The supply chain trends shaking up 2023

KPMG Board Leadership Centre

Disruptions to supply chain operations are set to stay in 2023, whether they be existing or new geopolitical conflicts, inflationary pressures and the recessionary environment, climate change weather events, or other issues yet to emerge. They can all impact access to goods and how they flow to their final destination, create port holdups, reduce container and ocean freight availability, and surge prices, among other concerns. Managing an organisation’s response to these might be critical in the year ahead.

In 2023 there will be some key supply chain trends to manage – nations will be sceptical about cross-boarder trade cooperation; cyber criminals ramp up activity; there will be key material access turmoil; manufacturing footprints will change shape; retail and distribution supply chains are morphing; investment in supply chain technology will accelerate; and on the ESG front, scope 3 emissions will be scrutinised by investors and regulators in addition to an ever more environmentally conscious consumer.

Nations sceptical about cooperation

Geopolitical tensions have seen nations turn inward and become increasingly sceptical about cooperation and interdependence. As if tensions escalate, essential materials may become inaccessible or major trade routes closed. Governments and industry leaders are exploring domestic self-sufficiency in material supply and manufacturing. Short of this, they are looking to build friend-shoring relationships – trade links with like-minded and most likely geographically close countries (‘near-shoring’) where the supply of goods will likely be more secure.

To protect against geopolitical tensions, some critical steps to consider during 2023 include:

— Model scenarios to understand the impact geopolitical tensions will have on your supply chain.

— Consider how friend-shoring or near-shoring can create a more secure supply network.

— Be clear on what will happen if you can’t access a key material or component. Will you need to reformulate a product? What will this mean in terms of regulatory and/or customer approval and are there cost implications to sourcing from new suppliers / markets?

— Recognise the impact that friend-shoring or near-shoring will have on lead times and speed to market. Can you become more responsive, agile, and reduce working capital?

Cyber criminals ramping up

In 2023, cyber criminals will likely be even more sophisticated when it comes to infiltrating supply chains to damage or steal from businesses. The supply chain can offer vulnerabilities that provide external parties with a pathway to get into your systems, particularly via your supplier network. Criminals could also hack in through basic warehouse equipment such as a barcode reader or via Internet of Things (IoT) devices applied within your manufacturing and other operational sites. Cyber risk will likely be impacted if you rethink your supplier networks and make changes to friend-shore or near-shore, or invest in new technologies.

To mitigate cyber risk, some critical actions to consider during 2023 include:

— Recognise that cybersecurity strategies often stop at the borders of your own enterprise. Therefore, identify the strategies that you and your partners must enact to mitigate cyber risk across the supply chain. How can you help ensure that those strategies are robust across your third-party contracts?

— Ensure new third parties brought into your supply chain ecosystem undergo thorough cyber risk assessments.

— Consider funding and implementing artificial intelligence (AI) or machine learning (ML) as part of the standard onboarding process of new suppliers to identify threats such as spam and phishing emails.

— Human error is a key cyber security risk. A recent report from the World Economic Forum highlighted that close to 95% of cyber-attacks that have been successful are linked to a human element/error. Define strategies to leverage technology and automation that help mitigate this exposure.

— Conduct a cyber assessment for all the functions/activities within the supply chain using IoT devices (storing data, managing inventory, tracking goods), especially those with direct access to sensitive information and/or provide a gateway to wider system access.

Access to key materials in turmoil

In the year ahead, a second wave of unplanned supply chain risks will likely be realised. Organisations may experience limited access to critical inputs for manufacturing, or even spare parts and critical maintenance items. Also, key commodity prices and availability may fluctuate – whether that be energy/fuel, construction items like timber, steel and resin, or plastic for packaging. Building resilient supply chains to combat future disruptions and adapt to new changes will be key to help navigate these risks.

Key steps to protect against material access issues during 2023 might include:

— Protect your core offer and mitigate risk by removing critical time spent managing low-demand items.

— Resolve redundancy in your supply chain by shifting from Just-In-Time to Just-In-Case, holding extra inventory for critical items, maintaining low-capacity utilisation, and engaging with multiple suppliers.

— Don't just say you'll find alternative suppliers in a disruption, but have clear plans for who those suppliers are, and what impact any changes will have on your costs and operations.

— Adopt real-time data analytics to enhance the accuracy of forecast demand volatility.

— Leverage technologies such as Blockchain for greater product transparency, to prevent counterfeit products, to minimise discrepancies.

— Prioritise your supply chain resilience with end-to-end visibility and transparency across the supply modes of transport and links.

The changing shape of manufacturing footprints

While accessing critical materials in 2023 may be challenging, so too will be manufacturing for many of the same reasons including the rapid rise in energy costs and key inputs. Therefore, global organisations with manufacturing operations will be re-evaluating their manufacturing footprint. Friend-shoring and near-shoring will again be considered, however, there may be deeper thinking around whether manufacturing needs to be – and can be – done entirely onshore. This shift can't happen overnight, but wheels will be put in motion.

Another factor in 2023 will likely be the increased impact of online retail on product manufacturing. Often, online platforms want to differentiate their offer, whether that be the size of products, minor ingredient changes, or even the style of packaging. This means organisations will seek out manufacturers that can provide more customisation. Similarly, in life sciences, precision medicine will become more accepted by regulators, healthcare practitioners and patients. Therefore, rather than manufacturing millions of units for each vaccine/drug and moving these products across the globe, corporations may seek to manufacturer specific products per patient.

This manufacturing change will significantly transform the future manufacturing footprint and how supply chains operate. As a result, a key question is whether organisations should establish new supply chains or simply divert production to other markets with existing capacity.

Other key considerations during 2023 include:

— Consider the future of your manufacturing site location and how any changes may help the competitiveness of your products.

— How can you source from multiple suppliers / manufacturers in different countries to help protect your operations from uncertainties in key manufacturing markets?

— Explore opportunities to contract global organisations to manufacture on your behalf, or if manufacturing should be part of your core DNA and done onshore within the next few years.

— Understand if mass manufacturing may be right for your business in future, or do you need to look at customised manufacturing approaches?

Retail and distribution supply chains are morphing

While getting goods into the hands of consumers in 2023 might appear easier than in earlier COVID19 times, it will likely not be simple nor inexpensive. There may be more consumption mechanisms and channels than ever, and costs are not showing any signs of letting up, partially due to the close link to the complex manufacturing challenge, but also to the difficulty in getting goods into the hands of a more-demanding-than-ever consumer. The prevalence of last mile delivery challenges, coupled with reliance on suppliers that are often experiencing difficulties also, means global and local retailers may need to review their inventory distribution network.

Key steps to better manage retail and distribution complexities in 2023 include:

— Consider the future of your distribution and micro-fulfillment centre locations.

— Enhance and advance your e-commerce and omni-channels into true unified commerce process and technology.

— Review sourcing and supplier strategies to reduce risks.

— Create greater visibility in a predictive environment, leveraging AI and ML.

Technology investment accelerating

Over the past year, investing in a cloud-based digital transformation strategy was a key trend, and in 2023 this trend is likely to accelerate as organisations seize technology as a strategy to mitigate their growing concerns around inflationary pressures and economic stagnation. While technology transformation has often focused on the back office and better customer engagement, supply chain and operational capabilities will be key in 2023. Importantly, there will likely be greater investment to uplift supply chain planning maturity, automation of warehouse and operational tasks, as well as in gathering better end-to-end supply chain analytics to create enhanced visibility.

Supporting this trend is a move from some major technology suppliers towards holistic supply chain platforms. Rather than offering supply chain capabilities as discrete add-on systems, they are bringing them all together in one platform, aiming to provide a seamless user experience.

Key actions to take in 2023 include:

— Prioritise technology investment in supply chain planning capabilities, and end-to-end visibility enabled by real-time analytics, as these can help you to maintain operational stability.

— Fast-track your data management policies and capabilities, and upskill your teams to make the most of the technology capability for insights led decision making.

— Consider how you can invest in automation to replace redundant manual supply chain activities, drive productivity gains, and protect against margin squeeze and cost increases. There are opportunities to streamline very manual activities such as Global Trade documentation, Free Trade Agreement (FTA) compliance, trade tax calculations, reconciliations and settlements, and reporting.

Scope 3 emissions to be scrutinised

Supply chain sustainability strategies have long been integral to achieving corporate ESG initiatives. In 2023, regulators and other important stakeholders will likely demand a focus on scope 3 emissions control. You may be expected to make informed decisions to reduce these emissions, and 'greenwashing' will not pass scrutiny.

Adding to the pressure will likely be a shift in investor activity towards organisations that can prove their scope 3 emissions are low. Global banking institutions, private equity and venture capitalists want to see that their portfolio is aligned to sustainable organisations.

Priority actions for ESG improvement in 2023 include:

— Operationalise your ESG strategy by aligning the objectives of each function within your business including Finance, HR, IT, Operations and Commercial. Ensure that there is internal collaboration and alignment with each function accessing and tracking the same ESG data.

— Capture real-time operational data along your supply chain for measurement and reporting of ESG matters.

— Build end-to-end visibility of the supply chain to see where your goods move, the organisations that are moving them, and their sustainability credentials. With this insight, make active decisions about your partners to reduce your scope 3 total.

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