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2012 Management Report

INSEAD Humanitarian Research Group
The World of the Humanitarian Logistician



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**Management Report 2012
Humanitarian Research Group**

« The World of a Humanitarian Logistician »

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Logistics and supply chain management within humanitarian organisations is receiving more attention as people and organisations start to recognize its integral role in the performance of humanitarian aid programmes. In parallel, there has been a proliferation of training programmes offered by universities, non-profit foundations and the humanitarian organisations themselves.

We know surprisingly little about how the role of the logistician has evolved in recent times, and consequently how training needs have shifted. This report provides a timely and informative view on the role of the logistician.

As such it offers essential input to those who design training programmes. It captures valuable perceptions of logisticians in terms of the support they receive as well as their suggestions for improvement.

This report presents the preliminary results of a survey of more than 200 logisticians representing a large set of humanitarian organisations of different types, sizes, missions, and at different organizational levels. Those who responded to the survey are members of the Humanitarian Logistics Association (HLA), most of them managers with several people working under them. As members of HLA they are motivated to improve both logistics functions and opportunities for career development for humanitarian logisticians.

We find that they are generally satisfied with the organisation and the support it gives them, but that they are keen to provide more value by applying their skills to contribute to programmes. We also find a desire to professionalize, to upgrade their skill base, and an understanding of how to achieve this. They are ready and able to add value but recognize that their—and ultimately their programmes'—success will depend on integration into the “core business” of serving beneficiaries, and at the early stage of programme design. Interestingly, our findings echo those of the Fritz Institute’s 2003 report, which identified both a lack of professional staff and the disconnect between logistics (which is seen as a support service) and programmes.

This preview will be followed by an in-depth statistical analysis of the survey. We hope that you enjoy reading it. Any feedback or insight from your own experience or organisation would be very welcome.



A better understanding of the role and responsibilities of logistics and supply chain personnel within humanitarian organisations is fundamental to creating tools and providing solutions that not only improve the effectiveness of the logistician, but ultimately improve the service given to beneficiaries. Yet, never having been directly involved in the work, the ability of academics to understand “what works and what doesn’t” and propose relevant and impactful solutions is limited.

For this reason, INSEAD’s Humanitarian Research Group (HRG) and the Humanitarian Logistics Association (HLA), through the network of the latter, conducted a survey of logistics and supply chain personnel working in humanitarian organisations.

The survey addressed five primary areas: (1) organisations and project information, (2) personal information, (3) the logistician’s work, (4) their perceptions, and (5) their suggestions. Together, these allow for a preliminary analysis of the role and responsibilities of logisticians in humanitarian organisations.

The original survey design was tested with 11 phone interviews. Interviewees were encouraged to give feedback both on the content and the structure of the survey. Based on their feedback, as well as the input of selected experts in the sector, the survey instrument underwent a number of key changes, and an online version was created for ease of dissemination to the members of the HLA. Note that using HLA members does not constitute a random sample, as it is likely that HLA membership signals a keen interest in the evolution of the profession.

Of the approximately 1200 members of the HLA, 258 fully completed the online survey. Of these, 57 were excluded from the analysis as the respondents either worked in a private company or their job title was unrelated to logistics and/or supply chain management. The remaining 201 responses formed the basis of the report that follows. It explains who the respondents are and why they are representative of the sector, as well as presenting the answers to a number of survey questions in graphic form. The aim is to provide a preview of responses prior to publication of an in-depth statistical analysis.

Survey Population

The respondents represent various logistics and supply chain functions at all levels of the organisation. The majority (42%) work at country level, followed by field (29%), headquarters (22%) and region (5%).

Level of Organisation



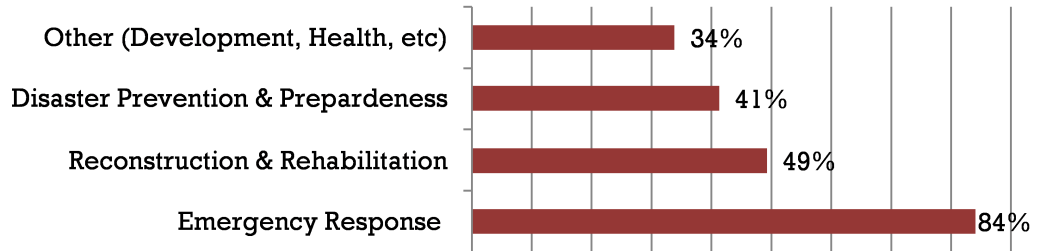
Respondents are spread across a variety of organisations. The Red Cross and United Nations (30%), as well as a large number of international NGOs (70%) are represented. The distribution across functions and organisations reflects a diverse set of respondents, giving us confidence that the information collected is representative.

Type of Organisation

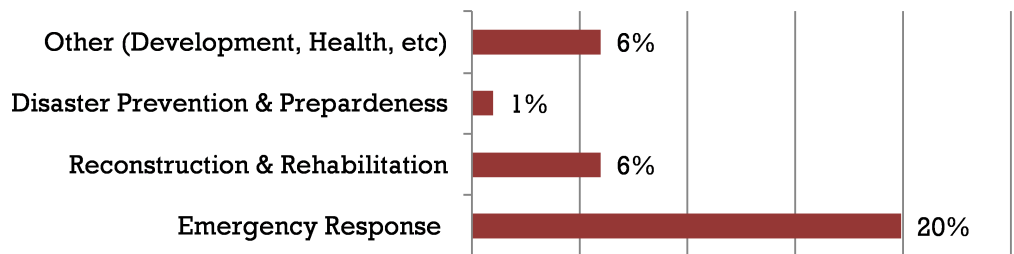


The majority of organisations represented by respondents manage programmes that address multiple stages of the disaster lifecycle, from prevention and preparedness (41%), to emergency response (84%), and reconstruction/rehabilitation (49%). 34% specified “other” programmes that they felt were not covered by the categories provided. The most common among these were: “Health”, “Refugees”, “Development” and “Peacekeeping”. A number of organisations indicated only one type of programme. For example, close to 20% of the organisations deal exclusively with emergency response, as shown in the second graph.

Type (s) of Programmes Organisations Manage

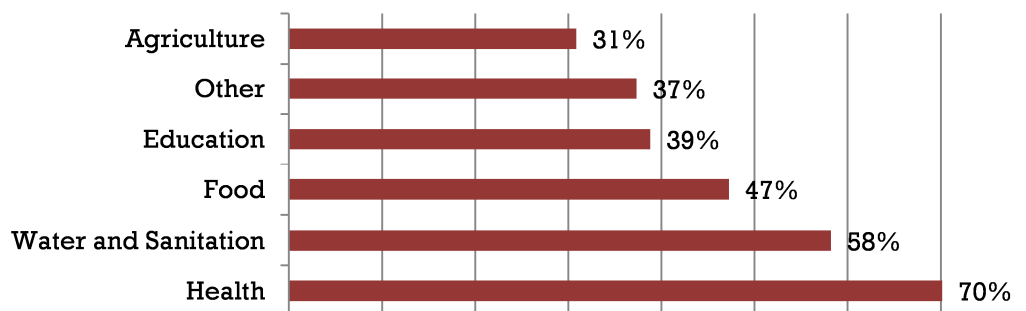


Those Who Chose *Only* the Following

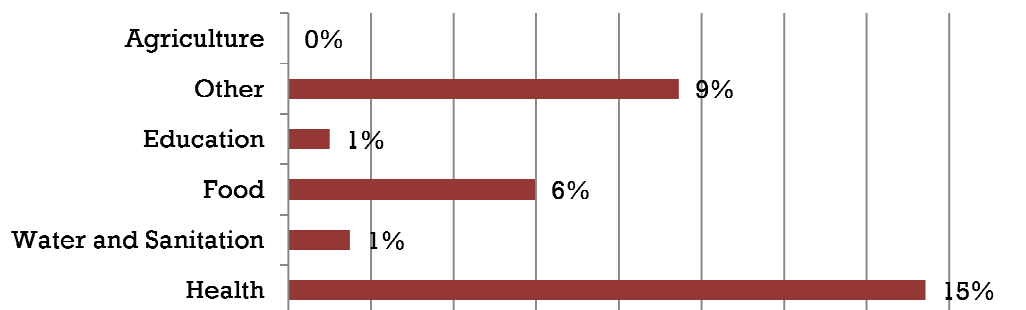


Most respondents claimed that their organisations provided more than one type of aid. “Health” and “Water and Sanitation” were the most common forms of aid, with 70% and 58% respectively, followed by “Food” (47%) and “Education” (39%). In terms of specialization, those that focused on health-related aid typically did not engage in other types of aid. The most popular response for “Other” types of aid included: “NFIs”, “Shelter”, and “Child Protection”.

Type (s) of Aid Organisations Provide



Those Who Chose *Only One Type*



Overall, the wide range of respondents in terms of the type and level of organisation, as well as the range of programmes and aid that they provide capture the diversity of logisticians working in the humanitarian sector.

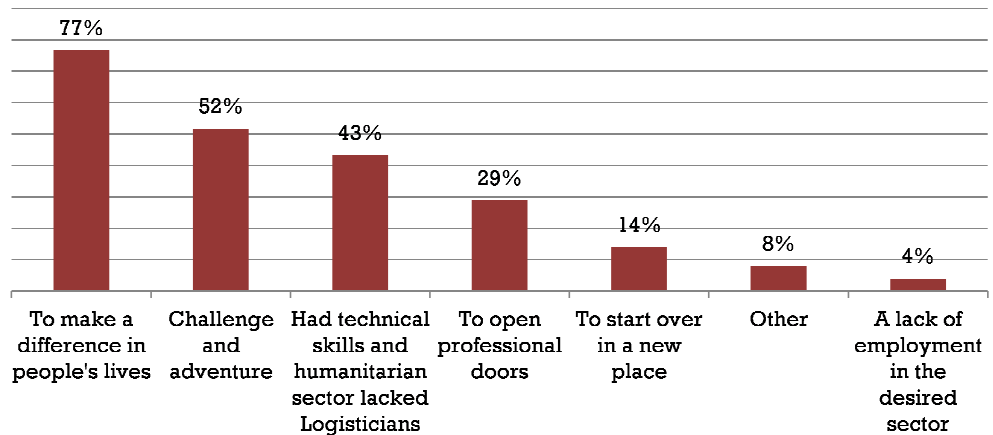
An overwhelming majority of the respondents are male (84%). Logistics seems to be a male business. On average, women have been working in their organisations for 6.9 years, compared with 5.2 years for men. The average tenure is 5.5 years.

Understanding that the motivation of those who work in the humanitarian sector tends to differ from that found within the private sector, we asked respondents to select up to three statements that best described their motivation(s).

77% of respondents claimed that their motivation was to make a difference in people's lives. Such a high percentage suggests that humanitarian organisations attract and value individuals with some degree of "dedication to the cause", a phenomenon that is worthy of further investigation. As one logistician put it, "Perhaps if the right motivations are there, the skills don't necessarily have to be."

Approximately half of those respondents also chose "I was looking for new challenges and adventure every day". Clearly, adventure and making a difference in people's lives are not typical drivers of motivation in private companies, and this result should prompt some reflection on the consequences for public-private partnership.

Individual Motivation(s)

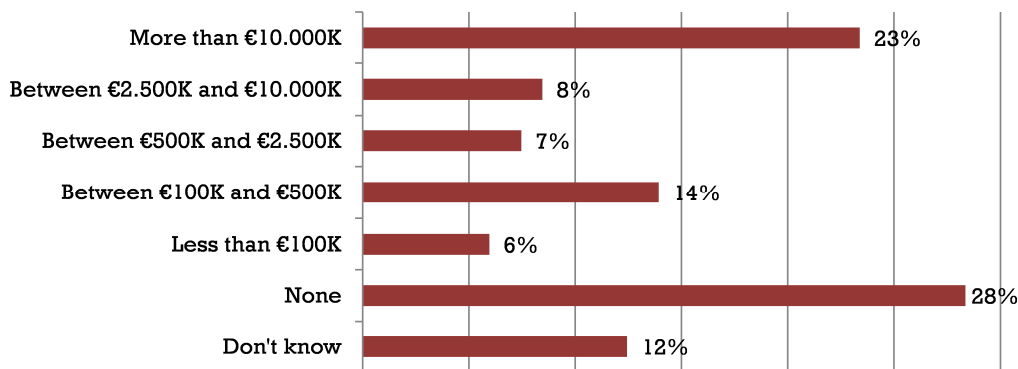


The following three questions give a sense of the level of responsibility of respondents in terms of hierarchical dependency, annual budget, and number of target beneficiaries.

The majority of respondents (51%) have less than 10 people under their responsibility. In the second largest segment, they have between 10 and 50 people under them (39%), and only 10% have more than 50 people. Considering that such a large percentage of respondents have between 10 and 50 people under their responsibility, it seems appropriate to give some thought to whether the logistician is prepared to manage large numbers of people.

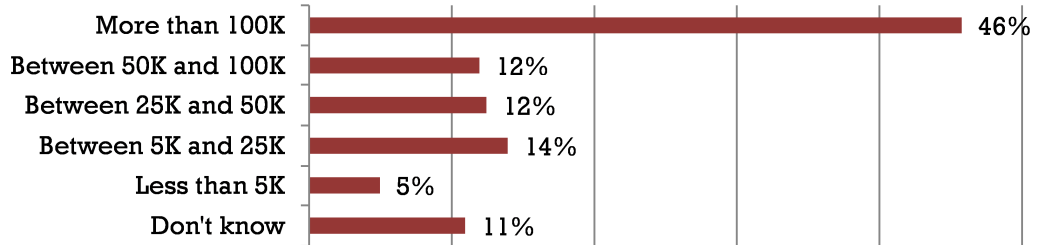
The next question was about the annual budget our respondents manage. Roughly a quarter of people manage no budget directly, presumably because the budget for logistics is part of another budget, e.g. for the corresponding programme. Another quarter manage more than €10,000,000 annually.

Annual Budget (direct control)



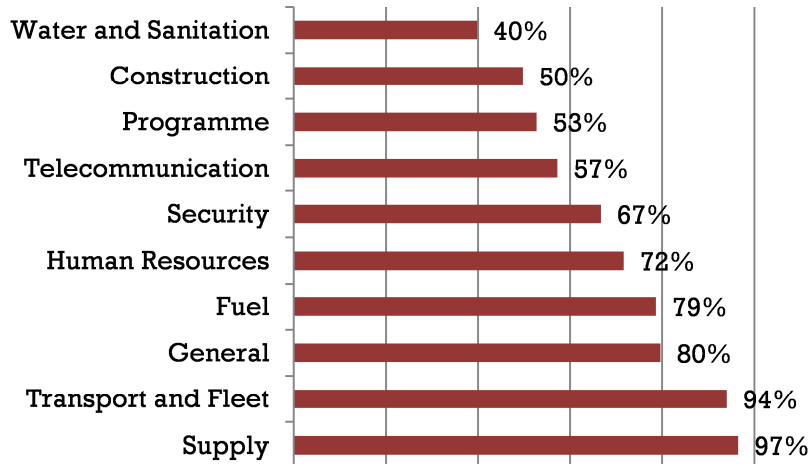
The estimated number of beneficiaries of the respondent's programme was typically over 100K, showing a tendency towards larger interventions.

Estimated Number of Beneficiaries in the Programme(s)

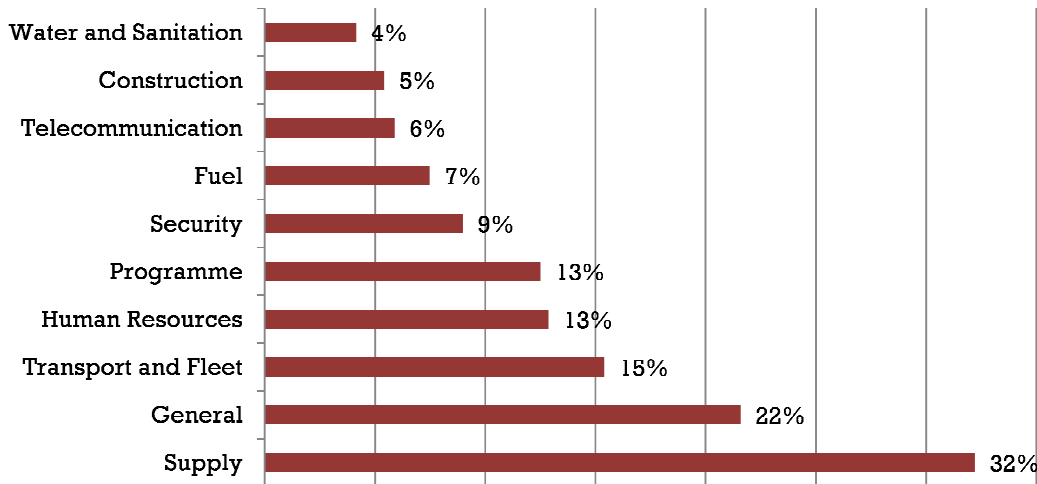


The next set of questions relates to the tasks our respondents perform and how they allocate their time. Not surprisingly, 97% indicate that supply management is an area that they are either partially or fully involved in, closely followed by transport and fleet management (94%). Note that 80% of the respondents are also involved in general management.

Are You Involved in the Following Areas?



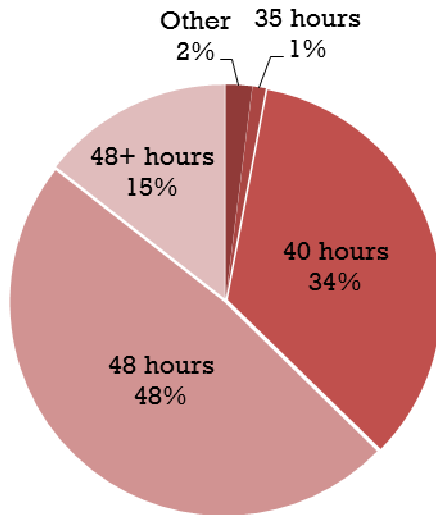
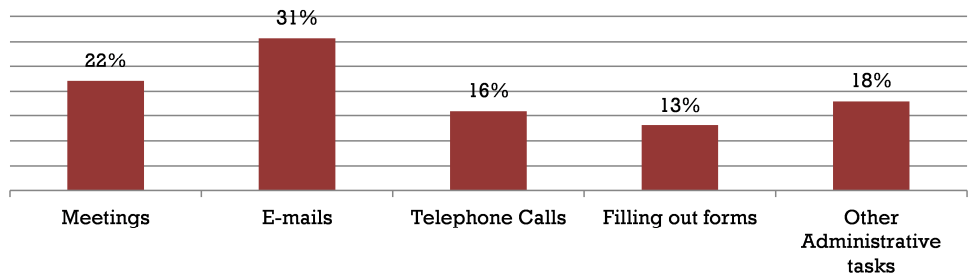
% Time Devoted to Each Area



The chart “% Time Devoted to Each Area” depicts the average amount of time those partially or fully involved in the area devote to the category. Supply management is not only the area of greatest involvement, it is also the area where people devote most of their working hours (32%). While 94% of people are involved in transport and fleet management, they spend only 15% of their time in this area. General management is the second most time-consuming area (22%). Again, this raises the question of whether logisticians are sufficiently prepared to exercise this function.

Respondents were asked to specify how much of their working time they spend on administrative tasks such as emails, meetings, phone calls and form-filling. On average respondents spend 31% of their working time on emails and 22% in meetings. This raises question about the most effective use of communication channels such as email, telephone and face-to-face meetings.

Average Hours Worked/Week



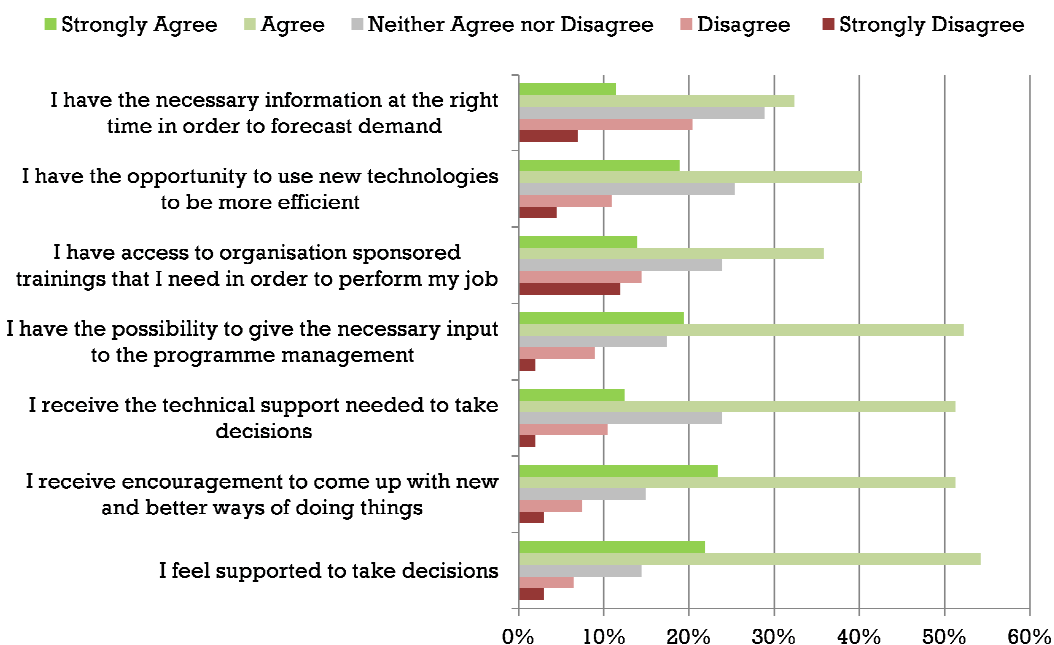
Effective use of limited time should be seen in the light of the total workload, as indicated by the number of hours worked.

63% of respondents work more than the standard 40 hours per week. The global average is 46 hours per week. This means that the average person spends approximately 10 hours a week on general management tasks.

We first asked respondents about the degree of support they received from their organisation to be able to perform their jobs, and their overall satisfaction with their role and the organisations for which they work.

There was a clear affirmation of the statements involving support to make decisions: 63% to 76% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt supported to make decisions, received encouragement to come up with new and better ways of doing things, were given technical support to take decisions, and had the possibility to give input on programme management.

Degree of Satisfaction (Part I)

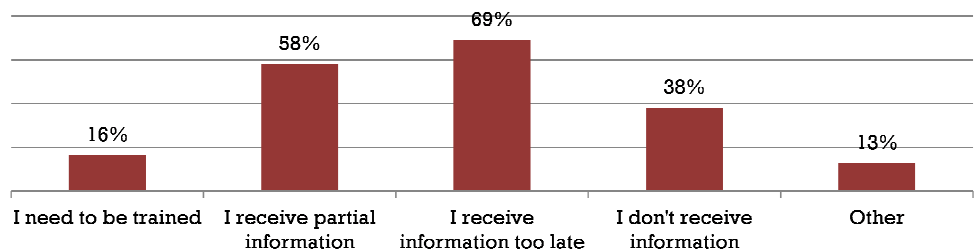


There was less support for the statements related to receiving sufficient training: only 50% agreed or strongly agreed, while 12% strongly disagreed, being able to use new technologies (59%), and having the necessary timely information to forecast demand (43%) - all essential to logisticians today.

We dug a little deeper with regard to respondents who felt they did not have the necessary timely information to forecast demand. When asked why, the majority stated they either received partial information, or they received it too late. 24 of the 55 respondents checked both options.

Clearly, there is room for improvement here, perhaps through better and timely communication with the programmes.

Identified Reasons for not Having the Necessary Information at the Right Time to Forecast Demand

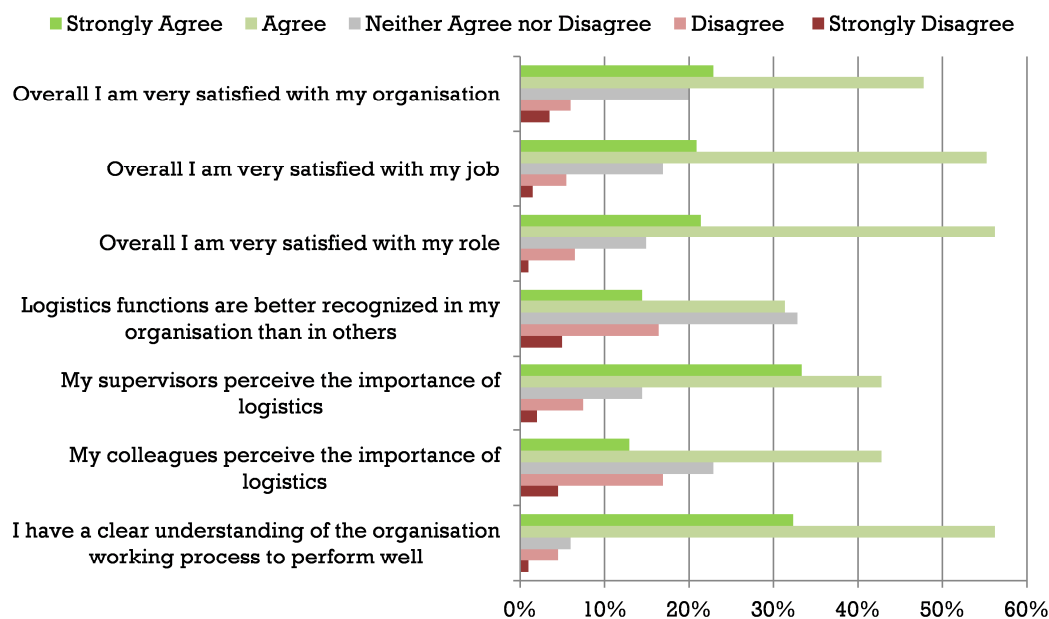


While respondents were not asked to state the root cause of not having the right information to forecast demand, some of the text responses and phone interviews alluded to the fact that the logistics department was often excluded from programme planning. “Logistics are not well equipped with information,” claimed one respondent. Another respondent indicated a “lack of planning in the programme teams”. The responses to later questions reinforce the importance of coordination and information sharing between programmes and logistics.

In the second cluster of statements, the vast majority (88%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had a clear understanding of their organisation's working process to perform well. Approximately three quarters agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their role and job. Respondents were only slightly less satisfied with their organisation in general (71%). There was little strong disagreement with any of the statements made. These results are encouraging.

The highest levels of disagreement fell under "My colleagues perceive the importance of logistics" (21%) and "Logistics functions are better recognized in my organisation than in others" (21%). 33% of respondents neither disagreed nor agreed that logistics functions were better recognized within their own organisation.

Degree of Satisfaction (Part II)



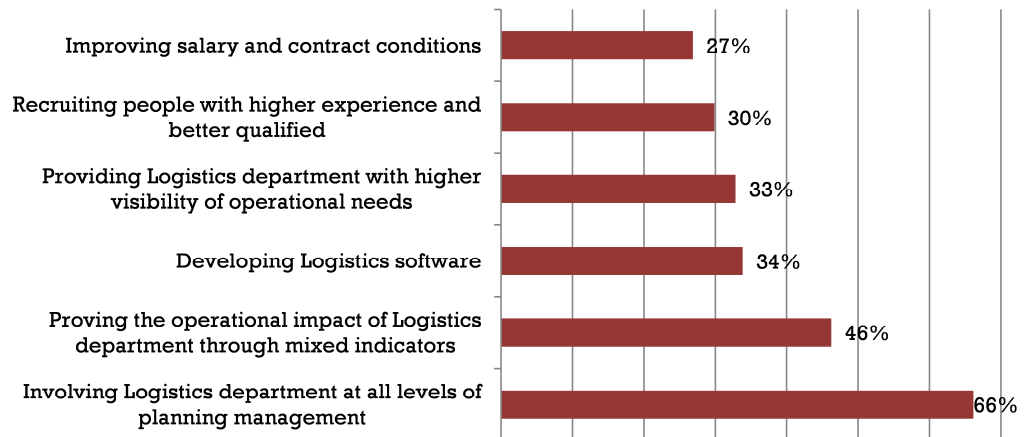
Finally, we wanted to hear suggestions from logisticians regarding their jobs. They were asked to select three topics that would improve overall logistics performance and recognition within their organisations.

66% suggested that involving logistics at all levels of planning management would improve the organisation's logistics performance. In total, 88% made a suggestion that included either more involvement in planning/operations or demonstrating the impact of logistics through mixed indicators.

Clearly, the message is: We could help you a lot better if you involved us earlier and better in your plans and if you were clear about how we can contribute to your objectives and key performance indicators. As one interviewee phrased it, "Logistics are seen as service providers [even while] they play a central role in the whole programme process."

It is interesting to note that in a previous question 71% either agreed or strongly agreed that they had the possibility to give the necessary input to programme management. Logisticians clearly feel they can add much more value.

Suggestions to Improve the Organisation's Logistics Performance



Respondents were asked to select three topics that reflected the most important areas for their professional development over the next two years. The top four responses are shown below. “Logistics planning and management” led with 70%. 91% of respondents chose at least one of the top three choices, while half of those that chose “Logistics planning and management” also chose “Information systems for logistics”. These choices appear to be coherent with earlier responses.

Most Important Areas for Professional Development



In a separate question, the majority of respondents (56%) answered that they had received some form of logistics training in the past year. (Note that this number includes both internal and external training, and does not distinguish between education and training on organisational processes and procedures). There does appear to be an acknowledgement of the importance of logistics and the corresponding need for training.

Nevertheless, in a previous question, 26% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had access to the training necessary to perform their job. Our analysis shows that across different types of organisations (Red Cross, UN, international NGOs), the percentage that received training in the past year was relatively similar. Further analysis should allow us to determine differences related to the size of the organisations or their type of activity.

Conclusion



This survey cuts across types of organisations and different activities, as well as hierarchical levels. It offers the views of more than 200 of those involved in logistics and supply chain within humanitarian organisations.

The good news is that a majority of practitioners are satisfied with the organisation they work for and feel supported to do their job. Nevertheless, we find that the same challenges that existed 10 years ago persist today.

Logisticians feel that their value is not fully recognised. They believe they could contribute much more if they were better integrated into the programmes.

It is apparent that their colleagues do not fully understand the value they could bring. The obvious question here is how to change this. Do logisticians need to push to gain more respect for the value they could bring if they were better integrated into the “core business”, instead of still being an “add-on” as in many cases? Stated differently, instead of griping, is there a way to clearly demonstrate added value by showing their positive impact on well-selected, programme-based performance indicators?

Logisticians want the job to become more professional: hire qualified people and pay them well, integrate them into the “core business” of serving beneficiaries through programmes, and let them develop and implement the right tools (software, use of new technologies).

Logisticians work long hours. They often manage large teams and substantial budgets for programmes serving a vast number of beneficiaries. They carry a huge responsibility and are obviously aware of the vital nature of their work.



Most logisticians give the bulk of their attention to supply management, transport and fleet management. They also attend to general management and human resources management tasks. The question is, are they properly prepared for these responsibilities?

Humanitarian logisticians are strongly motivated. This is not only reflected in their long working hours but also in their determination to make a difference in people's lives and to lead interesting lives themselves. Clearly, there are important differences with

commercial logisticians and these need to be understood when working with partnerships and/or when developing tools for use in a humanitarian logistics context.

Logistics is still a male-dominated activity, especially at the field level. The small percentage of women in the sector tend to work in more central positions. It begs the question whether this is a desirable situation, and, if not, what it would take to bring about change.

Having 'taken stock' in this preliminary analysis, we are now positioned to delve deeper into the issues identified here as part of the ongoing challenge to understand the job of the humanitarian logistician, the differences with commercial logisticians and the role of logistics in humanitarian programmes, as well as to forge ahead with upgrading the logistics function to reflect its key contribution to performance. The rich responses to the survey will subsequently allow us to define training needs and training sequences in more detail so that more targeted programmes can be developed. Given the multitude of related university-based courses to have emerged, this is a timely and important step.



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