



EMPLOYEE AND MANAGERIAL COMPETENCES IN LOGISTICS COMPANIES

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ABSTRACT: *The article presents the basic conditions for the functioning of logistics companies. The implications of globalisation processes have been strongly emphasized. It has been highlighted that the internationalisation of business activity is one of the important factors influencing the need, even the necessity, to constantly improve employee and managerial competences. They were the subject of surveys, the results of which are presented in the final part of the article. Research has shown that the basic competencies of logistic company personnel are interdisciplinary knowledge, effective skills for coping in various situations, and the ability to resolve various problems quickly, regardless of the conditions under which the company operates.*

KEYWORDS: *logistics, management, personnel, competences*

INTRODUCTION

Many companies are operating in public and economic spaces. They conduct a variety of activities, not always focused on earning money, which is visible through the prism of public organizations and institutions. Each organisation (Kotarbiński, 1995) has been created to achieve specific goals. It functions in a strictly defined environment, producing a product or service expected by potential recipients. These paradigms of modern business activity also apply to logistics companies. Not only have they recently had to overcome many difficulties and barriers related to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also those resulting from the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine in February last year.

In the statements of theoreticians and practitioners of management, various classifications of problems shaping the circumstances of the operation of logistics companies may be encountered. On their basis, it is possible to distinguish several basic determinants of the management of the 21st century, which include—as has been mentioned - the globalisation of economic activity. This process is influenced by many factors, of which the socio-economic ones are very important, if not the most important ones (Janik, 2007). Regardless of various types of circumstances, which are not always conducive to the efficiency of task implementation, the most important to logistics companies is the delivery of the right amount of goods to the indicated place, proper protection of the transported cargo, ongoing monitoring of order execution, and supervision over timeliness and quality.

1. SELECTED CONDITIONS OF LOGISTICS COMPANIES' OPERATIONS

The rapidly occurring transformations are a premise for the statement that in times of advancing globalisation, strategy is a game for the future (Malara, 2007), and the goal of logistics companies in this game is to win. This assumption results from the fact that the company's activity is based on strategy, and it is important to define it correctly based on a precisely and accurately defined mission and vision (Nowicka, 2000). A good strategy should not only define the way to achieve the company's intentions but also protect it against the negative effects of changes in the environment and ensure a competitive advantage. It requires a good internal structure and knowledge of the environment. At the same time, it is worth emphasising once again that what is of paramount importance is not the present state, which is the point of reference, but what will happen in the foreseeable future.

In the future, as we see it today, the global strategy of logistics companies will continue to be based on the search for ways to gain a competitive advantage. It is about crystallising the company's strengths from the structure of the company, focusing on key competencies, as well as searching for new areas of competitiveness and sources of strength. In what is now, and especially in the future, employees will play a key role, the staff is a living actor of what takes place in a logistics company. How they react to

the legitimacy of transformations will determine what will happen in the future and the position of a given logistics company against the backdrop of what the competition is doing. Managers in particular should think about the future, try to anticipate the present with this thinking, and introduce adaptive changes.

Emphasising certain issues in the area of change results, first of all, from the conditions of functioning of modern companies. They are not always beneficial, and the turbulence of transformations clearly emphasises that flexibility, the ability to adapt to changing conditions, and the ability to work in a team should be the primary competences concerning the personnel of logistics companies. However, one cannot ignore the fact that every organization is an open system that is capable of performing long-term tasks, being able to exchange information with the environment and striving to maintain a dynamic balance (Piotrowski, 1996). Moreover, we are currently observing a significant increase in international interdependence on a previously unprecedented scale. It is the environment of organisations that has a significant impact on their functioning on a micro and macro scale. Mainly for this reason, these phenomena should be considered, since they are located in the analysed environment of the company.

Currently, companies, if they want to function efficiently and effectively, must adapt to the requirements of the environment and make appropriate changes. They are necessary for the development of the organisation and its adaptation to the environment. At the same time, the complexity and the increasing dynamics of change, as well as the increasing uncertainty, trigger the need to make economic activity more flexible (Ziółkowska, 2013). Therefore, in every situation, one should strive to maintain harmony with the changing environment, which significantly affects the company. It is also moving the organization to a higher level of functioning while improving the efficiency and satisfaction of the company's members. Such an attitude must become an integral part of any company's global strategy. Nowadays, one more condition must be met - organizations must meet the challenges resulting from the internationalization of many phenomena (processes). Nevertheless, the basic paradigm of economic (business) activity has been unchanged for many years, which is: whatever new humanity discovers and adapts to its needs, the economic nature of everything that surrounds us will cause the effects of these discoveries to become the domain of international activity.

The reality that surrounds us is in constant motion and development. All processes and events take place in constantly different, changing conditions. The conditions for the implementation of tasks by organizations, including logistics tasks, are also undergoing transformations. They are becoming more and more complex, which is not indifferent to the perception of personnel (people), their role in striving to achieve high efficiency of operation (performance of tasks) and for the possibilities and effectiveness of the adopted solutions.

The current operating conditions of companies, not only the logistics ones, force a different approach to issues related to solving emerging problems than it was in the past; now it is necessary to take into account what results from operating in a turbulent and international environment. Nowadays, applicable solutions do not correspond to what we observed a few years ago. If you want to be successful, you need to skilfully use the achievements of scientists and flexibly apply the solutions they generated in practice (Pawęska, Ścibiorek, Zamiar, 2017).

The results of many studies, supported by conclusions from practice prove that it is now necessary to adopt a specific (international) perspective of considering several phenomena related to a given logistics company. It should also be remembered that there is no one universal style of management that works in all countries. To a large extent, the way managers make decisions, and formulate and implement goals depends on the culture they come from and the country they operate in. To be successful, you also need to be able to work in multicultural environments. Only the combination of various cultural elements will positively affect the synergy effect. Today, knowledge only in the field of running a business on a national scale is no longer enough. The required skills include qualifications and theoretical and practical knowledge of management methods and techniques in an international environment. Creativity, diplomatic skills, and the ability to conduct negotiations are of great importance (Ścibiorek, 2014).

The necessity for continuous adaptation of logistics companies to the changes in the environment and the desire to improve operational efficiency necessitates the need to improve the quality of work processes and management processes, the information system, planning and control, as well as the technical equipment of workstations. However, all activities (tasks) are performed by more or less competent employees, hence the result of their activities depends on their efficiency, creativity, independence, and ability to "move" in rapidly changing conditions. These threats result from various situations that may occur on a micro- and macro scale. They can be of different natures and scopes. In many cases, these threats do not respect state borders, which makes it difficult to identify the perpetrator of the event (situation) unfavourable either to people or to the environment (Ścibiorek, 2018).

The array of potential threats to the existing state of life (existence) of society is considerable and is growing every year. Issues focused not on ensuring security but on preventing dangers are raised more and more loudly. It is, therefore, understandable that the issue of safety or danger is the subject of many studies. Authors present the issues of possible threats and ways of counteracting them in varied ways, but since the dawn of humanity, the issues of protecting and defending the population against threats resulting from both the forces of nature and the effects of human activity have been in the foreground. Following this, the possibility of the occurrence of non-military extraordinary events that will have a significant impact on the functioning of logistics companies is being discussed more frequently. The reality that surrounds us is in constant motion and development. All processes and events take place under constantly changing conditions. The conditions for the implementation of tasks by organisations, including logistics tasks, are also transforming. They are becoming more and more complex, which is not indifferent to the perception of personnel (people), their role in striving to achieve high efficiency in operation (the performance of tasks), and the possibilities and effectiveness of the adopted solutions.

2. POSSIBLE PREMISES FOR THE SUCCESS OF LOGISTICS COMPANIES

The science of management and administration is still alive and open, mainly due to the exceptional complexity of the issues under consideration. In this situation, the interdisciplinary nature of the studied phenomena often forces the use of solutions that are specific and can only be used in a specific organization. The conclusions have diverse values, which are probably not surprising to anyone. Some of them refer to the most important issue: how to gain and maintain a competitive advantage. There are not many roads leading to this goal. However, there are many more ways to overcome the route to the dream goal, i.e., solving emerging problems, that result from the specificity of a given company and the conditions of its operation.

Currently, no one disputes the statement that if a logistics company wants to operate efficiently and effectively, it must adapt to the operating conditions. It is necessary for the development of the enterprise. It requires adjusting its elements and adapting to the environment. As a result of changes, new elements of organizational structures are created, new ties among the elements of the structure arise, a new process of work division is created, a new organizational culture is created, and the people employed in a given company change. However, it should be remembered that even if a particular procedure has worked, it is not a guarantee that it will have a positive effect in another case.

Today, it is not enough to act only in accordance with certain proven principles that have been effective in the past. The rule stating that certain decisions cause certain effects, most often predictable ones, is no longer sufficient. Today, the relationship between cause and effect is more complex. The management of logistics companies is required to think long-term when acting. A significant role here is played by the phenomenon of tomorrow's uncertainty. From all these considerations, one very important conclusion emerges: there is virtually no alternative for modern enterprises. If they want to stay on the market and strengthen their position, they must acquire the ability to use modern management methods aimed at strengthening the good position of a logistics company, adapting to external conditions, and surviving crisis situations—they must undergo a continuous process of various transformations. Following this, projects in the field of international communication are indispensable, if only because working in multicultural teams is becoming an increasingly tangible reality. This is very valuable nowadays because it allows you to create products with a global reach. In turn, the condition for effective communication within the team is the cultural competence of the employees themselves, especially of

the management staff. You can get them yourself, but it can take many years. It is easier to learn from experts who study cultural differences on a daily basis.

Employers indicate that they treat employee training as one of their priorities. About 50% of them want their current staff to stay in their jobs and use new technologies in their work, which means that they do not plan to make redundancies. In addition, 41% want to allocate funds for retraining employees, and 33% stated that they will finance training only for those employees who need retraining and upskilling the most (Ścibiorek, 2022).

According to research by the Centre for American Progress, 83 million workers will enter the workforce over the next 20 years. One-third will be immigrants and their children. Without them, the economy will face the spectre of collapse. These US data are an indication of where the labour market will draw its workforce from. Although in Poland, until a few years ago, employers thought that they would manage by reaching out to Polish employees only, the good economic situation quickly revised these assumptions. Due to the labour shortage, Poland is one of the largest markets for labour migrants in Europe. Professor Jurgen Bolten from the University of Jena says that cultural competence is not something that can be learned just like that. It is not the number of trips, it is not a perfect language or knowledge of other countries and their histories. These elements are necessary, but not the most important ones. The results of the aforementioned studies show that 89% of employers indicate highly developed soft skills as key in the logistics department. The employees themselves talk about soft skills as an element that allows them to stand out in the labour market.

The intensive development of logistics and the growing demand for specialists with experience and appropriate competences mean that in some areas of logistics, we can talk about a candidate market. The situation forces companies to use new ways to attract and retain employees. Candidates with the right mix of technical and soft skills are in demand, and the competition for the best specialists is increasing. At the same time, almost 90% of employers agree with the growing importance of the soft skills of candidates. The employers participating in the survey clearly state that they increasingly expect developed soft skills from candidates for logistics positions.

Regardless of the research results cited, theoreticians and practitioners agree that today, and even more so in the future, achieving a competitive advantage depends mainly on the use of the consequences of technological changes, which relate in particular to microtechnology, material engineering, telecommunications, software, and hardware enabling the acceleration and mastering of information processing and the creation of systems such as the Internet and other information banks. This means that there is no place for conservatives or conservatism. A logistics company must be headed by people oriented towards the future, embodying self-reliance, creative thinking, independence, and a willingness to take risks, as well as people able to use increasingly sophisticated business management tools and those who can introduce the principles of intelligent management into practice and are able to manage knowledge—the intellectual potential of the managed company.

3. COMPETENCES OF LOGISTIC COMPANY PERSONNEL - RESEARCH RESULTS

A feature of the modern approach to influencing personnel is building a strategy based on the skills of human potential. At this point, it is worth emphasising that the full use of the knowledge and skills of the logistics company's personnel, shaping them and creating conditions for their disclosure, cannot be spontaneous and occasional, but requires a systemic approach and treatment as an appropriate process that requires constant control and regulation. The knowledge of the company's employees is a dynamic resource, it is constantly updated, and its bearers - the company's employees - are constantly developing and improving. Human behaviour is not guided by a rule, but by the complex value of work and life, people perceive reality in a subjective way, and their behaviour often changes with the change of the situation or task. E. Tengström and B. Jungen emphasise that he must adapt to the roles imposed on him by social structures. He must adapt to the natural, social, and cultural environment and therefore must be malleable and easily moldable. However, man also has the ability to change his environment and is therefore creative. Plasticity and creativity, essential human attributes, are the starting point for the analysis of human beings (Tangström, Jungen, 1987).

In order to achieve a high level of efficiency for logistics companies, professionals are indispensable, who, in addition to knowledge and qualifications, have certain personal predispositions. Today, an employee must have knowledge and skills in many areas. It is important to constantly improve the knowledge or skills once acquired. This fully corresponds to the definition of M. Jabłoński, who states that "competences are knowledge, skills, and attitudes expressed in the form of behaviour that are a prerequisite for success in a given position" (Jabłoński, 2011). This is consistent with the position of P. Louart, who emphasizes that "...in personnel management, all elements interact with each other, and that is why a methodological and strategic approach is so important, a comprehensive vision of the necessary effort and goals to be achieved in a given time" (Louart, 1995).

The issues of competence were strongly reflected in the prepared survey. Its development was influenced by the analyses of the provisions contained in the compact studies. At the same time, it should be emphasized that competences (staff qualifications) are defined in various ways in the literature, although each of them repeats the share of three basic components, which include knowledge, skills, and responsibility.

There is no single definition of competence. The opinions of scientists, theoreticians, and practitioners are divergent. Below, independently of the above notation, there are a few definitions as a kind of reference point. And so, competences are the result of knowledge, skills, and attitudes—abilities, personality, psychosocial, and cognitive predispositions. Properly shaped professional competences allow employees to perform professional tasks at the required level. It is interesting to say that competence is the extent of one's knowledge, skills, and experience. Competent people possess an attitude that proves that they are able to properly use the knowledge they have to perform a task or solve a problem.

The Polish language dictionary defines competences as the scope of powers and privileges, the scope of operation of an authority or organisational unit, and the scope of someone's knowledge, responsibility and skills.

The main purpose of the research was to diagnose the competences of employees of logistics companies from the southwestern regions of Poland. The agreed-upon research goal translated into the criteria for selecting the research sample. When undertaking the research, it was assumed that the conditions of operation of modern logistics companies strongly emphasize the competences of the company's personnel. It was also taken into account that the knowledge and qualifications of individual employees become outdated quite quickly. This position formed the basis of the conducted research, in which 214 people took part. They represented different environments. It was a purposeful (non-random) selection of the sample of respondents, consisting of their subjective selection by the researcher, whose aim was to create a close representative sample. The group of respondents was dominated by men (64% - 137 people). Only 26 respondents (approx. 12%) are students of dual studies at the International University of Logistics and Transport in Wrocław, who combine study with professional work. Representatives of medium and small enterprises were the most numerous, respectively 43 people - 20% and 102 people - 48%. The remaining 43 (20%) are employees of large logistics companies with more than 250 employees.

In relation to this article, the results of research relating to the competences of both operational (physical) employees and managers, mainly middle-level management, will be presented. Due to the indicated discrepancy, of mainly linguistic (conceptual) character, individual competences were included in the questionnaire after generalising the terms contained in various types of sources. And so, in relation to operational employees of logistics companies, 12 competencies were specified (flexibility, ability to adapt to changing conditions, openness to change, independence, initiative, ability to work in a team, communication skills, ability to solve problems quickly, ability to work under pressure, responsibility; creativity; self-confidence), and in relation to managers 16 competencies (leadership, decisiveness, effective time management skills, effective people management skills, negotiation skills, business relationship building skills, teamwork skills, openness to change, independence, initiative, communicativeness ability to solve problems quickly, ability to work under pressure, responsibility, creativity, self-confidence). In both cases, the order in which individual competencies were recorded

resulted from the most frequently presented terms referring to the professionalism of these two groups of respondents, who could select only one answer, referring to only one competency. The results of the research are presented in the charts below. It is easy to see that not all competencies are shown in individual charts. This state of affairs results primarily from the fact that some competences were not noticed by the respondents, and some only had a single reference.

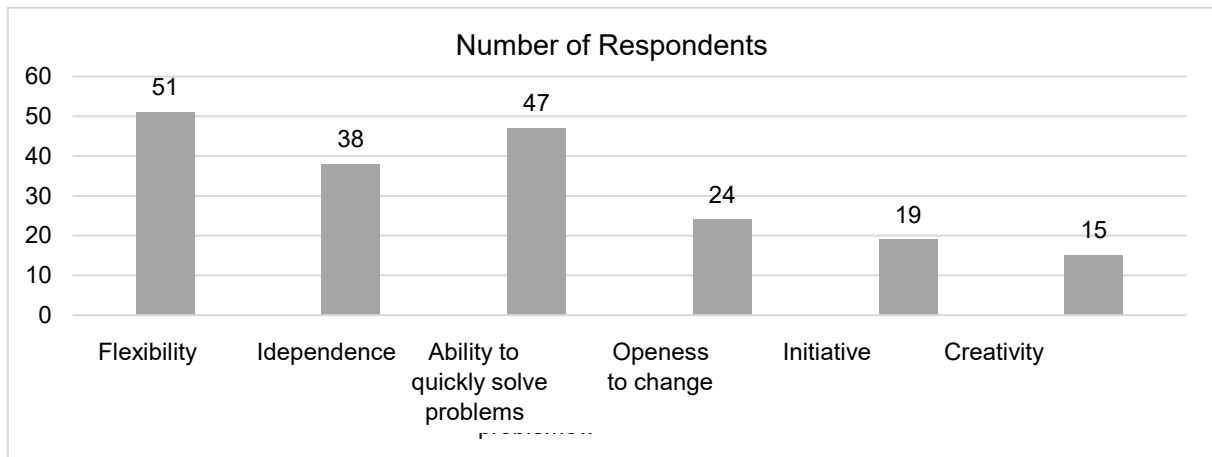


Figure 1 Staff competences (own elaboration based on conducted research)

With regard to employee competences, flexibility, interpreted as the ability to adapt to changing conditions, ranks first. This competence was perceived as the most important by 24% of the respondents. Slightly fewer respondents, i.e. 22%, listed the ability to solve problems quickly in second place. These key competences correspond with independence, which was mentioned in third place by 18% of the respondents. In total, these three employee competences dominated the answers of the respondents - 64% of the respondents). With regard to the data contained in Table 1, out of almost 13 people (6% of the respondents), most people were in favour of the ability to work in a team (6 people) and communicativeness (4 people).

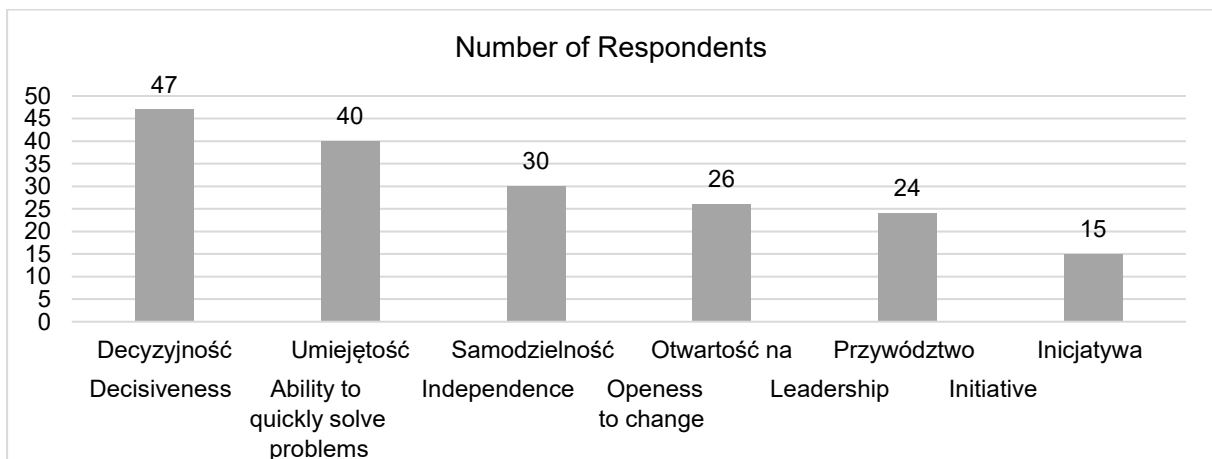


Figure 2 Managerial competences (own elaboration based on conducted research)

The results of research concerning managerial competences are slightly different. In this case, decision-making comes first. This position was expressed by 22% of the respondents. It seems to be understandable because employees expect their supervisors to solve emerging decision-making problems. This approach to managerial functions is reflected in another competence, which is the ability to quickly solve problems. This was supported by 19% of respondents. Probably the most common perception of the role of managers in the functioning of logistics companies, also in the event of extraordinary events, was related to independence - 14% of respondents, followed by openness to change - 12% of respondents, and leadership - 11% of respondents. In total, these four managerial

competences were perceived by 2/3 of the respondents (67%) as of primary importance. Concerning the data contained in Table 2, out of almost 17 people (8% of the respondents), the majority of people were in favour of self-confidence (9 people) and communicativeness (5 people).

CONCLUSION

The Polish strategy of internationalisation of logistics enterprises appears to be a consequence of the chosen path of systemic transformations. It contains elements, among which the ability of domestic logistics companies to undertake business activity and create value in other countries will be of fundamental importance.

Logistics and its processes are undergoing major and dynamic transformations. On the one hand, the development of last-mile logistics and all related elements is positively influenced by the intensive growth of e-commerce. On the other hand, it must face high market volatility, staff shortages and a rapidly progressing technological revolution, requiring enterprises to implement innovative solutions quickly, which improve the functioning of the organisation and help maintain its position in the market. Logistics companies must have competent staff to achieve their goals. Much will depend on managerial competence. They, similarly to employee competences, clearly emphasise the possession of knowledge and skills to effectively manage various situations and quickly solve problems, regardless of the conditions in which the logistics company operates. The possibility of the occurrence of non-military extraordinary events is even more emphasized by the possession of such competences.

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