

# Supply Chain Manager interview questions

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## What to expect

Interviews for Supply Chain Manager roles tend to mix operational process questions with behavioural questions about supplier and stakeholder conflict, plus at least one scenario question testing judgement under time pressure. Larger employers often add a data or case exercise given how central ERP and BI reporting are to the role.

- **Process:** Questions asking you to walk through how you'd build or run a specific supply chain function, such as strategy development or inventory planning.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about past experience managing suppliers, resolving conflict between teams, or handling budget pressure.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical disruptions, like a missed supplier delivery, testing how you'd respond under pressure with incomplete information.
- **Technical/data:** Questions on using ERP systems and BI tools to identify trends, risks or cost-saving opportunities.
- **Stakeholder-focused:** Questions about balancing competing priorities between sales, procurement, warehouse and finance teams.

Most processes start with a recruiter or HR screen focused on background and salary expectations, followed by a panel interview with the hiring manager and a senior stakeholder from operations or finance covering process and behavioural questions. Some employers add a case study or data exercise, working through a sample inventory or supplier problem using ERP or BI-style data, before a final conversation to confirm fit and discuss reporting lines.

## 1. Walk me through how you'd develop a supply chain strategy to reduce costs while keeping delivery performance on track.

### Why they ask

This tests whether you understand the moving parts of the role, procurement, inventory, warehousing and distribution, and how you sequence changes without breaking service levels.

### How to structure your answer

Walk through it step by step: start with the data you'd pull, the stakeholders you'd consult, the trade-offs you'd weigh between cost and service, and how you'd measure success after implementation.

### Example answer

*"I'd start by pulling current freight, holding and procurement costs alongside delivery performance data from the ERP system, then sit down with sales and warehouse leads to understand where the current strategy is causing friction. From there I'd identify two or three areas with the clearest cost-to-risk trade-off, such as consolidating freight lanes or adjusting reorder points, and pilot changes in one region before rolling out more broadly. I'd track cost per unit shipped and on-time delivery rate weekly during the pilot so I could catch any service drop early."*

## 2. Tell me about a time you had to manage a difficult supplier relationship or resolve a contract dispute.

### Why they ask

Supplier management is central to the role, and this checks how you handle conflict without damaging a relationship you may still need long-term.

### How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation and the supplier issue, the task you were responsible for, the specific actions you took to negotiate or de-escalate, and the result for the relationship and the business.

#### Example answer

*"A key supplier had started missing agreed delivery windows, which was affecting our production schedule. I was responsible for the relationship and needed a fix that didn't involve switching suppliers mid-contract. I set up a direct meeting with their account manager, laid out the specific delivery data showing the pattern, and we agreed on revised performance metrics with a review clause if things didn't improve within a set period. Their reliability improved noticeably afterwards, and the revised terms gave us a clear escalation path if it slipped again."*

### **3. A key supplier misses a delivery deadline right before a peak demand period. What do you do in the first 24 hours?**

#### Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure and how you triage a disruption with incomplete information, which is a regular feature of the role.

#### How to structure your answer

Talk through your immediate priorities in order, what you'd check first, who you'd contact, and how you'd protect customers while working the problem, then note what you'd do afterwards to reduce the chance of repeat disruption.

#### Example answer

*"First I'd confirm the actual scale of the delay and which customer orders it affects, rather than reacting to the initial alert alone. I'd contact the supplier directly to get a firm revised timeline, and in parallel check inventory across other warehouses or alternate suppliers for a short-term workaround. I'd flag the affected customer accounts to sales so they can manage expectations proactively rather than customers finding out from a missed delivery. Once the immediate gap is covered, I'd review why the early warning didn't give us more lead time and adjust the monitoring threshold with that supplier."*

### **4. How do you use tools like Power BI or Tableau to identify risks or cost-saving opportunities in the supply chain?**

#### Why they ask

Data analysis is listed as a core skill for this role, and employers want to know you can move from raw ERP data to decisions, not just build dashboards.

#### How to structure your answer

Give a concrete technical explanation: what data sources you'd connect, what kind of view or metric you'd build, and how it changed a real decision.

#### Example answer

*"I usually pull inventory turns, supplier lead times and freight cost per unit out of the ERP system into Power BI, then build a view that flags SKUs where turns are dropping and lead times are lengthening at the same time, since that combination is a leading indicator of a stock-out risk. In one case that view showed a supplier's lead time creeping up over several months before it became an obvious problem, which gave us time to start qualifying a backup supplier well before it became urgent."*

### **5. How do you balance competing priorities between sales, procurement and warehouse teams when a demand forecast changes suddenly?**

#### Why they ask

The role sits at the intersection of several teams with different incentives, and this checks your stakeholder management approach.

#### How to structure your answer

Describe your general approach to competing priorities, then ground it in a specific example of how you actually resolved a conflict between teams.

**Example answer**

*"I try to get everyone looking at the same data before arguing about the response, because a lot of the disagreement comes from each team working off a different version of the forecast. When sales pushed a large upside revision late in a quarter, I brought procurement and warehouse leads into one meeting with the updated numbers and asked each to flag their real constraints, lead time on reorders for procurement, storage capacity for warehouse. We ended up phasing the additional stock over two orders instead of one, which sales accepted once they saw the capacity numbers directly."*

**6. Describe a time you improved inventory accuracy or reduced excess stock.**

**Why they ask**

Inventory control is one of the measurable outcomes hiring managers expect from this role, and this question checks for a real, specific result rather than a general claim.

**How to structure your answer**

Use STAR, with particular attention to what the situation looked like before your change and what specifically improved afterwards.

**Example answer**

*"Excess stock had built up across a few slow-moving product lines because reorder points hadn't been reviewed in a long time. I was asked to look at working capital tied up in inventory, so I ran a review of turnover rates by SKU and reset reorder points for the slowest-moving items, cutting order quantities and extending review cycles for those lines. That freed up warehouse space and reduced the amount of capital sitting in stock that wasn't turning, without affecting availability on the fast-moving lines customers actually wanted."*