SUPPLY CHAIN CAREER HACKS

Supply chain management professors and practitioners share advice and strategies for leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to boost your skill set and supercharge your career trajectory.

AI IN SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT: MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU

Remember AI is a tool and a methodology. Those who utilize it correctly will benefit from enhanced decision making and speed. The risk is not understanding how to use the tool correctly or worse, entrusting this technology to produce solutions that are not verified adequately. Like any new tool, AI will be most effectively utilized by those who get training.

If you plan to be a programmer or heavy contributor to the development and utilization of AI in the workplace then we would recommend that you get professional training to do so. If on the other hand, your intent is to be a user of AI-enhanced processes, you must think of AI as a new tool just as the calculator and the computer were once integrated in society in previous generations.

–David Fisher
Executive Director, Transportation & Supply Chain Institute, University College | University of Denver

First, get familiar with AI basics, machine learning, and data analytics. Embrace the data deluge and think strategically, not just tactically. Lastly, network, network, network. It's important to talk with and learn from tech-savvy folks in the industry such as AI developers, data scientists, and other forward-thinking carriers. Stay ahead of the curve as AI is constantly evolving.

–Lesley Veldstra Killingsworth
NMFTA Chairperson, Vice President of Pricing and Market Strategy, Polaris Transportation Group

Be open-minded. We are in the early stages of determining all the applications of AI in supply chain management. Recognize that it can have a role in virtually any problem that must be solved repeatedly. It's also important to stay abreast of each new application.

–Dan Singer
Vice President, Dedicated Operations, Averitt

Foster a collaborative approach to AI implementation and involve cross-functional teams and stakeholders. This can facilitate seamless integration and maximize the benefits of AI across the supply chain. By embracing AI with a combination of technical expertise, adaptability, and collaborative spirit, supply chain professionals can then position themselves for success.

–Christine Barnhart
Chief Marketing and Industry Officer, Nulogy

Identify and understand gaps AI can't fill. This means that while AI is invaluable when it comes to getting a tailored approach to data (among many other benefits), supply chain managers should be the strategic, big-picture, and nuanced thinking that AI may not yet recognize in the process.

–Heather Hoover-Salomon
CEO, uShip

AI should be a tool for decision-makers and not the decision-maker itself. AI systems need a lot of data. To generate the data, a lot of processes must be digitized. It is supply chain professionals who will decide how this will be done.

The good news for humans is that their interactions have many nuances; and there are idiomatic differences across regions and countries. Can such variations be reflected in digital contracts and transportation bills of lading?

Will an AI system be able to "negotiate" contracts for two parties better than the parties themselves? If there were a legal dispute, would an AI system be able to replace judges and juries?

What is not surrendered to AI must be presided over by human decision-makers. Transportation, the most outsourced logistical activity, should be the best test-case for the promise of AI. Automating the process of transport, port entry/exit, and compliance should generate enough AI "hallucinations" to keep supply chain professionals gainfully employed for years to come.

–Dr. Darren Prokop
Professor Emeritus of Logistics, College of Business & Public Policy University of Alaska Anchorage

Focus on rethinking processes to leverage AI's potential to reduce manual work and enhance productivity. This means critically analyzing existing workflows to identify areas where AI can automate routine tasks, streamline operations, and optimize decision-making.

For example, look at how AI tools can be applied to forecast demand, manage inventory levels more efficiently, or improve logistics operations. Practitioners should start with small AI projects to gain practical experience and learn from both successes and failures, then slowly expand projects with the intent of developing people and processes. Embrace AI not only for its technological capabilities but also for its ability to transform business processes.

–Sumit Vakil
Co-Founder and Chief Product Officer, Resilinc

Consider how AI can best advance your organizational goals. While AI is sexy, it is a tool. Take it as seriously as you do WMS, VMI, ERP, CRM. Don't let it create blinders that prevent you from seeing other solutions.

Getting up to speed on blockchain and IoT for delivering greater transparency, traceability, optimization, and trust in the chain will put rocket boosters on your career trajectory.

–Lee Allison, Ph.D.
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