



Under the impact of the pandemic, communication in Crane Worldwide Logistics went digital. MS Teams was a critical tool to keep everyone connected and give them the feeling that they were not skipping a beat, recalls Megan Soltura, Vice President of Global Human Resources.

Technology investment did not stop at communication software, as shippers and consignees were screaming for supply chain visibility and solutions to move their traffic. "Doing business as usual is not accepted any more. Customers demand automation, shipment transparency," observes Brandon Fried, Executive Director of the US Airforwarders Association.

This has opened new doors. The accelerating flow of data between supply chain partners and the deployment of new capabilities and digital formats enables companies to solve problems they did not know existed or how to deal with them, notes Henk Mulder, Head

The past two years have accelerated change, such as the shift to digitisation and process automation. This calls for new skill sets and approaches, writes **Ian Putzger**.

of Digital Cargo at IATA.

This also has ramifications for the people who are wielding these tools, he adds. A broader skillset is required that harnesses understanding logistics as well as data management. Training environments have begun to include digital business as well as traditional business elements in their programmes, notes Mulder.

"It definitely helps to have skills in data management," says Soltura.

Some observers describe the new ideal recruit as a cross between a logistics specialist and a data scientist. "That's been coming for a long time. In the past it wasn't so widespread. Now you need somebody who is at least tech-savvy, at least able to use the data," comments

Helmut Berchtold, President & CEO of logistics recruitment specialist adi Consult.

Fried observes that roles which traditionally involved virtually no technology, like trucking, today require electronic management of appointments at cargo facilities. "There's more emphasis on data – understanding data, data manipulation," he says.

Charles Edwards, Vice President of consulting and training firm Strategic Aviation Solutions International (SASI), notes that the emerging skillsets follow the migration of beneficial cargo owners as they embarked on the Industry 4.0 concept. Besides the use of emerging technologies, this also calls for a broader grasp of supply chains. "We need people trained with a helicopter view

of end-to-end supply chains," he says.

Jens Tubbesing, CEO of GSSA Airline Network Services, is leaning towards hiring candidates who know technology. Some people don't like technology and are not familiar with things like Zoom, he says. "It's difficult to change that. I can teach people airfreight," he adds.

Edwards sees benefits in recruiting people from other industries, as they can bring in a new perspective. SASI's training courses teach participants to look at everything from the outside.

This is not the only gap in most training programmes that SASI tries to plug. "The industry is not training people how to be a member of a project team or how to lead a project team," he says.

In today's hyper-tight employment market, it is very tough to find qualified candidates, reports Berchtold. This has shifted the rules of the game. "You're not hiring for skills any more, you're hiring

for attitude. Skills can be taught," he says.

Crane, which largely develops talent in-house rather than hire externally for management positions, is looking for the right mix of recruits with the right fundamental skills whose attitude matches the company's culture. Knowledge of technology is an asset, but it can be taught, remarks Soltura.

Younger recruits tend to be at ease with technology, notes Tubbesing. "It's their lifestyle. That's how they do things. We use it as a tool," he says.

He adds that the work environment has to adapt somewhat to their ways of doing things in order to attract and retain young talent. Mulder remarks that often it is not that employees lack the digital skillsets but rather that they are frustrated with not being able to utilise them more because their environment has been slow to transform itself. Companies are not going to throw away their legacy investment, so they still have to work with paper.

Firms that have ventured deeper into digitisation and the use of artificial intelligence are faced with another problem. They see new roles emerging that have to be defined and fitted into the corporate structure. At the same time, these structures themselves are in flux, as the experience of the pandemic and the disruptions it brought on operations not only exposed vulnerabilities in supply chains but also the inflexibility of siloed organisations. Business consulting firms have been preaching to C-suites to break up silos to allow for unfettered flow of information across companies.

Some industries are further ahead in this transformation than the logistics sector.

Whereas beneficial cargo owners (BCOs) embarked on Industry 4.0 principles, transport and logistics continued to be siloed, observes Edwards.

"Break down the silos – internally and externally. You've got to share information. That's what BCOs are doing and expect you to do," he says.

This transformation aims at more than accommodating talent that can harness new technologies and bring in new efficiencies; it is about transforming companies themselves to meet new requirements in the market. Edwards argues that the forwarding industry needs a new business model. With a growing palette of choices from digital platforms and integrated logistics providers like Maersk (and, increasingly, Amazon), BCOs are questioning the benefit of using forwarders, he says. If they can book their shipment on one of these providers and get a fast transit time, why use a forwarder, who has to consolidate traffic to make margins work, which means longer transits, asks Edwards.

Forwarders have to change and embrace digitisation, he states. "The smart forwarders get it, but the majority are so scared of sharing information. They're going to get run over by the train," he says.

Stan Wraight, President & CEO of SASI, sees the airlines in a similar predicament, at risk of losing the higher yielding traffic and ending up as commoditised carriers of low-margin cargo. "If you think like an airline, you're doomed. You need to think logistics. It's what you do in logistics that makes the difference, and that's a different skillset," he says. 🌐



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