

FASHION SUPPLY CHAIN WORKER EXPLOITATION: A STRUCTURAL CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Worker exploitation is an ongoing problem globally within the textile and garment industry. Multinational and local retailers often grapple with the issue of identifying and navigating perpetrators along inherently intricate supply chains. This paper examines the critical strategic cross-cultural knowledge within this setting necessary to develop diagnostic and relational competency. Moreover, it introduces Structural Cultural Knowledge Theory (SCKT) within the Thailand fashion industry supply-chain with the aim of demonstrating how critical knowledge structures are essential in developing marketing relationships, while identifying and mitigating worker exploitation. The findings are based upon 24 in-depth interviews among fashion manufacturers within Chiang Mai, Thailand who collaborate within dyadic manufacturing and export relationships.

Structural Cultural Knowledge Theory (“SCKT”) is grounded on the principle that cultural knowledge is hierarchical in nature, and has a declarative foundation. Well-formed emic-procedural knowledge is grounded on a richly developed network of declarative knowledge. Moreover, declarative knowledge is best developed when based upon a theoretically-driven understanding of cultural variance. In other words, well developed declarative knowledge foundations are critical antecedents to the formation of rich emic procedural structures.

As useful cultural knowledge is developed, etic procedural structures are replaced by emic procedural structures. Vital to SCKT is delineation of the three dimensions of cultural knowledge: declarative, etic procedural, and emic procedural. It is the interaction among the three knowledge types, which lead to the development of cultural knowledge structures. Of critical importance is the nature of the knowledge and the type of intelligence advantageously critical to a firm’s success.