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Developing Supply Chain Management Professionals

Edward Sweeney, NITL

Shortage of Supply Chain Management Professionals

The need for improvement in the logistics and supply chain management capability of companies in Ireland is becoming increasingly recognised. One of the main bottlenecks currently is the shortage of supply chain management professionals. Education and training has a fundamental role to play if the supply of suitably qualified human resource is to be addressed in a meaningful way. A cursory glance at the "situations vacant" columns of the press indicates that demand for people with the right knowledge and skills greatly exceeds supply.

There are numerous techniques and technologies which can facilitate improvement in a company's supply chain capability. However, experience has shown that these tools alone can not address the weaknesses. After all any improvement tool is only as good as a company's ability to utilise it and effective utilisation depends above all on the knowledge and skills of employees. Education and training is essential in developing the requisite knowledge and skills. Consultants can play a role in terms of providing an objective view of a company's requirements. But the only way to generate a sustainable competitive advantage is to ensure that the necessary knowledge and skills are available in-house. Indeed, the "consultancy culture" which has developed in many companies is a direct result of this lack of in-house expertise. Given the shortage of suitably qualified and experienced people in the job market, the only way that this problem can be addressed is through effective development of existing staff.

Training and Education – the role and responsibilities of managers

People at all levels in organisations require broader perspectives combined with the ability and motivation to manage change. In tackling the issue of staff development in the area of supply chain management companies must firstly recognise the role played in

the business improvement process by different levels of management. Senior management is responsible for formulating a strategy and monitoring its implementation. Junior and middle managers are generally responsible for the detailed implementation of the strategy and ongoing operational management. Functional specialists within support functions facilitate this implementation. Irrespective of function staff need to develop an understanding of the appropriate philosophies, practices, techniques and tools which are necessary in achieving world-class status in logistics and supply chain management. Any worthwhile development programme must address the needs of all levels of management.

Development of senior managers should be aimed at strategic decision making. Robust supply chain strategies are vital if corporate resources are to concentrated in such a way as to improve overall business performance. Senior managers need an understanding of the role of supply chain management philosophy in the overall business improvement process. This is achieved through open short courses which describe the latest developments in the field, workshops which involve detailed review of a company's strategy and one-to-one mentoring and coaching of individual managers.

In most companies the majority of existing junior and middle managers have not been sufficiently developed. As a consequence of this much of their true potential remains untapped and they are prevented from fully contributing to the change programmes necessary for a company to become, and to remain, competitive. Education and training of junior and middle managers should focus on awareness of business strategy and the development of the specific tools and techniques necessary for active involvement in the change process.

There is also a prime need for the best young brains to provide a fresh, innovative impetus. These graduate-level "high-flyers" have a potentially useful role to play as "agents of change". They generally require postgraduate-level development in all areas of supply chain management. Such development programmes recognise that the successful senior managers of the future will be drawn from this group.

Scope of Supply Chain Management Development Programmes

Irrespective of which level of management is being developed there is a need for knowledge and skills improvements in four broad areas: logistics, technology, operational management and strategic management. The "Logistics" area provides a detailed understanding of all key aspects of supply chain management philosophy and operational practice. The "Technology" element addresses the role of technology, in particular IT, in facilitating business and supply chain improvements. The "Operational Management" area includes all aspects of operational management, including quality and project management as well as providing an understanding of the main issues involved in people management. It is imperative that at least an appreciation of the role of logistics and supply chain management in the context of the overall business is developed. The "Strategic Management" element addresses this requirement.

	Logistics	Technology	Operational Management	Strategic Management
Senior	**U**	**A**	**U**	**C**
Middle	**U**	**U**	**C**	**A**
Junior	**U**	**C**	**C**	**A**

A Awareness

U Understanding

C Competence

Education and training programmes aimed at senior management will focus on the strategic dimension while programmes aimed at middle and junior management will have more of an operational management focus (see diagram).

Some elements of supply chain manager development are best addressed using "open" programmes where managers from a group of companies attend education and/or training courses. Such elements would include education in the generic philosophies and concepts (e.g. partnership approaches to supplier management) and training in generic skills (e.g. project management skills). An advantage of the "multi-company" approach is that useful cross-fertilisation of ideas between participants from different companies and backgrounds can take place. For education and training which addresses specific issues of concern to a particular company or industry more focussed in-house programmes may be required.

The Partnership Approach to Training and Education

Irrespective of what level of management is being trained and whether the course is "open" or in-house there is a need to ensure that training providers and client companies work in partnership through all stages of programme design and delivery. In the past companies have all too often presented their perceived training needs as part of an invitation to tender. Potential training providers then bid for the right to design and deliver this training. In such situations the client company often takes a back seat while the training provider designs and develops the course material. During this design and development stage the provider is often forced to work with briefing notes which lack the necessary detail. The client then complains loudly when the training programme fails to live up to expectations!

The only solution to this problem involves the training provider and the client working together on all aspects of the programme design, development, delivery and follow-up. This approach is rooted firmly in supply chain management philosophy. Companies need to select strategic partners to support all stages in the process. In this way, the design and detailed development of programmes will reflect the real, rather than the perceived,

training needs of companies. By adopting the partnership approach at the programme delivery stage participants will be better able to relate general principles to the operations of their own organisations. Finally, programme assessment and follow-up needs to be carried out jointly by the company and the training provider. This stage involves participant review of programmes and assessment of participant competence levels as well as measurement of changes in employee and organisational effectiveness in the short, medium and long term. This type of partnership approach helps to ensure that companies generate as high a rate of return on their training and education as possible.

The NITL Integrated Development Programme

The NITL Integrated Development Programme (IDP) addresses the needs of all managers through its comprehensive structure. Middle and junior managers who have extensive practical industrial experience but who do not necessarily have formal academic qualifications benefit from the **Executive Development Programme** (EDP). The **Graduate Development Programme** (GDP) is aimed specifically at graduate-level staff who aspire to being the senior managers of the future. The **Senior Executive Learning Programme** (SELP) keeps senior managers abreast of the latest developments in supply chain management. The **Dedicated In-house Programmes** are designed and delivered in collaboration with the NITL's partner companies to meet their specific requirements.