

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OF EMPLOYEES IN LOGISTICS

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Abstract

Well managed logistics is crucial base for any manufacturing company. It is always an employee who stands behind its success or failure. So well set requirements on candidates in a recruitment process and strong emphasis on continual training and development of logistics staff should be in the permanent focus of company managers. This paper presents outputs and related recommendations of the survey among managers of Czech manufacturing companies focused on their demands on graduates suitable for logistics positions and on their opinion on a practical benefit of training and development methods for their employees in the related positions.

Keywords: HR, graduates, logistics, training and development

1. INTRODUCTION

More and more workers find their self-fulfilment in the wide field of logistics because companies are competing in getting their products and services to the clients in the shortest time and at the lowest possible costs [1]. This is one of the reasons why the logistics sector constantly assumes new tools and technologies; after their introduction in one company of the given business segment, they must be introduced in all other companies otherwise these would not be further competitive. As examples, regarding the first major innovations, we can mention the H. Ford's assembly production line, the first use of containers in transportation, the introduction of ERP systems or the use of the Internet in business processes. These changes were being implemented in the course of decades [2]. Since the 1990s, however, technologies, methods and software have advanced so rapidly that it is difficult to keep up with them without continuous training and development of responsible managers and workers, and the recruitment of new people who are willing to improve and update their knowledge in the field of logistics although being currently well prepared [3].

In the article, the authors focused on the requirements for the training and development of employees for positions related to business logistics processes. Based on interviews among managers of manufacturing companies, they investigated the requirements for skills, abilities and other competences necessary to perform job tasks, especially regarding the supply, production and sales positions.

2. METHODOLOGY

During the period of August - September 2015, the authors personally discussed with managers of 13 manufacturing companies in the Moravian-Silesian Region on the theme of requirements of their companies for university graduates who wish to work in logistics positions. Managers also reported basic shortcomings whose removal usually requires more time to adapt graduates and delays solutions to common daily tasks of the relevant jobs.

Part of the interviews also was the further education of the current employees in logistics, with an emphasis on the practical benefit of available training methods from the perspective of the employer.

The outputs of the questioning were the basis for the next two chapters.

3. REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATES OF LOGISTICS BRANCHES

Candidates for positions related to business logistics processes must be smart, able to take decisions quickly, flexible and interested in their work and intuitive; above all, however, they must have excellent analytical skills [4]. These positions are the most complex of all, and the managers generally agreed that the logistics positions in the technical environment of their companies cannot be held by persons with no relevant technical knowledge.

From the perspective of professional training, managers emphasise that the students should gain professional experience directly in business processes and participate in solving real situations and problems using business technology and logistics management tools already during their studies.

Managers appeal that the teaching includes as many case studies as possible, logistics games and the use of modern software tools for the management of logistical flows. According to them, the students must not be afraid of "making their hands dirty".

Graduates should be able to solve multi-task problems, react quickly to changes in assignment or conditions and steadily pursue the problem until it is resolved. They should cope with everything above even under great pressure of time and accountability for corporate resources and goals.

Fundamental and relatively new condition for successful applicants seeking logistics jobs is a deeper knowledge of advanced digital and communication tools. [5]

4. METHODS OF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OF LOGISTICS STAFF

There are many training methods for employees, whether in the workplace or outside. Logistics is a complex field that requires professionals with a great range of knowledge and skills. Knowledge can be acquired at schools, in theoretical courses or through self-education. To reinforce skills and experience, it is also possible to use a number of training and support methods. The following list represents those educational methods that were most often cited by the interviewed managers as the most efficient approaches used in their companies or the methods which are supposed to be used in the future based on positive references from partner companies.

Teaching in the training room

This type of training is suitable especially for employees that have no experience or have only minimal experience and knowledge with logistics and production flows. It allows them to study the theoretical foundations of how supplier-customer flows operate or what is the base for selecting various distribution channels. Employees can pass this type of training also at secondary schools or universities or in special external courses if the company does not have enough resources or staff to provide this training on its own premises.

Simulation

Simulations allow students (i.e. educated employees) better understanding of how their decisions and activities affect logistic processes [6]. The most famous simulation tools include the well-known game with the supply of beer, which was developed at MIT. This simulation technique is also incorporated into the curriculum of our branch "Economics and management in the industry" at the Faculty of Metallurgy and Materials Engineering at the Technical University Ostrava and always has very positive response among students.

Case studies

These practical studies develop teaching in the classroom and complement the acquired theoretical knowledge through examples of real problems addressed by particular companies and effects subsequently achieved. If they are used for teaching directly in the workplace, it is appropriate to present the experience of the given

company, ideally by employees who participated in solving the respective problems.[6] During familiarization with these studies, the trainees can be asked about their views of how responsible persons proceeded or how they should have proceeded and why.

Adaptation

New employees require an efficient (i.e. quick and substantive) training with regard to work tasks as well as social relationships in the workplace. Especially in logistics professions, it is necessary to ensure a continuing collaboration with the participants of the entire production process, from receiving orders up to delivering ex stock; therefore, a rigorous training in all possible communication links is inevitable. Regarding job duties concerned, it is appropriate to link new employees with an experienced mentor who will professionally lead them until they are able to work independently. The mentor allows the newcomers to work and decide independently but he/she should help them by constructive criticism and expert advice if they need it. This can prevent unnecessary losses due to ignorance of logistics processes by newcomers.

During adaptation, as well as in the case of other methods of education in the workplace, it is appropriate to use visual and amusing learning techniques rather than demanding text manuals.

For this purpose, it is also possible to use various additional illustrative materials prepared in a funny form to help better understand the internal flows. For example, the company may propose a cartoon mascot who constantly makes mistakes at work, violates applicable procedures and bears visual consequences.

Feedback

Interactions between the tutor and educated workers are absolutely essential for all education activities. They increase the likelihood that students will remember the subject matter. During his/her presentation, the tutor should ask students about the curriculum learnt and ascertain their views, ideally their experiences from practice, because they prefer to speak about them being thus best drawn into teaching. If there is an opportunity, it is advisable to divide students into groups in which they compete in the assigned tasks related directly to the subject matter taught. The feedback also includes a test on teaching content completed by the students immediately after the training. It is reasonable to repeat the test even in two weeks after completion of the course so that it can be more easily evaluated in terms of its benefits for employees. If the students were divided into teams, the team with better results might receive a prize to increase motivation for the study.

Games

Educational video games are very popular in the US. Managers know about them but these games are not yet much used in our country. In the future, however, the companies would like to include them. Animation of these video games is not at such a high level as in the case of classic games for home use but they are more financially friendly and fully sufficient for representing the business areas and processes. Video games allow students to better empathize with the assigned tasks and use it later in addressing real work problems.

5. CONCLUSION

The more the concept of logistics as a comprehensive corporate discipline extends even to technical fields, especially due to the use of multimedia technologies, the more companies realize the necessity of employing only the best-prepared people and accordingly set the requirements for their knowledge, skills and abilities, and even their activities at schools. Managers require that the graduates have practical experiences in the customer-supplier processes from production companies and are able to cope with multi-task assignments requiring cooperation of several departments, and that they are flexible and mainly capable of working under pressure. In this context, the managers are also aware of the need for further education of their employees in logistics positions because their primary knowledge no longer corresponds to the new logistics techniques and instruments, including online processes and software to facilitate business flows. Nevertheless, the question of efficient use of time and resources still remains in the mind of each capable manager; therefore, the possible

methods of education must always be chosen depending on the specific needs and circumstances of each company.

These options include the methods of education in the workplace. They enable that the workers are trained during their working hours and are in a touch with the problem, participating directly in the logistic processes. The workers are trained and supervised by an experienced person who fully masters the present technologies and tools. These methods have their advantages - workers are trained during their working hours, they do not have to go anywhere and learn techniques which they will further use. A disadvantage may be an inappropriately selected trainer or a decline in productivity in the workplace resulting from the participation in training activities.

Another possibility is the participation of employees in external training seminars. More and more schools offer courses or entire fields in logistics so that the companies can choose from. Generally, the costs of attending these courses are lower as the courses are not specially created for the given company; in the Czech Republic, however, their quality varies significantly. It is therefore appropriate to seek for references in advance, become familiar with the teaching methods and especially find whether they also contain some practical situations such as simulations, case studies or playing games. A disadvantage may be the fact that the course currently does not offer any training of the software used by the company nor specifically addresses the field of its activity.

Irrespective of the chosen teaching method, the first lesson should always introduce the basics of logistics chains. Many trainers expect that students already know this basic knowledge but the opposite is often true. Plenty of them only master "their" chain section and do not understand its place in the entire logistics process.

Each educational method should finally lead not only to a self-confident feeling of managers or other course participants about their ability to apply the gained knowledge in practice but also to their awareness that their training is far from its end because the technology in the area of logistics develop faster and faster.

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