**APPLE INC. - GLOBAL PROCUREMENT AND SUPPLY STRATEGY**

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# Abstract

This paper evaluates Apple's procurement and supply chain strategy, discussing its strengths and weaknesses. Apple's strengths include its focus on supplier relationship management, supply chain transparency, and supplier diversity. However, the company faces limitations such as overreliance on key suppliers, human rights and labour issues, environmental impact, and cost. To address these limitations, Apple can diversify its supplier base, enhance transparency and collaboration, develop sustainability metrics, adopt digital technologies, and support SMEs. Although these challenges are not unique to Apple, companies must continuously improve their supply chain practices to meet stakeholder expectations. By adopting best practices in procurement and supply chain management, Apple can mitigate risks, improve efficiency, and enhance its reputation as a socially responsible company. Ultimately, with the right approach, Apple can continue to innovate, maintain high-quality products and services, achieve its sustainability goals, and remain competitive in the market.

# Introduction

Apple Inc. is a well-known international technology company with its headquarters located in Cupertino, California. The company was founded in 1976 by Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak, and Ronald Wayne, and since then it has developed into one of the richest companies in the world. Apple creates, sells, and advertises retail goods, online services, and portable electronics. The majority of its most well-liked products, according to Phillips (2023), are iOS devices, such as iPhones, iPod touches, Mac laptops, Apple Watches, and Apple Television.

Apple's approach to procurement and supply chain management is focused on innovation, quality, and sustainability. The company has implemented a number of initiatives aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of its procurement and supply chain management processes. Apple's Supplier Code of Conduct is one such initiative. It outlines the company's expectations for its suppliers in terms of labour and human rights, environmental protection, and ethical business practices. Apple works with suppliers who are committed to meeting these standards (Copacino, 2019, p.34).

In regards to innovation, Apple's supply chain management and procurement strategy is focused on collaborating extensively with suppliers to create revolutionary technologies and commodities that may be utilized in its goods (Copacino, 2019, p. 35). Additionally, the business places a high priority on corporate social responsibility and sustainability. Apple has established a target of using recyclable or sustainable resources in the production of all of its merchandise. The business has also put in place a variety of programs to lessen the impact of its operations and goods on the environment.

We will employ pertinent scholarly ideas, including supplier relationship management, transparency in the supply chain, diversity of suppliers, closed-loop logistics, and corporate social responsibility, to evaluate Apple's procurement and supply chain management approach. We will assess the organization's procurement and supply chain management strategy, pinpoint its advantages and disadvantages, and offer suggestions for development. In general, this paper will include a thorough examination of Apple's supply chain management and procurement strategy, emphasizing both its strong points and places for development.

# Procurement and Supply Chain Management Approach of Apple

Apple Inc.'s procurement and supply chain management approach is centred on the company's design-led culture and strict quality standards (Gartner, 2015). The company has a vertically integrated supply chain that is designed to give it complete control over the manufacturing process, from component sourcing to final assembly. This strategy allows Apple to have greater control over the quality of its products and reduce the risk of supply chain disruptions.

To maintain a trustworthy and effective supply chain, Apple's procurement approach requires collaborating extensively with a small number of carefully chosen suppliers. The organization gets its raw materials, components, and finished goods from a network of more than 200 suppliers in more than 40 nations. Rigorous performance standards apply to Apple's suppliers, and the business frequently evaluates their performance to make sure they are meeting the standards (Kang et al., 2023).

Apple has also implemented a supplier code of conduct that outlines the company's expectations for its suppliers. This code of conduct covers a range of issues, including labour and human rights, environmental responsibility, and business ethics (Nyamweya, 2021). The company expects its suppliers to comply with these standards and conducts regular audits to ensure compliance.

## Strengths of Apple's Procurement and Supply Chain Strategy

Apple's procurement and supply chain strategy has several strengths that have contributed to the company's success. These strengths include:

### Vertical Integration

Apple has been able to create a supply chain that is more reliable and efficient because to its vertical integration strategy. Apple can make sure that every part of its goods complies with the necessary requirements because it has full oversight over the overall procedure, from development to distribution (Kaponda, 2020, p. 24). By getting rid of middlemen in the supply chain, the company has also been able to save costs. Apple has been able to negotiate better rates and lower expenses connected with logistics, and coordination since it owns many of the businesses involved in making its goods. Apple's vertical integration model has also improved the time it takes for its products to reach the market, allowing it to launch new items more quickly and adapt to market changes.

The risk of supply chain disruptions can also be reduced through vertical integration. Apple can lessen the probability of delays brought on by external causes like catastrophes, civil unrest, or supplier insolvency by controlling every aspect of its supply chain (Kaponda, 2020, p. 24). For instance, Apple had the ability to utilize its own chip-making facilities to make the necessary chips while there was a market scarcity of memory chips, which prevented disruptions in the manufacturing of its products.

Apple has effectively implemented the "make or buy" theory of decision-making into its approach to product creation. The corporation has concentrated on producing those goods and services in-house that are crucial to the business strategically, like chip manufacturing and design. Apple has done this in order to safeguard its intellectual property and preserve its competitive edge. Alternatively, non-core tasks like shipping, logistics, and packaging have been delegated to outside vendors (López & Ruiz-Bentez, 2020, p. 100). With the help of its external vendors' experience and efficiency, Apple has been able to concentrate on its core skills.

### Supplier Relationships

Apple's strong supplier relationships have been instrumental in ensuring a reliable and efficient supply chain. Apple works closely with a select group of suppliers, which enables it to develop strong relationships with them ([Ashcroft](https://supplychaindigital.com/author/sean-ashcroft), 2022). The company also requires its suppliers to adhere to strict quality and ethical standards, which has helped to establish a culture of trust and collaboration in its supply chain.

The significance of supplier relations in an organization's supply chain has been extensively examined in the field of academia. Strong supplier ties can result in improved quality control, cost savings, and enhanced productivity (Ashcroft, 2022). The idea of supplier relationship management (SRM), which stresses the value of forming long-term alliances with important suppliers to generate mutually advantageous results, is in line with Apple's strategy for handling supplier relationships.

### Quality Standards

In order to guarantee consumer happiness and preserve brand reputation, businesses must implement quality management into their supply chain activities. According to research, implementing quality management techniques can raise customer satisfaction, which in turn can boost revenue and profitability (López & Ruiz-Bentez, 2020, p. 100).

Apple's strict quality standards align with the ISO 9000 standard, which emphasizes the importance of continuous improvement and customer satisfaction. The ISO 9000 standard provides guidelines for quality management systems and requires companies to establish processes to monitor and improve quality performance (López & Ruiz-Benítez, 2020, p.100).

Additionally, businesses that implement quality management practices can lower costs and boost supply chain efficiency. Apple can prevent expensive recalls or defective goods by imposing stringent screening and inspection procedures that allow them to identify and solve quality problems early in the production phase. According to Munir et al. (2019), this strategy can also assist to decrease waste and boost production, which will save money for both Apple and its suppliers.

The Samsung Galaxy Note 7 is a current illustration of the significance of quality control in supply chain operations. When multiple of its Galaxy Note 7 devices caught fire in 2016, Samsung was forced to issue a widespread recall. A flawed battery design was found to be the root of the problem; this flaw might have been found and corrected with the application of efficient quality management procedures (Munir et al., 2019).

### Supplier Code of Conduct

Apple's supplier code of conduct exemplifies its dedication to moral and environmentally friendly business operations. The code makes suppliers accountable for their conduct and lays out precise objectives for them. Apple may make sure that its supply chain runs in an ethical and socially responsible way by mandating that suppliers adhere to these requirements. This strategy aids in reducing risks like bad press or legal troubles that are connected to unethical or unsustainable supply chain operations. Additionally, it fosters relationships of mutual respect and trust with all parties involved, such as clients, investors, and staff (Jaiswal & Ha-Brookshire, 2020).

The importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in supply chain management has been highlighted by numerous studies. For example, a study by Ceil (2018) found that CSR practices in the supply chain can lead to improved environmental, social, and economic performance. Another study by Basu (2023, p.21) found that CSR practices can enhance supplier performance and reduce supply chain risks. Moreover, CSR practices in the supply chain can enhance brand reputation and create a competitive advantage for companies (Stanton, 2023).

Apple's supplier code of conduct aligns with the United Nations Global Compact's ten principles, which emphasize the importance of human rights, labour rights, and environmental sustainability in business operations (Stanton, 2023). The company's commitment to these principles is evident through its efforts to reduce its environmental impact, such as using renewable energy sources and implementing recycling programs. Apple's approach to CSR in its supply chain serves as a best practice example for other companies seeking to enhance their social and environmental responsibility.

### Sustainability

Apple's devotion to sustainability is a vital aspect of its procurement and supply chain strategy since the business realizes the need of incorporating sustainable processes across its daily operations. Apple is minimizing its carbon footprint and relying less on fossil fuels through the utilization of renewable energy resources. The business's recycling initiatives also contribute to waste reduction and the development of a circular economy, in which things are recycled and reused as opposed to being thrown away (Ceil, 2018). Additionally, Apple is assisting to mitigate the risks that climate change could present to its operations and supply chain by lowering greenhouse gas emissions.

Researchers such as Fayezi & Zomorrodi (2016, p.313) have emphasized the significance of sustainability in supply chain management, since it may result in less environmental impact and increased brand reputation. Organizations can save operational costs and lessen global warming risks by implementing sustainable practices. The triple bottom line idea, which stresses the significance of social, environmental, and economic sustainability in corporate operations, is in agreement with Apple's policy on sustainability. Apple is upholding its social obligation and guaranteeing long-term corporate success by putting sustainability first, as sustainability is now a crucial consideration for numerous stakeholders when assessing an organization's performance.

## Limitations of Apple's Procurement and Supply Chain Strategy

Despite its strengths, Apple's procurement and supply chain strategy has several limitations that could impact its long-term success. These limitations include:

### Overreliance on a Few Suppliers

One significant weakness in Apple's purchasing and supply chain approach is the company's overreliance on a small number of major suppliers for essential components. This is due to the fact that any difficulties with these suppliers, such as manufacturing challenges, quality concerns, or bankruptcy, might severely interfere with Apple's supply chain and affect its capacity to ship goods to clients. This emphasizes the value of supply chain diversification and supplier relationship management. Building and keeping strong connections with suppliers is an important part of supplier relationship management since it may assist to keep them dedicated to completing orders and upholding quality standards (Wagner & Kemmerling, 2014, p. 157). On the other side, diversification entails collaborating with various suppliers for identical components, which might lower the risk of supply chain interruptions. For instance, in 2011, a major earthquake and tsunami struck Japan, seriously disrupting the world's supply chain for electronics. There were disruptions in the production of Apple's iPad 2 as a consequence of the catastrophe, which impacted several of Apple's important suppliers, including Foxconn and Toshiba. Similar problems were brought on by the COVID-19 epidemic in 2020, which affected a number of Apple's suppliers in China and other nations.

### Human Rights and Labour Issues

Apple has come under fire for the labor abuses and human rights infringements committed by its suppliers. This might harm the business's reputation and brand image, which would drive away clients. The significance of taking care of labor and human rights problems throughout the supply chain has been extensively covered in scholarly works. According to Abdukarimova and Munisa (2021), businesses have an obligation to make sure that their suppliers follow ethical labor practices and human rights standards because doing otherwise could result in legal and reputational repercussions. This emphasizes how crucial it is to have transparent supplier codes of conduct and oversight procedures in place to guarantee that suppliers are adhering to these requirements. Apple's supplier code of conduct is a positive move, but the corporation could do further by putting in place stricter monitoring procedures to guarantee compliance. For instance, Foxconn, one of Apple's major suppliers, was the subject of reports in 2010 of horrible working conditions and employee suicides. Public uproar and requests for Apple to enhance its supply chain procedures resulted from this. Apple came under fire in 2014 for using tin obtained from illegal Indonesian mines that were connected to child labor and ecological harm.

### Environmental Impact

Apple's production procedures nevertheless have a substantial environmental impact despite its dedication to sustainability. This is due to the fact that the manufacture of electrical gadgets necessitates the utilization of non-renewable resources and produces a significant quantity of waste. Transporting raw materials and finished goods can also cause greenhouse gas emissions. There has been a lot of discussion in the academic literature on how crucial it is for the supply chain to tackle environmental sustainability. According to Ray and Bag (2022), businesses have an obligation to reduce their environmental impact and risk legal and reputational repercussions if they don't. This emphasizes the significance of adopting sustainable practices along the entire supply chain, like cutting waste, utilizing renewable energy sources, and decreasing emissions from transportation.

Apple has declared a pledge to employing renewable energy sources and developing recycling programs; nevertheless, the corporation might still do better by adopting more environmentally friendly manufacturing procedures (Ray & Bag, 2022). For instance, in its "Guide to Greener Electronics," published in 2011, Greenpeace placed Apple last among large technology corporations due to its data centers' dependence on coal power. The Italian administration penalized Apple in 2019 for neglecting to publish information regarding the ecological effects of their goods.

### Cost

Apple's products may cost more than those of its rivals due to its tight supplier criteria and quality standards. The market share and profitability of the company may be affected by this. In the academic literature, it has been extensively addressed how crucial it is to maintain a balance between cost and quality in the supply chain. According to Chan et al. (2020), businesses should concentrate on minimizing the total cost of ownership, which entails taking into account expenditures for quality, delivery, and service in addition to the purchase price. This emphasizes the significance of strategic sourcing, which entails finding the most affordable suppliers without compromising quality. Apple may yet do better by maximizing its ties with suppliers to make sure it is getting the most for its money. The business may also think about different methods for product design and production that would enable it to uphold its quality requirements while cutting costs, including employing more modular designs or putting lean manufacturing principles into practice (Chan et al., 2020). For instance, Apple's premium prices compared to those of its rivals are a result of its tight supplier criteria and quality standards. For instance, the iPhone X cost $999 when it was first introduced in 2017, while the Samsung Galaxy S8 cost $725. The increased cost of the components utilized by Apple's products, in addition to the organization's focus on design and user experience, have both been cited as contributing factors to this pricing discrepancy.

## Effectiveness of Apple's Procurement and Supply Chain Strategy

Overall, Apple's supply chain and procurement strategy has been successful in helping the business achieve its objectives of providing customers with high-quality products. Because of its commitment to sustainability and its partnerships with suppliers, the organization has been able to reduce its environmental effect while maintaining control over the quality and dependability of its products (Kaponda, 2020, p.24).

Nevertheless, the organization still has to deal with a number of difficulties in its supply chain, including the danger of concentrated suppliers and the possibility of supply chain difficulties brought on by events like catastrophes and international conflicts. Furthermore, the business has previously come under fire for the working conditions at certain of its suppliers' manufacturing plants. Apple has implemented measures to tackle these problems, such as expanding the range of vendors it works with and putting in place inspections to keep an eye on the circumstances at suppliers' plants (Kang et al., 2023).

Regardless of these difficulties, Apple's supply chain management approach continues to be crucial to the company's on-going prosperity. Apple is able to preserve its competitive edge in the marketplace and satisfy the ever-evolving requirements of consumers by constantly analysing and enhancing its supply chain procedures.

# Recommendations for Improvement

Based on the analysis above, the following recommendations are made to improve the procurement and supply strategy of Apple Inc.:

## *Diversification of Suppliers*

Diversification of suppliers is a common strategy to mitigate the risks of overreliance on a few key suppliers. This strategy involves working with multiple suppliers for the same components, which can reduce the risk of supply chain disruptions. By diversifying its supplier base, Apple can ensure a stable supply of critical components and reduce the impact of any disruptions caused by external factors.

To effectively diversify its supplier base, Apple can leverage the best practices of supplier relationship management. This involves building and maintaining positive relationships with suppliers, which can help to ensure that they remain committed to fulfilling orders and meeting quality standards. Apple can also consider developing long-term relationships with key suppliers, which can foster innovation and quality improvement (Valentina, 2020, p.226).

Toyota provides a relevant example of the benefits of long-term supplier relationships. Toyota has developed a collaborative approach to working with suppliers, where suppliers are viewed as partners rather than simply vendors. This approach has resulted in increased efficiency, quality, and innovation in Toyota's supply chain. For example, Toyota's partnership with Denso, a key supplier of automotive components, has resulted in the development of new technologies and improvements in production efficiency.

## *Transparency and Collaboration*

Transparency and collaboration with suppliers are essential for ensuring that suppliers comply with ethical and sustainability standards. By establishing a clear and concise supplier code of conduct, Apple can set expectations and requirements for suppliers. The code of conduct should address issues such as working conditions, human rights, and environmental sustainability (Brun et al., 2020, p.44). Apple should regularly review and update the code of conduct to reflect changes in the industry and feedback from stakeholders. The company should also consider third-party auditing and verification to ensure that suppliers are meeting these standards.

Collaboration with suppliers can be useful in identifying and resolving supply chain sustainability problems. This can be accomplished through collaborative activities like supplier conferences or workshops (Brun et al., 2020, p. 44). For instance, Walmart's "Project Gigaton" collaborates with suppliers to establish sustainability goals in order to lower greenhouse gas emissions in its supply network. Working together with suppliers may result in creative ideas that are advantageous to both the firm and the supplier. Apple can build a more robust and sustainable supply network by engaging with suppliers to discover and tackle sustainability challenges.

Nike's "Contract Factory Disclosure" initiative demonstrates the importance of transparency in supplier relationships. By publicly disclosing the names and addresses of its suppliers, Nike is holding itself accountable and promoting transparency in the industry. This level of transparency can increase trust between the company and its stakeholders, including customers, investors, and NGOs. Apple should consider similar initiatives to promote transparency and accountability in its supply chain (Brun et al., 2020, p.44).

## *Sustainability Metrics*

The development of sustainability metrics is crucial for Apple to measure and improve the environmental impact of its products and supply chain. By setting clear and measurable targets, Apple can monitor progress towards its sustainability goals and identify areas for improvement. This can help the company to reduce its carbon footprint, minimize waste, and promote responsible sourcing practices (Amatucci & Gagnon, 2021, p.35). For instance, by integrating sustainability metrics into its supplier evaluation process, Apple can ensure that its suppliers are meeting sustainability standards and reduce risks associated with unethical practices.

Moreover, sustainability metrics can be integrated into a company's overall business strategy and help drive innovation and cost savings. By analysing energy and water use, waste reduction, and social responsibility, a company can identify areas for improvement in its supply chain and operations (Amatucci & Gagnon, 2021, p.35). For example, Unilever's Sustainable Living Plan includes a commitment to reduce the environmental impact of its products by measuring and improving the lifecycle impact of its packaging.

Finally, communicating sustainability metrics and progress to stakeholders can improve a company's reputation and brand image (Amatucci & Gagnon, 2021, p.35). By being transparent about its sustainability goals and performance, Apple can build trust with customers, investors, and other stakeholders. This can enhance the company's competitive advantage and strengthen its relationships with suppliers and other partners.

## *Adoption of Digital Technologies*

The adoption of digital technologies can greatly increase the efficacy and accountability of the supply chain. Apple can use digital technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), and blockchain to do this. Apple is able to establish a safe and open record of each transaction throughout the supply network, starting with the procurement of raw materials to the shipment of the finished product, by utilizing blockchain technology. This can lessen the possibility of products being counterfeited and guarantee that everyone involved in the supply network complies with ethical and sustainable norms. Machine learning algorithms may assist as well to increase the precision of demand projections, which will enhance inventory management and result in cost savings (Ermolaeva, 2021, p.46).

Amazon's use of machine learning algorithms is a prime example of how technology can transform supply chain operations. The company's algorithms analyse vast amounts of customer data, including purchase history, search queries, and customer reviews, to predict demand accurately. By doing so, Amazon can optimize its inventory levels, reduce waste, and improve its delivery times, ultimately leading to higher customer satisfaction (Abreu Lopes & Erridge, 2021, p. 45).

Furthermore, digital technologies can improve collaboration and communication between supply chain partners. For example, AI-powered chat-bots can provide real-time updates to suppliers and customers, helping to reduce response times and improve efficiency. In summary, the adoption of digital technologies can help Apple to optimize its supply chain operations, reduce costs, and enhance transparency and collaboration with suppliers and customers (Ermolaeva, 2021, p.46).

## *Support for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)*

The foundation of the economy is small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), yet they frequently have trouble getting access to funding, training, and other resources (Sherr et al., 2017, p. 43). Apple can be a key supporter of small SMEs particularly in the areas where the organization operates. Apple can assist SMEs in meeting their procurement needs by giving them access to funding, training, and other facilities. This will allow them to diversify the supplier pool and open up new business prospects.

In addition to supporting economic development, supporting SMEs can also help Apple to build a more resilient supply chain. Diversifying the supplier base to include more SMEs can reduce the company's reliance on a few key suppliers and mitigate the risks of supply chain disruptions. SMEs can also bring new ideas and innovations to the table, fostering a culture of innovation and creativity (Sherr et al., 2017, p. 47).

Several companies have successfully implemented initiatives to support SMEs. For example, Walmart's "Global Women's Economic Empowerment Initiative" aims to support women-owned businesses by providing them with access to training, mentoring, and capital. The initiative has helped to create new economic opportunities for women entrepreneurs and has contributed to the diversification of Walmart's supplier base. By following a similar approach, Apple can create a positive impact on the communities where it operates while also strengthening its own supply chain.

In summary, Apple can improve its procurement and supply chain strategy by diversifying its supplier base, enhancing transparency and collaboration, developing sustainability metrics, adopting digital technologies, and supporting SMEs (Sherr et al., 2017, p. 45). These recommendations are in line with best practices in procurement and supply chain management and can help Apple to mitigate risks, improve efficiency, and enhance its reputation as a socially responsible company.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, Apple's procurement and supply chain strategy has several strengths and weaknesses. The company's focus on supplier relationship management, supply chain transparency, and supplier diversity has been key strengths, allowing Apple to maintain its position as a leading technology company. However, the company faces several limitations, such as overreliance on key suppliers, human rights and labour issues, environmental impact, and cost, which could impact its long-term success.

To address these limitations, Apple can adopt several measures such as diversifying its supplier base, enhancing transparency and collaboration, developing sustainability metrics, adopting digital technologies, and supporting SMEs. By diversifying its supplier base, Apple can mitigate supply chain disruptions caused by natural disasters, political instability, and other factors. Enhancing transparency and collaboration with suppliers can ensure that suppliers comply with ethical and sustainability standards. Developing sustainability metrics can measure the environmental impact of its products and supply chain, which can set targets and monitor progress towards its sustainability goals. Adopting digital technologies such as block chain can improve supply chain efficiency and transparency. Finally, supporting SMEs can help to diversify the supplier base and promote economic development in communities where Apple operates.

Despite the fact that Apple faces a number of supply chain and procurement challenges, other businesses also deal with issues of a similar nature. In order to fulfil expectations from stakeholders and deal with these constraints, businesses must constantly review and enhance their supply chain procedures. By using best practices in procurement and supply chain management, Apple may enhance its procurement and supply chain strategy. This can aid the business in reducing risks, increasing productivity, and enhancing its standing as a socially responsible enterprise. Apple can keep its commitment to innovation, high-quality goods and services, and sustainability while still competing successfully in the market.

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