White Paper: The Supply Chain Talent Paradox (2024–2025)

Why Digital Ambitions Are Outpacing Workforce Readiness—and What Leaders Must Do Next

By: Guy Breier
Operations, Quality & Supply Chain Transformation Leader

Executive Summary

Across the U.S. supply chain landscape, organizations are investing heavily in **digital transformation, automation, and AI**, yet workforce capabilities and hiring practices have not kept pace. The combined data from the **2024 Cleo Supply Chain Jobs Report** and the **2025 DSJ Global Talent Report** reveals a widening gap between **strategic intent** and **operational reality**.

While companies emphasize modernization, jobs still overwhelmingly require **manual skills, reactive problem-solving, and legacy system knowledge**, not the forward-looking digital competencies needed to unlock the value of these investments.

This white paper exposes the structural disconnect and offers strategic recommendations for building a workforce capable of executing the supply chain of the future.

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1. The Digital Ambition Gap: A Structural Failure in Talent Design

Supply chain leaders increasingly cite digitalization, automation, and AI as top strategic priorities. However, hiring patterns clearly contradict these ambitions.

Evidence from the 2024 Cleo Report

- Only **7%** of job postings mention automation.
- Only **2%** mention AI.
- Only **5%** require data management.
- Less than **1%** mention APIs or Quality Management Systems.
- Only **54%** require any software knowledge at all.

Interpretation

Companies declare an intent to modernize, but job descriptions still reflect a world of **manual processes, low digital literacy, and reactive work patterns**.

The result is a workforce structurally unprepared to support the technology investments leadership is making.

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2. Workforce Skills Are Misaligned With Supply Chain Complexity

The DSJ Global report highlights employers' rising expectations for software, systems, and analytical ability —while also showing these expectations are rarely embedded in job design.

Key Findings (DSJ 2025)

- Increasing demand for **SAP, WMS, TMS** literacy.
- Rising need for **strategic thinking** as automation reduces tactical work.
- Significant **skills shortages**, especially in digital proficiency.
- Professionals report **stagnant wages** despite increased expectations.

Insight: A Talent Model Built for Yesterday's Supply Chain

While supply chains become more data-driven, roles remain anchored in **legacy competencies**. Companies want modern skills, yet do not hire, train, or incentivize for them.

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3. Supply Chains Are Still Reactive, Not Predictive

Cleo's analysis found job postings focused on **reporting** (27%) and **problem-solving** (13%), with minimal emphasis on **forecasting** (10%).

Implication

Organizations have not operationalized predictive, forward-looking practices—even though volatility, geopolitical risk, and disruption demand forecasting.

The workforce is being hired to solve yesterday's problems—not prevent tomorrow's.

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4. Digital Skills Directly Drive Compensation—But Are Underdeveloped

Both reports show a strong correlation between **software proficiency** and **higher salary bands**.

Insight

The market increasingly rewards digital fluency, yet: - Companies rarely require it. - Professionals seldom receive training. - Job descriptions fail to reflect modern technical needs.

This creates a **bifurcation of talent**: - Those with digital skills accelerate into higher-band roles. - Those without stagnate in manual, lower-paying work.

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5. Work Flexibility Is Collapsing—And Becoming a Talent Risk

The DSJ Global report reveals a sharp decline in remote/hybrid work: - Hybrid dropped from **71% to 59%**. - On-site requirements are rising. - Lack of flexibility is now a **top reason candidates reject offers**.

Impact

Supply chains—many already struggling to attract talent—are reintroducing rigidity at the exact moment the labor market demands flexibility.

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6. Retention Pressure Is Mounting: Counteroffers, Stagnant Raises, Burnout

Key findings from DSJ Global: - **36%** of workers received *no* raise. - **39%** received *no* bonus. - More than **50%** of candidates receive counteroffers. - Employees often leave due to **work-life imbalance** and **low pay progression**.

Implication

Companies rely on **counteroffers and ad hoc patches** instead of creating sustainable talent strategies and digital-skills development pathways.

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7. EHS and Risk Roles Are Accelerating Faster Than Technical Ones

The 2025 DSJ report notes a surge in **Environmental Health & Safety (EHS)** hiring.

This reflects: - Stricter regulatory requirements. - Increased brand and legal risk. - The cost of safety failures.

Insight

Organizations are more prepared to operationalize **safety** than **digital transformation**. Safety has mature processes, metrics, and compliance frameworks. Digital transformation does not.

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8. Training Is Not Keeping Pace With Technology Investments

Cleo highlights a crucial failure point: companies invest in automation, analytics, and digital tools but **do not train workers** to use them.

DSJ reinforces this: employees report **limited development opportunities**, even as expectations rise.

Insight

Technology evolves. Budgets increase. The talent does not. Without workforce upskilling, digital transformation will underperform.

Strategic Recommendations for Supply Chain Leaders

1. Redesign Job Roles for the Digital Supply Chain

Every job should explicitly require: - Data literacy - Systems fluency (ERP, WMS, TMS) - Digital workflow capability - Change-management proficiency - Familiarity with automation and AI-supported processes

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2. Build a Digital Talent Pipeline

Companies must invest in: - Upskilling programs - System training and certifications - Cross-functional rotations - Analytics and forecasting training

Digital readiness cannot rely solely on recruiting.

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3. Shift From "Reporting" to "Forecasting" as a Core Competency

Transform job descriptions and KPIs to emphasize: - Predictive analytics - Risk sensing - Scenario planning - Simulation and digital twins

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4. Reevaluate Working Models for Competitive Advantage

Flexibility is now a differentiator. Organizations unwilling to offer hybrid options will: - Lose top candidates - Increase hiring costs - Struggle to retain high performers

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5. Align Compensation With Digital Skills

Salary structures must reflect: - Demand for digital fluency - Competition for tech-forward talent - The ROI of automation-ready employees

Digital skills should earn explicit salary premiums.

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6. Create Technology-Adoption KPIs

To embed digital transformation: - Measure system adoption - Tie bonuses to digital KPIs - Assess data quality and process compliance

Without accountability, transformation remains theoretical.

Conclusion: The Future Supply Chain Is Digital— But the Workforce Isn't Ready

The combined findings from both reports reveal a stark truth: - Digital ambition is **high**. - Workforce readiness is **low**. - Talent strategies are **misaligned**. - Transformation is at risk.

Supply chains will not modernize through technology alone. **Transformation requires people who are prepared, empowered, and incentivized to use that technology.**

This white paper serves as a call to action: **The supply chain workforce of the future must be intentionally designed—not inherited by default.**