

Women In Supply Chains

Punching above their Weight Class

As we celebrate International Women's Day in March, it's imperative to shine a spotlight on the remarkable contributions and challenges faced by women in the supply chain industry. Despite progress in gender equality across various sectors, the supply chain still grapples with gender disparities and the underrepresentation of women in key roles. This article delves into some critical aspects, underscoring the importance of fostering inclusivity and empowering women in this dynamic field.

➤ Rachayita Sidharth



Facilitating the seamless movement of goods across borders and continents for centuries, the logistics and supply chain industry stands as a critical pillar of global commerce. Even though the industry, worldwide, has been conventionally male-driven and male-dominant, women have increasingly emerged as instrumental agents of change, driving innovation, efficiency, and sustainability within this dynamic ecosystem.

mark on its evolution and growth. From pioneering entrepreneurs to trailblazing executives, women have excelled across various domains, including transportation, warehousing, procurement, and distribution. Female visionaries exemplify the diverse talents and leadership prowess of women in driving organizational success and shaping industry trends.

Superwomen!

Women bring a unique perspective and skill



Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have emerged as crucial factors propelling the advancement of numerous companies in the sector. In 2021, approximately 74% of companies made DEI a priority in their new employee hiring processes. As per a report by Gartner, women made up around 41% of the supply chain workforce in 2021. Out of this 41%, around 15% of women were in the top echelons of the companies.

Over the years and making significant strides in the industry, women have left an indelible

set to supply chain management, leveraging their inherent strengths in communication, collaboration, and problem-solving. By harnessing data analytics, technology, and strategic foresight, women leaders have spearheaded initiatives to optimize supply chain processes, enhance visibility and transparency, and mitigate risks. Their innovative approaches have led to cost savings, operational efficiencies, and greater resilience in the face of disruptions, positioning companies for sustainable growth and competitive advantage.



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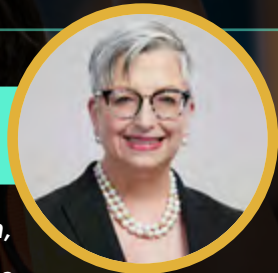


Though the examples are many, we selected a few Superwomen and their work for you to get inspired!



Gretchen McCarthy
Chief Supply Chain and Logistics Officer, Target

In nearly 20 years of experience she has gathered, McCarthy has continued learning and listening, using experience to drive her career and lead to new opportunities across the business – from working on merchandising initiatives, leading Target’s global teams during difficulty, and holding multiple senior leadership positions to merchandise planning and buying, leading teams in Canada and India, and serving as a sponsor of the Supply Chain Diversity Action Council. She now oversees all functions of Target’s global supply chain and logistics network, including inventory management, replenishment, fulfillment, global transportation, logistics, and distribution.



Carol Tomé
Chief Executive Officer, UPS

Twice recognized on Forbes’ list of The World’s 100 Most Powerful Women, Tomé started at UPS in 2003 on its Board of Directors and in 2020, she was appointed as the 12th CEO in its 115-year history. Prior to UPS, she spent nearly 25 years at The Home Depot, the world’s largest home improvement specialty retailer. During her time there, The Home Depot grew from 400 stores to 2,200, with a revenue of nearly USD 100bn and 450% increase in share price.



Gail Tifford
Chief Brand Officer at WW International (formerly Weight Watchers)

Tifford played a notable role in the supply chain industry. While her primary focus may not be on logistics and operations, her expertise in branding and marketing has likely influenced supply chain strategies within WW International. Effective branding can enhance product visibility, demand forecasting, and inventory management, ultimately contributing to a more efficient and responsive supply chain.



Indra Nooyi
Former CEO of PepsiCo

Nooyi's transformative leadership at PepsiCo resulted in a substantial shift in the organization's reputation, cost structure, and agility. Her strategic focus on sustainable sourcing, enhanced efficiency, innovative packaging solutions, global integration, and digital transformation revolutionized the supply chain, leading to remarkable organizational advancements.



Supriya Iyer
Director Global Networking Supply Chain & Commercial Operations, Google

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Mary Barra
CEO of General Motors (GM)

Barra's leadership at GM has focused on reshaping the company's supply chain to adapt to changing consumer preferences, technological advancements, and sustainability initiatives. Under her tenure, GM has implemented agile manufacturing processes and adopted electric vehicle technologies, impacting the entire automotive supply chain.



Kusum Sharma
Head of Supply Chain and Digital Transformation, Mercedes Benz R&D India

Sharma has built a strong supply chain and digital portfolio and was recently awarded as the ETPWLA Operations Leader of the Year. She successfully overcame external challenges like supply chain uncertainty and semiconductor shortages while addressing internal hurdles through reskilling initiatives and fostering a growth mindset. She launched a supply chain academy for talent reskilling and introduced 10 innovation use cases.

These Superwomen, and many others, have made significant direct and indirect contributions to the supply chain industry through their leadership, innovation, and advocacy for diversity and sustainability.

We Need Them!

Women in the field of supply chain logistics possess a rich and diverse skill set that seamlessly aligns with the dynamic nature of this sector. Attributes such as effective communication, meticulous attention to detail, and adept multitasking abilities are just a few examples of the fundamental yet invaluable qualities that women bring to the table. By acknowledging and harnessing these proficiencies, the supply chain industry can not only navigate complexities and uncertainties but also thrive amidst them.



Furthermore, recent global crises have starkly emphasized the imperative of building resilient supply chains. Women's active participation in decision-making processes and leadership positions empowers organizations to approach risk mitigation and contingency planning from diverse perspectives. This inclusivity fosters a comprehensive approach to addressing challenges, bolstering the supply chain's resilience against disruptions and ensuring uninterrupted operations.

Embracing and empowering women within

the sector presents a solution by tapping into a vast pool of skilled professionals. By promoting diverse representation, the industry not only bridges critical skill gaps across various supply chain functions but also ensures its continued evolution and competitiveness in the global marketplace.

Despite their undeniable contributions, women continue to encounter barriers to entry and advancement within the logistics and supply chain workforce. Gender stereotypes, unconscious bias, and systemic inequalities persist, hindering women's access to opportunities, mentorship, and leadership

roles. The traditionally male-dominated nature of the industry further exacerbates these challenges, creating a pervasive culture of exclusion and underrepresentation.

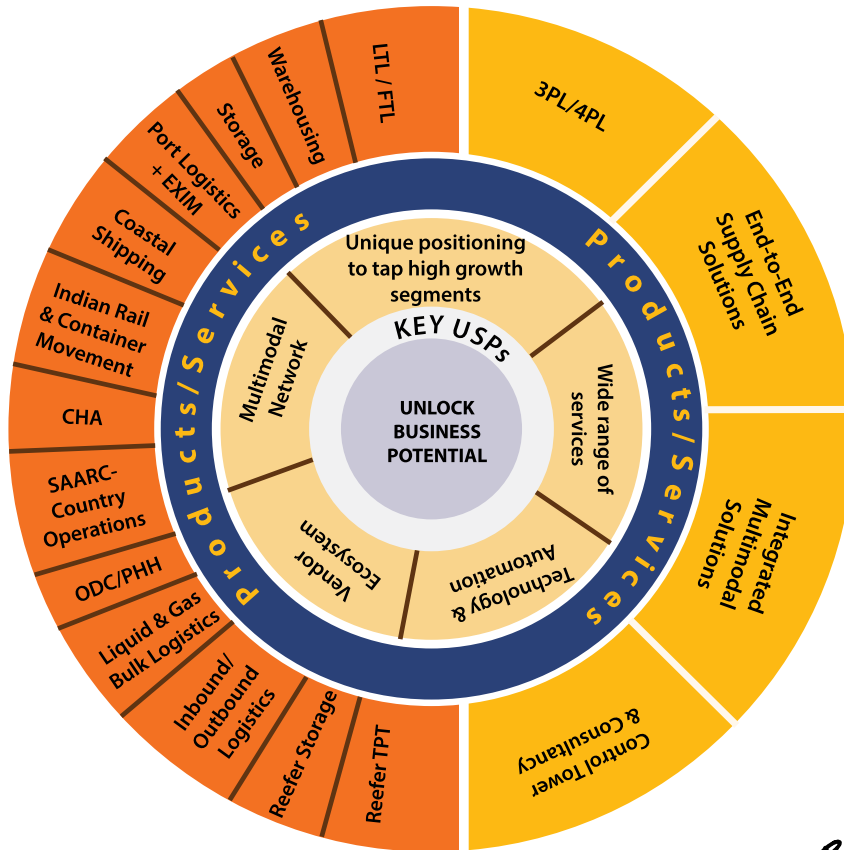
Moreover, work-life balance issues, lack of support networks, and limited access to professional development opportunities pose

additional hurdles for women seeking to thrive in the logistics and supply chain sector. The demanding nature of operational roles, coupled with rigid organizational structures, often dissuades women from pursuing careers in this field or advancing up the hierarchy.

Addressing the gender gap in the logistics and supply chain industry requires concerted efforts from stakeholders across the board. Employers must prioritize diversity and inclusion initiatives, implementing policies and practices that foster a supportive and

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equitable work environment. This includes promoting flexible work arrangements, establishing mentorship programs, and providing leadership development opportunities tailored to women's needs.

Education and awareness campaigns are essential for challenging stereotypes and promoting gender equality from an early age. Encouraging girls to pursue STEM education and careers in logistics and supply chain management can help bridge the talent gap and cultivate a more diverse talent pipeline. Additionally, advocacy for policy reforms, such as parental leave policies and childcare support, can alleviate the burden of work-life balance challenges women professionals face.

Women in STEM Roles and Technological Innovation

Years ago, a distraught Alice Williams – an aspiring Royal Air Force member – was told, “You're too short to be a pilot”, before it was added that she “didn't weigh enough”.

Williams, now the Vice President of US Services Excellence at Schneider Electric, was told she was too short and light to be a pilot when she was younger. This was her first experience of feeling like the world wasn't designed for her. Instead, she pursued a career as an engineer in the British Army, maintaining tanks. Williams attributes the low representation of women in STEM roles in both military and civilian life to such situations where women face challenges due to their physical attributes.

Never let anyone tell you that the world is ‘not designed’ for you..

In an era defined by digital transformation and Industry 4.0, the demand for skilled professionals in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields is on the rise. However, women remain underrepresented in STEM roles, posing a significant barrier to innovation and progress in the supply chain industry.

Bridging this gender gap requires concerted efforts to attract, retain, and advance women in STEM disciplines through targeted recruitment strategies, inclusive workplace cultures, and ongoing professional development initiatives.

Encouraging girls and young women to pursue STEM education and careers is essential for creating a diverse talent pipeline and fostering a culture of innovation.

By challenging stereotypes, promoting STEM literacy, and showcasing female role models and success stories, we can inspire the next generation of women leaders in supply chain and logistics.

Moreover, embracing emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and data analytics presents unprecedented opportunities for women to drive transformative change and shape the future of supply chain management.

Latha Narayan provided valuable insights into the opportunities for women in STEM roles within the logistics sector, strategies for encouraging more women to pursue careers in technology and innovation within supply chains, and the transformative impact of technology on the future of logistics. Latha noted a significant increase in the representation of women in the logistics workforce globally, rising from 8% in 2010 to 20% by 2023. Latha attributed this increase to the sector's adoption of technology and innovation, creating new roles and opportunities for women, particularly in e-commerce, where advancements like automation and state-of-the-art equipment have leveled the playing field. She emphasized the need for clear career paths, internal mobility, ongoing training, and mentorship programs to support women's growth and development. Latha also highlighted the importance of supporting women re-entering the workforce after maternity leave through flexible work arrangements and childcare support. She proudly shared Etihad Cargo's commitment to gender diversity, where 40% of employees are female. She commended the airline's leadership for their dedication to building a diverse and inclusive organization, exemplified by joining the International Air Travel Association's '25 by 2025' pledge to increase the female workforce by 25%. Latha emphasized that such initiatives not only benefit women but also enhance innovation, performance, and sustainability across the organization. In terms of women's role in the evolution of the industry, Latha emphasized their patience, sharpness, and multitasking abilities, which are essential for seamless technology implementation.

**LATHA NARAYAN**

Director Commercial APAC, Australasia and ISC

Etihad Cargo

**RESHMA ZAHEER**

Chief Operating Officer

TT Logistics & Cargo

Reshma Zaheer shared her insights on the opportunities for women in STEM roles within the logistics sector, as well as strategies for encouraging more women to pursue careers in technology and innovation. Reflecting on the current landscape, Reshma highlighted the increasing demand for skilled professionals adept at leveraging data analytics, automation, and artificial intelligence to optimize supply chains. She emphasized that women bring diverse perspectives and skill sets to the table, which can lead to more creative solutions and enhanced efficiency in logistics operations. In her view, the inclusion of women in STEM roles not only promotes gender diversity but also contributes to the overall growth and innovation of the industry. She stressed the need for organizations to actively promote gender diversity in leadership positions and collaborate with educational institutions and industry associations to foster a pipeline of talented female professionals in STEM fields. By showcasing successful female leaders and highlighting their contributions, organizations can inspire more women to pursue careers in technology-driven roles within supply chain management in India. Looking towards the future, Reshma envisioned technology playing a transformative role in logistics through automation, digital transformation, and the integration of diverse perspectives in technology development. She emphasized that women can play a pivotal role in this evolution by contributing their problem-solving skills, effective communication, and collaboration abilities. Additionally, Reshma emphasized the importance of women taking on leadership positions within the supply chain industry to drive innovation and ensure that technology represents the needs of the entire population.



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Work-Life Integration

WIn today's rapidly evolving supply chain landscape, achieving work-life balance remains a formidable challenge for professionals, particularly women, and more so for those who also play the role of primary caregivers.

Flexible work hours, remote work options, and supportive policies are crucial for cultivating an inclusive work environment where women can thrive without sacrificing their personal commitments.

While the traditional notions of rigid schedules and on-site presence prevail in many organizations, forward-thinking companies are embracing innovative approaches to

accommodate the diverse needs of their workforce.

Efforts to promote work-life integration extend beyond mere policies; they entail fostering a culture of trust, respect, and empowerment. By leveraging technology and digital platforms, companies can facilitate seamless collaboration and communication, enabling employees to fulfill their responsibilities effectively while enjoying greater flexibility.

Embracing remote work not only enhances productivity and efficiency but also widens the talent pool by attracting and retaining skilled women professionals who may otherwise be deterred by traditional workplace structures.

Niharika Jalan shared her insights on managing work-life integration in the fast-paced logistics industry. Reflecting on the terminology of 'work-life integration versus balance', Niharika emphasizes the importance of seamlessly merging work and personal life. She suggests that there are days when work demands utmost attention, while on other days, personal or family commitments take precedence. Niharika advocates for accepting this seamless flow and embracing the reality that occasionally dropping the ball is inevitable. She underscores the significance of seeking assistance both at work and home, highlighting that people are often willing to lend a helping hand if asked. As a mother, Niharika involves her child in her work life, familiarizing them with her team members and the operations of their warehouses. By treating family members as equal stakeholders, she believes they gain a better understanding of the demands of her job, fostering empathy and support during crises or urgent situations. Regarding organizational support for better work-life balance, Niharika emphasizes the need for companies to encourage female employees to speak up and ask for assistance when needed. She stresses the importance of implementing suggestions and providing a safe space where women feel comfortable taking time off without fear of repercussions. She notes a significant shift in the industry's landscape over the years, with more women assuming diverse roles. Through her experiences and insights, she inspires a more inclusive and equitable approach to work-life integration in the industry.

**NIHARIKA JALAN**

Founder and Chief Growth Officer

Indicold



SONIA NAIR

Vice President and Head of Customer Service
BlueDart Express

Sonia Nair sheds light on her approach to managing work-life integration within the fast-paced logistics industry. Sonia acknowledges the inherent challenges posed by the unpredictable nature of logistics, where work and personal life often intertwine. She emphasizes the importance of integrating work tasks seamlessly into her daily routine, even extending beyond traditional work hours to address urgent matters and ensure customer satisfaction. Sonia's self-reliance, coupled with support from her family in daily chores, enables her to maintain control over her schedule, avoiding disruptions that could impede work-life balance. Central to Sonia's philosophy is carving out dedicated time for personal pursuits, which serve as rejuvenating outlets after demanding workdays. Beyond personal strategies, Sonia advocates for organizational policies that support better work-life balance, stressing the importance of flexibility and understanding individual needs. She highlights initiatives such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) and remote work options, which benefit all employees, regardless of gender. Reflecting on her own experiences, Sonia acknowledges the challenges of maintaining work-life integration within the supply chain industry. Urgent deliveries and late-night coordination for time-sensitive shipments have often encroached on personal time. However, she emphasizes the value of teamwork in meeting expectations and finding moments of fulfillment amidst the demanding nature of the job.

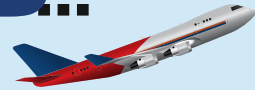


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Mentorship and Support Networks

Mentorship and support networks are pivotal in nurturing talent and fostering professional growth, especially for women in male-dominated industries like supply chain and logistics.

Establishing formal mentorship programs and affinity groups can provide invaluable guidance, encouragement, and advocacy for women at various stages of their careers. These initiatives create safe spaces for sharing experiences, seeking advice, and building meaningful connections, thereby empowering women to overcome barriers

and seize opportunities for advancement.

Effective mentorship goes beyond conventional mentor-mentee relationships; it involves sponsorship, advocacy, and allyship. Male allies and senior leaders have a crucial role to play in championing diversity and inclusion initiatives, amplifying women's voices, and advocating for equitable opportunities. By cultivating a supportive ecosystem where women feel valued, heard, and empowered, organizations can unlock the full potential of their workforce and drive sustainable business growth.

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Sakshi Gupta shared her insights on the transformative power of mentorship and the importance of support networks for women in the logistics industry. Reflecting on her own journey, Sakshi emphasized the profound impact mentorship has had on her professional growth. She likened her career trajectory to navigating two paths: one winding and uncertain, and the other clear and guided. She stressed the importance of diversity, structure, and inclusivity for organizations establishing mentorship programs for women. Drawing inspiration from nature, architecture, and global connectivity, Sakshi underscored the need for a diverse pool of mentors, clear career goals, regular check-ins, and cross-cultural mentorship opportunities to foster a supportive and inclusive environment for women in the industry. Sakshi explained that support networks serve as the wind beneath the wings for women, providing safe spaces for open dialogue, collaboration, and community-building. She said that through sisterhood and collective empowerment, women in logistics can overcome challenges, uplift each other, and drive meaningful progress in the industry. Sakshi's insights shed light on the transformative potential of mentorship and support networks in empowering women in the logistics sector. Her experiences and advice serve as valuable guidance for organizations looking to cultivate inclusive environments and support the professional growth and success of women in the industry.

**SAKSHI GUPTA**

Country Manager India

Air Logistics Group

**SEEMA NARERA**

Vertical Head for FMCG (India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka)
Maersk

Seema Narera provided valuable insights into the role of mentorship in her professional growth and the importance of establishing effective mentorship programs within organizations. Seema highlighted the absence of a formal mentorship program in her organizations, yet, emphasized the significant impact of having personal mentors who provided invaluable guidance and support. Seema credited her mentors, both within and outside the industry, for offering diverse perspectives and challenging her to think strategically. She noted that their insights transcended the traditional boundaries of her roles, enabling her to navigate across functions and industries. When discussing advice for organizations establishing mentorship programs for women in logistics, Seema underscored the importance of diversity, structure, and inclusivity. Seema emphasized the need for a diverse pool of mentors, clear career goals, regular check-ins, and cross-cultural mentorship opportunities to

foster a supportive and inclusive environment for women in the industry. Furthermore, she stressed the need for mentorship to be seen as a serious skill for leaders, separate from traditional performance management metrics. Seema accentuated

the importance of nurturing skills in leaders and creating a culture where mentorship is valued and prioritized. She advocated for mentorship programs to be integrated into leadership development plans and emphasized the mutual benefits for both mentors and mentees.



Don't We Agree?

As we commemorate International Women's Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to advancing gender equality and promoting inclusivity in the supply chain industry.

Despite progress in gender equality, the industry still grapples with gender disparities and underrepresentation of women in key roles. Recent years have witnessed a shift towards gender equality, with women emerging as instrumental agents of change. Diversity, equity, and inclusion have become essential, with companies recognizing the growing representation of women in the workforce. Technology is also transforming the industry, and women are playing a pivotal role in driving innovation and efficiency.

By championing work-life integration, fostering mentorship and support networks, and empowering women in STEM roles and technological innovation, we can build a more equitable, resilient, and prosperous future for all. Together, let's celebrate the achievements of women in supply chain and redouble our efforts to create a world where every woman has the opportunity to thrive and succeed. 📦