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Rationale behind the need for the implementation of strategic ideas in a logistics company's management system

*If everything around us was certain,
we would not need strategic management¹.*

Abstract. Managers of logistics companies work under permanent pressure of the changes taking place in their environment. There is nothing revealing in a claim that these changes are sudden and abrupt, and that they can exert negative impact on outcomes of economic activity over a short period of time. One can respond to these unfavourable conditions by effectively implementing values, ideas and methods developed under the scientific discipline known as strategic management in the managing process of a logistics company. This article provides a model of strategic procedure entailing the specificity of operations conducted by a logistics company.

Key words: logistics, logistics management, strategic management

1. Introduction

Contemporary management of a logistics company depends on the ability to observe and adjust to the variable conditions of the surrounding. These changes are so profound and unpredictable that managers must face an ongoing process of redefining their activity. In order to respond to these continuous changes efficiently, it is of major importance to display the ability to implement ideas, values and recommendations developed in the field of strategic management

¹ “Gdyby wszystko dookoła było pewne, nie potrzebowalibyśmy zarządzania strategicznego” – A. Góralczyk, *Myślenie strategiczne w zarządzaniu*, Wyd. Prawno-Ekonomiczne INFOR, Warszawa 1999, p. 14.



in the process of logistics management. The author of this paper has provided arguments to support close cooperation between the fields of logistics and strategic management.

2. Contemporary conditions of logistics management

In 1850, one of the greatest philosophers of the 19th century, Frédéric Bastiat, wrote that “there is but one difference between a bad economist and a good economist: the former is satisfied with the noticeable outcome, whereas the latter entails both the outcome that can be noticed and the outcomes that should be anticipated”². If one was to translate these words into the language of logistics, one could assume that a ‘bad logistician’ can only operate limited to the categories of short-sightedness, whereas a ‘good logistician’ is not only capable of assessing their own actions from a short-term perspective, but more importantly, can anticipate the consequences of their decisions in a more extensive and longer horizon. The latter feature, namely the ability to think and act strategically and in a long time horizon, is becoming a more and more serious challenge for persons operating in the TSL (transport, shipping, logistics) sector.

Browsing through various publications concerning the extensive body of problems pertaining to logistics management, one may notice a certain gap related to strategic management and its influence on logistics management. The reasons for such a state of matters remain unknown, but this subject tends to be consistently marginalised. The available studies are more concerned about the principles of building logistic strategies and concepts of strategic supply chains³. There are no comprehensive solutions to assess the influence of strategic management on the field of logistics in its broad understanding. Neither are there any empirical studies conducted in this area, which makes it impossible to diagnose the state of connections, correlations etc. between strategic management and logistics, and to develop specific recommendations modifying these correlations.

It seems that the role of strategic management in the extensive field of logistics will keep growing, this to be primarily associated with characteristics of the contemporary framework of the environment affecting the operations of a logistics company. Regardless of the legal and organisational form, specialisation, managerial framework, size, capital and type of clients serviced etc., logistics

² F. Bastiat, *Dziela Zebrane*, Wyd. Prohibita Warszawa 2009, in: L. Balcerowicz, *Odkrywając wolność – przeciw zniewoleniu umysłów*, Wyd. Zys i S-ka, Warszawa 2012, p. 885.

³ See also: J. Witkowski, *Strategia logistyczna przedsiębiorstw przemysłowych*, Wyd. AE we Wrocławiu, Wrocław 1995; M. Ciesielski, *Logistyka w strategiach firm*, PWN, Warszawa – Poznań 1999.

organisations present in the market are subject to ongoing changes. One will not be particularly innovative claiming that the only constant element of this reality is the change. "The change is a ubiquitous and permanent element of the contemporary organisation's life, for it affects both the surrounding and the inside. It is also difficult to imagine even a short period of time with no changes taking place. This results from a specific density of both the external and the internal environment of an organisation, i.e. an immense multitude and complexity of direct and indirect connections between the phenomena occurring around and inside the organisation. Global and local markets of commodities and services, capital and labour, are active all the time, triggering changes of prices, demand and costs, forcing managers to make the necessary adjustments. They lead to changes in business profiles, technologies, market orientation, employment policy etc. Their impact is similar to that of political events, legal framework modifications and governmental policies. Also human attitudes, aspirations and motivations outside and inside the organisation tend to change. Some changes involve others, and then further and further changes in the long run. And this is how this everlasting and ongoing game is played"⁴.

It was already in the year 1985, that Harry Igor Ansoff observed a specific trend in the increase of the change newness which consisted in important events affecting enterprises being more and more dissimilar from what had used to be known in the past⁵. "The world succumbs to changes. We do not know whether today's changes are more dramatic than those from fifty or one hundred years ago, but we do know for sure that they are more rapid and thoroughly modify the landscape of the competitive environment. These changes apply to different organisations to a different extent, but they do apply to all of them. Large companies must tackle global competition on their local markets, public institutions are subject to informatisation and small companies internationalise their operations via the Internet"⁶. "The environment is dynamically changing. The sources of these changes are to be sought in technological, social, political and economic conditions. New technologies, new ideas, new standards and values cause that the former efforts undertaken by organisations are no longer guarantees of success measured by the degree to which the strategy has been effectively implemented. This means that the dynamic of the environment forces logistics organisation to make necessary corrections, both in terms of the level and the scope of their activities, this triggering the necessity to yield to the process of changes"⁷.

⁴ A. Koźmiński, *Zarządzanie od podstaw*, Wyd. Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2008, p. 493.

⁵ H.I. Ansoff, *Zarządzanie strategiczne*, PWE, Warszawa 1985, p. 65.

⁶ K. Obłój, *Strategia organizacji*, PWE, Warszawa 2007, p. 23.

⁷ P. Banaszyk, *Strategiczna odnowa przedsiębiorstwa*, Centrum Doradztwa i Informacji Difin, Warszawa 2007, p. 11.

“Managers often tend to fall for an illusion of being able to control and change their organisations as they please and plan. Meanwhile, numerous organisations change slowly and reluctantly, or even prefer to die out rather than to change their well-established action pattern”⁸. A change is about the future, i.e. about the point of reference which is unknown, and this triggers uncertainty and anxiety. The very idea of the future was well recapitulated in the famous Roosevelt’s saying: “in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes”⁹. “The only certain thing one can say about the future is that it will differ from what used to be. Most people, if they think about it at all, believe that the world they know will last for ages. People face difficulties imagining a radical change of their own lives, not to mention a completely new civilisation. They obviously notice things changing but, relying on some curious rule, they still assume that the transformations will somehow leave themselves be, not disturbing the familiar structure of economic and political life. They confidently await the future to become a continuation of the present”¹⁰. One obviously cannot know the future with a 100 per cent certainty, however, there are methods to predict the future. Michel Robert¹¹ has proposed to rely on ‘4 models of the future’ when trying to make forecasts:

1. The future ahead of us – related to the phenomena and consequences of changes one can predict based on trend extrapolation, e.g. demographics.
2. The future behind us – the author argues that the future repeats itself, and certain trends are sinusoidal.
3. The future around us – trends and phenomena that are little noticeable at present, but will intensify as time passes.
4. The future beside us – events and trends occurring in distant markets that will ultimately migrate and start affecting our own organisation.

The future cannot be predicted with 100% certainty, but one can be prepared for it and control it. “In an environment characterised by ongoing instability and volatility, the future of an enterprise depends more than ever on its capability to learn about and understand the factors of evolution and breakthroughs. The changes emerging on the horizon are barely noticeable; information about them is fragmented, disturbs the peace and, as such, it is often rejected by organisations”¹². A person managing a contemporary logistics company faces specific challenges

⁸ J. Palikot, K. Oblój, *Myśli o nowoczesnym biznesie*, Wyd. Słowo/Obraz/Terytoria, Gdańsk 2005, p. 56.

⁹ A. Supernat, *Techniki decyzyjne i organizatorskie*, PWN, Wrocław 2000, p. 113.

¹⁰ A.H. Toffler, *Budowa nowej cywilizacji. Polityka trzeciej fali*, Wyd. Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2005, p. 12.

¹¹ M. Robert, *Nowe myślenie strategiczne*, MT Biznes, Łódź 2006, p. 43.

¹² G. Roth, M. Kurtyka, *Zarządzanie zmianą, od strategii do działania*, CeDeWu, Warszawa 2008, p. 147.

the future brings. It means the necessity of continuous search for new institutional models and managerial behaviours in practice. In light of irregular changes of discontinuous nature, both in the micro and the macro scale, there are considerable difficulties in interpretation of the future economic and social events. New technologies and globalisation force organisations to assume instability as a normal state of matters (uncertainty and risk). To perceive the state of uncertainty and risk as a threat is a mistake, and it only reflects the fact that one lacks the ability to perceive change as something normal. "Nothing here is given and invariable; everything is a matter of choices being limited to a larger or smaller extent. What seems to be constant for Polish managers is variable for the western ones. What Polish managers perceive as an issue is an opportunity for their western peers. And finally, the constant variability of all things (regulations, prices, recipients), treated by managers of Polish enterprises as unbearable, is perceived by the western partners as normality, where one acts and not complains"¹³, Krzysztof Oblój wrote in his book published in 1998 entitled *Strategia sukcesu firmy* (company success strategy). Even though 15 years have passed ever since, the notions of change and future are still perceived by most Polish logistics organisations as threats and not opportunities; not as possibilities to accomplish new plans, but rather as situations forcing a defensive attitude, which only leads to the lack of response to the potential options emerging in the surrounding. In Hugh Courtney's article of 1997, published in *Harvard Business Review*, the author described models of uncertainty levels:

- "the first level applies to the future being rather clearly determined as a point of destination, the access path to which is relatively easy to programme in a procedure,
- the second level which describes the future as a series of alternative scenarios involves higher labour demand and increased costs. One can develop ways to reach individual alternative targets,
- the third level: future defined as a range of possible events – a target/goal of an organisation's operations can be found at any point of the continuum within the given range,
- the fourth level: 'total vagueness' – in this case, the future is described by multiple dimensions of transitory nature (they come and go mutually coupled which makes the environment completely unpredictable)"¹⁴. The contemporary organisation management framework is typical of the fourth level.

¹³ K. Oblój, *Strategia sukcesu firmy*, PWE, Warszawa 2000.

¹⁴ H. Courtney, J. Kirkland, P. Viguerie, "Strategy under uncertainty", *Harvard Business Review* 1997, Vol. 75, No. 6; after: R. Krupski, *Elastyczność organizacji*, Wyd. UE we Wrocławiu, Wrocław 2008, s. 11.

The requirements imposed by the environment and the difficulties in anticipating development paths force organisations to assume maximum flexibility of their operations and always seek the emerging opportunities¹⁵. The level of social and economic development of a country, and hence the living standard of its citizens, is ultimately dependent on the economic entities creating value. Contemporary businesses require continuous development. They need to identify a new business philosophy and corporate values in a global integrated market, and enforce implementation of such decision making and regulatory solutions which improve their competitive advantage, create their value for business and clients as well as reduce the risk of loss.

Consequently, organisations should effectively channel their stream of offerings (products, services) so that they can be accepted by the market and reach clients at prices ensuring economic surplus¹⁶. “Willing to adapt to the surrounding, survive and thrive, businesses should ensure that their development is sustainable and lasting. The sustainable development concept is based on utilisation of synergy of three aspects: economic, social and ecological, and it conditions the prerequisites of an enterprise’s functioning and development”¹⁷. Along with the socioeconomic development, one can observe a relative decline in the importance of resources referred to as ‘hard’ (fixed assets) in favour of the importance of ‘soft’ resources (competences, standards, cultural values, relationships, systems, attitudes). The latter are an expression (outcome) of intellectual, creative efforts of the human capital engaged in the activity of economic entities. “If the contemporary knowledge is becoming the basic strategic resource, on the foundations of which advantage is built in competitive markets, then also management, and strategic management in particular, is becoming one of major areas of organisation management”¹⁸.

2. Role of strategic management in logistics management

Success of a logistics organisation, operating under conditions of strong competition, ongoing changes in the economic system and the consumer awareness, involves high requirements towards the organisation’s decision makers. The ability to quickly notice changes and trends makes it possible to recognise the emerg-

¹⁵ More on this subject in: R. Krupski, *Zarządzanie przedsiębiorstwem w turbulentnym otoczeniu*, PWE, Warszawa 2005 and R. Krupski, *Elastyczność organizacji*, op. cit.

¹⁶ M. Białasiewicz, *Rozwój Przedsiębiorstwa. Zarządzanie i diagnoza*, Wyd. Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, Szczecin 2004, pp. 11-14.

¹⁷ K. Janasz, *Zarządzanie strategiczne*, Centrum Doradztwa i Informacji Difin, Warszawa 2008, p. 18.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 19.

ing threats, opportunities and occasions, and enables application of numerous means to adjust to the current situation. Logistics organisations operating in an unpredictable market, if they are determined to succeed, are obliged to make use of the achievements (tools, methods, techniques) of strategic management. “For those who do not know which port they are headed to, no wind is favourable” are Seneca’s famous words of wisdom which accurately illustrate the ideas of strategic management being a concept focused on formulation and implementation of a long-term strategy for the organisation’s survival and growth, a concept of management, a scientific discipline as well as art aimed at determination of long-term organisation goals and practical means to accomplish them. “What is required to recognise and analyse mutual correlations between functional areas of a company and its connections with the changing surrounding is to apply appropriate management methods and techniques”¹⁹.

Halina Brdulak noticed that various regions of the world seem to exist facing growing uncertainty and, to a lesser or greater extent, they are connected with logistics, therefore the understanding of the notion of logistics keeps changing and, most importantly, the gist of the problem is not merely to keep up with these changes, but rather to be ahead of them²⁰. In the contemporary world, full of mutual interconnections, where complexity and uncertainty have become a standard, persons in charge must assume new ways of acting. The scale of this phenomenon may be evidenced by the fact that new nomenclature reflecting the variability and complexity of the business environment is more and more commonly used. Authors of the *Harvard Business Review* believe that we are doomed to what is known as ‘new normality’, i.e. radical alteration of rules and conditions of economic activity and management. “One thing is certain: when we finally enter the post-crisis era, the business environment will no longer be what it used to be before. Managers willing to succeed in the new normality must have clear understanding of what has changed and what still remains unaltered from the perspective of clients, the company and the entire sector. The new environment, even though it differs from what we may be used to, still provides numerous opportunities for those who are appropriately prepared²¹”. Authors of the report entitled “Future Supply Chain 2012”²² made an attempt to anticipate radical changes in the current understanding of characteristics of the activity referred to as a supply chain. The most important ones include:

¹⁹ Z. Drązek, *Zarządzanie Strategiczne Przedsiębiorstwem*, PWE, Warszawa 2003, p. 25.

²⁰ H. Brdulak, *Logistyka przyszłości*, PWE, Warszawa 2012, p. 9.

²¹ Ł. Świerzewski, “Nowa normalność w świecie biznesu”, *Harvard Business Review Polska*, July-August 2012, p. 14.

²² More on this subject in: “Łańcuch dostaw 2012 – presja na zmiany – jak nowe trendy rynkowe, technologiczne i demograficzne zmieniają reguły rządzące globalnymi łańcuchami dostaw”, *Harvard Business Review Polska*, November 2012, pp. R1-R12.

- growing importance of the emerging markets, i.e. Brazil, China, India, Russia, African countries and South Korea,
- growing consumption markets,
- technological development, and e-commerce in particular,
- increasing significance of what is referred to as green supply chains – maximum respect towards natural resources,
- ageing of the Western societies,
- progress of urbanisation.

The aforementioned change trends should be taken into account by persons managing global supply chains.

The speed of changes observed in the global world, and so in the TSL sector as well, does not surprise anyone and it is commonly accepted by those in charge. The difficulties occur when these changes start being perceived and identified, when one responds to them, starts creating development scenarios and adjust to the changes etc. The changes are particularly significant for logistics as a scientific field which may be characterised as interdisciplinary, living, continuously changing and following the transformations taking place. In such a complex environment so difficult to predict, the only organisations which may succeed are those being capable of anticipating the specific future events, taking over the initiative and creating their own fate. There are numerous examples of logistics organisations which, despite operating in unpredictable conditions, keep following the path of variability and successfully implement their services and products, hence outdistancing their competitors.

The speed of change of contemporary organisations is so high that laboratories and research centres must continuously design products and services with the prospects to replace those that are only to be introduced into the market in the nearest future (e.g. in the automotive or IT sector). Such an intentional attitude to consistent taking over of the initiative is an expression of standpoint that may be referred to as a strategic initiative. Consequently, one may propose a hypothesis that the more unpredictable the operating conditions and the more turbulent the environment of logistics organisations are, the more legitimate it is to act strategically by following a suitable development concept entailing a long time horizon. Proper and wide-scale implementation of the strategic management principles on the logistic grounds enables concentration on key success factors of the given logistics organisation, since a natural state of organisation management is the pressure on making ad-hoc decisions being contradictory and mutually exclusive in numerous different areas. What matters most in this respect is to find the equilibrium, i.e. a balance between various operational aspects and the ability to perceive matters from the perspective of the future. By approaching management in such a manner, one is capable of a hierarchic glimpse into the reality, which

may lead to an appropriate separation of prioritised efforts from those of lesser importance. The theoretical conditions of contemporary logistics management discussed above have enabled the author to develop a practical model of a strategic procedure to be implemented in a logistics company. The author is convinced that one of the main goals of scientific efforts is to create effective tools and methods which, once they have been planted on the ground of economic practice, will enable efficient solving of the dilemmas decision makers must face.

The procedure of the strategic management process developed for a logistics company has been illustrated in Figure 1.

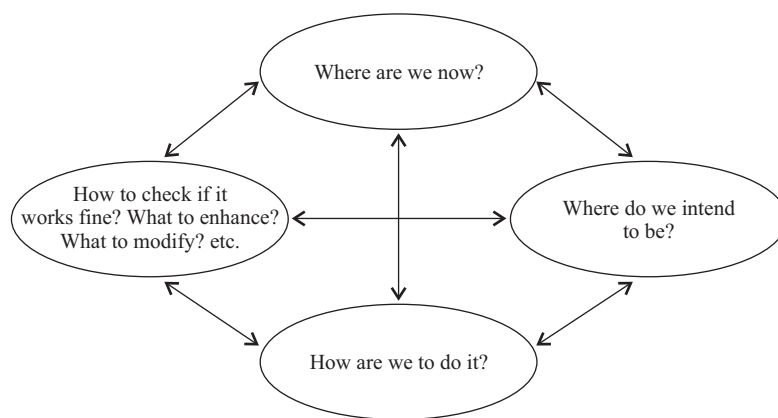


Figure 1. Implementation of the strategic procedure in a logistics company

Source: author's own study based on: A. Kaleta, "Process wyboru strategicznego – kluczowy etap zarządzania strategicznego", in: *Zarządzanie strategiczne w badaniach teoretycznych i w praktyce*, eds. A. Kaleta, K. Moszkowicz, Wyd. UE we Wrocławiu, Wrocław 2006, p. 74.

The model proposed may constitute a valuable source of practical guidelines pertaining to introduction of strategic thinking into logistics management. The first stage is related to a diagnosis of the state the logistics enterprise is facing. It consists in thoroughly isolating logistic processes and describing strengths, weaknesses, potential opportunities, limitations, future hazards and developmental prospects. Such a diagnosis should never end with the mere statement of the current status, but with recommendations on the future states of the organisation's development²³. The next stage is determination of the direction towards which the logistics organisation should aim in development and of what needs to be

²³ Find out more about this subject at: A. Bujak, D. Ostrowski, "The role of strategic analysis in logistical management", in: *Developing of transportation flows in 21st century supply chains*, ed. J. Szołtysek, *Studia Ekonomiczne Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Katowicach – Zeszyty Naukowe Wydziałowe* 2012, No. 121, pp. 45-58.

improved in the operations as well as sending an explicit message about what the company will look like in 5 or 10 years. In this respect, the instruments one may find very useful will be strategic and operational targets along with specific indicators applicable to individual areas²⁴. What follows is the stage of skilful application of the principles related to operational management as well as methods and tools developed in the course of business practice. This stage is particularly practical in nature as it involves efficient transformation of the original strategic assumptions into the actual operations. The final stage is effective learning, drawing conclusions and modelling of the strategic practice. One should stress that the said individual stages continuously merge and complement one another.

3. Conclusions

To recapitulate the discussion on the influence of strategic management on logistics management, it needs to be emphasised that “strategic management should, at least theoretically, reduce the importance and the scope of events difficult to predict and having negative consequences for the organisation, which may even be surprising. For that reason, the purpose of this discipline is also to drop hints on what to do in order to make the future, at least to some degree, more predictable. It increases the capacity of organisations to control their own future”²⁵. In order to respond proactively to the variability, tumultuous character and unpredictability of the environment, organisations operating in the TSL sector should pursue fully intentional implementation of ideas, values and methods of strategic management in their own managerial process which, as the business practice seems to confirm, is an effective means of response to the ever-changing conditions of management.

Every logistics organisation must continuously answer questions about its future: what will it be like, will it change the conditions of competition, how will it affect operational decisions, how will it shape the relationships with business partners? Despite the enormous sphere of growing uncertainty, the key to success is the ability to anticipate the future trends and phenomena. How to achieve this, what methods, tools or measures to apply to meet the objectives are questions partially answered by both the theory and the practice of strategic management. “One may think, write, speak about the future, one may try to guess it, forecast

²⁴ Find out more about this subject at: D. Ostrowski, M. Wilk, “Rola i znaczenie strategii i celów strategicznych w logistyce”, in: *Wyzwania i perspektywy współczesnego zarządzania*, ed. K. Łukasik, *Monografie Politechniki Częstochowskiej – Wydział Zarządzania*, Częstochowa 2012, pp. 219-235.

²⁵ J. Sutherland, *Klucz do zarządzania strategicznego*, PWN, Warszawa 2007, p. 7.

through extrapolation etc., but most of all, the future needs to be moulded”²⁶. The author is aware of the fact that this article is by no means exhaustive with regard to the subject discussed, and the problem in question is interesting and complex enough that it requires detailed and intensified studies. It is recommended that both theoretical considerations and practical examinations pertaining to the influence of the strategic management concept on logistic activity should be conducted in a more detailed fashion, since there is a noticeable gap in the literature of the subject where the problems discussed above most definitely fit.

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²⁶ G.W. Kołodko, *Dokąd zmierza świat. Ekonomia Polityczna Przyszłości*, Wyd. Prószyński i S-ka, Warszawa 2013, p. 69.

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Uzasadnienie potrzeby implementowania idei strategicznej w zarządzanie przedsiębiorstwem logistycznym

Streszczenie. Zarządzający przedsiębiorstwami logistycznymi poddawani są nieustannie presji zmian dokonujących się w otoczeniu. Nie jest niczym odkrywczym stwierdzenie, że zmiany są gwałtowne, raptowne i potrafią w bardzo krótkim czasie wpłynąć niekorzystnie na efekty działalności. Odpowiedzią na te niesprzyjające warunki może być skuteczna implementacja w proces zarządzania przedsiębiorstwem logistycznym wartości, idei, metod wypracowanych przez dyscyplinę naukową zarządzanie strategiczne. W opracowaniu zaprezentowano model procedury strategicznej uwzględniający specyfikę działalności przedsiębiorstwa logistycznego.

Słowa kluczowe: logistyka, zarządzanie logistyczne, zarządzanie strategiczne