If Milind Dawande gets his way, the world of supply chain management will set off a chain reaction and create a more sustainable and socially responsible marketplace. "I'm deeply interested in socially responsible supply chain management — the social value as well as the economic value," says Dawande, the Mike Redeker Distinguished Professor in Management. "You have to think of all the stakeholders instead of just considering one objective."

Looking at multiple viewpoints comes naturally to Dawande, who started his career in computer science, detoured into math and finally found his way into business.

Growing up in Amravati, a midsize city in India, he decided to become a teacher and researcher after listening to his mother, a history professor, talk about her rewarding academic career. But he was conflicted at first about what topic to teach.

Even as he was earning his bachelor’s degree in computer science from the Birla Institute of Technology and Science in India, he found himself drawn to another area. "I was more interested in the mathematics foundations of computing, rather than coding," he says. So he earned a master’s in mathematics from the University of Louisiana and then enrolled at Carnegie Mellon University, where he received both a master’s and a PhD in algorithms, combinatorics and optimization — a one-of-a-kind joint program offered by the Tepper School of Business, the Computer Science Department and the Mathematics Department.

"Before, the mathematicians and computer scientists and business guys were each doing their
own stuff and solving their own problems. But when they realized that their hardest problems were essentially equivalent, they said, “Let’s come together and share our techniques,” he says.

Dawande’s new way of looking at things came in handy in 1997, when he joined IBM’s T.J. Watson Research Center in upstate New York. There, he helped steel companies figure out new ways to improve their manufacturing and customer service. His work included award-winning solutions that also found applications in e-commerce.

In 2000, Dawande joined the UT Dallas School of Management, and in 2012, he was appointed an Ashbel Smith Professor. This spring, he was appointed the Mike Redeker Distinguished Professor in Management (see University Honors Seven Jindal School Professors With New Appointments, page 10).

Along the way, Dawande has served as an associate editor in top journals (including Manufacturing & Service Operations Management and Production & Operations Management) and has published research on topics as varied as robotic cells and mobile-ad blockers.

In recent years, he has developed a special interest in socially responsible operations. His research has delved into the most efficient distribution of food grains, the fairest distribution of scarce water among farmers, and the best schemes for making sure milk farmers supply their highest-quality milk to a distributor.

In the future, he wants to research new ways to design business contracts that will incentivize companies to use sustainable practices. “There have to be checks and balances to make sure suppliers are using ethical practices and not creating environmental harm,” Dawande says.

Whenever he needs a break from research and teaching, Dawande loves to watch televised cricket, a sport he played as a youth. He is also a Bollywood film fanatic who can bend your ear on the genre’s finer points, like which movies are realistic and which actors are right or wrong for a role.

But these days, his spare time is in short supply. In addition to teaching and researching, he has served as coordinator for the Operations Management Area for the past 13 years, a role which includes juggling the schedules of almost 30 full-time faculty members.