2021 Women in Supply Chain Survey Shows Resilience, Improvement in Representation

An excerpt from the Gartner/AWESOME Women in Supply Chain Survey
As the COVID-19 global pandemic ground through years of women’s hard-won workforce gains, we were certain that the 2021 Gartner/AWESOME Women in Supply Chain Survey would show degraded diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) results for supply chain organizations. We’d be lucky to get the same flattish results we saw in our prepandemic 2020 numbers.

What we saw instead was remarkable: In every level of the supply chain pipeline except the C-level, we saw improved representation of women, bucking pandemic-era odds. And we saw a record number of specific commitments and supply-chain-led actions to ensure follow-through on gender DEI.

Stated goals and targeted initiatives are crucial, but to sustain progress, chief supply chain officers (CSCOs) must address midcareer attrition.

This report provides an overview of the survey’s three key findings:

1. Representation of Women Improved at Nearly All Levels in 2021
2. Record Number Setting Gender DEI Goals and Leading Their Own Initiatives
3. Increasing Attrition of Women Midcareer
Survey Finding 1: Representation of Women Improved at Nearly All Levels in 2021

The pandemic forced millions of women out of the workforce. Yet this seems not to have been the narrative for the average supply chain organization. In fact, supply chain organizations have not only been able to retain women, but have been able to develop and promote them into higher levels of leadership. Women officially make up more than 40% of the total supply chain workforce and have bounced back from a slump in 2020 at nearly all levels of leadership (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Representation of Women in Total Supply Chain Workforce and Supply Chain Leadership Roles

The only dip, which we predicted last year based on the softness of the 2020 pipeline at the VP level, was at the executive level — a drop to 15% from last year’s high of 17%. This trend has remained since the Women in Supply Chain Survey launched in 2016: As the corporate ladder advances, the proportion of women leaders declines. Women only comprise 23% of VP-level positions in the average supply chain organization.
Survey Finding 2: Record Number Setting Gender DEI Goals and Leading Their Own Initiatives

In 2021 we saw a significant jump in the percentage of supply chain organizations that articulate and document gender DEI goals. The proportion of supply chain organizations with stated goals jumped from 64% last year to 73% (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: More Supply Chain Organizations Have Gender DEI Goals

Among the survey respondents with stated goals, 68% said the supply chain organization had a targeted initiative focused on women, a huge step up from 46% in 2020. Twenty-three percent rely on enterprisewide DEI initiatives, and 10% said they were considering starting a supply-chain-led one. In total, 90% of respondents report active initiatives, an all-time high. Also, for the first time, no respondents gave a “hard no” to the question about whether they had a targeted initiative. In previous years, as many as one in 10 respondents who had goals had no plan or initiative for how they would reach them.
Importantly, the survey respondents with stated goals, and especially targeted initiatives, were more likely to report overall improvement in gender DEI (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Supply Chain Organizations With Goals, Initiatives Significantly More Likely to Report Gender DEI Improvement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Worse</th>
<th>No change</th>
<th>Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objectives (n = 148)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Objectives (n = 50)</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted Initiative (n = 91)</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Initiative (n = 48)</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q: Characterize your progress toward achieving gender DEI at the top leadership level. Source: Gartner/AWESOME Women in Supply Chain Survey 2021

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.
Survey Finding 3: Increasing Attrition of Women Midcareer

Fifty-four percent of survey respondents claim that retaining midcareer women is an increasing challenge, and 10% advise that it is a significant challenge. Only about a third of respondents said that it was not a problem in their organization.

Lack of career opportunities is the top reason that midcareer women are leaving (see Figure 4). Almost 70% of survey respondents selected it as one of the top 3 reasons for midcareer women attrition. The second-most selected option was development opportunities, but this was a very distant second, selected by only 36% of respondents on average.

Figure 4. Lack of Career Opportunities Top Reason Why Women Leave

Q: When women have left at midcareer to later, what have been the reasons? (multiple responses allowed)
Source: Gartner/AWESOME Women in Supply Chain Survey 2021
About the Survey

The 2021 Women in Supply Chain Survey is a collaborative effort by a team of Gartner analysts who research supply chain workforce and organization dynamics and AWESOME, a U.S.-based nonprofit organization focused on advancing women’s supply chain leadership. Other key partners: Council for Supply Chain Management Professionals (CSCMP), a U.S.-based nonprofit organization for supply chain professionals, and boom!, a U.K.-based global community formed to support and link women in the supply chain profession, with membership spanning 30 countries.

Gartner and AWESOME partnered to develop the survey and recruit participants. The sample was augmented with recruitment efforts by CSCMP and boom! The survey was reviewed, tested and administered by the Gartner Research Data Analytics team.

The survey period ran from 23 February through 31 March 2021. The survey respondents totaled 223 supply chain professionals, primarily in North America. Qualified participants worked in companies earning at least $100 million USD in annual revenue and that operated an internal supply chain organization or operated supply chain as a separate business unit/specialty/practice area or served as vendors of supply chain services and solutions. Of the 223 respondents, 178 were from companies with internal supply chains and 45 were from companies categorized as supply chain business services and solutions.

Survey questions focused on: company goals and initiatives to improve recruitment, development, retention and advancement of women; representation of women of color; practices that increase the engagement with, and success of, women in supply chain organizations; midcareer pipelines; and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, we collected baseline data on how many women are in frontline manager/supervisor, senior manager, director, vice president/senior director and executive-level roles within supply chain organizations.
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