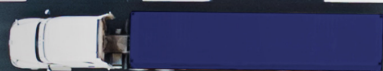




DP WORLD

REWIRING GLOBAL TRADE:

How Chief Supply Chain Officers
are building for growth



**GLOBAL
TRADE
OBSERVATORY**



INTRODUCTION

The rise of the Chief Supply Chain Officer (CSCO) reflects a broader transformation in international business. A role once defined almost entirely by cost and operational execution now reaches into corporate strategy, growth, risk and investment. Today's CSCO must understand not only how goods move, but where businesses can grow, how they can enter and serve new markets, and how operations can adapt as circumstances change.

This report examines that expanding role through a survey of 103 CSCOs across 14 markets and nine industries. Strikingly, 93% say their role in driving business growth has become more central over the past three years, while 87% agree that supply chain management is now central to executive decision-making.

It is also a story about opportunity as much as disruption. Despite recent geopolitical tensions, tariffs and uncertainty over trade policy, 97% of the CSCOs surveyed are optimistic about the outlook for global trade over the next year. New markets and technologies are creating possibilities for growth, while greater uncertainty is increasing the value of resilience and the ability to adapt. Technology is also increasing the value of connectivity, visibility and speed.

Today's CSCO increasingly combines operational expertise with strategic judgement: balancing efficiency and resilience, managing risk while enabling growth, and making decisions across markets, sourcing, technology and logistics. This report explores that new strategic landscape, including the shift towards greater optionality and the capabilities that will matter in the years ahead. It also considers what this means for logistics providers, and the value of international networks, local knowledge, specialist expertise and an end-to-end perspective.

FROM COST CENTRE TO GROWTH ENGINE

For decades, companies judged their supply chains almost entirely on two things: cost and execution. Supply chain leaders were expected to minimise costs while ensuring that materials and components reached production sites and finished goods reached customers reliably and on time. Those responsibilities remain fundamental, but the role and nature of supply chain leadership have changed significantly.

Muzammil Ahmed, Head of Supply Chain for the Americas and Global Foods at Unilever International, says “supply is a business differentiator and a competitive advantage when executed properly.”

Recent disruption has accelerated that change. The pandemic, geopolitical tensions, tariffs and disruption to major trade routes have brought supply chains much higher up the corporate agenda.

Susan Johnson, Chief Supply Chain and Transformation Officer at AT&T, says that COVID-19 fuelled a realisation among chief executives that a strategic perspective on supply chain is essential and that it can be a competitive differentiator. “Supply chain leaders across the board are now viewed as strategic partners,” she adds.

This view is echoed by Gajaindren Nair, Malaysia-based Senior Procurement Lead at Siemens Healthineers: “The primary catalyst for change has undeniably been COVID-19. It transformed how the supply chain functions, and elements such as resilience, risk management, diversification and business continuity have become increasingly critical,” he says.

Yet disruption only partly explains the shift. Technology, changing patterns of global growth and intensifying competition have also made supply chain capability increasingly important to commercial strategy.

Digital platforms have made it easier for companies to reach customers far beyond their home markets, while advances in logistics, visibility and connectivity have made those markets easier to serve. Emerging economies, meanwhile, are increasingly important sources of demand as well as production and supply. Speed to market can influence whether a company captures a new opportunity, while decisions about sourcing, manufacturing, inventory and logistics can shape where and how it can grow.

What our survey suggests is that the elevation of supply chain leadership has become much more widespread, and that the change is still under way. More than nine in ten CSCOs (93%) say their role in driving business growth has become more central in just the past three years. None say it has become less central.

The shift reaches into the highest levels of corporate decision-making. Some 87% of respondents agree that supply chain management is now central to executive decision-making, including 46% who strongly agree.



FIGURE 1:
THE CSCO'S ROLE IS BECOMING CENTRAL IN DRIVING BUSINESS GROWTH

Compared with three years ago, how would you describe the CSCO's role in driving business growth in your organisation? Select one option.

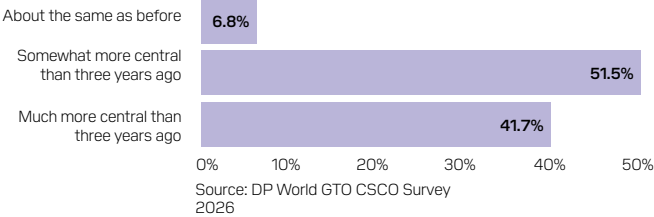
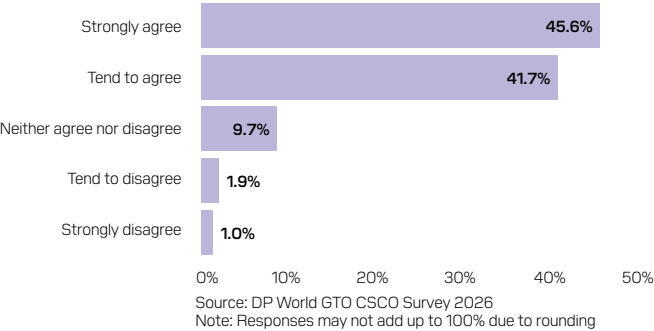


FIGURE 2:
SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT NOW CENTRAL TO BUSINESS DECISION-MAKING

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Supply chain management is now central to my business' executive decision-making. Please select one option.

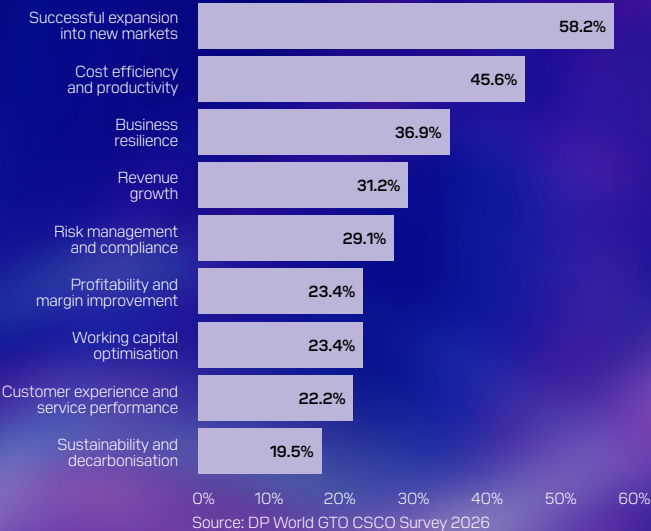


These findings point to a CSCO operating at the intersection of operations and corporate strategy. Decisions that once might have been taken elsewhere in the business and passed to supply chain teams for execution increasingly require supply chain expertise while the options are still being considered.

The objectives against which CSCOs are measured provide further evidence of how much their mandate has broadened, and how closely it is now tied to business strategy. Successful expansion into new markets is included in the personal performance objectives of 58% of respondents, making it the most frequently selected business outcome in the survey. Cost efficiency and productivity remain important, selected by 46%, while CSCO objectives also encompass business resilience, revenue growth, risk management, profitability and customer experience.

FIGURE 3:
EXPANSION INTO NEW MARKETS AN IMPORTANT BUSINESS OUTCOME FOR CSCOS

Which of the following business outcomes are included in your personal performance objectives? Select up to three.



“Your sourcing capability can be a true growth driver. We have executed projects where reconfiguring our sourcing network generated substantial cost savings that were reinvested directly into the P&L, which in turn drove volume growth.

Muzammil Ahmed
 Head of Supply Chain for the Americas and Global Foods
 Unilever International

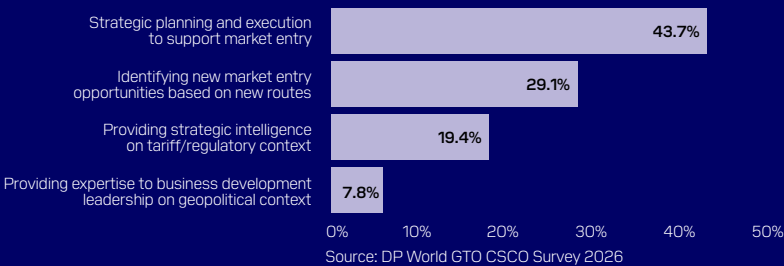
Market entry provides one example of why supply chain expertise is becoming more strategically important. Entering a country or region requires decisions about sourcing, routes, customs and regulation, inventory, distribution and the infrastructure available on the ground. These considerations influence the cost and speed of expansion and, in some cases, whether the proposed approach is commercially and operationally viable.

Logistics can become one of the key determinants of the growth strategy: whether products can reach the market at the right cost and speed, whether customers can be served reliably, and whether the business can scale rapidly if a product or brand suddenly takes off.

CSCOs are consequently becoming involved in these decisions earlier. Asked where they add most value when their organisation enters a new market, 44% identify strategic planning and execution to support market entry. A further 29% point to identifying market-entry opportunities based on new routes. Together, the findings show supply chain leaders helping to determine where and how their businesses can grow, as well as how the resulting strategy will be executed.

FIGURE 4:
CSCOs INVALUABLE TO THE IDENTIFICATION, PLANNING AND EXECUTION OF NEW MARKET ENTRY

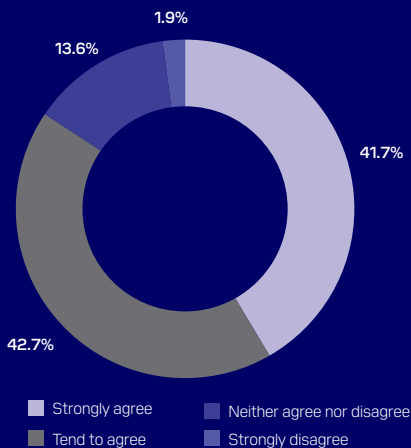
When your organisation enters a new market, where does your role add most value? Select one option.



This capability is likely to become still more important as businesses look beyond established markets for growth. More than four in five respondents (84%) agree that emerging markets are becoming more important to their business's growth strategy.

The opportunity can be significant, but expansion into new markets may expose companies to unfamiliar customs regimes, transport infrastructure, regulatory requirements and distribution networks. Supply chain expertise can therefore shape the commercial case for expansion as well as its execution. Attractive demand is only part of the equation. Businesses also need to understand how products will enter and move through a market, where inventory should be held, how reliably customers can be served and how those requirements affect the economics of expansion.

As supply chain choices increasingly influence where companies compete and how quickly they can expand, CSCOs are helping to turn corporate ambition into commercially viable operations.



Source: DP World GTO CSCO Survey 2026
Note: Responses may not add up to 100% due to rounding

FIGURE 5:
EMERGING MARKETS ARE BECOMING MORE IMPORTANT FOR BUSINESSES' GROWTH STRATEGY

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Emerging markets are becoming more important for my business' growth strategy. Please select one option.

THE NEW SUPPLY-CHAIN QUESTION: HOW MANY OPTIONS DO WE HAVE?

For CSCOs, the changing trade environment creates a different kind of strategic challenge. Supply chains have traditionally been designed around assumptions about costs, suppliers, production locations, inventory and routes. When tariffs, trade rules or geopolitical conditions change, yesterday's optimum may no longer be the best configuration.

This is already affecting long-term decisions. Ninety percent of respondents agree that recent tariff changes are reshaping their investment, sourcing and supply-chain decisions, while 83% expect tariff uncertainty to continue affecting supply-chain strategy for the foreseeable future.

The task for CSCOs is therefore increasingly to build resilience while preserving room to manoeuvre. We specifically asked whether resilience and optionality had overtaken cost reduction as the primary drivers of supply-chain strategy. In response, 84% agreed that they had. You have to evaluate resilience. In today's rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape, leaders must design resilient contingency networks," Mr Ahmed concurs.

The shift is particularly pronounced in healthcare and life sciences, where 90% of respondents agree that resilience and optionality have overtaken cost reduction as the primary drivers of supply-chain strategy.

Having been in supply chain for a while, we always joke about the teeter-totter between just-in-time and just-in-case inventory management, which keeps the job interesting. There is no such thing as one single strategy for everything we buy as we spend about US\$60bn a year. We consider the category we are buying in, assess the dynamics, and then shift that teeter-totter in the right direction.

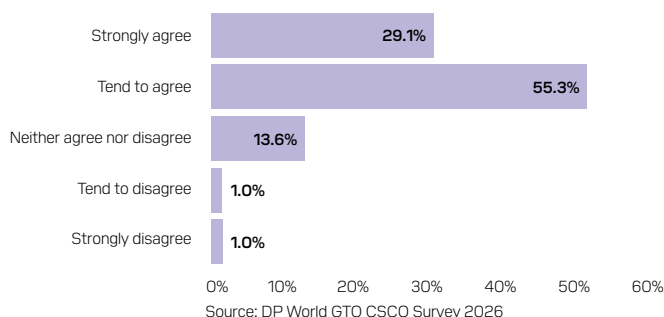
” Right now, anyone sitting in the technology space buying base core electronics is competing with the hyperscalers. The rapid increase in demand from the hyperscalers is putting supply constraints in the underlying components we buy for our electronics and telecom equipment. We are shifting to ‘just-in-case’ to ensure we have long-term committed supply for certain components in high demand.

Susan Johnson
Chief Supply Chain and Transformation Officer
AT&T



FIGURE 6:
**BUSINESS SAY RESILIENCE
 AND OPTIONALITY HAVE
 OVERTAKEN COST REDUCTION**

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? For my business, resilience and optionality have overtaken cost reduction as the primary drivers of supply-chain strategy. Please select one option.



In healthcare, resilience can no longer be treated simply as insurance; it is becoming both a clinical and commercial imperative. There is a patient at the end of every healthcare supply chain, so a single point of failure is not just a logistics delay – it can mean a shortage of critical medicines or therapies.

What these findings tell me is that the old playbook is changing. Companies are diversifying suppliers, building greater flexibility into inventory and routes, and combining nearshoring with a broader sourcing base. We need to build more paths to the patient.

Confidence in global trade remains strong, but confidence and predictability are becoming decoupled. For healthcare, that means designing networks that can keep products moving when a primary supplier, location or lane is disrupted. Alternative routes and greater optionality are therefore becoming clinical continuity levers, helping us protect patient access while continuing to grow.

Magrietha Mallinson, Global Vice President - Healthcare
 Global Logistics, DP World

This does not make cost unimportant. Rather, CSCOs increasingly have to weigh it against the value of having viable alternatives. A second supplier, perhaps in another country, additional inventory, another production location or an alternative route may carry a cost in normal conditions, but each can provide choices when disruption or a change in trade policy alters the economics of the existing supply chain. Some of these options may also be needed as businesses enter new markets, establish new production locations or adapt their supply chains to serve them.

Companies are putting this into practice across several parts of their operations. Over the next 12 months alone, 71% plan to diversify their supplier base, 59% expect to increase inventories, 57% plan to nearshore operations and 48% to friend-shore.

The picture becomes more revealing when these changes are considered in combination. The most common combination in our survey, selected by 22% of respondents, brings together three different changes: diversifying suppliers, increasing inventories and nearshoring operations. Companies are building optionality across sourcing, inventory and production geography at the same time.

The survey also suggests that the choices companies make can vary substantially with their scale. Among large organisations, defined as those with more than 1,000 employees, 80% plan to increase inventories, compared with 44% of smaller organisations with 50 to 250 employees. One possible explanation is that larger organisations have greater financial capacity to carry additional stock, while smaller businesses may face tighter working-capital constraints.

FIGURE 7: SUPPLIER DIVERSIFICATION IS A TOP STRATEGY FOR BUSINESSES

What are the top three strategic supply chain changes your company plans to make in the next year?
Please select up to three.

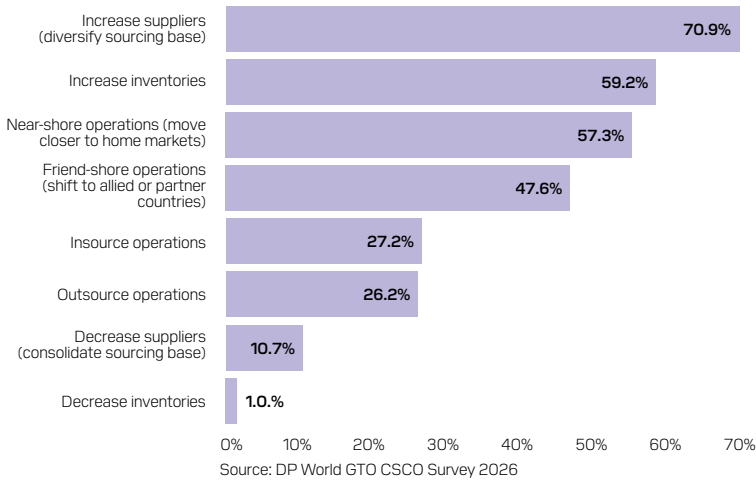
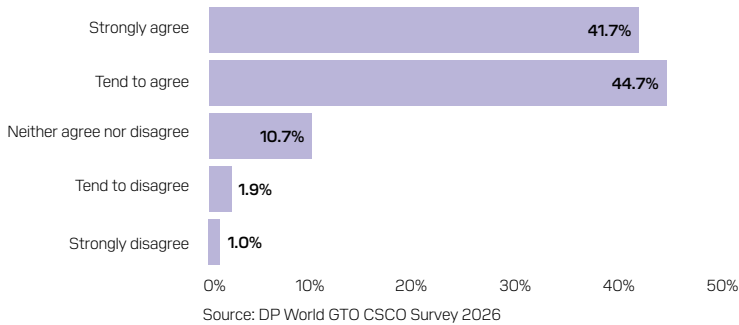


FIGURE 8: ALTERNATIVE TRADE ROUTES ARE BECOMING A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE FOR BUSINESSES

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Access to alternative and multimodal trade routes is becoming a competitive advantage for my business.
Please select one option.



Routes are another important source of flexibility. When we asked specifically about the commercial value of route choice, 86% of respondents agreed that access to alternative and multimodal trade routes is becoming a competitive advantage. Alternative routes can help when a corridor is disrupted, but the ability to switch between routes and modes can also allow businesses to balance cost, speed and market access differently as conditions change.

Mr Nair provides an anecdote. A critical shipment of Siemens Healthineers was blocked due to the conflict in the Middle East, and the company then deployed a multimodal contingency route. “We transported the cargo overland across land borders from the Middle Eastern port to a city in North Africa. We then airfreighted the cargo from North Africa directly to Malaysia to satisfy a strict Ministry of Health installation timeline,” he says. While rerouting and airfreight carry premium costs, he says, preserving business continuity and fulfilling commitments creates a clear competitive advantage.



This takes the argument beyond resilience alone. Optionality can give businesses greater freedom to pursue growth, as well as reducing their exposure to disruption. Mr Ahmed says that over the past five to six years, Unilever International has transitioned from a pure back-to-back setup to establishing strategic regional warehousing hubs in Panama, Rotterdam and Singapore. “From these central consolidation points, we deploy multimodal freight - combining ocean, rail, and long-haul road transport depending on customer lead times, border constraints, and channel requirements.”

For CSCOs, the challenge is to make these choices under uncertainty, determining which options are worth creating and maintaining before they know precisely which will be needed. More suppliers, additional inventory, multiple production locations and alternative routes can increase cost and complexity. Yet a supply chain designed too narrowly around today's optimum may leave a business with fewer choices tomorrow.

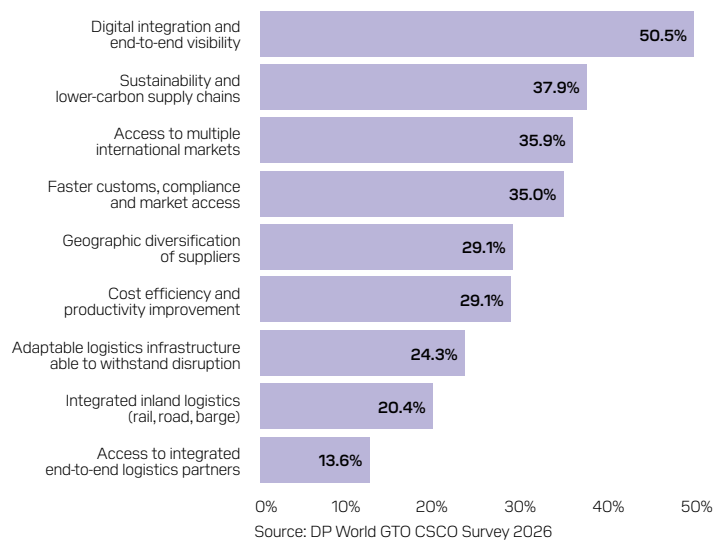
NEW CAPABILITIES FOR FUTURE GROWTH

For CSCOs, the next three years promise new opportunities to use supply chain capabilities to drive growth. As they navigate continued disruption and build greater optionality into their supply chains, CSCOs are also looking at the capabilities that can help their businesses grow over the next three years.

Digital capability stands out. When we asked which supply chain capabilities would be most important in enabling future business growth, half of respondents identified digital integration and end-to-end visibility, making it the most frequently cited capability. Lower-carbon supply chains followed at 38%, with access to multiple international markets at 36% and faster customs, compliance and market access at 35%.

FIGURE 9:
DIGITAL INTEGRATION AND SUPPLY CHAIN VISIBILITY AMONG TOP FUTURE GROWTH CAPABILITIES

Which of the following supply chain capabilities will be the most important in enabling business growth in the next three years. Please select up to three.



” In large multinational healthcare organisations, operating across extensive supplier pools, global customer bases and diverse product categories creates immense complexity. Without end-to-end visibility and data integration, operations can stall.

Gajaindren Nair
Senior Procurement Lead
Siemens Healthineers



Our survey shows a strong connection between digital integration and growth. When asked whether greater integration of digital technologies in supply chains is enabling faster entry into new markets, 87% of CSCOs agree. That is a striking finding for a function whose role in market entry and business growth is already increasing.

Digital integration can also give CSCOs a more complete view across suppliers, inventory, capacity, shipments and markets. Better information across the supply chain can help them identify dependencies, compare options and make decisions across the system. It can also help businesses respond more quickly when new opportunities emerge, from entering a market to scaling supply as demand grows.

Artificial intelligence is one part of this shift. Our survey suggests that, in several areas of supply chain management, AI has already moved beyond experimentation. Seven in ten respondents (70%) say they are using AI to improve performance in demand forecasting or have progressed to fully AI-driven operations in this area. The equivalent figures are 66% for risk analysis and forecasting and 65% for inventory optimisation.

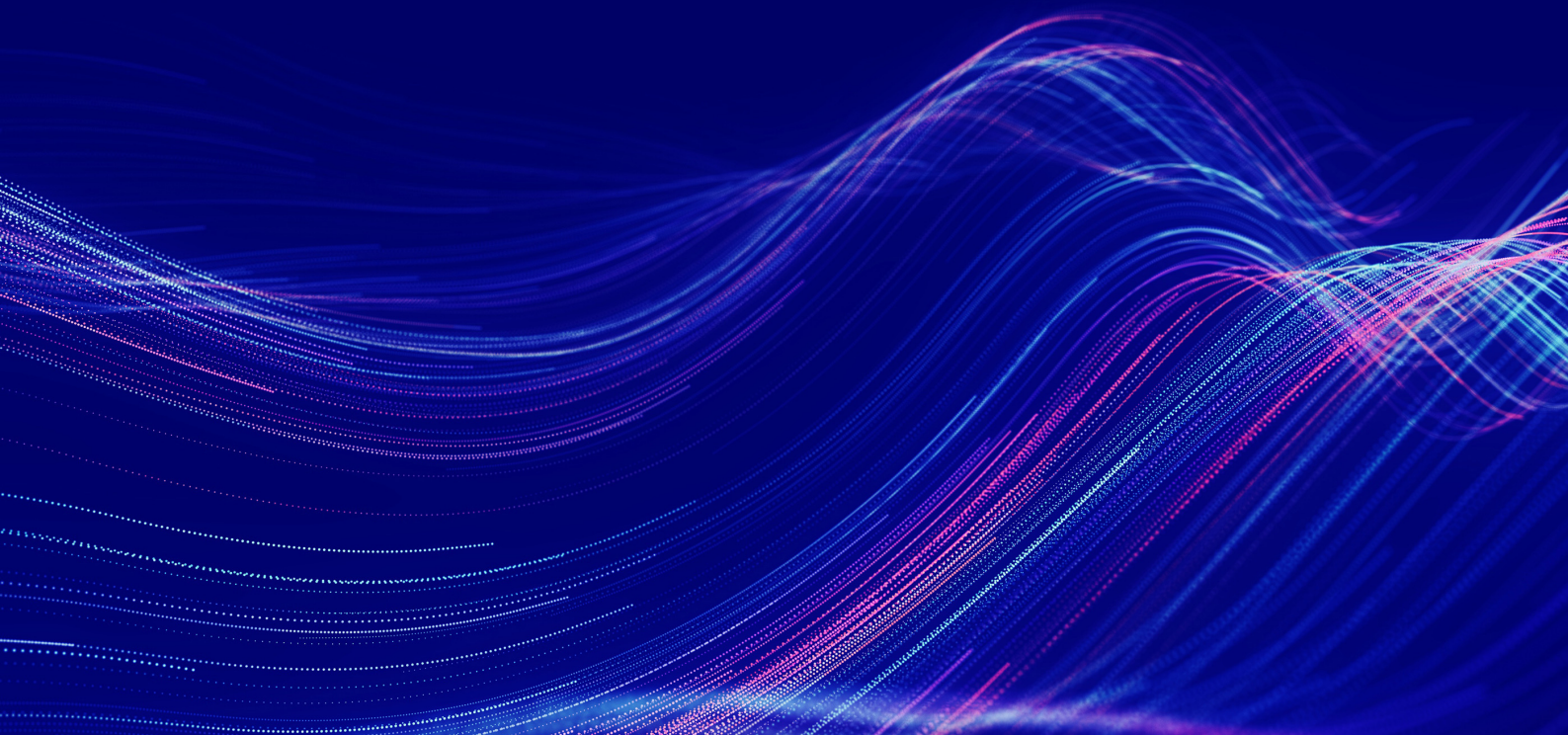
These findings suggest that AI adoption is particularly advanced in areas where companies need to anticipate changing conditions and make decisions about future demand, risk and inventory. “AI tools give us the ability to track exactly how much we are buying, whether we are hitting volume thresholds and if our purchase orders match negotiated prices. We are now stitching that together, from contract to payment, to understand the full ‘source-to-pay’ lifecycle,” says Ms Johnson.

Respondents' priorities evolve further when they look three years ahead. We asked which capabilities they consider important in enabling growth today and which they expect to be important in three years' time. Access to multiple international markets is the most frequently identified capability today, at 51%, falling to 36% in three years' time. Digital integration and supply chain visibility rises from 41% to an expected 50%, while lower-carbon supply chains rise from 24% to 38%. Cost efficiency and productivity falls from 40% to 29%.

The comparison suggests a changing balance of priorities. Established requirements such as cost efficiency remain important, while respondents expect greater emphasis on digital integration and lower-carbon supply chains as enablers of future growth.

Some of the largest increases are in capabilities selected by relatively few respondents today. Integrated inland logistics rises from 10% to 20% over the next three years, while access to integrated end-to-end logistics partners rises from 5% to 14%. The increase in end-to-end logistics partners is even more pronounced among large organisations, defined as those with more than 1,000 employees, rising from around 3% today to 23% in three years.

These capabilities will not be equally important to every business or in every market. Their value will depend on geography, existing infrastructure and the nature of a company's supply chain. But the findings are consistent with integrated logistics becoming particularly valuable where businesses operate across multiple markets and modes or require specialist capabilities. In those circumstances, end-to-end logistics partners can bring together infrastructure, transport modes and expertise that are too often considered separately, helping CSCOs turn strategic choices into workable supply-chain solutions.



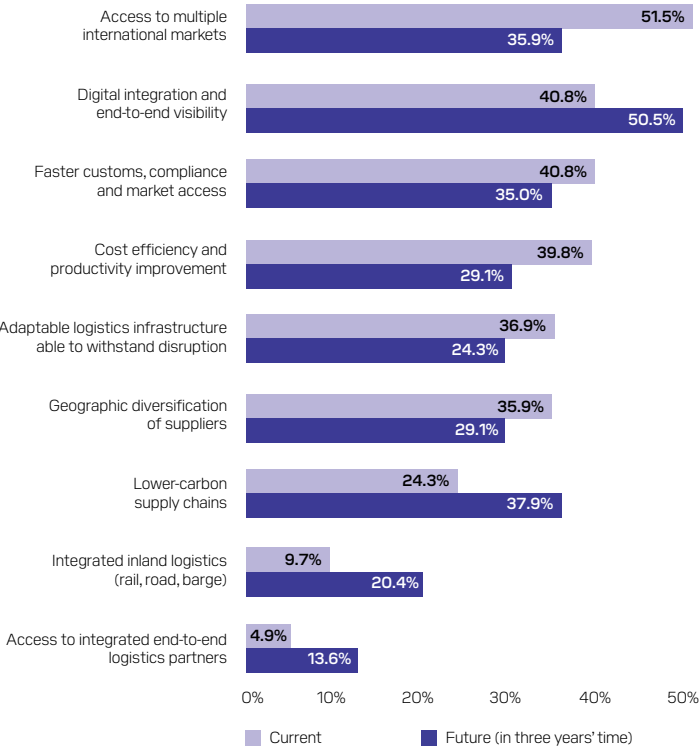


Lower-carbon supply chains are another increasingly important part of the growth picture. Globally, the proportion identifying them as important in enabling growth rises from 24% today to 38% in three years. Among large organisations, the change is sharper still, rising from 10% to 40%

The larger opportunity lies in how these capabilities are combined. Taking a systems-level view allows CSCOs to understand how decisions across the supply chain interact, judge the trade-offs and identify where different capabilities can create the greatest value. As the CSCO's role in growth expands, the ability to bring these capabilities together and decide how best to deploy them will become an increasingly important part of the value the function brings to the business.

**FIGURE 10:
LOWER-CARBON SUPPLY CHAINS
GROW IN IMPORTANCE
(IN PERCENTAGE POINTS)**

Which of the following supply chain capabilities are most important in enabling business growth? Currently vs Future (in three years' time). Select up to three.



Source: DP World GTO CSCO Survey 2026

Resilience is increasingly about anticipating where supply chains need to go next, not simply responding to disruption. These results show that lower-carbon supply chains are set to see some of the strongest growth, signalling a clear shift in how businesses are thinking about long-term resilience. We're seeing the same with our customers, as sustainability becomes more closely linked with future-ready trade. Decarbonisation and competitiveness should not be viewed as separate agendas - the opportunity is to build supply chains that are more resilient, more efficient and lower carbon at the same time. It's why we're continuing to build out solutions that help customers better understand their supply chains and make informed choices as expectations, opportunities and trade patterns evolve.

Ayla Bajwa, Group Senior Vice President
Sustainability
DP World

CONCLUSION

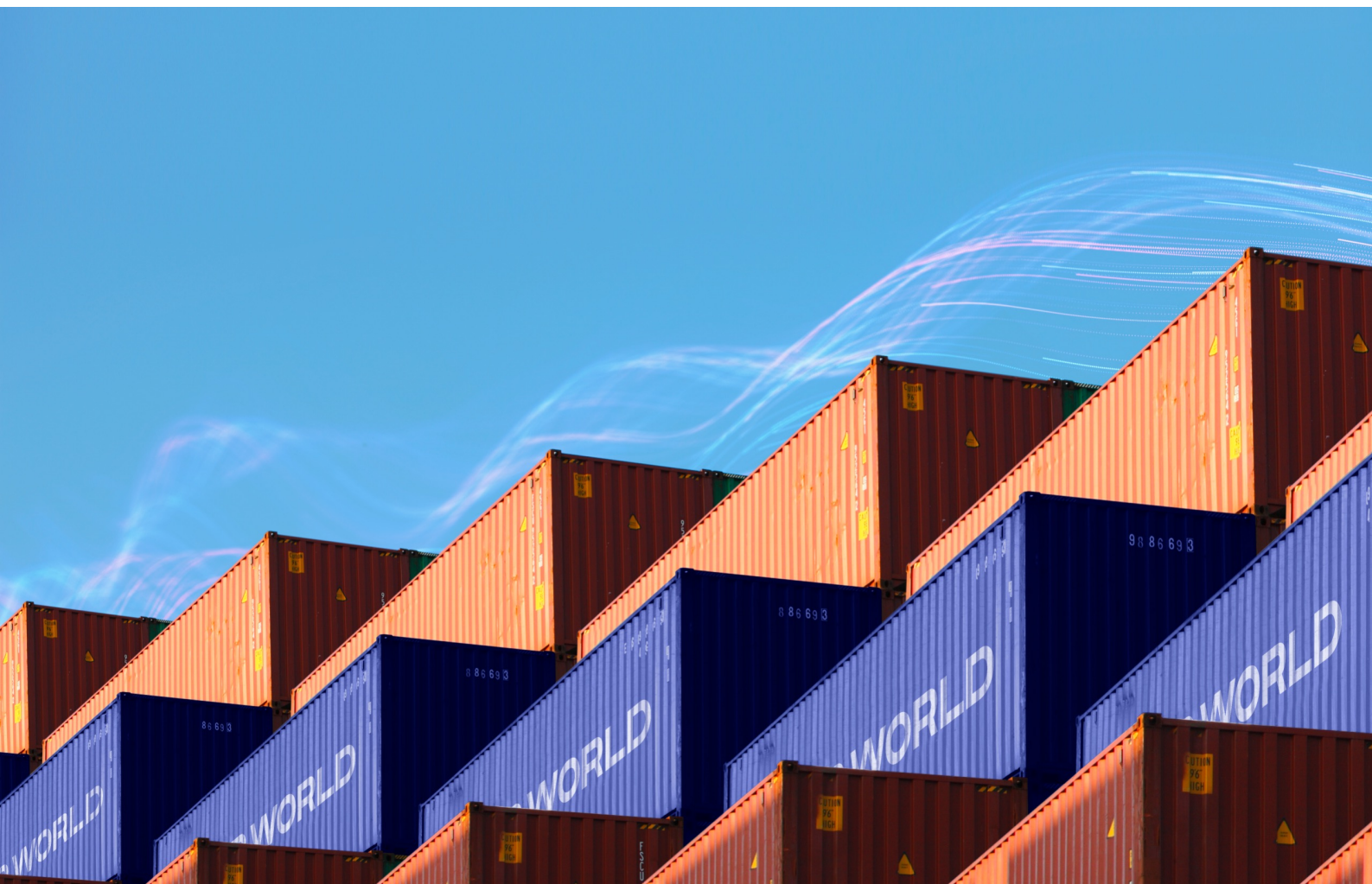
The changing global trade environment has helped elevate the CSCO, but that is only part of the story. Supply chain leaders have also driven that change themselves, embracing new technologies, building greater optionality and demonstrating how supply chain expertise can strengthen resilience, create competitive advantage and ultimately drive growth.

Our experience working with CSCOs reflects what we see in the survey. Increasingly, these are executives contributing at the highest levels to strategic decisions about growth, investment and risk under uncertainty. Their expertise influences where businesses source and manufacture, which markets they enter and how they respond as conditions change. Yet there is an opportunity to take this further. The prize is far larger than incremental cost savings. As emerging markets become more important sources of growth, the ability to combine international reach with knowledge and capabilities on the ground will become increasingly valuable.

It is clear that the strategic value of supply chain management increasingly comes from seeing more of the picture. End-to-end logistics can bring together capabilities that are too often considered separately, from ports, freight forwarding and inland transport to warehousing, economic zones, market access services and highly specialised logistics. The value lies in drawing on the right combination to support business objectives, create new possibilities and adapt as circumstances change.

This creates an opportunity for logistics partners too. Operational excellence remains essential, but supporting the expanding strategic role of the CSCO requires international networks, local knowledge, specialist expertise and an end-to-end perspective. As the role of the CSCO evolves, the relationship with logistics providers can evolve with it, moving beyond service provision towards strategic partnerships that combine insight with the ability to execute.

CSCOs have already done much to expand the strategic potential and role of supply chain management. The opportunity now is to push that transformation further, making supply chain capability an increasingly important part of how businesses compete and grow.





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