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## **Adapting the skills of a future purchaser within the organizations**

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**Abstract.** Starting from the contemporary role of the purchaser within company's life, this qualitative research examines the competencies currently required and it presents an image of the purchaser profile needed in the near future. The literature review served as a basis for an empirical investigation among local large organizations. The methods used were in-depth bibliographic documentation and semi-structured interviews addressed to sixteen purchasing executives from the local banking organizations and also IT&C. The study focuses on the competencies the buyers will be requested in the near future, considering the challenges encountered.

**Keywords.** purchasing, buyer, hard skills, soft skills, sustainable purchasing

### **Introduction**

From “buying at the lowest price”, the purchasing function has moved to the decision-makers' table within a company and today plays a strategic role. Purchasing function shifted from a primarily price-focused activity to an integrated position across the economic and financial business' flows (Van Weele, 2018; Monczka et al., 2020). This change was sped up by the disrupted supply, the price volatility, the fast-paced digitalization, the proliferation of rules on the sustainability, and the duty of care on the commodity chains.

Nowadays, the procurement professionals drive cost effectiveness, cash flow and resilient performance by spend management, provider oversight, and mitigating risks (Deloitte, 2023; Gartner, 2023). They control working capital (through payment terms, inventory, and supplier financing), and manage set of risks (operational, litigation, cybersecurity, financial, environmental, political, etc.).

Heighten regulatory scrutiny, including those related to sustainability requirements have further strengthen the role of the buyers throughout the supply chain (European Commission, 2024; UN Global Compact, 2023). The decisions of the buyers are a factor in the overall cost of ownership, capital expenditures, reputational, legal and business risks (Ellram & Tate, 2016; ISO, 2018). The purchasing choices determine the way in which value is delivered: the business requirements addressed on the market through the request for proposals processes are linked to their internal budgets and influence the total cost of ownership; the vendors selection takes into account business continuity, compliance, quality of products and services

acquired; the payment terms and all the negotiated terms of the contracts impacts the financial statements, whether there is a cost avoidance or there are savings with real impact in the profit and loss account statement.

This research analyses the today and future skills clearly split by technical and soft competences that should foster their work to be successful and meet their management and shareholders' goals.

### **Literature Review**

Modern purchasing prioritizes total cost of ownership, should-cost model, with a heavy emphasis on a performance-based contracting, vendor co-creation and innovation, considering also the outcomes based by the environmental regulations and the potential related risks, such as penalties, additional taxes, commercial or image damages. Except the normal preoccupation for the cost control, applying ethic sourcing practices, the operational hygiene and efficiency are key factors to nowadays business framework. In addition to cost reduction, procurement influences working capital through payment terms and inventory collaboration (HSBC, 2021; PwC, 2021). Research shows that mature procurement functions correlate with improved firm performance and resilience (Zsidisin et al., 2020).

Managing risks is imperative considering the market conditions and the internal rules and procedures. In practice, risk classification in purchasing includes: operational risks (constraints related to supplier capacity, dependence on a single supplier, quality defects, supply chain disruptions, natural disasters, employee strikes, etc.), financial risks (price volatility, hidden costs, cost leakage, frauds, inaccurate savings calculation, etc.), legal and regulatory risks (unclear liabilities included in the contracts; trade sanctions; labor slavery legislation, GDPR related issues, etc.), cybersecurity risks (third-party breaches, data leaks from sourcing platforms, etc.), environmental and reputational risks (sourcing from suppliers working with children, high emissions, poor working conditions, greenwashing, etc.) and political risks (trade restrictions, unstable political climate, war, etc.). Various disturbances within the supply chains demonstrates the importance of the forward-looking risk modelling and recovering forecasting (Thun & Hoenig, 2011; WEF, 2026). ISO 31000 (2018) provides a general structured framework for risk identification and mitigation.

Measures relating to sustainable procurement are increasingly being implemented. ISO 20400 (2017) includes social and environmental criteria into procurement policies, while guidelines spread responsibility beyond supplier levels (European Commission, 2024). Researchers highlight that expertise in sustainability competencies is considered an essential part of the purchasing system (Bals et al., 2019; Beske-Janssen et al., 2023).

The buyers' job requirements are redefined by the digital disruption. Artificial intelligence boost transparency and help with the risks assessment (McKinsey & Company, 2024; Xu et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, the qualifications encountered within the buyers' teams may reveal some breaches to interpret and evaluate the information provided by the artificial intelligence and handling the data driven findings (Gartner, 2021; Hackett Group, 2023). Class-leading purchasing teams could train people in order to build strong analytics competencies. Currently, the buyers' skills set includes AI supported decision and enhanced quantification of risks (McKinsey & Company, 2024; Xu et al., 2023).

Studies on purchasers' mandatory competencies reveal hard skills such as: commercial and financial acumen (should-cost analysis, TCO, savings validation, risk and data analysis), but also a mixture of excellent interpersonal skills related to negotiation, communication,

relationship management, ethical judgement, strategic and analytical skills. Briefly, hard skills such as financial acumen, legal literacy, supplier and risk management, analytics proficiency are vital; in the same time, soft skills including negotiation, ethical leadership, and stakeholder alignment are indispensable (Bals et al., 2019).

Considering the buyers' hard skills necessary within a company's flows, the evolution of the supply management demonstrates that the purchasers must have strategic capabilities quicker than only being capable of placing orders; skills related to strategy, improving processes, and value contribution appear as mandatory as its maturity develops (Giunipero et al., 2006). In time, fostering collaboration with the suppliers leads to an improved supply management performance. The strategic supply management skills signify the premises for a supplier integration, and this in turn leads to better overall supply management outcomes (Eltantawy et al., 2009).

Regarding the commercial and contractual competences, the purchasers should run smoothly the request-for-proposal processes, including the contract drafting principle and the internal service level agreements with the internal budget owners, monitoring the operational capability of the suppliers, applying concrete commercial and contractual skills, offering internal support in a way that fits the organization's sophistication (Tassabehji & Moorhouse, 2008).

Due to the fact that the purchasing function has grown intensively data driven because of the electronic sourcing platforms and the enterprises resources planning integration, the buyers are increasingly in need of data literacy in order to master the ability of converting data into information that help the management to make the right decisions (Hallikas et al., 2021). Latest studies underline the digitization as an increasing job requirement, equally important with sustainability and openness towards the internal stakeholders needs (Bals et al., 2019; Beske-Janssen et al., 2023).

An important point is that the last decade comes up with much expectations on the ethical sourcing perspective, the risk management and the compliance know how, applying know-your-supplier procedures to prevent operational or reputational risks (Toma & Radu, 2022). The purchasers need hard skills that support supply chain flexibility while aligning purchasing to sustainability objectives (Beske-Janssen et al., 2023). Even role-based competency studies inside purchasing departments show that buyers hard skills competences are not related only to technical purchasing knowledge but also include risk, quality, and sustainability-related decision skills (Sikorska & Hadaś, 2024).

As for the related needed soft skills, the studies underline negotiation, communication, and relationship management as mandatory buyers' capabilities, purchasing performance being accompanied by the influence upon the suppliers and internal stakeholder and not just selecting bids (Bals et al., 2019).

Another soft skill mentioned is linked to cross-functional collaboration, as the purchasing division works across horizontal functions and this can build credibility, the purchasing value being in many instances created through alignment rather than authority (Tassabehji & Moorhouse, 2008). Toma & Radu (2022) emphasize that an appropriate solution to mitigate challenges faced by the purchasing teams is to synergize the business requirements needs, the financial and human resources inside the organization.

Related survey work on how to train supply managers suggests that different procurement objectives linked to the sustainability and innovation require different skill bundles, implying buyers must be able to flex their approach rather than apply one "standard playbook" (Stek & Schiele, 2021). According to Toma et al (2021), the sustainable purchasing

“impact the business development by both avoiding potential negative effects (i.e. reputation, financial costs, operational issues), but mostly through positive achievements focusing on creative solutions and long-term commitment to complying with expectations (i.e. regulators, top management or shareholders’ vision, customers new habits and expectations).”

Contemporary competency debates increasingly view ethics and responsible sourcing as essential to professional effectiveness and not separate “values statements” (Sikorska & Hadaś, 2024).

### **Methodology**

This study includes a qualitative desk-based analysis of sixteen practitioner perspectives, through semi-structured interviews, addressed to the purchasing executives coming from local banking organizations and IT&C companies. These kinds of corporations acting in some intensively regulated fields of activity, within banking and IT & C represent a good basis for the research, having qualified buyers.

The general objective of our qualitative research was to identify the purchaser profile needed in the near future in order to bring success to their organizations.

The majority of the studies within the specialized literature on purchasing activity focus on large companies, so we choose companies acting in a dynamic field of activity, namely the banking field and the IT&C sector.

The analyzed target group was composed of sixteen managers from private companies within the banking industry and IT&C. In order to encourage transparency of their internal practices, the anonymity of their answers was ensured. In terms of gender, out of the sixteen managers, 7 were women (44%) and 9 were men (56%), having also management expertise.

Within the interviews performed, the main topics presented to the participants were related to (1) hard skills the purchasers should have now in order to reach their objectives; (2) the soft skills needed up to now; (3) the risks and additional challenges the buyers should pay attention to in the near future, and (4) the key skills the purchasers will have in order to surmount their challenging job in the future.

The following main questions were addressed to the participants: (table 1):

**Table 1. Main Questions Asked in the Semi-structured interviews**

No.	Items
1	What are the main hard skills a buyer should have nowadays, so that they meet their company’s objectives? To what extent the above-mentioned characteristics of the buyer influenced the results within the purchasing flows? Please rank the impact on a scale from 1 to 3 (i.e. 1 = low influence; 2 = medium influence; 3 = high influence).
2	What are the main soft skills a buyer should have nowadays, so that they meet their company’s objectives? To what extent the above-mentioned characteristics of the buyer influenced the results within the purchasing flows? Please rank the impact on a scale from 1 to 3 (i.e. 1 = low influence; 2 = medium influence; 3 = high influence).
3	Please enumerate four main additional challenges the buyers will encounter in the near future.
4	Please mention four elementary key skills the future purchaser will have, facing the various challenges to be overcome.

Source: Authors own research

The questions were sent via email in September 2025. The answers were received up to October 2025, when we also had online discussions with the participants in order to clarify some statements. Due to their busy agenda, online communication was preferred by all the interviewees, instead of the physical meetings we initially suggested. The analysis of the answers was performed by the end of November 2025.

### **Results and discussions**

After analyzing the answers to our interviews, we could notice various competencies that the future purchasers should have.

Related to the first question, the hard skills, we found out that the purchaser should have nowadays various competencies related to different field of activities (table 2):

**Table 2. Main hard skills required**

No.	Hard Skills
1	Strong financial and accounting acumen, in order to be able to enlarge a “should-cost” modelling, “total cost of ownership” analysis and to be able to perform savings validation proposal, whether if there is a “cost avoidance” case or even a direct impact in the P&L account.
2	Commercial and contracting literacy, meaning legal related field knowledge about commercial and financial liabilities, indemnities, data protection, sustainability criteria, social and corporate responsibility clauses, compliance awareness, etc.
3	Supplier relationship management (SRM), including supply market analysis, “know your supplier” procedure covering periodic checks of the supplier financial health, managing and selecting the best suppliers, knowledge of the regional supply chains, etc.
4	Computer use and dashboards, basic statistical thinking, data quality, etc.

Source: Authors owns research

Among the other competencies weighted in the participants ‘opinions, there were also mastery of specific sourcing levers (i.e. aggregated demand, TCO focus), “make or buy” analysis, and the knowledge of the local commercial legal framework.

In connection to the second question addressed, there were around thirty different nominated soft skills, the most frequent and best ranked being presented as it follows (table 3):

**Table 3. Main soft skills required**

No.	Soft Skills
1	Negotiation and influencing skills, regularly used inside and outside the organization
2	Problem solving mindset and conflict management skills
3	Aptitude for verbal and written communication
4	Ethic judgement and behavior, avoiding conflict of interest

Source: Authors owns research

Other mentioned soft skills with higher weight included also: the curiosity and the openness, the rigor, the capacity to collaborate well within the big purchasing projects in cross-functional teams and the charisma.

Concerning the principal risks and the challenges the buyers face in the future, the interveners mention:

Savings to be obtained and validated

- Facing the scarcity of the ressources, on the one hand and the corporate budgets constraints, on the other hand

Digital disruptions

- In the condition of AI integration, the corporate operations will encounter major challenges in adapping efficiently, analytics fluency being critical to the forecasts and for the supply management

Resilience and business continuity

- Scenario planning and resilience facing the sudden changes from political, social, environment and financial perspective

Regulatory compliance

- Potential new legal rules, including, but not limited to the environment, social and government (ESG) components

Figure 1. Challenges to come

As for the skills needed for tomorrow’s buyers, there is an attention point related to the AI adaptation and management, the risk engineering and the regulatory compliance, combined with the critical thinking, the strategic thinking, the high agility, and the innovation:

Hard skills

Soft skills



- AI and data analysis fluency, machine learning
- Regulatory and compliance knowledge, including sustainability factor
- Risk mastering
- Contract clauses adaptability and flexibility

- Critical thinking & strategic storytelling with data
- Adaptability to VUCA world, agility and innovation
- Intercultural management collaboration driven skills
- Ethical leadership

Figure 2. Main set of skills for the future buyer

Other proposed skills for the future buyer were related to the sound financial and economic knowledge, the capacity to influence inside and outside the organization, the

multidisciplinary expertise, the supply market awareness, the strategic alignment to the continuous transformation of the organization, etc.

The results of the research imply that the future buyer should be a “T-shaped” professional (Guest, 1991; Hammer, M., et al., 2021; Hansen, 2010), possessing excellent knowledge of purchasing, being “deep” in multiple purchasing perspectives (i.e. sustainability criteria, sourcing procedure, analytics, contracts clauses, risk management, etc.), and being also “broad” in human capabilities (collaborating with internal or external stakeholders, negotiation, critical thinking, and influence). The competitive advantage comes from the combination between the hard skills that make good decisions possible and the soft skills that make good decisions implementable.

### **Conclusion**

The purchaser of tomorrow will act as a strategic integrator of economic, financial, and risk dimensions, influencing the profit margins, the working capital, the business continuity and resilience (Deloitte, 2023; Zsidisin et al., 2020).

Future purchasers must combine advanced analytical capability with ethical leadership and regulatory awareness (European Commission, 2024; Bals et al., 2019). Automation will enhance, not replace, strategic human judgment (McKinsey & Company, 2024).

Scrutinizing the future, the technological advancement and the regulatory expansion will continue reshaping the purchasing operations and the actors involved. The successful purchaser of the next decade will integrate the financial rigor, the digital intelligence, the risk governance, the sustainability commitment, and the collaborative leadership into a cohesive professional identity.

The purchasing function will become more complex. The challenges may come from the company’s itself when its potential mission and objectives may change on the fly, facing external forces that seem to be in continuous transformation. The demand for the cross-cultural teaming skills will also increase, considering the globalization in place. Thus, the training of the dedicated buyers becomes a critical success factor in order to ensure the organization’s competitiveness.

Our research is limited due to the small number of interviewed people and by the eventual subjectivity of the interveners, being the hierarchy of the purchasers and their roles intertwining.

In this regard, looking to the next researches, a proper way of profiling the future purchaser could be to define the purchaser individual competencies, but also the collective competencies of the purchasing team, triangulating the sources of information by including the top management and potential third parties.

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