

Through the looking glass – supply chain education and training in NZ

By Walter Glass

In this article, the second of a two-part feature, Logistics Training Group director Walter Glass comments on how current education and training in New Zealand fit with the logistics and supply chain industry's need for skilled and talented people. The comments are generalisations about an industry that contributes a similar amount to New Zealand's GDP as the dairy and meat sectors combined, yet has no common voice of representation.

Part 1, in the previous edition of FTD, outlined the highly rated 2013 study by BVL International on the importance leading companies placed on the training and retention of people talent. Conversely, the focus in New Zealand is mainly on operational skills, with a lack of integrated industry, government, or education system planning for the development of people who enter the sector or transition within it from operations to senior management. This has contributed to a short-sighted habit of recruiting offshore for migrant managers to fill talent gaps which, in turn, has led to its own series of problems regarding staff morale and corporate culture.

Is New Zealand providing the right education programmes to broadly support the logistics and supply chain sector with adequate skills at the various levels? The answer to this question is neither simple nor easily explained.

This is the biggest industry in New Zealand. The breadth of the sector's coverage, the number of vastly different roles, the huge variety of skillsets used, and the multiple levels of competence and qualifications required mean that education and training requirements can be both generic and, in many cases, very role specific.

Add to this the consideration of the 'level' of education and training required and the question becomes substantially more intricate. In addition, there are the confusing issues of inconsistent terminology and complicated job titles which serve to baffle even the most experienced.

So, broadly, how is New Zealand performing in logistics and supply chain-related training or educa-



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tion as it pertains to entry, middle and senior skill levels, and what are the recruitment considerations at each of these levels?

The school leaver – NECA Level 1 or 2

From observations and questioning at secondary school career expos, discussions with teachers and background research, the knowledge and base awareness level of logistics and supply chain is an unknown in the New Zealand secondary school sector.

Secondary teachers appear oblivious to the sector beyond perhaps telling a non-academic student to consider becoming a truck driver, courier, or storeman, and the bright student that there are few careers outside of being a doctor, lawyer, accountant, ICT graduate, engineer or teacher. This comment may appear flippant, but it is based on observation.

Not every school leaver will become a rocket scientist and many will begin their careers in base-level logistics and supply chain-related activities. Quite a number will develop significant careers in the sector. In this technology-driven industry these students will definitely be on a continual road of learning throughout their careers.

Currently, however, many NCEA Level 1 and 2 students are woefully lacking in the basic academic, social maturity, communication and attitudes skills required in the workplace. For many years, New Zealand companies and the public purse have had to pay to upskill school leavers to a 'work ready' level. This is a task that the New Zealand taxpayer has already paid handsomely for the secondary schools to do. This retraining time and cost needlessly drops workplace productivity, and reduces profitability to companies and the nation simply because of

the 'disjoint' between schools and the reality of the workplace.

In a business context, secondary schools do not appear to know what their 'end customer' requires, nor do they turn out a product 'fit for purpose' in many cases. In the commercial world, the consumer of such a non-performing product is protected under law and fully entitled to return it to the supplier and demand a refund or replacement. Unfortunately, New Zealand schools are not accountable and simply push their product out the gate, expecting others to pay to fix it.

The apprenticeships/ young employee worker – years 1 or 2

Much has been done by the industry training organisations (ITOs) to bridge school leaver skill shortfalls in generic areas such as health and safety, apprenticeship-specific training, and catch-up numeracy and literacy, using the 'unit standard' learning method. ITOs work in conjunction with schools, industry and their training providers to deliver a range of lower to medium-level vocational courses that are designed to meet their specific industry needs. Ideally, basic generic skills work could and should be done by schools, leaving the ITOs to take skills development to higher levels.

Middle to senior management training/ education options

There are some excellent academic and applied courses in logistics and supply chain management, with various levels of flexibility depending on student requirements.

For example, a person (with or without previous academic qualifications, but extensive experience) who wants an inter-

nationally recognised specialist qualification in this sector, but also wants a bridging programme to the New Zealand tertiary framework, could undertake the 'applied' UK-registered Chartered Institute of Logistics & Transport (CILT-UK) professional qualifications that the Logistics Training Group (LTG) offers in New Zealand. These programmes have a 20-year success record here.

For those who want to undertake traditional academic courses, there are a variety of related course options available from numerous universities and polytechnics, some of which cater to quite specific areas of skills – Massey University's supply chain management programme, for example, or Manukau Institute of Technology's maritime studies.

The recruiter – the 'meat in the sandwich'

As background to this article, LTG approached around 50 recruitment companies that claimed skills in filling logistics-related roles, including supply chain/value chain sector management positions. Ultimately, 16 responses were deemed valid, although the depth of respondent knowledge varied in different areas.

The purpose of this exercise was to understand how recruiters interface with the sector to service the people talent requirement. While recruiters provide the link between company and prospective employee resource, they must understand the subject matter really well to be of value. Interestingly, with the information gathered, it appears fair to say the position of the recruiter is often that of being the 'meat in the sandwich'.

Recruiters commented on the alarmingly wide element of

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