

MIDDLE MANAGERS' ROLE AND CHALLENGES AT LOGISTICS AND SHIPPING COMPANIES

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In today's fast paced world, the convenience of online shopping and doorstep delivery have great influence on the present society. Customers expect a faster delivery of goods with flexible payment methods. In this world of immediate gratification, customers have good impression and brand loyalty for the agents who deliver the goods faster in an efficient manner, it also increases the chance for repeated purchase. However, behind every smooth delivery lies a group of real heroes working tirelessly to ensure the products are delivered at the right time with the right product to the right person.

Logistics management becomes an essential part of the supply chain that deals with planning, implementation, control of movement and storage of goods and services from one point to another point of consumption. This study focuses on the role of middle managers in logistics and shipping companies. The study aims to explore the factors affecting middle managers in logistics and shipping companies. It also identifies the challenges faced by middle managers today in this sector.

Jack Hoxie, Jan 17, 2024, Logistics in today's world, is a highly complex process where there is greater expectation across various market channels in-store, online, wholesale, retail and drop shipping. To meet these expectations it requires very high co-ordination and integration between various agents involved in the process. In International trade, there are more complexities, more alerts on inventory level, alignment with strategies of various governments, its unique tariffs, trade agreements and regulations. These procedures consume more time and cost, hence effective management of time, cost and resources is more significant in this sector. Multi-modal (sea, air, road and rail) transport requires careful planning in co-ordinating the sequence in transporting without delay and reaching customers in time. All these activities are responsibilities of the middle managers in logistics and shipping companies. They communicate the strategic goals aligning it with day-to-day activities to the

frontline employees. Furthermore, they are the ones who bridge the gap between upper management and operational employees. They oversee and monitor all the process and check whether they are in the right track and if any issues arise they take immediate actions and provide alternate ways to resolve the problems. Their efficiency in handling teams and tasks assigned have significant impact on supply chain process. Hence, the researcher aimed to analyse the challenges faced by the middle managers of the logistics and shipping sector.

LOGISTICS MANAGEMENT

Francisca explains the "logistic management as the integration process involved in facilitating smooth movement of goods from sellers to buyers". As such the orchestration of logistic demands, astute oversight from managers and professionals responsible for the logistics system and organisation.

EVOLUTION

History of logistics evolves from simple trade system to global networks:

- Ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, China used animal driven modes and manual systems to move goods. Silk Road served as a connecting link between Asia and Europe.
- Military logistics then played a significant role in supplying armies with food, medicines, weapons across a vast distance.
- World Wars 1 and II brought in innovations in the military logistics. This served as a base for development of global logistics.
- In 1950's invention of shipping containers revolutionised cargo handling by effective management of costs and shipping times.
- Technology Integrations:

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Recent days technology integrations such as CRM - managing customer interaction and client communication, EDI (Electronic data interchange) helps in fast customs clearance and container tracking, IoT and GPS tracking systems that check timely delivery, optimal routing and fuel efficiency and Cloud-Based systems for handling supply chain operations and communicating with multiple locations has major transformations in accessing the materials.

Shipping is the process of physical movement of goods and involves the activities done as goods move throughout the supply chain. It includes documentation, working with carriers, tracking handling, delivery times, transportation. Logistic deals with synchronised operations that includes procedures on acquiring products, storage and transporting to reach the final destination, thereby shipping is just a process in logistics.

IMPORTANCE OF LOGISTICS MANAGEMENT

In India, logistics management play a vital role in country's economy. Indian logistics market size is calculated at 317.3 billion USD in 2024 and expected to be 546.6 billion USD by 2030. In India, the logistics sector cover road, rail, port and air transport, supported by investments in infrastructures and multimodal logistics parks.

Shipping generally described as the backbone of the global trade, is responsible for the transport of raw materials, components and finished products that drive the economy. Shipping companies contribute 95% on India trade by volume and 70% by value. Shipping facilitates trade, making foreign countries to export and import goods, raw materials and industrial products. It handles around 1.3 billion metric tonnes yearly.

It is one of the most energy saving modes of transport in context to reduction of carbon emissions enabling sustainability in transport of goods to a longer distance.

It is one of the cost efficient modes where large volume of goods can be exported or imported in a reasonable cost when compared to other modes of transport.

Another significant role of logistics is providing career opportunities, creation of industries like ship building, manufacturing companies for spare parts of ship and repair services and port services.

In today's trending world customers frequently use their smartphones Compare the price, quality and order products, they receive in a very quick time period from 24 to 48 hours. To meet these expectations companies must optimise logistics efficiently. Arrange the orders dispatch it in the right time to the reliable source in a cost-effective and timely mode. A well organised logistics plan is the major part of

success. The mantra for Logistics 'Right product, right place, right time to the right person.

TYPES OF SHIPPING LOGISTICS

They are broadly classified into three major categories.

Inbound Logistics

Inbound logistics is the process of moving raw materials to the company from the supplier to the warehouse. The process involved in sourcing the products receiving storing transporting and managing supplies. Inbound logistics helps to build customer satisfaction by providing the goods as and when the customer requires the product.

Outbound Logistics

Outbound logistics is the process of moving finished goods to the end consumer. It involves packing shipping and delivery of goods and its ultimate aim is to reach the right destination in right quantities and at right time.

Reverse Logistics

Traditional flow of goods start from suppliers to customer is bad, reverse logistics, the flow of goods start from customers to suppliers

FUNCTION OF LOGISTICS

Order Processing: Is one of the important factor of logistics function is the processing of orders. It can be placed through various modes of communication (i.e) mail, computers, sales people, etc.

Certain things to be noted while processing orders are is there any change in negotiated terms, check for the availability of stock, and if shortage occurs arrangement for the orders to be fulfilled.

Transportation: It is one of the crucial process involved in logistics. Once the order is placed, the goods are allowed to move from provider to the buyer. There are various modes of communication involved: they are road, rail, water and truck.

Inventory Management: Inventory management is overseeing and having control over the stock. It's major function is to check that the stock is not overflowed nor out of stock. Proper inventory management leads to efficient cost utilisation, ensuring stock availability at the right time that leads to customer satisfaction.

Demand Forecasting: for an effective inventory management, one should possess good demand forecasting skills. It is the process of accurately predicting the demand of a particular product or service. It increases the overall supply chain regulating demand and supply. Accurate demand forecasting is essential in logistics to meet the customer demands

Warehousing: It plays a key role in storing and managing goods or products until they reach the final destination. Warehousing improves supply chain efficiency and ensures customer satisfaction by providing ordered goods when they are required.

Packaging: Products are maintained due to its proper packaging until its delivery to the customer. It protects goods from environmental factors that affect the product due to moisture, heat or shock. Effective packaging balances durability and cost effectiveness in accordance to the standards set by the manufacturers to meet the customer expectation.

MIDDLE MANAGERS

Middle managers are employees who hold managerial positions in an organisation. They are paved below executive level and above frontline supervisor. They act as a bridge between senior leadership and operational staff. Their main role is to ensure goals set by the organisation and is executed efficiently by the lower level employees. They play a key role in making employees meet the expected performance and standards targeted by the organisation.

Common Duties and Responsibilities

Middle managers handle day-to-day activities in the organisation. Managers focuses on building strategies. Long-term planning for sustainability of business. Some duties are:

- Develop and implement strategic plans of top management.
- Assigning and supervising specific work task.
- Monitoring the performance of employees.
- Make sure that tasks are aligned with organisational goals.
- Inspiring and motivating employees to perform well.
- Reporting issues and performance of the employees to the top-level management.

Qualities of Good Middle Manager

- Leadership

- Interpersonal Skills
- Communication Skills
- Abilities to delegate task
- Flexibility to manage immediate events or unexpected emergencies.
- Conflict Management
- Motivation
- Empathy
- Decision-Making Skills

Designations of Middle-Managers in Logistics and Shipping Companies

Operations Manager

An operations manager is responsible for increasing productivity and cost reduction. He monitors the inventory, warehouse and transportation. The manager manages budget and cost effectively.

He co-ordinates with all departments (i.e) sales, production and procurement.

Warehouse Manager

Warehouse manager takes care of the product storage, its maintenance and optimise space utilisation. His duty is to ensure timely provision of goods and safeguarding it from receiving till dispatch.

Logistics Manager

Logistics manager makes strategic plans, optimise routes and monitor performance. The manager frequently communicate with various departments involved in flow of goods from supplier to buyer. He ensures effective cost and supply chain flow by optimising transportation routes and methods.

Distribution Manager

Distribution manager oversee the distribution of goods to customers or retailers. They are responsible for optimising delivery routes and proper scheduling for timely deliveries.

They collaborate with warehouse department for dispatching and it continues until the procurement reaches the customers. Furthermore he looks after the issues on deliveries.

Transportation Manager

Transportation manager manages the fleet operations, fuel consumption, compliance with laws and regulations. He check the availability of drivers and schedules routes. He also looks after the safety of drivers and Vehicle maintenance.

Role of Middle-Managers in Logistics and Shipping Companies

- Develop and Execute plans for logistics, warehousing, transportation and customer Service operations.
- Oversee and monitor the order fulfilment process.
- Effective Communication with suppliers, manufacturers, retailers and customers especially negotiating with all parties for cost efficiency.
- Train and mentor staffs in warehouse for proper maintenance of stock.
- Ensure on-time delivery, cost-efficiency and C racy in all sectors of logistics management.
- Identify and resolve conflicts, issues or any complaints that arise.
- Tracks key performance metrics, data analysis and keep on continuous improvement.
- Ensure compliance with relevant laws and regulations and ISO Standards.

Challenges Faced by Middle-Managers in Logistics and Shipping Companies

Middle managers play a dual role both as sub-ordinate and supervisor, balancing upper management and operational staffs ensuring there is good flow of communication among the departments. Certainly, it becomes hectic during some circumstances.

Talent Management and Skill Development

In Logistics and Shipping Companies, one of the major challenge is shortage of skilled labour force. Middle Managers are the ones, who are responsible for recruiting the right person, for the right job. After selecting, they ought to look after the employees are trained for their assigned job role, track on their competency level, observing their performance. They are responsible in retaining skilled workforce by pertaining their needs and motivational acts to keep their employees engaged towards the work and the organisation. It becomes the major challenge in retaining talented workforce in this competitive sector.

Co-Ordination with Multiple Stakeholders

Middle managers are highly responsible in maintaining good relationships with suppliers and vendors. They negotiate terms on cost and delivery schedules. They keep track on activities in suppliers. Adding to, they solve problems occurred due to delayed deliveries, issues on service and quality difference.

Transport Facilities

Middle managers always check on the availability of transport, different modes for transporting goods in a smooth flow in order to deliver goods at the right time.

As multimodal transport is more significant in Thoothukudi district, it has become a major challenge for the middle managers to keep track on all modes of connectivity ensuring the right flow of goods in time.

Rapport with Various Department

Another significant role of middle manager is to have a good rapport between all departments involved in the logistics services. The department include warehouse department, Procurement department, inventory control and Technology department. Effective management relies on efficient communication network with all departments, this strengthens the organisation presenting strikes, lockouts or miscommunication.

Crisis Management

Middle managers are often first line defence during crisis or natural disasters, damage or delay due to weather conditions, they take care of goods and services suggesting alternate ways to transport the goods or providing advise on different routes ensuring safe deliveries of required procurement. They also take responsibility in informing customers or buyers on reason for delay and the approximate time of delivery.

Technology Updation

In this technology integrated world, middle managers should be able to adapt themselves to learn the advancements in technology, implement the changes in collaborating with the help of IT department. They train the employees on the adopted technology providing the details of the inventory, its flow and status of shipment. Even customers are able to track the shipment. If the problem arise in getting information, the customers gets dissatisfied with the service. Hence middle managers are accountable to update customers on the state of shipment.

How Middle Managers Solve Complexities in Logistics Sector?

Communication between Team

They decode the task assigned by the higher authorities and delegate them into actionable task to the frontline employees. This alignment keep employees engaged with organisation task.

Monitor/Overseeing

They are responsible for the smooth operations of transportation, warehousing, inventory control and distribution process. They monitor regulatory costs, incurred, order fulfilment time and customer satisfaction level.

Risk Mitigation

These are the people who are in the place of handling operational risks, Their decisions on crisis plans are crucial in maintaining the flow of operation.

Human-Resource Management

They take responsibility in managing teams, operation driver, distribution heads, co-ordinations, and warehouse staff. They provide guidance, training, feedback, motivate them to be more productive.

Effective Middle managers insist ethics, morale, and harmony at workplace reducing occupational stress.

Alignment with Customer Satisfaction

They always keep customers first, and meet their expectation for longer sustainability.

The main aim of middle managers is providing the procurement to the customers according to their expectation.

Ensuring Efficient Process

Middle managers identify the inefficiencies in logistics processes and recommend improvement strategies. As they are experts in operations they can easily identify the bottlenecks and how they can be streamlined. Overseeing that all operations are happening rightly they up-skill employees by training the staff to do the assigned activities efficiently. Middle managers today are supposed to implement lean logistic practices that reduce waste, effective time management, and cuts operational cost.

Change Management

New strategies, market change, cost, savings plan, technology upgradation are all the key roles of middle managers. They always take initiative in training the employees with changed or upgraded advancement through the affective communication. They make alterations, fill requirements according to the employers' expectation and minimise the disruptions in operations.

CONCLUSION

Today people prefer services rather than quality. And most of the organisations rely on third party logistics for better and

fast services in delivery of products to the retailer or buyer. Hence effective performance is ideal for any organisation is ideal to compete in this logistics sector. Through the study, the researcher identified that in logistics, where a load of skills including communication, interpersonal skills, with various departments and assuring the products are delivered in right time to the customers. They make strategies into execution, through efficient cost management, right selection of modes of transport, correct inventory control, and aligning with the organisational goals assuring logistics is done smoothly within the expected time limit. Most of the challenges of middle managers are set right by upgrading themselves in adopting to new strategies, new technology, maintain good co-ordination with various departments, practising empathy towards employees and being a moderator while reporting issues on behalf of them to the higher authorities and making innovative and develop strategies for the betterment of employees. Though technology integration make major advancements in every field, the role of middle managers stands as the secret of success behind every efficient organisation. Effective middle manager role directly impacts the performance of the organisation, rendering a good flow in supply chain services.

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