

SUSMILE Synthesis note

Capsule 3.4.3 – Sources analysis

In this Capsule, we looked at the stress resistance required of last-mile distribution operators and in particular delivery workers, whether they work with a truck or any other mode of transportation. While the sources are synthetic, they all help to reflect that around the world the urban environment has evolved and that working conditions can be particularly challenging for these workers. A better understanding of the issues and the possible measures to be implemented will enable them to enter a company with a better attitude, social protection and adequate training.

All sources are complementary, and teachers may want to select only some of them in order to best direct their students toward specific messages, aligned with their program development.

The evolution of society

There are more of us in the urban environment than ever before, and all trends seem to indicate that the human density near populated cities will increase compared to the development of the countryside. Large cities have become hubs for all the facilities and services that modern life has to offer, and this is the reason why the demand is constantly increasing for logistic operators regarding the last mile distribution.

The difficulty for professionals is to meet both this demand and higher service expectations, while on the other hand, end customers do not really know or understand the realities of these jobs. This creates additional stress for operators who are already facing a high-stakes business and high productivity. This is one more reason for transport and logistics managers to take care of their employees and invest in their working conditions and training.

1. Customer service skills

As mentioned in the very title of this article, it is interesting to note that delivery personnel are now considered "ambassadors" of the company, even more so than most senior executives. Especially for the customers of transport and logistics operators, as brand image has a direct impact on customer loyalty, long-term use of their products, etc.

What stands out in this simple list of five skills are the two related to the fundamental social aspects of politeness and personal hygiene. It may seem surprising, but these elements are the basis of the image that we have of others, and even more important here because it is a "professional" image that the end customers will relate to.

In terms of stress resistance, the customer's perception and evaluation of the delivery person's every move or word is a new aspect of the job for most operators. Knowing that they are being evaluated, and for many, knowing that the grade received after the delivery person's visit will have an impact on the company's image, is increasingly being used as a performance criterion by employers (especially distributors who subcontract their transport operations). This makes it possible to identify the drivers with or without the right attitude to retain only the best. On the other hand, the rating system is far from fair and can be linked to anything other than the driver himself (delivery time, product suitability, packaging, etc.).



2. Organisational skills

This second source of information shows a different list of skills, but one that also reflects a stress-sensitive work environment. Delivery drivers today are expected to be good communicators, motivated, and remarkably organized with respect to time management constraints (especially tight deadlines).

A few years ago, this type of position was more autonomous, depended on instructions given and brought experience in driving and generally known routes. Nowadays, routes are more complex, delivery points are new on a daily basis or almost, and delivery drivers are entrusted with a role of direct interaction with the end customer, even though they are considered to be the ultimate target of a commercial strategy. This new level of responsibility implies significant pressure on costs, on the quality of customer service, etc.

3. Self-control skills

Delivery drivers are professionals. This means that they have to behave on a different level than ordinary people, in the sense that they are trained to deal with any situation on the road... or almost. The difficulty remains in the relationship with individuals, since other road users, whether pedestrians, cyclists, or motorists, will not have the same relationship to time, to road use and to others.

It is therefore important to maintain self-control in all circumstances, through this type of advice and recurring training or reminders within the company. The support and the managerial proximity, in this sense, will be just as important to accompany the drivers and to confirm their belonging to a team, united and with a common objective. This can start with setting the right performance indicators, preserving the drivers' right to respond to an unfavourable delivery notice, etc.

4. Safety and stress

This last documentary source is very interesting for its broad approach to the job and its goal of educating future workers in the industry about the safety aspects of the job. Although the example and statistics are only for the United States, it reflects a long list of things that one really needs to understand in order to be on their best behaviour and have the right attitude accordingly. Additionally, it is not only for employees but also for employers, which can give insight into what may be required of a line manager in terms of equipment or means to work in the best possible conditions.

Among the list of challenges that are stress resilience factors:

- Urban violence, from verbal to physical,
- Environmental work conditions, from heat to cold,
- Sick leave, due to accidents or long-term maladaptive postures.

It is very interesting to pay attention to all the tips and tricks provided in this document because they can be relevant to any culture and not only to the working conditions of drivers. It is an opportunity to become aware of these constraints either to better face them or to accompany them to future colleagues for students who will be brought to evolve towards management positions.



Conclusion

The objective of this Capsule is to provide some food for thought on the role of delivery drivers in relation to their status and recognition within the company. Although they are essential to the company and to society in general, since all goods will always need someone to physically move them, there is still a lot to be done to protect them and provide them with the best working environment. Although companies cannot address all aspects, many stresses are generated within the organization itself, due to a lack of information or weaknesses in terms of management. In conclusion, this may indicate that it is not only the delivery drivers that need to be trained, but the whole chain of command that needs to evolve with the trends and innovations in urban logistics.

One thinks of the status of independent delivery drivers linked to digital platforms and on two-wheelers. All these urban delivery professionals do not receive the same training, the same support, or the same social protection. This generates risks for individuals and dangers for society with a higher accident rate, social insecurity, lack of recognition, etc.



Second part – Questions

EQF level 4

1. **S2** What is the key skill recommended to face difficult partners?
2. **S3** Why do delivery drivers need to be committed and self-motivated?

EQF level 5-6

1. **S2-S3** Why do you think that professional and timely communication is a necessary skill to delivery drivers nowadays?
2. **S3** Why to you consider that organisation skills tend to respond to better stress management?
3. **S4** What are the main recommendations that can be listed from the document to face the different risks listed?

