



CSCO Insights: **Building the workforce of the future**



This report is designed for CSCOs who need the core findings and a clear action agenda. For teams building the business case or operationalizing the recommendations, the full report—Turning the supply chain talent shortage into strength—provides deeper analysis, extended case study detail, and role-level data across 15 supply chain occupations.

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Supply chain leaders have a labor problem that hiring won't solve

Between 2026 and 2035, demand across US supply chain occupations will grow by 1.34 million roles while labor supply grows by only about 221,000 workers, according to projections based on our proprietary scenario-planning model.

The result is a persistent gap of nearly 1.1 million roles, a direct result of a structural mismatch between traditional scaling methods and modern complexities of the industry.

That mismatch is widening as several forces increase demand at once. Near- and reshoring, supplier diversification, regulatory pressure, geopolitical volatility and rising service expectations are just the beginning of the forces on today's supply chains. Historically, organizations responded to added pressure by increasing headcount. When networks expanded, disruption increased or service requirements rose, organizations hired more planners, buyers, supervisors, coordinators and operations staff. Today, that approach doesn't scale. Chief supply chain officers (CSCOs) now face a new question: How can we redesign work so that business scaling and growth no longer require a proportional growth in headcount? Answering it requires a new workforce design that restructures how work scales as technology absorbs execution and expands decision load.

Technology plays a critical role in facilitating this approach, especially as organizations deploy more capable artificial intelligence (AI). **When leaders intentionally align technology deployment with workforce redesign, projected workforce growth compresses from 15.6% to approximately 0.3% over the next decade**, according to our analysis. Delivering that outcome requires a deep understanding of the workforce and how roles function, using task level insight to sequence deployments and investments effectively.

Technology, after all, does not affect the workforce evenly. Across the range of technologies we assessed, some roles with higher shares of repetitive, process-heavy work offer more opportunities to create capacity through automation. Others will be shaped more by augmentation, as systems expand decision speed and scope without reducing their accountability within the business. And still others will remain structurally durable because they depend on physical presence or human judgment.

We identified four actions CSCOs can take to redesign the workforce and close the labor gap:

1. Anchor investment decisions in task level visibility.
2. Sequence investments by their impact on the labor equation.
3. Pair technology deployment with explicit role and skill redesign.
4. Govern investments as a connected portfolio.

These actions mark the start of a fundamentally different operating model, one that absorbs greater complexity, supports growth with far less incremental labor and scales on intelligence rather than headcount.

Emerging technologies reshape the workforce across three distinct groups

Workforce impact varies sharply across the supply chain. Some roles face substantial redesign as automation removes execution, others change primarily through augmentation as decision scope expands. Even structurally durable roles experience pressure as workflows, expectations and dependencies shift around them.

The workforce group most relevant for closing the labor gap is automation-led (**Figure 1**). These roles are transaction heavy and decision intensive, with work that scales directly with volume and complexity. In our model, roles such as production planning clerks, buyers, procurement clerks and purchasing managers show the greatest disruption, with 40–55% of current task time either automated or significantly augmented under high adoption scenarios.

These and similar positions carry a disproportionate share of routine, rules based work, including ERP updates, scheduling, document handling, quote management and compliance checks.

This makes them highly exposed to technologies like agentic AI and intelligent document processing.

At the same time, these roles sit closest to demand volatility and supplier variability, increasing time spent on exceptions, judgment and coordination as autonomy scales.

Roles in this group scale linearly with volume today and therefore absorb a disproportionate share of the labor gap. Organizations that redesign these roles for automation break that link and provide the fastest path to capacity relief.

Figure 1. Automation-led roles have the highest share of routine, transactional work removed and have the strongest opportunity to create capacity.

Role	Why automation leads	Human workforce demand reduction	Human workforce demand task shift due to technology	Skill changes
Heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers	Driving (45% of role) is fully automatable; loading, inspection and recordkeeping follow	Highest automation exposure; headcount falls sharply under full autonomous vehicle deployment	Execution removed; role shifts to autonomous monitoring and exception handling	Manual driving declines; autonomous vehicle oversight, diagnostics and override skills emerge
Production, planning and expediting clerks	Document reading, scheduling and compliance tasks are automatable via AI and IDP	Rapid capacity gains with role redesign; execution shrinks, exceptions grow	Routine administrative tasks removed; role shifts to AI workflow monitoring and exception management	ERP and workflow skills decline; AI anomaly interpretation and human-AI collaboration emerges as new skills

Other occupations in this category: Shipping, Receiving and Inventory Clerks; Weighers, Measurers, Checkers and Samplers (Recordkeeping); Inspectors, Testers, Sorters, Samplers and Weighers; First-Line Supervisors of Transportation and Material Moving Workers; Driver/Sales Workers

Source: Accenture proprietary workforce model



Managerial and supervisory roles, such as production managers and transportation managers, fall into the second group: augmentation-led (**Figure 2**). These roles show lower automation potential but the highest levels of augmentation, with up to 70% of task time supported by intelligent systems. As technology absorbs analytics, coordination and validation activities, decision scope widens without reducing accountability. Cognitive load increases, raising the bar for judgment, governance and system oversight.

Augmentation-led roles do not reduce workforce demand. Instead, technology increases expectations, decision frequency and complexity in these positions.

Figure 2. Augmentation-led roles will see decision speed and scope expand through AI deployment. Demand does not fall as systems get smarter.

Role	Why augmentation leads	Human workforce demand reduction	Human workforce demand task shift due to technology	Skill changes
Transportation, storage and distribution managers	Monitoring and response automate; oversight and strategic decisions remain augmented	Role rewritten; decision scope and complexity expand	Execution removed; role shifts toward AI agent formulation and network optimization	Coordination declines; digital twin management and fleet governance emerge
Purchasing managers	Routine documentation automates; supplier strategy and negotiation remain human-led	Role rewritten; ~56% of future skills are new	Execution removed; role shifts toward AI workflow design and exception management	ERP and coordination skills decline; agentic AI configuration and decision oversight grow

Other occupations in this category: Cargo and Freight Agents; Procurement Clerks.

Source: Accenture proprietary workforce model



Finally, roles that depend on physical presence, sensory assessment or direct human interaction, such as inspectors, testers and certain field based operations roles, show more limited disruption. Over 50% of task-share in these roles remains unchanged even under aggressive adoption scenarios in our model (**Figure 3**). Still, these structurally durable roles are not untouched: upstream automation reshapes surrounding workflows, decision timing and performance expectations.

As automation scales around this third group, its strategic value increases. People in these roles become the judgment layer that governs, interprets and corrects automated systems.

Figure 3. Structurally durable roles require a strong human presence. Automation and augmentation impact is limited.

Role	Why people lead	Human workforce demand reduction	Human workforce demand task shift due to technology	Skill changes
Industrial production managers	Production strategy and compliance governance remain judgment-led	Demand stable to growing; governance complexity increases with intelligent systems	Partial automation of scheduling and data; role expands toward AI ethics governance and digital twins	Execution skills decline; AI ethics design and agent goal programming emerge
Buyers and purchasing agents	Negotiation and supplier relationships remain augmentation-dominant	Lowest automation exposure; demand remains strong	Partial automation of records and coordination; purchasing and negotiation are augmented	Transactional coordination declines; AI-enabled sourcing workflow design emerges

Other occupations in this category: First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers; Logisticians.

Source: Accenture proprietary workforce model



Synthesis: Why scale breaks the headcount model

CSCOs face a clear decision. Technology adoption will continue, driven by competitive pressure, capital investments and enterprise technology priorities. The real question is whether workforce design keeps pace.

When technology moves faster than workforce redesign, problems surface quickly. Exception volumes rise beyond what planning and operations teams can absorb. Decision rights blur as intelligent systems surface more insights than leaders can effectively validate or act on. Governance bottlenecks replace execution bottlenecks, slowing throughput even as automation expands. Over time, organizations carry more technology, the same labor demand and higher operational fragility.

In this environment, expected capacity gains never materialize. Complexity overwhelms them. CSCOs respond by funding more tools to address performance shortfalls that stem from misaligned roles, skills and accountability rather than technology gaps.

Workforce redesign therefore functions as risk control, not incremental optimization. Leaders must decide whether to deliberately govern how work changes or allow it to evolve unevenly across roles and decisions.

Organizations that deploy technologies as isolated pilots simply redistribute labor pressure across the enterprise. Those that manage them intentionally, using task level insight, role redesign and reskilling, compress workforce growth and scale operations without proportional hiring.

In practice, automation creates new work. In compliance-heavy environments, teams still need to configure AI systems, audit decisions and intervene in edge cases. A large US pharmaceutical company illustrates this point. Leadership set a clear target to reduce its demand planning team by a third, from 135 planners to 90. The math appeared straightforward until our model tested it. Even after deploying agentic AI and robotics across the full set of planner tasks, the company achieved only six percentage points of net efficiency gain.

The analysis strengthened the case for technology while clarifying its limits.

The real opportunity lies in deliberately redesigning how humans and machines share the work, rather than treating automation as a headcount lever.

The right redesign: Four CSCO actions to take today

Closing the supply chain labor gap requires the right choices about how work scales across planning, procurement, manufacturing, logistics and service. For CSCOs, that means redesigning roles, sequencing technology investments and governing how work changes as technology expands.

Here are four actions CSCOs can take today to put that redesign into motion.

1 Anchor investment decisions in task level visibility

Task level insight provides a fact base for distinguishing and making investment decisions about automation led, augmentation led and structurally durable roles. Move beyond the organizational chart by using technology to understand how work actually happens, where time concentrates and which tasks scale with volume or complexity.

2 Sequence investments by their impact on the labor equation

Prioritize automation led roles to reclaim capacity quickly and relieve workforce pressure. Follow with augmentation led roles so leaders can absorb increased decision scope and complexity as autonomy scales. Treat structurally durable roles as anchors of performance and focus investment on enablement and orchestration rather than automation.

3 Pair technology deployment with explicit role and skill redesign

Technology alone does not create capacity. Align reskilling and role redesign with each technology deployment so teams can operate within the new model from day one. With every intervention, specify how roles change, which responsibilities grow and which skills become critical.

4 Govern investments as a connected portfolio

Manage automation, augmentation and enablement as a single, connected portfolio rather than as isolated initiatives. Establish governance that aligns technology, workforce and operating model decisions so investments reduce overall labor pressure instead of shifting it across the organization.

The importance of a shared enterprise effort

Workforce redesign becomes a shared enterprise effort. The CSCO defines how work changes and how it scales. The Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) translates redesigned roles into skills, career pathways, workforce planning and reskilling programs that sustain the model over time. When the business defines the work clearly, HR can equip the workforce to deliver it at scale.

Designing the future workforce starts today

The supply chain talent gap now constrains growth more than demand or investment. It reflects a structural mismatch between how work expands and how organizations add capacity.

As advanced technologies scale, workforce pressure does not ease on its own and requires role redesign and reskilling.

CSCOs therefore face a clear choice. Leaders who act on the four actions outlined here can absorb complexity, protect capacity and scale operations more predictably. Those who delay will contend with rising workforce pressure and expanding operating model complexity that make transformation harder and more costly over time.

The organizations that will lead are not those that adopt technology fastest, they are those that bring their people with them.

About the research

Accenture developed a proprietary scenario-planning model to forecast how supply chain talent needs change under different economic conditions and rates of technology adoption.

The model links projected industry growth to demand across 15 standard US supply chain job families, mapped to a government occupation and task taxonomy, then simulates how 14 technologies automate some work, augment other tasks or leave work unchanged. Because it connects tasks to skills, it also shows how AI adoption drives specific changes in the skills the workforce will need over time. The model also employs a skill taxonomy developed by LightCast, and a custom LLM tool to map occupation-level skills to individual tasks.

We use generative AI in our research production process. Our research experts review and validate the generative AI outputs with traditional research methods where possible, applying Accenture's Responsible AI standards.



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