



# Wesco & ISM: A Learning Mindset



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Wesco builds, connects, powers and protects the world. A leading provider of business-to-business distribution, logistics services and supply chain solutions, Wesco helps businesses run smoothly. Having recently celebrated its 100th anniversary, the company has a history of delivering ingenuity and expertise.

Through the efforts of approximately 18,000 employees, Wesco offers nearly 1.5 million products in over 50 countries to 140,000 customers. Wesco is a trusted partner for many businesses and organizations around the world. The company's commitment to customer service and innovative solutions is evident in its work.

An Institute of Supply Management® (ISM®) Corporate Program member since 2019, Wesco operates in three primary business units: Electrical and Electronic Solutions, Communications and Security Solutions, and Utility and Broadband

Solutions. The ISM Corporate Program has afforded Wesco employees in supply management — and other functions — valuable education and certification opportunities. This membership has enabled the company to (1) develop and enhance skill sets, (2) create a culture of learning and collaboration, (3) embrace the value of supplier diversity, and (4) retain and attract talent.

### Executive Profile

Hemant Porwal, MBA, CPSM is the Executive Vice President, Supply Chain & Operations at Wesco and serves on the ISM Board of Directors. Porwal began his career with PepsiCo, working in information technology (IT), quality, operations and procurement before moving into finance. In 2011, he moved to Sears as the Chief Procurement Officer (CPO) for about four years before joining Wesco in 2015 as the Vice President of Global

Supply. When Wesco merged with Anixter a few years later, Porwal was named Executive Vice President of Supply Chain Operations of the merged companies. “There are 5,000 people that are part of supply chain and operations that are part of my team,” he says. The desire to develop a learning culture was a catalyst for engaging his supply chain team with ISM’s Corporate Program.

## Committing to Employee Development

In today’s business world, ensuring your team has the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed is more important than ever. One way to do this is by providing them with access to training and resources through corporate memberships like ISM.

Porwal was motivated to choose the ISM Corporate Program membership because it quickened the certification process for his team members — and help them grow professionally. He states, “I wanted to remove any barriers that might prevent them from being able to get their Certified Professional in Supply Management® (CPSM®). We also reimburse employees for their exam fees.”

Porwal knows the amount of effort necessary to earn a CPSM and the commitment those who pursue the certification are willing to make in their career. Porwal states his most significant career accomplishment to date is helping more than 20 people, including himself, earn CPSM certification through ISM in less than a year.

When his team at Sears set out to earn the CPSM certification, it didn’t anticipate the positive impact on camaraderie and team building. Porwal was adamant about meeting regularly to review chapters, take tests and celebrate success. The process took nearly a year but ultimately led to Porwal receiving his certification on Thanksgiving Day 2013. While the working environment and landscape have changed drastically since then, Porwal’s commitment to employee development is unchanged. He believes that providing quality training opportunities is key to employee retention. Creating that sense of accountability and community among employees in today’s fast-paced and ever-changing world can be difficult — but not impossible.

## Creating a Strong Foundation

When it comes to investing in the growth of his team, Porwal believes in taking a long-term view. Rather than seeing employees as a short-term expense, he sees them as essential to the company’s future success. By investing in their education and development, he is helping create a return that the company

will benefit from for years. Although some employees may depart after receiving training, Porwal believes it is worth the investment. “I believe a learning culture, like a rising tide, will lift all boats,” he says.

He sees training as an investment in the future of not only the company, but also the employees. Porwal says, “I’m doing all I can to help my kids grow and to be contributing members of society, so that someday they can fly from the nest and be successful on their own. Why would I treat my team differently?”

While he would love to see certifications available for other areas of supply chain, Porwal believes the CPSM is the “crown jewel” — where recipients stand out from other professionals.

On his team members pursuing CPSM Certification, Porwal says, “This allows me to invest or target my time to their growth and development. If you are committed to your career, I’m also going to do my fair share to help you grow in your career.”

While pursuing his MBA degree and supply management certifications, Porwal was already working full time and raising a family, and he knew continuing his education would require considerable time and effort. While he recognizes that not everyone is in a position to continue their education, he believes that the academic rigor is essential to the value. Without the difficult coursework — and the challenge of completing it — he believes the degree and certifications would be meaningless.

“If somebody just gave me my MBA, I wouldn’t value it as much, and it’s the same thing for CPSM and CPD (Certified Professional In Supplier Diversity). If it didn’t require a level of rigor, everyone would say they have one too,” he says.

## A Learning Culture

Being a top-notch procurement professional in today’s business world requires more than just a basic understanding of contracts and sourcing. With the advent of electronic procurement tools — or Procurement 2.0 — has arrived. These tools provide a new level of transparency, accountability, and previously unattainable efficiencies.

“Electronic procurement, understanding of source to pay, understanding of contracts, leveraging contract management modules, your ability to be able to run an RFP, then run a reverse auction if you needed to — all of those capabilities is what makes procurement professionals world-class, he says.

“I wanted my team  
to become world-class  
supply chain leaders.  
I wanted to look at some  
capstone certification  
or training that would  
give them that sense,  
not just internally, but  
externally.”

"This drives a different level of efficiency, a different level of accountability, a different level of transparency and allows for risk mitigation."

Helping professionals reach their full potential requires access to theoretical knowledge and exposure to cutting-edge tools. With the right mix of understanding and experience, he believes, anyone can become a world-class procurement professional. "I wanted to build a learning culture and learning mindset with my team," he says. "I've earned other certifications along the way for artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) and spent weekends and nights studying."

Porwal continues to set the example of a lifetime learner. He recently completed studying for his Certified Professional in Supplier Diversity® (CPSD™), took and passed the exam. "I would love for more people to earn their certification," he says.

Porwal believes keeping an open mind is critical for leaders, employees, and organizations to connect the dots. Having realized the value of ISM content, Porwal has offered ISM membership to sales employees, since most do business with procurement professionals. He felt this would provide a deeper understanding of supply chain and insights into the latest trends and developments in the procurement world.

"I've also offered ISM membership to our salespeople. Most of our sales team sell to procurement professionals," he says. "The ability to help people understand what is important to a procurement professional to create a win-win."

### Investing in Talent

Companies striving to remain competitive in retaining and attracting top talent must invest in talent by offering continuing education and professional development opportunities. It also means being open to new ideas and ways of doing things. That's where ISM comes in.

ISM offers certification programs to help employees stay ahead of the curve. Moreover, ISM Corporate Program membership provides access to a vast knowledge base and a network of like-minded professionals. The membership ROI pays for itself in terms of the talent your company retains, the training and onboarding costs avoided, and the productivity gained from having a more engaged and knowledgeable workforce. In today's ever-changing business environment, that's a priceless resource.

"If you can keep your talent, the cost to train, and onboard, and the productivity you lose puts the cost of attrition well over \$50,000," Porwal says. "That pays for your membership if you can lower the attrition rate."

Porwal says that, during team interviews, members were optimistic about Wesco's investment in training, development, and certifications while highlighting the company's use of

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world-class technology to its advantage. Porwal believes this employee feedback shows that investing in employees' careers not only aids retention but also attracts and keeps top talent.

### Certifications

By offering employees a chance to improve their skills, companies are rewarded by keeping them on the team and reaping the benefits of their loyalty and expertise. It's a sound investment. Porwal says that during his career, he's seen situations where executives worried certified talent would depart. He's seen the opposite happen: Talent stayed and learned, and the company continued to hire good people.

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Porwal believes earning his CPSM Certification helped build team camaraderie. Having each leader complete the certification while leading a group from a different department showed that everyone was committed to the company's success, and each other's individual development. "I was in the trenches with them, and it was a great experience," he says. "We all learned so much and came out of it as a stronger team."

In today's business world, more companies are focused on supplier diversity. Several factors drive this trend, including the desire to build relationships with a broader range of suppliers, the need to tap into new sources of innovation, and the realization that failing to grow and change can lead to obsolescence.

"Every company, if they are not, should be focused on supplier diversity," Porwal says. "I've been around supplier diversity throughout my career and helped launch it here at Wesco. We have tripled the size of the supplier diversity team in the past two years."

In today's rapidly changing business landscape, companies that embrace supplier diversity are better positioned for success, through the new ideas and innovations generated from working with a wide range of suppliers. And by building solid relationships with these suppliers, companies can create long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships.

Building a world-class supply chain team requires a commitment to excellence. It starts with attracting and retaining top talent. Investing in people through ISM Corporate Program membership is one way Wesco maintains its position as a leader in the supply chain industry.

By setting an example of lifetime learning — and using ISM resources to facilitate such opportunities for his team — Porwal has developed an authentic learning culture, allowing Wesco to build a world-class supply chain team, retain talent, and reap the benefits of their loyalty and expertise.

### Key Takeaways

- 1) ISM's Corporate Program membership helps organizations retain and attract top talent by offering access to training resources such as the CPSM® and CPSD™ certifications. Both certifications add value for employers and help supply management professionals to advance their careers.
- 2) Investing in employees' careers not only aids retention, but also attracts and keeps top talent.
- 3) Supply chain professionals need to have a wide array of skill sets and be knowledgeable in a multitude of areas, requiring agility, collaboration, and a learning mindset.
- 4) Supplier diversity is an essential trend in today's business landscape, and companies that embrace it can gain access to new ideas and innovations.
- 5) Creating a learning culture requires leadership support, thus eliminating barriers that hinder individuals' access to high-quality training options.

### About ISM's Corporate Program

As a nonprofit organization, Institute for Supply Management's (ISM®) mission is to work with companies to advance the practice of supply management. With more than 100 years of experience, ISM offers best-in-class education and content to further develop teams and their leaders. Our Corporate Program is specifically designed to help organizations develop and retain their talent by giving them to the gold standard in education, professional certification, leadership development and research. We help organizations, like yours, to identify your team's skill gaps and enable its strengths so that you can align educational needs to your priorities and desired outcomes. As your partner, we want to help ensure your team remains your greatest competitive advantage.

**Interested in learning more about ISM and how to partner with us? Contact us: [Corplnfo@ismworld.org](mailto:Corplnfo@ismworld.org) or call +1 480.752.6276, opt. 9.**