Young Professionals in Supply Chain

What They Think About

- Their Jobs Today
- The Role of the Supply Chain
- Training and Advancement Opportunities
Supply chain professionals under 30 are happy with their career choice, and the majority are looking forward to moving into leadership positions. They are concerned about pay and benefits and want to see a clear development track in their field and training opportunities.

As part of the third Young Professionals in Supply Chain study, The Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals (CSCMP), Penske Logistics and Korn Ferry surveyed hundreds of young professionals under the age of 30 working in the supply chain to learn more about what they are looking for in a supply chain career, how satisfied they are with their current roles and what they want to see in the future.

Supply Chain Industry Careers

Young professionals are increasingly aware of supply chain roles. “Over the last year and a half, people have become very aware of how you get access to things you need to survive and to enjoy,” said Karyn Troxell, vice president of human resources for Penske Logistics. “It caused people to naturally think about product movement in general.”

Nearly all respondents—99%—agree that the supply chain field is a good career choice, and 95% said they are excited to have a career in the supply chain field.

What’s more, 97% said they would recommend others consider supply chain as a career.

“For the most part, they're happy with the pay, they're excited about supply chain, and they see it as something that is fast and meaningful,” said Kristen McConnell, director of supply chain talent strategy for Land O’Lakes Inc.

Yet, despite most agreeing or strongly agreeing that the supply chain field is a good career choice and that they recommend it, there is mixed agreement about ease of advancement and the ability to secure a good job in the field, shown in Exhibit 1.

EXHIBIT 1: SATISFACTION WITH SUPPLY CHAIN CAREER CHOICES

The supply chain field is a good career choice.

I’m excited to have a career in the supply chain field.

I would recommend others consider supply chain as a career.

Advancement is easy in the supply chain field.

A good job in supply chain is hard to secure.
Overall, respondents are happy with their current employers (see Exhibit 2), and they said they are staying at their current employer due to the work environment-culture or co-workers (60%), development opportunities (60%), and the salary and benefits (53%), see Exhibit 3.
The Right Role

Finding a career within the supply chain often starts with young professionals seeing a job description. A position that matches the job description adds to overall job satisfaction. “From a compliance standpoint, we want to make sure we’re going to be as clear as possible on the day-to-day responsibility so we can candidly and clearly state what type of qualifications we’re looking for,” Troxell said.

Those within the industry said that their job descriptions largely align with their current position, Exhibit 4.

It can be difficult to fit everything into a description and seeing the work environment can help candidates make sure they want to work for a specific organization and in the supply chain. “It is very important for us to bring candidates into the environment and have them walk around to see what it is like and shadow,” Troxell said, adding that there are many aspects of supply chain positions that don’t translate into a job description.

Korn Ferry looks at a success profile for a position and assesses individuals against that profile. “It is having a good job description and then going a layer beyond that to ask who would do the job well and the underlying skills the person has to have,” said Melissa Hadhazy, senior client partner for Korn Ferry.

Brennen Moore, Cisco supply chain global university lead, said Cisco’s university program works closely with hiring managers and their internal stakeholders to determine the ideal skillsets needed, but because the supply chain is changing rapidly, the exact job description can be a moving target. “We do our best to forecast in advance what are the future scopes of work in alignment with our overall workforce strategy,” she said.

Learning agility is important for those in supply chain roles. “We recognize that supply chain roles are evolving so quickly that we don’t necessarily have the perfect profile in place,” Hadhazy said. “Ideal candidates have to have a high agility component. They need to be open to new ideas. They need to be coachable, and they need to grow with the role.”

Troxell said the strongest supply chain professionals typically have specific qualities. “They have hustle. They want to get their hands dirty. They have an entrepreneurial drive,” she said.

High Levels of Job Satisfaction

Roughly 88% of respondents characterized their jobs as good, 80% better than most and 77% as enjoyable.

While these represent the majority of the responses, they have decreased from 2019. Conversely, the percentage of people reporting a negative view of their job increased over 2019 but remained lower than in 2017 (see Exhibit 5.)

Among respondents, 82% said they have worked in a supply chain position previously. As a result, it can be inferred that the industry retains talent reasonably well, with young professionals moving to new positions within the field.

Previous experience in the supply chain lends itself well to advancement opportunities. “In supply chain, you have to have the depth, but you also have to have the breadth,” McConnell said. “If you want to be good at continuous improvement and network design and excel, you need to have done the day-to-day and functional roles so you understand the reality before you can do the theoretical.”

Even if professionals haven’t held operational roles, they need to be aware of what those roles require, especially as they grow in their careers, Troxell said. “The most important thing for supervisors is to know what it is like for people in those positions. They need to know what it is like to be a loader,” she said.
A Sense of Purpose

Since the 2019 study, the primary reasons young professionals are interested in the supply chain industry have changed. Currently, the majority of respondents, 58%, said they chose to pursue a supply chain career due to the impact supply chain roles/the supply chain have in business and their tangible impact on outcomes. This is a significant increase from the 13% who cited this reason in 2019 and the 10% who cited it in 2017.

“Supply chain has become a dinner conversation in peoples' homes. That is getting people interested in degrees in the supply chain, and it has opened their eyes to the tech companies and how they can support supply chains,” Hadhazy said. “People are interested in coming up with more ideas of how to do it better.”

Opportunities within the supply chain can help people feel like they are contributing. “Young professionals want to make an impact, and they want to make an impact now,” McConnell said, adding that there is a greater understanding of what supply chain is. “The joke I’ve always had is I didn’t get into supply chain for the recognition or the money. We’re finally hitting that tipping point where people see it matters.”

The effects of the pandemic and supply constraints have increased the general public’s focus on the supply chain. Those who haven’t considered supply chain as a career path may now have a better understanding of the various roles and opportunities within a supply chain career, Moore said. “Where many before assumed supply chain roles were specific to manufacturing, it’s much more,” she said.

Respondents also said they’re choosing supply chain because of the variety of opportunities and job types (55%) and because it is a challenging, always changing, fast-paced field (48%). The number of respondents entering the industry due to first-hand exposure, 38%, also increased over previous studies, shown in Exhibit 6.

EXHIBIT 5: HOW RESPONDENTS THINK OF THEIR JOB MOST OF THE TIME

EXHIBIT 6: HOW RESPONDENTS BECAME INTERESTED IN A SUPPLY CHAIN CAREER
The study showed the young professionals are thinking of their futures. Several job features appeal to young supply chain professionals. Nearly three-fourths, 74%, ranked competitive pay, 71% listed career advancement opportunities, and 69% listed their involvement in strategy, shown in Exhibit 7. Not far behind was work-life balance (68%), strong team (65%) and leadership (64%).

When asked to rank the perfect position in the supply chain field, respondents ranked optimization, continuous improvement, efficiencies, intelligent movement No. 1 at 84%, followed by distribution network, managing getting things from one place to another efficiently, moving goods from producer-supplier (56%), Exhibit 8.

Respondents also ranked the perfect supply chain field by company type, and more than half—56%—listed a logistics company, followed by manufacturing (52%) and retail/e-commerce (50%). As shown in Exhibit 9, aerospace, healthcare and energy appear to be either not desirable or not as relevant from a supply chain perspective.
Logistics companies provide the opportunity to never sit still, stay busy and develop. “Job security has become so much more of a value, and people are mindful of it,” Troxell said. “This showed us the world still has to happen, and these are the companies that make it happen.”

Supply Chain’s Meaning to Young Professionals

Young professionals show that they understand the role of the supply chain, but how they think about the supply chain is shifting. This year, there was a significant increase in the number of respondents who said the first thing they think of is a distribution network, managing getting things from one place to another efficiently, moving goods from producer-supplier (33%), compared to 10% in 2019. On the other hand, there was a decrease in the number of respondents who think of supply chain as inventory management, inventory transportation or product lifecycle (see Exhibit 10).

EXHIBIT 10: WHAT RESPONDENTS THINK ABOUT WHEN THEY THINK OF SUPPLY CHAIN

- Distribution network, Managing getting things from one place to another efficiently, moving good from producer-supplier
- Product lifecycle, from raw materials to end customer
- Optimization, continuous improvement, efficiencies, intelligent movement
- Logistics, in general
- Business critical, essentiality, strategic business approach, competitive advantage
- Connecting value chain, adding value
- Supply and demand
- Transporting, specific types of transportation modes and-or Warehousing
- Sourcing, procurement
- Relationships (strategic business relationships, customer relationships)
- Manufacturing or producing goods
- Inventory management, inventory transportation
- Other
- Complexity

2019
2021
Opportunities Abound

Young professionals continue to be satisfied with the opportunities a supply chain career affords them. The majority of respondents pointed to promotion opportunities within their companies as a prime example. More than half of respondents—56%—said their companies offer a good opportunity for promotion, 58% said they have a good chance for a promotion, and 67% said their companies offer a fairly good chance for promotion. However, 12% said they see their current position as a dead-end up, up from 7% in 2019 (Exhibit 11.)

EXHIBIT 11: YOUNG PROFESSIONALS SEE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROMOTION

Respondents to this year’s survey are more willing to relocate for a new position than in the past, with 44% saying they would be very willing to relocate for a new opportunity, up from 31% in 2019 but still down from nearly 50% who said in 2017. Roughly one-third—32%—said they are somewhat willing to relocate, down from 40% in 2019, shown in Exhibit 12.

Respondents are mixed on their willingness to extend their daily commute for a better opportunity, see Exhibit 13. Among those surveyed, 29% said they would be very willing to add commuting time to their day for a better job, an increase over the 23% of respondents willing to add commute time in 2019 and 32% of respondents in 2017. However, nearly half—45%—said they are somewhat willing, down from 53% in 2019 and 50% in 2017. Additionally, 23% said they are not very willing to extend their commute, an increase from the 15% reported in 2019 and 2017.
For those seeking new supply chain-related jobs, they are looking for opportunities via social media, such as LinkedIn and Facebook, (68%), online job boards such as Indeed, Monster, CareerBuilder and JobsinLogistics (64%), and directly on company’s websites (48%), shown in Exhibit 14. Young professionals said they found their most recent positions via social media (24%), online job boards (23%), word of mouth through friends or family (20%), see Exhibit 15.

Moore said she is seeing a shift to more recruiting via LinkedIn and social media, particularly as in-person career fairs have limitations due to the pandemic.

In addition to recruiting online, employers said they partner closely with university programs to find young professionals.

When searching for new talent, employers often work with local colleges and universities. “Historically, we have tried to target schools with stronger supply chain programs. We can have individuals who have qualities that are a good match with the company and corporate culture but may not have gone through a supply chain program,” Troxell said, adding that Penske provides training and development opportunities for new hires.
McConnell guest lectures on supply chain planning and control at the University of Minnesota as part of the company’s relationship and recruiting efforts. “I start off asking what everybody’s major is and drawing every single major in by saying how each interacts with supply chain and that we keep everybody together. We make business strategy happen. You’re truly a cross-functional strategic partner,” she said.

Cisco hosted a virtual supply chain national case competition to provide students with an opportunity to enhance and test their supply chain knowledge. “The competition is one of our catalyst events that generates excitement within the organization and creates a buzz and branding opportunity within the universities,” Moore said.

Students presented alternative solutions and strategies to address working end-to-end supply chain challenges. There were seven student teams, and students had six weeks to create their final presentations. “We had one team of non-supply chain students, and one person said, ‘I had no idea that the things I am studying could apply in a supply chain role,’” Moore said. “You do not necessarily have to have a supply chain degree to pursue a supply chain-related role. Having a background in engineering, data science, business, finance, etc., can be applied to various elements of a company’s supply chain.”

### Professional Development Priorities

Development opportunities and salary-benefits increases are the top reasons respondents reported applying for a position at another employer (Exhibit 16).

Young supply chain professionals say they are eager to continue their education on the job.

The majority continue to prefer face-to-face training (Exhibit 17). The majority also prefer active training through mentoring or task-based activities (Exhibit 18). About half said they like a group setting, such as a classroom, cohort, etc. (Exhibit 19).

Cisco has shifted to virtual professional development due to the pandemic but previously had a mix of in-person and virtual learning opportunities. “We have curated training with professors, executive coaches and development experts. There are also some development programs that leaders can be nominated and apply for within Cisco and the supply chain organization,” Moore said. “Each of our hiring managers are asked to create and co-develop a development plan with their university hire as they join, so they can outline their work deliverables/expectations, development opportunities and short-term goals.”

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**EXHIBIT 16: WHY YOUNG PROFESSIONALS SEEK POSITIONS AT ANOTHER EMPLOYER**

- Development opportunities
- Salary-benefits increase
- Finishing school, graduated
- Different-more interesting type of work
- Better chance of advancement
- Searching for a job
- Better work environment
- Better manager-management
- Unemployed
- Better location
- More responsibility
- Different work schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>5%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>15%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>25%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development opportunities</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salary-benefits increase</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finishing school, graduated</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different-more interesting type of work</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better chance of advancement</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching for a job</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better work environment</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better manager-management</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>Better location</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>More responsibility</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>Different work schedule</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXHIBIT 17: YOUNG PROFESSIONALS PREFER FACE-TO-FACE TRAININGS
THINK FOR A MOMENT ABOUT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (THAT IS, OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP THE SKILLS NECESSARY TO SUCCEED AT YOUR PRESENT JOB OR PREPARE FOR ANOTHER JOB). DRAG THE MARKER TO THE PLACE ON THE LINE THAT BEST REPRESENTS HOW YOU WOULD PREFER TO RECEIVE THIS KIND OF LEARNING.

EXHIBIT 18: HOW YOUNG PROFESSIONALS WANT TRAINING DELIVERED
HOW WOULD YOU PREFER THE TRAINING IS DELIVERED?

EXHIBIT 19: HOW YOUNG PROFESSIONALS WANT DEVELOPMENT STRUCTURED
HOW WOULD YOU PREFER THE DEVELOPMENT BE STRUCTURED?
Well Compensated

When examining pay, young professionals generally remain satisfied with the compensation they receive, with 86% saying they earn enough to live on, 75% saying they are comfortable, and 48% saying they are well paid. However, the number reporting they are underpaid increased to 35%, up from 28% in 2019 but still down from 40% reported in 2017 (Exhibit 20).

For young professionals, pay and benefits that are competitive with other local companies is the most important factor in an employment opportunity, followed by work/life balance and a positive working relationship with a manager, shown in Exhibit 21.

EXHIBIT 20: YOUNG PROFESSIONALS ARE SATISFIED WITH THEIR PRESENT PAY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Well paid</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough to live</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underpaid</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barely live on</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXHIBIT 21: RESPONDENTS’ PRIORITIES IN EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pay and benefits that are competitive with other local companies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Positive working relationship with manager</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A work/life balance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A clear development track in my career field</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Freedom in decision making</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Training opportunities to develop the skills to succeed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Co-workers with whom I enjoy working</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>High importance placed on the tasks I am given</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Feedback about my performance on the job</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Variety of skills used on the job</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Corporate alignment to my values</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Travel opportunities</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The best supplies and equipment to do my job</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Environmental impact of company</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Closely related to my education</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Supervisors can play a critical role in overall job satisfaction. When asked about the kind of supervision they receive on the job, respondents had positive feedback, saying supervisors know the job well (84%), are up-to-date (78%) and praise good work (78%).

“Many people leave a job not because of the job but because of the leader. We have a team within our central operations focused on investing in the development and upskilling of our supply chain leaders,” Moore said.

Professional development is crucial to ensure supervisors have the skills necessary to lead. “You get promoted based on your hard skills, not off of your soft skills. Yet, when you’re promoted, you need to use more soft skills,” Hadhazy said. “Coaching has to take place formally or informally for those skills to fill out and progress.”

Penske offers several leadership development programs both for new leaders and for those who have been promoted from within and are now managing peers. “The on-the-job development our associates are able to experience is very broad,” Troxell said.

Overall, young professionals reported that the majority of people they work with are responsible (87%) and smart (85%). A much smaller number called those they interact with in connection with work lazy (13%) or boring (12%).

Vital Statistics

The typical young professional responding to the 2021 survey has worked in the industry for just over 3.23 years, a decrease from the 4.2 years reported in 2019, and has a bachelor’s degree, with the majority majoring in supply chain management, supply chain analytics, logistics, operations (shown in Exhibit 22 and 23). Additionally, 80% of respondents said their educational degree prepared them for the work they do today.
Survey respondents are nearly evenly split between men and women (Exhibit 24).

Most respondents work in manufacturing, followed by transportation and warehousing, and third- and fourth-party logistics providers. There was a 6% increase in respondents reporting work in the professional services/consultancy industry compared to 2019. However, there was a significant decrease in the number of respondents reporting work in the 3PL/4PL industries and the merchandising/retail trade industries. (see Exhibit 25). This could point to increased professionalization of the supply chain sector.

A Dynamic Future

Overall, young supply chain professionals show a great understanding of the industry as well as possibilities for advancement. They are exhibiting a greater appreciation for the effect the supply chain has not only on their companies but also on the environment, communities and quality of life.

Hadhazy said supply chain roles are being elevated within organizations, which is expected to bring more attention to the roles. “We’re seeing a trend to more and more supply chain officers with unique roles in leadership committees. The succession of supply chain folks to CEO is growing,” she said.

Innovation is also expected to increase, and logistics positions will demand decision-making and creativity. “We as an industry are anything but stagnant. We’re going to be in continuous disruption,” McConnell said. “We’re looking for people who are agile and resilient and can really see the connection between the end-to-end supply chain.”
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