

Gender Diversity in Supply Chain Tool Kit





How a diverse supply chain workforce impacts the business bottom line



This information sheet is based on research funded by Wayfinder industry sponsors and FIAL in 2020.

Business research shows that increasing diversity in the supply chain workforce results in better company performance, greater productivity, improved profitability, and a competitive advantage.

↑22%

The rise in female employment since 1974 has boosted economic activity by 22%.

Goldman Sachs 2009

↑19%

Companies with above-average diversity in their management teams experienced a 19% increase in innovation revenue.

BCG 2018

↑\$60 Billion

If the labour force gender participation gap were halved, annual GDP would increase by \$60 billion in 20 years.

KPMG 2017

↑\$12 Trillion

Increasing the number of women in the workforce could create up to \$12 trillion in additional GDP globally revenue.

KPMG 2017

That gender equality is critical to a company's economic bottom line continues to be demonstrated by numerous studies globally and nationally.

Companies are currently responding to a confluence of challenges in their supply chains – the COVID pandemic, digital disruption, geopolitical turmoil and shifting demographics. They are looking for workforce competencies that will enable them to deal with the increasingly complex aspects of risk, forward planning, statistical modelling and multilevel management.

In 2020, Deakin University's Centre for Supply Chain Logistics interviewed over 100 women at all levels in the supply chain sector about the skills and competency gaps.

Here are the trends driving the need for more women in supply chain:

- The current supply chain workforce is aging and predominantly male – companies simply can't afford to ignore 50% of the talent pool.
- A diverse workforce reflects a company's customer base, and is better able to meet the technical, operational and cultural challenges of customer demand.
- The SC workforce is evolving - in today's world of Big Data, IoT, digital buyer-seller relationships, and robotic process automation, companies are more reliant on technology. Brains, not brawn, matters.
- Our increasingly digitised and interconnected supply chains are as much about the flow of information as they are about the flow of goods and services - technical knowledge, financial acumen, communication skills, agility, resilience, creativity, and collaborative problem solving are the must have skills of the future.
- The online market is growing, and consumer expectations are evolving – a diverse workforce more accurately reflects a company's customer base and brings clear market advantages.
- Today's top talent looks for companies with social purpose – millennials make career decisions based on a company's demonstrated commitment to diversity, flexibility and inclusion.





Avoiding gender bias in recruiting



This information sheet is based on research funded by Wayfinder industry sponsors and FIAL in 2020.

Industries where males are in the majority in the workforce are particularly prone to gender bias in recruitment and unconscious bias is often communicated unintentionally in the way position descriptions and job ads are written.

Avoiding gender bias in language

Job ads are low hanging fruit when it comes to addressing gender diversity. There are two easy ways to reduce gender bias. The first is to review the language for unconscious bias, avoiding masculine adjectives like 'target focused', 'ambitious' or 'assertive' – opting for gender-neutral terms such as 'adaptive', 'collaborative' or 'customer centric'.

The second is to limit the number of mandatory requirements, listing only those skills that are absolutely necessary for the role. The problem with including lots of 'nice to haves' is that many women won't apply for a job unless they meet all criteria (research suggests that many women won't apply for a job they do not 100% qualify for, whereas men will apply for a position they feel they're only 60% qualified for).

Recruiters also often insist on industry-specific experience (in automotive, mining or maritime for example) when the particular skills required can readily be learned on the job and the key requirements are a set of hard or soft skills the candidate has in spades.

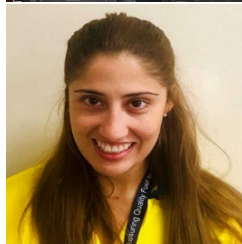
Another way in which Position Descriptions favoured males was that they insisted on warehouse floor experience, the sort of operational experience that many men will have but is quite rare for women (as a forklift driver for example).

Marketing a supply chain career to candidates

While COVID has certainly helped raise the visibility of the sector and the key role it plays in our economy, the supply chain sector continues to have an image problem. Supply chain is an exciting, dynamic, demanding job, integral to a company's economic success and critical to an environmentally sustainable future for Australia – but ask people outside the industry and they know little about it. COVID 19 may have raised people's awareness of the word supply chain and its importance to our economy, but not about the breadth and depth of career opportunities.

The supply chain workforce is no longer a dirty, unattractive profession requiring physical strength. In today's world of Big Data, IoT, digital buyer-seller relationships, and robotic process automation, modern supply chain workers must navigate social, cultural, and geographic differences with ease.

When asked about the skills they saw as important to success in a supply chain career, the women in our research study were uniformly positive about the advantages of a supply chain career – they saw it as a high tech, high speed, high stakes game, managing multiple interactions and requiring a rich mix of skills. The salary can be excellent, it often involves opportunities for travel and the work is interesting, exciting and rarely ever boring.





Attracting and retaining the next generation workforce



This is part of a series of information sheets based on research funded by Wayfinder industry sponsors and FIAL in 2020.

No matter what our age, we all want to be treated respectfully and fairly – to be recognised, valued, and appropriately compensated. But there is no denying that different factors motivate different generations.

A key challenge for recruiters in supply chain and logistics is making the job attractive not only to women but to all millennials (those born between 1981 and 1996) and Gen Zers (those born after 1997) – they are the supply chain leaders of the future.

What matters to the next generation workforce?

Having a job with a purpose

Millennials and Gen Zers want to be part of something bigger than themselves, and the supply chain industry's role in supporting sustainable practices has the potential to be a major recruitment drawcard. It's rarely showcased, but into the future, modern supply chains have a key role to play in paving the way for fuel efficient shipping and freight, recyclable packaging and improved biosecurity.

The millennial generation cares about issues such as climate change and ethical supply chains and they want to see company values demonstrated and not just talked about. They have high expectations around corporate social responsibility and want the businesses they work for to focus more on people, products and purpose and less on profit.

Workplace flexibility

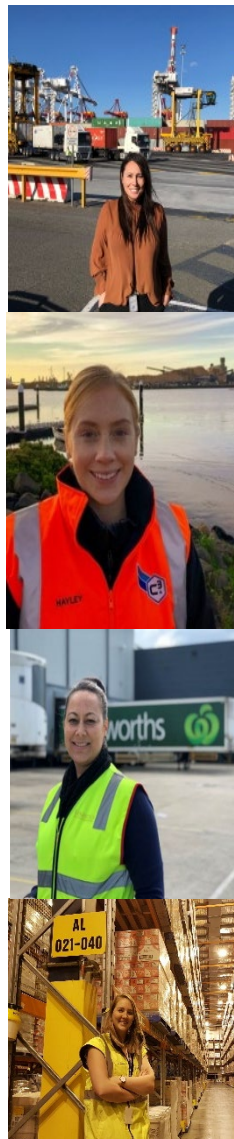
The next-generation workforce expects greater flexibility in their working hours and better work life balance than their predecessors. They are the first generation to enter the workforce with access to technology that enables them to seamlessly work remotely, and demand for greater flexibility is also driven by an increase in dual income households. Millennials are almost twice as likely to have a partner working full-time than baby boomers and while women continue to take the major responsibility for childcare, fathers are much more involved in parenting than previous generations.

Flexible jobs can help attract and retain millennial talent. It can be in the form of remote working, job sharing, parental leave, four-day weeks or volunteer time off – and even small concessions can make a difference. Providing work is completed on time and to the client's satisfaction – where it happens is becoming increasingly irrelevant.

A clear way forward

Millennials and are not afraid to seek employment elsewhere to progress their careers when it makes sense to them, but when it comes to progressing careers, steady work with compensation and good benefits, along with an opportunity to learn and grow, is a common thread that links all generations.

The next generation workforce expects opportunities for professional development and training, including the secondment and shadowing opportunities that will encourage talented workers to see they have a career with the company not just a job. And in selecting participants it is important to focus on transferable skills not years of experience or specific industry experience – many will have highly valuable hard and soft skills but not length of time or experience in a particular industry.





Achieving work life balance in a sector that never sleeps



This is part of a series of information sheets based on research funded by Wayfinder industry sponsors and FIAL in 2020.

Achieving work life balance in a business that runs 24/7 for 365 days a year is operationally difficult, but it's not impossible and it's increasingly important.

The supply chain never sleeps

At all hours of the day and night for 365 days in the year, shipments are moving, data is being produced and exchanged, and you can expect the unexpected in terms of external events that impact on operations. Mobile devices and instant communication also contribute to 'always on the job' expectations.

Achieving work life balance in a business that runs 24/7 for 365 days a year is operationally difficult, but not impossible – and it's increasingly important. Millennials and Gen Zers in particular, look for work life balance and greater flexibility in their working hours. They are almost twice as likely to have a partner working full time than baby boomers, and fathers are much more involved in parenting than previous generations.

It's not one size fits all – work life balance means different things to people at different life stages and with different personal circumstances and it also depends on the nature of the work.

Working from home can make a difference, especially for those with families – the quarantines and lockdowns imposed by the COVID pandemic pushed large numbers of people to work from home, accelerating a workplace experiment that pre-pandemic had struggled to take hold.

The benefits (and limitations) of remote work are now much clearer and many executives are now seeing the advantages of a hybrid model. For many (although not all) jobs – it's possible to work just as effectively from home as it is from the office at least for 2-3 days a week.



Making it work

A number of companies have initiatives in place to promote work-life balance.

Work life balance is part of the company's values – the supply chain and logistics sector is dynamic and fast paced, but to attract (and keep) top talent, successful companies make a healthy work life balance integral to their company culture

At least some of the shifts include family friendly options – times that take account of school or kinder pick-up times and managers understand employees may need to take time off for sports events or parent-teacher interviews.

They are transparent – up front with current and future employees about what to expect in terms of hours and what is (and what isn't) possible.

They offer 'offset' options – additional programs and benefits to offset long 'ugly' hours. Options can include allowances, additional leave and periods of remote work. Other options can include initiatives that promote positive wellness.





Does company culture matter?



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What differentiates successful companies from the rest? Efficient systems? Strong leaders? Clever strategy? Innovative products? Talented staff? All these are important, but it's company culture that gives companies the competitive advantage to thrive and grow.

Company culture, like personal character, is difficult to describe, but it has a powerful influence. At its heart, culture is *why* people do what they do, the shared mindsets that influence how people in an organisation behave. The culture of an organisation sets expectations about how people behave and work together, how they function as a team, and how they feel about the work they do. Company culture matters.

In a sector where change is constant and business models continue to evolve, culture becomes even more important. Poor cultures do not respond well to change, and company culture has a major influence on whether people decide to stay or move on from their company. With social media, views on company reputations travel fast, and a strong company culture is a major drawcard for top talent. For millennials, and for women in particular, strong company values towards diversity, ethical responsibility and sustainability – not only evident on a website but in company actions – is a major decider in their thinking about joining or staying with a company.

For almost half the people in our study, company culture was cited as barrier to further developing their career. If employees are able to get away with bad workplace behaviour it can lead directly to poor morale, stress, reputational damage and increased staff turnover. Negativity in the workplace is contagious and it can affect the whole team.

Policies may be in place, and there may be annual reviews of internal barriers to issues such as bullying, gender equality or sexual harassment – but if company culture is poor inappropriate behaviours will persist.

Workplace cultures are formed from the actions and beliefs of those who work there but ultimately, company culture comes down to leadership. Leaders must send the right messages about the company's stance on issues like bullying and sexual harassment and represent company values in their own behaviours. If bullies do not see themselves as a problem, then no policy and no amount of training will make a difference.

"Guys make inappropriate comments about our appearance and when we raise our concerns no one listens."

Research participant

"Culture comes down to leadership and what leaders are prepared to walk past."

Research participant





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*.



New skills for a transforming industry

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

The supply chain industry's growing reliance on technology is an employment disrupter, increasing efficiency and productivity in some areas, making other roles redundant, and transforming almost all work in some way. It means the industry is looking for a different and more complex set of capabilities.

The supply chain and logistics industry face a rising skills shortage, driven by the fast-evolving needs of a sector experiencing transformational change and shaped by the prevailing social trends of the COVID-19 pandemic, shifting geopolitical tensions, the rise in enabling technologies and increased attention to corporate social responsibility.

Today's supply chains are a series of globally interconnected operational nodes of real-time information, capable of end-to-end visibility and predictability into each component of the supply chain, from development to planning, to procurement, manufacturing and fulfillment.

What skills is today's supply chain sector looking for?

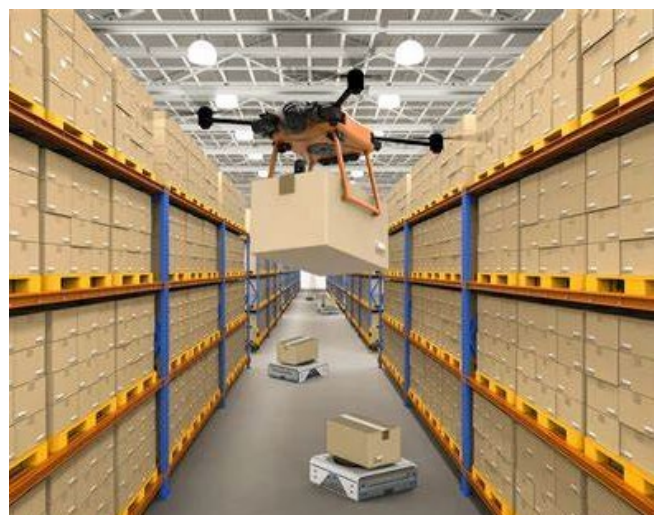
Thanks to emerging technologies such as blockchain or IoT, previously siloed activities like logistics planning and freight payment can now be combined. Today's supply chain professionals require **knowledge of the organization across the breadth of the value chain, the skills to collaborate in cross-functional teams, and the ability to adapt in a dynamic environment.**

In addition to **operational expertise**, employees at all levels are increasingly expected to possess a range of 'soft skill' professional competencies such as **strategic thinking, innovation, and high-level analytic and technological capabilities and of course people management and leadership** – it's a combination of operational skills, trust of data, creativity and emotional intelligence that's proving difficult to find.

Even entry level roles require a level of **technical literacy and cross-functional understanding**. New roles are emerging that require a broader set of skills, cognitive abilities, and interpersonal characteristics as companies work to meet the technical, operational and social challenges of a fast-evolving industry.

In an industry responding to global stresses and transformational change, **resilience and the ability to manage constant change** have become imperative.

Resilience requires **the ability to recharge, not endure, and mental health is crucial to this**. Every business has a legal and moral responsibility to provide a safe and fair workplace and a mentally health workplace benefits both employees and the organisational bottom line.



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