

UK faces shortage of Supply Chain Professionals

By Hugh Williams of Hughenden

Whilst people used to end up in planning, Supply Chain is now seen as a proper career path, with qualifications, skills and recognition. But with businesses heavily recruiting Demand Planners and Supply Chain Managers, consultancies growing their teams of experts, and the requirements to fit the role ever more demanding, the candidates are becoming short in supply...

The UK is starting to experience a shortage in skilled Supply Chain Professionals. Cross-industry businesses, including retailers, manufacturers, recruitment agencies and consultancies, seem to agree that the demand for Production Planners, Demand Planners and Supply Chain Managers is increasing faster than the supply.

The shortage is particularly noticeable amongst roles such as Demand Planners and Supply Chain Managers/Directors. These only appeared a few years ago but are now seen as key functions to help make Supply Chains more responsive. “Many companies have now recognised that Forecasting is a vital input into the business planning processes such as Sales & Operations Planning, hence the race to recruit Demand Planners” says Hugh Williams, Managing Director of Supply Chain Planning specialist Hughenden.

Supply Chain in the Boardroom

“Whilst people used to *end up* in planning, Supply Chain is now seen as a proper career path, with qualifications, skills and recognition” adds Williams. Whether from a Purchasing, Production or Demand background, planners are the prime candidates to become Supply Chain Managers. And whilst the role of Supply Chain Director is still to gain ground amongst SMEs, larger businesses are already allowing it into the Boardroom.

However, Supply Chain Planning is a science, with techniques and principles that will either make or break a business. The planners for which recruitment agencies are desperate need to have the necessary specialist skills and industry experience, as well as a good understanding of broader Supply Chain Thinking (Lean, Theory of Constraints, 6 Sigma, etc.). “With so many businesses implementing some sort of

Sales & Operations Planning process, the Supply Chain Professionals need to be knowledgeable in the links between their role and the other Planning processes”, explains Williams.

Consultancies are growing their Supply Chain teams too

So, can the shortage be overcome through internal movement and promotion? The Government recently reinforced its message that training needs to be industry led, but businesses are already a step ahead. Internal training programmes dedicated to Supply Chain for the development of skills and competency are becoming very popular. Williams describes the trend: “Businesses used to come to us for a one-off course or workshop on Inventory Management for instance. Now, we mostly deliver structured programmes designed for companies who want to combine the education of their business (Supply Chain Thinking) with that of their individuals (planning skills)”. Examples of Supply Chain Academy programmes can be requested from www.hughenden.net.

There is no doubt that the market for recruiting Supply Chain Professionals is very buoyant at the moment. The shortage is accentuated by the fact that many consultancies are growing their own teams due to the high demand for Supply Chain support services.

So is Supply Chain about to replace IT as the hot career to choose for young people?

Hughenden specialises in Supply Chain Planning and helps companies develop their Supply Chain Practitioners’ skills and knowledge, whilst improving the Planning Processes. The Hughenden team offers focussed consultancy and interactive education. Its customers include Marks & Spencer, Kraft Foods, Johnson & Johnson, Nestlé, and Hallmark Cards. For more details, visit www.hughenden.net