



The structural barriers to a diverse supply chain workforce

This is part of a series of information sheets based on research funded by Wayfinder industry sponsors*.

Despite decades of diversity mandates, the aging and male-dominated supply chain sector lags behind other industries in attracting a workforce that is more reflective of its customer base. There are structural barriers evident at all stages of the career lifecycle from recruitment through to career development and progression.

Gender stereotypes such as an expectation that women are accommodating and nurturing while men will be self-confident and forceful or that it's women's responsibility to take care of the children. Gender stereotypes subtly influence which candidates are recruited for certain roles, how salaries are negotiated, and which employees receive career development opportunities.

Poor industry image is one of the key barriers to recruitment, with the supply chain industry perceived as 'blokey', with unattractive and sometimes unsafe conditions. The long hours can make it unattractive to millennials (men and women) who have different expectations around work-life balance than their baby boomer predecessors. Hiring practices and promotional policies often following the way 'things have always been done' and unconscious bias can deter women from applying.

Discriminatory attitudes in the workplace can result in pervasive exclusion and isolation. Women may not be listened to, or they may experience double standards (a male getting angry is OK, an angry woman is 'emotional'). There is also a subconscious bias in all industries to employ and promote 'people like us'. Through strong and long nurtured networks, men support and promote from within their peer network, the men they know well and feel comfortable with.

Women are not a homogenous group, they have different backgrounds, different personalities, different education, and they face different barriers at different career stages. Career stage is strongly linked to life stage, with women looking at peak career in their 20s, time out or plateauing or career interruption as they have children, and then re-entry as their children get older. Our research suggests that the women who succeed in a supply chain career have confidence, resilience, tenacity and a sense of humour at levels greater than usually expected of their male peers.



How can industry respond?

Focus on organisational values and workplace culture

Introduce diversity training around recruitment and provide ongoing diversity training for managers

Ensure job positions and advertisements use gender neutral language

Provide internships, skill development and work placement opportunities

Introduce initiatives to increase work life balance such as parent friendly rosters

Ensure professional development including shadowing opportunities, are inclusive

Address issues of workplace safety and amenity including ensuring there are appropriate facilities for women.

* McLean P., Perez-Franco R., and Jones J. (2020) FIAL *The under-representation of women in the supply chain workforce*.

Parsons H., Perez-Franco R., McLean P. and Jones J. (2021). CSCL. *A view from the top: Current Workforce Challenges in Supply chain and logistics*.

McLean P. and Jones J. (2022). iMOVE. *Barriers to Recruitment and progression in the transport industry*.