

Согласитесь, гораздо приятнее ожидать свой автомобиль за чашкой кофе и журналом, чем мерзнуть на улице.

Подводя итоги, стоит отметить, что за последние несколько лет компании в Беларуси действительно стали понимать важность клиента для бизнеса. Это большой шаг для создания качественного сервиса в стране. Однако не стоит забывать, что для получения действительно сильного конкурентного преимущества необходимо обратить внимание на те моменты, которые до сих пор не заметили другие. Именно тогда компания становится серьезным игроком на рынке, обращая на себя внимание покупателей.

## **MODERN TENDENCIES AND APPROACHES TO EDUCATING SPECIALISTS IN LOGISTICS**

**Myasnikova Olga Vyacheslavovna  
Sereda Alexander Evgenyevich**

School of Business and Management of Technology  
Minsk, Republic of Belarus

*It is becoming more and more acceptable that we are facing two challenges in educating logisticians. On the one hand, we have to ensure that they gain skills needed to succeed in the world outside the academia; on the other hand, educating students properly contributes to the economy growth, for we live in a highly competitive, changing world.*

*Also important is to distinguish between theory and experience that should act together and support each other. We need to lay emphasis on the developing not only a professional with theoretical and empirical knowledge, but also a specialist able to apply both, gathering new and deepening already existing understanding of business environment.*

As of today, we are lucky enough to witness great changes in demands initiated by the modern market that directly affect specialists in logistics and other business fields alike. The continuous development is mostly propelled by the changes of overall business environment and heightened competitions. Especially this holds true for the companies whose intention is to function on a global scale. As a result, managers face relatively new types of challenges that have to be effectively dealt with in order to keep up with the competition and away from bankruptcy

or merging. Therefore, students should be introduced to the programs designed to prepare them for already existing challenges and trends and, which is also significant, to the upcoming difficulties and changes that they will possibly face later. The main purpose of such programs should be to create an ability to think strategically and envision all the likely outcomes that can follow any decision made. However, by what means can it be achieved? On the whole, it is conventional to highlight two main approaches: theory – oriented and practice – oriented ones. To start off with, let us take a look at the theory – oriented one.

The most important aspect of all is, of course, basic theory, which constitutes the foundation to build on for a specialist of every kind. Without carefully structured theoretical knowledge, it would be hard to impossible to form a clear understanding of what is happening around. According to the general theory of reflexivity put forward by George Soros, theoretical knowledge is here to support the cognitive function which, in essence, is not much more than gathering information about various processes in order to manipulate reality [5, p. 6]. Sophisticated though it appears, that is about all what it does – it provides only a general understanding which doesn't have to be accurate at all (although it may claim so). The greatest flaw of theoretical knowledge is that it can be slightly different from actual reality at best and completely misleading at worst. The theory of games designed by John von Neumann could serve as a decent example with regard to this; it seemed flawless on paper but was impossible to apply while playing the real poker. The reason for this is that theory created boundaries within which it was applicable, but real – life situations tend to be different and there is no mathematical theory that could predict anything with 100 % credibility [5, p. 29].

As a result, we can not fully rely on the theoretical knowledge as the main tool in educating students; however, theoretical knowledge is necessary in order to envision, analyze and approximately predict provided the information received is precise. That being said, even the perfectly shaped theory can be misleading to a certain extent. To prove this, we can use the theory of the so – called «market fundamentalism» which contends that markets tend to equilibrium and there is no need for regulating forces. Seems pretty viable and logical considering that any powerful economy has its own balance that supports it afloat. According to George Soros, however, markets without regulating may enjoy short period of free economic growth, but, at the end of the day, the whole story will spin out of control and end up in a new financial crisis due to the fi-

nancial bubbles appearing in certain areas – again, these are removed because of the help provided by the regulators. He also contends that using mathematical models like Nash equilibrium is pointless due to the uncertainty principle that exists as the result of participants' biases, notions of rationality and society's developing trends, which can hardly be predicted in the long run [5, p. 98]. Contrary to the deterministic approach proposed by Laplace, when it comes to humans (or economy), we shouldn't be claiming that some theory is one hundred percent correct and can be used to foresee the future as we have learned from the examples above. This is what students should understand first while studying theories. Then again, what is it we can rely on in order to succeed? Now it is time to turn to the practice – oriented approach, which provides empirical knowledge or experience.

As it appears, the most important part of any high – quality education is practice. Back to the example of the game theory by Neumann, we can see that he created a theory which was confined to a certain set of situations. A pure theory that doesn't work if something goes wrong [2, p. 39]. The real business environment is just as complex and has even more combinations and possible outcomes than the game of poker – especially when it comes to logistics. However, if the theory is seen as a foundation that is backed up by experience, it can produce unexpected results. Here we have the practice – oriented approach coming to the fore. According to the behavioral economists Kagel and Battalio, to think rationally (that is, to react to incentives with accordance to our needs) we need to gather enough hand – on experience, which we do on conscious and subconscious levels. In short, it requires enough practice. The statement is supported by the rational choice theory described by the British economist Tim Harford and tested by John List, who emphasized that to act rational we need to be «in the game» for enough time to get used to all the up and downs and at least have approximate knowledge of all the gamers [2, p. 17]. Newbies tend to do irrational choices, which lead to mistakes, no matter how much of theoretical background they might have (irrationality of a choice usually reveals itself later in the form of consequences). The everyday observations tend to support that assertion, for many businesses have their own education programs in order to re – educate new specialists. On top of that, they mostly resort to the practice – oriented approach that is central in business.

The way it seems, both approaches, theory – oriented and practice – oriented one, are required to prepare a specialist in logistics to be successful and productive, and both are used to some extent. The whole purpose of them being used in the process of education should be to function as one, for, as we have seen, neither can exist without the other; otherwise, such a specialist would lack sufficient understanding of the ongoing processes in the business environment. Needless to say, each approach harbors specific practices with theory – oriented approach introducing such methods as studying various economic literature, analyzing researches conducted by scientists and business analysts from past and present times; however, practice – oriented approach offers a little bit wider variety of aspects such as learning in action, analyzing real life situations, developing quick creative thinking, deepening strategic ability, gathering experience on conscious and subconscious levels, and practical way of resolving business problems. The problem is that we need to train well – rounded specialists capable of combining both, which results in developing reflexive, or flexible, thinking. Therefore, it wouldn't be out of place to turn to a combination of both approaches in order to achieve this goal. Unfortunately, it would not be correct to state that this approach is fully implemented in Belarus where it is rather common to hold to the traditional methods of education despite rapidly happening changes around [3, p. 96].

The combination of both approaches should provide an identical simulation of the already existing business processes and risks they entail as well as the future ones. Students should practice their strategic thinking and team work, which is necessary to succeed, in situations that are as close to the real ones as possible. To realize the full potential of the approach we need to establish a close connection between universities and businesses, for we need to keep up with the real challenges and processes that nowadays companies struggle with. In doing so we can avoid the situation in which we teach students theories that are no longer applicable and in demand. As part of this approach should be easier access for the CEOs and other business executives to the education process, which will then result in students learning what is expected from them once they have graduated. Evidently, the core idea here is studying theory as well as going through simulations provided by the universities while being in close contact with real enterprises.

The crux of the combined approach is preparing a logistician who is perfectly able to interact with people inside the firm as well as outside, who can forge a contingent and implementable plan as to how the enterprise they work for can succeed and win the competition race. It is of great significance for logisticians to be capable of making business decisions, operating state – of – the – art technology, and having a good command of logistic processes of enterprise in general. It is essential, while teaching, to use such technics as presentations given by business executives and discussions with the aim to find a solution to existing business problems and the upcoming ones [4, p. 197]. That being said, before we take a closer look at the future challenges, we have to sort out the already existing ones. For that, we need to foster reflexive, or flexible, thinking in our students, which should be the foundation to build on later as it is essential to have the ability to absorb new knowledge along the way as well as utilize it to succeed. In order to achieve that, we need first to tend to the ways we educate our students.

For example, according to Belarussian scientist Lemeshevski, when it comes to the education system in Belarus, we can see that a large number of students in Belarus are so – called part – time students. In fact, they outnumber the full – time students by a huge margin [3, p. 96]. Considering the fact that such form of education is practically non - existent in developed countries, which should already ring the bell, it doesn't take much of an effort to figure out that there is a better alternative; the quality of such form of education leaves much to be desired in comparison with that the full – time students receive. Another aspect, noted the scientist, is that there is a big discrepancy between the amounts of practice and theory (that are too many) students are taught, which is, actually, nothing short of a limited approach [3, p. 97]. It clearly buttresses the vision that there is urgent need for the combined approach in order to prepare full – qualified logisticians. Is there anything we are doing to circumvent this problem and upgrade the system? The answer is affirmative.

As of today, it would not be correct to assert that there are no steps taken in Belarus to overcome the limited boundaries of theories and incorporate more practice into otherwise predominantly theoretical education process to develop reflexive thinking indispensable to the successful managers capable of accommodating to the changes taking place all the time. For example, if we take a closer look at the SBMT (School of Business and Management of Technology of BSU), it becomes apparent

that the ice is starting to break for the new ways of learning which are essential to, at least, break even and keep up with the competition when handling money and managing personnel in the real business. So far, it has been an innovative approach; however, as groundbreaking as it might seem, we are only catching up to our partners from developed countries by implementing what have already been a solid part of western educational system for quite a while [3, p. 91]. For instance, SBMT introduces students to the following programs:

1. Education via the Internet. It has become possible to study by using the web platform set up by the SBMT at any time possible. This includes lectures read online, tests and various forums. It also now available to download books and data needed to prepare for the examination.

2. The emphasis is laid on the practical aspects of educational process. Due to the fact that SBMT acknowledges the prime importance of practical thinking and ability in order to rationally make a business decision, students are offered technologies and methods that provide them with the insight into the modern – day business processes and currently developing trends.

3. There has been established a connection between businesses and education process, which makes it easier to make sure that the knowledge given in lectures is not out of touch with that needed in business environment. Additionally, it enables one with outstanding grades to secure a job position even before graduating.

4. In order to prepare successful managers and business executives, team work, negotiation and communication skills are given special attention. It is also within reach for all students to attend scientific or business conferences with the aim of introducing viable solutions to the existing problems and risks.

5. A part of the education process is visiting foreign lectures, seminars, as well as doing excursions and student exchange, which has become possible since SBMT teamed up with the tourism bureau «Universum». The purpose of such activities is to establish deeper ties between SBMT and our foreign partners, for, in terms of logistics, as well as any other business field, it is essential that we are able to absorb experience [4, p. 199].

It is evident that in case of SBMT we can observe an innovative direction in educating logisticians. As there is a clear trend towards moving from regional to global, many companies need specialists who are qualified enough to establish an international connection apart from ana-

lyzing foreign experience gathered by close collaboration with foreign partners. It means that we need to prompt enhancing the relationships not only with local businesses, but also with our partners around the globe in order to share experience. Belarus is not one of those countries that can boast deep connections with its developed neighbors in terms of education, which puts a lot of roadblocks in the way of acquiring foreign experience and, as a result, establishing ties with their educational system [3, p. 138]. In order to overcome that problem we need to strongly encourage international educational programs such as excursions, student exchange, practice in a foreign company, etc.

In conclusion, it would be appropriate to enumerate all the important points made throughout this work so that nothing will be left out without thorough consideration. The points mentioned were the following:

1. Theory – oriented approach, being traditional in Belarus, is deployed excessively in the process of educating specialists in logistics and any other business field as well. In order to act rationally, we need a solid storage of empirical knowledge, so it is necessary to turn to the combined approach, which incorporates a significant amount of practice into the education process as it supports the assertion that no rational decision can be made without having a certain amount of experience.

2. Apart from the fact that theories tend to lose credibility due to the changing business environment and, therefore, can't be applied anymore, they create certain boundaries which must not be crossed, for the theory can't be credible once past them. It prompts limited thinking and in no way supports innovation and encourages taking on risks – all the qualities sorely needed in business. The solution is to use theories as foundation for the developing reflexive thinking by students; theories are there to build on them, not to fully fall back on. As a result, the only solution would be to encourage students to rely on their own knowledge and experience, trust their instincts and analyze their observations before making a decision.

3. To realize the full potential of the approach we need to establish a close connection between universities and businesses, for we need to keep up with the real challenges and processes that nowadays companies struggle with. In doing so we can avoid the situation in which we teach students theories that are no longer applicable and in demand.

4. We need to prompt enhancing the relationships not only with local businesses, but also with our partners around the globe in order to

share experience. Therefore, it appears rational to strongly encourage international educational programs such as excursions, student exchange, practice in a foreign company, etc.

Then again, what does Belarus have to gain from all of this? As a matter of fact, the country is located in the position on the world map that can be regarded as very promising, and it can be clearly observed as the costs of the shipments that go through our country can reach as high as 1 billion dollars per year. This fact alone seems very reassuring for our logisticians, for it is very unlikely that logistics as science and branch of economy will be ever put on ice. Every day, there is a large number of shipments passing through our borders on their way to the destination, supporting our economy and bringing additional jobs into the country. Moreover, to add to the already indisputable importance of logistics for Belarus, I shall mention that, in accordance with the opinion of Drosdov, who is a Belarussian scientist, maintaining logistics and supply chains accounts for no less than 70 per cent of the cost of goods imported or exported as well [1, p. 53]. Here we can see great prospects for our economy in developing well – trained and fully – qualified specialists in logistics who can successfully deal with challenges and developing trends in the economy worldwide. As it happens, the responsibility for that not easy task rests with us.

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