



Strategies to plug the manpower gap

Competition for talent is exceptionally high across many industries and young professionals often shun logistics, attracted down other supposedly more exciting career paths. The niche project logistics and heavy transport industries, meanwhile, are barely a ping on most people's radars. *David Kershaw* looks at some of the strategies being adopted to fill the void.



AAL Shipping said it is actively pursuing the brightest and the best candidates.

The pandemic threw logistics to the forefront of people's minds – rarely has the supply chain garnered so much attention and the public been aware of its importance to everyday life. Project logistics, however, continued about its business relatively true to form – in the background.

Fast forward three years, with oil and gas markets in flux and an energy transition in full swing, and there is an acute shortage of qualified staff at all tiers of the project logistics industry. There has been a broad array of tactics adopted by associations and companies alike to help cultivate new recruits and develop the industry's next generation of leaders, but most agree that much more needs to be done.

Thomas Skellingsted, president of 4D Supply Chain Consulting, said: "There is a lack of knowledge and knowhow in the industry. We have a pool of people working for us now – 14 full-time employees that we send out into companies that can perform and train staff in effective supply chain management," he explained. There has been a great deal of work at 4D over the past 24 months to champion its services and increase awareness of the consultancy advice it can provide clients. Today, Skellingsted said 4D is supporting all industries, broadly within the energy market, but also within general cargo for construction, through to the NGOs and the entertainment industry.

"Training is one part of what we offer but when we come in that's when we can start adding value. We can support clients to identify areas of improvement in their supply chain process and we help to develop it. Subsequently, we start looking at KPIs and how they are reporting. Then, there is a 'snowball effect'. It's all about adding value to the project, the business and the industry," he explained. For example, when considering a project budget, "we make sure that budget is kept, that the freight forwarder is doing what has been written in the method statements and project descriptions, and also that the client delivers what has been promised in order to achieve what they want to do within the project. We can act as the middleman for both parties by delivering value through pre-emptive action."

Improving standards

Skellingsted said that 4D's approach can fundamentally improve standards of a project and, ultimately, realise cost efficiencies. "Things are coming alive and we are gaining traction with a number of clients," he said, and there is a steady, growing pipeline of work ahead.

He believes that the lack of skilled industry personnel has been one reason for 4D's recent success. "Of course, that's a part of it," adding that there are plenty of personnel capable of project logistics management from afar, but there is often a

lack of skilled operatives throughout organisations and on the ground. "Then you have large corporate companies, that also move people around their organisation. That means for projects that could be six years in the making, from the RFQ to execution, and three years in production, a company could have changed or moved 50 percent of its staff." Clearly, holes in knowledge, expertise and understanding can emerge.

Personnel challenge

Vilasini Krishnan, senior consultant at 4D, believes demand for skilled personnel is still high and filling positions for logistics-related roles still seems to be one of the biggest challenges in the industry, globally. There appears to be a dearth of skilled personnel, even at a junior/intern level.

"As such, trainings are in high demand to upskill not only personnel within the industry but also to provide the necessary training for more experienced individuals desiring to change their career path and enter the logistics and transport industry."

For instance, she cited efforts by the British International Freight Association (BIFA) to address staff shortfalls. "BIFA, in an effort to fill the gap, has created a Manpower Freight Development Pathway to support various industry partners to fill their manpower requirements by providing foundational training to inexperienced individuals interested in joining the industry. As such, we continue to see a demand for the trainings be it virtual or face to face, as well for support to provide manpower to fill the industry need for skilled personnel."

Present conditions – namely a lack of staff and increasing demand for project logistics services – have presented gaps that consultancies have been quick to advise on. For instance, said Krishnan: "On the back of these challenges, 4D has signed contracts with industry-leading clients to provide manpower provision to support with their logistics and transport as well as procurement needs. This helps to quickly fill a role for the client as it offers a 'plug and play' solution. And the agility also allows 4D to quickly move individuals around to support the clients globally.

"In addition, we have also signed a number of contracts with both universities and educational institutes globally who are keen to offer alternative learning methods to their students with much required input from industry experts.

"We are also seeing increasing demand for face-to-face training from industry partners and clients alike from various regions, including the USA, Africa and Asia."

The demand for skilled personnel is still high. Filling positions for logistics-related roles still seems to be one of the biggest challenges in the industry, globally.

– Vilasini Krishnan,
4D Supply Chain Consulting



Rockbottom Consulting has cornered a niche by specialising in recruitment for the project freight forwarding sector, and Jason Dickens highlighted the ageing nature of the business as a cause for concern. “The talent in the industry is certainly mature in nature, and as years pass we have more highly skilled people exiting the sector due to retirement... however without the needed influx of fresh talent willing to learn to act as a counterbalance we see that the industry still relies on this mature skill set, especially when we experience periods of increased project activity.”

Knowledge problem

That in itself is indicative of a critical problem facing our sector: a lack of knowledge filtering down into the minds of the generations coming through. “There’s got to be action,” said Dickens. “If you consider the supply chain in its entirety the project forwarder whilst providing service/solution has also traditionally proved to be the hunting ground for the EPCs and project owners especially when they look to staff logistics teams on mega projects. However with talent in such short supply you will effectively have a situation where those higher up the project supply chain are

weakening their own subcontractors. Essentially robbing Peter to pay Paul.” Unfortunately, Dickens believes that many project forwarders have backed themselves into a corner by running lean, and staffing up when they win work. “From a business-minded perspective, that makes absolute sense and also considering recent times it was the only real option. However operationally we need to try new initiatives to achieve a balance in these teams between trainees, graduates and experienced talent to regress the overall talent shortage. I am aware that a number of project forwarders are already thinking in this manner, with graduate/trainee schemes in place for 2023.”

That being said, he did highlight the uphill battle that project forwarders face when it comes to attracting young people to the sector. “It’s easy for us to sit here and say

‘we need an influx of younger people’ but many of them are either unaware of the opportunity project forwarding presents or have different goals and ambitions. We have also seen a dramatic change in appreciation to travel; in the main younger people want stability, locality and flexibility not regular international travel.”

Attracting talent

Quite how that hurdle can be cleared could be debated for hours.

“Attracting the highest calibre of graduates into multipurpose shipping is one of the hottest topics we are trying to address as a sector – how to make our sector more appealing to the younger generation coming out of universities around the world,” said Kyriacos Panayides, ceo at AAL Shipping.

“What we are fighting against is an old perception of shipping being only for those who have grown up in major shipping hubs around the world, like Hamburg, Rotterdam, Singapore, Shanghai, and Houston and negating the impression of shipping being either less dynamic or financially lucrative than other industries, such as banking and finance.”

Panayides said that AAL is actively pursuing candidates from all backgrounds to

Attracting the highest calibre of graduates into multipurpose shipping is one of the hottest topics we are trying to address as a sector ...

– Kyriacos Panayides, AAL Shipping



Connected in Shipping

Inquiries



Justin Archard • John Hinrichsen
info@oneworld-shipbrokers.com
49 (0)40 655 86 200

HAMBURG

CHARTERING | SALE & PURCHASE | RESEARCH | CONSULTING
BREAKBULK - MPP - HEAVYLIFT - PROJECTS

fill its variety of roles. “With an ocean transportation and cargo operation company like AAL having so many facets and departments, we also offer graduates the opportunity to tour and spend time in those departments they find most appealing – to see where they might fit in best. Once someone has chosen their preferred department, we encourage our teams to visit their colleagues in other offices around the world, where they can experience different cultures and methods of working – which is key to the overall international shipping experience, where cultural and ethnic diversity is celebrated.”

Online training

The carrier also introduced the AAL Academy earlier this year, an online training platform that features micro-learning modules through to longer one or two-hour sessions that provide in-depth coverage of key topics.

There is evidence of a greater focus on professional development across the industry as a means to attract and retain talent. The European association of abnormal road transport and mobile cranes (ESTA) is attempting to lure the next generation into logistics, having launched an internship scheme in May. The scheme enables all ESTA member companies to send a young employee with management potential to ESTA or a member association for an agreed period of time. The intern will be given a research assignment and will have his or her board, lodging and travel costs paid by ESTA. Their salary will still be paid by the parent company or organisation.

ESTA director Ton Klijn explained: “The advantage for member companies is that it gives one of their young employees the opportunity to gain international experience and to build up a network of European contacts. For ESTA, it gives us additional capacity to carry out much-needed research and strengthens our ties with member companies and associations.” ESTA is currently considering applications for the first internship appointments.

Similarly, UK-based project logistics specialist Osprey Group launched a ‘year in industry’ internship and graduate programme in March this year. Both programmes involve working alongside Osprey’s team of marine, civil and structural engineers who are charged with creating the best possible, end-to-end plans for clients in every sector. The rest of the time is invested in onsite experience, associated with specific projects either onshore or off.

Wendy Kenny, chief operating officer at



Mammoet said virtual reality training situations are increasingly being adopted.

Osprey, added: “We have an incredibly diverse set of skills working within each one of our business units, and these are likely to be sought-after programmes. Whether it is the marine engineering internship or graduate marine engineering programme, or the general engineering internship or general graduate engineering programme – we cannot think of anyone else offering exposure to the same variety of skills in such a compact experience, but reflects our organisation’s multi-disciplined approach.”

Across the heavy lifting and project logistics business, there are few standardised practices. ESTA has had notable success with its European Crane Operators’ Licence (ECOL), allowing its holders to work in various markets internationally. ESTA continues to spread the word and increase its uptake, and private companies are integrating it into their training platforms.

For instance, Belgian heavy lifting and transport engineering specialist Sarens achieved its certificate to give ECOL training to its employees in 2021 and opened a revamped training centre the following year, increasing capacity both for classroom and practical crane training. It also introduced the Liebherr LTM 1030-2.1 to its training roster, according to the current standard EN 13000, and a full option for live training sessions.

To mark the launch of the revamped

centre, Sarens held an open day, giving interested individuals and companies the chance to explore the centre and discover the range of training courses – and also take the opportunity to sit in a crane themselves.

The centre reopened with an open day, giving interested individuals and companies the chance to explore the centre and discover the range of training courses – and also take the opportunity to sit in a crane themselves. The facility is recognised as a training and examination centre for high-risk tasks, according to BeSaCC-VCA, for which the training centre has successfully undergone audits by QFor.

ECOL courses

Sarens’ centre is the first in Belgium and the fourth worldwide to offer ECOL courses. Commenting on that certification, Line Rigo, training and development manager for Sarens, said: “It is important for us to have that ECOL certificate. We want to really facilitate it and spread the word about ECOL because it gives more of a guarantee about the competencies of our crane operators and the differences within all the different countries.”

Regarding its dedicated Sarens Training Centre, she continued: “By training our own employees, we can exceed the minimum requirements and better assess and strengthen competencies. Ultimately, our goal is to offer training of the highest quality... While other training centres might focus only on complying with imposed terms, we always set higher standards for our trainees.

“We do this by combining the imposed terms with our assessment of what the person who holds this licence or certificate should be able to do within a Sarens heavy lifting context, which distinguishes us

By training our own employees, we can exceed the minimum requirements and better assess and strengthen competencies.

– Line Rigo, Sarens

EVERYWHERE WE ARE HEAVY LIFT

SUPPORTING CUSTOMERS IN THEIR STRATEGIC MARKETS
WITH CUSTOMIZED END-TO-END SOLUTIONS

 **ERHARDT**
Projects

ASIA | EUROPE | MIDDLE EAST | USA

erhardtprojects.com
an Erhardt company

DON ANDERSON HAULAGE:

exceptional service
for cargo of any size

Our in-house project management team, in collaboration with the countless talented logistics managers, provide seamless journeys for your cargo from Point A to Point B. With specialists in Energy, Oil and Gas, Chemical, Infrastructure, and Mining, Don Anderson Haulage delivers an unmatched heavy haul experience.

www.andersonhaulage.com



- Servicing all of Canada and the US
- Extensive fleet of specialized trailers
- Multiple lines of Scheuerle hydraulic platform lines

- Hauling capacity over 800 tons
- Hydraulic Gantries and Jack and slide systems up to 800 tons
- Hydraulic crane services

- Engineered transportation and rigging services
- Warehousing / storage for any size cargo
- Project management

Michael Anderson, President, Don Anderson Haulage Ltd. +1 (416) 936-1622
Dave Barnett, VP Operations & Sales, Anderson Heavy Haul and Rigging +1 (204) 906-9460



**SCAN THE QR CODE
TO REGISTER**



ANTWERPXL.COM



by EASYFAIRS

from external training centres.” She was quick to champion the benefits of having such in-house training programmes, from both competence and professional development standpoints. She cited various examples of staff members that were onsite for a number of years, before progressing upwards to senior project planning teams. “There is also an experienced crane operator who became the technical support coordinator. And then the trainers themselves – they also have a background of being 15-20 years as crane operators,” said Rigo.

Such programmes have also assisted with recruitment; organised schemes enable people to realise their potential, many of whom are eager to progress both personally and professionally. “We start the programme and we build it up gradually... they can start learning in small steps and become experts,” she explained, adding that “we do the big jobs – heavy lifting, heavy transport, cranes, SPMTs – but the equipment is useless without the correct people, they are our main assets.”

Continuous investment

Melvin Schaap, head of learning and knowledge management at Dutch heavy lift and transport engineering specialist Mammoet, said the company continues to invest. “We have all the necessary knowledge and experience available in-house to train and develop our professionals. The Mammoet Academy is our central training facility offering formal instruction and practical training to everyone in the company. Our academy has built up an effective training infrastructure and developed a number of new courses and programmes at several levels.”

The nature of Mammoet’s work and the equipment it works with is helpful in attracting new people, but more is needed to keep them. “Continuous learning and knowledge sharing are considered vital in meeting existing and future heavy lift and transport engineering requirements,” he said. “As an example, we give riggers the opportunity to develop themselves into crane drivers, supervisors, and into the more specialist areas of our work to become SPMT operators, special device operators and even to become a trainer or a mentor to others.” It continuously adapts its programmes, based on new insights and equipment developments, but also to the needs of the ‘modern learner’ and how this knowledge can be integrated into the flow of work. Virtual reality (VR) training situations are also being increasingly adopted.



“It gives employees the chance to undertake on-the-job training in a risk-free environment where they can learn by doing. Retention of skills learned in VR is high, meaning it is more likely to be applied in the workplace and ultimately lead to increased productivity, and safety,” said Schaap.

Mammoet first deployed VR for its PTC 140/200 DS simulator training – an exact replica of the of the crane’s operating system, complete with operator cabin, HD screens, server rack, crane control cabinet and instructor station.

Schaap explained: “Before Covid-19 there was already an idea to further explore the opportunity to use VR for training. This resulted in creating training animation videos as part of our comprehensive SPMT training programme. The system went on to pick up a Heavy Lift Award, as part of the 2020 ceremony. Other VR initiatives have been mainly about developing and



We have all the necessary knowledge and experience available in-house to train and develop our professionals.

– Melvin Schaap, Mammoet

showcasing scenes for sales purposes.”

He added: “Our innovations, visualisations and academy teams came together to look into the role VR can potentially play to educate our employees. The visualisation department is capable of developing VR training in-house, using the experience it has developed over the years. We are in the process of exploring possibilities for an even more immersive experience for SPMT training and we are currently running a pilot for our Mega Jack 5200 system. This system is hard to train colleagues for, because we only use it a couple of times a year and is too costly to set-up for training purposes only.”

Training failure

Ultimately, there is consensus that more needs to be done to safeguard the industry from the threat of a lack of skilled personnel. Training to retain is critical. However, the result of an industry-wide failure to recognise and address the situation is manifesting in the present recruitment market. Rockbottom’s Dickens said: “If we consider lower-level positions, we are being regularly approached in the current market to target and identify talent – this highlights the lack of talent volume; in an ideal market our client would be able to engage at this level through their own networks and not require the support of external headhunters.

“It’s interesting as this level of talent is crucial to the execution phase of projects, should the level of award match projections we are currently seeing this could become an extremely critical topic as over reliance or the same resource could have the reverse effect to the small pool of experienced talent.

“Then finally we consider the merging of companies and new investments due to market buoyancy. These organisations will be fishing in the same candidate short pool.”

HLPFI



Sustainable logistics for a brighter future

Almajdouie Logistics serves diverse industries, including petrochemical, oil & gas, utilities, FMCG, retail, and automotive. With 50+ years of quality and reliability, it exceeds customers' expectations. Specializing in project logistics, Almajdouie deploys extensive assets, including a 1,100-ton gantry crane, conventional trailer axles, SPMTs, and lowbed trailers for transporting oversized cargo.

Serving Saudi Arabia, Middle East, and Far East megaprojects, it supports sustainability through national renewable energy initiatives like Dumat Al Jandal wind farm and Sakaka Solar PV plant, shaping a cleaner future.



Contact us



www.mlc.sa