Business Strategy and Performance of Logistics Companies in Malaysia

Saari Ahmad[1],*, Sahibuddin Ishak[2] and Khairol Anuar Ishak[3], Rozi bin Dan[4], Roziyana Jafri[5] and Jonghyun PARK[6]

[1,2,3] *School of Business Management Universiti Utara Malaysia, E-mail: saari@uum.edu.my*
[4] *RNH Utara Entreprise*
[5] *Universiti Sains Malaysia*
[6] *Pusan National University*

Abstract: The importance of logistics industry to trade activities is never ending. However not much is known on which strategies used and its performance. This study attempts to investigate the business strategy and performance of logistics companies in Malaysia. The data was collected through 400 mail questionnaires sent to the selected companies. Two hundred companies responded by returning the questionnaires. Only 125 were fully completed used in the analysis. The findings clearly indicate that the business strategy adopted by the logistics companies are specializing in product type strategy, specializing in customer type strategy, growth strategy, differentiation strategy, low-cost strategy, hold and maintain strategy. The performance of these companies was indicated by the number of employees which are increasing and the volume of business which are increasing annually. Their performance are mainly dependence on the nation's economic growth and the regional economy as well as the world economic situation.

Keywords: Strategy and performance of logistics companies in Malaysia

LITERATURE

Malaysia solely depends on its international trade as the growth engine to spur the economic development in the country. Malaysia was rank 32nd largest nation trading activities. Logistics industry is the catalyst to theses trading activities. Logistics providers need efficient and reliable infrastructures such as highways, railways, ports, airports in their operation. Cooperation among the logistics operators is a must for them to be efficient in their services.

The important role of logistics as a crucial factor in Malaysia's trade and economic growth are highly applaud as speed, costs and efficiency are the main factors for survival on the industry.

Logistics industry in Malaysia covers four main modes of transportation, sea, land, air, and rail.

Logistics management is a neglected area of business in Malaysia in the past, causing the country to be left far behind from its neighbour, the world's best, Singapore. Logistics and other means of services such as, energy, postal services, and telecommunications have not always been as open to competition as they are today. Trade liberalizations have given opportunities to international logistics player to compete with the local logistics services providers. As a result, consumers has many options and alternative to choose hence getting value for their money with high degree of efficiency to fulfil their needs and wants. Consequently, it assists Malaysia to be more competitive. In railway, electricity and gas industries, the network operators are now required to give competitors fair access to their networks. In these industries, monitoring fair network access by all suppliers is essential to allow the consumer to choose the supplier offering the best conditions. Industries in Malaysia are predominantly located in over 1000 industrial estates and Free Zones throughout the country. These zones are categorized as export processing zones, which cater to the requirements of export-oriented industries. The Malaysian government also encouraged specialized parks that have been developed to cater to the needs of specific industries.

The logistics industry is moving at a positive rate, however much rooms of improvement need to be addressed. (Ahmad *et al.* (2017); Ahmad, S., & Melan, M., (2014)and transportation blue print has identified issues and challenges in the logistics industry.

Current issues in the logistics industry

(a)   High and Heavy Vehicle Volume

    i)   Heavy traffic has result in congestion.

    ii)   Congestion in local and urban street as a result from heavily vehicle movement.

    iii)   Trade expansion and economic growth has result in the increased cargo movement.

(b)   Poor urban logistics

    i)   Unsystematic loading and unloading in commercial areas.

    ii)   Residential areas and road sides were illegally used for Heavy vehicles parking area.

    iii)   Residential areas become chaotic and congested as a result of poor logistics.

(c)   Lack of Inter-modal choice

    i)   Lack of rail access to industrial areas result in over dependence on road than rail.

    ii)   Lack of optimum connectivity and accessibility by road and rail terminals to industrial and commercial spatial locations

(d)   Unhealthy Competition

    i)   Unhealthy competition among haulage operators.

    ii)   Weak and fragmented logistic industry institutional framework.

    iii)   Industry players work in isolation under competitive pressure with no sharing of logistic information and planning.

(e) Poor logistics infrastructure

    i) Lack of logistics infrastructure to support growth of cargo movements and throughput expected in Iskandar Malaysia sea ports and airport.

    ii) Less logistic system performance to provide efficient and reliable and competitive cost for global trade.

(f) Under usage of ICT in logistics

    i) Lack of adaptation of advances in supply chain management and lagged in leveraging ICT systems by industry players.

    ii) Outdated supply chain and logistics practices.

(g) Pollution

Over reliance on fossil fuel by trucks and being a main contributor to GHG emission.

Challenges in the logistics industries

(a) Unsustainable trend the challenges for the "Green" transport sector can be overcome by focusing on the following:

    (i) The growth of demand for transport activity, and it is predicted to roughly double between 2010 and 2020

    (ii) Transport activity is increasingly motorized (private cars for passenger transport and lorries for freight, almost all of which are propelled by internal combustion engines);

    (iii) The global vehicle fleet is multiplying between three or four-fold in the next few decades, this growth set to occur in developing countries. The forecast for 2050, two-thirds of the global vehicle fleet is expected to be in non-OECD countries.

    (iv) Technological improvements such as fuel-efficient vehicles and alternative power sources have not been rapid enough to offset the impacts of this growth.

These trends translate directly into various costs for the environment, society and economy

(i) Energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions;

(ii) Congestion (and associated losses in productivity of urban areas);

(iii) Resource depletion and land grab;

(iv) Degradation of human health (through air pollution, noise, vibration, etc);

(v) Reduction in human security (through traffic accidents);

(vi) Reduction of accessibility and severance of communities; and

(vii) Loss of biodiversity.(Ahmad *et. al.* (2017);Ahmad, S; & Melan, M; (2014) and Transportation blue print)

The future urban challenges

(i) Urbanization is happening everywhere in Malaysia which focused on the new developed area by the local authorities and the private sectors.

(ii) Public transport facilities are inadequate compared to the industrial development requirements and publics expectations. (NCER, ECER, SCORE corridor).

(iii) High demand from the densely populated residential areas in Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya,Shah Alam, Johore Bharu, Penang, Kuching, Kota Kinabalu and all the Ports surrounding these cities.(Ahmad *et. al.* (2017); Ahmad, S., *et al* (2015) and Transportation blue print)

The Desired Future

The most desired future for the Malaysian transport and logistics systems is an efficient system which sustainably friendly environment.

Green Goals

(i)   The Goals towards the sustainable Transport system and facilities in Malaysia are:

(ii) To provide suitable location for sustainable development and healthy lifestyle

(iii) To have an economically and environmentally friendly and viable transportation facilities

(iv) To enhance more efficient and reliable public transport services which are accessible and affordable and healthier to the public

(v)   To provide facilities which integrate all modes of transport in a common centre.

(vi) To improve the quality of transport corridor and facilities incorporating network of facilities for the pedestrian and other non-motor vehicles.(Ahmad *et al.* (2017); Ahmad, S., *et al.* (2015) and Transportation blue print)

Malaysian current economic scenario

Malaysia international trade experienced unprecedented growth in the first eight month of 2017. The growth has exceeded 20 percent every month of 2017 except for the month of January and June. MITI estimated 3 percent growth in total trade for 2017. Based on the current economic performance, Malaysia is expected to achieve 10 percent growth of international trade in 2017. The trade surplus has also been healthy, increasing to RM60.84 billion for the first eight months of 2017. (MITI Bulletin October 2017).

Manufactured goods have performed well, particular electrical and electronic products. E&E exports amounted to RM220.56 billion (January to August 2017), growing 21.4% compared to the same period in 2016. MITI forecasted the E&E sector to continue to grow given the improvement in global semiconductor sales and strong projections from the smart devices, automotive, storage and healthcare markets. Mining recorded a strong performance, driven by crude petroleum and LNG, which collectively surged by 34% to RM45.16 billion during the same period. Trade with China strengthened to 26% in the first eight months of 2017 to RM188.26 million compared to the previous period. This was driven by exports which surged 36.5% to RM80.47 billion. Trade with our key markets, ASEAN, EU, United States and Japan remained strong with growth of 23.9%, 18.3%, 19.7% and 17.7% respectively in the first eight months. Malaysia's trade remains resilient driven by diversification in exports. E&E accounted for 36% of exports in January-August 2017, while Petroleum, LNG and Chemical products account for 22.7% of exports. Agriculture including palm oil & palm oil based products is also an important component of Malaysian exports, amounting to 8.5% of total exports. The World Trade Organization recently raised their 2017 growth

forecast in world merchandise trade volume to 3.6% from a previous estimate of 2.4%. This is attributed to a resurgence of Asian trade flows as intra-regional shipments picked up and as demand in North America recovered after stalling in 2016. Malaysia will benefit from the increase in global trade with it's trade remaining robust for the rest of 2017.(MITI Bulletin October 2017).
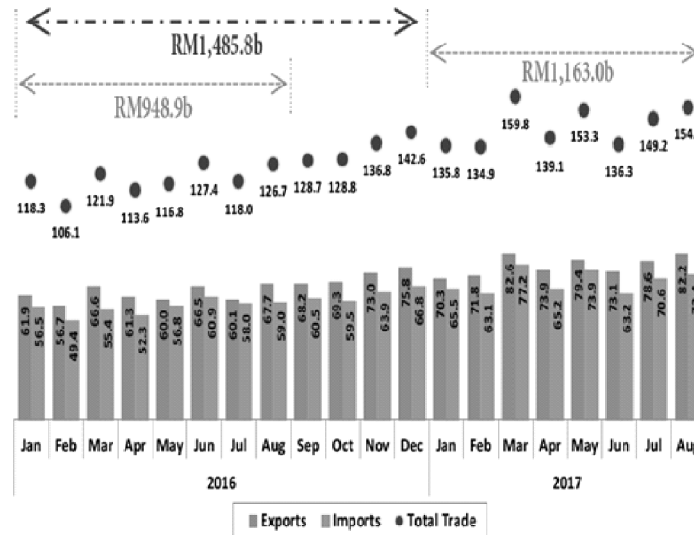

Chart 1: Comparison of volume of imports, export and total International Trade

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia.

Chart 1 illustrates the total export and import of the nation have achieved RM 1.16 trillion as at August 2017. It clearly shows that the total international trade are increasing.

Business Strategy

Business strategy is defined as the method to achieve business objectives in a specific time frame. Issues and problems that exist in the industry and the company should be addressed accordingly. How to attend the issues and challenges is known as strategy. Strategy is a systematic approach to achieve the objectives in a specific time frame. Changes in the environment will affect the strategy. Strategy needs to be reconciled to align with the changes in the environment.

Previous researchers, theories, and practitioner have different perceptions on business strategy in the past decades. Firms that adopted the low cost strategy emphasized on high productivity, low margin products, budget price and cheapest product. Firms that used the differentiation strategy stressed on best product, best quality, great image, best service, premium price and intensive campaign. Growth strategy was adopted by firms that focused on risk taking, expansion, aggressive search for market share, use price cuts, promotional campaign. Hold and maintain strategy stressed on continuing the present strategy and scrounging up enough resources to keep sales, market share, profitability, and competitive position at survival levels Bare-bone strategy was based on low overhead, use of low-wage labour, tight budget control, and rigid to a no-frills expenditure policy. Specializing in product type strategy focused only on one type of product.

Business strategies in Malaysian SMES

Porter's model of generic strategies has been found to be particularly useful to the Malaysian SMES (Hashim *et al.* 2004; Ahmad, S; 2017). Malaysian SMES use Porter's generic strategies because of the explicitness with which it captures the essence of the strategy formulation process (Hashim *et al.* 2004; Ahmad, S; 2017). The political, economic and regulatory changes of recent years have stimulated cost containment strategies in the Malaysian SMES. The owners and managers of Malaysian SMES have focused a great deal of attention on cost control measures in order to protect themselves from competitive forces arising in the industry.

Examples of cost control strategies used by Malaysian SMES include reducing waste, improving inter-functional co-ordination, income generation by selling or renting the unused capacity, and more recently also reducing staff and eliminating unprofitable products and services. However, at present, there are practically an examples of consolidation strategies in the form of mergers or joint ventures that could lead to economies of scale. By tight cost control, Malaysian SMES have attempted to demonstrate efficiency in the use of allocated resources to the resource providers. Hashim *et. al.* (2015)contended that Malaysian firms that adopt six business strategies (harvest, build, cash out, niche, climber and continuity) for businesses in consumer markets and four (low commitment, growth, maintenance and niche) in industrial markets, firms should make the right choice of strategy that fit to their company and industry.

Finally, specializing customer type strategy emphasized on specializing in serving customers who are the least price sensitive, going after those buyers who are interested in additional services or product attributes or other extras, serving customers who place custom orders and targeting buyers who have special needs or tastes.(Hashim, M. K., Sulaiman, M. 2003; Ahmad S, *et al.* 2016; Ahmad, S, *et al.* 2017).

Although the literature suggests that strategies are developed at the three different levels, theoretical and empirical studies on the relationship between strategy and organizational performance have mainly emphasized on business strategy (Ahmad S, *et al.* 2016; Ahmad, S, *et al.* 2017; (Hashim *et al.* 2015); Hashim *et. al.* 2001; Ahmad, S; 2005). Meanwhile Hashim *et al.* 2015, and Ahmad, S; 2014), contended that although most of the empirical studies centre upon large firms, a small body of research indicates that business strategy can also influence the performance of smaller firms (Hashim *et. al.* 2001; Ahmad, S; 2014). However, the authors stressed that in selecting the choice of strategic focus, managers in SMES must consider their industrial environment before deciding which strategies to be use in their operation.(Hashim *et. al.* 2001; Ahmad, S; 2014).

Organizational Performance

Performance of an organization is the result of the competitive advantage achieved by converting a source advantage resulting from superior skills and resources into revenue. Ahmad, S *et al ;* (2017) Ahmad, S, *et al;* 2016, and Ahmad, S; (2008), pointed out that profitability is the most common measure of performance in Malaysian companies. Profit margin, return on assets, return on equity, return on sales are considered to be the common measures of financial profitability (Ahmad, S; (2017) Ahmad, S; 2016, and Ahmad, S; (2008), Hashim *et. al.*, 2001; Hashim, 2000, Robinson, 1988; Galbraith and Schendel, 1983).

Definition of logistics company

A company that provides management over the flow of goods and materials between points of origin to end-user destination. (Ahmad; S., *et al.* 2015).

Definition of Internationalization

Internationalization is defined as cross borders activities involving goods and services for the purpose of value creation.

Threat of Internationalization

Growing fears for the world economy signal more pain and even bankruptcies among dry bulk ship owners who are getting rock-bottom rates to carry cargoes like coal and now face a glut of new vessels ordered when times were good. The tougher climate has hit the sector hard lately and confidence is at a record low MHA(Malaysian Haulage Association, 2015). Smaller companies tend to have less access to capital.

Research Objectives

(i)   To examine the type of business strategy adopted by the logistics operators.

(ii)   To investigate the performance of the logistics operators.

       The scope of the study is based on the logistics operators listed in the Logistics directory 2013.

Performance

Performance is measured by number of employees at business start-up, number of employees the current financial year**,** volume of business at start-up and the current volume of business at financial year ends.

Logistics operators

Companies that are directly involved in the logistics activities as listed in The Association of Malaysia Logistics (AML) Directories. Listing of members of AML 2016 was used as the Sampling frame.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sampling Frame and Sample

This study is confined to logistics operators operating in Malaysia. The data were collected by mail survey. Through telephone conversations and a follow-up letter the participation of the selected firms is confirmed. Structured questionnaires were then mailed to the top management of the 400 firms. Out of 400 questionnaires mailed in a self- addressed envelope to the respondents only 200 questionnaires were returned and the return rate is 50%. Out of the 200 questionnaires returned only 125 is usable due to incomplete information.

Questionnaires

The self-administered questionnaire was used to gather the data from the respondents. The questionnaires were mail to the respondents together with the self-addressed envelope and stem. The first section focuses on the general characteristics of the logistics operators in Malaysia. These characteristics include information on the owners/managers, percentage of ownership, industry experience, size of capital, age, organization structure,

employees. Following this, the second section of the questionnaire aims to capture information on the types of a business strategy adopted by the firms. This includes low-cost strategy, differentiation strategy, focus strategy, hold and maintain strategy, bare bone strategy, product type strategy, and customer- type strategy.

The final section of the questionnaire seeks information on the performance of logistics operators in Malaysia. This study proposed to measure performance by using the actual figures of dollar sales volume, the number of employees, over a three to five-year period.

Findings

Table 1
Respondents Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Frequencies	Percentages
Malay	27	22
Chinese	94	75
Indian	4	3
Total	**125**	**100**

Table 1 illustrates the respondent Ethnicity. Majority of the respondents that is 75% are Chinese, 22% are Malays and 3 % are Indian.

Table 2
Status of Ownership

Status ownership	Frequency	Percent
Founder	36	29
Cofounder	14	11
Inheritance	5	4
Others	70	56
Total	**125**	**100**

Table 2 illustrate the respondents status of ownership**.** It clearly indicates that 29 % of the respondents are founder to the business, 11 % are cofounder, 4% inherit from their family while 56 % others.

Table 3
Number of business owned

Class interval	Frequency	Percent
1-2	55	44
3-4	7	6
5-6	5	4
None	58	46
Total	**125**	**100**

Table 3 illustrates the number of business owned. It clearly shows that majority of the respondents that is 46% did not owned any business, 44% own at least one business. While 10 % owned more than 3 business.

Table 4
Respondent Position in the company

Position	Frequencies	Percentage
CEO/MD	59	47
Manager	66	53
Total	**125**	**100**

Table 4 illustrates the respondent position in the company. It clearly shows that majority of the respondents that is 53 % are Manager and 47% are CEO/MD of the company.

Table 5
Frequency table on types of Business Strategy applied by logistics operators

Types of Business Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
1. Low cost strategy	12	10
2. Differentiation strategy	15	12
3. Growth strategy.	5	15
4. Hold and maintain strategy.	19	4
5. Hold and maintain strategy	5	4
6. Specializing by product type strategy	35	28
7. Specializing by customer type strategy	28	22
8. Others (please specify)	6	5
Total	125	100

Table 5 illustrates the business Strategy applied by logistics operators. It shows that 28% of the respondents adopt Specializing by product type strategy, 22% of the respondents adopt specializing by customer type strategy, 15 % Growth strategy, 12% Differentiation strategy, 10% Low cost strategy, and 5% Others, 4% Hold and maintain strategy.

Table 6
Number of Employees at Business Start-up

Number of Employees at Business Start-up	Frequency	Percent
<50	40	32
51-100	50	40
101-150	10	8
151-200	5	4
200<	20	16
Total	**125**	**100**

Table 6 illustrates the respondent's number of employees at business start-up. It shows that 28% of the respondent's number of employees at business at start-up is more than 100 employees. While 72% of the respondent's number of employees at business start-up is 100 or less.

Table 7
Number of employees last fiscal year

Number of employees last fiscal year	Frequency	Percent
<50	9	7
51-100	24	19
101-150	15	12
151-200	11	9
200<	66	53
Total	125	100

Table 7 illustrates the respondent number of employees in last fiscal year. It shows that about 62% of the respondent number of employees in last fiscal year is more than 150 employees. While 38 % of the respondent number of employees in last fiscal year is 150 or less.

Table 8
Volume of business during start-up (RM)

Volume of business during start-up (RM)	Frequency	Percent
<RM5,000,000	29	23
5,000,001-10,000,000	**96**	**77**

Table 8 illustrates the respondent volume of business during start-up in (RM). It clearly shows that 77 % of the respondents volume of business during start-up is 5,000,001-10,000,000 while 23% are <RM5,000,000.

Table 9
Volume business last fiscal year

Volume business last fiscal year (RM)	Frequency	Percentage
<5,000,000	14	11
5,000,001-10,000,000	35	28
Above 10,000,000	76	61
Total	**125**	**100**

Table 9 illustrates the respondent volume of business in the last fiscal year (RM). It clearly shows that 61% of the respondents volume of business in last fiscal year is above 10,000,000, 28%, 5,000,001-10,000,000 while 11% are <RM 5,000,000.

CONCLUSION

The findings clearly indicates, the business strategy adopted by the logistics companies are specializing product type strategy, specializing customer type strategy, growth strategy, differentiation strategy, low cost strategy, hold and maintain strategy. The performance of these companies was indicated by the number of employees and the volume of business which are increasing annually. Their performance are mainly depending on the nation's economic growth and the regional economy as well as the world economic situation.

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