

Taking the classroom to the real world – supply chain as a school subject

By Walter Glass



Logistics and supply chain-related activities account for around 13–15% of New Zealand's GDP – so why is this subject matter not taught in our secondary schools?

Search for the term 'logistics' in the New Zealand Curriculum – that overarching framework that sets out what the Ministry of Education expects students to know and be able to do by the end of Year 13 – and you'll come up empty-handed. So what can be done to raise awareness amongst school-leavers of this vital industry?

If one was to evaluate the current relationships for NZ logistics and supply chain person 'skill levels' between education skills, industry skills, school-leaver understanding and experienced employee understanding, I would anticipate finding an absolute disjoint between the school-leaver and the logistics employee's understanding, yet a much closer relationship between the education and industry skill levels.

This is because the school programmes put together by traditional educationalists and their associated government advisors are out of step with the commercial world, thus while base education skills may be present in the school-leaver, there needs to be a connection with how these skills would be used in industry. As Confucius once said, "I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand."

More than just forklifts

Most secondary school teachers seem to think that logistics and supply chain (L&SC) is about forklift trucks, with perhaps the term 'truck driver' or maybe 'warehouse worker' in the mix

somewhere – which they are, but only as a small skill-set in a very large sector.

L&SC is the 'sleeping giant' in the employment sector, with rapidly increasing technology, an ageing workforce, and a willingness to employ young New Zealanders who are passionate about learning and progressing a profession. More unfortunate is the fact that secondary school-leavers do not know about the L&SC sector, primarily because their teachers don't link the students' school learning to the work skills involved.

Students then reach a point where they need to leave school and often wander off aimlessly to get any sort of job they can, or perhaps enrol in some further education course, as they do not understand the application of the skills they have, nor what is expected of them in any job.

The prospect of working from 7am to 4pm for 48 weeks of the year is frightening for someone who has, for the previous 13 years, had their day broken into various classes for a few hours each day, had around 13 weeks' holiday a year, had a money tree called 'parents', thinks that everyone is always a winner, and does not understand that playing Pokémon Go during work time is not acceptable.

Consequently, courses which prepare the student for the workplace, and provide them with a 'translation sheet' of what their skills are now and how these might be applied in their professional development, are invaluable.

Opportunities realised

Currently, both school-leavers and the L&SC sector pass like ships in the night, with the student blissfully unaware of the opportunities lost, and the industry not proclaiming the huge career option choices it offers.

The Logistics Training Group (LTG) has been operating in this sector for over 20 years and offers a number of internationally recognised and applied L&SC qualifications. LTG is determined to see both industry and school-leavers with their lights blazing brightly and opportunities realised.

To this end, LTG is working with Ken Benn, academic dean at Palmerston North Boys' High School, with the objective of establishing an L&SC pilot programme in 2017. Ultimately, LTG would like to see all school-leavers being aware of the L&SC sector – that it offers a huge range of career options – and have schools provide course options to pre-skill students for this career path.

The rationale for this awareness is that L&SC-related activities are connected to every part of our private and business worlds and account for around 13–15% of New Zealand's GDP (thus dwarfing any other industry, including the primary sector). As such, it is incomprehensible that this subject matter is not taught in our secondary schools.

Same subject, different titles

You do not see a secondary school without computer access for students, yet the computer is

only a tool to achieve an end goal, and ICT is but one skill required in L&SC.

L&SC skill requirements are underpinned by just about every subject that is taught in school, albeit with different 'commercial' titles such as supply chain or transport management, human resources, information and communication technologies (ICT), sourcing, production planning, hazmat, weights, dimensions, marketing and sales, demand forecasting and procurement planning, distribution, product development, security, finance, research ... the list goes on.

The most important thing for schools to understand is that around 15% of their graduates will end up in this industry directly, and likely another 5% in the provision of specialist services to this industry. Not everyone is going to be a lawyer, accountant or engineer, but being the logistics person that runs a multi-million-dollar warehouse or hospital, or is part of a sourcing and procurement team that makes the right decisions on a multi-billion-dollar infrastructure project, is no mean feat either.

Logically therefore, students need skills in mathematics, physics, English, geography, problem-solving and decision-making. LTG also uses simulation in its current courses, and gamification is an increasing application of technology in training.

Integrating education with industry

I am looking forward to the day

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