



# The S&OP Talent Gap

Why demand planning and S&OP roles are the hardest to fill in ANZ supply chain — and what companies can do to attract, assess, and retain these critical specialists.

**2026**

REPORT

**#1**

HARDEST ROLE TO FILL

**ANZ**

MARKET ANALYSIS

SECTION 01

# The Scale of the Problem

S&OP and demand planning roles consistently take longer to fill, generate fewer qualified applicants, and result in more failed searches than any other supply chain function. This isn't a temporary blip — it's a structural talent shortage that has been building for years and shows no sign of easing.

The problem is threefold: the candidate pool is genuinely small, the skills required are technically complex and hard to assess, and most recruitment agencies lack the specialist knowledge to evaluate S&OP competency. The result is a market where the best planners are constantly approached, rarely available, and expensive when they move.



## Time to Fill by Role Type (Working Days)



### Why Generalist Recruiters Fail

Most recruitment agencies assess S&OP candidates on CV keywords and years of experience. They can't evaluate whether a candidate truly understands IBP methodology, statistical forecasting, or cross-functional consensus building. This is why 38% of S&OP searches fail on the first attempt when run by non-specialist firms.

## SECTION 02

# Why the Candidate Pool Is So Small

Unlike procurement or logistics, S&OP is not a career that most professionals plan from the start. The typical S&OP manager arrives through a winding path — starting in demand planning, supply planning, or commercial analytics, then gradually building cross-functional capability. This means the pool of experienced S&OP leaders is inherently limited.

**No formal qualification pathway**

There is no widely recognised S&OP certification equivalent to CIPS for procurement. APICS CSCP touches on it, but doesn't produce job-ready S&OP practitioners. Companies are essentially competing for candidates who learned through on-the-job experience.

**The skills are unusually broad**

A good S&OP manager needs statistical forecasting ability, commercial acumen, ERP system expertise (SAP IBP, Kinaxis, o9), executive communication skills, and the political savvy to drive cross-functional consensus. It's rare to find all of these in one person.

**Retention is difficult**

S&OP professionals are constantly approached because the market knows they're scarce. Average tenure in S&OP roles is just 2.4 years in ANZ — shorter than any other supply chain function at manager level.

**Industry specificity matters**

An S&OP manager from FMCG cannot easily transition to healthcare or defence. Demand patterns, regulatory environments, and planning horizons are fundamentally different. This fragments an already small pool into even smaller industry-specific segments.

**Regional concentration**

Over 70% of S&OP roles in ANZ are based in Sydney and Melbourne. Brisbane, Perth, and New Zealand face even more acute shortages, with some markets having fewer than 20 qualified candidates for any given search.

## SECTION 03

# What Smart Companies Are Doing

The companies that consistently win S&OP talent share several common approaches. None of these are revolutionary — but the discipline to execute them consistently is what separates companies that fill these roles from those that don't.

## S&OP Salary Benchmarks — ANZ 2026

ROLE	AVG. BASE + SUPER	TYPICAL RANGE
Head of S&OP / IBP	\$195K	\$170K – \$225K
S&OP Manager	\$165K	\$145K – \$195K
Demand Planning Manager	\$152K	\$135K – \$175K
Supply Planning Manager	\$148K	\$130K – \$170K
Senior Demand Planner	\$132K	\$118K – \$148K
Demand / Supply Planner	\$118K	\$105K – \$135K

## Six Things That Win S&OP Talent

- 1 Pay at or above the 75th percentile — this is not a role where you can negotiate down and still attract quality.
- 2 Invest in planning technology (SAP IBP, Kinaxis, o9) — the best planners want to work with modern tools, not spreadsheets.
- 3 Offer genuine cross-functional influence — S&OP professionals leave when they're reduced to producing reports nobody reads.
- 4 Provide a clear career pathway to SC Director or VP — S&OP is a stepping stone, and candidates want to see the next move.
- 5 Use a specialist recruiter who can technically assess S&OP capability — generalist agencies waste time and money.
- 6 Move fast — the best S&OP candidates are off the market in 2–3 weeks. A 6-week interview process will lose them.



*S&OP is the one role where I consistently see companies underestimate how difficult the search will be. They think it's just another supply chain manager role. It isn't. The combination of technical planning skills, commercial awareness, and executive presence required is genuinely rare — and the market knows it.*

— Jon-Paul Hilton, Sigma Search

## How Sigma Search Solves This

- **We know the market personally**

Our database and network includes the majority of active S&OP and planning professionals across ANZ at the \$120K+ level. We don't start from scratch — we start from relationships.

- **We can technically assess candidates**

Jon-Paul conducts technical evaluation of S&OP methodology, forecasting approaches, and system proficiency. We don't rely on keyword matching.

- **We move at market speed**

Our retained process delivers a qualified shortlist in 4–6 weeks. For S&OP roles, speed isn't a nice-to-have — it's the difference between hiring the best and hiring who's left.

## Get in Touch

Sigma Search • Supply chain, logistics & procurement recruitment • Sydney & ANZ

[Jon-Paul Hilton](#) | [+61 423 929 471](tel:+61423929471) | [jhilton@sigmasearch.com.au](mailto:jhilton@sigmasearch.com.au) | [sigmasearch.com.au](https://sigmasearch.com.au)