



Overcoming Crisis: Correlations between Procurement Professionals Social Skills and Mitigation of Supply Chain Disruptions

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Abstract: *Procurement professionals can benefit from developing a range of social skills to build strong supplier relationships. Some key social skills include assertive communication, active listening, empathy, negotiation and conflict resolution, cultural awareness and the ability to collaborate and work within teams. Additionally, skills in influencing and persuasion, as well as the understanding of ethical business practices can also be crucial in fostering positive and long-lasting supplier relationships. During a crisis (pandemic, geopolitical, climate changes) the procurement people's experience and their social abilities are used in specific contexts. This study explores the perception of different procurement professionals from a multinational enterprise with several global supply chains. The quantitative analysis was conducted based on a survey and the online questionnaire was applied to several procurement roles. To interpret the results the Pearson correlations were used with the conclusion that the initial statements are validated. These results have shown the unanimous opinion that procurement professionals' experience and soft skills, backed up by risk monitoring systems, are essential to mitigate unexpected disturbances. The conclusion highlights the need for enterprises to support soft skills and negotiation training for their employees. During crises, making use of the procurement professionals' acquired experience and existing social skills, supported by informatic tools for risk monitoring, is an effective strategy for mitigating disruptions.*

Keywords: *Procurement professionals, social skills, supplier relationship, risk monitoring, crises.*

1. INTRODUCTION

For procurement and supply chain professionals concerned with risk and the future of procurement, the attention is to ensure a resilient supply chain. The crises such as the past coronavirus pandemic or current geopolitical uncertainties, expose the volatility of today's global supply chains (Haas & Huber, 2023). Going forward, enterprises are under increasing pressure to adapt and learn from the lessons of the pandemic (von Ehren & Marshal, 2024). Many researchers and consultants have extensively discussed ways to strengthen the resilience of supply chains. Despite this, there has been relatively less emphasis on the necessary social skills required by procurement professionals to overcome the crises. Therefore, this study is intended to address this gap and bring attention to the set of skills and essential knowledge for procurement professionals to navigate and strengthen supply chains in the face of disruptions.

Enterprises need to strategically invest in procurement capabilities, technologies and people to navigate the risks arising within the global supply chain (Bednarski, Roscoe et al, 2023, pp.1-27). In 2020, the coronavirus pandemic changed the world in significant ways, many people had to adjust to working remotely and adapting their social interactions to new virtual platforms. Even the multinational global enterprises used to remote work activities had to adapt fast to the "new normal" and in this context, to counterbalance the missing direct interactions. Social skills are crucial during crises for maintaining connections through effective communication (Chen & Bonanno, 2020). The procurement businesses had to reconsider the supplier relationship and risk monitoring as priorities. In the past two years, the Russian invasion of Ukraine triggered multiple disruptions, with an impact on social and economic levels at a global stage. The war's disruptions led to further increases in raw material prices, resulting in unprecedented price levels. Market instability and recession have led to lower investment rates, high unemployment and reduced market strength (Tien, 2022).

Strong social skills can facilitate resilience, cooperation and the ability to navigate challenges during times of crisis (Kaniasty & Norris, 2009). Research suggests that social skills play a significant role in mitigating the negative impact of crises on mental health and well-being (Silva, Resurreccion et al., 2020, pp1-13).

In alignment with the research objectives, it was considered to analyze from the social skills perceived perspective a survey submitted to different procurement roles within a multinational enterprise. The focused aspects were the yearly experience of the procurement managers and their social skills in building some leverages for supply chain resilience. By “supply chain disruption” will be further considered any potential disturbance or purchasing deviation (price level, on-time delivery, quality, capacities, etc). The supply chain resilience is a vast topic, therefore was considered only some perceived aspects of the level of disruption and needed solutions to mitigate them. By examining the communication and relationship-building capabilities of procurement professionals, the study seeks to identify how these social skills contribute to resilience and adaptive strategies in the face of supply chain disruptions. Understanding these correlations can provide valuable insights for organizations seeking to enhance their procurement teams' abilities to navigate and overcome crises within the supply chain context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to systematize the statements a thorough literature review was conducted using the listed keywords. The selected literature provides a comprehensive understanding of the concepts having in focus the procurement professionals and the assets that contribute essentially to cope in times of crisis. Analyzing the academic research and other relevant studies, the following three queries have been considered:

2.1. What Would be the Connection between the Yearly Experience of the Procurement Professionals and their Ability to Mitigate Disturbances during the Crisis?

In times of crisis (such as natural disasters, economic downturns or global pandemics) supply chain disruptions can significantly impact organizations ranging from delays in production to shortages of the raw materials and essential goods (Bednarski, Roscoe et al, 2023, pp.1-27). Procurement professionals play a crucial role in mitigating these disturbances and ensuring the continuity of supply chains (Dijmarescu, 2024). Their experience and expertise are valuable assets in navigating the complexities of crises and minimizing the negative effects on organizational operations (Ghadge, Kidd et al., 2018). Procurement experts bring a lot of experience and knowledge to the business, which can be beneficial in addressing disruptions during crises. Studies have shown that experienced procurement professionals possess a deep understanding of supply chain dynamics, market conditions and supplier relationships (Thompson & Harrison, 2022). According to several authors, this expertise enables them to quickly assess the impact of disruptions and develop effective strategies to mitigate their effects (Ghadge, Kidd et al., 2018; Thompson & Harrison, 2022). The cited authors highlight the aspect that by drawing on their experience, these professionals can make informed decisions that help maintain the flow of goods and services, even in challenging circumstances. Furthermore, the ability of procurement professionals to leverage their industry-specific experience during crises can lead to the identification of alternative supply sources and the implementation of contingency plans. Other research highlighted the importance of proactive risk management strategies in mitigating supply chain disruptions (El Baz & Ruel, 2020).

Experienced procurement professionals are adept at identifying potential risks and developing robust mitigation plans, thereby reducing the vulnerability of supply chains to crises (Bednarski, Roscoe et al, 2023, pp.1-27). Their experience allows them to anticipate challenges and adapt quickly to changing conditions, ultimately securing the continuity of operations. The relationships and networks built by procurement professionals throughout their careers can be invaluable assets during crises. Studies have emphasized the significance of collaboration and communication with suppliers and other stakeholders in managing disruptions (Giunipero, Hooker et al., 2012). Procurement professionals with extensive experience have established strong relationships with suppliers, enabling them to negotiate solutions and secure priority access when needed. These relationships can be essential in obtaining critical supplies during crises and maintaining a degree of stability within the supply chain (Mwesiumo, Nujen et al., 2021).

In conclusion, the experience of procurement professionals is a critical factor in mitigating disturbances during crises (von Ehren & Marshal, 2024). Their expertise, proactive risk management strategies, and established relationships with suppliers contribute to their ability to navigate disruptions and ensure the continuity of supply chains. Organizations that recognize the value of procurement professional experience and empower these professionals to leverage their knowledge effectively can enhance their resilience in the face of crises (Haas & Huber, 2023).

With increasing yearly experience, procurement professionals become adept at proactive risk management and contingency planning to limit costs (von Ehren & Marshal, 2024). Research authors have shown that experienced professionals in procurement are better equipped to identify potential risks and develop robust mitigation strategies. Their accumulated expertise allows them to assess the impact of disruptions and implement timely measures to minimize disruptions, thereby contributing to the continuity of operations. Moreover, the relationships and networks built by procurement professionals over the years become increasingly valuable during crises. Also other studies have emphasized the importance of collaboration and communication with suppliers and stakeholders in managing disruptions (Mwesiumo, Nujen et al., 2021). Procurement professionals with years of experience have established strong relationships, enabling them to navigate through turbulent market conditions and secure priority access to critical supplies, ultimately contributing to the resilience of the supply chain.

Considering these conclusions, the logical statement and further hypothesis to demonstrate is the following:

H1: Procurement professional's experience can mitigate the disturbances during the crisis.

2.2. What would be the connection between the social skills of the Procurement professionals and their ability to mitigate disturbances during the crisis?

Generally, the ability of strategic procurement to effectively communicate, negotiate and build relationships is essential for reliable and professional business relationships. In times of crisis these social skills are even more vital as several studies have showcased. Effective communication is a fundamental social skill that can aid procurement professionals in managing disruptions during a crisis (Mwesiumo, Nujen et al., 2021). By fostering clear and transparent communication with suppliers and internal cross-functional teams, procurement professionals can facilitate the exchange of critical information, identify potential challenges and develop collaborative solutions (Cousins & Spekman, 2003).

Negotiation skills are another essential component of a procurement professional's social skill set that can contribute to mitigating disturbances during a crisis. Studies have shown that proficient negotiation skills enable procurement professionals to navigate through challenging market conditions (Gruenwald, 2020), secure alternative supply sources and establish mutually beneficial agreements with suppliers (Carr & Smeltzer, quoted by Fantazy & Mukerji, 2020). During crises, the ability to negotiate effectively can be pivotal in addressing supply shortages and mitigating disruptions, ultimately achieving the resilience of the supply chain (Mwesiumo, Nujen et al., 2021). Furthermore, according to the authors Mwesiumo, Nujen et al. the capacity to build and maintain strong relationships with suppliers and stakeholders is a critical social skill that can enhance the ability of procurement professionals to mitigate disturbances during crises. Several researches have highlighted the importance of trust and collaboration in supply chain relationships, particularly during disruptive events (Giunipero, Hooker et al., 2012; Gruenwald, 2020). Procurement professionals with strong social skills can leverage their relationships to address challenges (Fantazy & Mukerji, 2020), obtain priority access to critical resources, and implement contingency plans, thereby contributing to the continuity of supply chains during difficult times (Haas & Huber, 2023).

In addition to the aforementioned social skills, the empathetic and adaptive nature of procurement professionals can also play a significant role. The ability to understand and respond to the needs of suppliers, can foster resilience and cooperation (Pagell & Wu, 2009). According to the cited authors, in addition to traditional social skills, such as communication and negotiation, procurement

professionals can showcase emotional intelligence and cultural understanding.

It is important for supplier relationships and n-tier supply chain transparency that procurement to address and cope the challenging situations with human understanding and empathy. With an empathetic approach, procurement professionals can manage stress and build rapport with stakeholders according to Gruenwald (2020), also to build relationships with reliable suppliers. The application of cultural intelligence, which involves an understanding of diverse cultural norms and practices, can enhance the ability of procurement professionals to address international suppliers. By recognizing and respecting cultural differences, professionals can navigate through cross-border challenges and build trust with international partners (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008 cited by Ang, S., Ng, K. Y. & Rockstuhl, T. (2020). In summary, the integration of emotional intelligence and cultural intelligence into the skill set of procurement professionals can offer innovative approaches to find mitigation for disturbances during crises. As a logical consequence, the second hypothesis is the following:

H2: Procurement professional's social skills can mitigate the disturbances during the crisis.

2.3. What would be the connection between the usage of risk monitoring means by the Procurement professionals and their ability to mitigate disturbances during the crisis?

The ability of procurement professionals to monitor and manage risks is very important. It presumes the existence of specific risk management platforms and the digital skills needed to be able to use them proficiently.

Effective risk monitoring enables procurement professionals to anticipate and prepare for potential disturbances before they escalate into critical issues. Studies have shown that proactive risk management contributes to the resilience of supply chains by reducing the likelihood and severity of disruptions (Christopher & Peck, 2004). By continuously monitoring market conditions, supplier performance or other relevant factors, strategic procurement can identify early warning signs of potential disruptions and take countermeasures in due time. The utilization of advanced data analytics for risk monitoring equips procurement professionals with the capability to make informed decisions and implement targeted mitigation strategies. Several studies have shown the value of data-driven risk management in enhancing agility and responsiveness (Ali, Ahmed et al., 2021; Lu & Tomlin, 2023). According to the authors Christopher and Peck (2004) is important to categorize risks and be aware of any potential occurrences. On the other hand, as El Baz and Ruel (2022) claimed, in addition to proactive risk monitoring the set-up of robust contingency plans based on risk assessments can enhance the resilience of supply chains.

By leveraging real-time data analytics, it is possible to gain insights into potential vulnerabilities and develop agile sourcing strategies to address disruptions in a timely manner, as highlighted by authors Ali and Ahmed et al. Even before the pandemic, several researchers have showcased the need to anticipate potential disruptions based on historical data and market trends (Chopra & Sodhi, 2004; Sodhi & Tang, 2012). The combination of predictive analytics and scenario planning empowers procurement professionals to make informed decisions and develop agile risk management strategies that are adaptive to dynamic situations, according to these authors. The risk monitoring consists in usage of different software platforms internal or external developed.

Consequently, the formulated third hypothesis is the following:

H3: Procurement professional's risk monitoring can mitigate the disturbances during the crisis.

3. METHODOLOGY RESEARCH

Aligned with the research objectives and research questions, the author considered using the survey and questionnaire for a quantitative analysis. The data was collected from the 87 answers received from a structured survey sent to 115 procurement professionals from different procurement roles and various category supply chains.

Figure 1 presents the percentages of the procurement roles (Q1) of the persons contributing to the

survey and the range of the procurement professional's ages (range Q2).

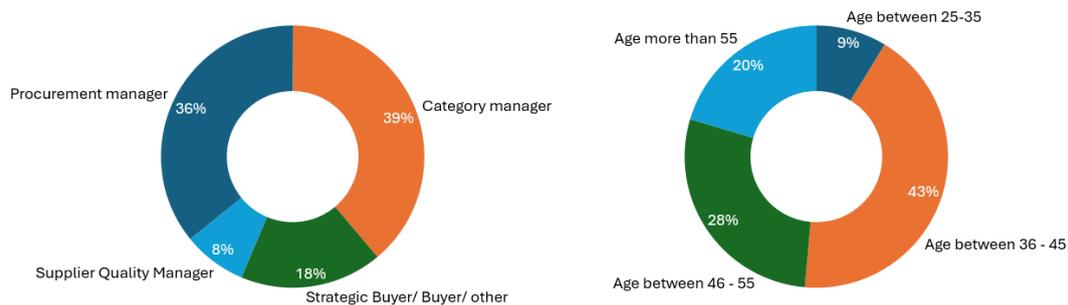


Fig1. Procurement roles and range of their age based on survey responses

Source: own author's research

The used variables are shown in Figure 2. The survey included questions about the procurement professional's perceptions of the impact and the level of disruption in various supply chains they are acting, perception in crisis time (pandemic) compared with the pre-crisis period. The data collected was analyzed using statistical techniques to identify patterns and correlations. The survey questions covered various aspects, such as:

1. Perception of the challenges faced from various risk case scenarios:

(Q5) the perceived level of the disruption (Significantly less/ Slightly unchanged/ Moderate increased/ Very increased/ Extreme increased). This variable is Q5 (Delta Level disturbance)

$$Q5 \text{ (Weighted Formula)} = \Sigma(\text{DisturbanceLevel} * \text{WeightDisturbanceLevel})$$

(Q6) = categorization of the risks (Direct suppliers/ Logistical services/ Sub-suppliers Tier-n/ Own plants production/ others interferences/

$$Q6 \text{ (Weighted Formula)} = \Sigma(\text{DisturbanceFactor} * \text{WeightDisturbanceFactor})$$

2. Mitigation actions by risk monitoring combined with procurement yearly experience:

(Q9) the risk monitoring by using specific means starting with (None/ Excel spreadsheets/ Database for financial KPI's/ Risk monitoring software platform).

$$Q9 \text{ (Weighted Formula)} = \Sigma(\text{None} * 0 + \text{RiskMonitoring} * \text{WeightRiskMonitoringFactor})$$

3. Social skills and competencies – simplified way to scale the social skills based on typically given answers (“hard to mitigate, I had to escalate to my manager”/ “several meetings conducted”/ “a compromise solution agreed”/ “understand the situation and I offered a solution”/ “no difficulties, I know this supplier since long time”)

(Q7) the level of the used social skills (Active listening and effective communication/ Ability to collaborate/ Ability to mitigate (conflict resolution)/ Influencing skills/ Ability to negotiate/ Fostering positive and long-lasting supplier relationship/ Cultural awareness)

$$Q7 \text{ (Formula)} = \Sigma(\text{Social Skills})$$

(Q2) personal age, numerical scale; (Q3) the yearly experience in the procurement role, numerical scale;

For further interpretation of the results and primarily to check the stated hypotheses the Pearson correlations were used. This statistical method measures the linear relationship between two variables. It has a range of values between -1 to 1, with a value of -1 (red) meaning a total negative linear correlation, 0 being no correlation and + 1 (green) meaning a total positive correlation.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This quantitative research method involved collecting data from various procurement professional and therefore the survey included aspects about their perception of the impact of reality during a time of crisis with specific challenges faced and the used competencies and skills to overcome.

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The data collected was analyzed using statistical techniques to identify patterns and to check whether the hypothesis was true or not.

The identified main correlations have been showcased in the following chart in the Figure 2:

Variables	Q2	Q3	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q7a	Q7b	Q7c	Q7d	Q7e	Q9
Q2 (Age)	1.000										
Q3 (Experience)	0.690	1.000									
Q5 (DELTA Level Disturbance)	-0.101	-0.129	1.000								
Q6 (Factor Disturbance)	-0.320	-0.612	-0.074	1.000							
Q7 (Social Skills)	0.438	0.515	-0.012	-0.551	1.000						
Q7a (Assertive communication)	0.328	0.376	0.080	-0.315	0.760	1.000					
Q7b (Conflict resolution)	0.318	0.402	0.028	-0.579	0.802	0.440	1.000				
Q7c (Influencing by negotiation)	0.318	0.355	-0.057	-0.496	0.888	0.648	0.764	1.000			
Q7d (Fostering long relationship based on)	0.477	0.560	-0.029	-0.454	0.725	0.586	0.366	0.565	1.000		
Q7e (International cultural awareness)	0.273	0.371	-0.056	-0.380	0.769	0.406	0.609	0.572	0.532	1.000	
Q9 (Risk monitoring factor)	0.088	0.225	-0.451	-0.377	0.277	0.188	0.382	0.256	0.058	0.202	1.000

Fig2. Green/ Red – Positive/ Negative Pearson correlations

Source: own author's research

As a validation test and control questions had been observed the following positive correlations with values over 0.5 for the Q2 (Age) and Q3 (Experience) and the Green column of Q7 (Social skills) as a weighted sum of the Q7a/Q7b/Q7c/Q7d/Q7e.

Further analyzing the data from the perspective of the stated hypotheses were identified the following results:

The intersection between Q3 (Experience) and Q6 (Factor of Disturbance) is negative and less than -0.6. The correlation stands for the logical interpretation that procurement professionals over time improve their effective communication skills and business competencies which equips them with strategic analytical thinking and the ability to mitigate disturbances. Lessons learned and best practices acquired make them able to foresee risks. This is a simplified use case study to consider the visible part of the "risk mitigation icebergs", the so-called under-the-water procurement realm of the risk mitigation is not this study's scope. By engaging with stakeholders across the organization and establishing partnerships with suppliers, procurement professionals can leverage collective knowledge to develop a comprehensive mitigation strategy. Experience is an essential key factor needed for the procurement professional's role profiles. According to this result and in conclusion, the procurement professional's experience can mitigate the disturbances during the crisis (H1).

The intersection between Q7 (Social skills) and Q6 (Factor of Disturbance) is equal -0,551 and this negative correlation showcases the reciprocity of these two variables. Furthermore, each of the five considered social skills (Q7a/Q7b/Q7c/Q7d/Q7e) ranges in the same negative correlations, apparently the Q7b (Conflict resolution) = -0,579 having the highest impact for the Q6 (Factor of Disturbance). It is important to mention that the variables are perceived notions expressed by the respondents and the crisis time might be a subjective context. Nevertheless, it is well understood that the procurement professional role profiles are subject from very good to high-level social skills either naturally or acquired being important entrepreneurship profile assets (as leadership, spokesman, negotiator, networking, compliance and trustful ability to build supplier relationships). This result demonstrates the second hypothesis and namely: Procurement professionals' social skills can mitigate disturbances during the crisis (H2).

The intersection between Q9 (Risk monitoring factor) and Q5 (Delta level of Disturbance) is a negative correlation equal -0,451 and from the range of the column Q5 shows the highest impact over the mitigation means. The interpretation is that besides the social skills and specific required competencies, the usage of the risk monitoring platforms is highly effective. As a logical consequence, the utilization of predictive analytics and risk monitoring platforms (financial KPI's databases, risk assessment software, other intelligent platforms) offer innovative approaches for procurement professionals to mitigate disturbances during a crisis. Scenario planning allows procurement professionals to simulate and prepare for various crisis scenarios, providing valuable insights into potential impacts (Sheffi & Rice, 2005). This result considers the validity of the third

hypothesis which states that procurement professional's risk monitoring can mitigate the disturbances during the crisis (H3).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study showcase a clear consensus among procurement professionals regarding the critical role of social skills and experience in mitigating supply chain disruptions during crises. The results indicated a strong connection between the perceived importance of social skills and the ability to manage supply chain disturbances effectively. The survey highlights the significance of combined experience and social skills, emphasizing the need for enterprises to prioritize developing and supporting soft skills including negotiation training and the digital skills needed for their procurement teams. This study has limitations in scaling the priorities between social skills, competencies and digital analytics means. Such research serves as a call to action for organizations to recognize and harness the potential of social skills and experience in procurement professionals as indispensable assets for procurement professional role profiles.

Overall, this research underscores that effective procurement is not only about reacting to crises but also proactively adapting to various dynamic contexts. The supplier relationship procurement approach has to be constructed based on trust and long win-win business commitments. It is essential to establish a strong foundation built on mutual trust for successful business partnerships even more in complex multi-tier supply chains. For a beneficial supplier relationship, procurement professionals have to align objectives balanced with soft skills such as assertive communication, empathy, cultural awareness and the ability to convince and negotiate. As procurement organizations navigate the complexities of digital transformation internally and economic crisis and geopolitical shifts externally, the insights provided here serve as a roadmap for adapting strategies and driving sustainable growth. By empowering procurement teams with the necessary social skills, experience, and technological tools for risk monitoring, enterprises can enhance their capacity to effectively navigate through crises and ensure the resilience of their supply chains.

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