

Logistics Skill Shortage

- by Johannes Aydin and Joshua Ege

On the one hand, we are afraid for our jobs because of digitisation and on the other hand, we have an enormous shortage of skilled workers. Paradox!

The everyday life of a professional driver

Monday morning 04:30 - the alarm clock rings. Another week starts, during which Manni knows that he will not see his family. This week the tour takes him to sunny Malaga, Spain. Summer, beach and sea - it would be nice, because Manni has to work! He is a professional driver. In the following we will take a closer look at his profession.

Life on the street

The professional driver spends most of the next working week on the road. Long distances through Europe are part of everyday life. Looking back over the last few years, the profession of professional driver has changed a lot. He eats and sleeps in his cab, far away from his family.

Reputation, wages and time pressure

The **low wages** in the industry make it very difficult to provide a high standard of living for the family. Also the bad reputation in the transport sector rushes ahead. Grumpy looks on the motorway and honking cars are part of everyday life. The driver is also under constant pressure to arrive on time. This **permanent time pressure** gets to the heart of the matter. Change in activities

Looking back over the last few years, the profession of professional driver has changed a lot. In the past, the main task was to deliver the transported goods from the source to the sink. Nowadays, however, there is much more to it than just covering one distance per day. Loading and unloading has added new tasks that put a physical strain on the driver.

Driving and rest periods

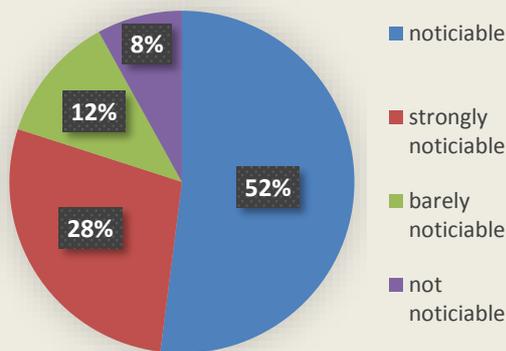
Although the **driving and rest periods** were intended to counteract the permanent time pressure, no improvement can be seen. This is because **parking and rest areas are overcrowded**. As a result, professional drivers very often cannot find a suitable place to sleep and increasingly often exceed the prescribed driving and rest periods.

The effects of time pressure

At the beginning the driver had to fight with time pressure. Now **tiredness and lack of sleep** are added to this. If the tiredness gets the upper hand and the driving time is already clearly exceeded, there is only one possibility left. The wild camping. Here the driver leaves his actual route and switches to an alternative sleeping place and spends the night far away from a seemingly safe resting place. The rest stop should offer the driver a clean toilet and a warm shower. But if you take a closer look at the rest stops, you soon realise that they are not clean and often there are no sanitary facilities. The driver therefore has to struggle with **poor hygienic conditions**, which of course does not speak in favour of the job. Who wants to spend the night in the dirt voluntarily?

It is often suggested to the professional driver to stay overnight in hotels. But this is not an option. Because the driver has to take care of his goods. Tarpaulin slitting, diesel theft and cargo theft are often the order of the day. Therefore, the driver has hardly any possibility to leave his truck "empty". It becomes clear that the professional driver is a very demanding job.

The "Bundesvereinigung Logistik (BVL)" has produced a survey of companies which shows the shortage of skilled workers in logistics.



Source: Own illustration based on: BVL (2020), online.¹

In 2019, there were 573,849 professional drivers, of which almost 30% were older than 55 years. This shows that demographic change is slowly but surely catching up with us.²

Digitisation knows no STOP!

Logistics is becoming increasingly digital - warehouse management systems - sensor technology - autonomous driving - automation of work processes. There is no stopping digitalisation, as it is becoming more and more an integral

part of logistics. The logisticians fear for their jobs.

Digitisation for "occupational pensioners"

Just before retirement and a smartphone in your hand is already too much digitalisation?



Source: Pexel (2020), online.³

We **logisticians are getting older** and older and are not getting any new recruits for our logistics professions. The introduction of new technologies brings many advantages. We can work more efficiently and **save a lot of time** that we need for other processes. In addition, employee turnover due to health problems is a major issue.

We can counteract the enormous physical strain with digitalisation.

Anyone who thinks that without digital processes we can withstand the price pressure of the industry is sorely mistaken!

Win-win situation through digitisation

For the executive level, the logistics specialists are too unprofitable. If we don't keep up with digitalisation, robots may become cheaper. They are expensive to buy, but much more efficient

than the normal employee. However, a robot cannot replace a human being, so we need training opportunities that teach us how to use the equipment. It is not enough if we automate the whole logistics without having the appropriate personnel or logistic specialists who cannot operate the machines.

A win-win situation for employees and employers!

Future Prospects

How can skilled workers be advertised and how can young people be encouraged to take up logistics training? Starting with the truck drivers, we are already short of more than 10,000 drivers.⁴

At the end of 2018, almost 1.5 million jobs were unfilled in the transport and logistics sector.⁵ No wonder - with sometimes terrible working conditions! The task now is to make the industry more lucrative. Possible solutions could be created through monetary incentives. In addition, the logistics sector would benefit from an improvement in its image, as the collective agreements do not correspond to the performance of the logistics companies. Since 1st March 2020, the “Fachkräftezuwanderungsgesetz” has come into force, which ensures that skilled workers with foreign training are given access to the European market.⁶

Sources:

¹Bundesvereinigung Logistik (2020):

<https://www.bvl.de/dossiers/arbeitgeber-logistik/umfrage-fachkraeftemangel-2017> (accessed 21st of October 2020)

²Bundesamt für Güterverkehr (2019):

https://www.bag.bund.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Marktbeobachtung/Turnusberichte_Arbeitsbedingungen/AGL_2019-1.pdf?__blob=publicationFile (accessed 19th of October 2020)

³Pexel GmbH (2020):

<https://www.pexels.com/de-de/foto/mann-liebemenschen-frau-3823542/> (accessed 22nd of October 2020)

⁴DVV Media Group GmbH (2020):

<https://www.dvz.de/rubriken/meinung/detail/news/fachkraeftemangel-in-der-logistik-tatsaechlich.html> (accessed 21st of October 2020)

⁵DVV Media Group GmbH (2020):

<https://www.dvz.de/rubriken/politik/detail/news/arbeits-staatssekretaerin-fachkraeftemangel-bremst-wachstum.html> (accessed 18th of October 2020)

⁶Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales (2020):

<https://www.bmas.de/DE/Presse/Meldungen/2020/neue-gesetze-fachkraefteeinwanderungsgesetz.html> (accessed 22th of October 2020)

We hereby allow Carola Schulz to publish this article on her HHN webpage.