

Interview



# Jonathan Dweck

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## Talent in Demand: *Recruiting Supply Chain Professionals*

*RK Supply Chain, part of Kellan Group plc, is the UK's leading consultancy specialising in the recruitment of Logistics, Procurement and Supply Chain Planning professionals. RK Supply Chain operates throughout the UK and Canada and across all sectors.*

*Candidates looking to develop their career or businesses seeking to recruit the brightest professionals will appreciate RK's knowledge and understanding of the Supply Chain industry.*

Jonathan, you help companies recruit Supply Chain professionals, from Demand Planners to Supply Chain Directors. How would you describe the current market?

“The market has now slowed down. We expect people to hold back until Christmas and then we should see the usual rush in January.

However, I do not believe that we will see large scale redundancies like we have seen in the past, because the importance of Supply Chain has changed. Traditionally, the roles and profiles of Supply Chain professionals were not very well documented in businesses, so they were ideal candidates for redundancies when things got tough. This is very different now.

Depending on the industry sectors, there are still some major projects out there. Many companies are in the process of implementing Sales & Operations Planning processes for instance, particularly in the Electronics and Telecommunication industries. These projects often involve the creation of and recruitment for Demand Planning positions.

In the Food industry, Supply Chain functions are much more mature so the teams are established. I know of one client who has just reached saturation point after 9 years of double digit growth figures, so the focus for recruitment has changed. But other sectors that are discovering the benefits of Supply Chain Planning roles are still recruiting.

The only downturn seems to be in project-based roles at senior levels, such as Project Director, Change Manager, etc.”

What are the skills that companies are seeking?

“To understand the skills companies are looking for, you have to take into account the focus of current Supply Chains. Businesses are looking at cost reductions but with improvements in flexibility. Add to this the context of more outsourcing of manufacturing and the move of offices towards countries like Switzerland because of tax considerations...

The candidates’ skills need to cater for this. It translates into a need for a good understanding in Supply Planning but with added commercial skills. The ideal is someone who has the Supply Chain experience but who is also good at commercial negotiations with suppliers that may be located at the other end of the world. And then you have the Management of 3<sup>rd</sup> parties and multi-sites, although not as high on the agenda as it once was.

However, customer-facing skills are now important, because the boundary with Customer Service is blurring, and because of new ways of working such as Collaborative Forecasting. Not forgetting experience in implementing Sales & Operations Planning and Demand Management, which is absolutely key right now. But do not underestimate manufacturing experience early in a career, which gives a real advantage in Supply Chain. I believe that some senior Supply Chain people have not had enough manufacturing exposure in their career.”

## What do these skills mean to the practicalities of the recruitment process?

“It is becoming more and more difficult to cross industries when recruiting because the Supply Chain skills are becoming so specific! And there is no doubt that our clients have become more demanding. I guess they can, because with the development of recruitment databases, they are given the opportunity to ask for every single box to be ticked, including *“needs to know how to use software xyz”*. On the one hand, I think that it is a positive evolution because it means that we can look for a perfect match. On the other hand, you need some flexibility to allow for new talent to join. For example, one candidate may well know how to use software xyz, but the other candidate may be a better fit for the long term development of the business...

If we are given the opportunity to help with the job description, it is amazing to see how we can evolve the opportunity to bring in many new skills. We will suggest new talents that the client never thought about considering.”

## Whilst there is still no proper University path to become a Supply Chain professional, do you think it is finally seen as a career?

“No, not yet. There is still no ‘typical’ Supply Chain career path. I still find it surprising when I interview candidates who have had a 1<sup>st</sup> from Cambridge that they ask for advice on what skills they will need. From a career path viewpoint, Supply Chain is lagging behind other functions because there are not enough champions who take the responsibility within businesses. I remember one graduate who asked a Supply Chain Director *‘how do I get to your position?’* The Supply Chain Director just replied *‘stick around’*.

We need to raise the awareness even at an under-graduate level. There is no doubt that the Supply Chain functions exist in businesses. It is now time that we formalise the corresponding career paths.”

## So what is the secret of success in recruiting the right people to grow your Supply Chain team?

“You must go to a specialist recruitment firm who can analyse and understand your brief. If you talk about a job in Finance, the title is always clear and points exactly at the role required. This is not the case for Supply Chain. The same role might be called Commercial Planner, S&OP Planner, Sales Analyst, Demand Planner, etc! In my experience, Human Resources departments have got a weakness in their understanding of Supply Chain.

We have invested heavily in head-hunting tools, because having a strong network is crucial to recruit for Senior Supply Chain roles.”

### What market trends do you see for the future in Supply Chain recruitment?

“First, there is the industry sector shift because Supply Chain Directors are looking for new challenges. The Gaming industry is a good example, which is attracting talent from the shrinking DVD industry.

We also see new roles appearing like Space Planners, a sort of true merchandising linked to Supply Chain. New Product Development roles are evolving to become more aligned with Supply Chain, because NPD under Operations was traditionally about local optimisation...

In terms of skills, Demand Planning is still growing fast in new sectors such as electronics and telecommunications.

Another evolving aspect relates to the increasingly international nature of Supply Chain roles. If you are a candidate, you have to accept that your job might be based overseas; or at least be prepared to travel, otherwise you will struggle.

Then there is the ERP software side with the big question of experience in *the software*. Let’s put it this way: 50% of our clients use SAP. Even when SAP is not mentioned, clients would at least look for someone who has made decisions about selecting software.”

### One last piece of advice for businesses that are looking to grow their Supply Chain talent?

“Practice what you preach. If you are responsible for planning the Supply Chain, then you should also create long term plans for the talent of your team. Otherwise, you will have all these brilliant ideas but no-one to implement them for you!”

Hughenden would like to **thank** Jonathan Dweck

for sharing his experience and advice

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