



Distribution Center

AI Logistics Officers

All Systems Sleigh: The AI Roles Behind Holiday Retail

CH.1

It's December 2045. Delivery trucks are autonomously humming silently through city streets, package drones are zipping across the sky, and smart distribution centers are reordering inventory automatically before it runs low. This is the future of holiday retail. At the center of it all sits an artificial intelligence (AI) Logistics Officer (ALO) — a human leader located in a retailer's corporate headquarters — who oversees hundreds of AI bots and agents, orchestrating the entire retail delivery ecosystem.

This officer's dashboard pulls insights from databases that touch all areas of the organization, including merchandising for inventory and product availability, marketing for real-time demand signals, and digital commerce to monitor online traffic and conversion patterns.

With a single click, the ALO can see that a snowstorm in Denver might disrupt holiday deliveries. In response, they can adjust promotions in real time to redirect demand and deploy alternate delivery methods, which helps make sure customers still receive their gifts on time.

Today's retail logistics may not look like this just yet, but this is where the industry is heading. AI will underpin nearly every aspect of retail operations. In the future, retailers will not distinguish themselves simply through their widespread AI use. Instead, the key differentiator will be how well they leverage AI's ability to coordinate across functions. To succeed in this future state, retailers must break down AI silos to connect insights to various departments, while keeping the human element intact. The true differentiator will be how effectively organizations unleash the human advantage of AI and prepare to people to work alongside new tools. The important role of human employees within this new digital workplace cannot be overlooked, and retailers will need to make investments to get their teams up to speed because the future of retail logistics depends on how well organizations equip their teams to adopt, adapt and lead in a digital environment.

Today, eight in ten organizations struggle to integrate AI into daily workflows. Only 8% of leaders prioritize change management or user adoption, and just 4% are actively training employees or gathering feedback on how AI should be used, according to [BDO's research](#). These numbers must be higher for the future of retail logistics to be truly AI-powered and digitally native in a way that keeps them relevant for years to come.



ALO: Orchestrator of the Back-end Retail Symphony

CH.2

Virtually no retail function will be left out of the AI transformation. Businesses will increasingly need to rely on data-backed insights and smart, predictive tools to help them support everything from on-time deliveries to seamless returns. Digital technologies and advanced software can boost logistics efficiency and agility, while greatly reducing operational costs or disruption risk.

As retail networks transform, retail supply chain leadership must also evolve. The supply chain leaders of the future must look beyond the basic elements of today's logistics, such as shipment tracking or product shelf life. Instead, they will need to focus on broad experience orchestration: anticipating disruptions before they happen and adjusting inventory in real time by collaborating with marketing teams. The ALO will also need to orchestrate a hybrid workforce of humans and AI agents, where success depends on their ability to interpret nuance, weigh trade-offs, and align people around shared outcomes.

How would this role look in practice? During a busy holiday season, an ALO might be notified by social listening platforms that an influencer's viral video has caused demand for a limited-edition sneaker to spike. AI detects that the merchandising department plans to order 500 units, but marketing data predicts demand for 1,500. Within seconds, the ALO reaches out to both teams with a message, "Adjust order quantity — merchandising and marketing should meet." Before the teams even set a meeting, AI is preparing a recommendation for merchandising to adjust regional SKUs by factoring in the latest marketing data and inputs.

In sending that message, the ALO will have teed up a critical first step in team coordination, but that is just the beginning. Once the new shipment numbers are entered and approved, logistics systems automatically recalibrate last-mile delivery routes throughout different regions to handle a potential influx of orders for the viral sneaker. The ALO can then evaluate those recalibrations and may decide on a case-by-case basis if and how to override them. Perhaps part of the stock should be diverted to micro-fulfillment centers closer to major metro areas where the ALO, based on previous experience with similar incidents, sees potential for demand surges and delays. Making this call enables better chances of on-time delivery. Finally, AI prompts marketing teams to adjust their delivery messaging on websites and within emails to alert customers when they should expect their shipments.

Logistics managers will increasingly lead through influence, judgment, and coordination —bringing together diverse inputs from humans and machines to make decisions that reflect context and long-term impact.

While this level of AI-facilitated coordination appears seamless, it requires substantial preparation. The siloed operational structures of today will need to give way to models that afford ALOs and their tools a dotted line of visibility into every relevant business function, much like the example above described. Amid this evolution, retailers will be better suited to navigate supply chain hiccups and maintain both consistency and visibility across teams.

Yet, amid all of the technology, humans have a crucial role to play. Future-proofed retailers will be looking for a different set of skills to help navigate emerging complexities.



EQ at the Center: Being Wired for Empathy

CH.3

Despite retailers' growing reliance on technology, they cannot afford to overlook the human element of their business. Leaders will have to reimagine how they work alongside AI as individuals and teams — learning to guide, supervise, and refine machine-driven recommendations while encouraging employees to adapt along the way.

It is humans that can weigh competing priorities, interpret context, and navigate the gray areas where real decisions live and where nuance can be tricky.

Employees who interact with AI regularly are more optimistic about its benefits and more likely to see its value in practice. The role of the ALO, as a new type of professional fluent in data science and human enablement, embodies this reality.

As retailers start building out their own ALO role — or others like it — the strongest candidates will share several defining traits. First, agility and curiosity should top the list as indicators of a mindset that will empower leaders to navigate emerging tools, decode complex data models, and guide teams through constant change.

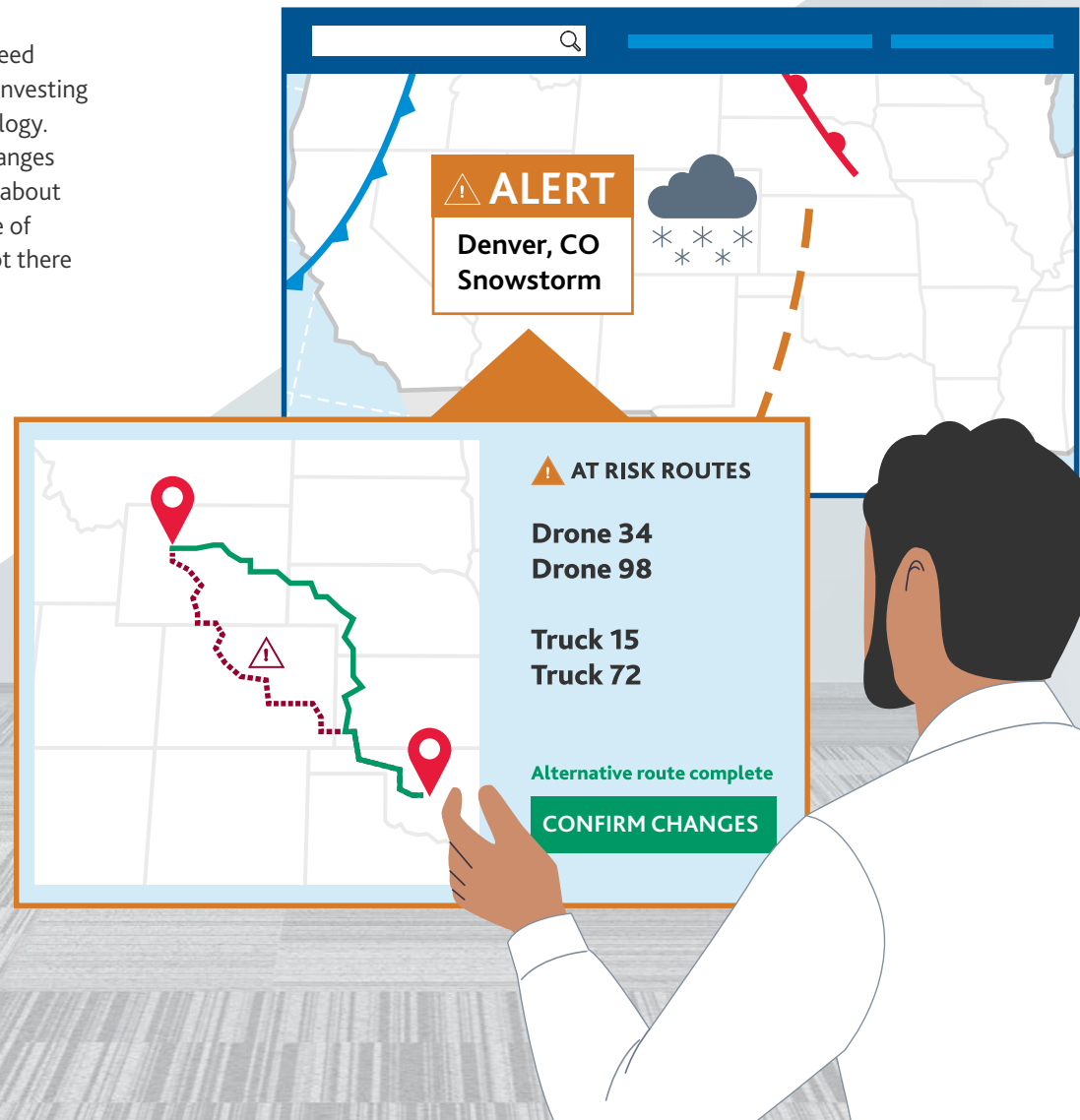
Second, and essential for any role that works in conjunction with AI, is a sense of empathy and strong emotional intelligence (EQ). EQ helps leaders recognize the human impact of automation on teams and customers alike and is becoming even more important than IQ, [according to Forbes](#). In fast-moving AI-powered environments, EQ allows leaders to effectively navigate change, sustain employee morale, and inspire their teams. Soft skills like empathy, compassion in communications, patience in coaching, and an ability to create psychological safety are valuable leadership qualities that become core competitive differentiators in an era of AI-enabled operations.



As retailers look toward their workforce and new talent pools, it's also important that they define the key elements of what the ALO role would include. Consider job duties such as:

- ▶ Identifying overlapping projects and inefficiencies
- ▶ Serving as connective tissue between functions that previously were disconnected
- ▶ Drawing insights from data that may have ripple effect on other functions
- ▶ Demonstrate enterprise thinking by being adaptable and using strategic foresight to lead the way
- ▶ Overseeing change management efforts

To staff ALO and related functions effectively, retailers will need to place a higher priority on developing these soft skills and investing in reskilling pathways so people can evolve alongside technology. Building trust with teams will be critical. As technological changes unfold, leaders should clearly communicate with employees about how AI will be used and what decisions it will inform. A sense of inclusion and empowerment can help teams see that AI is not there to replace human contribution but enhance it.



How BDO Can Help: Human Leadership in an AI World

CH.4

For AI-powered roles to deliver real value, their outputs must help improve the customer experience, drive revenue, and generate meaningful efficiencies across the enterprise. Achieving those goals will require a careful balance of technological savvy and human-centered skills.

Tomorrow's retail logistics leaders will be distinguished by their ability to future proof the human element that allows for truly impactful [AI integration](#). If you're a retail leader that wants to advance but you're not sure how to prepare your people or identify the right talent, BDO can help.

[BDO's People Strategy & Solutions](#) team can help your organization design change-management frameworks that align people and platforms, train and equip teams to work comfortably alongside AI and automation, and help retail teams master the human element of transformation. Because the retailers that win will go beyond adapting their roles to AI; they will use it to amplify their existing human potential.



Ready to launch your team into a future
where human EQ meets machine IQ?



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