

ASSESSMENT OF TRANSPORT LOGISTICS' GRADUATES COMPETENCES FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF EMPLOYERS

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Abstract. *The modern logistics business world is changing and presents new challenges to companies, so it is currently necessary to pay attention to the competence of employees, but also to predict which of these competences will be necessary in the future. The aim of this work was to research the competences of Vilnius College of Technologies and Design Transport Logistics graduates from the point of view of employers. Based on scientific literature and in dept interview of Lithuanian transport and logistics companies' managers, the article reveals the significance of qualified transport logistics specialists. It presents the analysis of the competences of Vilnius College of Technology and Design Transport Logistics graduates. According to experts, 88.5 percent of Transport Logistics graduates of the Vilnius College of Technology and Design have very good knowledge and skills. They are zealous, possessing not only theoretical but also practical knowledge. They are able to analyse practical situations, not afraid of challenges.*

Keywords: *competences, the point of view of employer, transport logistics manager.*

Introduction

In Lithuanian transport companies, the main workload and the main part of the tasks related to generating profit, as a rule, falls on transport logistics managers (Puodžiukienė & Aksomitienė, 2019). Therefore, the level of employees' competences, the ability to promptly respond to changes in the market is becoming more and more important.

Job satisfaction, performance evaluation, feeling of appreciation, recognition, etc. - these expectations an employee brings to a company. Any job dissatisfaction and failure to meet these expectations may lead to employees not putting their best effort into their work, not doing their work quickly, and not fully committing to the

company; and failure to do the work timely and efficiently is associated with losses for the company (Bagdonas, 2008).

Likewise, employers also expect their staff to meet certain criteria. Čižiūnienė, Vaičiūtė & Batarlienė, 2015 said that “there are cases when a lack of competences encourages the employers to seek for certain alternatives”. That is why the acquired qualifications and competences of the employees are extremely important.

The object of this article's research is the professional competence of transport logistics graduates of the Vilnius College of Technology and Design at the beginning of their careers.

The aim of the paper is to address the competences of Vilnius College of Technologies and Design Transport Logistics graduates the point of view of employers.

Goals of the article are as follows:

- To present the concept of the competences of Transport Logistics specialists.
- To carry out in-depth interviews on competences of Vilnius College of Technologies and Design Transport Logistics graduates

The research methods used by the authors: analysis of scientific literature, systematization, generalization and comparison, Lithuanian transport and logistics companies' managers in-depth interviews.

Concept of the competence of Transport logistics specialists

The concept of competence has been addressed by various researchers from different angles. For example, in the opinion of (Armesh, Wei, Ghalandarzehie, Sargolzaie, & Kahrazeh et al., 2014, Dobroszek, Mourao, & Grzesiak, 2019), the competences of specialists have an impact on the management of a technological environment, and the competitiveness of an organization. For some, the competences of logistics specialists, together with the investment in technologies, enable a company to gain a major competitive advantage in the market, and, respectively, comprise the present and future service possibilities of a transport organization (Katinienė, Jezerskė, & Vaičiūtė, 2021). Another scholar, Liikamaa (2015), defines a competence as an individual's underlying characteristic that is causally related to effective performance in a job or situation. They state that the principle of competency evaluation is that competences have to fit the required characteristics and the job (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). For Katinienė et al. (2021) “a competence is a set of personal applied abilities, skills and professional knowledge, required to choose the necessary operational methods and to perform the activities/functions/work of a particular type”. A competence is also defined as the

ability to perform a certain activity based on all acquired knowledge, abilities, skills and values (Čižiūnienė et al., 2016, Prusak, 2016). According to Vaičiūtė, Skirmantienė, & Domanska (2017), competence is a demonstration of efficient performance, ability to conduct assigned tasks in real and simulated work situation.

To summarize, it can be claimed that a competence is a set of person's abilities, such as personal skills, special skills, which help to complete assigned tasks. It signifies employee's ability to perform certain tasks. This definition will be a starting point for our research.

The scientific literature presents a variety of different competence groups. Researchers often classify competencies based on their logic, theory and purpose of the study, for example, Threshold and Performance competencies, Soft and Hard competencies, Prior and Empirical Classification (Mühlbacher, Nettekoven, & Putnova., 2009).

Competence Baseline classifies competences into three categories: technical, behavioral and contextual. Thus, competences are a behavioral approach to emotional, social and cognitive intelligence (Boyatzis, 2008).

Goleman divides competences into two main groups and five subgroups. Personal competences are self-awareness (competences 1–3), self-regulation (competences 4–12), cognitive skills (competences 13–15), motivation (competences 16–19) and social competences are empathy (competences 20–23) and social skills (competences 24–30) (Liikamaa, 2015).

Researchers Martinkus, Neverauskas, & Sakalas (2002) distinguished the following types of general competences:

1. Personal – personal development, communication with companies and team members. Comprises such skills as communication and cooperation, ability to delegate, creativity, stability and self-confidence, ability to work intensively in a team.

2. Social – ability to work with co-workers, executives, clients and create certain climate in a company. Ability to present oneself, to contact, to negotiate in a flexible manner, to cooperate, to express opinions and question;

3. Methodical – ability to obtain information, to process, to evaluate and to provide suggestions, to improve future operations, participation in social processes;

4. Professional – encompass all knowledge, preparation, necessary to conduct specific professional assignments. Necessary professional knowledge, experience, skills and knowledge on the product;

5. Management – management of specific professional area or organization. Assurance of company's results, production supply, innovations, strategic reasoning and planning, encouraging employees.

For the present work, the following three main competence groups are identified: special competences, social competences, personal competences (Vaičiūtė et al., 2017; Puodžiukienė & Aksomitienė, 2019). In Transport Logistics, special competences mean understanding the principles of logistics and transport operations, i.e., the competences required to fulfill the assignment. Analytical (social) competences are the competences needed to plan an optimal route, select cargo criteria, identify the needs of the clients, i.e., the competences related to the analysis, synthesis, modeling methods. Personal competences are communication, cooperation with clients, i.e., self-management competences.

Lin & Chang, 2018 proposed a framework with 83 required skills in logistics industry (33 business skills, 18 logistics skills, and 32 management skills).

Stankevičienė & Lobanova, (2006) identify four competences that are important in the context of person's work. The first, personal competence, is determined not by knowledge, but rather by employee's personal characteristics. The second, professional competence, is a range of qualities, abilities and experience applicable to employee's specific area of work. The third, social competence, comprises ability to communicate with other people. The last competence, identified by the scholars, is management ability, i.e., assurance of one's area of work and organization's results.

Table 1 Personal Competencies (prepared by the authors)

Puodžiukienė, Aksomitienė, 2019	Liikamaa, 2015	Vaičiūtė et al., 2017
Responsibility	Self-confidence	Responsibility
Good reaction	Self-assessment	Diligence
Commitment	Trustworthiness	Initiative
Diligence	Flexibility	Creativity
Conscientiousness	Innovation	Persuasiveness
Punctuality	Responsibility	Self-confidence
Initiative	Stress management	Goal and result-orientation
Self-control	Analytical thinking	Communicability
Persistence	Language proficiency	Persistence
Creativity	Achievement drive	Good memory
Aesthetic appearance	Commitment	Logical reasoning
	Initiative	Independence

The analysis of the classification of competences identified by different scientists, demonstrates the never-ending criteria and approaches applied for meaningful competence grouping. However, despite the different concepts, all researchers consistently distinguish personal competences, social competences and

professional competences as part of their approach. Thus, based on the analysis of scientific research, tables of different competencies were compiled.

Table 1 presents personal competencies based on the results obtained by three different studies.

Drawing on the results of the general competences table, it can be stated, that responsibility, creativity, initiative and self-confidence are personal competences identified by all researchers.

Meanwhile, such competences as aesthetic appearance, language proficiency, independence raise the question of whether they can still be classified as personal competences. This is especially true for language proficiency, as most researchers have identified it as social competence.

The results of yet another research, conducted in Finland, revealed that the most important competencies were "Achievement drive and Leadership, as well as Conflict management and Initiative" (Liikamaa, 2015).

A group of Lithuanian researchers also claimed that "it is possible to distinguish character traits that are regarded as very important by executives of Lithuanian and Polish transport companies: responsibility, goal and result-orientation, communicability, logical reasoning" (Vaičiūtė et al., 2017).

Researchers (Puodžiukienė, Aksomitienė, 2019) claim that the majority of respondents, when assessing the personal abilities of the managers in their companies, rated responsibility, quick orientation and conscientiousness as the most important. Hard work and honesty were named as equally important."

Drawing on numerous scientific research (Puodžiukienė, Aksomitienė, 2019; Liikamaa, 2015; Chang & Lin, 2018; Vaičiūtė et al., 2017), a list of social competences was developed and presented in Table 2.

Such social competences as negotiation skills, knowledge of foreign languages, ability to work in a team, delegation, appear to be among the most important ones, as they have been presented by the majority of the researchers.

It should also be noted that Chang & Lin, in their 2018 study, put more emphasis on study subjects, which they classified as business skills.

Vaičiūtė, Skirmantienė, & Domanska, in their research paper in 2017 claimed that „the research results have shown that leadership skills, driving license, the ability to work in a team, organizational skills, delegation, the ability to influence are important”.

Table 2 Social Competencies (prepared by the authors)

Puodžiukienė, Aksomitienė, 2019	Liikamaa, 2015	Chang & Lin, 2018	Vaičiūtė et al., 2017
Ability to expeditiously solve problems	Understanding others	Foreign Language	Leadership skills
Ability to work in a team	Developing other people/ Leadership	Operation system/software savvy	Ability to solve problems quickly
Negotiation skills	Leveraging diversity	International finance/exchange/trade	Driving license, Category B
Knowledge of Russian/ English/ German/foreign language	Organizational savvy	Business negotiation /communication	Ability to work in a team/ Delegation/Ability to influence
Leadership skills	Communications	Management (Strategy/ Financial/ Marketing/ Human resource/ Customer relationship)	Organizational/ negotiation / good computer skills
Delegation	Management	General business administration/ Business regulation/ Business statistics	Decision making
	Collaboration /Team Capabilities Relationship building	Accounting and cost control/Insurance	Knowledge of Russian/ English/ German/foreign language
		Micro/macroeconomics	

Research also reveals that communication skill is perceived as the most important business skill, followed by customer and strategy management skill, computer skill, finance skill, international trade and regulation skill, and regression analysis skill (Chang & Lin, 2018).

Research conducted by Lithuanian scholars (Puodžiukienė & Aksomitienė, 2019) indicate that the general abilities of managers working in transport and logistics companies are most valued: the ability to promptly solve problems, work in a team, negotiation skills and knowledge of English and Russian.

Special competences are of core importance when evaluating Transport logistics specialists. The list of competences is provided in Table 3, which presents the data of the research conducted by three groups of scientists (Puodžiukienė, Aksomitienė, 2019; Chang & Lin, 2018; Vaičiūtė et al., 2017).

Table 3 Special Competencies (prepared by the authors)

Puodžiukienė, Aksomitienė, 2019	Chang & Lin, 2018	Vaičiūtė et al., 2017
Employee work organization	International logistics/ Global logistics management	Planning
Planning	Transportation management/ Distribution management	Organization
Transportation processes management	Intermodal logistics	Management of the Warehouse functions
Preparation of Reports	Logistics law and regulation	Management of Transportation Process of Logistics Product. Quality assurance
Maintaining client relations	Logistics information system	Preparation and Implementation of Projects and Plans
Initiation and implementation of innovations	Delivery management	Issuance, acceptance and maintenance of documents to improve transport business
Searching for new clients and intermediaries	Quality assurance management	Initiation and implementation of Innovations
Customs clearance	Transportation economics	Inventory management
Management of transport documents	Supply chain management	Calculating service costs
Preparation of projects and plans	Electronic commerce	Preparation of Reports
Stock management	Enterprise resource planning	Preparation of contracts
	Inventory management/ Warehousing management/ Order management	Employee work organization
	Logistics system simulation	Warehousing and control of logistics product
	Purchasing/ Retailer management	Maintaining lasting client relations
	Production plan	Searching new clients and carriers

The analysis of the table demonstrates that different research revealed various special competences that were appreciated, and that the way these competences were prioritized was different. For example, the research conducted by Lin et al., 2018 revealed that transportation skill is perceived as the most important logistics skill, followed by global logistics and supply chain management skill, logistics information management skill and logistics operation skill. (Chang & Lin, 2018); a similar research by Vaičiūtė et al. (2017) revealed that such competencies as

planning, coordination and control of order fulfillment process, maintaining lasting client relations, calculating service costs as well as searching for new clients and carriers hold particularly importance". In their research findings indicate that "organizing the work of employees, planning and managing transportation processes, preparing reports and maintaining relations with customers" are of vital importance (Puodžiukienė & Aksomitienė, 2019).

Thus, to conduct the survey of the competences of Transport Logistics graduates of Vilnius College of Technologies and Design, representatives of transport logistics companies were introduced to the concepts of competences and their division into main groups. The respondents were requested to evaluate special competences (competences required for work), as well as social competences and personal competences, based on compiled lists of competences (Table 1, Table 2, Table 3).

Research of the competence of Vilnius College of Technologies and Design Transport logistics graduates

To obtain representative results of the in dept interview, the target survey segment was established, i.e., 10 experts that matched the following criteria were interviewed: respondents had to have education in the sphere of logistics or transport, at least a 5-year working experience in a transport organization, and at least a 3-year management experience. They also were employees at the companies that had hired the highest number of Transport Logistics study programme graduates of Vilnius College of Technologies and Design.

The experts were asked to assess the competencies necessary for transport logistics specialists and to rank them according to their importance. The interviewees also had to assess which competencies were the most important for a transport logistics manager working in a transport organization.

Graduates of Transport Logistics study programme at Vilnius College of Technologies and Design perform a variety of functions: search for the cargo/transport, plan routes as well as working hours of the drivers, control and manage the movement of vehicles, accept orders from the company's customers, control the cargo transportation process, communicate with clients, administers documents related to cargo transportation.

The first task of this study was to find out whether the managers were satisfied with the level of competences of the existing employees, and whether their competence was sufficient for the position. Majority of the managers said that not all employees have the necessary competencies; however, some competencies are acquired only in work activities, and employees often lack work experience. The

employer has the opportunity to choose from a larger number of people who want to work, which creates career opportunities in companies.

While assessing the competences of Transport Logistics graduates, the experts indicated a good command of foreign languages (English, Russian), good teamwork skills, critical analytical working skills, digitization skills and specialist knowledge, e.g. knowledge of international transport markets. Although knowledge of English and Russian languages is good, skills of German or other EU languages are lacking.

Interviewees also indicated that experience is not always a necessity, but motivation, honesty and responsibility are of real importance. By observing graduates in their work activities, companies have the opportunity to observe their work and demonstrated competences and abilities during the trial period.

Experts stated that knowledge of law, of project management as well as ability to work with special IT programs is very important; however, graduates lack this knowledge.

According to the experts, as many as 88.5 percent of Transport Logistics graduates of the Vilnius College of Technology and Design demonstrate very good knowledge and skills.

The experts stated that practical knowledge of the graduates is of particular importance. They confirmed that the Transport Logistics graduates of Vilnius College of Technology and Design have excellent practical knowledge, which largely depends on the individuality and personal characteristics of the person.

When evaluating professional competences, the experts emphasized that graduates are able to apply theoretical knowledge in practice, know and comply with the requirements for work safety, know foreign languages, and are able to formulate a task and perform it. Graduates lack decision-making autonomy.

Experts assessed graduates of Transport Logistics at Vilnius College of Technologies and Design as hard working, eager to learn new things at the workplace, and hungry for new knowledge. When presented a task, they quickly figure it out and present several ways to solve it.

So, it can be stated that the graduates are curious, having not only theoretical but also practical knowledge. They are able to analyze practical situations, and not afraid of challenges.

Experts were asked to evaluate the personal qualities of the graduates. Interest in work and profession, conscientiousness, diligence, creativity, communication, ability to work in a team were considered the most important qualities. Such personal qualities as diligence and honesty, initiative, was the least manifested.

Thus, the graduates are really motivated and responsible, diligent and open to new tasks and responsibilities.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the result of this research expresses wishes and views of a large group of Transport logistics' professionals regarding the competencies that are important for those who work in the field. The results can be utilized in decision making, recruitment, selection, education, training.

Conclusions

Scientific research emphasized the importance of the competencies of logistics specialists. The competence is a set of person's abilities, such as personal skills, special skills, which help to complete assigned tasks. The concepts of competences are division into main groups special competences (competences required for work), as well as social and personal competences.

While assessing the social competences of Transport Logistics graduates, the experts indicated a good command of foreign languages, good teamwork skills. Interviewees also indicated that the personal competences are motivation, honesty and responsibility and critical analytical working skills are of real importance. As special competences, respondents mention digitization skills and specialist knowledge of law, of project management as well as ability to work with special IT programs are very important.

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