

Supply chains are the new black

The bushfires that ravaged so many parts of Australia last summer brought into sharp focus how integral supply chains are to our lives. The crisis caused highway closures, production stoppages, power outages, flight cancellations and delays, revealing what we normally take for granted: an invisible and seamless network of planning, coordination and delivery.

Contemporary supply chains are about much more than warehouses and freight. From the moment we wake and put lights on, turn on the taps, get dressed, buy a coffee and travel to work, domestic, and often international, supply chains streamline each transaction. Dynamic systems move people, goods and data.

Each day right across Australia, they connect our agricultural regions and resource basins to cities and ports, delivering produce and minerals to global markets. These movements are often underpinned by groundbreaking technologies, which help to ensure that business is conducted not just efficiently but also ethically and sustainably.

As supply chains evolve in their sophistication and use of digital technologies, it's become clear employers are looking for new skills and that those skills are often common across multiple industries. In direct response, the Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC) commissioned the development of ten nationally endorsed cross sector supply chain Skill Sets and sixteen Units of Competency to be delivered by Australia's national vocational education and training system. This work has been led by a project reference group of representatives from key industries: mining and resources, horticulture, transport, humanitarian aid, manufacturing, printing and graphic arts, forestry, textiles, clothing and footwear.

The project's cross sectoral approach makes sense in a digital world, where blockchain technology is transforming linear, siloed supply chains into distributed ledger systems (blockchains) to record the status of goods and services at each stage of production. The records are permanent and make it possible to trace each product to its source.

Supply chains therefore now need end-to-end experts, who understand the totality of the transaction rather than being specialists at only one point along its way. Digitisation has also created greater demand for data analysts, IT engineers and supply chain managers. But businesses still need people who know their industry and are able to blend functional and digital expertise. This means existing workers need to be able to augment their experience with new skills.

To ensure high quality delivery and assessment of the new cross sectoral skills, Australian Industry Standards (AIS), the body responsible for developing the 10 new Skill Sets and 16 Units of Competency with industry, has produced a compendium of guidance for Registered Training Organisations on how to contextualise these skills for different industries.



The publication includes resources to support each Unit of Competency and Skill Set (housed in the Transport and Logistics Training Package). These include case studies and links to reports, articles, blogs and videos. Given the speed of change to supply chain practices and the rapid introduction of new technologies, AIS will regularly update the compendium with new material and resources.

Breaking down the silos of skills will bring rewards for the economy, business and individuals. A skilled and adaptable workforce has been identified as a critical component in delivering the National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy. The strategy recognises the importance to industry of having employees who can adopt emerging technologies and practices quickly and effectively.

For Australian industry, cross sector supply chain skills will create an agile, highly mobile supply chain workforce that gives existing workers an opportunity to quickly upskill. For individuals wanting a career with endless opportunity, cross sector supply chain skills will enable graduates to move between industries, along different elements of the supply chain, and provide opportunities to work overseas with Australia's trading partners.

Mark McKenzie, Chair of the Cross Sector Supply Chain Skills Project Reference Group, emphasises that attracting the right people to the sector needs industry input:

'I encourage employers to spread the word that a career in supply chains offers lots of great prospects for digitally savvy people to work with the latest technology and collaborate with partners across the entire spectrum of business.'

'Supply chains are the new black. They offer jobs and careers with lots of variety that also make a positive difference to people's lives.'



Mark McKenzie

