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Rafał Matwiejczuk

University of Opole
e-mail: rafal.matwiejczuk@uni.opole.pl

ORCID: 0000-0001-8638-3273

ON THE RESEARCH CONCERNING THE RELATIONS BETWEEN LOGISTICS AND STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT – TOWARDS THE STRATEGIC LOGISTICS CONCEPT IN MANAGEMENT

Z BADAŃ NAD RELACJAMI MIĘDZY LOGISTYKĄ A ZARZĄDZANIEM STRATEGICZNYM. W KIERUNKU STRATEGICZNEJ KONCEPCJI LOGISTYKI W ZARZĄDZANIU

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Summary: Logistics occupies an important place within two contemporary, influential streams of strategic management: (1) market-based strategic management and (2) resource-based strategic management. Logistics also significantly contributes to the development of business models which are based on the strategic logistics concept. The aim of the article is to identify the most significant relations occurring between logistics and strategic management. The article presents the nature of the logistics concept and its relations with business management, the brief characteristics of market- and resource-based strategic management streams, the most important relations between logistics and these streams, the logistics strategy and its place and role in strategic management, and finally the premises of the strategic logistics concept development as well as the role of the logistics concept in business model development. The article is an introduction to in-depth research planned in the nearest future.

Keywords: logistics, logistics concept, strategic management.

Streszczenie: Logistyka zajmuje ważne miejsce w dwóch współczesnych, wiodących nurtach zarządzania strategicznego: (1) nurcie rynkowym oraz (2) nurcie zasobowym. W dużym stopniu przyczynia się ona również do rozwoju modeli biznesowych opartych na strategicznej koncepcji logistyki. Celem artykułu było zidentyfikowanie najistotniejszych relacji zachodzących między logistyką a zarządzaniem strategicznym. W artykule przedstawiono krótką charakterystykę koncepcji logistyki i jej związki z zarządzaniem przedsiębiorstwem, syntetyczny opis dwóch nurtów zarządzania strategicznego (rynkowego i zasobowego), najważniejsze relacje między logistyką a tymi nurtami zarządzania strategicznego, strategię logistyczną oraz jej miejsce i rolę w zarządzaniu strategicznym, a także przesłanki opracowania strategicznej koncepcji logistyki i jej roli w rozwoju modeli biznesu. Artykuł stanowi wprowadzenie do dalszych, pogłębionych badań zaplanowanych w najbliższej przyszłości.

Słowa kluczowe: logistyka, koncepcja logistyki, zarządzanie strategiczne.

1. Introduction

One may notice the growing role as well as the significance of the logistics concept in the contemporary strategic management of a firm. Logistics not only occupies an important place within the most influential streams of strategic management referred to as (1) "market-based strategic management" and (2) "resource-based strategic management", but also may significantly contribute to the business models' development, which are strongly based on the strategic logistics concept.

This is a conceptual article whose aim was to identify the most significant relations occurring between logistics and strategic management. In particular, the article presents: (1) the nature of the logistics concept and its relations with business management, (2) brief characteristics of the mentioned above market- and resource-based strategic management streams, (3) the most important relations between logistics and the market- as well as resource-based strategic management streams, (4) the logistics strategy, including its place and role in strategic management, and (5) the most significant premises of the development of the strategic logistics concept and the role of logistics concept in business model development.

This article is only an introduction to further in-depth research related to building the broadly understood firms' and supply chains' competitiveness based on the strategic potentials concerning logistics and supply chain management concepts. For this reason the article does not present any results of the empirical research that will be conducted within the next stages of the in-depth research process planned in future years.

2. The nature of the logistics concept. The context of the flow orientation

The concept of logistics occupies an important place in contemporary management. This is evidenced by the results of the research carried out in recent years, among others by: M. Dehler [2001], B. Mikus [2003], I. Göpfert [2006], G. Prockl [2007], and P. Klaus [2009]. The research carried out by the authors mentioned above highlights the importance of the logistics concept in broadly understood business management, in particular in achieving the expected market and economic outcomes by a firm, which are the symptoms of its success, as well as in creating the foundations (premises) for achieving the sustained, long-term competitive advantage by a firm.

In Poland, research devoted directly to the concept of logistics, compared to global trends and world tendencies, is still relatively rare. This does not mean that the concept of logistics, or more precisely its individual components, are not at all the subject of research. Nevertheless the managerial dimensions of the logistics concept, perceived in terms of a system (subsystem) of the goods and information flows management, are still relatively little explored.

P. Blaik analyzed the relations between logistics and management, manifested in the perception of business logistics management as [Blaik 2009]:

1. Business management subsystem (relation: "logistics vs. system").
2. Flow-oriented concept of the integrated business management (relation: "logistics vs. business management concept").
3. Network (structure) of the key managerial and transformation processes in a firm (relation: "logistics vs. process").
4. Subsystem of the management tools concerning the strategic and operational aspects of logistics-mix (relation: "logistics vs. business management tools").

The basis for shaping and developing the concept of logistics is flow orientation. According to J. Szołtysek, flow orientation is even a logistics paradigm. In the author's opinion, the logistics paradigm is its flow orientation, i.e. the existence of material (including personal) and information flows, which – within the management process – are shaped in such a way as to achieve access to products (and to places) within the set rules and priorities [Szołtysek 2015].

As emphasized by P. Blaik, flow orientation means the detailed shaping of processes within a firm that is oriented onto fast, cross-cutting and turbulence-free flows of materials, goods, information and financial resources. These flows occur both within the firm and along the entire value creation network. They manifest themselves, among others, in minimizing inventories and goods' storage time, as well as in the desired and efficient system of benefits both in the firm as well as in the market scale [Blaik et al. 2013].

3. The most influential streams within contemporary strategic management. Market-based vs. resource-based strategic management in the creation of a firm's competitive advantage

The central issue within contemporary strategic management area is a firm's competitive advantage. Such an advantage can be created in several ways depending on the type of advantage (price/cost-based advantage, quality-based advantage, information-based advantage, relational advantage), the size of the advantage, the durability of the advantage, etc. Strategy is the most significant tool for creating a firm's competitive advantage.

During recent years within the strategic management area one may observe two major streams: (1) a market-based stream of strategic management, also referred to as positional stream of strategic management, and (2) a resource-based stream of strategic management. The former describes a firm's strategy from the product and market perspective, while the latter describes a firm's strategy from its strategic potentials perspective, comprising resources, capabilities, competences and knowledge. Both streams concern the development of the strategy primarily at the level of strategic business units (or just – at business level), which often plays a crucial role in building and maintaining the competitive advantage by a firm.

Within the market-based strategic management stream, key significance is assigned to a firm's competitive position on the market, often equated (though not quite correctly) with the strategy itself. The foundation of the positional stream of strategic management is the assumption that the essence of the firm's strategy is to achieve competitive advantage [Obłój 2007]. The leading representative of this stream is M. Porter, whose works devoted to, among others, the value chain concept, the model of five competition forces in the sector, and the strategies for competition in the sector [Porter 1996; 2006], have permanently entered the canon of strategic management studies.

Since the 1990s, the resource-based stream has been becoming increasingly apparent within strategic management [Day 1994; Foss 1996; Knudsen 1996]. Within this stream a key role in creating the competitive advantage of a firm is assigned to the so-called firm's success potentials, i.e. (1) resources, (2) capabilities, and (3) competences. Apart from those one may also note the so-called symptoms of a firm's success, which are the expected market and economic outcomes achieved by it [Matwiejczuk 2014; 2015]. Despite many often quite significant differences between the above strategic management streams, the common point of these streams is the firm's aspirations to gain and maintain a long-term competitive advantage.

Although within the resource-based stream of strategic management, competitive advantage refers to the firm's success potentials, while within the market-based stream of strategic management, this refers to the firm's competitive position on the market. In both cases competitive advantage is primarily associated with the achievement of the expected market and economic outcomes by the firm, which are more favorable (in various respects) than similar outcomes achieved by the competitors. The basic determinant of achieving the above outcomes, and consequently the most significant tool for building a sustainable, long-term competitive advantage is the firm's strategy.

4. Logistics within a market-based strategic management stream. The context of the value creation chain

Within the process of strategic directions shaping, in particular in striving to achieve competitive advantage on the market, firms should focus their activities on creating and implementing appropriate values for the customers. The value creation process conducted by a firm is accompanied by a number of goals that it aims to achieve, including the proper recognition of customer preferences, the development of its market offer in line with their expectations and solving their problems, the delivery of products in the right place and time. This also concerns conditions appropriate from the customer's point of view (price, quantity, quality, information, etc.), and establishing long-term, mutually beneficial market relations (i.e. both for customers and for firms) which are manifested in repetitive transactions.

Firms striving to gain competitive advantage often attempt to design and organize the value creation process implemented through subsequent activities occurring in the logistics value creation chain. As a result their market offer is supposed to meet the customers' expectations to the maximum. One may then notice that the firm achieves "excellence" in offering and delivering products expected by customers, which involves three basic characteristics [Dytwald 1997]:

1. Price for the customer.
2. Benefits for the customer.
3. Costs for the firm.

The price is the most important component of the costs incurred by the customer in the purchasing process (next to such components as the cost of lost time, the cost of mental involvement, and the cost of reaching the point of sale). The basic role of a firm is to "compensate" the customer for the costs incurred by improving the activities that make up the value chain. As a result, the final market offer presents the benefits that lead the customer to conclude the transaction.

It is particularly important to correctly identify the potentials inherent in the logistics value creation chain, which allows firms to provide the highest value added for the customers, clearly distinguishable from the competitive offers (values). This is associated with a precisely designed and implemented transformation processes (spatial, temporal, qualitative, etc.), resulting in an appropriate market offer delivered by a firm in line with the customers' expectations.

Obtaining and maintaining a competitive advantage depends on, among others maximizing the value offered to customers by giving the products useful functions that meet customer requirements, which also strive for the costs' reduction. There are three ways of actions (solutions) leading to building a competitive advantage of a firm by creating and implementing added value within the subsequent activities making up the logistics value creation chain [Góralczyk 1999]:

1. Increasing of resources' productivity conditioning the improvement of the process of value creation and its delivery to the customer.
2. New products development (specific sets of benefits offered to customers) as well as product-mix optimization.
3. Improvement of the control of the product manufacturing process.

The first of the above-mentioned activities, i.e. increasing resources' productivity, consists in changing production methods and techniques in order to minimize losses, reduce costs and give appropriate speed and fluidity of material and information flows realized within the logistics value creation chain. It is also important to synchronize these flows and activities so that they are performed in the simplest possible way, involving the minimum of time and costs.

In turn, the development of new products as well as product-mix optimization is primarily aimed at offering a product (product line) with a specification precisely defined from the customers' point of view, especially their preferences and expectations. This means the appropriate, i.e. oriented to customers' preferences and expectations shaping of the individual parameters of the product-mix such as its width, depth, length and consistency. Proper shaping of the product-mix parameters allows the submission of a market offer that creates a wide range of choice for customers who will be able to decide on the "composition" of the value added they purchase.

Finally, improving the control of the product manufacturing process consists in a firm's constant pursuit to increase the effectiveness of the decisions and actions regarding the launch (initiation) of the production process and its constant supervision and correction. This is to strengthen the relationship between the value creation process and the process of its delivery. The logistic processes and activities implemented in the value chain at the intersection of the production and distribution areas are of key importance in this respect.

In addition, in recent years within the logistics value creation chain an important role has been also assigned to reverse logistics, related to the concept of green supply chain management [Maryniak 2017].

5. Logistics within the resource-based strategic management stream. The context of the strategic potentials of a firm

Apart from the relations between logistics and market-based strategic management, in recent years one may notice the increasing significance of the relations between logistics and resource-based strategic management. In the context of the growing importance of the logistics concept in strategic management, key significance is assigned to the so-called logistics success potentials, including logistics resources, logistics capabilities and logistics competences [Matwiejczuk 2015].

A firm's logistics success potentials may be understood as a group of success potentials related to the area of logistics, which are factors affecting the achievement of the expected market and economic outcomes by a firm, and – as a consequence – the creation of the firm's competitive advantage. In particular, the logistics potentials of success can be talked about when logistics resources, logistics capabilities and logistics competences are perceived and implemented (used) as the key success factors of a firm, contributing to creating its competitive advantage [Matwiejczuk 2014].

The identification of logistics potentials of success is based primarily on the use of assumptions and elements of the most significant concepts placed within the resource-based strategic management stream, particularly including such concepts as: (1) resource-based view concept, (2) dynamic capabilities concept, (3) knowledge-based management concept, and (4) competence-based management concept.

According to A. Sennheiser and M. Schnetzler [Sennheiser, Schnetzler 2008], the logistics potentials of success can be defined as specific resources and capabilities occurring in the area of logistics, and even in the area of the entire supply chain management, which the firm can use and/or develop in the long-term perspective, striving to achieve sustainable, significant outcomes related to the logistics area. Logistics success potentials can be treated as one of the types (group) of business success potentials, determining the creation of competitive advantage, and distinguished based on the features and dimensions of the logistics concept.

The logistics potentials of success taken as a long-term capabilities conditioning the value creation and its providing to the customers, are characterized by two basic features [Blaik, Matwiejczuk 2011]: (1) they condition the achievement and maintenance of a firm's competitive advantage, and (2) they stabilize and strengthen the competitive position of a firm itself and/or their chains or networks.

As emphasized by P. Blaik, logistics as a potential for a firm's benefits achieved in the area of competition is revealed in the creation of premises enabling differentation and offering the created value systems in a more favorable way than competitors [Blaik 2010]. In this sense, one may talk about the strategic management of logistics potentials of success.

Such management consists in shaping and using the logistics potentials of success, as a result of which the firm achieves competitive advantage on the market by focusing on costs (offering value to the customer at a lower price compared to competitors) and/or by focusing on customer service (offering value to the customer that is significantly different from the values offered by the competitors).

6. Logistics strategy. The most significant tool in strategic management leading to the creation of a firm's competitive advantage from the flow management perspective

The commitment to the logistics potentials of success in a firm's efforts to gain and maintain competitive advantage requires, above all, the development of strategies that take into account the capabilities of firm logistics systems to meet the customers needs and expectations as well as ensuring the appropriate level and structure of costs. In order to reach the optimal relations between the achieved outcomes of using the logistics potentials of success and the costs incurred, it seems primarily necessary to properly integrate the logistics strategy with the firm's (corporate) strategy as well as with the strategy of the entire supply chain.

In a situation where the logistics potentials of success play a key role in creating a competitive advantage, the firm's strategy can be based to a large extent on the logistics strategy. One may then talk about the growing importance of the strategic aspects of logistics, associated with a gradual departure from the perception of logistics only in functional categories towards its recognition as an important component of the firm's (corporate) strategy and its individual businesses (strategic business units) [Waters (ed.) 2003].

In the classic approach, logistics is perceived as one of the many functions (functional areas) of a firm, related to the coordination of materials, goods and information flows within the firm. Taking into account thus perceived logistics concept, one may talk – among others – about logistics strategy as one of a firm's functional strategies.

J. Witkowski defines logistics strategy as a functional strategy which is a composition of long-term, internally and externally coordinated decisions and activities in the field of location, transport, warehousing, shaping and control of inventories, and customer service, conditioning the competitive advantage achievement [Witkowski 1995]. Despite the "assignment" of the logistics strategy to a group of functional strategies, for many years it has been perceived as a potential determinant of creating a firm's competitive advantage.

The key and constantly growing role of logistics – including logistics strategies – in shaping the broadly understood firm's competitiveness as well as creating competitive advatage is emphasized by G. Persson [1991]. In his opinion, logistics is increasingly contributing to the shaping and development of business strategies, primarily through the use of strategic aspects of logistics concepts related to logistics systems and processes.

The constantly growing increase in the importance of logistics is also noted by M. Christopher, according to whom logistics strategies and logistics tools are increasingly used as instruments for achieving competitive advantage by a firm [Christopher 2011]. The author emphasizes that the most spectacular results in creating competitive advantage are obtained by firms and supply chains that concurrently focus their attention both on costs and customer service. An important role in creating competitive advantage also applies to the concept of supply chain management [Witkowski 2010], as well as the mentioned above concepts of reverse logistics and green supply chain management [Maryniak 2017].

The importance of logistics strategies in building a firm's competitive advantage was also confirmed by the results of the empirical research conducted by D. Bowersox and P. Daugherty. These authors defined three orientations that form the basis for formulating and developing a logistics strategy based on a firm's resources and capabilities. Among these orientations, D. Bowersox and P. Daugherty indicate [Bowersox, Daugherty 1987]: (1) process orientation, (2) market orientation, and (3) information orientation.

Within the process orientation, all the logistics processes and activities are treated as parts of the value added creation system. The logistics strategy can contribute to the creation of a firm's competitive advantage primarily by maximizing the effectiveness and efficiency of individual processes carried out in the areas of purchasing, production, scheduling of deliveries and physical distribution.

In turn, within the market orientation, the coordinated implementation of logistics processes and activities (concerning various strategic business units) in the area of physical distribution, enabling the achievement of synergy effects is of key importance. The basic source of a firm's competitive advantage is a logistics strategy based on customer service.

Finally, within the information orientation, it is assumed that logistics processes and activities require integration and coordination throughout the entire supply chain. This orientation is the "starting point" for the development of cooperation between supply chain enterprises, based on the integrated management of goods and information flows, as well as enabling the achievement and maintenance of a lasting, long-term competitive advantage.

Logistics strategies are usually distinguished according to the concept of M. Porter, who defined three so-called basic competitive strategies: (1) cost leadership, (2) differentiation and (3) concentration [Porter 1996; 2006]. The result of M. Porter's concept adaptation to logistics area is – above all – the proposal of K. Rao, J. Steenger and R. Young consisting of distinguishing three main logistics strategies: (1) cost minimization strategy, (2) strategy for maximizing value added, and (3) strategy for achieving flexibility and controlling of the logistics system [Bowersox, Daugherty 1995; Witkowski 1995]. These strategies are primarily associated with the basic directions within the strategic management of business logistics, including in particular the identification of the main sources of a firm's competitive advantage achieved through logistics.

Logistics strategies may be also classified according to the type of logistics concept used (implemented) by a firm. Considering the challenges related to the market environment, as well as the long-term goals of enterprises regarding achieved market outcomes (e.g. customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, market share) and economic outcomes (e.g. profit, profitability, return on investment), two main types (groups) of logistics strategies can be distinguished: (1) strategies related to managing the entire supply chain, and (2) strategies related to time compression [La Londe, Masters 1994]. As emphasized by B.J. La Londe and J.M. Masters, logistics strategies should take into account the firm's goals as well as its resources and capabilities [La Londe, Masters 1994]. A logistics strategy understood in this way begins to go beyond the classic functional framework, playing an increasingly important role in creating competitive advantage of a firm.

7. Towards the strategic logistics concept. Logistics as the basis for the business model development

The results of research conducted both across the world and in Poland indicate that logistics strategies are increasingly going beyond the functional framework, having an increasing share not only in the formulation and implementation of business strategies, and even overall/global firm strategies (corporate strategies), but also in building and developing modern business models, which are the basis for creating and maintaining sustainable, long-term competitive advantage by a firm [Autry et al. 2008; McGinnis et al. 2010; Blaik et al. 2013].

K. Obłój states that the business model is a combination of the strategic concept of the firm and the technology of its practical implementation, understood as building a value chain that allows for the efficient exploitation and renewal of resources and skills [Obłój 2002]. It is worth emphasizing at this point that the business model can successfully "tie" elements of the market-based strategic management stream (positional approach related to the concept of the value chain, including specified processes and activities related to research and development, production, logistics, marketing and sales) and the resource-based strategic management stream (an approach emphasizing the importance of resources as the basis of the domain/activities of the firm). This is particularly important in the context of identifying and/or choosing the sources and ways of competitive advantage creation, which is directly related to the building and development of the business model.

As B. Nogalski emphasizes, the business model can be treated as a developed, contemporary (opposed to traditional, classic) form of an organizational model of business management and presented as a systematic image of the desired directions of the firm and its strategy development, as well as the conditions of this process [Nogalski 2009].

In turn, according to H. Brdulak, the business model is a certain – unique for a given firm or group of firms (supply chains, networks) – way of operating on the market, which ensures maintaining a long-term competitive advantage by providing the expected value added to the customers, and in the case of chains or networks, also to the individual entities within the chain/network. Value added is understood as meeting or even exceeding the customers' expectations regarding the broadly understood quality of the products (goods and/or services) [Brdulak 2011].

Therefore it can be said that the business model primarily reflects the broadly understood premises (conditions) of a firm operating on the market, taking into account the basic types of competitive advantage that the firm can gain and/or maintain, the firm's key success potentials (resources, capabilities and competences), as well as the solutions in the area of modelling and/or improving the firm's value chain [Obłój 2002]. At the same time, the business model provides the basis for formulating and implementing the firm strategy that allows gaining and maintaining a sustainable, long-term competitive advantage based on the firm's success potentials.

The potentials for creating a firm's competitive advantage based on broadly perceived logistics was identified in the early 1970s by J. L. Heskett [Heskett 1977], who pointed – already then – the significantly growing role of the logistics concept in business management. In his opinion, logistics strategy may be of key importance in formulating and developing the overall strategy of a firm (corporate strategy), referred to as the "logistics-oriented firm strategy", determining the building and maintaining the long-term competitive advantage as well as shaping and developing modern business models.

A. Stainer [Stainer 1997] also describes the strategic aspects of logistics related to achieving the expected market and economic outcomes in the context of developing a logistics strategy affecting the creation of a firm's competitive advantage. In his opinion the logistics strategy is significantly linked to the firm's environment, as well as the adequate measures and indicators describing the achievement of the expected market and economic outcomes by the firm. The logistics strategy perceived in this way not only goes far beyond the classic functional framework, but also can be an important component of the business strategy, and even the overall, logistics-oriented firm's strategy (corporate strategy) closely related to the business model development.

D. Bowersox and P. Daugherty emphasize that firms which particularly value the strategic aspects of logistics by implementing the strategic concept of logistics in shaping their business model, as well as formulating and developing business strategies, are primarily looking for opportunities to use unique (distinctive) competences related to the area of logistics [Bowersox, Daugherty 1995].

The competences of a firm related to the logistics area (i.e. logistics competences) can be defined as the long-term capabilities to use resources, in particular logistics resources, actively involved in the implementation of the firm's goals and tasks, leading to the achievement of the expected market and economic outcomes. The basic condition for the development of logistics competences is the integration and coordination of the logistics resources and logistic capabilities possessed by the firm [Matwiejczuk 2014]. Logistics competences are the most important logistics potentials of a firm's success, as well as the key components of the modern business models.

8. Conclusion

In recent years there has been a noticeable increase in the perception of logistics as a significant determinant of a firm's effectiveness and efficiency growth, its success, as well as a determinant of creating the firm's competitive advantage. According to P. Blaik [2010], a manifestation of the growing importance of management aspects of logistics is that strategic decisions in the area of logistics and supply chain management are increasingly contributing to the systematic discovery and creation of the new potentials of the expected outcomes and success reached by a firm.

Firms that strive to gain and maintain a competitive advantage use many instruments, including logistics strategies, which are an important component of the broadly understood logistics concept, perceived as goods and information flow management.

The article presents the most important relations between logistics and strategic management, primarily in the context of two basic streams in contemporary strategic management: (1) a market-based stream, also referred to as positional stream of strategic management, and (2) a resource-based stream of strategic management. In particular, attempts were made to show that there is a number of significant relations between logistics and strategic management, the use of which allows the development of modern business models as well as logistics strategies that affect the creation of a sustainable, long-term competitive advantage of a firm.

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