OPERATING MODEL & DECISIONS

We Do Not Just Plan Supply Chains

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This article is dedicated to my team, to the people who make supply chains steerable.

Over the last years, I have worked with people who never treated supply chain planning as a narrow functional discipline. They did not come into projects asking only for a process chart, a system module, or a meeting calendar. They asked different questions. How does this factory really run?

Where does variability enter the system? Why does the plan look good, but execution still struggles? Which capacity is real, which demand is valid, which inventory is intentional? Where is a planner still compensating for a system that should have supported better decisions in the first place?

That mindset shaped me.

I started my career close to the shopfloor, working on PP/DS, production planning, packaging lines, sequencing logic, setup matrices, master data, recipes, safety stock concepts and the practical question of how planners actually use a new tool in daily operations.

Later, the scope became broader. Shopfloor visibility. MES integration. Quality and release processes.

Factory physics. That one stayed with me. Because supply chains are not abstract systems. They have flow, friction, queues, constraints and feedback loops. Kanban and CONWIP.

Global network planning. Deployment logic. Rhythm-wheel planning. S&OP and S&OE.

IBP, APS, ERP, planning platforms and analytics. Operating models, governance and supply chain strategy. At some point, it becomes hard to call this only Supply Chain Planning. Planning is part of it.

But the work is bigger. It is about designing the management system that allows a company to steer its supply chain. A supply chain is not managed by visibility alone. It is not transformed by technology alone.

It does not improve from another planning meeting. It becomes steerable when an organization has a shared logic for decisions. That means one valid plan. Reliable data.

Clear roles. Defined escalation paths. Capacity and inventory logic that reflects reality. Execution feedback that actually reaches planning.

Technology that supports the model, not technology that replaces the model. This is where my team works. At the intersection of planning and execution. At the intersection of factory reality and executive decision-making.

We work on demand, supply, capacity, inventory, production, logistics integration, quality constraints, finance alignment and management governance.

Not as separate disciplines. As one system. That is why I no longer accept the label Supply Chain Planning for what we do.

Too often, it is reduced to Demand Planning, Supply Planning, IBP, OMP, Kinaxis, SAP IBP, PP/DS, APO, system testing, training or PMO.

All of these topics matter. But none of them alone describes the real work. The real work is to connect them. To define which demand is valid.

Which supply is realistic. Which capacity is constrained. Which inventory is deliberate. Which service promise is executable.

Which trade-offs need escalation. Which execution signals must change the plan. And which decisions

belong in S&OE, S&OP or the Management Business Review. That is not only Supply Chain Planning.

That is Integrated Supply Chain Management. And maybe this is why I increasingly think of us less as supply chain planners and more as supply chain engineers. Not because engineering sounds more technical. Because it describes the work better.

We design how the system behaves. And that requires a particular kind of team.

A team that can speak to planners, plant managers, supply chain leaders, IT architects and executives without changing the substance of the message.

A team that understands that a setup matrix is not a technical detail when it drives capacity, service and inventory. That master data is not administration when it determines whether a plan can be trusted. That S&OP is not a meeting cadence when it defines how a company makes trade-offs under pressure.

That S&OE is not firefighting when it becomes the control layer between plan and reality.

A team that can segment the supply chain, assess the long tail, determine the right inventory and supply strategy per segment, select forecasting models and decouple supply from forecast noise through buffer logic and DDMRP principles.

A team that understands data models, planning foundations and the architecture behind integrated supply chain management: APS, ERP, MES, logistics systems, finance integration and the analytics layer that needs to sit on top of all of it.

And this point matters more than many organizations admit. Operations and IT are still too often treated as separate worlds. Operations defines the process. IT implements the system.

Then everyone wonders why the transformation does not change how the supply chain actually runs. The hard work sits in between. Understanding the operational reality deeply enough to know what the system must support. And understanding the system deeply enough to know what the operating model can actually execute.

A team that brings meaningful AI into supply chain, not as theatre, but as a way to improve sensing, decision support, parameter logic, exception handling and operational steering. And only when the decisions, data and ownership are defined first.

A team that understands change beyond the classical change management toolbox. Because adoption does not happen because a communication plan exists. It happens when people recognize their own reality in the future model.

When planners, plant teams, supply chain leaders, IT, finance and commercial teams understand what will change in their daily decisions.

And when the people leading the change can speak the language of the organization, not only the language of the program. A team that knows the difference between a visible problem and a solved one. This is the team I am proud of. Not because they know every buzzword in supply chain.

Because they understand the system behind the buzzwords. Because they can move between shopfloor detail and operating model design without losing the thread.

Because they can move between a sequencing problem on the shopfloor and a governance question in the boardroom, and lose nothing on the way.

Because they care whether the plan is executable. Supply chains do not run on slides. They run on decisions, data, constraints, people and disciplined execution. My team understands this.

And they build accordingly. We do not just plan supply chains. We are supply chain engineers. We design how they are steered.

This article is for the people who know exactly what that means, because they do it.