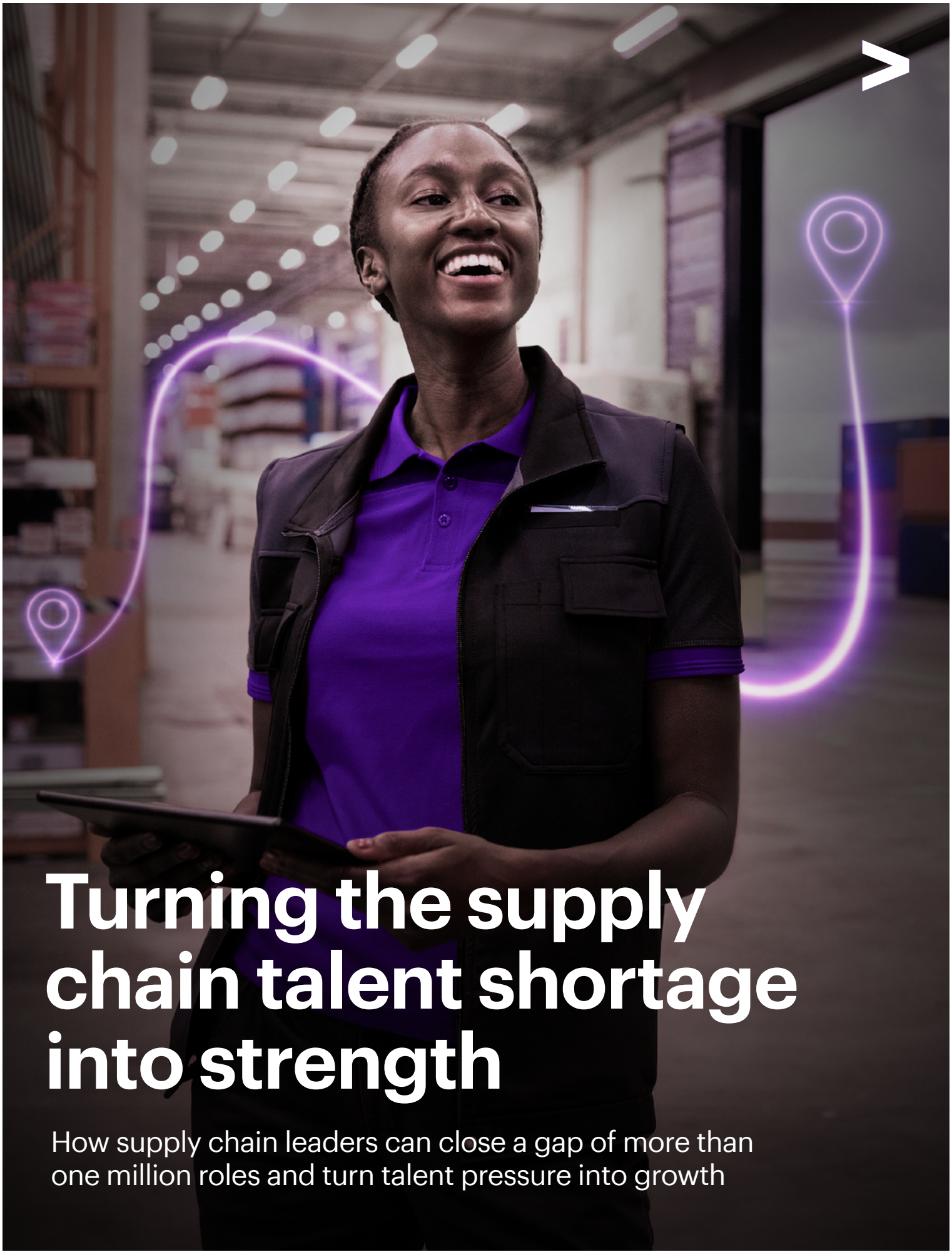

# Turning the supply chain talent shortage into strength

How supply chain leaders can close a gap of more than one million roles and turn talent pressure into growth

Contents

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# In supply chain and operations, I'm often asked the same question: How do we grow when we can't hire fast enough?

**That question came into sharp focus recently with a large US-based industrial manufacturer. Their leaders weren't being dramatic; they were being realistic. Demand for service was rising. Customer expectations were rising. And yet, when they looked into the future, they told us they'd consider it a win just to keep their field service workforce flat.**

If you've ever led a field organization, you know why. These are the people who show up. They travel from site to site. They solve problems in real time. They keep relationships intact. And they carry an invisible second job after every visit including documentation, updates, follow-ups, invoicing and expense reports. The work is essential, but it doesn't scale easily.

What was striking in this case wasn't just the size of this company's projected shortfall; our analysis indicates it reflects a broader gap of more than 10,000 additional field service workers needed over the next decade across all industries. It was the realization that no recruiting strategy, on its own, was going to work.

**So we stepped back and asked a different set of questions:**

Where is time actually going today? What work could be simplified or shifted? And what would it look like if technology gave these teams back capacity without taking away what makes them effective? We built a dynamic model to help us envision what their future workforce could look like.

That's when the conversation changed. Not to "replace the workforce," but to redesign the work, so skilled people spend more of their day on what only humans can do: seeing what's happening on site, making judgment calls, building trust and solving customer problems. We started by modeling the two biggest drains, time on the road and the administrative work that piles up after each visit. Then, we modeled how physical and agentic AI could take the friction out of both. We believed that if we could tackle both challenges, "keeping the workforce flat" would stop sounding like wishful thinking and start looking like a plan.

This paper builds from stories like this one. It looks clearly at where the pressure is building, why "just hire more" is failing and how supply chain leaders can respond by reshaping roles, skills and operating models so their organizations can grow on intelligence, not headcount.

# Supply chains are growing faster than the workforce built to run them

**Every time a supply chain adds complexity, leaders reach for the same lever: hire more people. More volume means more planners. More suppliers means more buyers. More compliance pressure means more managers. That instinct has carried the function for decades. Today, the math is moving faster than that playbook.**

Supply chains keep expanding, but the workforce can't keep pace. Our projections, based on a proprietary scenario-planning model, show demand across core US supply chain occupations rising by 1.34 million roles, or 19%, from 2026 to 2035. Over the same period, our model projects that the labor force will grow by about 3.2%, adding roughly 221,000 workers. The implied gap reaches nearly 1.1 million roles, far beyond what conventional hiring can cover. Several forces increase demand at once: economic expansion, nearshoring, agentic commerce, delivery compression, supply base diversification and rising compliance complexity.

**19%**

projected growth in core US supply chain roles, adding 1.34 million jobs from 2026 to 2035

A gap of this size makes simply hiring more workers an insufficient strategy. To understand how leaders can respond, we built a 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 technology 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.

Three shifts emerge from this model. **First, technology changes the trajectory of workforce growth** by breaking the link between volume and headcount for many transaction-heavy tasks. **Second, technology rewrites work inside roles** as intelligent systems take on more independent execution, freeing people up for exception handling, oversight and higher-judgment decisions. **Third, technology resets the skills required to perform the work**, necessitating continuous skill building rather than periodic retraining.

Supply chain leaders need to respond to these shifts by taking three corresponding actions: build talent foresight where demand changes fastest, redesign work so people and systems scale together, and build skills continuously as tasks evolve. Clear ownership, governance and metrics are the key enablers that help teams run a human + machine workforce in daily operations.

When leaders execute these moves together, scale stops depending on proportional headcount growth. In one high-adoption scenario we modeled (agentic AI at 75%, autonomous vehicles and drones at 75%, IoT/sensor networks at 50% and exoskeletons at 75% deployment), projected workforce demand growth compresses from +18.7% to roughly −3.0% over 2026–2035, turning a shortfall of an estimated 1.1 million roles into a potential surplus of more than 360,000. Supply chain leaders can achieve outcomes like this when they pair technology deployment with role redesign and workforce development from the start.

**When leaders execute these moves together, scale stops depending on proportional headcount growth**

# Three shifts reshaping the supply chain workforce

**We used our newly developed scenario-planning model to translate growth and adoption rates into shifts in roles, tasks and skills. It links growth projections to roles and tasks, then tests how adoption reshapes the task mix and the skills those tasks demand. The output highlights where work shrinks, where it expands and where new work appears, revealing three consistent shifts that show up across roles.**

Shift 1:

# Technology changes the shape of workforce growth

Headcount can flatten under high technology deployment, depending on where leaders deploy it and how they redesign work around them (Figure 1). Technology creates value through task redistribution. As systems absorb routine work, the link between growth and headcount weakens. Supply chains can expand with less hiring pressure when leaders align roles and decision rights to the new task mix.

**Figure 1: Role-by-role impact of automation and augmentation**

| Category | Occupation | Task fate | Strategic implication |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Highest automation** | **Shipping & inventory clerks**<br>Driven by:<br>· Agentic AI (75%)<br>· Autonomous vehicles (75%)<br>· IoT/sensors (50%) | **64.6% Automated**<br>**35.4% Augmented** | Highest automation of any occupation under technologies deployed in combination.* Inventory tracking, shipping documentation, ERP updates and dispatch scheduling are absorbed by the combined action of agentic AI and autonomous vehicles. The role restructures entirely around exception handling, physical oversight and AI output validation. Skill decay is steep (−57%) and 40% of 2035 skills are entirely new. Critical evaluation of AI recommendations becomes a core competency. Urgent reskilling investment required now. |
| **Highest augmentation** | **Logisticians**<br>Driven by:<br>· Agentic AI (75%)<br>· Autonomous vehicles (75%)<br>· IoT/sensors (50%) | **30.1% Automated**<br>**69.9% Augmented** | Highest augmentation rate of any occupation under technologies deployed in combination.* Network optimization, scenario planning and carrier coordination are heavily augmented—AI delivers real-time data and recommendations while the human retains decision ownership. The role expands in scope rather than shrinking. Logisticians also act as the mobility hub in the model—strongest reskilling connectivity to eight other occupations. Invest in AI-augmented logistics planning, data analysis and KPI governance. |
| **Least technology impact** | **Inspectors & testers**<br>Driven by:<br>· IoT/sensors (50%)<br>· Autonomous vehicles (75%) | **46.8% Automated**<br>**35.6% Augmented**<br>**17.6% Unchanged** | The only occupation with a meaningful unchanged task share (17.6%) under technologies deployed in combination*—physical inspection, sensory assessment and hands-on quality checks resist all four active technologies. Automation here is driven by IoT/sensors, not agentic AI. The durable core of the role (good manufacturing practices, product QA/QC) retains importance through 2035. Skill decay is the lowest in the model (−42%). Stable role that requires targeted IoT literacy and AI output review skills rather than full redesign. |

Automated (A) Augmented (P) Unchanged (N)

*Simultaneous deployment of agentic AI (75%), autonomous vehicles and drones (75%), IoT/sensor networks (50%) and exoskeletons (75%) across supply chain operations.

Source: Accenture proprietary workforce model

Shift 2:

# Technology changes the work inside the role

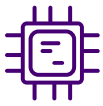
As intelligent systems enter workflows, administrative, validation, coordination and tracking tasks shrink. At the same time, technology introduces new tasks required to configure, operate and sustain these systems in practice. Over our forecast horizon, supply chains depend on people to direct the systems, resolve exceptions that systems can't anticipate and own outcomes that matter.

In practice, that human work includes designing AI-enabled workflows, monitoring system outputs, managing exceptions, validating inputs and maintaining system performance over time. Many organizations do not staff these responsibilities explicitly today, but they have become essential as intelligent technologies move from pilots to scaled operations. In earlier work, we introduced an insight-led approach to workforce strategy that breaks roles at the task level and rebuilds a workforce model based on human-AI collaboration, with clarity on what tasks must remain human, what should be hybrid and what AI can lead.[1]

> **Technology reduces routine execution and adds the operational work needed to sustain automation at scale. People then spend more time on oversight, exception handling and judgment calls.**

The model shows different patterns by role. Some roles see large shares of routine work automated. Others experience augmentation that expands decision scope. Some retain substantial task share that remains unchanged because the work depends on physical presence or judgment. Across the board, roles become more complex and more consequential.

**To focus redesign where it matters most, our model groups roles into three patterns based on how technology changes the task mix.**



**Automation-led roles:**
Routine, transactional work shrinks sharply, creating near-term capacity if leaders redesign decision paths and exception handling.

**Example:** Production, planning and expediting clerks

**Augmentation-led roles:**
Systems accelerate analysis and coordination, while decision scope expands and governance demands rise.

**Example:** Purchasing managers

**Structurally durable roles:**
Task substitution remains limited because the work depends on judgment, leadership or physical presence, even as surrounding workflows change.

**Example:** Industrial production managers

Shift 3:

# Technology changes the skills required to perform the role

As new tasks appear and old ones shrink, the skill profile shifts. Some capabilities fade, and new capabilities take their place.

Skills tied to routine execution, such as enterprise resource planning (ERP) interaction, structured data management and workflow coordination, decline in importance as intelligent systems handle more of that work. This shift is consistent with findings from the Wharton-Accenture Skills Gap Index, which maps how AI adoption is reshaping skill demand across industries and functions. The supply chain workforce faces some of the most acute transitions in the index.[2] At the same time, skills required to operate and govern intelligent systems rise.

These skills include interpreting AI-generated outputs, monitoring and validating system decisions, managing exceptions, curating data for models and exercising judgment in algorithm-enabled environments. A significant share of future skill demand does not appear in many current role profiles. Leaders should plan for skill replacement, not just skill addition.

Together, these shifts redefine the workforce challenge and set up the leadership response that follows. Leaders need to act on workforce planning, work redesign and continuous skill building at the same time. Clear ownership and measurable targets make the moves real while helping teams integrate human and machine work into day-to-day operations.

> **Leaders need to act on workforce planning, work redesign and continuous skill building at the same time**

# Three strategic moves for CSCOs

Recommendation 1

## Build talent foresight before the workforce gap widens

Historically, supply chain growth went hand in hand with labor growth. That link is now breaking. Our model shows that up to 48% of routine, high-frequency work can be fully automated, but only when multiple technologies work together. No single technology changes the equation on its own. Even the most impactful technologies automate only part of the workload independently while augmenting a larger share.

The outcome is a fundamentally different workforce strategy. By removing transactional work, technology breaks the connection between volume and labor. For example, when the combination of agentic AI, autonomous vehicles and IoT automates over 65% of a Shipping and Inventory Clerk's task time, the role does not disappear. It evolves into one that demands more of people: sharper judgment, greater accountability and deeper expertise.

The first strategic move, then, involves talent foresight: Look beyond hiring plans and pinpoint where technology can change the trajectory of workforce demand itself.

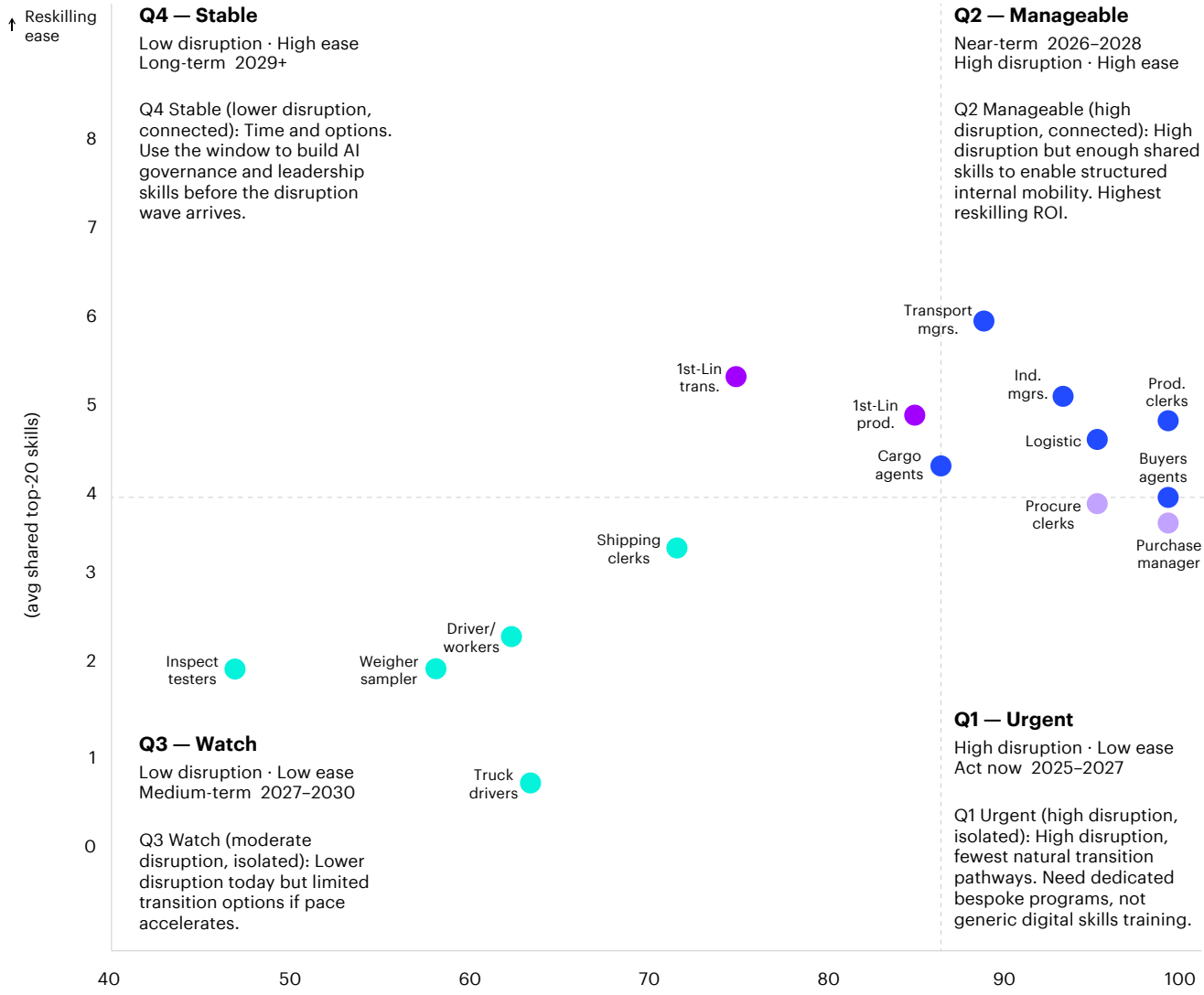
The model reveals that technology's impact on roles is not uniform (Figure 2). It clusters. Some roles, like Purchasing Managers, Procurement Clerks and Truck Drivers, face the steepest task transformation with the fewest natural transition pathways, putting them at the highest risk of workforce displacement and requiring targeted intervention.

Others, including Planners, Buyers and Production Managers, face high disruption but have stronger adjacency to other roles, enabling structured mobility. Still others remain relatively stable, particularly where physical execution or judgment cannot be automated.

> **Look beyond hiring plans and pinpoint where technology can change the trajectory of workforce demand itself**

## Figure 2: Reskilling urgency matrix (high disruption versus mobility pathways)

X axis = disruption score (technology impact on task content) · Y axis = reskilling ease (avg shared top-20 skills) · Active technologies: Agentic AI · IDP · RPA




*Simultaneous deployment of agentic AI (75%), IDP (75%) and RPA (75%) across supply chain operations.

Source: Accenture proprietary workforce model

This segmentation changes how leaders should act. The roles most at risk are often the least visible and, therefore, the least prioritized. Leaders need to move from reactive hiring to predictive, role- and task-based forecasting. That means modeling workforce scenarios, quantifying task-level shifts and translating those into updated role and skill definitions.

**Leadership implications**

1. This work cannot sit only with Human Resources. Supply chain leaders need to make workforce forecasting an explicit part of the journey to an AI-enabled enterprise, with clear ownership, funding and decision-making visibility.

2. If supply chain leaders cannot see where workforce risk is forming, they will discover it only after adoption begins to stall, weakening return on investment (ROI) and slowing transformation.

Recommendation 2

# Redesign work as autonomy scales

Technology does not eliminate roles. It removes tasks and creates a redesign obligation. When technology absorbs large portions of routine work, organizations face a choice: leave roles partially empty or redesign them around higher-value work. Only the latter captures the value of technology.

When agentic AI and IDP automate over 50% of a Production Planning Clerk's task time, the organization faces a choice it rarely acknowledges explicitly: What does this role become? If the answer is, "the same role with fewer tasks," the organization has wasted the technology investment. The value of task automation is the space it creates for the worker to do something more valuable with the time recovered.

As intelligent systems are embedded into workflows, administrative, reporting, validation and coordination tasks shrink. At the same time, new tasks are introduced; ones required to operate those systems in practice. In roles such as Purchasing Manager, work shifts away from documentation and coordination and toward designing AI workflows, monitoring system decisions, managing exceptions and curating data.

**52%**

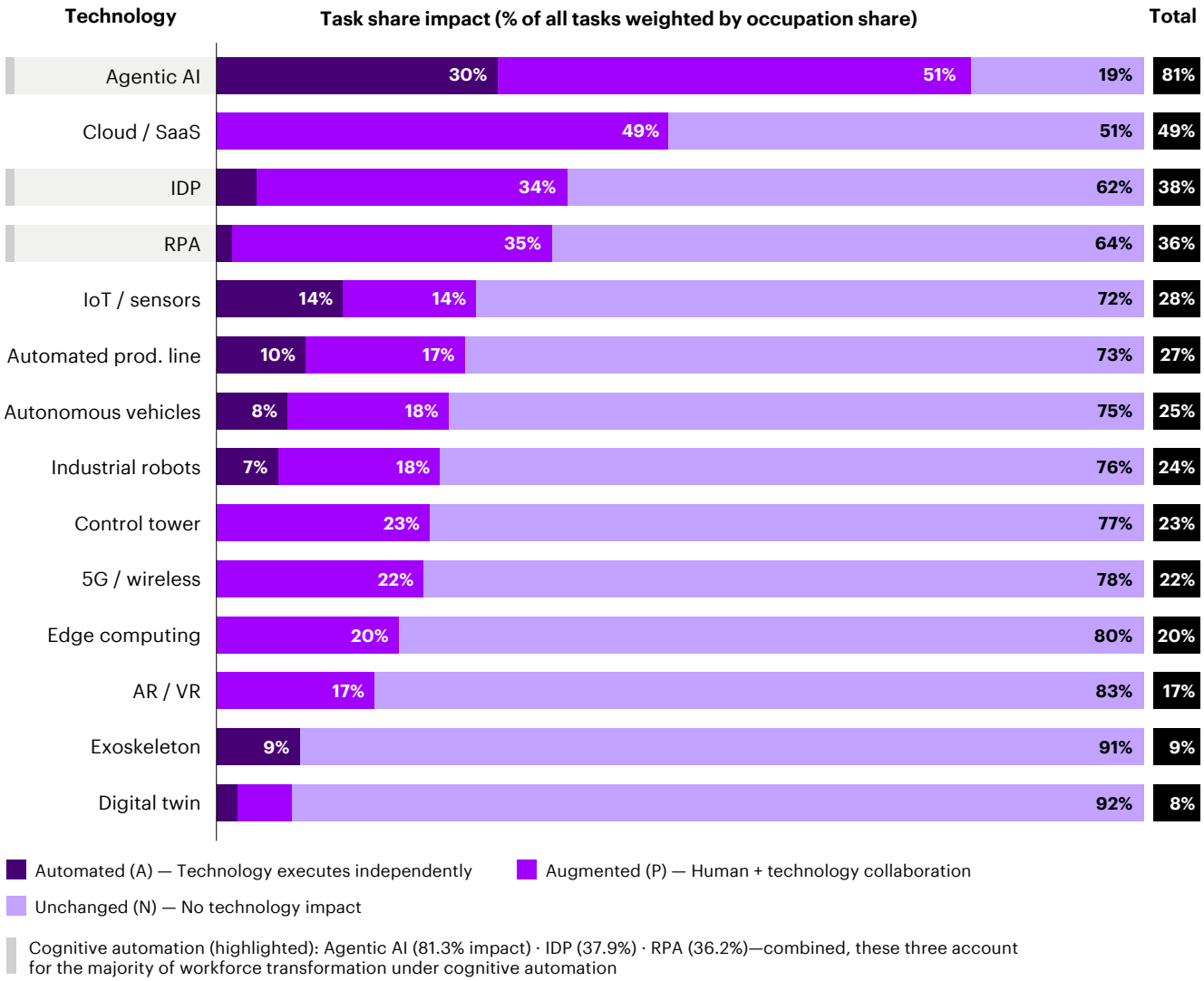
of total tasks can only be augmented; none of the technologies considered can fully automate them

Across the model, this shift varies by role. Some roles are automation-led, where large portions of task time are removed. Others are augmentation-led, where systems expand decision-making scope and increase complexity. In some roles, most tasks remain unchanged, reinforcing the continued importance of human presence. What is consistent is that roles expand in scope and significance. They require more judgment, not less.

Augmentation consistently outweighs full automation across all 14 technologies examined in our model. People are repositioned, not replaced. And 52% of total tasks can only be augmented; none of the technologies considered can fully automate them. Negotiation, supervision, judgment calls, physical handling can be assisted but never removed.

Agentic AI is the most disruptive technology (Figure 3). It automates 30% of tasks and augments a further 51%. No other single technology comes close to this level of task disruption. Yet it still leaves 19% of tasks unchanged. Closing the workforce gap requires deploying multiple technologies simultaneously, each targeting different task pockets.

**Figure 3: Technologies can automate, augment or have no impact depending on individual tasks**




Source: Accenture proprietary workforce model

**81%**

of tasks have the potential to be automated or augmented by agentic AI

Cloud computing (49%), IDP (38%) and RPA (36%) form the second tier of impact as primarily augmentation-led. Together with agentic AI, these four technologies account for the majority of workforce transformation potential. Physical AI (robots, autonomous vehicles, production lines) can automate physical and operational tasks, reaching 24–28% of task time across 14–15 occupations. Human augmentation technologies like exoskeletons and augmented reality/virtual reality go further still, but only to enhance. They have zero automation impact. Exoskeletons reduce strain for Truck Drivers (18% of tasks) and Driver/Sales Workers (26%), but the person stays in the role.

Effective work redesign concentrates human energy on the tasks where human capability creates disproportionate value. Our model identifies a clear hierarchy of durability: The tasks that resist all technology are precisely where human judgment, relationship and physical presence matter most.

Human-machine collaboration now sits at the center of workforce strategy. Leaders can no longer scale by staffing processes alone. They need to design work so people and systems share decisions, handoffs and accountability.

Leaders should define what the system decides, what humans oversee and what triggers escalation. They should also move work redesign and talent readiness in parallel with technology deployment so teams can operate the new model from day one.

**Leadership implications**

1. This is where trust is built or lost. Employees need clarity on how work will change, how decisions are governed and where human judgment still matters.
2. The CSCO defines the work while the CHRO equips the workforce.
3. If work redesign lags technology rollout, organizations will automate processes without building the human system required to scale them effectively.

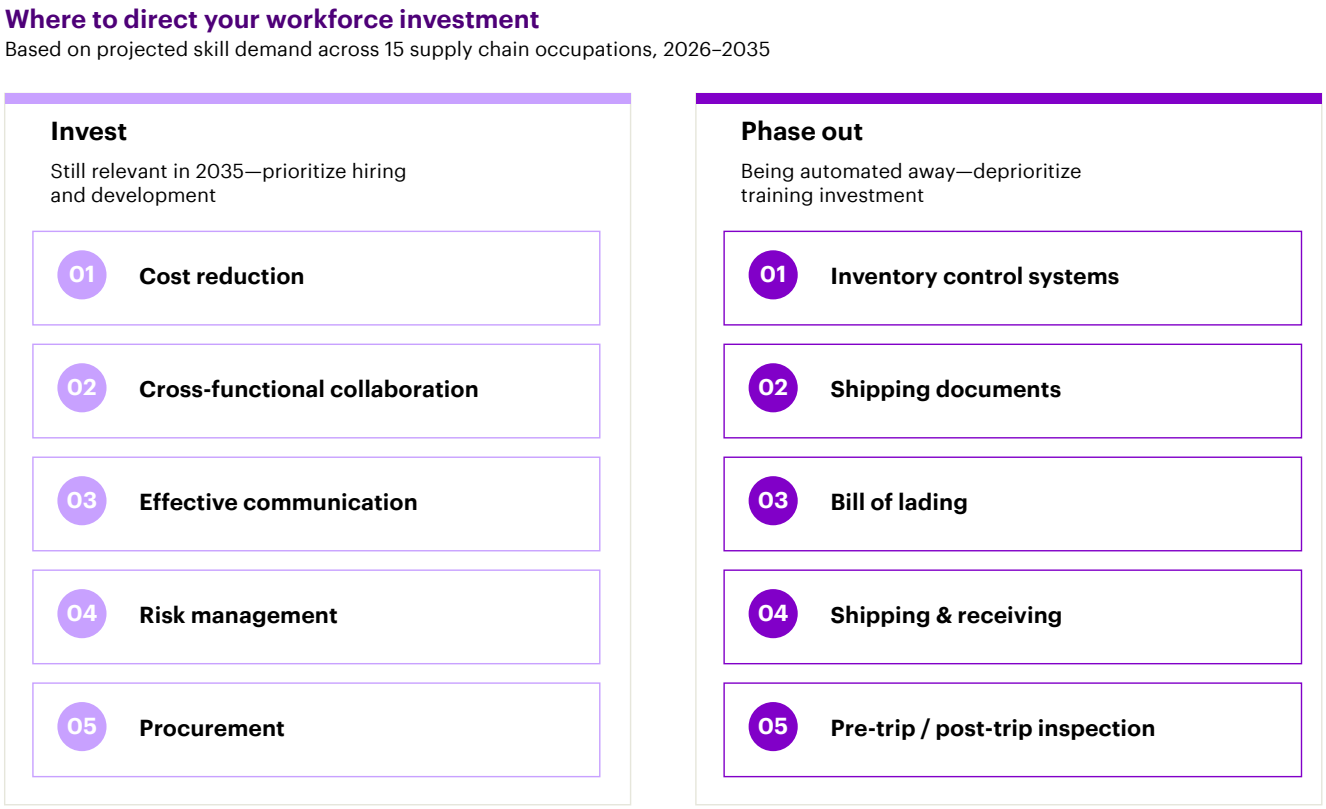
Recommendation 3

# Build skills continuously, not once

As leaders redesign work, they need to reassess and rebuild skills around the new tasks technology introduces.

The model shows that many of the most heavily developed skills today, particularly those tied to ERP systems, data management and workflow coordination, decline sharply in importance as intelligent systems absorb those activities (Figure 4).

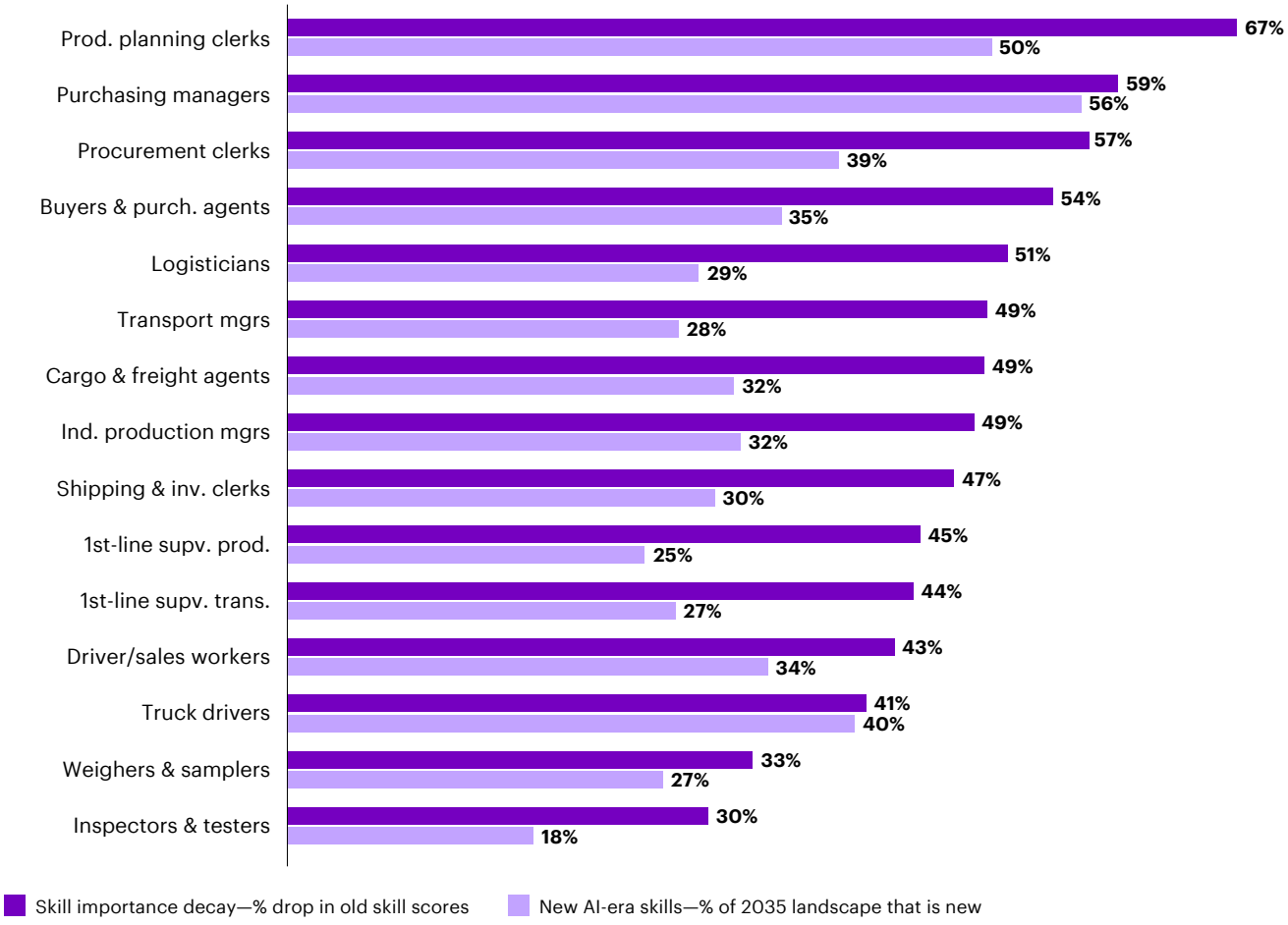
**Figure 4: Vulnerable versus durable skills**




Source: Accenture proprietary workforce model

At the same time, new skills rise: those required to interpret system outputs, monitor decisions, manage exceptions and govern automated workflows (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Skill evolution impact by occupation**




Source: Accenture proprietary workforce model

As automation reduces routine work, leaders should treat training budgets as a portfolio and rebalance away from skills whose value is declining. That shift creates room to build the capabilities AI operations demand.

Reskilling is not uniform. Some roles have strong overlap with others, providing multiple career pathways for workers and facilitating structured internal mobility (Figure 6). Others are more isolated, with limited transition options and a workforce that will need bespoke support rather than generic training programs.

## Figure 6: Skill overlap and mobility pathways across roles

Each pathway below is rated by the number of skills workers currently hold that transfer directly to the target role. "Very easy" reflects nine or more shared skills, with a high degree of overlap that makes the transition achievable with targeted upskilling rather than full retraining.

| Illustrative career pathway | Strength | Strategic value |
|---|---|---|
| **1st Line supervisor transport –> transport managers** | 12 shared skills—very easy | Strongest pathway in the model. Twelve skills in common, including data analysis, KPIs, operations management, risk management, regulatory compliance. Near-seamless transition. |
| **Buyers –> transport managers** | 10 shared skills—very easy | High overlap despite crossing functional boundaries. Shared skills include continuous improvement, cost reduction, performance management and stakeholder management. |
| **Buyers –> purchasing managers** | 9 shared skills—very easy | Natural vertical progression—but caution: four of nine shared skills decay at −56% to −62% by 2035. Build the pathway around the durable skills, not the decaying ones. |

**The critical nuance on "Strength":**
A pathway with 10 shared skills looks very strong—until you check the skill half-life data. For buyers –> transport managers, four of the 10 shared skills (continuous improvement −59%, operations management −62%, process improvement −59%, stakeholder management −60%) decay sharply by 2035. Build reskilling programs around durable shared skills like cost reduction (−50%), effective communication (−48%), data analysis (−53%), risk management (−51%), not declining ones.

Source: Accenture proprietary workforce model

The combination of decaying skills, emerging capabilities and uneven transition pathways means reskilling must become continuous, role-specific and directly tied to how work is changing.

Supply chain leaders can embed learning into day-to-day work, supported by structured pathways and real mobility opportunities for workers. They should further tie development to actual role transitions, or reskilling efforts will stall before they scale.

**Leadership implications**

1. Reskilling will not scale unless leaders signal that new capabilities lead to real career mobility, stronger roles and a more compelling supply chain talent proposition.

2. Talent mobility and co-learning turn reskilling into real transitions by building new capabilities alongside deployment and linking them to clear pathways into redesigned roles.

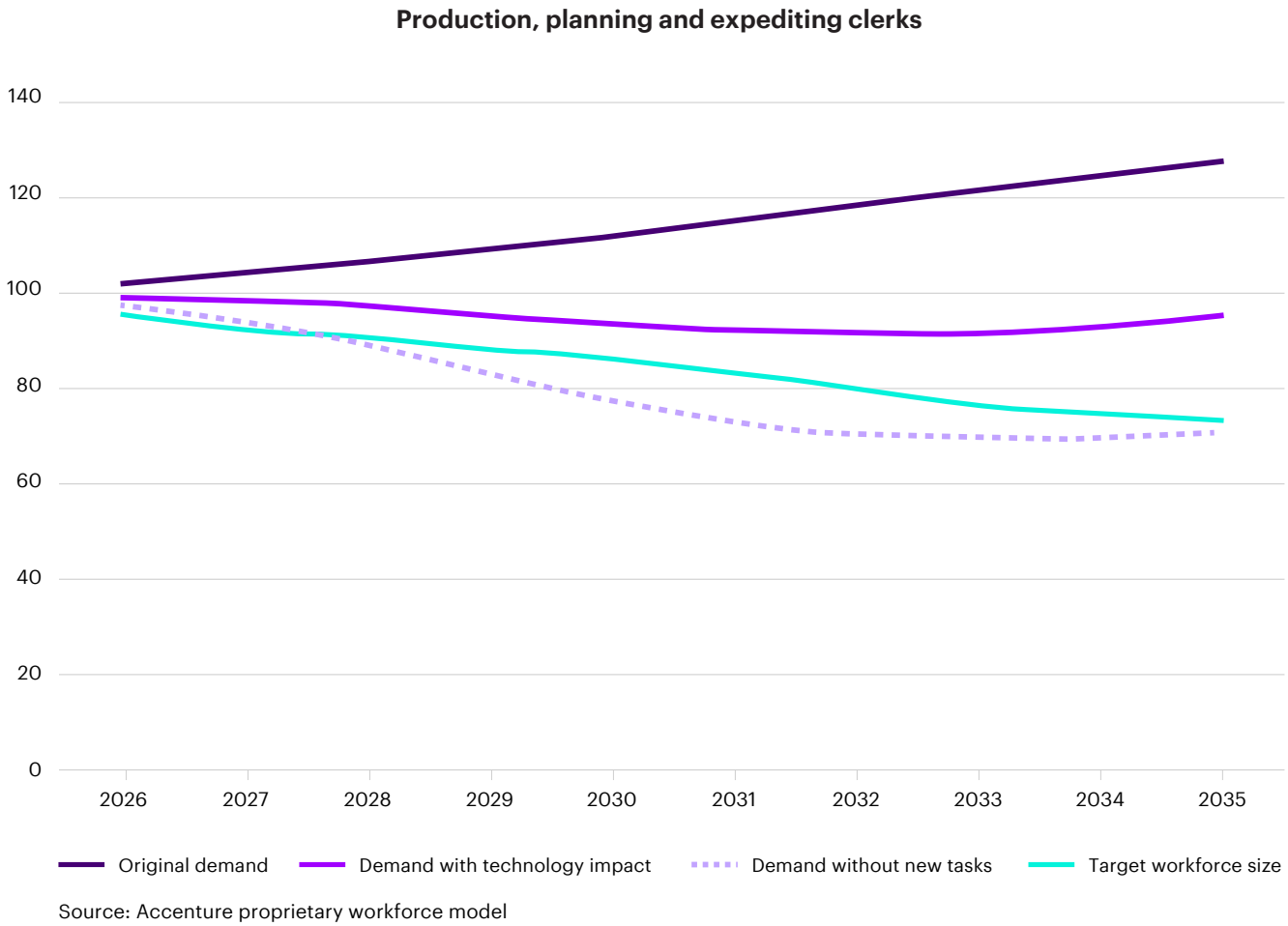
3. As work evolves, one-time training becomes insufficient. Continuous development becomes a strategic requirement.

# Centralizing demand planning in large pharma: A supply chain workforce scenario

**A large US-based pharmaceutical company set a clear goal for its demand planning team: reduce headcount by one-third, from 135 planners to about 90. Leaders expected that centralizing the work, moving planners from multiple sites into a single center of excellence, would make that reduction possible.**

Yet they worried the hub could not attract and hold that much specialized talent. Our workforce model supported that concern. Across pharma, demand for planners is projected to grow 27% by 2035, while supply is projected to grow only 3.2%. That gap would leave roughly 19% of national demand unmet. Against that backdrop, the company's target required a 33% reduction, and our model suggested that no realistic combination of existing technologies could close that gap on its own (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Normalized demand and supply curves for planners**




Source: Accenture proprietary workforce model

To test what technology could truly change, our model broke the planner role into individual tasks and compared options that surfaced two technologies with meaningful impact with minimal overlap. According to the model, agentic AI drove most of the potential change. It supports work that depends on judgment, like pricing, purchasing and directing operations, representing 37% of the role's tasks (Figure 8). It also automates paperwork-heavy duties like scheduling, records maintenance and compliance checking, representing 53%. IoT covered the remaining 10% by handling shop-floor inspection and monitoring product completion, as well as feeding real-time production status into planning systems so planners did not have to check status manually.

Together, these technologies automated or augmented 100% of the planner role's current tasks. Importantly, the model also simulated the work that technology creates in a regulated pharma setting: People have to set up and manage AI workflows, monitor and audit AI decisions, validate sensor data and step in for edge cases. That work is essential to make the technology reliable and compliant.

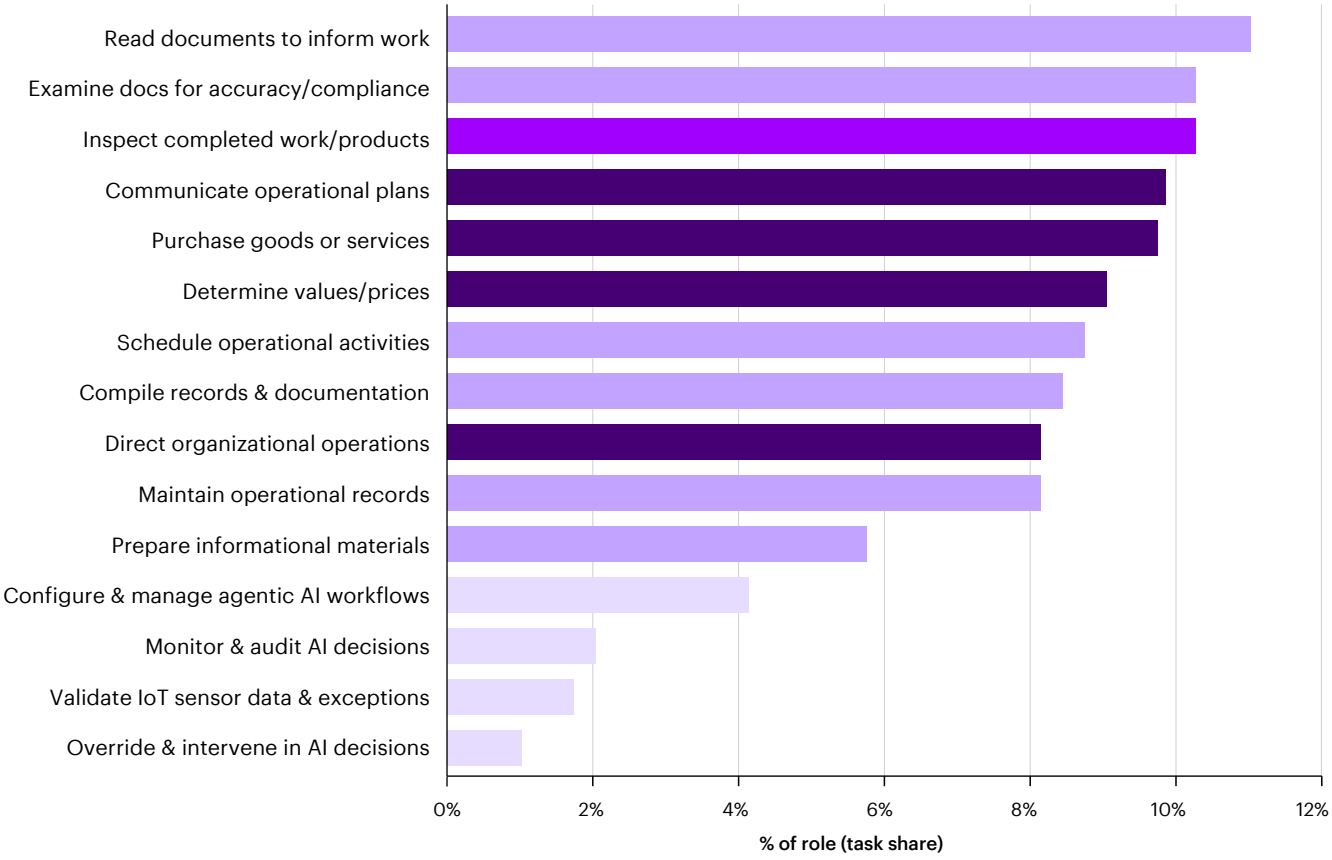
## Figure 8: Demand planner task evolution

**Current headcount**
**135** Distributed model

**Target headcount**
**90** Centralized hub

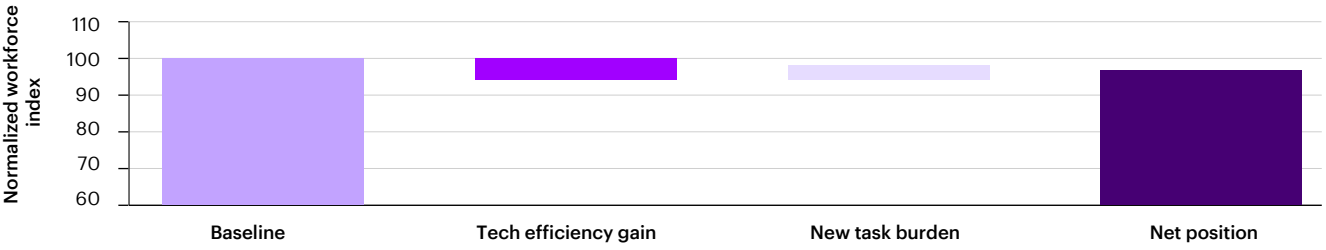
**Max modeled reduction**
**~6%** At 100% implementation

### Task coverage by technology—and new tasks added




Source: Accenture proprietary workforce model

### Why the gap persists: Technology giveth, new tasks taketh away




Technology offsets are partially consumed by new human tasks required to deploy, monitor, validate and override the same systems. The net reduction at full implementation falls well short of the 33% target—no combination of available technologies closes this gap.

Normalized index: baseline = 100. Max tech reduction at 100% workforce implementation shown as ~94. New task burden partially offsets efficiency gains. Actual client headcount to be calibrated by your team.

*Automation-rated tasks do not generate efficiency gains in the model—they remain in scope for human oversight and exception handling.

Source: Accenture proprietary workforce model

**33%**

reduction didn't materialize—full rollout delivered only ~6% net efficiency

Even with full rollout modeled across the workforce, the two technologies together delivered only about six percentage points of net efficiency gain, which left the future workforce need far from the 33% reduction target. The result clarified what the company could and could not ask technology to do. The tools reduced some tasks, but they also created a meaningful amount of new technology-driven work for people, especially in a knowledge-heavy, compliance-heavy function.

In other words, the analysis reaffirmed the need for human roles. It also sharpened the path forward: better outcomes would come from deploying technology and people more strategically together, redesigning how planning workflows across humans and machines, rather than treating tools as a direct route to a 90-person organization.

# First moves: The next 12 months

**The three recommendations above only deliver results when pursued together, and they reinforce each other quickly. Foresight sharpens where redesign will create the most value. Redesign makes reskilling investment land in the right roles. Continuous skill-building ensures the workforce can operate the systems being deployed. The immediate priorities below are designed to activate all three at once.**

## Immediate priorities

### 1 Anchor investment decisions in task-level visibility

**Foresight**: Map your workforce against the reskilling urgency matrix. Identify which occupations sit in the highest-risk category and begin designing bespoke pathways, not generic digital skills programs, for those roles.

**Foresight**: Audit your technology deployment roadmap against task-level impact. For every technology you plan to deploy, answer: which tasks does it automate, which does it augment and what does the role become?

**Foresight**: Conduct a skills audit using your top 15 occupations as the unit of analysis. Measure current skill profiles against the 2035 skill landscape. The gap between those two profiles is your reskilling priority queue.

### 2 Sequence investments by impact on the labor equation

**Foresight**: Identify which of your highest-headcount occupations are automation-led, augmentation-led or structurally durable. Sequence technology deployment to target automation-led roles first, where capacity relief is fastest.

**Redesign**: Before committing to augmentation-led investments, confirm that leadership and governance capacity exists to absorb increased decision complexity. Technology that expands decision scope without capable decision-makers creates risk, not relief.

## 3 Pair technology deployment with explicit role and skill redesign

**Redesign:** Take one high-impact automation-led role—Production Planning Clerk or Procurement Clerk—and redesign it end-to-end. Define what the role looks like when automated tasks are removed, then build a pilot for 20 to 50 workers. Do this in conjunction with IT projects that are being planned, and connect around the roles impacted by that system.

**Redesign:** Create a joint governance structure requiring technology deployment and workforce readiness to be approved together. Technology and HR decisions made in isolation produce the misalignment that stalls transformation.

**Skills:** Redirect training investment away from ERP, data management and workflow management towards the durable and emerging skills the model identifies: effective communication, regulatory compliance, safety standards and AI-era capabilities.

## 4 Govern investments as a portfolio, not a set of pilots

**Skills:** Formalize your strongest internal mobility pathways—1st-Line Transportation Supervisors to Transport Managers, Buyers to Purchasing Managers—as structured career programs. These can be activated within 12 months.

**Skills:** For highest-risk roles like Purchasing Managers, Procurement Clerks and Truck Drivers, begin conversations with ecosystem partners: community colleges, trade associations, technology vendors. Internal solutions alone will not be sufficient.

# The leadership choice

**The 1.1 million-role gap is real. The test is how supply chain leaders respond, because each path builds a different organization over the next 10 years.**

Leaders who default to hiring will spend the decade managing scarcity. Vacancies persist, wage pressure climbs and high-value people stay buried in work intelligent technologies could handle. Supply chains slow down when the business needs them to accelerate.

Leaders who act now can build a supply chain that scales on intelligence rather than headcount. Advanced technologies, including agentic AI, already move from pilots into planning, procurement and operations. They take on transactional execution and they also create new work at once: oversight, exception management, governance and decision ownership. Those demands arrive with deployment, so leaders need to redesign roles, tasks and skills in parallel or complexity will compound faster than capacity and technology returns will erode.

Our model shows what becomes possible when leaders make that shift deliberately. In a high-adoption scenario, projected workforce growth compresses from +18.7% to roughly −3.0% over 2026 to 2035 when leaders pair technology deployment with role redesign and measurable capacity building. The three moves in this paper—building talent foresight, redesigning work as autonomy scales and developing skills continuously—belong on the CSCO and COO agenda. They determine how the supply chain grows, where people create value and whether technology investments compound or stall. The window to move first is open. Technology adoption is inevitable. Workforce redesign is the choice, and it determines whether the next decade ends with a bigger talent gap or with a supply chain that can grow without hiring in lockstep.

## About the research

This report draws on a proprietary workforce model developed by Accenture Research, built on task-level data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics O*NET database, economic projections by industry from Oxford Economics and occupational skills data from Lightcast. The model covers 15 supply chain occupations and 14 technologies, assigning each task a share of total working time and an impact rating across automation and augmentation dimensions; skills were then mapped to tasks using a custom large language model developed in-house. Outputs are scenario-based rather than predictive, reflecting a range of technology adoption trajectories.

**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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