

Insight of Interview

Mr. Manish Kumar- *Section Head, Supply Chain Strategy & Logistics Transformation, Hero Motor Corp.*



A results-oriented Manager with over 15 years of distinguished experience driving excellence in **Supply Chain & Distribution Management**. A specialist in **Digital Transformation** and **Green Sustainability Initiatives**, I possess a proven track record of orchestrating complex operations while fostering a culture of innovation. I am an expert in building cross-functional, high-performing teams, dedicated to enhancing operational agility. My core philosophy centers on aggressive **cost optimization** and strategic resource allocation, ensuring fiscal efficiency without compromising the integrity or quality of products and services.

1. What initiatives have you taken to keep yourself updated with rapid technological changes?

Staying ahead in the automotive sector requires a dual-track approach: academic rigor and industry immersion. Given my **PhD background**, I dedicate time to analyzing white papers on **Industry 5.0** and **Circular Economy**

principles, specifically how they apply to EV supply chains. I am an active member of professional bodies like **ASCM (Association for Supply Chain Management)** and regularly participate in global forums to understand the impact of **Digital Twins** and **Predictive Analytics** on logistics. Within my organization, I have pioneered 'Tech-Sprints' where we pilot niche startups' solutions for real-time fleet tracking and warehouse automation, ensuring we aren't just following trends, but actively shaping our technological roadmap.

2. Can you share your journey, contributions, and key learnings in your organization?

My journey has been a transition from managing 'Flow of Goods' to managing 'Value Streams'. Starting with the technical foundations, I have spent 15 years navigating the complexities of the Indian automotive landscape. My primary contribution at the national level has been the **structural optimization of our distribution network**, where I led the shift from a fragmented regional model to a centralized, hub-and-spoke system. This saved the organization millions in 'Dead-Stock' costs. My key learning is that

Supply Chain is the heartbeat of a company. If the synchronization between procurement, production, and the dealer network is even a second off, the financial impact is exponential. I have learned that agility beats forecasting every single time.

3. What is your success mantra or how do you achieve targets/results?

My mantra is '**Precision in Planning, Agility in Execution.** I believe that targets are achieved not by micromanagement, but by **Process Integrity.** I utilize a framework I call **The Triad of SCM Success:** Data Accuracy, Stakeholder Alignment, and Risk Mitigation. To achieve national targets, I break down high-level corporate goals into 'Actionable Granules' for my regional teams. We use **S&OP (Sales and Operations Planning)** as a 'Single Source of Truth' to ensure that every department—from the factory floor to the showroom—is looking at the same numbers. Success, to me, is when the system functions efficiently even in my absence.

4. How would you describe your leadership style?

I describe my style as **Transformational Leadership with an Analytical Core.** Because of my academic and engineering background, I lead through logic and evidence, but I inspire through vision. I am a firm believer in **Empowerment through Accountability.** I provide my team with the 'What' and the 'Why,' but I give them the creative freedom to determine the 'How.' This fosters a culture of intrapreneurship. However, in a national role, I also adopt a **Coaching style,** identifying high-potential managers and mentoring them on the nuances of 'Systems Thinking' so they can handle the complexities of a volatile market.

5. What challenges have you faced as a leader and how did you overcome them?

One of the most daunting challenges was managing the **supply chain volatility during the transition from BS-IV to BS-VI emission norms,** followed immediately by global lockdowns. We faced a dual crisis of obsolete inventory and zero incoming supply. I overcame this by forming a **Cross-Functional Task Force** that bypassed traditional silos. We renegotiated vendor contracts to move from fixed to flexible volumes and leveraged 'Reverse Logistics' to repurpose components where possible. By maintaining transparent, daily communication with our dealer network, we managed to maintain 98% serviceability levels despite the macro-economic chaos. It taught me that in a crisis, **over-communication is a virtue.**

6. How do you maintain a balance between work and personal life?

I view it through the lens of **Work-Life Harmony** rather than a 50/50 balance. In a national role, the demands are non-linear; there are seasons of intense activity. I manage this by practicing '**Deep Work**'—focusing on high-impact strategic decisions during my peak hours to ensure I don't get bogged down in administrative trivia. I am a proponent of 'Digital Detox' during my time with family, which helps me recharge. I also encourage my team to do the same, because a burnt-out leader cannot think strategically. Discipline in my personal routine—be it fitness or reading—is what provides the mental stamina for my professional responsibilities.

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11. Is there any scope for collaboration between your organization and academic institutions for developing research programs?

There is not just scope, but a **strategic necessity**. My PhD research highlighted the massive gap between theoretical supply chain models and the 'chaos' of the Indian logistics terrain. I see three clear areas for collaboration:

- **Applied Research:** Partnering with B-School & engineering institutions to develop algorithms for **Last-Mile delivery** in Tier-3 cities.
- **Talent Pipelines:** Creating 'Co-op' programs where students work on live supply chain bottlenecks as part of their thesis.
- **Executive Feedback:** Industry leaders acting as 'Professors of Practice' to ensure that the curriculum keeps pace with the transition to **Electric Vehicles (EV)** and **Hydrogen fuel cells**, which will fundamentally alter the supply chain landscape.

12. How do you deal with failure and what do you learn from it?

I view failure as '**Tuition Fees**' for **future success**. In a national supply chain, failures—whether it's a failed software implementation .or a supply disruption—are inevitable. When a failure occurs, my first step is to remove the 'Blame Culture.' We conduct a **Root Cause Analysis (RCA)** using the '5 Whys' method. For instance, a major stock-out taught me that our safety-stock logic was too reliant on historical data and ignored 'Black Swan' event signals. The lesson was to move toward **Heuristic Modeling**. Failure has taught me that a 'Robust' system breaks under pressure,

but an '**Antifragile**' system gets better because of it.

13. What traits should a good manager possess? What suggestions would you like to give to our young budding professionals?

A great manager must possess **Emotional Intelligence (EQ), Technical Competence, and Decisiveness**. You cannot lead people you don't understand, and you cannot manage processes you haven't mastered. **My advice to young professionals:**

- **Master the Fundamentals:** Don't just learn to use the ERP; understand the logic behind the code.
- **Develop a 'Nose for the Floor':** The best insights are found at the loading docks and the assembly lines, not in a PowerPoint deck.
- **Be a Continuous Learner:** Your degree is just the starting line. The day you stop being a student of the industry is the day your growth plateaus. In the age of AI, your ability to **unlearn and relearn** is your greatest competitive advantage