

Training and studying key to logistics careers



BY SEAN HARGRAVE

Logistics and supply chain management are now clearly recognised as board room positions and so practitioners are finding they need to raise their game if they are to make an impact at the top level.

Hence, many graduates are ensuring they are fit for the work place through post graduate study in logistics and supply chain and so too are many existing executives who realise to get ahead in an increasingly professional field, they need to ensure their qualifications are up to date.

Combining work and studying has certainly worked for Stuart Whiting, Head of Global MNC at DHL. He was already a senior executive at the logistics specialist when, as he puts it, the board decided it was time for 'education to catch up with experience'.

At the company's suggestion he undertook a two year Executive MSc in Logistics and Supply Chain Management at Cranfield School of Management and has since, he believed, improved his understanding of his industry and its place within the wider business world as well as,

demonstrably, improved his career. "I was thirty seven when I started the MSc so I was at a stage where I knew I wasn't going to change industry so it was a good opportunity to learn about the industry outside of my own company," he says.

"It was so interesting to be learning alongside people from other companies and industries, it forms an amazingly diverse mentor group that you can share experiences with and learn from. The teaching and research you do to support the modules opens you up to new approaches and techniques which I've found invaluable in my career. It gives you the opportunity to leave your office and think about how things are being done elsewhere which is always a good idea."

Better working

In fact, due to the course being evenly split between exams and a final dissertation, Whiting found he could put the newfound know-

ledge he had gained over the two years of modular study to very good use.

"Doing the dissertation was a great way of looking at how we were doing things at DHL and examining if we had the right approach," he says.

"I looked at the downstream effects in the market to see if we were as close to our customers' needs as we could be. I basically asked are we putting the customer at the centre of everything we do and I think there was room for improvement which I've now been able to put in to practice."

Like the majority of people who have studied for an MSc Whiting's career development accelerated after he finished the course. In fact, Cranfield's research shows that students who complete the course will likely see their salary rise 118 per cent (a figure boosted by overseas students) and, for those not in a job or considering a move, nearly all will be in a job they are satisfied with within three months.

“Supply Chain Management is now a boardroom position”

Education key

The feedback from other universities offering higher degrees in supply chain management and logistics indicates a growing trend among businesses to realise that there is much that can be learned about the industry by leaving the office behind and studying latest best practice from around the globe.

David Bennett, programme leader for the MSc Global Logistics and Supply Chain Management at Northumbria University's Newcastle Business School believes businesses are now realising how central logistics is to their operations and so ensure staff are educated to the relevant high standard.

"Supply Chain Management is now a boardroom position in many forward thinking organisations, especially as outsourcing is now an accepted operational procedure often enforced due to the requirement for cost reduction," he says.

"You have to remember that logistics is a sub-set of supply chain management and so, in my opinion, it is this integrated global supply management that now demands the attention of senior executives. Higher degree courses underpin the

theoretical concepts that modern supply chain professionals need to understand to be successful global players in the 21st Century."

Work training

Nigel Sullivan, group HR director for Wincanton believes that the importance now being placed in people within the logistic industry seeking further education and personal development is a sign of how the sector is actively improving its image. At the same time as third party logistics providers, such as Wincanton, have finessed their services to move beyond simply picking up and delivering loads, their client lists have moved into the blue chips who both require and expect to be dealt with by well trained, professional managers. Hence Sullivan oversees a training programme in which not only is training in logistics given but also executives are schooled in management and leadership programmes.

"When you're working within a blue chip's supply chain you need blue chip calibre people," he explains. Many of our people will study for MBAs and all our executives are put on management and leadership modules because they need to be trained to that level so they can interact with clients well and lead their own teams. It's a classic 'win win' situation where we actually find it acts as a differentiator in the market and means we get the best quality people applying for our graduate trainee programme. Our retention rate over 10 years is around 70 to 80 per cent, which is great because it means we've normally got the people internally to promote from within rather than go to the cost of hiring a recruitment firm."

This move to management training sits alongside nationwide roll out of higher education courses designed to ensure that logistics and supply chain management can become increasingly professional as it moves from the warehouse to the board room.

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