

Three Moves Supply Chain Leaders Need to Make in 2026: Insights from APQC's Supply Chain Priorities Research

This executive summary of APQC's white paper, [2026 Supply Chain Priorities and Challenges: Orchestrating Resilience at Scale](#), examines three priorities shaping supply chain strategy in 2026: scalable enterprise planning, stronger relationships with strategic suppliers, and digital and AI investments that improve coordinated execution and resilience across the supply chain.

APQC's [2026 Supply Chain Priorities and Challenges](#) research shows modest improvement in overall performance compared to the previous two years. Most organizations, however, are still not achieving all of their business goals, and performance in areas like inventory management and customer service declined year over year.

These mixed results suggest that achieving coordinated, end-to-end performance across the supply chain remains difficult. Collaboration continues to be a leading challenge, and technology implementation remains a barrier for many organizations.

APQC's white paper, [2026 Supply Chain Priorities and Challenges: Orchestrating Resilience at Scale](#), explores how organizations are strengthening planning, supplier relationships, and digital capabilities to improve coordinated performance. The executive summary below highlights three moves supply chain leaders should prioritize in 2026 to strengthen coordinated performance and resilience. The full white paper explores these priorities, challenges, and capabilities in greater detail.

Design Planning That Scales Across the Enterprise

Supply chain planning is the top priority for organizations in 2026, cited more frequently than any other focus area in APQC's research. Within planning, organizations are increasing their emphasis on demand forecasting, AI planning, and automation, while process standardization has emerged as the leading strategy for improving planning effectiveness.

This focus reflects the role that planning plays in coordinating decisions across the supply chain. When planning processes are inconsistent or disconnected from execution, organizations struggle to align trade-offs and translate plans into results. In 2026, supply chain leaders should **design planning as a standardized, governed enterprise process that aligns trade-offs and translates plans into execution**. The full report explores how standardized processes, clearer decision ownership, and tighter links to execution enable planning to support consistent performance at scale.

Strengthen Resilience Through Key Supplier Relationships

Sourcing and procurement remains one of the highest priority focus areas for supply chain organizations in 2026, second only to planning. Within this domain, supplier and vendor relationship management is the leading priority, and improving key supplier relationships is the

most frequently cited strategy. These findings reflect the central role that strategic suppliers play in both risk exposure and recovery.

Supply chain leaders should **treat supplier relationship management as a foundational building block for resilience** rather than a transactional sourcing activity. This means being deliberate about which suppliers require deeper coordination, establishing clearer governance and performance expectations, and integrating strategic suppliers into planning and risk discussions.

Focus Digital and AI Investments on Coordinated Impact

Innovation is a top priority for supply chain organizations in 2026, with a strong emphasis on operational and process innovation, AI planning and adoption, and automation and digitization. Many organizations are already using advanced technologies across activities such as inventory optimization, spend analysis, and supply chain control towers. At the same time, challenges related to technology implementation and readiness remain among the most frequently cited barriers to improving supply chain performance.

The differentiator in 2026 is not whether organizations are adopting digital and AI capabilities, but how effectively those capabilities support coordinated decision-making and execution. Supply chain leaders should **prioritize integration, governance, and decision-oriented use cases over stand-alone tools or pilots**. The full report explores how organizations are embedding digital and AI capabilities into core workflows, clarifying ownership, and building the readiness required to translate technology investments into consistent, enterprise-wide performance.

Building Orchestrated Resilience for 2026 and Beyond

Individually, each of these moves addresses a familiar challenge. Together, they point to **orchestrated resilience**: the ability to connect planning, supplier relationships, and digital capabilities into a coordinated approach that aligns decisions, manages risk, and performs consistently under pressure.

APQC's [2026 Supply Chain Priorities and Challenges: Orchestrating Resilience at Scale](#) explores how these capabilities reinforce one another in practice, where organizations continue to encounter barriers, and what it takes to move from incremental progress to sustained, enterprise-wide performance.

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