

From concept market in eight weeks!

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NOTHING succeeds like success: but getting the garment on shelf right from the concept in eight weeks time seems too optimistic. When retailers wait for 52 weeks for seeing their favourite fashion items in their back-store after finalising the design, this "eight week" promise seems to be more like "loosing five inches in one

week" kind-of-a- assurance. The promise also seems to take the experts of apparel supply chain by surprise.

However, this has already been made feasible on trial basis, claims a world-renowned supply chain expert. While working on the principle of critical path method study and compressing all activities in a bare minimum time frame, he placed the entire game plan on the feasibility table. The project he undertook for getting this done comprised analysing all activities from getting market feedback to conceptualising the fabric and vendor selection to final manufacturing and shipment.

Demarcating all these activities into distinct lines, he designed the critical path by having the value-added and essential activities. He also prescribed organisational changes with the formation of core-team having cross-functional representatives. Also creating awareness across the entire supply chain including vendors and suppliers regarding this "fast-track supply chain" helps to mobilise resources and quicken decision-taking ability significantly. Finally, sharing the benefit, which is derived out of this super-fast product launch, needs to be on top of the agenda involving each stakeholder.

The super-fast supply chain certainly pivots on critically analysing the entire process flow and redesigning the activities in a way that allows the non-value added activities to be performed simultaneously and in conjunction with the critical process. The critical path consists of conceptualising the design through a representative group of customers in the first

week, finalising and completing sample development in next two weeks time. The actual manufacturing takes place on fourth week with the next four weeks spent on actual shipment from a Bangladesh factory, say KDS, to a US store, say, Target.

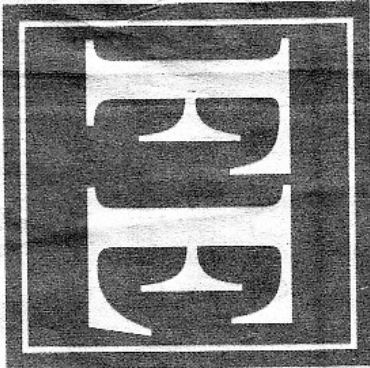
For instance, pre selection of certain fabric items and having them stored are prerequisites for this fast supply chain. Surely the additional cost of holding inventory needs to be offset by the additional margin a retailer get from a premium customer who replenishes her ward-rob every month! Moreover, cross-functional team selection also plays a vital role, as decision-making and authority to change production line have to be made with lightening speed. Finally, the benefits coming out of this kind of super-fast fashion line should be passed down across the upstream members of the supply chain through special contract sharing one another's cost.

Surely this idea will kick start more debates than acceptance in the initial phase. But it provides a possibility of super-fast replenishment at store-level that every retailer would dream about. As apparel supply chain goes more complex and elongated with the introduction of mind-boggling product lines and spreading of supply-web across continents, cycle time gets extended at the expense of cost. This idea will surely introduce the necessary momentum to turn around fashion lines in the shortest possible time to make consumers excited all the time.

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WEDNESDAY, JULY 12, 2006

ASHAR 28, 1413 BS



The Financial Express

Tropicana Tower (4th floor), 45, Topkhana Road, Dhaka-1000

Monday, June 26, 2006

Asharh 12, 1413 BS : Jamadul Awal 28, 1427