



# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **The under-representation of women in supply chain and logistics**

**CENTRE FOR SUPPLY CHAIN  
AND LOGISTICS**

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## Reliance and Disclaimer

This report was prepared for the 15 major companies that sponsor the Wayfinder: Supply Chain Careers for Women initiative and the national partner – Australia's Food and Agribusiness Growth Centre (trading as FIAL), August 2020.

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## About the Centre for Supply Chain and Logistics

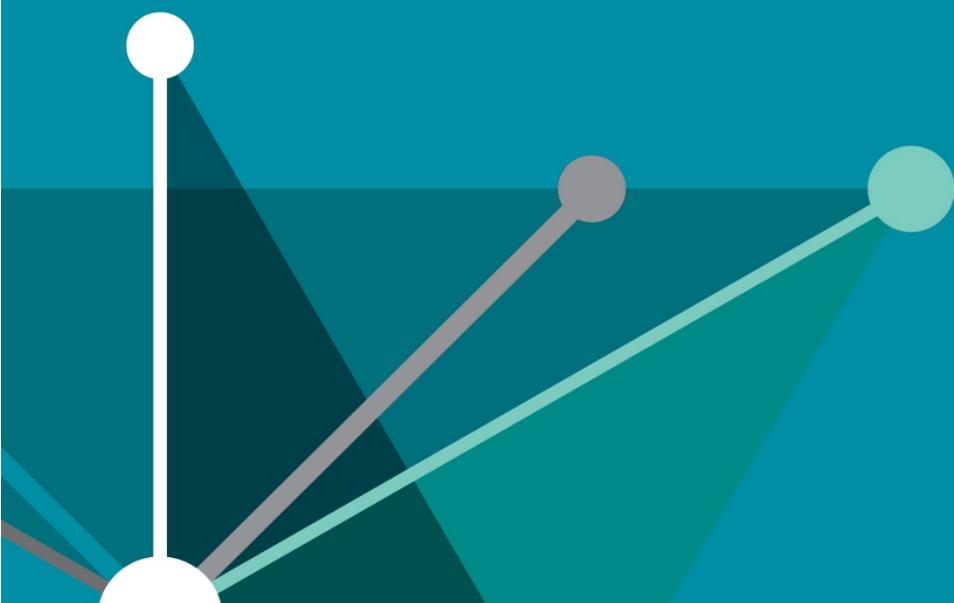
The Centre for Supply Chain and Logistics at Deakin University is Australia's leading research centre focusing on freight logistics and value-added supply chains. We aim to optimise public and private sector decision-making to achieve a better and more sustainable future.

CSCL's activities are built on three pillars: innovative and rigorous applied research; industry engagement throughout Australia, Asia and the Pacific region; and capability building through the provision of practical education programs, including Doctoral and other postgraduate programs.

All CSCL's activities are underpinned by the diverse and extensive expertise of its people and partners, including extensive operational, strategic and academic experience.

## The Research Team

Report authors were Dr Patricia McLean in collaboration with Dr Roberto Perez-Franco and Ms Jennifer Jones.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Why does this research matter?

Supply chains and logistics networks underpin the productivity and growth of our national economy, but the sector globally, faces a confluence of mega-change. Digital disruption is evolving new business models and requiring new skill sets, climate change is driving new expectations, and demographic shifts are impacting both demand and the sector's capacity to respond. Future supply chain performance will depend on the sector's capacity to upskill the current workforce and to attract and retain the new talent that will drive the innovation, efficiency and productivity so important to survive and thrive in a fast-changing market. The fragility of Australia's supply chain networks has been further highlighted by the impact of COVID-19.

To date, the predominantly male supply chain sector has struggled both to attract women to apply for supply chain roles and to retain those women currently in their workforce, effectively restricting their talent pool by 50%. The *Under-representation of Women in the Supply Chain and Logistics Workforce* report aims to investigate women's perception of supply chain and logistics positions and to consider what attracts them to supply chain and logistics careers. We examine their experiences working in supply chain and logistics companies and the issues that influence their decisions to remain or to move on.

Addressing the under-representation of women in the supply chain and logistics workforce is important, not just because of its relevance from a societal perspective but because it makes excellent bottom-line business sense.

One of the greatest challenges facing CEOs of Supply Chain and Logistics companies, is finding and retaining top talent in a highly dynamic and globally competitive market place and as one of our participants said: "talent does not have a gender or a race or an age". Diversity of thinking and people is widely recognised as a key success indicator for all businesses.

## The research funding

The research was co-funded by the consortium of 15 major companies that sponsor the [Wayfinder: Supply Chain Careers for Women](#) initiative and the Food and Agribusiness Growth Centre (trading as FIAL), an industry led not-for-profit organisation and conducted by Deakin University's Centre for Supply Chain and Logistics (CSCL). The researchers interviewed 102 women: 14 recent graduates, 80 women currently working in the sector across a variety of roles and 8 women who have now left the sector.

The study aligns with the Australian Government's Industry Growth Centre priority *Enhancing Management and Workforce Skills*. It gives a voice to the women in the supply chain and logistics sector, analysing their views on the issues to be overcome if we are to create and support a sustainable pipeline of women in supply chain and logistics careers into the future. It addresses the issue from three perspectives – sectoral, organisational and individual, providing practical recommendations to each of these groups.



## Challenges facing the sector in increasing the diversity of its workforce

There are sector-wide challenges to recruiting and retaining women to the supply chain sector. These include a continuation of negative perceptions and a lack of awareness in an industry that has struggled to project its image. Its long-standing tradition as a male dominated sector has deterred many from applying, and it is also an industry that 'never sleeps', with 365 day a year 24/7 operations which makes achieving work life balance difficult. Achieving greater diversity in the sector – encouraging more women to consider a career in supply chain and logistics and developing them to rise to senior positions – is a challenge for the whole sector. Persuading senior operations management of the importance of diversity and inclusion to their company success is key to achieving inclusion in the sector.

### Factors relating to talent acquisition in companies

If supply chain and logistics companies are to create a diverse talent pipeline, the views of women currently working in the sector are a vital resource to inform talent acquisition across school leavers, university and TAFE graduates, career changers and those looking to grow their career within the sector. Many of the women we spoke to were passionate about their careers, but their passion and enthusiasm for the work they do, is 'insider' information, known only to those within the sector. For the majority of participants their entry into their first supply chain role was serendipitous rather than a deliberate career choice. The sector is poorly understood both within companies and in the community more broadly. COVID 19 may have shone a spotlight on the importance of our supply chain network, but it has not increased understanding about the work it does and the range of career opportunities it can offer. Participants talked about the importance of developing stronger links with schools, TAFEs, and universities both to increase understanding of the sector and better promote it to students but also to ensure courses are better aligned to industry needs.

Participants talked about what they enjoyed about their work, information that should be incorporated into recruitment promotion opportunities. Factors contributing to job satisfaction for our participants included: the opportunity to make a difference, and the importance of supply chain ethics and sustainability; the constant variety in day-to-day work; the opportunity for systems thinking and problem solving; the challenge of working in a fast paced environment; and the people aspect of supply chain. For a number of participants an element of the role often associated with a traditional male domain was seen as a positive – working in warehouses and with trucks and donning a Hi Vis vest and boots instead of corporate gear.

Participants also spoke of how gender specific language in advertisements and position descriptions often dissuaded women from applying for roles they were eminently qualified for. Unconscious (and conscious) bias was also raised as a factor detracting from women's ability to succeed at interview, with women asked questions that would not be asked of their male peers and gendered assumptions made about their capabilities and capacity to take on a role.



## Factors relating to retention in companies

The study also looked at the issues impacting retention in supply chain companies, taking a more nuanced perspective of women's career pathways and their reasons for leaving supply chain positions. The reasons women (and men) give for job satisfaction or lack of it, are complex and often intersecting. When we asked women what they saw as the barriers to their career in supply chain and logistics, a number of the women across all age groups either saw no barriers to their career or felt any barrier was self-imposed. Unsurprisingly there were differences based on age and career stage. Women differentiated between their personal challenges in a particular company and issues relevant to their role or to work in the sector as a whole.



Far and above the most significant issue women raised as a barrier to their career, was their experience of bullying, sexual harassment and intimidation, with a number of women also raising concerns about how cases of sexual harassment were handled within their company. While policies and processes were in place for gender equity the women reported a great deal of disparity in the way they were interpreted or actioned; women were aware of the disparity but had no confidence it would be dealt with and did not want to 'rock the boat'. In some instances, bad behaviour was deeply entrenched and overlooked, with company culture coming down to what leadership is prepared to walk past.

The women also spoke of missing out on promotion opportunities or being paid at a significantly lower rate. Discriminative attitudes associated with a 'boys club' mentality also related to assumptions about what women could or could not do in the workplace. Either their ability to cope with aspects of the role or assumptions about women's place in the sector. Aside from the impact on confidence and job satisfaction, such assumptions directly limited the opportunities women have for promotion and career development.

Lack of women in leadership positions was a major factor impeding career progression: for women to see a career future for themselves, they need to see the examples of other women to aspire to. There was a sense too, that through strong and long nurtured networks, men supported and promoted from within their peer network, the men they 'went to the football with' or 'played golf with'. It was described as not intentional: these were men they knew well and felt comfortable with; but in a sector where promotion often comes from within, it created a 'boys club' which is an additional barrier for women.

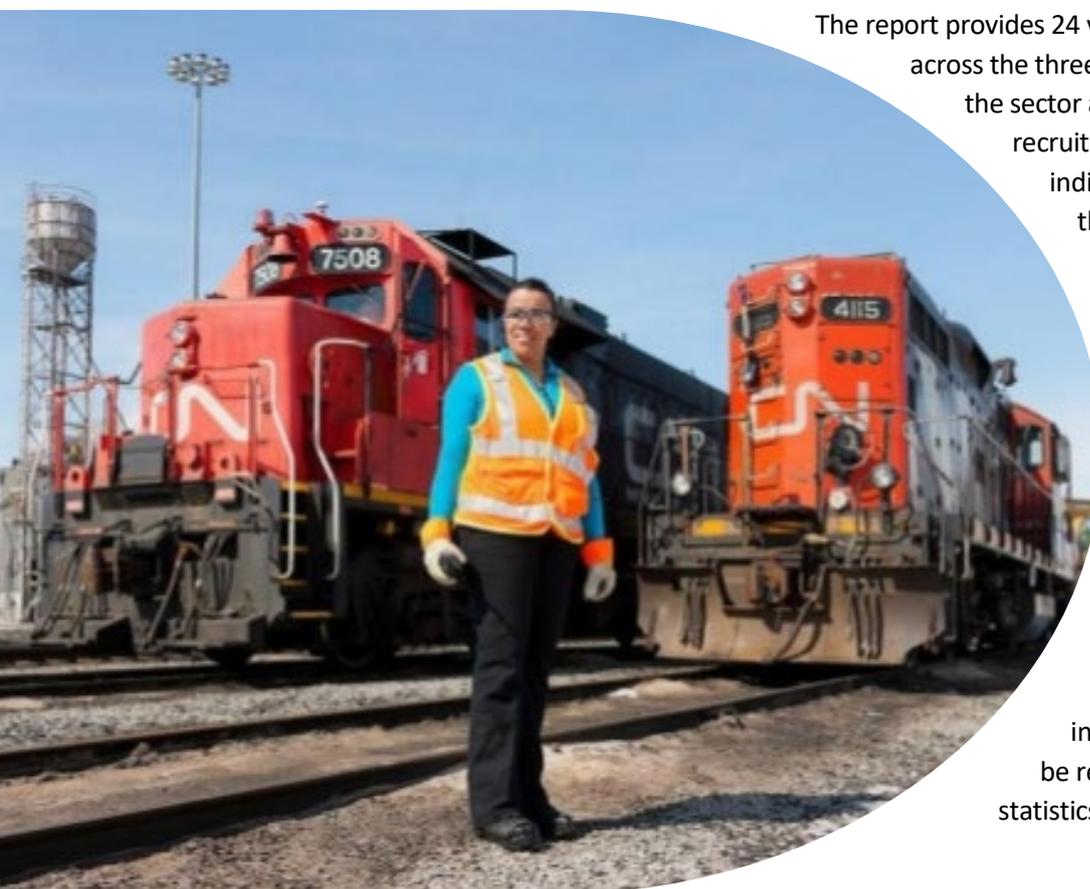
Unsurprisingly, inflexible working hours was another detractor for many, particularly those with family responsibilities. We spoke to a number of women who had senior positions in the industry, managing a high pressure role while meeting family responsibilities, but it was a challenge, and they spoke of the importance of having greater visibility around the infrastructure necessary to succeed. The importance of affordable childcare, support from a partner and a willingness to invest in future earnings through childcare and home support costs. Our participants also spoke of the importance of professional development opportunities in driving career ambitions – secondments and shadowing opportunities as well as formal training opportunities.

## Success factors for women working in supply chain

Finally we looked at the success factors for individual women in supply chain and logistics roles, including the importance of particular personality traits, the need for transparency, the importance of mentoring, the role of informal support networks and financial aptitude – a characteristic many women thought was crucial to success. A majority of our cohort thought mentoring by both men and women was an important ingredient for career success and job satisfaction. Mentoring is a two-way process and women who mentored others talked about how important it was to ‘give back’ and how much they valued the experience.

A number of the participants spoke of how advancement in the sector relied heavily on word of mouth support and known contacts, making the development of both informal and formal support networks more important. More formal networking groups also have an important role to play and can be an efficient way to meet valuable contacts and gain ideas. For some women, female-only networking groups provided an important space for gender issues to be discussed without judgement. There was considerable support for groups like the Supply Chain and Logistics Association of Australia (SCLAA), Women’s International Shipping and Trading Association (WISTA) and Wayfinder: Supply Chain Careers for Women. The study also looked at lessons from companies leading the way in increasing diversity, and companies getting it wrong, through two composite case studies.

The women we spoke to acknowledge the difficulty of working in a largely male dominated industry with difficult and high-pressure working hours but had developed strategies to manage the challenges. They were often disappointed by the lack of support they received, but it did not dampen their enthusiasm for a career they believe offered exciting prospects. They were acutely aware of company values and company culture and it was a major factor driving their decision-making about future career opportunities. Women in senior leadership positions were disappointingly few in number, but they were seen as a beacon of hope for the next generation of supply chain women.



The report provides 24 very practical recommendations across the three areas covered by the report – for the sector as a whole, for companies (on recruitment and retention) and for individual women looking to progress their career in supply chain. The findings will inform the next stage in the development of the [Wayfinder: Supply Chain Careers for Women](#) and we hope will be applied to policies and practices of the companies in the Wayfinder consortium, resulting in an increase in the number of women applying for operational roles in supply chain and an improved retention rate for those women already working in the sector. The research team will be reviewing and reporting on gender statistics of the companies in July 2021.



The researchers would like to acknowledge the 102 women who gave so generously of their time and expertise. They were truly an inspiring group of women.



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