

The Future of Supply Chain Podcast

Episode 5: How Innovation And Technology are Opening Doors for Women In Supply Chain with Mindy Davis and Paige Cox

Mindy Davis: The idea of what women or young girls are studying in school to paint the vision for them to see, look, if you are studying this in school, you can really have an impact on the way the world runs in the future.

Sin To: Welcome to the Future of Supply Chain Podcast from SAP. My name is Sin To, I'm a marketer, blogger, and podcaster on the topic of supply chain here at SAP. For today's show on the International Women's Day, I'm joined by three amazing women. So one of the ladies is my wonderful co-host, Nicole. Over to you, Nicole.

Nicole Smythe: Thank you for the kind words, Sin. Hi, I'm Nicole Smythe, and as Sin mentioned, today we're joined by our two wonderful guests, Mindy Davis and Paige Cox, to discuss what it's like to be a woman in a largely male dominated field. So, welcome Mindy, and welcome Paige. Thank you both so much for joining us today, and it's great to have you both on the series.

So if you could take a moment to introduce yourselves, give some insight into your previous roles and what you do today.

Mindy Davis: My name is Mindy Davis and I lead our Global Marketing team for our Digital Supply Chain portfolio. I'm actually celebrating, I can't believe it, 18 years at SAP in a couple of weeks. But I'm thrilled to be joined by my colleague Paige Cox, who I consider actually a mentor of my own and a female leader in the organization. So, Paige, introduce yourself.

Paige Cox: Thanks, Mindy. Hello everyone. My name's Paige Cox. I'm the Chief Product Officer and Head of Development for SAP Business Network. Spend a lot of time in supply chain, obviously, and, when Mindy kindly say a mentor, she meant older colleague. So I am at SAP over 22 years. So, yeah, so happy to be here.

Nicole Smythe: Well, thank you both and what amazing careers you both had so far. As you mentioned, you're both in the supply chain area here at SAP, but how did you both come to work in the field and what really interested you in the area?

Mindy Davis: I'll go first because I actually studied Logistics in my undergraduate studies and I'll never forget it - I was managing a warehouse and, I mean, I walked in on my first day in this yellow suit and faced hundreds of men in the field and they were surprised to see a woman walk into the warehouse. And I very quickly changed from the suit to steel-toed boots and jeans.

You know, what interests me most about Supply Chain is this whole idea of it's a puzzle, right? And trying to put the pieces together between Planning, and Logistics, and Warehouse Inventory. And I got my start, like I said, in a warehouse, and I very quickly realized that there were plenty of places to optimize some of our Go-To-Market in terms of how we're transferring product. And I quickly turned to programming.

So I was a management trainee, back in the day, and I noticed in the warehouse all these pallets sitting around. And I was just thinking there's gotta be an easier way to manage this. So I actually programmed a program basically to manage the pallets, just make it easier for everybody in the warehouse, employees and management themselves. So I realized that my interest was definitely in software because it made things so simple, and you could be more efficient, more agile. And actually what's really, kind of ironic, is more resilient, right? As we see in today's environment.

So, I'm really doing the same thing, it's just a larger scale puzzle, right? So it's gone beyond logistics. And when we think about a supply chain, it's not only transferring product, but it's the whole process from design to operate. So, it's been fun to see this evolution of going from my early days as a warehouse manager to now managing a whole scale of the end-to-end supply chain in a really connected environment.

And I'll also say that, once I got out of the warehouse and I jumped to a software company, my first day on the job, I was working for a consulting company and we walked into a boardroom and it was all men. And I didn't really realize that we had to sell ourselves, right? And so, it was me and two of my male colleagues and my manager at the time was an executive at the company, she was a woman, and she pulled me aside and just kind of gave me the extra power I needed. And said, 'Hey, you've got this!' And I was a little bit irritated because I was like, why is she telling me and not my male colleagues? And what ended up happening was she gave me that extra boost to actually go into the boardroom, sell myself. So I got the job and she actually became my mentor. And to this day, we still connect over, gosh, 25 years of history. So, kind of a fun story.

Paige, what about you?

Paige Cox: Yeah, similarly. So for me it's also, Supply Chain was kind of, I fell into it a bit. When I got out of college, I started first in the management consulting field. So obviously one of the areas was allotted to do with the different parts of supply chain practice and enterprise also. So it was interesting that my first customer was General Motor and when I walked into the shop floor, obviously, I was assigned to the engine control team that we are supposed to doing all these engine control modules. I was the only woman there, so they were very cute. They put me in the middle of the office. So I was kind of the princess of the shop floor.

And fast forward, of course, did consulting for a while then felt like, okay, I'm always implementing someone else's solution. It would be great to actually have greater impact, if I could create something. So during the Start Up Dot Com era, I joined a startup company and then created the whole manufacturing shop floor solution.

And later on that little startup was acquired by SAP, and hence my journey started with the SAP. Since SAP, I've done various different areas in the product area mostly, in Development in different roles and different continents, different topics. I moved from Manufacturing to then Industry 4.0, which is very natural to drive those kind of initiatives. Started a lot of with the to-do with China growth, also to expand that globally, which ultimately landed me moving my whole family from US-based to headquarter Germany, Waldorf-based.

Did the first public cloud SaaS product in the PLM area because I thought, Hey, I've been doing Manufacturing so long and so deep into the execution, wouldn't be cool to get into the design space and

learn how people really do true R&D, how they design the right product for the right customer? So I moved to PLM, and shaped the new Public Cloud area.

And then notice me every two, three years, I changed because there's still all that entrepreneur roots in me. Then, I moved to logistics and so I also met Mindy there. We launched our first Logistics Network and then soon became larger as the supply chain network when we connected Logistics, Manufacturing, Operations under one umbrella. And then, three years ago, we started the journey, that I started too, we create a new area and growth area, SAP Business Network, basically also bring our acquisition, that Ariba network together with our supply chain networks into one largest B2B marketplace, and basically largest commerce and supply chain network in the world. And that's been really, really fun journey.

But I'd say I sort of traveled across all the disciplines of different functions in supply chain. So, I kind of spend my whole life learning and growing in this field, it's still fascinating. There's still so much to learn.

Sin To: Indeed, indeed. We heard now a lot of words like Logistics, Transportation, Manufacturing, and also Supply Chain. So the term, supply chain, itself wasn't coined until the late eighties. And since then, the industry and the field have not only grown in recognition but also career opportunities. So a question to both of you, since starting in this field, what was it like when you first started versus now, in 2023? What are some of the biggest changes that you have noticed so far?

Paige Cox: Maybe I can go first. So, at least from my point of view, I think when you first started the supply chain, it's still very departmental and very vertical by functions. So there are people taking care of sourcing, there are people taking care of planning, there are people taking care of designing things but then it's people doing the shop floor manufacturing and people at the warehouse and the transport, and none of these people actually talk to each other.

When I was in the PLM days, the biggest challenge was the change management. So if you design something, but what's getting manufactured, it's very different than where was it designed. So I think this feedback loop and then also how do you transport, how do you source? And it's never planned together with the logistic partners, right? So it's always about pricing and picking the partners and the suppliers that you resource with. And nevertheless everyone thinks every function to work and assume it could work. Now, fast forward now, at least the last three years we had so much disruption and the supply chain is being stressed. And, this takes that feedback loop and then all these functional departmental kind of planning and execution can no longer work, right? So, that alone, that supply chain, needed to be much more responsive and much more intelligent, in a way, that to have real time data to be able to sense and respond.

And furthermore, I see supply chain are started to intertwining because, my supply chain is your demand chain. And then if our chains are not connected and synchronized, then there's really no agility. So you see companies cannot orchestrate and optimize a supply chain without understanding and working with their ecosystem, and their partners, their trading partners, and other companies in their eco-chain together. So, , if you look at the trend, at minimum, you have to design your supply chain, together, with all the companies so that you do business with - whether it's your suppliers that you need to get the raw material or your contract manufacturer who's you are contracting with.

So, I think all of that becomes much more complex because no longer you can just say, Hey, this department would do this, and that department would do that. But when I started, that was the case. And you see that huge shift, that arbitrary line is blurring.

Mindy, what do you think?

Mindy Davis: Well, I'll just add that I think 20 years ago, it was all about heuristics, right? Like matching supply and demand. And the nucleus of the supply chain is still planning, manufacturing, and delivery. But what we've seen is over the years, we've gone from globalization, right? So, a lot of companies were outsourcing manufacturing to other countries. And then when the pandemic hit, it was really, really, like Paige said, stressful for the supply chain. So, you definitely don't want to be in the headlines with your supply chain, but what we found is, supply chains were in the headlines, right? It was the topic at boardrooms, it was topic in economic discussions. And now what we've seen is those successful companies that were able to digitalize their end-to-end supply chains were able to be more responsive and reactive to different activities or disruptions.

So, I think of Smart Press Shop, as an example, one of our customers, who actually digitalized their entire automotive body parts. So, when the pandemic hit, they were protected from all of this disruption because they were in a completely paperless environment. And they didn't have to rely on outsourcing or, lockdowns in manufacturing plants because everybody was working remotely.

The other notion that I've seen come to the forefront is this idea of sustainability, right? Because, really, sustainability initiatives start in the supply chain. So, if you think about zero emissions, you know, finding the lowest cost logistics provider through our network and making sure that you're identifying the lowest emissions, or making sure that your employees are healthy and safe in the warehouse.

So, I think, kind of, this notion of connectedness, collaboration and resilience really comes all together as we evolve. And I'll, I'll also add that, one of the things we're seeing is this idea of contextualizing information across your supply chain. So, like Paige mentioned, all these department silos are working together now, and the challenge is you need to connect all of the data going across your operations to your business data.

So, taking in finance information or taking in information from external events, so that you can really be responsive to disruptions that take place. You know, in Operations, we have solutions that you can actually pay attention to so that you'll know when a machine is going down on the plant floor and get ahead of it and fix it in real time. So, and again, this takes a network of providers, of operators to tap into. So, it's this whole notion of our ecosystem is really growing, and not only the ecosystem of people, but also this ecosystem of data, right? The fact that COOs are challenged with harnessing all the power of this data coming in from all these different business processes throughout their ecosystem and the way that we can connect those dots and make sure that the information is traveled through the end-to-end supply chain with the most impact is really desirable in today's environment.

Nicole Smythe: I mean, supply chain itself, it's a very, very complex field, but it's also, in my opinion, a very fulfilling because at the end of the day, you're helping customers get their goods, or you're helping companies just run better.

So even though a lot of progress and evolution has been made in the industry, and especially in career opportunities for women, what are some obstacles that you're still seeing when women are trying to enter into this field? And, what do you believe would have to change for more women to choose this field moving forward?

Especially like you said, Paige, it might be very time consuming. It takes up your weekends, it takes up your time, but moving forward and women that want to get into it, what advice would you say or what changes would you say need to occur?

Paige Cox: I think definitely awareness helps. So, when I was growing up and at least at the days the, when I was going to universities, there's not so much talk about supply chain and I think that trend is already shifting. A few years ago, when I did my Executive MBN in Manheim, there's actually a whole module dedicated to supply chain and operations. So, I think that awareness is already changing.

Then it's also creating those kind of interest for women, or men, right? So, so in other words that it becomes the top agenda now. And for women, you know, not being gender biased here, I think a lot of women share the same thing with me - for us, we believe in purpose, and we believe that we want to make the world a better place. Because women, by nature, still takes on much more of the caregiver role, whether that you were asked to or not. You know, being a mom or a wife or girlfriend, or daughter, or sister, you always have that nature in you.

And I feel like, if people can really understand, supply chain really runs the world because it's the only way to get the product from an idealization of a thought into a real product that you and I love, as the consumers and everything in between. It takes this magic to happen and that is the supply chain and that magic, normally, it's not talked about in your day-to-day life, people don't think about that, right?

You think a lot about the finance and the performance of the company. You think about the huge brand that is landing in the market, but you don't see who's making that happen in the middle. And I think that's the part that we can help also create that kind of excitement.

And then if people can feel that part of the purpose-filling and the making impact for the world, whether it's making the world drum better through this kind of immerse commerce and material flow, or is it just creating a better world for the next generations to come because it takes the real supply chain and takes the network of supply chain to really create that sustainable world and everybody has to participate in that. So therefore, I feel that if that kind of awareness is generated more and more women would want to join, right?

Obviously, you have to be slightly crazy because supply chain is a mission critical, so then when there's, when their warehouse is not shipping out the pallets and the raw material is not coming, and the shop floor stopped, and you know, someone has to call you, right? And you have to solve it. But, hey, I really think it's a fascinating field and especially if you can bring your creativity and that diversity part to it, and then like Mindy said, it's about connecting the dots. And women in general, it's like a different thinking, right? So, you connecting the dots and you see different things or challenges or problems with the different color of the lens. And I think together, you know, men and women together, you basically can really build very, very strong creativity to solve these world hardest problems. And supply chain is the hardest areas with the hardest problems to solve.

Mindy Davis: Oh, I love that answer, Paige, and I love the idea of bringing magic because it's funny, I have a daughter and she asks me all the time, Mom, what do you do? You just talk to people on the phone all day. And I tell her, no, no, no, I'm the one who makes everything work - like your supplies for school, your clothes that you wear, the food that you eat.

So, I'm always trying to bring these stories to life. And I think you're right, what I'm focused on right now with my team, because I'm in marketing, is making sure that we're bringing these customer stories to life in a real, authentic way that makes sense and we can attract more women, more young talent. Nicole, you're a perfect example of someone we want to attract to the field. Because I think the more we can make supply chain the weave of everything that we do on a daily basis and bring that to life in our efforts, working with customers and really showing the world how, we, as supply chain experts, are helping make the world run better.

Sin To: Fantastic answers. Wow. I'm very impressed. Paige, you mentioned two words: diversity and creativity. And this brings me actually to the topic that we also want to touch in this show. It's about this year's theme on the International Women's Day: DigitALL Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality.

So, in your experience, how has technology changed the working place for women, especially in the supply chain area? And what impacts do you see technology having on women's career in the future? If you take young women like Nicole, for example, starting their college career or professional careers in the STEM field, like science, technology, engineering, and mathematics and supply chain.

Paige Cox: Yeah, that's a interesting thing because technology is evolving all the time. I always say, if innovation is not solving problems, then it's just a cool innovation. So, in the end, the difference in supply chain is the innovation itself should also have a purpose of its own. It has to really address a challenge.

And, to me, the trend is also slightly different - I tell my team, too, that nobody told you what that first iPhone would look like, or that experience could be. It's an anticipated intelligence. You know, that's why you come up with that. And then you validate, and then you work with the customers, and then you now have whatever the generation we have already now, it's very different, right? So sometimes you have to balance that customer centricity versus this is the innovative, the kickstart. How do you synchronize that? And I think that is such an opportunity to bring a very diverse workforce together, men and women, and especially to infuse the female perspective into this mix of balancing. I think it's really, really, interesting and I think everybody can benefit from that kind of diversity and creativity.

And I think that's the learning that everybody has to come together and the more that you are coming from a diverse background, to having a different understanding, the more you can really leverage power of data, right? So, I think we tell each other something, everybody interprets it a little bit differently and everyone would take a different reaction. In business will be the same for supply chain, and if you want to have the resilience built in, you want to achieve that anterior transparency, and you want to ultimately drive this network effect of sustainability, you sort of need that creativity and diversity to look at all this data in a different way and then really coming together to say, Hey, how do we make this data that are really serving its purpose? And what data do we need? Where do I get it? And how do I actually collaborate? And who do I collaborate with? And how do I leverage that collaboration? Like you don't

have answers for that, right? And then it just basically takes people and take those minds together and really decipher what that could be.

And then it's the constant improvement, that feedback loop we talked about earlier. How do you in real time take that intelligence and being able to measure against your planning and then having the ability to instantly replan and redesign your supply chain, so to say, or repurpose in a way, that can be really responsive and resilient.

Mindy Davis: Well, I love this idea of DigitALL is the topic for Women's Day because it really does encompass this whole idea of digitalization and, like Paige was referencing, the idea of harnessing all of this data and innovating in terms of what to do with all of this data.

There's so much technology innovation and it's not used in the right way, or has the most impact, then, like Paige said, it's just innovation for innovation's sake. So, you see all these things like AI or machine learning or robotics and the idea of what women or young girls are studying in school to kind of paint the vision for them to see, look, if you are studying this in school, you can really have an impact on the way the world runs in the future.

And so I think that's what I would encourage, or what I'm encouraged from International Women's Day this year, is to see young talent kind of inspired by how innovation and technology can really enhance your end-to-end supply chain, manufacturing, operations; but really taking this to the next level and inspiring women all over the world and young girls to take this path of innovation in technology as it relates to supply chain.

Paige Cox: Yeah. I love that. Maybe I just add a little bit to that because I think when we talk about digitalization, oftentimes, it's a center around the technology itself, but the fact that we are the industry and the customer, we are actually going through a digital transformation.

So, I think technology is such an enabler for us to achieve a lot of that automation or intelligence, and to remove all these manual or these tedious things that can save the human time, right? But I think the emotional intelligence part of it, the human intelligence is so important. And that's why I think it would be fun for people to really jump into this field because to really take that digital data, that digital information, to make the right decisions, to really transform, it still takes us.

It takes all of us to do it. The AI is not going to tell you. And AI can tell you how your decision has been performed in real time, or can automate some of the manual entry that you have to do yourself. But taking that data and then taking that uncertainty, and rethink how you could make it better, that takes all of us, right?

And, that's really fun, that, to me, and that makes me excited every day. And that would be my thing to all the women out there, why wouldn't you want to do it, right? So it's

Mindy Davis: Putting the, putting the puzzle pieces together.

Paige Cox: Yes, exactly. Nice summary.

Nicole Smythe: I think it's too, I actually started in Chemicals and Utilities and now switched into SAP. So being in supply chain on both sides, being in the nitty gritty with the plants and the manufacturers, and

now being on the technology side, it is so interesting to see them start to intertwine because I was working in SAP and now working for SAP, so it was, it really is, it's like a full circle moment.

But I think being able to be here and see the evolution and progress and innovation that we're making as a company, but being also a woman in that field as well, it is, it's, like I said earlier, the field itself, supply chain, is very fulfilling, but being able to feel like you're making a difference is also just a different type of fulfillment.

So, completely agree with both of you.

Sin To: Yeah, me too. I mean, I still love the term, supply chain brings some magic. So when I joined SAP, I used to work in a different area, and, since a couple of years, I joined the supply chain team. And what I just figured out, even though you are working this field or you are just a normal end user going to a supermarket and buy something, and it's just like hitting you every single day and every single moment.

And I just remember the last weekend when I was on the motorway and I saw all the different trucks and was like thinking, ah, what are they using? What kind of technology do they have? Maybe assistance in place to say, Hey, you need to rest because this is for your safety or whatsoever. And this is now, in my mind, like every time.

I could actually talk to you all for a longer time, really, because it's so fascinating. But as we are now coming to the end of our podcast, we would love to ask the same question that we ask everyone on our show.

In your opinion, what is the future of supply chain? If you can give us an answer in one or two sentences.

Mindy Davis: I'll take this one first and, quite simply, it's risk resilient and sustainable supply chains; meaning you can actually use your supply chain to protect your entire business from risk with everything that we've talked about here today.

Paige Cox: I love it. I think that's ultimate the outcome, right? That everyone wanted to achieve is how do I get that resiliency, and transparency, and sustainability across. And then I will leave a little bit of food for thought as we're wrapping up. So, the role of SAP and the role of us is really recognized that that is the purpose that we can jointly bring to the market, to our customers, and that will be the outcome that we can achieve for generations to come.

If we look at SAP, we started the ERP world 50 years ago when we brought all the siloed department in the data into an end-to-end enterprise flow. Fast forward, for the next 50 years, we can actually create that connectivity tissue, that network of enterprises by bringing all the supply chains in that multi-tiered fashion to bring that, you know, insight to action to make those enterprise much more intelligent, much more responsive, and together, as the enterprises, form its own network effect by bringing that network effect into the supply and the demand. I think that's the only way to create that truly sustainable and resilient supply chains around the world. Which means that SAP now has this higher calling; that we spend decades to automate enterprise, to optimize the individual supply chains. Now we can also connect all of them by creating that network effect. So, the future of supply chain will be connected and will be much more intelligent, but it will also create a purpose for a better world, yet also a better purpose for us and the right reason to be in this field.

So, I will leave that as a departing thought for everyone.

Nicole Smythe: Amazing. Well, thank you both for joining us and for such a great conversation. I know Sin and I had an amazing time, and we really took away some great advice, guidance; like I said, being early talent, I can only hope to follow suit in your career.

So, thank you so much again, and thank you to everyone who's listening. As always, please mark us as a favorite and you can get regular updates and information about future episodes, but until next time, from Sin and I, thank you for discussing The Future of Supply Chain.