

“This is the Time to Shine”

Biopharma Supply Chain Leaders Have the Attention of the CEO and Board – Now What?

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to cause uncertainty, disruption and tragedy around the world, Supply Chain executives across the biopharma ecosystem have remained focused and resilient. From navigating complex geopolitical trade and sourcing challenges to the day-to-day balance of keeping manufacturing operators healthy and engaged, these leaders and their teams have been at center stage of the industry’s response to the pandemic. Indeed, with the race underway to develop and deliver a vaccine or treatment to a global population, Supply Chain performance will be a major determinant of success or failure in these efforts.

On June 30 we convened a virtual dialogue of nearly a dozen C-Suite leaders across the biopharma Supply Chain ecosystem – including manufacturers, suppliers, and contract manufacturing organizations – to reflect on the last few months and discuss what comes next for their organizations. Beyond the foundation of preparedness and risk management, these executives highlight the need for a clear sense of purpose, a culture of mutual respect, and a commitment to execution to empower organizations to thrive in this difficult environment. At the same time, they question what the pandemic means to the pre-existing talent shortage in Supply Chain ranks, and how the trend toward remote working could open up new opportunities for executives.

Sense of Purpose

“When the pandemic started to unfold, our people already knew what the right thing to do was. We have a very clear sense of purpose in our organization, and we give our people the freedom to act. So we didn’t need to explain what to do, but instead let our culture and values guide the way.” This is how the Executive Vice President and Head of Supply Chain at a \$5 billion multinational described her company’s response to COVID-19.

Leaders told us that their Supply and Operations teams are as committed as ever to get product to patients. Workers have continued operating on the shop floor and in warehouses, unable to work remotely like much of senior management. As one Chief Operations Officer said, absenteeism is down and retention and engagement are up during the crisis, as employees feel a sense of responsibility to deliver. “This is the time to shine,” commented a global Vice President of Supply Chain. “Many people in our function feel that they have spent years not being visible to the organization, but now is the time to deliver. It is the time to reach out and engage with your colleagues in other areas, like product innovation or sales, and develop new solutions together.”

Supply Chain, which has always been the “unsung hero,” is now at the foreground of a company’s success. As a result, these leaders now find that they have the opportunity – and the responsibility – to engage with their C-Suite peers, the CEO, and Board of Directors to help shape the future of the company.

Doubling down on Execution and Relationships

The foundation of people, trust, culture, and values is what carries you through a crisis. During the last few months, leaders have had to demonstrate a different type of ‘human’ leadership. “We have changed more in three months than in the last three years,” shared the Chief Operating Officer of a leading contract manufacturing organization. “Through a deep focus on execution, we have actually gotten more productive during the crisis – but don’t think for a minute that this is business as usual. We prioritized our planning, worked more closely than ever before with our clients, and communicated much more frequently and transparently with our employees.” Supply Chains are revamping in real-time how they execute. Executives told us that it is especially critical at this moment to stay aligned with your internal

and external stakeholders. The leaders emphasized the need to share information candidly and actively seek feedback from both employees and external voices such as government officials.

Additionally, the leaders valued their person-to-person relationships, noting that it is almost always more critical than any technical benefit over the long-term. Building and fostering these relationships – with a committed sense of empathy and understanding – are critical. And for suppliers to biopharma companies, there is even more of a need to put yourself into your customer's shoes these days.

Exacerbating – or Reducing – the Talent Shortage?

In our recent survey of more than two hundred Chief Supply Chain Officers from industries around the world (for more, see [Chain Reaction 2020](#)), the lack of qualified talent in Supply Chains was flagged as a major issue. In fact, nearly three-fourths of respondents said that they were concerned about the current skill level of people in their organization. In addition, 79% of executives said that they were worried about the ability to recruit talent able to handle the increasing pace of change in Supply Chains.

At the same time, the pandemic has now introduced a new variable, and possible inflection point, in gaining access to key talent. For example, one executive described how over the last few months he has seen executives start to openly question how much time they want to spend away from families and thus step back from pursuing roles that would require constant travel. If remote working has proven effective for many managers so far, is there really a need to go back to so much travel – or even re-locate – for a role? Will organizations accept and adapt to this next iteration of off-site (or even out-of-region) leadership? It is too early to know if the net impact of these new dynamics will be positive or negative to the talent gap, but there is no doubt it is a necessary conversation to have within your Supply Chain organization.

What Comes Next?

What has become clear, executives told us, is that resilient, collaborative and empathetic leadership – grounded in a clear sense of purpose and commitment to execution – is more critical than even before for biopharma Supply Chain executives.

From our perspective of assessing and developing executives across the industry, we see an urgent and important need to invest in the leaders of today, as well as those of the future. The ranks of Supply Chain leadership need to be ready to innovate, inspire, and power through even more complex challenges and disruptions in the future.

What are you doing to increase the resilience and flexibility of your Supply Chain organization? Do you and your leadership team have the competencies required to think and act more broadly? Are you investing in the next generation of Supply Chain leaders so they have the leadership tools needed for the next great challenge?

More broadly, given Supply Chain's re-positioning to the company's strategic agenda, what will be the competitive advantage that you present to your Board?

For more information, contact:



Peter Gallagher
New York
peter.gallagher@egonzehnder.com



Le Ly
Dallas
le.ly@egonzehnder.com

Covid-19 Micro-Website

We have launched a micro-website where this and other informative pieces are posted. This site will be regularly updated: [click here](#) for further details.

About Egon Zehnder

Egon Zehnder is the world's preeminent leadership consulting firm, sharing one goal: to help people and organizations transform. We know what great leaders can do and are passionate about delivering the best solutions for our clients.

Our more than 500 Consultants in 68 offices and 40 countries form one powerful, collaborative team. Our services include: leadership development, individual, team and organizational effectiveness, CEO search and succession, executive search and assessment, Board advisory, and cultural transformation.

For more information visit www.egonzehnder.com and follow us on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).