

boom!

Supply Chain 50/50 Next Generation Talent

Survey Results 2023

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Note to readers

Throughout this report you will see quotes like the one you see to the right. These quotes are drawn from supplemental interviews with survey respondents and other contributors. We thank everyone who took the time to share their thoughts and experiences, which serve to add more colour to the overall picture reflected in the survey data.

"I always knew that I wanted to work in corporate, but at high school I thought my only options were finance, marketing, or accounting. My university has a great system that supports students to try many different areas of business and that's how I discovered supply chain."

University student (USA)

References

- 1 [3 Supply Chain Talent Trends to Watch in 2023](#), Gartner, February 2023
- 2 [Quiet Quitting Is A Sign Of A Deeper Problem—Here's What It Means](#), Forbes, December 2022
- 3 [Program Spotlight: Supply Chain Management](#), Eduventures Research at Encoura, January 2022
- 4 [Supply Chain 50/50: Next Generation Supply Chain Talent](#), boom! webinar, October 2023
- 5 [What the Thriving Supply Chain Professional Needs to Succeed](#), boom!, September 2022
- 6 [2023 Women in Supply Chain Survey: Women Represented at Historic Levels](#), Gartner, May 2023
- 7 [To Make Orchestras More Diverse, End Blind Auditions](#), The New York Times, July 2020

Introduction

The so-called supply chain “talent crisis” remains an evergreen issue. Recent insights from Gartner reveal that the inability to access talent has interrupted or curtailed business activities for over half of supply chain organisations in the last year¹. Conversations with our own network of senior supply chain leaders echo this situation.

If we are ever to remove this from the annual list of concerns for supply chain leaders, what better place to focus than at the very beginning of the talent pipeline? There is no quick fix here, but if we can attract more young people who bring a diverse profile to the profession, ensure they have the necessary skills, and keep them motivated to stay and develop their careers, then the workforce of the future can only become more robust. To begin to address this, in our fourth annual survey of the global supply chain profession, we set out to explore the perspectives of the next generation of supply chain talent – our future leaders.

We would like to thank everyone who participated in our online survey. Additionally, we thank everyone who gave their time to speak with us and share their personal experiences and perspectives through one-on-one research interviews – a selection of the insights that emerged through the interviews are shared in quotes throughout this report.

We would also like to thank Kinaxis for their sponsorship of this independent research study. Thank you also to Polly Mitchell-Guthrie of Kinaxis, Philip Roe of Logistics UK and board member of the Chartered Institute of Logistics & Transport in the UK, and Jake Dean of the Grainger Center for Supply Chain Management at the University of Wisconsin for sharing their perspectives on the survey results in a webinar which accompanies this report. The webinar is available for viewing at <https://boomglobalnetwork.com/survey2023replay.html>.

Finally, thank you for reading this report. We hope you find our conclusions useful, and that they will help inform and shape your own strategies and initiatives for attracting and developing the next generation of supply chain talent. Please feel free to share it.

Authors



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Founder, boom! Global Network

Beth’s career as a supply chain industry analyst and advisor has spanned over two decades. Prior to launching boom! in 2019, she was Research Vice President at Gartner where she advised global Chief Supply Chain Officers and their teams on sustainability and talent management best practices. She is also a certified Performance Coach.



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Melanie has worked in supply chain for over twenty years, living and working in Europe, Africa, and North America. Her role at boom! combines her passion for supply chain management and for gender equality, researching strategies to improve diversity in the sector and working to support boom! members around the world.

Training the next generation of supply chain talent



Listening to the voices of young people entering supply chain from this year's boom! Supply Chain 50/50: Next Generation Talent Survey reminds me of those age-old algebra challenges about trains leaving different stations at different speeds. All aboard! Speed up! Slow down! The screeching of brakes.

The supply chain station destination is getting more popular. The survey reveals that supply chain is now an intentional career choice. Are trains moving too fast carrying early career professionals unprepared for the journey ahead? Yet, a slow-moving train with brakes on from navigating with archaic technology is destined for challenges. Our profession is accountable to support more young people to get on the trains, ready to ride, with confidence. I'll share some ideas of how we can all contribute to these goals.

All aboard!

At Kinaxis we are passionate about contributing to the craft of supply chain. By partnering with our academic colleagues, we are invited into classrooms across the globe to share fascinating and complex supply chain stories. Supply chain is an essential way to make an impact on the world and the next generation recognizes this. Since launching the Kinaxis Academic Program in March of 2020, we have spoken to more than 10,000 students from Syracuse to Sri Lanka, Dallas to Dublin. We've given guest lectures, created case studies, and even developed an interactive supply chain game. Universities are eager to hear from the voice of practice, so reach out and offer to return to the classroom and share your experiences, your journey.

Packing for the journey

As more young people board the supply chain train, they can be surprised to discover they don't have everything they need for the journey. Their education is an outstanding start, but they quickly discover that they need deeper knowledge of supply chains, finance, and technology, as well as skills to interact with people professionally and think through problems critically. These skill gaps are best learned from experience most of us receive on the job.

One accelerator is experiential learning, which is why we sponsored Texas Christian University's annual supply chain case competition. By partnering with one of our customers, TrinityRail, we were able to provide a real-world supply chain case that allowed students to experience a day in the life of a supply chain planner, including time-sensitive decision-making, customer expectations, uncertainty, and variability. Professors seek out business problems to turn into cases, so consider sharing one from your company. Companies build brand awareness and find future employees. Experiential learning is a win-win!

Ease off the brakes

Digital native graduates arrive presuming a seamless connection between applications with modern interfaces that connect across platforms. Yet only 52% of them find they have the supply chain systems and technology that allow them to be efficient and effective at their jobs. If we don't ease on the brakes, new employees will continue to grow frustrated. Being tied down to tedious tasks moving between legacy systems is a key factor contributing to retention challenges. Digital transformations that give planners better, integrated tools untethered from spreadsheets and make it easier to collaborate, allow teams to make the impact they want. Automating obvious tasks with AI (Artificial Intelligence) can also increase job satisfaction AND supply chain performance. A ticket worth buying!

Polly Mitchell-Guthrie, VP of Industry Outreach and Thought Leadership at Kinaxis

Executive Summary

By any measure, the last five years have been testing for even the most seasoned supply chain professional. But it was during these extraordinary times that the next generation of supply chain talent started their careers. As we will see, some even selected supply chain as a field of study or took up a job exactly because of what was happening in the world around them.

Starting out in your career during a time of crisis might seem like a high-stakes decision. We wanted to know whether the reality of the first few years in supply chain has lived up to expectations, and critically, given the on-going talent crisis, whether this next generation is in it for the long term having now had a few years of experience under their belts.

Despite 21% of the organisations we surveyed currently experiencing a hiring freeze or downsizing, of those companies that are still hiring, 79% tell us they are actively recruiting next generation talent into entry-level roles. Yet despite an increase in interest in supply chain as a career choice for the younger generation and a surfeit of students at the undergraduate level, demand for new talent continues to outstrip supply in many regions of the world.

To attract this new talent to your organisation, to build a robust talent pipeline of future experts and leaders, and to capitalise on their enthusiasm by making sure they are strong ambassadors for the generations that follow behind them, it is crucial that we better understand and learn from what motivates and engages these leaders of tomorrow.

Developing the leaders of tomorrow

Earlier this year we fielded a survey to explore the perspectives of two distinct groups:

1. Those in the first five years of their careers – we refer to this group as 'the next generation'.
2. Those with six or more years of experience – we refer to this group as 'leaders'.

From the first group, we wanted to understand their expectations coming into the profession and to what degree reality met those expectations. From the second group, we wanted to know what skills they are looking for in this new generation of talent and what their organisation is doing to attract, retain, and advance more young people in the profession.

What emerged were five areas that should be considered when thinking about how to attract, retain and develop the next generation of supply chain talent. We have grouped these as follows:

- Attract me
- Develop me
- Equip me
- Advance me
- Include me

Five ways to cultivate next generation talent

Let's start with the good news. The next generation of supply chain talent are overwhelmingly enthusiastic about their choice of career and the jobs they are in. They are ambitious and want to learn and grow in their careers. A whopping 90% of those surveyed said they would recommend a career in supply chain to others. What an accolade!

At the same time, however, this cohort of early in career supply chain professionals do not necessarily have everything they need to support that ambition. As we'll discover, some of what they need can only be developed from experience over time. But other parts can be purposefully provided or put in place. The risk of not doing this? Under-performance, disengagement, quiet quitting². Or perhaps moving on to another employer who can provide what they need. Or even leaving the profession entirely for a more attractive alternative in another field.

To keep this group engaged, motivated and performing to the best of their potential, these five key areas provide a high-level framework for focus and attention. Some sectors are already off to a good start – our data shows that the CPG/FMCG, hi-tech, healthcare and pharmaceutical industries are leading the way here. If you are doing some of these things already, now is the time to review, recalibrate, or even double down. If you are not, now is the time to begin.

ATTRACT ME

Next generation talent are making a clear choice to enter the supply chain profession and know exactly what they want from an employer. Are you offering them what they're looking for? Find out on page 7.

DEVELOP ME

There are more new entrants to the profession than ever, but do they have the skills you need? Both next generation talent and experienced leaders see gaps. What is missing and how can this be addressed? Find out on page 11.

INCLUDE ME

A strong employee value proposition can help drive engagement, but culture is key. Inclusive practices in recruitment and development are critical to attracting and retaining diverse talent. Find out how on page 19.

EQUIP ME

The smartphone generation expects cutting-edge technology in the workplace. Finding out it is not can be a shock to the system. But how well is technology helping new talent do their jobs efficiently and effectively? Discover more on page 14.

ADVANCE ME

Next generation talent are ambitious. They feel challenged and see opportunity to grow, but how to do so most effectively is not always clear. The need for better support is clear. Find out what this means in practice on page 16.

Over the following pages we explore each of these five areas in more detail. In addition to presenting data from the survey results, we also share anecdotal comments and insights selected from over 20 interviews carried out with individual next generation supply chain professionals, leaders, academics, and other industry stakeholders.

Attract me

If you've worked in supply chain for more than five years, chances are that you fell into the profession by accident. Historically, few people outside the profession knew about it and those who had would tell you, often vaguely, that it was about moving goods in trucks to warehouses and shops.

Almost 80% of our survey respondents who are experienced supply chain professionals told us that they fell into their careers by accident. But this is changing. For those currently in the first five years of their careers, that number has halved to 41%.

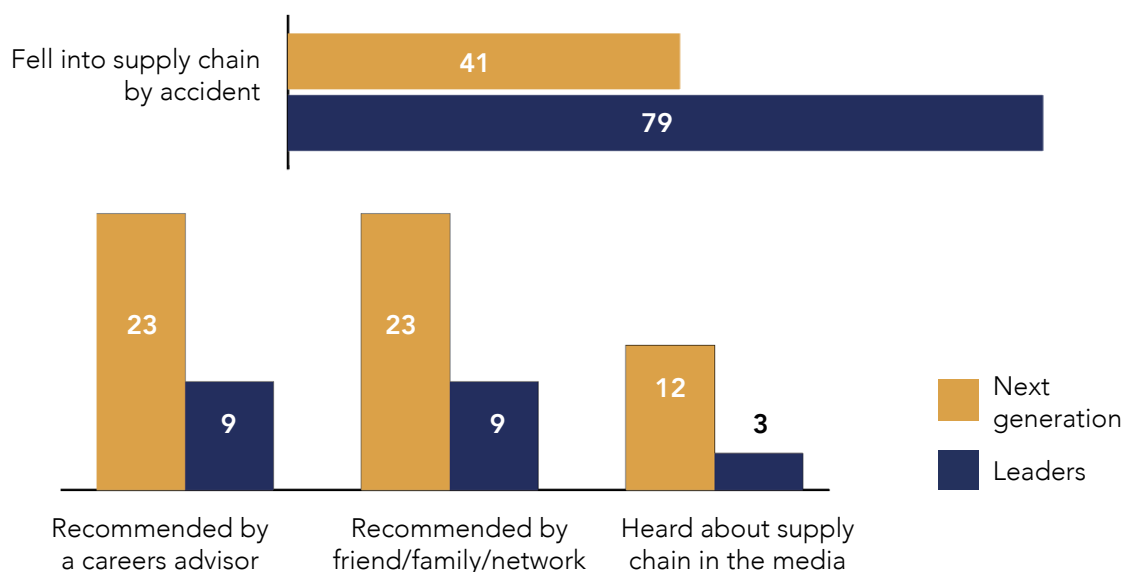
The global COVID pandemic has played no small role in this, with the increased focus by the media on supply chains during the crisis increasing awareness of what supply chain is and its impact on the world. Consequently, this has had a positive impact on the number of people intentionally choosing to enter the supply chain profession – 12% of our survey respondents said that the pandemic was their primary catalyst.

"I got into supply chain because of the pandemic. We ran out of toilet paper and I wondered about the reason for it. So I did some personal research and now I'm majoring in supply chain management."

– University student (USA)

But for students choosing to study supply chain and enter the profession in the years leading up to the pandemic, the groundwork had already been laid. Indeed for 46% of respondents, their choice was motivated by a recommendation, either from a careers advisor at school, college, or university (23%), or from a friend, family member or other connection (23%).

Choosing supply chain as a career is increasingly an intentional choice



% of respondents, n=141

The growing recognition of supply chain as a profession and career of choice is reflected in the surge in demand for supply chain-related degree courses, resulting in an increasing number of courses offered by educational institutions around the world. In many cases this trend began with the inclusion of supply chain as a topic within broader business or finance-related courses at graduate and post-graduate level.

“I sat through a supply chain class and realised that this is exactly what I’ve always thought I was going to do. I just never knew the name for it.”

– University student (USA)

Encouragingly, there are now even more courses dedicated wholly to supply chain as a focused area of study. Although the trendline no doubt differs by geography, in the United States, analysis from Eduventures Research shows a strong signal for student demand between 2012-2020. Here, the number of master’s programmes grew by 263% from 24 to 63 and bachelor’s programmes exploded by 283% from 12 to 46³.

At the same time, demand for new talent is still outstripping supply. This was a recurring topic in our research interviews, with industry leaders in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand all stating their serious concern about the lack of next generation talent joining the profession.

“Despite the pandemic, there’s still not enough focus on supply chain in Australia. There’s still a relentless focus on reducing costs and driving efficiency, and the salaries in supply chain don’t compare to a career in finance or accountancy. We don’t value supply chain, so we don’t have enough new talent coming into the profession.”

– Talent Acquisition Supply Chain Business Partner (Australia)

Partnerships can help address talent pipeline concerns

The connection between employers and educational institutions is a critically important way to further promote supply chain as a future career option. Companies that go into universities to do talks and share case studies are often the first point of contact with the real world of supply chain and offer a great opportunity to make connections between future employers and employees. Today, 47% of our leader group say that their organisations are actively involved in presenting at schools, colleges, and universities.

Our survey also shows that 63% of organisations are recruiting interns or offering typically short-term co-operative education experience (or “co-ops”) and a further 46% are offering longer-term university placements. Once available for full-time employment, 27% of organisations are offering formal graduate programmes, and 19% are offering apprenticeships. As we show in the next section, companies offering these entry points with formal skills development and training right at the beginning are likely to be more attractive to new joiners.

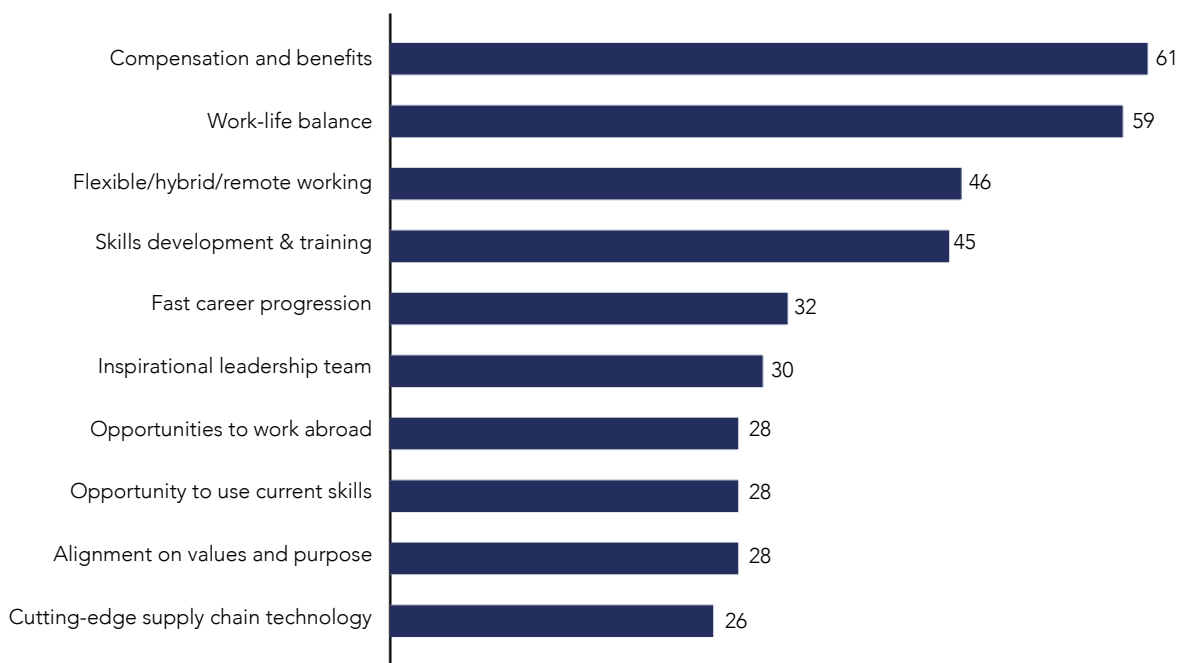


Percentage of companies offering university placements

What the next generation wants most from an employer

We presented a list of 18 options to our survey respondents and asked them to pick the five attributes they consider most important when evaluating a potential employer. Not surprisingly, our survey showed that the next generation of talent looks first and foremost at what a potential employer can do for them personally and professionally. Compensation and benefits, support for work-life balance, flexible/hybrid/remote working, and skills development and training top the bill, with opportunity for fast career progression making up the top five attributes most valued.

What are the top five things that are most important to you from an employer?



% of respondents who selected these option in their top five from a list of 18 options, n=69

In other words, the next generation of supply chain talent are expressing a desire for a well-paid job that does not take over their lives, allows them a flexible lifestyle and supports them in their professional ambitions. This seems like a reasonable ask, although our research interviews revealed somewhat of a generational divide on some of these points, with differences in attitude sometimes creating conflict between the generations. With many young people joining the workforce during the pandemic, flexible/hybrid/remote is largely seen as the norm; however, these working models are often seen by their more experienced colleagues as a privilege that is earned.

“This new generation of supply chain professionals seem less committed; when I see that I need to work more hours to get the job done, I do the hours. But the younger generation don’t want to do the time and still think that they deserve a promotion. You need to do more than what your job description says to get a promotion.”

– Senior Manager (Peru)

This is not peculiar to the supply chain profession of course – the heated debate that is highlighted in the media from time to time about companies mandating a return full-time to the office following the pandemic period is testament to that. But what we do know from our 2022 survey is that the absence or deterioration of the attributes that make an organisation attractive, can also drive talent to leave⁵. In short, as an employer, ignore these table stake items at your peril!

“I think COVID really put a huge divide between the generations. The next generation doesn’t want to come into the office five days a week, but older people think that we should come in every day and do our time.”

– Logistics Manager (USA)

What might prove to be a mildly eyebrow-raising data point given what we collectively perhaps thought we knew about the younger generation is what came bottom of the list of 18 attributes. In last place came working for a ‘cool brand’, with working for a company with a proven commitment to environmental and social sustainability coming in at 17th, with this being ranked in the top five by only 9% of respondents.

Develop me

Now that we have confirmed that a career in supply chain is of increasing interest to the next generation of talent, plus the attributes that they look for in an employer, we turn our attention to the readiness of the next generation to hit the ground running when they begin their careers in the field.

Essential skills for a supply chain practitioner

Our survey asked two distinct groups – those in career for less than five years and those in career for more than five years – what they thought the most important skills and attributes are for someone just starting out in supply chain. Although there is a slight difference in the order of importance, the two groups were in almost perfect agreement, with nine out of the top ten skills (selected from a total list of 23) the same for the two sets of respondents. There was only one difference of opinion in this list of ‘table stakes’ skills: our next generation responders included change management skills in their top ten list, while more experienced leader respondents included resilience, a character trait or personal attribute we will return to shortly.

What are the five most important skills for a person new to supply chain?

The next generation said:

1. Problem-solving skills
2. Adaptability
3. Cross-functional collaboration
4. Analytical skills
5. Communication skills
6. Attention to detail
7. Critical thinking skills
8. Change management skills
9. Learning aptitude
10. Team player

Leaders said:

1. Problem-solving skills
2. Analytical skills
3. Adaptability
4. Communication skills
5. Cross-functional collaboration
6. Critical thinking skills
7. Team player
8. Learning aptitude
9. Attention to detail
10. Resilience

Skills selected in top five from a list of 24 options, ranked by popularity, n=247

Where the differences of opinion become more divided is when we explored two additional questions.

The skills the next generation found they lacked once starting in role

Firstly, we asked our next generation respondents what skills they were lacking when they started out in their careers. On this list, shown to the right here, there were only three that carried over from their initial list (highlighted in italics), with seven other necessary skills needed but missing. While three of these missing skills are technical in nature, the remaining seven are all to do with working with other people, so-called ‘soft skills’.

The next generation said:

1. Role-focused supply chain knowledge
2. Negotiation skills
3. Financial knowledge
4. Technological aptitude
5. Influencing skills
6. *Change management skills*
7. *Analytical skills*
8. *Cross-functional collaboration*
9. External collaboration
10. Customer service skills

The skills leaders said are hardest to find in next generation talent

We then probed the more experienced supply chain professionals on their view of what skills are hardest to find in the next generation of supply chain talent. Most of these skills match those already mentioned. Notably however, there were three new ones added to the mix: resilience, EQ (emotional intelligence), and interpersonal skills. Again, these are not technical or 'hard skills' that are most easily teachable in a classroom environment, but rather the softer skills that come largely with experience.

The leaders said:

1. *Resilience*
2. Adaptability
3. Critical thinking skills
4. *EQ (emotional intelligence)*
5. Attention to detail
6. Communication skills
7. *Interpersonal skills*
8. Influencing skills
9. Problem solving skills
10. Role-focused supply chain knowledge

Barriers to critical thinking expertise

A lack of expertise in critical thinking came up both in the survey data and in several of the research interviews we carried out with both groups, indicating a possible gap here to be addressed within educational systems. One academic from the UK shared that they have now started to address this. However, she went on to make a salient point that asking questions is not always culturally acceptable – a key issue to be aware of when assembling and managing global teams.

"[Our students] need more training in asking questions and not taking everything at face value, so critical thinking is something we actively teach now. But critical thinking is difficult to teach to students who come from cultures where it is considered rude to ask questions."

– Academic (UK)

"I wasn't taught critical thinking skills at university, but I've had to develop them in my working life. I've learned to analyse the environment I'm in and the specific situation to determine the best solution."

– Logistics Manager (USA)

High levels of resilience cannot be expected from everyone

When it comes to resilience, is the COVID effect rearing its head again here? The majority of those who started out in their supply chain careers in the last five years did so during a time of crisis and intense pressure. What a baptism of fire! For some, this experience was their norm, boding well for a new generation of practitioners equipped to take on future challenges that will inevitably follow; for others it was not as easy – an experience shared across the generations. And yet, we know that this young generation would still happily recommend a career in supply chain to others.

"I think this new generation of talent suffer more from anxiety than we did, probably as a result of COVID, so they're more fragile in a way. It's our responsibility to keep them emotionally and intellectually engaged."

– Chief Supply Chain Officer (Netherlands)

Strengthening ties between business and educational institutions

Given the variety of roles and functions within supply chain, the expectation for new joiners to the profession to have an in-depth, role-based supply chain knowledge from the outset might be considered over demanding. Nevertheless, both sets of respondents put 'role-focused supply chain skills' on the list of missing or hard to find expertise. Although much of this expertise might be expected to be learned on the job, perhaps there is more that can be done in the earlier stages of development.

Our survey reveals that today only a relatively small percentage of organisations (16%) work with educational institutions on supply chain curriculum development. An equally small number (17%) work with industry bodies and associations on guiding the focus of research and training.



16%

Companies working with academia
on supply chain curriculum
development



17%

Companies working with industry
bodies/associations on supply chain
curriculum development

Although a focus on ensuring courses are as up to date and relevant as possible, sometimes developments in the field simply move too quickly. In our live panel discussion focused on the results of the survey⁴, Jake Dean from the University of Wisconsin admitted: "The notion of teaching technology comes with its challenges. We can teach skills around some of the big things like ERP or IT systems more broadly, but we don't have a course in generative AI. It takes a while for this technological loop to come back to universities."

Equip me

Next generation talent have never known a time without smartphones. They have grown up with access to a wealth of information at the touch of a button or simply by asking Alexa, Siri, or Google. They use the latest apps and can upgrade to a better app or a device that uses the latest technology as soon as one comes along.

Not surprisingly, it can come as a bit of a shock to the system to find that many supply chain systems are not considered anywhere close to "cutting edge". In our survey of the supply chain profession last year, we found that 59% of respondents were either using legacy systems where supply chain data and processes were fragmented and uncoordinated or were using systems that were isolated between internal supply chain functions. Only 7% were using integrated, cross-functional systems both internally and with customers and tier-one suppliers, and only 6% were using emerging technologies to gain real-time data and intelligence of their extended supply chains.

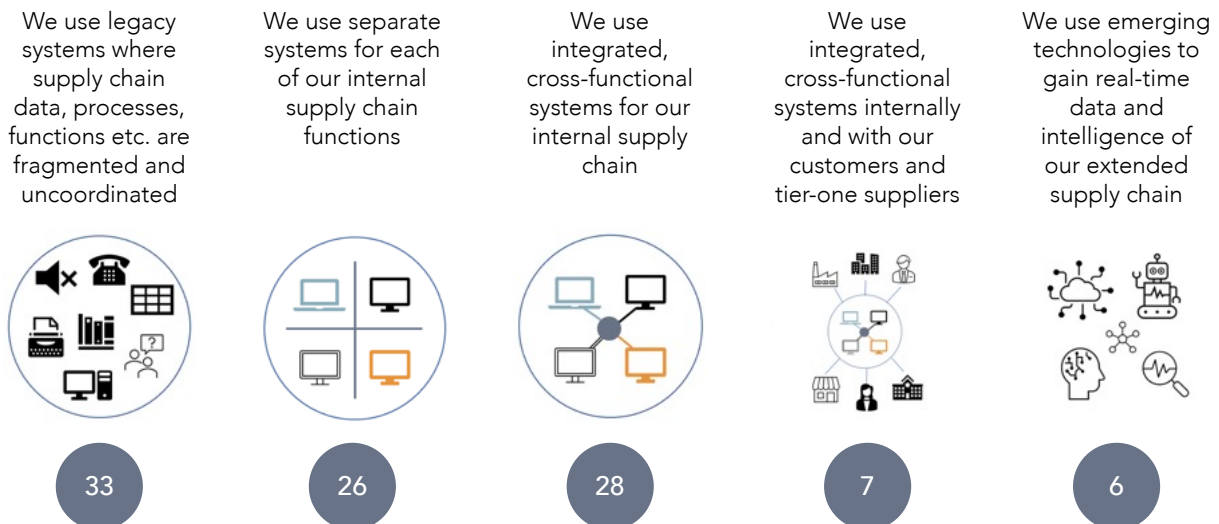
"All the companies I've worked in are using surprisingly archaic systems, some of them are from before I was born!"

– Product Manager (UK)

"I was shocked by the technology when I first joined the company. I work for a global organisation, and we are part of a group of companies that includes consultancies and specialist technologies, yet we still use a green-screen computer for some processes!"

– Supply Chain Analyst (UK)

Which statement best describes your access to the systems you need to do your job effectively?



boom! survey 2022, % of respondents, n=218

It is not surprising then, that expectations from next generation talent going into their first jobs were mixed. Whether for good or for bad, 39% said that the supply chain systems and technology at their company met their expectations. Only 22% said that they exceeded their expectations, while for 39% the technology fell short of their expectations.

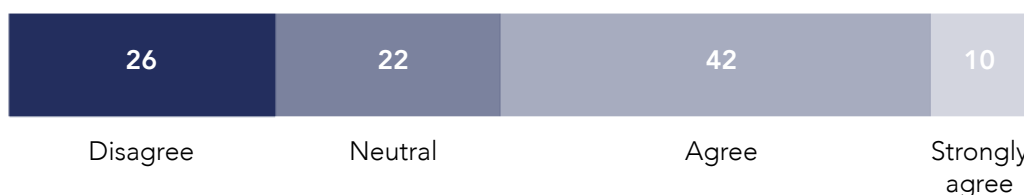
What were your expectations of your company’s supply chain systems and technology when you first joined?



% of next generation respondents, n=69

Assessing levels of expectation is clearly quite a subjective measure, but where the rubber meets the road lies in the answer to the question: do the systems and technology you need to use help you do your job efficiently and effectively? The answer for just over half of our next generation respondents is ‘yes’, they do – and 10% of those strongly agree. For the remaining 48%, either the jury is still out, or it is a definitive ‘no’.

Does the technology at your company help you do your job efficiently and effectively?



% of next generation respondents, n=69

Technical skills could be better but the desire for change could have more impact

Although not identified on the list of base skills needed by a new joiner to the profession, technological aptitude was highlighted as a skill some felt they were missing once they had started in role. In fact, ‘technological aptitude’ was ranked fourth by 38% of respondents in the top five missing skills list (see ‘Develop me’ above). Although this skill may be missing, some leaders recognise the value and opportunity creation that the next generation can bring thanks to their digital world perspective. A former logistics leader shared that many of the graduates they recruited were used to look at some of their more advanced programmes because they were less worried about the technology and just wanted to make it work. For example, some of the first robotics projects they did were run by graduates only in the second or third years of their careers.

Advance me

We have said it before and will no doubt say it again: supply chain professionals are an ambitious bunch, and this next generation of talent appears to be no less motivated to grow professionally and make progress in their careers. How well are organisations supporting them in their longer-term ambitions?

A career in supply chain is rarely linear. Given the breadth of functional scope, it is practically a pre-requisite for any supply chain leader worth their salt not to have specialised in just one or a small number of areas. Although all roads may lead to Rome, there is almost an infinite number of ways of getting there from a career path perspective. However, providing some element of visibility into the potential scenarios ahead is something that we have repeatedly learned that many supply chain professionals would value.

“I don’t want to stay in a position for 5-10 years, but I do want to think about my next step and not move to the next job too quickly. I want to keep making moves and doing entirely different things. Sometimes I think that I want to specialise, but really I just want to deliver successful projects.”

– Product Manager (UK)

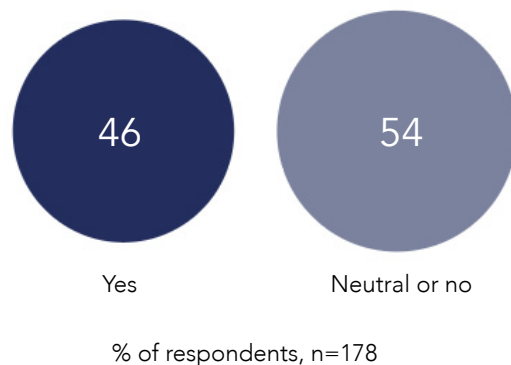
“I want to spend the first five years of my career gaining a strong foundation, working in all areas of supply chain. Then I want to move into management/leadership roles. In the long term my goal is to be COO or CSCO.”

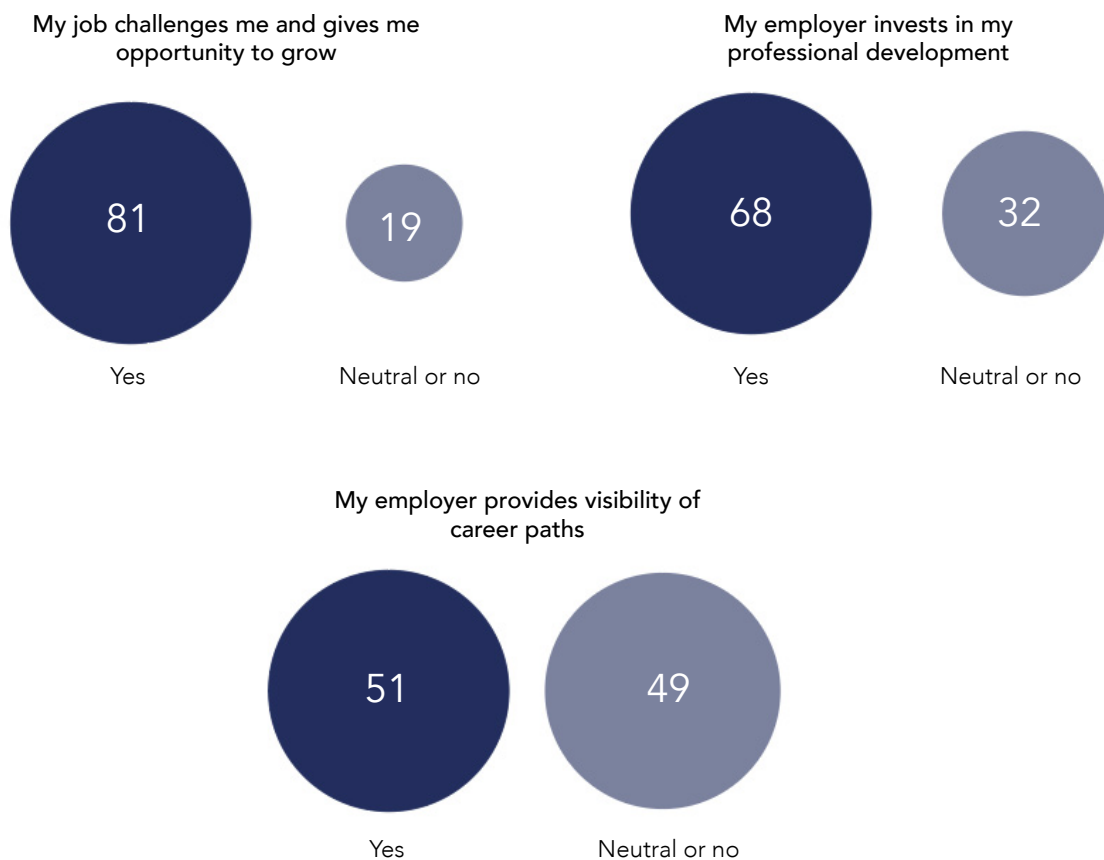
– Final year undergraduate student (USA)

In 2020 we published the results of our first boom! survey which that year focused on career progression in supply chain. Then, and each year since, our research has shown how important visibility of career paths and transparency of hiring/promotion criteria are to supply chain professionals as key enablers for career progression. This has shown to be of particular concern to those not always visible in official workplace environments (e.g., working remotely). The year’s research specifically adds the voices of the next generation to this critical call to action.

We have already seen that personal/professional skills development and training, and fast career progression both fall in the top five things that the next generation of talent look for in a prospective job (see page 9). Although the majority (81%) of our next generation survey responded very positively about the scope their job gives them to be challenged and grow, with a further 68% agreeing that their organisation invests in their professional development, guidance around what that future career path might look like and how to get there is not quite as prevalent. One in two next generation respondents said that their organisation provides visibility of career paths. At 40%, slightly fewer people say that there is transparency of hiring and promotion decision criteria.

My employer enables transparency in hiring and promotion decision criteria





% of respondents, n=178

What support is being given – and what's missing?

Beyond having good visibility into the potential career pathways ahead, access to resources that provide support in preparation, as well as along the way, are also crucial. To this end, we asked our next generation respondents what types of support initiatives they have access to and how.

From a set of five options we provided, less than 40% of respondents have access to any type of career development support. By far the largest group, 38% of respondents said their employer gives them access to third-party professional development resources. A further 7% seek out access to this under their own steam. Access to a mentor is the next most popular initiative, followed by access to a coach (17%), a sponsor (10%), or development champion (10%).

“People are looking for ideas, stories, and somebody to debate options with. That means you have to know the person, have trust between you, and for those conversations to be confidential. Mentorship has a great payback for business because retention and advancement of people always works better when mentorship is applied. But it does mean that the middle to senior leaders in the organisation need to devote more time to it.”

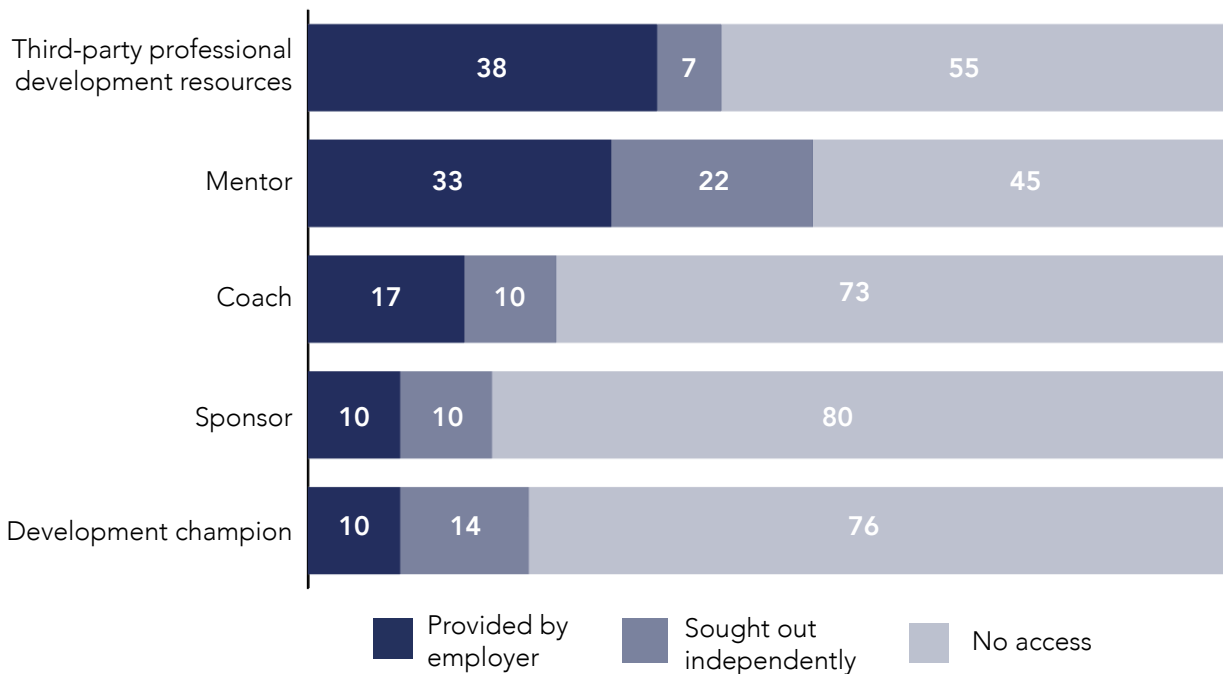
– President, Logistics UK



Our previous annual research surveys have repeatedly shown that having access to a mentor is highly valued as a professional development support mechanism. In 2020, this was selected as the third most impactful initiative, topped only by the opportunity to participate in a company leadership development programme and better visibility into potential career development paths.

In this year’s survey, one third of respondents say they have access to a mentor courtesy of their employer. The fact that a further 22% of our next generation respondents have sought out a mentor on their own (in the absence of a mentorship programme being provided by their employer) speaks to how much demand for mentoring there is.

Access to mentoring is the most independently sought after resource



% of next generation respondents, n=69

Include me

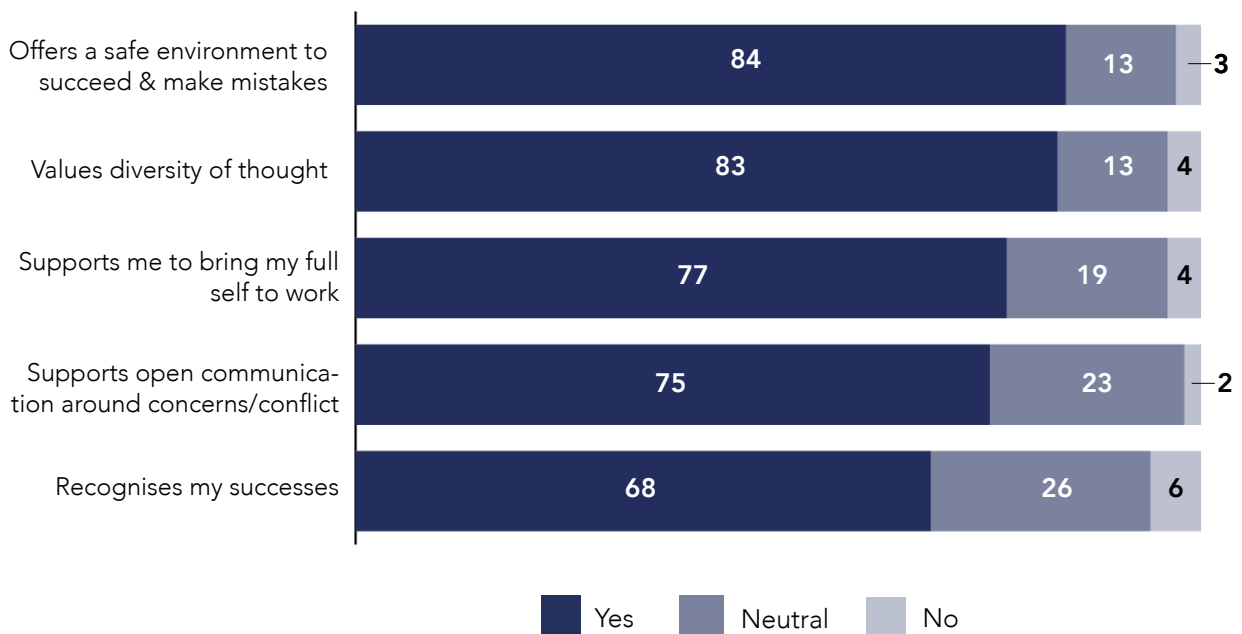
Creating a strong employee value proposition (EVP) can play a significant role in fostering a sense of inclusion and belonging. A good organisational culture is a key component of this, delivering many benefits such as improved retention and increased productivity and customer satisfaction. What makes for a good organisational culture is highly subjective and can therefore be difficult to define and certainly hard to measure.

Nevertheless, we asked our next generation talent survey responders about how they experience four fundamental attributes of organisational culture: a safe environment to both succeed and make mistakes; appreciation for diversity of thought; personal identity and potential; open communication around concerns and conflict; and recognition.

The results are positive. More than two thirds of respondents said they feel connected to their organisation's culture across all five areas. Even better, over 50% of respondents said their experience of these cultural aspects exceeded the expectations they had when they first joined (only 13% said that their expectations were not met).

The next generation is overwhelmingly positive about workplace culture

The culture at my current employer:



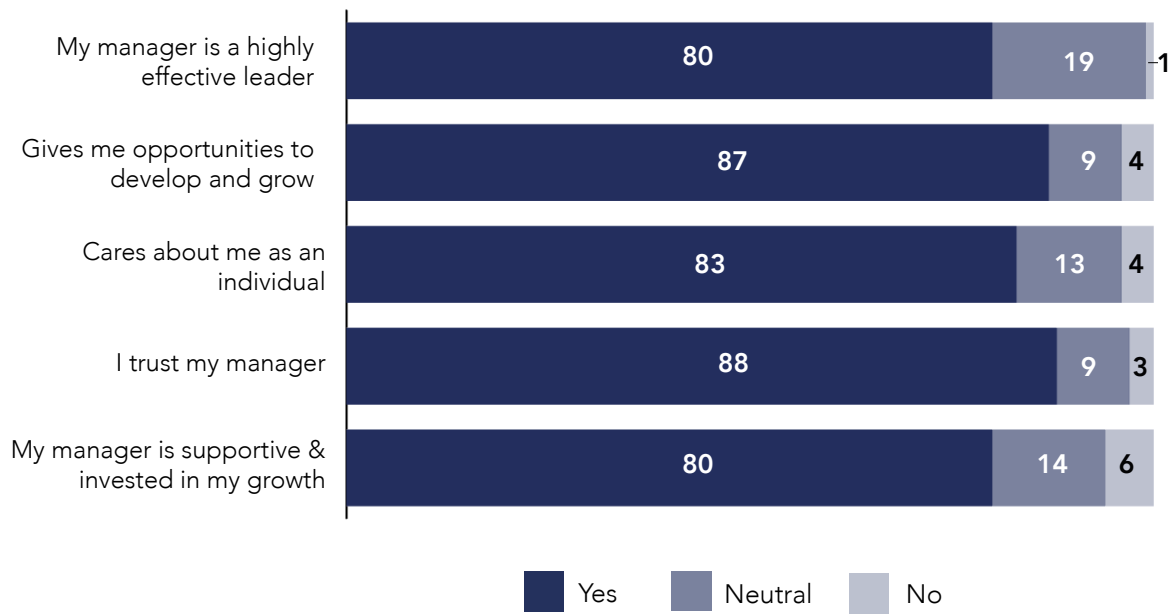
% of next generation respondents, n=69

It is worth noting that one area was rated less positively than the others – 32% of respondents said that their organisation did not have a culture that recognised success, an element that boosts engagement, aids retention and can help both employees and managers find meaning in their work.



Good managers are critical to fostering a positive sense of inclusion

A good manager inspires and motivates, helps employees to grow and develop their skills, offers guidance, feedback and support, and resolves conflicts. Our survey found that the managers of our next generation respondents are doing a great job, providing support in key management areas of leadership, professional growth, and trust. It is also encouraging to see that 83% of this younger generation agree that their manager cares about them as individuals – a skill that supply chain professionals across the generations said that they look for and value in their leaders.



% of next generation respondents, n=69

Overall, next generation respondents said that their line manager’s management style and skills matched (25%) or, better, exceeded (61%) their expectations. The old adage that “people don’t leave jobs; they leave managers” does not seem to be an issue for this group of next generation talent. In fact, if the quote shown here is representative, perhaps it should be changed to “people don’t leave jobs; they follow good managers”!

“My manager is honest and transparent. She sees us as people first. When we have an issue, she says ‘thank you for telling me, I will deal with this’. She always gets back to me with an explanation of why something happened. If she moved teams, I would follow her.”

– Supply Chain Analyst (UK)

On being authentic and bridging the generational divide

Although not reflected in the survey data, when we interviewed people from the next generation and leaders groups around the world, it very quickly became evident that despite great managers and great cultures, the potential for conflicts between the generations still exists. Although this is a phenomenon that is as old as the hills and will likely continue for generations to come, creating opportunities to air underlying resentments and eliminate ageist views on both sides might be something to consider!

One area in particular gave cause for concern on both sides. When the next generation hears that they can bring their authentic selves to work, some do just that; they are as much themselves at work as they are outside of work. Their more experienced colleagues say that being authentic still needs some allowances for professionalism.

“To many young people, professionalism means being fearful of their boss and having to act in a way that is alien to them. I don’t want to wear a suit and tie and go to the office five days a week. I want to bring my best self to work, which includes wearing a hoodie on camera. I think for us, professionalism is like, being cool and normal.”

– Supply chain planner (UK)

“Feedback from some employers on their interns is that there is confusion around what ‘bringing your authentic self to work’ means. Some young people appear to think that it means behaving in the same way in work as you would outside. But that’s not always professional behaviour. The pandemic appears to have exacerbated this age-old issue as some of this learning was missed.”

– Academic (USA)

Attracting, retaining, and developing a diverse workforce

A sense of inclusion may well relate to a sense of overall engagement and belonging, but when we talk about inclusion in its truest sense today, it is most often in combination with the words ‘diversity’ and ‘equity’.

Today, supply chain remains a largely male-dominated profession that lacks diversity, as well as in many cases, equity of experience, compensation, and career advancement opportunity. Diversity includes a range of characteristics and attributes such as age, ethnicity, physical capability, sexual preference, cognitive style, and so on, and we absolutely must consider all these intersectional aspects when bringing together diverse teams. However, developing a workforce that is more balanced from a gender perspective is an obvious primary goal.

What we know from the annual Gartner surveys (created in partnership with women’s leadership organisation AWESOME and with support from boom!) is that although the number of women in supply chain is increasing each year, it is doing so at a glacial pace. This is despite the plethora of research showing the benefits of a more balanced leadership team and workforce. Representing 41% of the overall workforce this year, the number of women in supply chain has increased only by 6% since Gartner first started collecting data in 2016⁶. This number drops as you go up through the hierarchy, with women in just 26% of executive roles. The number drops to 7% for women of underrepresented races and ethnicities.

This is the environment that the next generation of talent is entering. Although it may take some time yet for the numbers to change significantly, in order to attract diverse talent, it is vital that employers actively show their commitment to diverse and equitable workplaces. We asked experienced supply chain professionals involved in the recruitment process at their organisation how inclusive that process is and were pleasantly surprised by some of the results.

Let’s start by looking at diversity in recruitment.



Diversity in recruitment

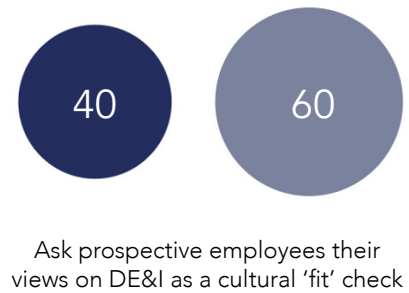
Attracting diverse talent starts with how you set out your shop window to the outside world and for potential recruits, their first impression most likely starts when scanning the careers page on a company’s website.

Encouragingly, 73% of respondents said that their organisations reflected a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) in supply chain job advertisements, and 85% said they purposefully used gender-neutral language when describing roles and the skills needed for them. Having selected candidates for interview, 73% said they then ensured a diverse interview panel.

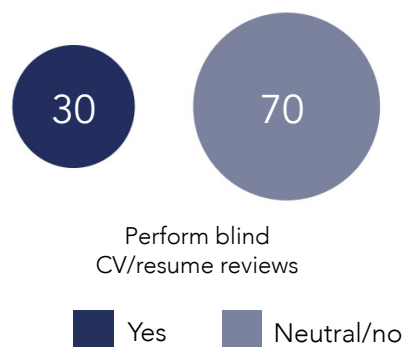
“A young black supply chain graduate got three job offers and visited all three companies. Only one organisation had people who looked like her, so she chose to work for them.”

– Academic (USA)

Does your organisation use the following practices in their recruitment process?



However, 60% of organisations are missing a perfect opportunity to ask prospective employees for their views on DE&I, which could be used as a cultural ‘fit’ check to ensure alignment with their organisation’s values. And 70% of companies are also missing the opportunity to mitigate bias by failing to perform blind CV/resume reviews, a process that has been shown to address inherent bias in selection right at the very start of the process (although there is some debate that blind reviews that are based on showcasing talent alone, with no visibility of other important diversity-related variables, are not the panacea to selecting a truly diverse team⁷).



% of respondents, n=113

“A recruitment strategy where a company recruits the best people from the best universities tends to lead to everyone being quite similar and there is a lack of diversity of thought. Finding people from different backgrounds who bring their own unique point of view builds a team that is better at finding better solutions to business problems faster, and they’re more fun to work with.”

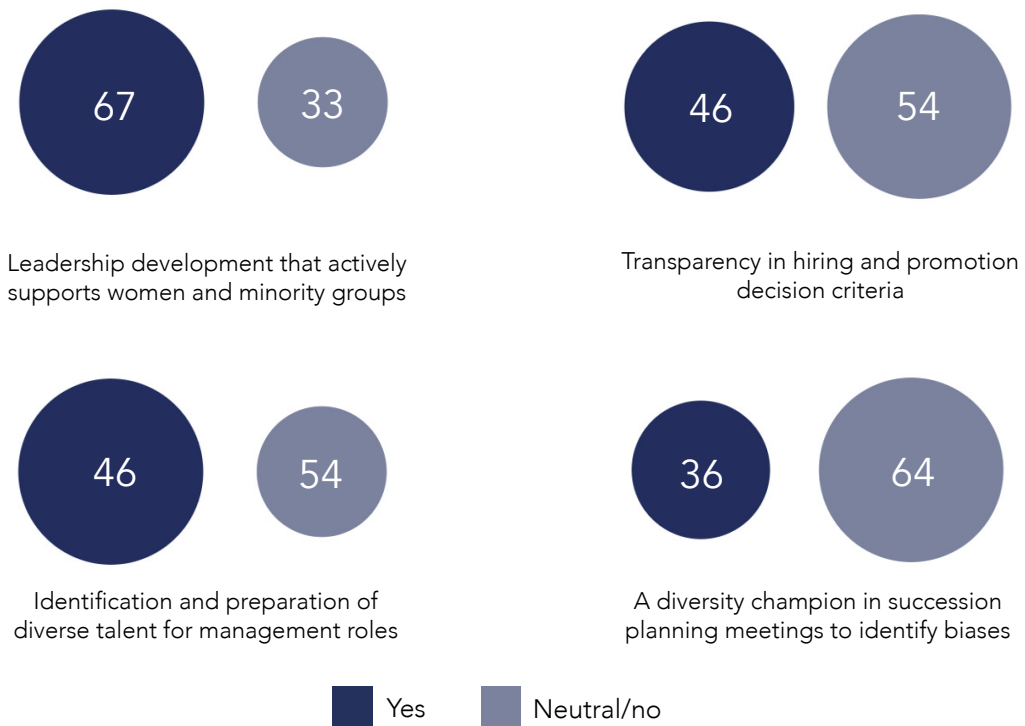
– Supply chain consultant (UK)

The same group of respondents also showed that programmes to attract and support diverse talent from other sources, namely those who have taken a career break and now wish to re-enter the workforce (returnships) and veteran employment schemes, are low in number at 18% and 12% respectively.

Diversity in development

Some organisations’ response to DE&I is to hire diverse talent and to leave it at that. However, if an organisation wants to retain its diverse talent and unleash their full potential, then they also need to support their career progression too. This requires inclusive career progression practices. We asked our experienced supply chain professional respondents about adoption of key career progression practices. The results were mixed.

The positive findings are that two out of three organisations are actively supporting women and minority groups in leadership development and have targeted career progression initiatives. However, less than half of our respondents said that their organisation identifies diverse talent at each site and prepares them for management roles or provides transparency in hiring and promotion decision criteria. Only one in three organisations includes a diversity champion in succession planning meetings to help identify biases. This does not bode well for retaining and advancing diverse new talent.

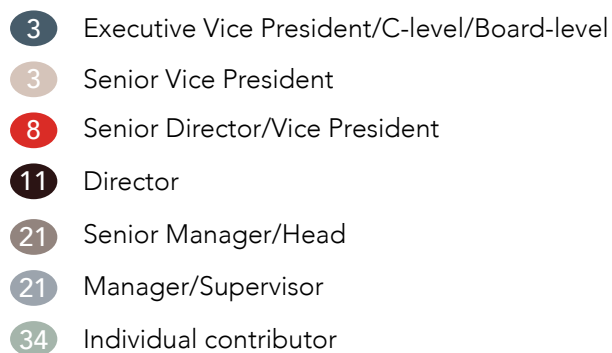


% of respondents, n=178

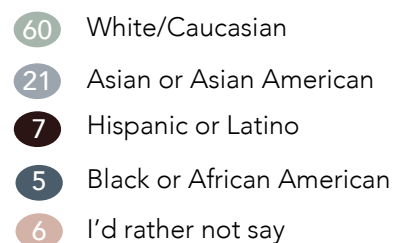
About the survey

Earlier this year, an invitation to complete an online survey was sent out to members of the boom! community and to the wider supply chain profession via LinkedIn. In total, 246 individuals from 31 countries participated in the survey, answering a set of questions based on their length of tenure in the supply chain profession (0-5 years or 6+ years) and whether they are involved in any aspect of the hiring process. The following graphics highlight the key demographics from these survey respondents. Figures represent the percentage of respondents.

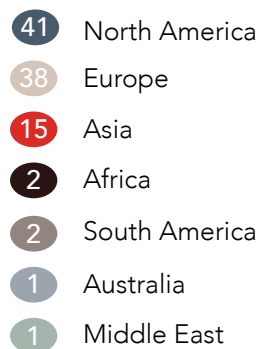
Job level



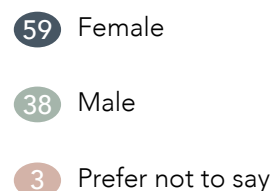
Ethnicity



Location of respondent



Gender



Industry sector

3	Aerospace & defence	1	Fabric & apparel	2	Medical equipment
1	Agriculture & mining	7	Food & beverage	0	Paper & packaging
3	Automotive	9	Healthcare & pharma	12	Professional services
2	Chemicals	13	Hi-tech	9	Retail
1	Construction & engineering	3	Industrial	2	Utilities & Energy
25	Consumer packaged goods	5	Logistics & distribution	2	Other

Company size by annual revenue (USD)

8	Less than \$10 million	17	\$1 billion to less than \$5 billion
5	\$10 million to less than \$50 million	6	\$5 billion to less than \$10 billion
2	\$50 million to less than \$100 million	9	\$10 billion to \$25 billion
5	\$100 million to less than \$250 million	15	\$25 billion USD or above
4	\$250 million to less than \$500 million	25	Don't know / undisclosed
4	\$500 million to less than \$1 billion		

The logo for 'boom!' is located in the top right corner. It consists of the word 'boom!' in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font, set against a solid orange rectangular background.

About boom!

The boom! community was launched in 2019 with a vision to empower women in supply chain for the benefit of all. Our members represent all supply chain and procurement functions and span multiple industries across nearly 50 countries, bringing a rich diversity of experience, thinking and ambition.

Our ultimate goal is an equitable world where there is a level playing field for all those with a desire to flourish in their careers in balance with their personal lives. In that world there will be no need for boom! to exist. Until then it is our mission to help enable women seize the opportunities available to them and to provide guidance to supply chain leaders and their teams as they work to nurture female talent and create equity of opportunity for all.

The boom! community is supported by supply chain leaders from companies such as Adidas, Cargill, Coca-Cola Europacific Partners, Colgate-Palmolive, Diageo, The Estée Lauder Companies, HP Enterprise, Microsoft, MSD, Nomad Foods, PHINIA, Unilever, and many more.

For more information visit www.boomglobalnetwork.com or contact us at hello@boomglobalnetwork.com



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