Is it a Supply Chain Issue or Poor Project Management?

By Rosemary Coates

We are in a global crisis. It’s a matter of life and death. There are shortages of supplies and equipment across the world including acute shortages in America, and yet we are supposed to have a national stockpile, and a coordinated government response. Having 50 governors in 50 different states running in competition with one another for supplies and medical personnel and enforcing different policies is not the optimal way of dealing with the pandemic. Everyone seems to be dealing with supply chain problems – even at the grocery stores where it is impossible to keep paper products and antiseptic wipes in stock.

We know there is plenty of manufacturing capability around the world for consumer goods, PPE, testing equipment, and medical devices such as ventilators. But procurement by thousands of individual hospitals and multiple governmental agencies is uneven and inefficient and we end up with variable pricing, too much inventory in some places, and not enough in others. These may look like supply chain issues on the surface, but they are actually project management issues.

These are not a supply chain issues, but rather a reflection of poor planning and execution. These are project management issues.

Professional project managers will tell you that successful projects require planning, discipline, milestones, and truthful, regular communications.
Taking the time to set priorities and develop an end-state vision creates the framework for successful execution. Here are a few principles of project management:

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<td>Develop a vision and mission with clear definitions of the problem to be solved - one that everyone understands. It is critical that everyone on the team moves in the same direction.</td>
<td>Set overall goals for the project including timing, budget, and clear milestones. Goals must be clear and measurable. Define the work to be done in manageable segments.</td>
<td>Measure progress, hurdles, and stumbling blocks. Be transparent about everything so that problems can be solved and project leadership can help clear the way forward. Ask for help when needed.</td>
<td>Inform all stakeholders regarding specific project progress toward milestones and success. Don’t be vague or overconfident. Tell the truth about progress.</td>
<td>When you have reached your goal, but not before, declare success. Be able to demonstrate that you have met and passed every milestone, and achieved the stated vision and mission.</td>
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Project management is an essential part of successful supply chains. It is structured and disciplined and a difficult task. It isn’t for the faint of heart. Successful supply chain leaders must also be excellent project managers.

**Legal cases often involve poor project management**

As an Expert in global supply chains, I work on cases involving sourcing and manufacturing projects, and software implementations that have failed. More often than not, project managers have failed to execute basic project management principles and communication skills. When milestones are missed and hurdles arise, poor project managers typically gloss over these problems, eventually leading to dissatisfaction and conflict. When disputes arise in global supply chains, poor project management is often a root cause.

Rosemary Coates is the President of Blue Silk Consulting, a Global Supply Chain consulting firm, with an impressive list of over 80 clients worldwide. She is a seasoned executive with an MBA and 25 years of experience in industry, consulting and as an Expert Witness. She is also a Licensed U.S. Customs Broker. She is the author of five books on supply chain including Amazon.com Best Seller: 42 Rules for Sourcing and Manufacturing in China.

Ms. Coates resides in Silicon Valley.

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I help my clients (and the attorneys representing them) to understand the nature of doing business in global supply chains. Avoiding and minimizing risk, friction, and conflicts should be major concerns for supply chain executives around the world.

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