

# Shaping Competitive Advantage of an Enterprise from Logistics Service Industry

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The aim of the article is to show the process of shaping competitive advantage of an enterprise from the logistics service industry. The study presents a general characteristic of enterprises providing logistics services and describes conditions of operation of contemporary logistics providers. The process of shaping competitive advantage of contemporary enterprises from the logistics service industry has been presented. The article has been written on the basis of the study of literature, research conducted by various research centres and own empirical research.

**Keywords:** competitive advantage, enterprises from logistics service industry, logistics processes.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Dynamics of processes in the contemporary, global economy forces organizations to continuously improve their effectiveness and shorten time of the flow of goods, information and money. Management of the streams of these flows in the enterprise and between economic entities, in order to ensure the required level of customer service at the lowest costs, is the domain of logistics. Enterprises and supply chains, where logistics belongs to key competencies, shape their competitiveness on the basis of their own logistics resources and logistics abilities enabling them to use these resources to produce and deliver values expected by the customers. If logistics does not belong to key competencies of an enterprise or supply chain, entrusting organization and/or realization of all or part of the logistics processes to specialised logistics service providers may significantly contribute to an increase in the effectiveness of the logistics processes, which translates into an increase in the ability to achieve the competitive advantage of the recipients. The decision about outsourcing logistics is conditioned by creating and delivering values expected by organizations being customers of logistics providers. Managers of enterprises from the logistics service industry should take quick actions to ensure the survival and, at the same time, try to

find new, future-oriented solutions which constitute an opportunity to create and maintain competitive advantages of these enterprises. The aim of the article is to show the process of shaping competitive advantage of an enterprise from the logistics service industry.

## 2. ACTIVITY OF ENTERPRISES FROM THE LOGISTICS SERVICE INDUSTRY

A logistics provider is a specialized, external supplier undertaking, as a part of its primary market activity, organization and/or realization of all or part of logistics processes between links of the supply chain. In the article it has been assumed that the supply chain includes enterprises that cooperate with other companies, participating in the process of delivering a product to the customer and their customers, with streams of products, information and financial means flowing among them. The above mentioned flows in the supply chain are related to one product or group of products; as a consequence, each enterprise can be seen as a participant in numerous supply chains. The supply chain can include both all flows from the beginning of creating the value to the final customer and a smaller range of flow, e.g. from one entity to another.

A logistic service is seen as a logistics product, i.e. a collection of requirements and expectations

of a customer with regard to goods and services of a determined form and quality, that can be met in accordance with these requirements only through the usage of the logistics system (Gołemska, 2012, pp. 36-37). The areas of logistics activities undertaken by logistics service providers in the enterprise are: procurement, production and distribution (Fechner, 2011, pp. 9-20). Contemporary enterprises compete by supply chains. One direction of developing outsourcing in logistics is the supply chain outsourcing. Thus, the logistics service provider cooperates with more than one economic entity. The range of cooperation between various links of the supply chain and logistics service providers can be dynamic and change if necessary (Jeszka, 2013, p. 105; Jeszka, 2014, p. 41).

In the literature of the subject, the following groups of logistics services are distinguished (Szałucki, 2016, pp. 631-643; Jeszka, 2013, pp. 59-60; Rydzkowski, 2009, pp. 216-218):

- forwarding services - providing advice related to forwarding processes, choosing the mode of transport, making transport agreements, insuring the parcel, preparing transport documentation, collecting the parcel from the sender, preparing the parcel for shipping, sending the parcel on the mode of transport with transport documentation, collecting the parcel from the mode of transport and the relevant documentation, customs clearance, handing over the parcel to the recipient;
- transport services - carriage of cargo in conditions suitable for its natural, technical and economic transportability;
- storage and terminal services - activities related to inventory management in warehouses include: storage, reception, inventory, issuing goods, stuffing and stripping cargo units, completion of shipment according to customer orders, reloading and sorting parcels, management of containers and pallets;
- additional services - services that do not belong to the categories mentioned above and add value to the products, e.g. adding manuals or warranty cards to goods, labelling, creating promotional sets, packaging.

The market of logistics services is divided into two segments - traditional services and contract logistics. The aim of the traditional services is to optimize costs of unit services which are regulated

and standardized. Contract logistics is based on the cooperation between a manufacturer and a logistics service provider, and it consists in the division of functions between two parties, and is focused on the specific requirements of customers and optimization of the supply chain (Krawczyk, 2011, p. 215; Jeszka, 2010, pp. 229-232).

### 3. DETERMINANTS OF FUNCTIONING OF CONTEMPORARY LOGISTICS SERVICE PROVIDERS

Customers of enterprises from the logistics service industry are companies operating on a global, permanently changing market having links in more and more complex supply chains which causes many threats. Providing logistics services for enterprises in global supply chains is burdened with high-risk associated with the culture of a given country. In recent years threats like terrorist attacks, anxieties and social unrest, temporarily or permanently closed objects or political instability have intensified (Rutkowski, 2015, pp. 92-96; Witkowski, 2015, p. 158; Brüning, Hartono, Bendul, 2015, p. 226). Consequences of these threats can lead to the necessity of redefining the existing strategic choices, financial loss, loss of customers, serious damage to the reputation, deterioration in profitability and reduction in enterprise value. Permanently changing market conditions put new challenges for logistics service providers. Enterprises providing logistics services have to be more dynamic, intelligent and better equipped with information than ever before in order to be able to reduce and mitigate risk. Systemic risk management has become a strategic task of managers from enterprises providing logistics services.

The research on logistics process outsourcing in enterprises in 2013-2015, conducted by the author of this article, among 172 small, medium and large enterprises of north-eastern Poland in 2016, led to the conclusion that motives for using services of logistics enterprises, most frequently indicated by the respondents, were: striving for cost reduction (77.3%), increase in customer satisfaction (66.3%) and increase in enterprise flexibility (52.9%). The key criteria, most frequently mentioned, for selecting logistics service providers in the surveyed enterprises were: price (70.3%), cost reduction (59.3%), flexibility (50.6%), increase in customer satisfaction (49.4%), range of services provided (47.7%) and delivery time (47.1%). Studies conducted by various research centres confirmed

that price and cost reduction are currently the key criteria for selecting logistics service providers most commonly used by the enterprises (Alkhatib, Darlington, Nguyen, 2015, pp. 102-134). Managers of enterprises from the logistics service industry have to create an offer and change the operation of the enterprise adequately to the market conditions, to meet the growing and changing demands and expectations of customers as soon as possible, at lower and lower costs.

Currently, a dynamic development of logistics technologies is visible. High-tech logistics technologies enable the efficient and effective implementation of logistics processes, achievement of competitive advantage and business development (Mindur, 2014, p. 19; Banaszyk, Gołemska, 2015, pp. 102-103; Ficoń, 2015, pp. 289-291; Olszewski, 2016, pp. 19-20). Development of information technology and tools of fast communication allows for an adequate response to changes on the global market and coordination of activities. Using new technologies, logistics service providers can quickly obtain information on the market, create new knowledge and use it quickly in order to be able to adequately respond to changes in the environment and shape competitive advantage.

Challenges of the economy, based on knowledge and global market, exposed the fact that achieving a long-lasting competitive advantage requires deepened coordination and cooperation between enterprises, and thus also deliberate and intentional limitation of their autonomy (Jaki, 2014, pp. 10-11). Cooperation of enterprises participating in the process of delivering a service to the customer enables the enterprise to achieve the synergy effect and create logistics systems characterized by a high degree of complexity and uniqueness. The market of logistics services in Poland, as in the countries of Western Europe, is not very centred. Even though large international logistics concerns function in Poland, a big part of the market belongs to many smaller entities. A global trend for consolidation of logistics services on the market has been observed for several years, which is mainly expressed in the form of mergers and acquisitions. Consolidation of logistics enterprises allows for the use of the returns to scale effect, enables the enterprise to achieve a stronger bargaining position and better use of resources, facilitates the control over implemented logistics processes, allows for the exchange of knowledge and experiences and transfer of the best practices. Consolidation is also associated with a number of

threats which result in the fact that not each fusion of entities ends with a success (Kawa, 2016, pp. 64-67; Raue, Wieland, 2015, pp. 421-423; Schmoltzi, Wallenburg, 2011, pp. 552-575). Enterprises providing logistics services can also shape partner relationships with other logistics companies in order to meet the requirements and expectations of the customers.

The environment and resources protection and responsibility for the influence of logistics activities and processes in the supply chain on the society belong to megatrends shaping the structure and functioning of contemporary logistics and supply chains (Kisperska-Moroń, 2012, p. 20). In the mentioned research, conducted by the author of this article in 2016, regarding the logistics outsourcing, none of the respondents indicated the implementation of the concept of corporate social responsibility as an important criterion for selecting an enterprise providing logistics services. Almost in every fourth surveyed enterprise (23.8%), logistics was a tool for sustainable development. It should be emphasised, however, that in the analysed period, 26.2% of the respondents indicated that the reputation is an important criterion for selecting a logistics service provider. Many of contemporary enterprises implement the strategy of sustainable development. In the view of contemporary global threats, social pressures, organizations supervising activities of the enterprises, customers and investors, ignoring environmental and social aspects of business activity in the management of an enterprise from the logistics service industry can negatively affect the reputation and results of the company (Gałowska, 2013, pp. 167-177). On the one hand, the conditions of operation of contemporary logistics service providers contribute to the implementation of the concept of corporate social responsibility, on the other hand, they limit it.

#### 4. PROCESS OF SHAPING COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF LOGISTICS SERVICE PROVIDERS

Competitive advantage is the ability of an enterprise to such a use of resources and conditions of the competition on the procurement and sales markets which enables the enterprise and its actual and potential customers to produce the higher added value than the added value generated by the competitors (Rokita, 2005, pp. 60-61). In changing market conditions, long-term competitive advantage of the enterprise is the consequence of

creating and implementing short-term competitive advantages. In the twenty-first century, the changeability and instability of competitive advantages has become a norm. Long-term strategies of enterprises are replaced by the emergent strategies, i.e. strategies being in a constant stage of creating and shaping, flexible and characterized by a quick response to the changing requirements of the customers, environmental conditions and activities of the competitors (Płoszajski, 2014, pp. 70-71; Stańczyk-Hugiet, 2013, p. 34).

The process of shaping competitive advantage of a logistics service provider is essentially determined by the effective planning and implementing customer orientation. The adoption and implementation of the customer orientation allows for the identification of goals, needs and problems of customers, orientation and adjustment of the supply offers of enterprises to the requirements of customers, solutions for determined problems of customers, consolidation of their bonds with the enterprise and, consequently, implementation of the long-term goals of the enterprise. Customer orientation should be the guiding principle of integrated enterprise management. This enables the enterprise to achieve the highest level of customer service, gain advantage in terms of efficiency and, consequently, achieve a long-term success on the market (Blaik, 2015, pp. 105-110). High-tech logistics technologies, implemented to meet the requirements and expectations of customers, are associated with great financial expenses. Fierce competition on the logistics service market causes problems associated with investment in logistics systems because many logistics companies do not receive the expected returns on investments (Wong, Soh, Chong, Karia, 2015, p. 686). An increase in customer service costs is justified if it is accompanied by an appropriate increase in sales. Comprehensive implementation of customer orientation enables an enterprise to achieve a high level of customer satisfaction, high level of their loyalty to the company, which translates into shaping competitive advantage of the enterprise.

Adaptability is a developmental megatrend of contemporary enterprises and supply chains. Current directions of the evolution of supply chains strive for: flexible activities, responsive to the needs of the customer and resilient to disruptions. In the current conditions, it is desired that the supply chains evolve in each of these directions at the same time. And, in such a way

supply chains evolve – only accents can indicate which direction is dominant (Szymczak, 2015, pp. 72-73). The logistics system of an organization using logistics outsourcing and logistics system of a logistics service provider undergo mutual interactions. Strategies implemented by recipients have an influence on modelling processes of the enterprise providing logistics services. The competitive struggle win those logistic service providers who can adjust their activities to strategies implemented by the recipients quickly and well.

Evolution of contemporary supply chains is done by taking into account the principles of sustainable development. Implementation of the concept of sustainable development by contemporary enterprises from the logistics service industry results not only from seeking for new opportunities to compete, but also from the need to adapt to the regulations for environmental protection. Better satisfaction of customers and other stakeholders can distinguish an offer of the logistics service provider and, consequently, allows for an increase in sales and market share. The implementation of the concept of sustainable development is associated with bearing costs and requires the approval of shareholders, customers and employees. Balancing economic, social and environmental goals in enterprises providing logistics services is a very difficult task because logistic service providers cooperate with many enterprises, often conducting operations in different countries (Bąkowska-Morawska, Witkowski, 2015, pp. 39-54; Piecyk, Björklund, 2015, p. 463).

In a dynamic, global environment only those organizations can survive and compete effectively which quickly learn and create organizational knowledge. Thanks to possibilities of contemporary information technology and tools of fast communication, boundaries between processing information and creating knowledge become more liquid (Malara, Rzęchowski, 2011, pp. 13-14). In the process of shaping competitive advantage, knowledge resources and methods of their use feature an essential role. Effective knowledge management enables the enterprise to obtain, store and use knowledge to achieve the objectives of the enterprise. Investments in the effective information system enables logistics service providers to take actions, which result in a quick response to the changing customer requirements, environmental conditions and activities of the competitors, improved operational

efficiency, constant growth in revenue, increase in market share and achievement of competitive advantage over the competitors.

Customers become more and more demanding and expect a higher quality of logistics services. Logistics innovation constitutes an improvement, new value, from the point of view of a customer, which is reflected in the market value and is the basis for the development of logistics services and building strategies of operation on the market (Brdulak, 2012, pp. 65-66). Implementation of logistics innovations allows enterprises from the logistics service industry to adjust their activities to the requirements and expectations of the customers, adequately respond to the changing requirements, experiences and behaviours of the recipients and shape their expectations. The enterprise which does not introduce logistics innovations must take into account the loss of its competitive position.

Innovative activities of enterprises depends on both external and internal factors (Romanowska, 2016a, pp. 29-35). Every innovation, especially during economic fluctuations, is associated with great uncertainty about the real effects. Innovation requires the enterprises to engage adequate capital, appropriate personnel, knowledge, skills and appropriate culture supporting creativity and openness to new ideas (Gąsowska, 2014, pp. 513-524). The logistics industry, compared with other industries, is not very innovative. Innovative logistics services are not protected by patents, in consequence, many logistics service providers do not bear costs and do not take the risk of creating innovations. Shaping competitive advantage of a logistics service provider requires effective innovation management (Cichosz, 2016, pp. 2-8). The process of creating reactive innovations should be short and flexible. Managers should permanently identify emerging threats, possibilities to reduce costs, emerging opportunities and implement appropriate adaptation processes to the changing market conditions. On the other hand, the implementation of proactive innovations requires effective integration of the customers, suppliers, and possibly other logistics service providers to cooperate on the innovative solution. Interaction of the logistics service provider with customer in the process of creating and implementing innovation contributes to an increase in satisfaction of the recipient (Hsu, Tan, Zailani, 2016, pp. 86-92; Bellinkrodt, Wallenburg, 2015, pp. 254-274).

Logistic service providers should strive to reduce the influence of disruptions on the

implementation of logistics processes (König, Spinler, 2016, pp. 122-134). Managers of enterprises from the logistics service industry should systemically manage the risk. Logistic service providers are permanently exposed to the risk of destabilization associated with an unpredicted event in the environment and failures and changes within the enterprise. Managers of enterprises providing logistics service should prevent the crises in the enterprise through an early detection of threats in the environment, development of resistance to the crisis and preparation of the enterprise for operating during the crisis if it cannot be avoided (Romanowska, 2016b, p. 30).

The enterprise achieves the strategic competitive advantage if it implements the strategy, which results in creating a higher economic value in the longer term constituting the difference between the received benefits and costs of their obtaining than competitors. The logistics service provider should focus on the selected target segment of the market and permanently adapt its activities to the customer requirements and changing conditions using professional actions and solutions. Currently, the competitive struggle win those logistics service providers who are strongly engaged in the process of meeting expectations of their customers, apply professional actions and solutions in order to respond quickly to the customer requirements, changing conditions and actions of the competitors at the lowest costs, implement high-tech technologies, develop skills of their employees, increase resilience to disruptions, cooperate with other entities in order to improve their competitiveness, apply advanced and precise measurement systems for logistics effects and permanently search for new ways and tools to achieve increased effectiveness of the provided services. The best logistics service providers orientate the entire process of enterprise management towards the customer, introduce technological, product and process innovations, cooperate with other organizations to increase their effectiveness and possess the best cost structure when considering the principles of sustainable development.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Results of activities and undisturbed functioning of contemporary businesses increasingly depend on the ability to create and execute efficient and effective logistics processes

within the enterprise and between organizations participating in the process of delivering a product or service to the customer. Enterprises or supply chains entrust organization and/or realization of all or part of logistics processes to specialized logistics service providers to increase their ability to achieve competitive advantage. Logistics service providers strive to create and deliver the greatest value to the customers, which in turn translates into an increase in sales, market share and profitability. The organization and/or realization of all or part of the logistics processes of enterprises or supply chains conducting their operations on a global, permanently changing market, being links of the increasingly complex logistics systems, is a very difficult task and is associated with many threats. Enterprises providing logistics services must be more dynamic, intelligent, better equipped with information and resilient to disruptions than ever before in order to be able to meet contemporary challenges of logistics. In order to achieve competitive advantage, logistics service providers create logistics systems characterized by a high degree of complexity and uniqueness.

The ability to achieve competitive advantage through logistics service providers is conditioned by the engagement of valuable, rare and difficult to copy resources and ability to use them in the process of value creation. Unpredictability and instability of market conditions cause that even a small mistake in organization or execution of logistics processes of the recipients can result in large losses and negatively influence the reputation and results of the logistics service provider. The long-lasting advantage of enterprises from the logistics service industry results from the ability to shape short-term advantages. The service provider should adopt and implement the customer orientation. Enterprises from the logistics service industry should quickly and adequately respond to the customer requirements, changing conditions and actions of the competitors at the lowest costs, develop competencies of the employees, increase resilience to disruptions, collaborate with other entities in order to improve their competitiveness, use advanced and precise measurement systems for logistics effects, implement innovations enabling an increase in effectiveness of the provided services and take into account, in their activities, the principles of sustainable development. The mentioned activities and solutions enable the logistics service provider to achieve a high level of customer satisfaction, their loyalty, and,

consequently, shape its competitive advantage and achieve the desired financial results.

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