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# Preface to Supply Chain Management and Logistics in a Volatile Global Environment

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# Preface

The National Institute for Transport and Logistics (NITL) was established in Ireland in 1998, based on the recommendations of a Government report that had been published some time earlier. This was during the early part of the so-called 'Celtic Tiger' period, during which the economy grew rapidly. There had been an incredible economic transformation in Ireland since the recessionary period of the 1980s. Indeed, NITL's establishment by the Irish Government as Ireland's supply chain management (SCM) 'Centre of Excellence' was recognition of the key role of SCM and logistics in creating competitive advantage for Irish business in this buoyant period of export-driven economic growth. NITL's mission was – and continues to be – to promote the development of supply chain excellence in Irish organisations, both private and public, for the benefit of the Irish economy and wider society.

NITL is involved in a range of SCM and logistics activities, including business consultancy, training and education, research and awareness creation. NITL's mission reflects its strongly held belief that SCM is an important determinant of competitive advantage and is a key business process for companies. Since its foundation, it has advised hundreds of organisations in its consultancy capacity, contributed to the development of new leading-edge thinking through its research programme and delivered hundreds of training and education modules to thousands of individuals. It has worked in all major sectors of the Irish economy, including food and drink, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals, electronics, logistics service provision and retail, as well as in many parts of the public sector. In the process, its staff have developed a unique and unrivalled experience of SCM and logistics in Ireland and, in particular, its role in improving competitive capability in a rapidly changing economic and business environment.

The recent economic turbulence coincided with NITL's tenth birthday. Both events prompted the writing of this book. Volatilitity in the international economic and business environment has resulted in SCM academics and practitioners being forced to re-evaluate the role of SCM in the wider strategic context. This book contributes to this re-evaluation process through a re-assessment by recognised experts of their specialist domains in the light

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of this economic uncertainty. In this way, this book builds on *Perspectives on Supply Chain Mangement and Logistics: Building Competitive Organisations in the 21st Century* (Edward Sweeney (ed.), 2007), which examined SCM from a range of academic and practitioner perspectives. SCM is, to a large extent, concerned with collaboration and partnership. In this spirit, NITL has forged collaborative relationships with academic colleagues in Ireland, the UK and beyond over the past decade. As part of our tenth birthday celebrations, we decided to invite a group of eminent thought leaders in the SCM and logistics fields, with whom NITL has worked in various guises over the last decade, to contribute to this book. The contributors have in some cases carried out collaborative research with us (e.g. Professor Alan McKinnon of Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh and Professor David Grant of the University of Hull); some have been keynote speakers at our annual Logistics Ireland conferences (e.g. Professors Martin Christopher and John Gattorna); and one has been the external examiner for our successful Executive M.Sc. programme (Professor Michael Browne). I am particularly gratified that one chapter (by Colm Ryan and Claudia Wagner) has its genesis in research carried out as part of our extensive industry-based postgraduate education programme. The contributions also reflect academic collaboration within Ireland (north and south) with chapters written by colleagues from University College Dublin (UCD) and Queen's University Belfast (QUB). Furthermore, research collaboration at EU level (and NITL's particularly strong links in Italy) is evidenced by the chapters originating from further afield. Furthermore, NITL's own research activity forms the basis of some of the material presented. The common theme in all cases is that contributors are exploring their specialist fields of SCM expertise in the light of recent economic developments.

In producing this book, we have tried to adopt the SCM approach (based on *teamwork* and *integration*) and have worked as a team and in as integrated a manner as was practically possible in the finalisation of the manuscript. Inevitably there is some overlap between sections and chapters. This is a product of the fact that no individual link or element in a supply chain can be dealt with in isolation – it is the total supply chain capability and performance that matters. The book was conceived with the many supply chain and logistics professionals who are following formal learning programmes at all levels (Certificate, Diploma, Degree and Masters) in the subject in mind. However, our intention is that it will be read equally profitably by students, researchers and practicing SCM and logistics professionals.

*Edward Sweeney*
Dublin, June 2009