

Through the looking glass – an industry in Wonderland

In this article, the first of a two-part feature, Logistics Training Group director Walter Glass looks at the state of training and education for logistics and supply chain management in New Zealand and asks, are we doing enough to meet the future skill demands?

At a recent conference address on trends in global logistics, I referred to a 2013 study by BVL International (a non-profit group that promotes awareness of logistics and supply chain management in industry) that collected responses from senior logistics and supply chain managers around the world. It asked them to identify the key industry trends they thought would be critical for the sector in the immediate future. The top nine in order were: customer expectations, a networked economy (vertical and horizontal), globalisation, cost pressure, talent shortfalls, sustainability pressure, volatility, increased risk and disruption, and new technology. Note that 'talent shortfalls' comes in at number five, with 'new technology' at number eight. The significant point here is that the talent shortfall is the first trend issue listed that relates



By Walter Glass

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directly to the internal operations of a company – one that it can actively influence. The first four trends are all external issues over which a company has relatively little control. The study also found that 'top performers' prepare strategies for emerging challenges around people, processes, technology, networks and community. With respect to the management and development of their people, these top-performing companies act to prioritise and retain talent, develop skills, build teams with an analytical focus, and develop communication and agile decision-making. How many New Zealand logistics and supply chain sector companies are world leaders in these areas?

The current operational situation in New Zealand

There has been a well-publicised, growing awareness in both New Zealand and Australia that, with an ageing workforce and the substantial influx of new technology, the logistics and supply chain sector is in for a major changing of the guard. From transport in all its modes, to procurement, inventory, warehousing and freight forwarding, and across all industries, the way in which future integrated logistics functions and individual supply chains are going to operate will require people who are significantly more skilled than many of the operators we see today. This is not to say that today's people are inept, rather that the

dynamic way in which supply chains must respond to customer pressures, utilising new technologies and enacting better management decisions, requires an entirely new perspective toward education, training and qualifications. Operational experience, the 'must have' catch-cry of the past, is no longer adequate, even though it is still the key selection criteria for employment with many current managers.

Bridging the gap

New Zealand, like many less-populated countries, still has a very operational focus on its logistics and supply chain training activities, especially for new entrants. Operator licences, health and safety, unit standard

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Study supports decision-making in the real world

Vocational study at Manukau Institute of Technology has given Erin Dickinson the confidence to understand the risks in every decision at work.

After graduating with a BCA in human resources and international business, Erin Dickinson knew she wanted to work in supply chain and logistics. Erin chose to study a Graduate Certificate in Supply Chain Management and Shipping at Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT). Moving to Auckland from Wellington for the one year of study, Erin was happy with her choice and enjoyed her time at MIT. "I absolutely loved the style of teaching at MIT. The tutors made you feel like family, and were a wealth of knowledge. They had

an open-door policy which allowed them to always be openly available," she says. "All the tutors always went that extra mile in answering the smallest of questions. They also always had an industry story to tell as well." Upon graduating, Erin sought employment in supply chain management and logistics, and currently works at the Department of Conservation (DOC) as a procurement administrator. "I look after and monitor the government electronic tendering system (GETs) for DOC. This system is where all government agencies place high-value tenders so the market can see and tender/apply for the work. This part of the role allows me to work with external suppliers and DOC rangers," she explains.



Erin Dickinson – now working at DOC as a procurement administrator following a year studying supply chain management and shipping at MIT

Managing decisions with confidence

Erin faces different challenges in her role at DOC. As part of her role, she is responsible for measuring risks and making decisions that could affect the long and short-term outcomes of the organisational choices. She says it is her training that helps her to manage these decisions with confidence. "At DOC, I am supported by

amazing people that jump at the opportunity to share their knowledge with me, as well as teaching me all the things I need to know," says Erin. "At MIT, I was taught different methods to apply to particular situations. Now that I have the opportunity to apply them in the real world, I value these lessons greatly." Erin is really enjoying working for DOC. She says she truly believes in the strong fundamental values of the organisation, and is proud to work for an industry that helps to maintain the environment in which New Zealanders live.

For further information on MIT's supply chain management programme, visit www.manukau.ac.nz