

EDU GUIDE

The prospects of studying SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT



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The year was 2021, and thanks to the new availability of the Covid-19 vaccines, many parts of the world were slowly opening up again after a year of stagnancy. However, it soon turned out that pent-up consumer demand during the pandemic was putting a significant constraint on the availability of products and services, especially Taiwanese semiconductors vital to the technology we use every day. In an even more dramatic turn of events, a 400-meter-long container ship had obstructed the Suez Canal, one of the most important global trade routes, significantly slowing down already strained international trade. Further into 2022, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, there was another significant disruption in the supply of grains and whole foods due to the conflict. These scenarios highlight the importance of the supply chains in the world we live in today.

A supply chain is a flow of goods through a network of companies and people, who are responsible for manufacturing and delivering a product or service. Fuelled by an explosive rise in global trade after World War II, the supply chain industry was estimated to be valued at USD 28 billion in 2022 and is expected to balloon to USD 75 billion by 2032.

The industry is rapidly expanding and with it, the importance of supply chain management (SCM). On a similar note, SCM is involved with the management of the material flow process, as well as procurement, manufacturing, operations, logistics, and marketing of finished goods from raw materials. While a relatively niche function in management, SCM has tremendous global growth and numerous job opportunities.

With Bangladesh's export-import trade volume exceeding USD 100 billion, the functional importance of supply chains for the economy is underscored. A report from IDLC shows that the industry has around a thousand local firms alongside twenty multinational logistics and freight forwarding companies, employing nearly 40,000 people. Additionally, the 2023 Logistics Performance Index (LPI) report published by The World Bank ranked Bangladesh 88th, a considerable 12-point improvement from 2022.

With industry growth comes an increase in educational and job opportunities. Regarding educational programs, a couple of universities, such as North South University (NSU), BRAC, and East West University, have started offering SCM as a BBA

degree major. On a non-managerial side, Industrial Process Engineering (IPE) degree-holders usually get jobs in supply chain management. IPE degrees are common in Bangladesh and taught in many institutes, from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) to Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology (AUST) and Islamic University of Technology (IUT).

You may ask, if Supply Chain BBA majors and IPE students can get the same functional roles, what's the difference between the two degrees?

"Internationally speaking, Supply Chain Management is taught in Engineering and Business schools as a bridge between the two disciplines," says Dr Ziaul Haq Adnan, Associate Professor at the Department of Management at NSU. "Engineering students learn IPE, which is more modelling and mathematically oriented. On the other hand, Supply Chain Management in Business schools is more case-study-heavy and taught from a managerial perspective," he explains.

So, let's get to the main point: should you consider getting a degree in SCM or not? Compared to other BBA majors, SCM falls on the tougher side of the spectrum, as it contains a lot of technical information, such as transportation models, quality management, and project management. So why should you choose it over more popular and established majors such as Finance or Human Resource Management?

"The biggest advantage of studying Supply Chain Management, I would say, is the tremendous growth potential of the field," says Meshbaul Hassan Chowdhury, lecturer at the Department of Management at NSU. "Both local and multinational corporations are specifically looking for supply chain graduates to streamline their operational activities efficiently," he adds.

Hence, SCM remains more future-proof compared to functions such as Finance, which are becoming increasingly saturated and outsourced to newer technology.

Another advantage of SCM is the broad scope of functional job roles available. "Effective supply chain management is essential to ensure a seamless flow from the point of origin to consumption," says Afnan Yusuf, lecturer at the Department of Management at NSU. "SCM professionals work in areas like buying supplies, managing transportation, keeping track of inventory, and production planning. These roles ensure efficient operations, timely delivery, and customer satisfaction,

making SCM critical for any successful business," she explains.

Apart from communication and negotiation skills, SCM demands quantitative, analytical, algebraic, and statistical prowess and in-depth proficiency in computer software and tools. "Advanced Excel skills such as solvers, analysis toolbox, macros, linking, and referencing, are necessary for supply chain modelling. For most careers in supply chain management, proficiency in spreadsheet applications, Power BI dashboards, and enterprise resource planning (ERP) certifications should be enough. However, for research, knowledge of Python, MATLAB, and coding is essential," says Ziaul.

As with any job, a degree in SCM or IPE is optional to enter the supply chain management industry, but it is an added advantage. Ziaul adds, "Having a degree in Supply Chain Management does certify that you have basic knowledge and understand core principles of SCM, which will definitely help you to stand out."

However, a popular way for graduates from different fields to enter the world of SCM is through professional certifications. "Earning a certification, especially after entering the industry, has helped boost my career growth and allowed me to stand out to the office management from a large pool of potential candidates," says Morshedul Alam Abir, a recent SCM graduate from NSU. Some popular supply chain certifications worth looking into include a CSCA (Certified Supply Chain Analyst), CSCM (Certified Supply Chain Manager), PGD in SCM, and Lean Six Sigma black belt certifications, to name a few.

So, is SCM worth pursuing as a degree? A hundred percent yes, according to Mesbaul. "When I joined the SCM department as a lecturer back in 2018, we had a maximum of 20 students in a course; fast-forward to today, we now offer multiple sections for many SCM courses," he says. "This shows that students understand the necessity and value of majoring in supply chain management and that there's increased demand for supply chain graduates in the corporate sector."

With the local logistics industry growing at an annual rate of 6.5 percent and the proliferation of manufacturing activities by local and MNC corporations, supply chain management seems an excellent candidate to study, seeing its undeniable footprint on the global economy.

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