

# 2025 ISM Supply Chain Career Guide

An introductory guide for students and emerging professionals  
as they enter the supply management profession.





## Introduction

We hope you find the information within the pages of the 2025 Supply Chain Career Guide a helpful resource. It contains recent articles from *Inside Supply Management*® magazine, ISM's member publication, that may assist students and emerging professionals who are embarking on a career within the supply management profession.

For more than a century, Institute for Supply Management® (ISM®) has impacted the supply chain management and purchasing profession through best-in-class education, certification, leadership development and research. Thousands have received ISM's coveted certifications including the gold-standard Certified Professional in Supply Management® (CPSM®) as well as the Certified Professional in Supplier Diversity® (CPSD®) and Associate Professional in Supply Management® (APSM®) designations.

ISM continuously evolves as the profession evolves and helps lead and advance the profession of supply management. For more information, visit us at [ismworld.org](https://ismworld.org).

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**Mike McCaig**

Chief Procurement Officer  
ATI (Allegheny Technologies Incorporated)

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*The Associate Professional in Supply Management (certification) was made known to me recently, and I think there's going to be a huge value in this certification for college and university students. For these students to potentially get a certification would be very helpful if they want to enter this field, and it would be something great for them to put on a resume, which might then interest companies in looking at them during a job search.*

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# Mentorship Packs a Powerful Punch



andres/Getty Images Plus

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In today's complex and ever-evolving supply management landscape, cultivating and retaining top talent is not only a strategic advantage, but also an absolute necessity. The ability to navigate intricate supply chains, anticipate disruptions and drive sustainable growth requires a workforce that is not only skilled but also adaptable, innovative and continuously growing.

Mentorship is a cornerstone in this endeavor; it offers a powerful and proven pathway for nurturing future leaders and driving organizational success.

## Benefits of Mentorship

For mentees, the advantages are clear: They gain access to their mentor's exper-

tise and experience, receive constructive feedback and guidance, develop increased self-awareness and confidence, expand their professional network, and accelerate their career development.

Mentors also reap rewards, including (1) a renewed sense of purpose, (2) an opportunity to shape future leaders, (3) fresh perspectives and insights, (4) leadership skill building and (5) recognition and appreciation. Most mentors would agree that mentorship is equally a learning experience for them, as both parties have value insights and lessons to share.

Ultimately, the organization as a whole thrives through improved employee engagement and retention, increased productivity and performance, a stronger leadership pipeline,

an enhanced organizational culture, and a competitive advantage in the marketplace. According to a study by research and consulting firm Gartner, mentees are promoted five times more often, experience higher retention rates and are more likely to receive salary increases.

## Building a Robust Mentoring Program

A robust mentoring program requires establishing clear objectives and understanding the multitude of benefits it offers. Effective programs foster a sense of belonging and loyalty, leading to increased employee engagement and reduced turnover. Research shows engaged employees are more productive, profitable and customer-focused, making mentorship a valuable tool for enhancing organizational performance.

Mentorship also plays a critical role in succession planning by identifying and nurturing high-potential employees. It builds a pipeline of future leaders, ensuring the organization's continued success.

Additionally, mentoring creates a strong professional network within the organization, fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing and a sense of community.

## Tailoring Mentorship to Specific Needs

Mentorship is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. Recognizing that mentors and mentees have unique journeys and aspirations, a spectrum of mentorship approaches has emerged.

**Traditional one-on-one mentoring.** This time-tested format fosters a close and enduring bond between a mentor and mentee. The mentor, drawing from experience, provides personalized guidance, acting as a sounding board, confidante and champion for the mentee's growth.

**Distance mentoring.** The digital age has ushered in a new era of

connection, enabling mentorship across vast distances. Through virtual platforms, mentors and mentees can bridge geographical gaps and forge meaningful relationships that transcend location.

**Group mentoring.** The power of collective learning comes alive in group mentoring. A single mentor guides a small cohort of mentees, fostering a sense of community and shared experience. Mentees benefit from the diverse perspectives and insights of their peers while receiving focused guidance from the mentor.

**Peer-based mentoring.** A refreshing approach to mentorship, this model pairs individuals with similar experience levels, creating a platform for mutual support and growth. It's a testament to the power of shared learning and the value of exchanging knowledge and insights among colleagues.

**Situational mentoring.** In the face of specific challenges or skill development needs, situational mentoring offers timely and relevant support. Mentees can seek guidance from mentors with expertise directly applicable to their current circumstances, enabling them to navigate hurdles and seize opportunities effectively.

**Developmental/career mentoring.** With an eye on the future, this model focuses on the mentee's long-term career aspirations. The mentor acts as a strategic adviser, helping the mentee chart a path for success and providing valuable insights and guidance at critical junctures.

Each of these mentorship approaches brings unique value to the table, offering a tailored experience that supports individual growth and fosters a culture of continuous learning. By embracing a spectrum of mentorship styles, organizations create an inclusive environment where everyone can find the support that is needed to thrive.

## A Mentorship Experience

*In Bridging Differences for Better Mento-*

*ring: Lean Forward, Learn, Leverage*, authors Lisa Z. Fain and Lois J. Zachary state, "Mentoring is not about making people into copies of yourself. It's about helping them become the best version of themselves."

One of my mentoring experiences was working with a driven, entry-level procurement team member — and witnessing her transformative journey. Recognizing her potential, I invested time and effort in cultivating her foundational skills in procurement and contract management.

Together, we dedicated countless after-hours sessions to honing her presentation skills, conducting thorough research for procurement solutions, mastering professional attire, formulating compelling counterarguments for negotiations, developing comprehensive scopes and orchestrating successful solicitation events.

Witnessing her achievements underscored the transformative power of mentorship in helping mentees become the best versions of themselves. This experience reaffirmed my belief in the profound impact of mentorship in shaping careers, empowering individuals and fostering a culture of continuous learning and development.

As organizations strive to achieve their strategic objectives, investing in mentorship programs is more than a good idea — it's a strategic imperative. It's about empowering individuals to reach their full potential, driving organizational success and creating a legacy of excellence for years to come.

Whether you are a seasoned professional looking to give back or an aspiring leader seeking guidance, mentorship offers a transformative journey of growth and development. Remember, the power of mentorship lies in its ability to connect, inspire and empower. It is a journey of shared learning, growth and success. Embrace it — and watch your organization and its people flourish. **ISM**

# Roles of the Future Combine Soft Skills, Tech and More



Just\_Super/Getty Images Plus

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**Sue Doerfler**  
is Senior Writer for  
*Inside Supply Management®*.

Meet the representative supply chain worker of the future: Andi. Not only is she a technology whiz, but she also has domain and business skills.

To be more specific, Andi understands how supply chains and operations work, says Lauren Acoba, who conceived the persona. She has business acumen and can lead with empathy. And her digital knowledge? “As a persona, Andi can be a citizen, translator or wizard in terms of her level of digital skills,” says Acoba, vice president of research at London-based supply chain intelligence solutions provider Zero100.

“In my conversations with leaders, they want to know, ‘How do we build more Andis? How do we find more Andis?’ ” she says.

To become the supply chain persona of the future in an ever-evolving landscape, practitioners must upskill their existing digital and organizational talents, develop new competencies, and be agile enough to adapt to whatever lies ahead.

## Why Soft Skills?

Artificial intelligence (AI) and advanced technologies are dominating today’s supply management conversations — and they will in the future, too. Research from Zero100 found a growing gap between organizations’ digital transformation goals and the skills required to achieve them. Therefore, the impact of technology, no matter how advanced, is limited if the workforce lacks the skills to leverage it, accord



ing to Zero100's *Meet the Supply Chain Worker of the Future* report.

Supply chain product manager role descriptions are seven times more likely to require generative AI skills compared to traditional roles, the report states. It also notes that hiring for such roles increased more than 50 percent from the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2022 to Q4 2023.

In addition, the report discusses the skill sets of the future and cites what it calls the "new-collar" workforce with three fundamental skills: business acumen, domain and digital. The rise in the new-collar workforce "emphasizes the need for continuous learning and adaptability in a tech-driven environment," Zero100 researchers noted.


Despite the drive to implement ever greater digital capabilities, organizations still have a need for soft skills. Communicating and building relationships with internal and external stakeholders — team members, suppliers, investors and the like — will be as crucial as ever to business success.

However, for many incoming workers, these are learned skills. The coronavirus pandemic spurred the remote workplace, and now, with return-to-office mandates at many organizations, a younger generation is entering the workforce with little to no networking experience, Acoba says. "The idea that there is a drive to digital doesn't mean that the need to lead with empathy goes away; in fact, it gets much larger as the role changes," she says.


"Supply chain management is a physical sport," she notes. Even data scientists must be players: Companies with technically advanced teams must upskill their data scientists on the business side of the equation, she says. This can mean visiting the factory floor and talking with the plant manager, supervisors and even workers. Supplement the data you have collected with real-life examples. "Learn how to story tell with your data," Acoba says.

## Defining the Andi Role

Detailing the characteristics of the role may mean taking organizational objectives and working backward to determine the skills necessary to achieve them. For example, Acoba says, "We think of automation as a portfolio. It doesn't mean that there aren't humans involved. In fact, quite the opposite. It's more about thinking of our operations at scale, understanding the jobs that need to be done — the products we deliver in



Consider AI as  
a teammate, not just  
a tool: How does  
that shift the role of  
the worker?



supply chain — and working back from what makes sense for a machine to do and what makes sense for a human to do."

It's developing a framework around tasks that should be (1) augmented by AI, (2) led by an AI agent and (3) fully autonomous, Acoba says. Then, an organization can determine how roles need to change.

"For example, if I'm a category manager in sourcing, it's finding out how my role changes if I'm using an AI agent to negotiate my long-tail suppliers or to help me prepare for a negotiation with a strategic supplier," she says. "It's determining how sourcing as a discipline is changing and how it interacts with the other elements of the ecosystem."

Defining the role could start with prioritizing what should be automated or digitally augmented for the organization to drive its desired value. Consider AI as a teammate, not just a tool: How does that shift the role of the worker?

## What Will Future Andi Roles Entail?

Acoba envisions execution-based supply chain roles shifting from humans to AI agents or robotic process automation. "Humans will be unleashed to do higher order work," she says. "That lets us be more creative, more innovative and more connected in supply chain. It will become more about how to diagnose and monitor to ensure the right questions are asked of the technology, and that data is accurate and relevant to current business needs."

Humans are always innovating, Acoba says, so technology will always change. "This means there will likely always be work to do that isn't fully optimized," she says. "It's more about understanding the shifts and evolution of skills — what's in decline and what's on the rise."

Still, supply chain expertise will never go away. "We must be careful we don't hamstring ourselves by not training and coaching on the fundamentals of supply chain management and how it works," Acoba says. "Part of that is seeing connections upstream and downstream, rotating through different roles, being side by side with the leader, and having diversity of experience, skill levels and abilities on your team."

That's especially important, she adds, as organizations digitize more — and machines are given more autonomy. **ISM**

# Collaboration Goes Beyond Communication



miniseries/Stock/Getty Images

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Supply Management*®.

As the word “collaboration” indicates, for a relationship to be successful, both parties must address other’s needs, wants, ideas and more.

It’s both sides figuring out the next steps together, says Kevin Frechette, co-founder and CEO of Fairmarkit, a Boston-based autonomous sourcing platform provider. “Intellectually, you need to make a commitment that you’re willing to listen and change,” adds Randall Moore, CPO at Boston University (BU). “That is one of the table stakes to call yourself a collaborator.”

Moore and Frechette know about collaborating: For the last six years, BU’s Procure to Pay organization and Fairmarkit have been strategic partners, through growth as well as disruption. Their story can offer insights to

organizations looking to establish stronger partnerships.

## Taking the First Step

It is obvious that the coronavirus pandemic era demonstrated the importance of collaborating with suppliers to assure supply.

“Supply chain collaboration is key to building an agile and responsive supply chain that can withstand unforeseen challenges,” a Deloitte article states. “By working together, supply chain partners can gain visibility into each other’s networks; identify, manage, and mitigate risks proactively; develop contingency plans; and innovate to adapt to changing market conditions.”

When Moore joined BU after working in



procurement strategy consulting, he set out to reorganize the sourcing and procurement organization, with the goal of creating greater effectiveness and innovation.

He attended an Institute for Supply Management® (ISM®) chapter meeting featuring presentation by a Boston startup on a tail spend management tool that allowed for quick bid solicitation for goods and services that aren't necessarily in a catalog or under contract.

"I don't even think he had a name for it then," he says of Frechette and Fairmarkit. "I was instantly intrigued. We had Kevin and his founders in for conversations and tried it out. We piloted a few quotations." The university became one of Fairmarkit's first customers. "We got off to a great start. Everyone on our sourcing team embraced it, and we pushed the platform out to the BU community as quickly as we could," Moore says.

## Defining Collaboration

Collaboration means understanding the client's customers. It means tailoring a product or service to fit the needs.

Fairmarkit learned quickly that the higher education space is different from the private sector, Frechette says. "In education, you have to provide something that's simple to use from an end-user standpoint," he says. "BU pushed us on that in a partnership way very strongly. It can't just be something for procurement, in procurement language. It needs to be simple for the end user across the entire university."

Collaboration means innovation. When generative artificial intelligence (gen AI) emerged as a new technology, it added another dimension to the collaborative experience. "How do we keep it simple but delight the user and add value as we do it? How can gen AI be used in tangible ways?" Frechette says.

"That's a cool collaboration we've had with the BU team as well."

Collaboration means listening. Listening assumes a high level of interest, attentiveness and understanding. It demonstrates thoughtfulness and a willingness to work together. And collaboration is a give-and-take.



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— **RANDALL MOORE**  
Boston University



BU has been thorough when explaining the problem it's looking to solve or the opportunity it wants to address, Frechette says: "We would come back with two or three different ways to approach the situation, as

well as other ways the solution could be used." The result was a productive exchange of feedback and ideas.

## In Sickness and in Health

Collaboration is critical during good as well as challenging times. In March 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, BU, like most universities, informed its students not to return to campus; until further notice, classes would be held online.

"It was a challenging time for us," Moore says. The university faced financial pressures and needed to find innovative ways to manage costs while maintaining essential operations. Moore connected with Frechette to discuss temporarily restructuring their agreement to adapt to the evolving circumstances.

"Kevin gave us a way to continue the relationship," Moore says. "Not many suppliers would be willing to even have a conversation with you about that because of the existing contract. But Fairmarkit found a way."

Also, collaboration is not just between company and supplier. When it happens internally and with other stakeholders, the supplier relationship can strengthen.

All too often, Frechette says, organizations aren't willing to take a chance or change the status quo. "They're not going to shake the boat to say, 'How do we become best in class?'" he says. That creates a culture that does not embrace change or collaboration.

But leaders who look for change collaborate better. "Moore is constantly looking for what's next and is willing to try new things and asking, 'How do we keep innovating?' and then, 'How do we pull in the rest of the university?'" Frechette says. "It has felt like BU is on our team. You don't get that a lot, where the client actually cares about the growth of your company." **ISM**

# Switching on Your Leadership Radar



What's on your leadership radar?

This is also described as self-awareness and social awareness, which are at the core of emotional intelligence (EQ). All of this is critical to understand what impact you are having as a leader.

### Your Internal Leadership Radar

When you switch on your internal leadership radar, you become aware of things like how you feel, what you're thinking, your values, your reactions, and what energizes, stresses and motivates you.

For example, if you are stressed or frustrated and don't know it, you aren't able to adjust your behavior, which could negatively impact your surroundings. On the other hand, if you are more aware of your stress and frustration, you can take greater control of your state of mind and how that reflects outward.

By taking control of your own thoughts, feelings, actions and behaviors, your impact on others can become what you want it to be. Do you want your impact to be inspiring, energizing, thought-provoking, collaborative,

enlightening, daring or different? Whatever impact you're going for, engage and take control of your inner world first.

### Your External Leadership Radar

To switch on your external leadership radar, you need to observe, listen and explore the world around you to better understand the environment, situations, people, moods, interests and political/social landscape. It's about tuning into the world around you. Your leadership radar needs to be operational all the time.

# last word on leadership

What's on your external leadership radar? What's going on around you? What do you need to be aware of?

Once your radar is on, you need to understand the system you're in. In systems thinking, there are two main considerations: the internal system of the organization and the external system, which is everything outside the organization that touches it in some way.

We would add a third system: the "inner system" of yourself.

When interlinked, these three systems show the complete picture of your ripple effect as a leader. By understanding each system, you can consciously choose how to behave, act and communicate to influence and achieve the strategic aim of the organization. You become more intentional about the impact you want to have.

## Radar Settings and Their Impacts

When your radar is on, the ripple effect you create is more impactful.

Impact happens on a one-to-one basis with individuals, and on a one-to-many basis with teams and groups.

Negative impact, for example, may be as simple as checking emails on your phone when in a one-to-one situation. How do you think that makes the other person feel? What impact are you having on them? Will they want to go that extra mile for you? And who are they meeting next? How might they affect that person?

Also, imagine that you're presenting to a room full of people, handing out awards and getting the recipients' names wrong. Your personal brand will be negatively affected. People will feel that they are not important enough to be remembered, or that you didn't care enough to pay attention to the details.

By taking  
control of your  
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And because people tend to remember those situations, you will now have to work harder to reclaim some lost credibility and achieve the impact you want.

Positive impact can be as simple as saying thanks to someone who helped. It doesn't matter how small or large, just taking the time to stop and say thanks can have a huge impact on people. In the busy world that we live in, we can easily forget this important and impactful effort.

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What's on your leadership radar? Is it switched on, enabling you to fully understand what's going on around you, as well as how you need to lead and respond to create long-term, sustainable results? You have a strategy for business, so why not have a strategy for impact? **ISM**

### LISTEN FOR MORE Last Word on Leadership Duo on 'Unfiltered'

To hear Mandy Flint and Elisabet Vinberg Hearn discuss the Six Superchargers™ for leadership, check out their appearance on Institute for Supply Management's podcast, "Supply Chain — Unfiltered." The episode is available at [ismworld.org/podcast](http://ismworld.org/podcast) or at popular podcast platforms.



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