, Middle Mgmt, Supervisory, Other)						
	Number of employees at location	Shafiq et al. 2014					
	Annual Revenue of Your Company	< \$1 Million \$1 to \$5 million \$6 to \$10 million \$11 to \$20 million \$21 to \$50 million Over \$50 million					
Communication Channels							
My company uses the following channels to communicate with stakeholders about our charitable activities		Du, Bhattacharya, Sen 2010	Yes	No	Do not know		
	Internal communication to employees (newsletters, blogs, etc.)						
	Company Annual Report						
	Press releases						
	Annual Corporate Responsibility Report						
	Company website						
	Advertising						
	Media coverage (TV, radio, newspaper, etc.)						
	Independent 3rd party website						
	Website of the charitable organization						
	Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, etc.)						
	Other: specify						