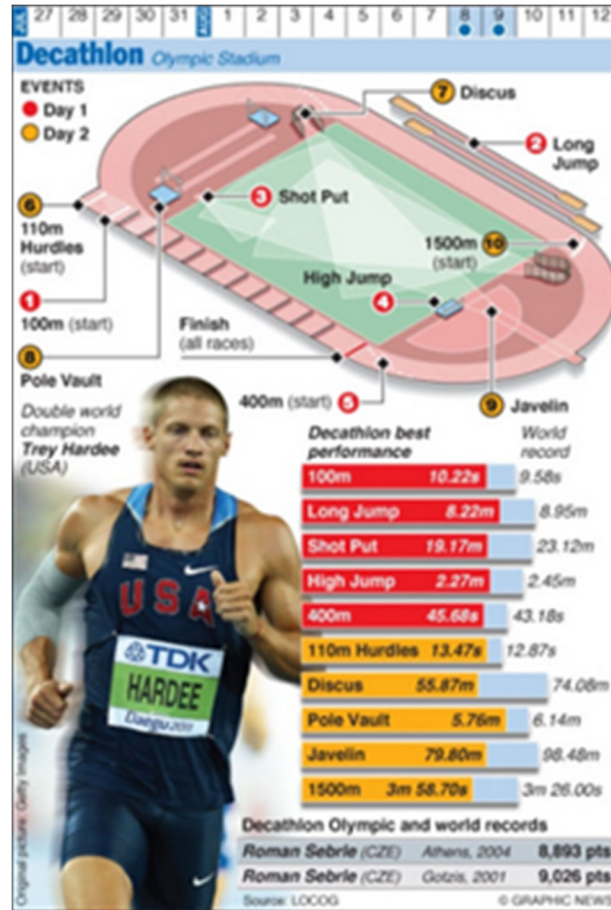


THE SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGER'S DAILY DECATHLON



In my blogs I talk about my professional passions: supply chain & the logistics world, managers & management, projects & project management, training & teaching and business simulations & experiential learning. I like to look forward, that's why the blog is titled "ADELANTE!", and I hope the reader will find something of interest in them, be it a new fact, a new way of looking or, even better, a new inspiration. (Ed Weenk)

THE SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGER'S DAILY DECATHLON (N° 1 of 6)

Given the diversity of the challenges in their job, Supply Chain Managers need to be versatile, multi-skilled people, chameleonic in a way. A bit like the decathlon athlete, (s)he needs to perform well on a lot of different disciplines, not necessarily the best at each, but good enough to have a good shot at becoming the overall number 1 in the tournament. Inspired by the concept of the "T-Shaped Supply Chain Manager", as it has appeared in various publications and was further developed by Inspired-Search, I will in a short series of blogs discuss the main important aspects of the Supply Chain Manager's peculiar modern-day 21st century Daily Decathlon, as well as some of the main implications for the company. Here goes the first one, let the game begin!

Decathlon – Game 1: "SimCity™"



(A game in which the participants act as the mayor of a city which will have to be developed from scratch, starting with establishing an excellent holistic view on the development to be done, creating a well-functioning infrastructure within the available budget, while supplying a complete set of services to the citizens living in the city. The winner is the one who has the happiest citizens, while staying within budget)

The Supply Chain goes from raw materials to final customer, crossing the whole company and touching all of the supporting functions. The Supply Chain Manager needs to see the links between these functional areas within the company, but also be sensitive to trends and tendencies in society in general and the company's direct markets and environments in particular. The skilled Supply Chain Manager understands that the show is not about him/her, even though (s)he can play one of the leading parts in it. In the end, Supply Chain Management is always at the support of the company, fulfilling customer requirements and company objectives as well as possible. This requires a sound basis of holistic thinking.

Decathlon – Game 2: "Mighty Materials Monopoly"



(A Supply Chain version of the classic real estate board-game, in which products have to be bought from suppliers and sold to customers, managing revenues, costs, penalties & bonuses. The winner is the one who achieves the best combination of ROI and carbon footprint)

Yes, Supply Chain is of course most of the time focused on buying materials, manufacturing goods and/or moving boxes. But in the end it is of course just as

much about creating competitive advantage, supporting the company's value proposition, playing a role in the sustainable success of the business. And this is normally, in some form or another, expressed in financial terms; whether it be called EBITDA, Return on Investment or shareholder value. In other words, mere holistic thinking as tested in the first game in the Decathlon is not enough: it's clear that top-notch Supply Chain Managers need solid doses of business sense, sensibility for trading, thinking in financial terms, being able to link operational actions to financial consequences.

To be continued here shortly

We've just reached the first turning point and we've been handed out some refreshing sponges and some cool water. In the next post, we will continue our Supply Chain Manager's Daily Decathlon.

(this post was also published on [Supply Chain Movement.com](http://SupplyChainMovement.com), 06-Mar-2013)

THE SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGER'S DAILY DECATHLON (N° 2 of 6)

Given the diversity of the challenges in their job, Supply Chain Managers need to be versatile, multi-skilled people, chameleonic in a way. A bit like the decathlon athlete, (s)he needs to perform well on a lot of different disciplines, not necessarily the best at each, but good enough to have a good shot at becoming the overall number 1 in the tournament. Inspired by the concept of the "T-Shaped Supply Chain Manager", as it has appeared in various publications and was further developed by Inspired-Search, I will in a short series of blogs discuss the main important aspects of the Supply Chain Manager's peculiar modern-day 21st century Daily Decathlon, as well as some of the main implications for the company. Here goes the second part!

Decathlon – Game 3: "Rush Hour®"



(A board-game centered on logical progression, problem solving and sequential-thinking skills as the basis for creating order and finding solutions in an apparently dead-end situation. The objective is to get your car out of a full parking-lot and the winner is the one who achieves to escape from the parking lot in the smallest number of movements).

25.000 customer addresses in 50+ countries and 2 business units to serve, 1000+ products in portfolio and increasing every year, 8 manufacturing locations around the globe, between 2 and 15 partners for each transportation mode and 3 more for warehousing. The expectation as raised by Top-Management is to increase performance while reducing operational costs. And still be "green", by the way. Everywhere.

It's obvious that a Supply Chain Manager has to be able to create clarity in complex situations, skilled at defining problems, structuring alternative solutions, setting up a global Program Structure and managing by projects. Medium- and long-term strategic and tactical thinking, executed via operational decisions in a logical sequence. This starts with the holistic view we've already seen, but also the skill to bring logic to the overall picture, to be target-driven and define clear and, to the extent possible, simple objectives. SCM is a complex area and it is therefore fairly easy to get lost in the (wrong) details.

Don't get stuck in the parking lot!

Decathlon – Game 4: “Power Pit-Stop Project”



(Under time pressure, consult with a number of technical experts and deliver a solid plan for repairing a high-tech machine, broken down by an unknown problem – mechanical, electrical, hydraulic, etc. The plan should not only cover the repair itself, but also the sourcing of the required resources, such as materials and/or people. The winner is the one who delivers the most convincing and feasible plan within the available short time).

At the heart of it, Supply Chain deals with a lot of functional or technical issues (manufacturing, transportation & warehousing, inventory optimization), and it is clear that Supply Chain Managers have to have analytical skills and a good technical insight into the complex “machine” that a Supply Chain is, as well as the necessary project management skills to get things done. But not only should they be good at doing this at the global level, as was already stress-tested before, they also need to be able to deal with unforeseen operational problems and capable of evaluating proposals from the technical experts with whom they work: Supply Chain engineers, specialists from IT, manufacturing, maintenance and converting all of this info into a coherent and feasible plan for execution.

It’s no secret, Mr. Murphy does exist and he normally strikes in the worst moments: the system breakdown and the fire in the warehouse would most likely happen during the critical phase of an operational transition and not during the quieter moments of the year. But when these things happen, the Supply Chain Manager has to know how and where to spot the issues without losing time, defining with the team which actions should be taken.

Go, go, go, no time to lose!

To be continued here shortly

We’ve just reached the second turning point and we’ve again been handed out some refreshing sponges and some cool water. In the next post, we will continue our Supply Chain Manager’s Daily Decathlon.

(this post was also published on [Supply Chain Movement.com](http://SupplyChainMovement.com), 20-Mar-2013)

THE SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGER'S DAILY DECATHLON (N° 3 of 6)

Given the diversity of the challenges in their job, Supply Chain Managers need to be versatile, multi-skilled people, chameleonic in a way. A bit like the decathlon athlete, (s)he needs to perform well on a lot of different disciplines, not necessarily the best at each, but good enough to have a good shot at becoming the overall number 1 in the tournament. Inspired by the concept of the "T-Shaped Supply Chain Manager", as it has appeared in various publications and was further developed by Inspired-Search, I will in a short series of blogs discuss the main important aspects of the Supply Chain Manager's peculiar modern-day 21st century Daily Decathlon, as well as some of the main implications for the company. Here goes the third part!

Decathlon – Game 5: "World of Warcraft®"



(A game in which complex quests have to be completed under high time pressure. The winner is the one who reaches the highest level within the given timeframe.)

Until now, in all of the games played so far, we have already seen a variety of situations, from high-level to very detailed, from long-term to urgent and operational. An important skill of the Supply Chain Manager should be to not panic under any of these circumstances, whatever the facts presented or the questions asked. Stay cool, even bluff a bit when necessary, but have well-founded confidence that things will work out.

Because of the overall complexity, many Supply Chain issues have an element of ongoing discovery, so upfront planning has its limitations, which will inevitably create a certain amount of uncertainty that the manager will have to deal with. Supplier negotiations, internal cross-functional meetings, board-sessions, customer business reviews, walking the talk in front of the own staff, etc. etc.

Stay cool!

Decathlon – Game 6: “High-hope Tightrope”



aesthetics.)

(A re-invent of the classical circus act, in which the objective is to reach the other side safely, fast and stylishly, while no safety-net is allowed. The winner is the one who reaches the highest score in a combination of speed and

Supply Chain Managers have to be the kings and queens of trade-off management, great at balancing sometimes conflicting interests. We all know the examples: costs versus service; lead-time versus customization; variety versus efficiency; resilience versus low-cost; ambition level versus available resources; etc., etc.

Successful Supply Chain Managers first of all have a certain kind of trade-off sensitivity, which helps them simply to have their trade-offs very clear. Secondly, they know how manage them within the organization, while keeping the different objectives reasonably aligned. And lastly, they are constantly pushing the limits, trying to “break” the rules of conventional trade-off wisdom: more service for the same costs, more variety at the same efficiency level, etc.

Be careful, keep your balance!

To be continued here shortly

We’ve already passed the halfway some time ago and again we’ve been handed out some refreshing sponges, a bit of cool water and some solid food to take us right to the finish. In the next post, we will continue our Supply Chain Manager’s Daily Decathlon.

(this post was also published on [Supply Chain Movement.com](http://SupplyChainMovement.com), 05-Apr-2013)

THE SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGER'S DAILY DECATHLON (N° 4 of 6)

Given the diversity of the challenges in their job, Supply Chain Managers need to be versatile, multi-skilled people, chameleonic in a way. A bit like the decathlon athlete, (s)he needs to perform well on a lot of different disciplines, not necessarily the best at each, but good enough to have a good shot at becoming the overall number 1 in the tournament. Inspired by the concept of the "T-Shaped Supply Chain Manager", as it has appeared in various publications and was further developed by Inspired-Search, I will in a short series of blogs discuss the main important aspects of the Supply Chain Manager's peculiar modern-day 21st century Daily Decathlon, as well as some of the main implications for the company. We've already passed the halfway-mark through the decathlon, here goes the fourth part!

Decathlon – Game 7: "Dragons' Den"



(Pitch a business idea to a panel of venture capitalists in order to secure investment finance from them. The winner is the one who achieves to sell and negotiate best and obtain the highest amount of money from the panel, while maintaining the highest possible stake in the own venture.)

It has already become clear in the previous games: Supply Chain decisions have in most cases also implications for other functional areas, sometimes even far reaching, for good or for (perceived) bad. So step 1 in the Supply Chain Manager's stakeholder management is to be able to make your point, sell your ideas, get buy-in from an audience via short, lively and to-the-point presentations or talks. They should be able to verbalize and visualize well-founded argumentations in terms that the audience understands and likes, because if they don't understand it, it is much less likely that they will accept it.

What sounds better when you want to get attention? Saying that you will close 2 warehouses, reduce from 10 to 2 logistics partners and increase your inventory rotation from 8 to 10? Or saying that you will improve delivery reliability with 5%, shortening lead-times with 1 week and reduce costs with 2 million?

Two different statements which could perfectly well be about the same project, but which sound completely different. Given the fact that in the audience in most cases will include some top-management or Board Members, it becomes evident that the Supply Chain Manager will have to be good at elevator pitching: get people interested in or even convinced of their point in less than a minute.

And remember: haste, but don't hurry!

Decathlon – Game 8: “Diplomacy®”



(A board-game in which each player has to win possession of a majority of strategic “supply centers” on the map, by making alliances with other players. The winner is the one who controls the highest number of supply centers.)

Apart from the technical difficulties involved, how complex is a typical SC project, like for example the pan-European centralization of warehousing and distribution from 15 current national solutions into one integrated solution with 3 regional DC’s and maximum 1 or 2 logistics & transport providers? Tell 13 country managers and their respective Business Development Managers that their country will go through an implementation which implies the end of their own local warehouse and saying goodbye to their long-time transportation partner; Explain to Corporate and National HR people, that this rationalization will have important staffing consequences, including relocating or even firing people; Ask the planning department to start redefining aggregate planning algorithms for the newly defined S&OP regions, and tell them to start preparing the stock build-up for the transition phase, etc. etc.

Supply Chain, especially in the case of important changes, is many times a potential political battlefield, given the cross-functional nature of the areas it touches. In order to create a situation in which these changes can flourish, the Supply Chain Manager needs to have good skills for making “friends” and find ways to liaise directly or indirectly with potential “enemies”, in other words be very good at continuous dynamic stakeholder management.

Stay sharp!

To be continued here shortly

We’re getting closer and closer to the finish line, just one more good sponge full of water and we’re going for the last stretch. In the next post, we should be able to reach the finish line of our Supply Chain Manager’s Daily Decathlon.

(this post was also published on [Supply Chain Movement.com](http://SupplyChainMovement.com), 19-Apr-2013)

THE SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGER'S DAILY DECATHLON (Nº 5 of 6)

Given the diversity of the challenges in their job, Supply Chain Managers need to be versatile, multi-skilled people, chameleonic in a way. A bit like the decathlon athlete, (s)he needs to perform well on a lot of different disciplines, not necessarily the best at each, but good enough to have a good shot at becoming the overall number 1 in the tournament. Inspired by the concept of the "T-Shaped Supply Chain Manager", as it has appeared in various publications and was further developed by Inspired-Search, I will in a short series of blogs discuss the main important aspects of the Supply Chain Manager's peculiar modern-day 21st century Daily Decathlon, as well as some of the main implications for the company. We've already passed the halfway-mark through the decathlon, here goes the fifth part!

Decathlon – Game 9: "Who are you?"



(A variation on the classic "Who am I?" in which participants carry a card with the name of a famous person on their forehead and by asking specific questions have to figure out which person they represent. In this version, participants have to observe and ask very specific questions to people in the audience to figure out which ones make the best team of 5. The winner is the one who is able to select the best balanced team and make them work together.)

SCM is not only a complex area from a conceptual or technical point of view, on top of that it's also very people-intensive and likely to be stressful in the sense of dealing with a lot of daily operational fires, in between the own organizational departments, suppliers and customers. We mentioned Murphy before, well here he is again.

Good Supply Chain Managers are able to bring the right team together and create a positive atmosphere, which makes it more likely that their people resist all these pressures that they continuously have to stand up to. For the Supply Chain Managers this means having sensibility for people, cross-cultural skills in case of multinational environments, attention for both content (the "what" of the message) and form (the "how to transmit the message").

Of course, not all projects need singing around the campfire or sharing an outdoor sauna in mid-winter, but the skilled Supply Chain Manager knows when to play this ace and when such an activity is a winning thing and a good investment.

Decathlon – Game 10 and Final: “Mega Marathon”



(The classic in its original form, in the true spirit of Pheidippides: run the full 42.195 kilometers in the shortest possible time. The winner is the one who... well, arrives first.)

Of course, there had to be a traditional element in the Supply Chain Managers Daily Decathlon as well: the all-time classic and milestone event of any athletics tournament: the Marathon.

This one is about endurance, about never giving up. Normally, and luckily, for most successful Supply Chain Managers this is not a big issue: they really like the finish line they're heading towards and look forward to this great feeling of crossing it, looking back with satisfaction at a race well-run. But maybe even more importantly, they usually not only enjoy the finish itself quite a lot, but also have a great deal of fun during the whole route to get there. It's not only about the destination but also about the trip to get there!

But for now, take a short and well-deserved break to relax a bit and think back for a moment to that great Decathlon we did today:

1. SimCity™ – holistic thinking, big picture, perspective
2. Mighty Materials Monopoly – business sense, financial expertise
3. Rush Hour® – logical thinking, problem solving, targets
4. Power Pit-Stop Project – analytics, technical skills, project management
5. World of Warcraft® – negotiation, stress- & uncertainty-resistance
6. High-hope Tightrope – trade-off sensitivity, balancing objectives
7. Dragons' Den – elevator pitching, verbalize and visualize
8. Diplomacy® – alliance building, political sensitivity
9. Who are you? – sensibility for people, creating ambiance
10. Mega Marathon – endurance, while enjoying the ride

We've made it to the finish! In the next post, which will be the last of this short series of blogs about the Supply Chain Manager's Daily Decathlon, some of the main implications of the Decathlon for the company will be discussed.

To be continued here shortly

(this post was also published on [Supply Chain Movement.com](http://SupplyChainMovement.com), 10-May-2013)

THE SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGER'S DAILY DECATHLON (N° 6 of 6)

Given the diversity of the challenges in their job, Supply Chain Managers need to be versatile, multi-skilled people, chameleonic in a way. A bit like the decathlon athlete, (s)he needs to perform well on a lot of different disciplines, not necessarily the best at each, but good enough to have a good shot at becoming the overall number 1 in the tournament. Inspired by the concept of the "T-Shaped Supply Chain Manager", as it has appeared in various publications and was further developed by Inspired-Search, I will in a short series of blogs discuss the main important aspects of the Supply Chain Manager's peculiar modern-day 21st century Daily Decathlon, as well as some of the main implications for the company. Here goes the sixth and last part.

Epilogue, from the finish-line



We know now in more detail about the Supply Chain Manager's Daily Decathlon, the challenges it contains, and the skills required for doing a good job. Going back to the original idea of the T-shaped Supply Chain Manager: the vertical base of the T stands for very specific Supply Chain knowledge, experience and "hard" operational and technical skills, while the top layer of the T stands for the general executive experience and the well-developed and complete set of "soft" leadership skills, required for instance for communicating at board level.

Someone might raise the valid point that it would be nearly impossible to find people who are great at all this, so maybe it's good to highlight once again that, "like the decathlon athlete, [the Supply Chain Manager] needs to perform well on a lot of different disciplines, not necessarily the best at each, but good enough to have a good shot at becoming the overall number 1 in the tournament." In other words, it's not so much about the individual elements, but particularly about the particular mix, the sum of all the ingredients.

In any case, I think we can reasonably safely assume that the Supply Chain Managers in question already were aware of the tasks they're facing and the skills they need in order to perform well, since they live this Decathlon every day. But what does this all mean from a company perspective?

Let me briefly focus on three things: recruitment, training and career paths.

Recruitment

If we agree that Supply Chain Managers do not only need to have sufficient "hard" skills (functional knowledge in manufacturing, logistics, HR, finance, and relevant industry sector expertise plus vertical experience in production, trade, consultancy and service provision, etc.), but also need a sound basis of "soft" skills

(communication, people management, negotiation, presentation skills and the like), then it should hopefully be clear that this is not a purely technical function.

In other words, typecasting like “oh, this is about pallets, so we need to find an engineer”, needs to be avoided. In fact, many of the required skills for successful Supply Chain Management are very similar to those of any (senior) management position, so it actually makes a lot of sense looking for people with a more generalist profile, or the potential to develop that. Of course, these could very well be engineers as well, but not necessarily.

Training

Depending on the particular characteristics of a company’s Supply Chain, the background of a specific Supply Chain Manager and his/her exact role in the company, the focus of training might be more on the hard or on the soft side of the job, but probably never on just one of these. And probably more shifting to the soft skills the more senior the person is. In any case, given the nature of the job, I think the training should be practically oriented, based on learning by doing.

In the end, we are talking about a (senior) management position, in other words about people who are being paid for making decisions and acting upon these, so any kind of training which allows for practicing the subsequent steps of analysis, synthesis, implementation design and execution will certainly be helpful. And this type of training comes in many forms and shapes. See also my recent blog, titled [“Experiential learning”](#), about the subject.

Career paths

I have said it before: the required skills for successful Supply Chain Management are very similar to those of any (senior) management position. Adding to that, because of all of the close relationships with the other areas we have seen in many of the games of our Supply Chain Manager’s Daily Decathlon, the Supply Chain function offers a wonderful outlook on almost all of the company’s functions, living the trade-offs and the interdependencies first-hand and day-in day-out.

Therefore, I think that successful Supply Chain Managers are excellent candidates for higher general management positions. Or, to put it in a different way: I’m convinced that the Supply Chain function is a great intermediate step in the career plan of any General Management candidate.

And now, to bed! There’s a new Decathlon waiting for us tomorrow!

(this post was also published on [Supply Chain Movement.com](#), 04-June-2013)