

Book Review:

Gennaro Ferrara and Alfonso Morvillo (eds.) *Training in Logistics and the Freight Transport Industry*¹

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This book was meant to disseminate the results of a national research project funded by the European Union. In this case, a standard structure could be expected containing the need for and the context of the research, the methodology used and the results obtained. But the book does a lot more than summarizing the research conducted. Each of the traditional items are of course reported throughout the different articles, but the emphasis is on original and provocative approaches. The evaluation of the latest trends in the sector, the impact of education and training on sector behaviour, the impact of culture, and the monitoring of reproductability and transferability of the evaluation procedure give an extra dimension to the analysis reporting. The main topic in itself too merits attention and praise since there is ample supply of training programmes, the quality of which, however, varies (a program useful in one situation may not apply to or even have a counterproductive effect in a different situation, and the need for training should be clearly evaluated before taking any action).

The book is composed of two major parts: the first part comprises four or five more or less descriptive articles presenting a view on the current situation, whereas the second part contains the real analysis. The second part is the most interesting, from an originality point of view, but this assumes sufficient knowledge of the sector (which we get in the first part), and the book's perspective is interesting in itself since it shows many unknown or unstudied aspects.

¹ Gennaro Ferrara and Alfonso Morvillo (eds.)

Training in logistics and the freight transport industry : the experience of the European Project ADAPT-FIT

Aldershot: Ashgate

2002

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187 pages

The first chapter combines an overview of the current situation of the transportation and logistics sector with fitting frequently used concepts like globalisation, just-in-time, supply chain management, ICT and transport system complexity into the training needs framework. It is shown how each of these in turn causes the transport sector to change, but also how sector changes result in further adoption of these concepts. The red line through all these items is the move from unimodal operators to customer logistics integrators. This analysis, in itself practical in nature, is, in a next move, checked for the Italian case.

In the second chapter, it is shown to what extent ICT reshapes the transport and logistics sector, and what are the reasons for and consequences of Italy's lagging behind in this development. The question whether technology is a driving force or just an enabling factor for the sector's restructuring is the key question to be answered, but the authors rightly state that a definite answer to the problem at hand is hard to give. The book nevertheless helps us on the right track where it treats the evolution as mutually influential: ICT has enabled efficiency gains in the sector, but in the meantime it has changed entire business models. Interesting in this respect is the conclusion that the spread is not equal for all sectors: e-business does not always replace traditional physical moves, it often stimulates them or makes the transactions less complex. Interesting also is the marked evolution in the adoption of ICT: from a merely supporting and separate tool, towards a really integrated way of doing business. The book also sheds some light on the twilight zone the ICT-concept often finds itself in: it distinguishes between ICT-instruments at information sharing, information transfer and operations planning level. Most importantly maybe, the second chapter indicates how the introduction and development of ICT has influenced and keeps on changing interrelationships between logistics actors concerned. For Italy, the main conclusions are that immediate action and especially state intervention cannot be postponed.

The type of actions required is detailed in chapter 3, through an inventory of what programs exist in terms of education and training, and what are the gaps. The main conclusion here is one which is reflected in Italy's entire socio-economic structure: a fundamental imbalance between north and south. As to the content of actions, there appears to be a clear need for diversified initiatives towards strategic and operational level workers.

Chapter 4 clarifies why a specific approach towards southern Italy is appropriate: figures indicate that this area houses the lowest number of logistics and transport firms in Italy, and provides least jobs in the sector. Although a bit more regional split-up could have been given for other indicators (degree of outsourcing, sector structure and number of mergers and acquisitions; data availability is probably the most pertinent obstacle here), the Campania case study clearly compensates for this. One of the topics which probably goes hand in hand with ICT-developments, but which does not come to the front here as far as figures are concerned, is vertical relationships and integration in the logistics chain.

The first part ends with a chapter that broadens the qualitative perspective from purely regional or national characteristics to other cultural aspects like firm- and industry-specific characteristics. It appears that in the adoption of ICT and adequate training, industry-specific characteristics play least of a part.

The second part shows how a training program can be developed and evaluated which takes account of the above notions: it should on the one hand take cultural diversity into account, and on the other hand develop a maximum level and the required type of skills, as it appears from chapter 6. The author calls programs fulfilling these conditions flexible and personalized training paths.

Before determining the optimal path, it is important to have a clear understanding of the exact needs. In chapter 7, a distinction is made between general policy needs and specific training needs. For the first part, it is important to know to what extent existing (national) structures respond to the observations made in the first five chapters. A semi-quantitative analysis is made of the extent to which the government founds its policy on needs analysis, the extent to which this analysis is structured and the amount of analytical tools used. For the second part, profiles need to be made up of competencies required. Again, a semi-quantified analysis (stated preference) is used. It is not always clear though how the crucial step is made towards determining the exact amount of education or training moments required.

After putting much effort into determining needs and setting up a training program, one often forgets or is reluctant to regularly review programs. However, if this reviewing is not considered to be an integral part of setting up and maintaining a qualitative program, there is a risk of losing quickly the benefits of the initial investment. Therefore, the methodology of the last chapter is definitely to be included in any program.

As a conclusion, it can be said that this book is original as well as fundamental for building the complex instruments training programs, since they absorb a large amount of resources but can fall short of attaining the desired outputs if any of the steps presented in the book is neglected or skipped.