



From Learning Objectives to Project Debriefing:

Collaborating with Industry Partners to Develop a Multi-Assignment Sourcing Case

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Background and Purpose. The role of sourcing professionals in the global textile and apparel supply chain is of high importance as these individuals are responsible for identifying and choosing suitable vendors, ensuring compliance, negotiating contracts and timely delivery of quality products (Karpova et al., 2021). In the world of intensifying global competition and changing consumer demands, the need for skilled sourcing and supply chain professionals is more pressing than ever (Berg et al., 2020). The complexity of global value chains (Guan et al., 2020) and the growing importance of sustainability in the textile and apparel industry (De Angelis et al., 2020) further emphasize the need for professionals who are competent to develop effective strategies in the face of these challenges. In this regard, preparing future sourcing professionals is an important objective for textile and apparel programs. In addition to the subject knowledge, developing key skills such as problem solving and critical thinking is essential for a success in the realm of apparel sourcing and supply chain management, as these abilities allow professionals to effectively navigate complex challenges and constantly changing industry demands (Barrett, 2013). The **purpose of this paper** is to document and share the process of developing, delivering, and evaluating a learning experience to (1) help apparel students understand the responsibilities and tasks of sourcing professionals and (2) enhance their problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

Theoretical Background. To address the purpose of the study, problem-based learning theory was used to guide the development of the learning experience. The theory focuses on students learning through the process of solving complex, real-world problems (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). Following the theory, case study method was selected to develop the learning experience.

Learning through Cases. One way to prepare graduates who are well-equipped to succeed as textile and apparel sourcing professionals is using cases that are developed with industry partners (Cherubini, 2009). Case study is a type of active learning requiring students to

utilize their knowledge for solving a specific problem (Rideout, 2001). Case studies are effective in improving students' problem-solving (Lall & Datta, 2021; Yoo & Park, 2015) and critical thinking skills (Burbach et al., 2004; Lundeberg & Yadav, 2006; Mayo, 2004) as well as decision-making abilities (Youngblood & Beitz, 2001). Case studies utilize experiential learning, which facilitates students' engagement and reflection on their experiences (Thomas, 2009).

Collaboration with Industry. When developing a case, we collaborated with industry partners to incorporate real-world industry scenarios and insights. Research shows that projects conducted in collaboration with industry improve students' employability as they provide opportunities to develop necessary skills and knowledge sought by employers (Aliu & Aigbavboa, 2021; Otache, 2022). Such learning experiences increase understanding of industry dynamics and allow students to apply their knowledge to specific problems (Ferns et al., 2018).

Case Description. This case was developed in collaboration with a leading US sock producer that owns domestic manufacturing facilities as well as works with vendors in several countries to produce orders for specialty and mass-market retailers. The goal was to offer a real-world learning experience and the opportunity for students to apply knowledge and practice sourcing an apparel product for a retail customer over a specified timeframe. As the first step of case development, academic and industry collaborators (the authors of this study) identified learning objectives, or outcomes, that were designed to prepare students to succeed in a sourcing internship or entry-level job within the apparel industry. The case learning objectives were:

1. Compare and contrast *countries'* characteristics that drive sourcing decisions to manufacture an apparel product line.
2. Analyze critical factors that determine selection of a *factory* to manufacture an apparel product line including FOB, LDP, manufacturing capacity, minimal order quantity, lead time, and payment terms.
3. Execute product costing throughout the supply chain.
4. Develop and justify a sourcing strategy to produce socks for a retail customer considering seasonal projections and delivery timeline.

The authors worked on the case development over several months to design learning activities ensuring the four learning outcomes. Five scenarios were developed so teams could work on producing and delivering socks for different retail customers at various price-points. The industry collaborators developed five tech packs (technical specification packets) describing different sock products in terms of order size, fiber content, retailer margins, season's key dates, and other technical details and retailer expectations.

To complete the case, students were acting as interns for a leading sock manufacturing company. They researched five countries (China, Ethiopia, India, Honduras, and USA) and analyzed pros and cons of factories' capabilities in these countries (provided in the case) with the goal of fulfilling an order for an assigned retail customer. To complete the case, students were required to develop, justify, and present a feasible sourcing strategy considering the most profitable and low-risk production location and factory for delivering socks order to the retailer as well as other crucial factors such as payment terms, inventory management, and seasonal demand.

Learning Outcomes. The case was implemented in a required Global Sourcing course for upper-level undergraduate students in an apparel program. It was completed over a two-week period at the end of the semester so students can apply the knowledge gained in the course. The case deliverables consisted of (1) a self-graded quiz over the industry terms used in the case; (2) several individual and team assignments; and (3) a final team presentation to explain and justify developed sourcing strategy. Presentations were debriefed by the industry partners commenting on each of the five teams' sourcing strategies, associated risks and projected profits. As part of the debriefing, teams were given 'final sales' numbers and asked to calculate 'real' profit, compare it with the projected numbers, and make adjustments to the proposed sourcing strategies. In addition to the instructor's grades assigned for the case learning activities, industry partners provided feedback on demonstrated students' knowledge and skills in addressing the case learning objectives.

Conclusion and Implications. The addition of the case to the sourcing curriculum was very successful in helping students understand the important role of sourcing professionals in apparel companies as well as the complexities of building global supply chains. The case provided an opportunity for students to practice knowledge and skills that are highly sought after by employers. The real-world context and scenario as well as involvement of the industry partners have enriched the educational experience and increased student engagement and performance. Many students commented they planned to pursue sourcing as a potential career because of the case. Overall, the case developed in partnership with industry professionals played a significant role in improving students' employability. The paper demonstrates a successful strategy to engage industry partners from planning to implementing a course project, which can be expanded to developing course or program's curriculum.

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