

A SUPPLY CHAIN RETROSPECTIVE by Gary Lenik

When speaking to groups on Supply Chain implementations I am frequently asked more questions about lessons we learned rather than the mechanics of what we achieved. There is so much interest in the journey and wisdom gained that I have jotted notes on the “realities” of implementation garnered from our collective experience-- one that continues to evolve. The biggest dilemma faced by companies attempting a Supply Chain solution is appreciating pitfalls and challenges encountered during the journey. Having traveled this route with eight other companies, the post mortem consensus is we didn't have a clue what to expect. Our best knowledge came from doing, experiencing setbacks, and eliminating them one at a time. Acknowledging ignorance became key to keeping on track and certain realities we now claim as knowledge actually came from implementing our “Super Team”.

Supply Chain Realities...

No progress will be made unless every partner and employee clearly sees the “WIFM” (What's in it for me?). All needs and concerns have to be addressed and reflected in the final solution. All participants need an incentive to drive toward the vision. The incentive may be different for each but the results have to support every company's WIFM. This critical element is the glue that keeps the new process intact. Without it the most seamless solutions unravel.

There is no canned solution or super-software. Methods and tools have to support the end result, rather than modifying the result to fit the method. Knowing the combined process requirements of SC partners presents the opportunity to define a vision and then slowly craft a solution that meets the criteria. Knowledge and the ultimate solution sprang from this process.

Implementing a “virtual company” was more complex than anything done within our own companies. Effecting change in a single enterprise is difficult. Managing change in multiple companies each with many functional departments is even more challenging. Overcoming agendas, preconceived ideas, concerns for jobs, conflicting performance criteria, and aligning systems is a big set of tasks and requires strong facilitation skills.

The value comes from removing cycle time from the processes within all companies; only activities that really add value with zero redundancy among participants survive. The biggest lesson – Simple is better! Everything must be driven by results. Sounds simple enough, but we often ended up mired in discussions of ideas that did little or nothing toward achieving the vision. We learned to give our ideas the vision test - does it support the vision or not? We always kept the end point in mind.

Improvements implemented during development reward participants with incremental success while journeying to the final solution. This can be effective as long as improvements support the vision and desired results.

The reality of implementing a successful Supply Chain requires being adept at being true to the vision, managing change across several companies, and tactical execution!