

The three-week program in MIT is a great networking conference where 200 students from 50 countries with passion in supply chain congregate and collaborate. The IAP is a true eye-opener as top executives from corporations such as BASF, Adidas and UPS shared their experience and supply chain practice to improve our understanding on the current supply chain challenges in different industries and the way to move forward. For instance, BASF constructed their vertically integrated Verbund complex close to the raw materials using a scalable design to enjoy cost-savings benefits and provide them with the flexibility to expand the site for additional capacity shall the need arise. All strategic decisions of the chemical giant were consolidated and performed at the global unit for improved coordination between regional offices. Besides that, they decided to keep all the units together instead of spinning off each niche business units into independent vertical units as practiced by their notable competitors such as DuPont and Shell which favours specialization. Hence, BASF continues to innovate and successfully “recycled” the by-products of their upstream products which have no direct use into products from a different product value chain, improving their bottomline substantially.

On another end of the spectrum, academic researchers are studying supply chain from a macro perspective and included the change in demographics and resilience into their design of supply chain networks, not focusing only on the conventional forecasting and inventory methods. The AgeLab realized disruptions in conventional supply chains due to the increase in life expectancy and decrease in fertility rate. The postponement of household formation with smaller household sends shockwaves around as this demographic shift saw the buildings of micro apartment living blocks (approx. 275-300 sq ft) and pet centre (aka Woof Park) at the expense of childcare parks as the newer generations prefers to have pets rather than babies. The sharing of this insight is truly memorable as the programs offers a bird-eye view of supply chain as a whole and encouraged us to innovate and think out of the box which leads to disruptive technologies such as the iTunes which changes the paradigm of song purchasing as user are allowed to purchase individual tracks instead of the entire album.

Besides corporate practitioners and academia, aspiring young supply chain specialists were also introduced to startup's such as UberFreight which offers a platform that is simple to use and offering fixed freight rates, leveraging on the

success of Uber. However, this startup runs a different supply chain and business model from Uber as UberFreight focus to bring down the conventional transactional and labour cost to improve the profitability of truck owner operators.

These informative seminars is even coupled with industry tours to allow us to see the management of different distribution centres right before our very own eyes and witness how academic theories were put into practice. The state-of-the-art Walgreen Distribution Centre which is a fully automated facility designed to empower the disabled community had elevated corporate social responsibility to a whole new level by collaborating with Non-Government Organisations (NGO) to train the disabled and fully integrate them into the workforce.

Besides, supply chain students from MIT SCALE Network were also introduced to the blockchain technology which had a far-reaching potential that just cryptocurrency as the open ledger concept would promote transparency and vastly improve the efficiency and robustness of transactions. Students were then offered to golden opportunity to make use of the latest technologies to pitch innovative business ideas for the APICS competition and get their hands dirty in a simulated environment by competing in the Fresh Connection Challenge. The simulation helps prospective supply chain managers to understand the importance of collaboration of sales, purchase and operations and ensure an efficient supply chain. Dominance by any departments would hurt the profitability of the business as a whole and it's all down to compromise by all business units. Besides that, supply chain also emphasized the importance of sound suppliers and customers relations. For instance, General Motors had the upper hand against their suppliers due to their purchasing power as explained by Michael Porters Five Forces and their negotiation antics had caused a handful of their suppliers to go out of business. On the other hand, Toyota worked closely with their vendors to improve their processes on a continuous basis that drives improvements to generate a win-win situation for both Toyota and their suppliers.

All these technical skills were finally rounded off with soft skills as the implementation of supply chain strategies requires buy-in from stakeholders and this requires negotiations. Hence, students were provided with tools to focus on human elements using the VELD technique, focussing on Vision, Emotions, Logic and Detail as this

three week program aims to nurture well-rounded supply chain experts for the market.

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