

From the logistics function to the logistics service: A literature review

Mamdouh Tlaty¹ and Mohamed Moutmihi²

¹ Hassan II University, FSJES- Mohammedia

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Abstract

The large outsourcing and refocusing movement, regarding the key skills, initiated by many companies, has made a new profession emerge: the one of the logistics service provider. The logistics service providers, along the multi-actor Supply Chains, are considered as real pilots of the interfaces and represent a radical innovation on the managerial, strategical and operational plan. Our article aims to bring a comprehensive literature review of this deep mutation, through a synthesis contribution that retraces the evolution of the logistics function towards the emergence of the logistics service phenomenon.

Index terms— logistics, SCM, outsourcing, logistics provider, logistic practices.

1 Introduction

Logistics have known, for decades now, a strong development and a radical mutation of its status and identity. It is, nowadays, perceived as a major element to affirm a competitive sustainable advantage, and thus becomes an approach that is strongly strategic for companies [1], which requires more and more resources. We notice an increasing importance given to the transport reliability, to the speed, to the qualitative factors and to the ability to provide adjusted services.

In order to avoid the scattering of their assets and to ensure the best incomes of their investments, a large number of companies have questioned their methods of conceiving and managing their Supply Chains, opting the outsourcing of their Supply Chain, or of a part of it.

The refocusing of industrials on their core business has promoted the outsourcing of the logistic function in an apparent contribution to create a logistics services market.

In this article, we suggest to enlighten and analyze this mutation in a chronological way. Our reflexion is based on a literature review, which presents, in a first stage, the concept of logistics and Supply Chains: their definitions, conceptions and management. We will also review the best practices in the logistic field, with an overview of the trends in which these practices are a forming part.

We will, afterwards, present the concept of outsourcing and the evolution of the logistic service provider business.

2 II.

3 Logistics: Origins and Evolution

In order to ensure a better understanding of the essence of logistics in the management of a company, it is necessary to review its definition, as well as to identify a brief history that allows framing its evolution and its current state.

Through our literary research, we could notice that there is no thorough agreement between actors, regarding the concept of logistics. This is due to the increasing number of data related to logistics, which have an important impact on the logistics' evolution, such as the market, the life cycle of products and services, the customers' requirements and the application field, to which the logistics function is applied.

43 We will retain the definition produced by the Council of Science and Technology (CST) [2], which seems to us
44 as the most appropriate one to the current situation of the market.

45 « Logistics is the whole operations of management and of the organization of the physical flows and of the
46 information inside the company, as well as between the company and its partners. It aims to coordinate the
47 sourcing of production and distribution activities. The transport is an essential component of it. Still, it also
48 includes the demand planification, orders' processing, procurement, planification, production, relations with
49 customers and suppliers, storage, handling, assembling, packaging, products' packaging and support functions
50 related to these activities.

51 **4 a) The major phases of logistics' evolution**

52 The concept of logistics dates back to ancient times, where the Greek have developed methods of logistics'
53 procurement and coordination, in order to support their military activities. Moreover, several great empires
54 appointed officials in charge of logistics. Logistics have been developed thanks to these military origins [3]. In
55 fact, before the 50s, logistics were still referring to military concepts [4].

56 In the 70s, logistics were more perceived as an internal activity of the company, whose major role was to
57 reach the optimization of resources they locally consume (function by function), and not in a global way. The
58 emergence of concepts such as the « just-in-time » leads us to think in terms of flows, which leads, in the 80s, to a
59 redefinition of logistics. This concept has L Abstract-The large outsourcing and refocusing movement, regarding
60 the key skills, initiated by many companies, has made a new profession emerge: the one of the logistics service
61 provider. The logistics service providers, along the multi-actor Supply Chains, are considered as real pilots of the
62 interfaces and represent a radical innovation on the managerial, strategical and operational plan. Our article aims
63 to bring a comprehensive literature review of this deep mutation, through a synthesis contribution that retraces
64 the evolution of the logistics function towards the emergence of the logistics service phenomenon. become a
65 transversal function which, on a horizontal plane, allows the coordination of the other functions, and, on the
66 vertical plane, supports a constant dialogue between the operational and strategic levels of the company [5].

67 Since the early 90s, the pursue of efforts that led to reduce costs and to enhance the service quality leads to
68 think about the Supply Chain as a whole and not only inside the company. In consequence, we could say that,
69 in this period, the logistic function manages both intern and extern relations between functions and the implied
70 companies in the logistic process, in order to maintain, not only the continuity of the physical flows, but also the
71 flexibility and the reactivity of the process. The following table recapitulates these five phases:

72 Inspired from the international congress of research on logistics, 2006 After having presented logistics and
73 its evolution, we will analyze the changes that have announced the implementation of the SCM. To engage our
74 study, it is necessary to show the impact resulted from the re-composition of logistics, which has emerged, later
75 on, towards the SCM.

76 **5 b) The emergence of the SCM paradigm**

77 The driven efforts seeking an integrated management of the Supply Chains have given birth to an approach of SCM
78 type, that has, by nature, an integrative and systemic vision, rather than a functional and compartmentalized
79 one.

80 All the definition attempts agree on the fact that this approach is a process that integrates the entire function
81 of the Supply Chain, with a global vision.

82 **6 i. Conceptual confusion between logistics and SCM**

83 There are many definitions that vary according to authors: several publications do not lead to a common body
84 of literature. This difficulty makes it hard to agree on a conceptual definition of the supply chain management
85 and might be the source of confusion between logistics and SCM.

86 This second approach refers to an expansion of the vision in terms of the SCM perception. Through this
87 expansion, Colin and Pache [6], make it evident that logistics, transcending borders, « accentuates the existence
88 of functional relations within and between companies, while the SCM visualizes the necessity to integrate the
89 totality of transversal operations into the flows of associated products and information, through the identification
90 of the major actors, among which it is essential to establish lasting relations, and which process are able to allow
91 its achievement ».

92 On the basis of this distinction, the authors [7], show the existing differences between the SCM and the
93 suggested definition provided by the Council of Logistics Management in 1998: "logistics is a part of Supply
94 Chain activities. It is related to the planification, execution and control of the efficient and effective flow of the
95 product's storage, and of the information service related to these functions, starting from the origin point to the
96 consumption point, in order to respond to the customers' requirements ». This definition shows logistics as a
97 function that participates to the SCM.

98 On this basis, the three authors gather in an SCM logic that goes beyond logistics, by focusing on a SCM
99 approach related to the process. Their approach refers to cooperation between the SCM actors that leads to
100 the management of activities and process: « Logistics, market research, sales promotion, information gathering,

101 research and development, the conception of products and the analysis of the systems' role in the value creation
102 ». To summarize, the supply chain management is a much larger concept than logistics.
103 This distinction between SCM and logistics allows us to identify, more precisely, the Supply Chain Management.

104 **7 III. Logistic Environment: Trends and Best Practices**

105 The environment framing the Supply chain management includes trends and best practices. Trends impact the
106 best practices and vice-versa.

107 The logistic practices presented below are made in the context of the logistic trends that have been shaping
108 this sector for decades; they are concrete answers to the environment pressures on companies.

109 **8 a) Trends**

110 Bigras [8] has developed certain trends that seem particularly significant to him. That to say:

111 * The increasing customers' requirements * The increasing competitiveness axed on productivity and quality

112 * The acceleration of technological development and diffusion.

113 **9 * The complexity and globalization of markets**

114 As far as their increasing needs are concerned, consumers are better informed and dispose of many resources to
115 compare the quality of available products. The ability to satisfy the consumer becomes then the main challenge of
116 competitiveness. At this level, consumers should be integrated into the supply chain, which goes from materials to
117 them. To face this environment, companies should develop their ability to satisfy and anticipate the evolution of
118 consumers' requirements. To highly achieve this, the producer should establish a partnership with his customers
119 at the level of the R&D, of marketing and manufacturing.

120 As for the increasing competitiveness based on quality and productivity, it is perfectly obvious that companies,
121 regarding their environment requirements, and in order to effectively satisfy their customers' needs, should master
122 their total quality management, while providing the guarantee and the assurance of a continuous improvement
123 to their customers.

124 Regarding the fourth trend, the world is becoming, more and more, an interconnected economic system,
125 in which companies get sourced, produce, commercialize and sell in many countries. Therefore, logistics and
126 transport are the key elements to competitiveness in international markets.

127 These changes in the environment have pushed companies to undertake some readjustments, which, in turn,
128 induce some changes in the supply chain organization. These intern changes are related to the will of minimizing
129 costs, improving quality, providing more satisfaction to customers and ensuring a better use of the company's
130 assets.

131 **10 b) Best logistic practices**

132 These practices contribute to the efficiency of any company. It is, somehow, what Cuthbertson and Piotrowicz
133 [9] call the best practices, which were classified, by Bigras [10], into three main categories, according to the main
134 lever put in action for each of the practices.

135 **11 i. The collaborative integration**

136 The collaborative integration between partners is one of the elements and practices that are essential to a healthy
137 supply chain management. Concretely, it is referred to collaboration between actors of a Supply Chain, to ensure
138 that everyone could reap benefits from it.

139 According to Ballou and al [11], there are three coordination levels inside the Supply chain: the intrafunctional
140 coordination between the process and the activities inside the company's logistic function, the inter-functional
141 coordination between the various functions of the company and the inter-organizational coordination of the supply
142 chain activities between companies.

143 ii. Process reengineering Several optimization approaches of the company's functioning have been developed
144 based on a process description. It is the Business Process reengineering (BPR). The principle of this approach
145 consists in challenging the existing functioning and cutting the rope with it, in order to reach improvement
146 levers. Thus, a process « re-conception » should take place, as well as an examination of the existing process and
147 a re-evaluation of it, with a new vision.

148 iii. Customers' relationship management At this level, many techniques are used to monitor the demand
149 development and to reduce the uncertainty related to the latter. It is also a matter of the demand pooling
150 techniques, the inventory sharing, the data capture at point of sale, as well as the demand chain management,
151 which is analogical to the supply chain management. The most important of these methods gather in the best
152 practice (CRM), we have previously defined. This practice aims to win the loyalty of the company's customers, by
153 supporting their marketing efforts through a system that allows the maintain, the updating and the interpretation
154 of the whole data related to both existing and potential customers.

155 These trends and best logistic practices require a serious growth of the logistic service industry, which is
156 explained by a will to outsource logistic activities by manufacturers and distributors.

12 IV. Outsourcing : A Strategic and Logistic Perspective

157 The transit from the mass economy to the one related to the singularity economics was at the origins of a
158 phenomenon that has strongly marked the evolution of many of the company's functions, especially the ones
159 related to logistics and transport. We are witnessing the transformation of the logistics function in manufacturing,
160 of the logistics service and of transport. A first stage was characterized by a massive use of third parties, allowing
161 the variation of fixed costs. Then, the affirmation, to customers, of the service as a key factor to competitiveness
162 has amplified the phenomenon of using professional logistics providers.

163 Thus, the development of logistic outsourcing appears fundamental to the rise of PSL. We will then explore
164 how this has allowed the emergence of the PSL profession.
165

13 a) The logistic outsourcing movement

166 The generally given definition of logistics outsourcing is quite similar to the one generally attributed to
167 outsourcing. Ivanoj and Massou Franzil [12] define the logistics outsourcing as "the fact to entrust the whole
168 supply chain, previously internally ensured, or only a part of it, with an eventual transfer of resources, over a long
169 term period, to an external provider, with a performance aim ». This definition, including a strategic dimension,
170 is thus distinguished from notions, which are often related and confused, of subcontracting, impartation...etc
171

14 b) The logistics outsourcing forms

172 The partnership with a logistic service provider gets normally built by the use of contracts. Outsourcing could
173 be done more simply, by the conclusion of a logistic outsourcing contract. Companies could also set firms of
174 different structures, to whom outsourced activities will be entrusted.

175 i. The contractual outsourcing Lamy [13] had defined this concept as « an outsourcing of tasks or of the logistic
176 function to a provider, by the stipulation of a contract ». This outsourcing is achieved through the signing of
177 contracts by ordering customers and providers, who are supposed to ensure the marketing and/or the execution.
178 In this case, logistics function transfer is a part of a customer-provider service relationship. The main advantages
179 of this modality are essentially simplicity and flexibility.
180

15 ii. Structural outsourcing

181 The company has the possibility to pursue an outsourcing strategy through structural means, which implies a
182 longer-term decision. This solution has the advantage of being stable; however, it is less flexible, unlike the
183 previous one.
184

185 Two outsourcing modalities are possible. Those where the structures do not involve the creation of a new legal
186 entity (branch), and the one where structures, conversely, chose the creation of a subsidiary or of a joint venture
187 [14] V.

16 Logistic Service Development & Expansion

188 The outsourcing movement has given birth to the recent profession of logistics service provider, which is enriched
189 with new activities, particularly in terms of products' packaging and of the supply chain steering.
190

17 a) Definition of logistics provider

191 There is no consensus in the literature about the definition of a logistic service provider. Authors [15] show the
192 difficulty to agree on the contrasted definition of the logistics service and its actors.

193 In literature, most of the contributions are focused on the outsourcing concept, without bothering to explicitly
194 return to the meaning of « logistics » in this context.

195 Sink and Langly [17] join the same definition, adding that the provider should be able to assume a combination
196 of at least two activities, in a coordinated or integrated way.

197 This been said, the definition, in the matter of logistics service, definitions that focus on different aspects of the
198 outsourcing operations (service, nature and duration of the service), overlap and reflect a chronological evolution
199 of the logistics services, from the transport execution to more sophisticated services, included in a longer-term
200 vision.
201

202 The diagram below provides an overview of the logistics outsourcing evolution. The diversity of roles that could
203 be attached to PSL leads to suggest typologies. Many criteria are taken into account to build these typologies:
204 the nature of services [18], the actions' complexity and specificities [19], the capacity of PSL to ensure various
205 service types [20], the strategic orientation of the customer and the service providers' perceptions [21].
206

206 The totality of these criteria presents various types of PSL.

207 Jacques Pons [22] suggests a classification of 5 types of logistics service providers, from the least to the most
208 complete:

209 The 1 PL (First Party logistics providers) corresponds to companies that ensure their own From the logistics
210 function to the logistics service: A literature review

211 Coyle and Al [16] define a logistics service provider as "an external provider who assumes the whole company's
212 logistics function, or a part of it ». logistics organization, having their own fleet of vehicles and warehouse. This

213 is, nowadays, still justified if the company has specific needs in materials and warehouses, or if the drivers perform
214 other tasks than the vehicle driving (assembling, installation, adjustment of the sold product).

215 The 2PL (Second Party logistics providers) are the classic logistics service providers that ensures the execution
216 of physical logistics operations (transport and storage). Their management system is limited to a monitoring for
217 the account of the client company. They are the first type of service providers that have emerged in the 80s and
218 that mainly focus on the development of the transport activity.

219 The 3PL (Third Party logistics providers) are in charge a part of a company's Supply Chain ; they do not
220 only ensure the function execution, but they are also in charge of planning and creating a relation with other
221 parts of the chain. The 3PL have slowly developed concentric circles of services with a high added value, which
222 leads them to achieve tasks more and more varied, such as the cross docking, the comanufacturing, the delayed
223 differentiation of products, the co-packing, the tracing and tracking?

224 The 4PL (Fourth Party logistics providers) appear at the late 90s and are characterized by the fact that they do
225 not own any physical resource. They could be a sort of a 3PL which are no longer sub-contractors, but that plan
226 and coordinate the physical flows, executed by physical operators (2PL) or by the supply chain providers (3PL)
227 that innovate and reduce global costs by the use of their own resources, as by competing with other competitive
228 service providers.

229 The 5PL have recently appeared on the market. They had to retain the experts competence in the integration
230 of SI logistics to totally steer the information sharing between clients, suppliers and 3PL. the 5PL conceive,
231 organize and realize, on behalf of a, ordering customer, logistics solutions in the field of information system and
232 of application software solutions.

233 « The LLP are logistics service providers that suggest, relying on their own assets, a complete and integrated
234 solution, by performing, for the account of their customers, steering activities, at the level, for example, of
235 the optimized management of stocks or purchases. This implies the achieving of the demand prevision and of
236 optimization, as well as a wider economic function [23] To complete this part on logistics service providers, we
237 will discuss the diversity of roles that service providers could play.

238 c) The role of logistics service providers in the logistic schemes According to Carbone [24], the importance of
239 the phenomenon of transport outsourcing and of logistics, by manufacturers and retailers, led to many efforts
240 to position the PSL as a key factor of the logistics evolution. Bolumole [25], considers that the PSL role in
241 the Supply Chain is conditioned by four actors: the strategic orientation of the outsourcing organization, its
242 perception of the PSL role, the nature of the customersupplier relationship and the extent of the logistic process
243 outsourcing.

244 18 i. The integrator PSL

245 In their synthetic work on the PSL role in the Supply Chain integration, Fabbe-Costes and al [26] underline that
246 it is crucial to consider, on one hand, the nature of activities of the provided services by the PSL, and, on the
247 other hand, the logistic integration.

248 A certain number of authors distinguish the PSL of type 3PL, which is in charge of executing the physical
249 transfers (traditional PSL), from the 4PL PSL, which, according to [27], coordinates the logistics activities.

250 According to [28] and to [29], 4PL is an integrator of chains, whose main role is to assemble and manage the
251 resources, the capacity and the technology of its own organization and of the complementary PSL, in order to
252 deliver an integrated solution to customers.

253 For Filser and Paché [30], the profession of 4PL includes other skills: relational ones, skills in SIIO (Inter
254 organizational information system) and in technologies support, regarding the management flows. This PSL type
255 has also architectural skills to advice, organize the flows management and conceive integrated solutions.

256 ii. The PSL firm Pivot Literature underlines that logistics service providers could play a pivot role in the
257 logistic space. Dumoulin and Al [31] consider that PSL could also play a pivot role of logistics alliance Networks.
258 Within this framework, the pivot is, therefore, essential, because of its information flows mastery. Thus, PSL is a
259 double intermediation actor between horizontal partners, and between the horizontal partners and a traditional
260 PSL complex. Britan and Al [32] suggest maestro and mini maestro notions. Carbone [33] adds that the control
261 of the client company's information flows, and of logistics process, strengthens the role of the conceptor and the
262 PSL chain manager.

263 iii. The facilitator PSL

264 The PSL facilitates the creation of the cooperative network, by accompanying the implementation of the
265 network strategy, the development and the smooth functioning of trades. According to [34], the facilitator role
266 includes many characteristics that ensure the cooperative network sustainability.

267 In its facilitator role, PSL has to mobilize the logistics skills, as well as the interpersonal skills, especially when
268 it comes to the interfaces management. iv. The coordinator PSL At this level, PSL, mostly a 4PL type, ensures
269 the operational management of the network and takes into account the totality of the strategic objectives of its
270 customers.

271 It is also in charge of the flows management coordination, of the execution of logistics activities (transport,
272 storage, sourcing), of the synergy of information systems and of the competing industrial technologies. PSL is
273 responsible of the organizing and optimizing resources. It is, therefore, the key actor of logistics pooling between
274 manufacturers.

19 v. The architect PSL

As an architect, PSL, mostly of type 4PL, ensures the negotiation of strategies and objectives of the network members, and formalizes the logistic schemes. Within this framework, PSL should organize meetings and suggest common logistic schemes to the network members, whit the emphasize on the advantages of the pooling approach; to achieve this, the service provider relies on the accumulated expertise from cooperation experiences, to whom he is coordinator and facilitator, as well as on its expertise as an intermediary actor between manufacturers and the large-scale distribution.

Fronting the increasing logistics performance demand, the PSL got slowly adapted and have enlarged their offers.

20 VI.

21 Conclusions and Research Paths

This article has suggested a synthesis about the logistics evolution towards the logistics service, as well as an exploration inside the new profession of the logistics service.

As a conclusion of this synthesis, we could retain the role of logistics and its evolution through the transit of the mass economy model to the one of the economics of singularity. We could also apprehend how logistics have become a strategical measure, through its successive management methods: mastery of the physical flows and SCM, a lever to get a competitive advantage.

We demonstrated that the PSL emergence is related to the logistics outsourcing movement. This weighty trend is a strategic challenge to the powerful raise of real multi-services and multi-functions professionals.

This literature review confirms the relevance of the research related to the logistics provider profession: this inducts many questions that we consider crucial: which skills should the PSL develop, in the matter of flows steering, to become the principal actor of supply chains? How to build an offer system adapted to the customers' requirements, while generating economies of scale and how to create added value? How to master the technologies progress, to ensure a better management of multi-actors supply chains, in terms of flows and platforms steering?

In short, what is the contribution or the real role of PSL on the level of multi-actors supplies chains? Many questionings that represent a research agenda of a primary importance. ^{1 2 3}

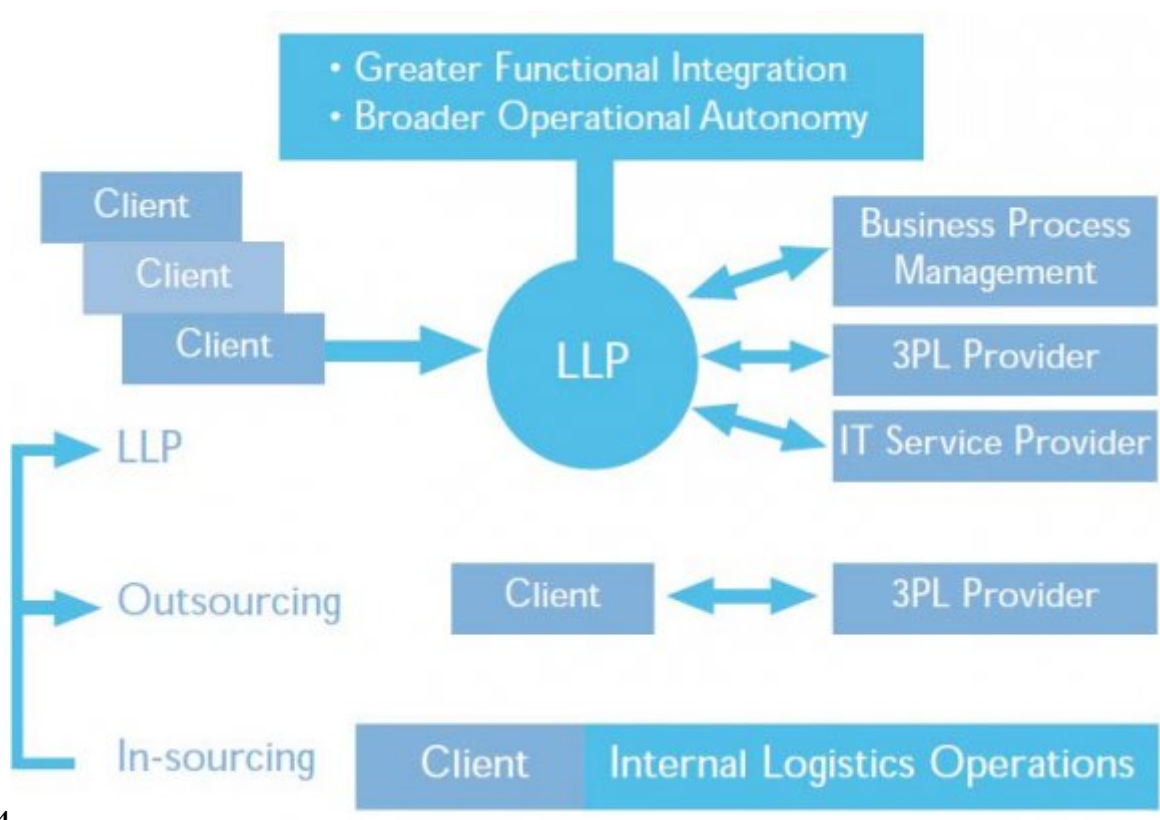


Figure 1: Figure 1 :

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Figure 2: 4 Global

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21 CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH PATHS

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