ramco

COMMAND CENTER - THE DATA-ENABLED SUPPLY CHAIN SPECIALIST ON THE ROAD TO VISIBILITY

> **Don't stand too long at the crossroads. You get run over by all sides.**
> -Jeremy Chin

The supply chain is currently at the crossroads of the contradictory consequences of globalization. With ever-increasing demands for agility, zero inventory, anytime anywhere status update, and real-time strategic decisions, this landscape of the traditionally slow adopters is under tremendous pressure to shed its antiquated practices and functionalities. But visibility has arrived into this scenario as the perfect elixir guaranteeing a cure-all for all the current woes of the supply chain.

While visibility as a solution has the consensus of all the stakeholders, the tool that can help reach this destination is still ambiguous. One of the increasingly trusted approaches to reach the goal of visibility is the command center or control tower, which delivers transparency across all the functionalities of the supply chain landscape and data-enabled insights that help stakeholders take timely and strategic decisions.

Let's evaluate the roadmap that will take us from visibility as the cure for all supply chain troubles to the command center as the direction that will lead us to visibility.

Choosing The Road Toward Visibility

The term visibility has varied interpretations across diverse supply chains and even across different stakeholders within a supply chain. From visibility of inventory and assets across the network to visibility of the entire transportation network and HR functionality, its purpose grossly fluctuates across organizations. The contradictory challenges of the supply chain landscape have contributed to this confusion, posing multiple hurdles.

Scope Of Visibility In Overcoming The Contradictory Challenges

Globalization opened up the entire supply chain network; however, it also laid the foundation for multiple challenges that the supply chain continues to grapple with. Visibility has all the right tools to solve these issues. Let's look at a few influencers.

Competitive Disadvantage

The extensive supply chain network improved the scope for innumerable procurement options and new customer acquisitions, but it also induced intense competition. The need to be the best and most visible among competitors started pushing stakeholders to look for differentiators.

Visibility across every node of the supply chain network proves to be the differentiator that ticks all the points of the checklist from real-time decision-making to minimal inventory.

Customer At The Driving Seat

The entire landscape has rapidly transformed from a profit-oriented approach to a customer-centric operational mode, enabling innovative solutions to be delivered with customers at the heart of every decision. However, brand loyalty, personalized services, real-time status, and many other such customer-oriented approaches have become norm, with a strong downward pressure on price. As a result, the supply chain is under pressure to comprehend and meet customer requirements.

A clear visibility of customers' requirements is hence critical to understand their needs.

Time Constraints

Although globalization broadened the supply chain landscape, it stretched the nodes of the ecosystem way beyond the local market. This extended transaction times within the supply chain; however, competition and customer requirements demanded not just timeliness but also reduced lead times and just-in-time deliveries. The intensely complex landscape makes even determining triggers of delay quite a challenging task.

The battle against time gains from visibility, since knowledge of any scope for delay is dependent directly or indirectly on having a clear visibility of the landscape.

Shift From Siloed Existence To Symbiotic Collaboration

The supply chain now includes multiple players who can potentially eliminate stress from the system by collaborating to share their responsibilities, but the reality is far from desirable. Since the supply chain's evolution has been predominantly inorganic, the current ecosystem, with its distinct partners with inconsistent capabilities and disparate technologies, essentially work in opaque silos. Hence, the scope for collaboration and consistent performance has considerably narrowed down.

A system that integrates disparate information systems across multiple stakeholders and provides consistent visibility will enable collaboration and real-time performance evaluation.

Reaching The Magic Zero In Inventory

Changes in supply and demand equations have been one of the toughest changes challenging supply chain stakeholders. This is the age of zero inventory; hence, maintaining the crucial demand–supply balance in the fluctuating ecosystem is fast becoming the top priority of supply chain players.

Efficient demand forecasts and supply mechanisms are the way out of this maze. This approach requires real-time visibility to detect demand variances, map them with timely supply, and eliminate the need for buffer inventory.

Enabling Real-Time Strategic Decision-Making

Real-time, immediate, and proactive are the keywords of today's supply chain. However, the seeming uncertainty of the landscape and its turbulent environment obstructs its capability to predict deviations before they occur.

The need of the hour is to leverage the power of visibility to foresee interruptions and derive prompt and effective solutions. This real-time decision-making ability enables appropriate corrective and preventive actions to be taken in a timely manner with almost zero impact to cost, reputation, and customer satisfaction.

Data As A Stimulant In Achieving Visibility

Having established the power of visibility, what now remains is to unveil the catalyst that delivers visibility. With every node and function of the supply chain going electronic, the colossal amount of data generated during every transaction serves as the critical enabler of visibility.

However, rich data does little in terms of delivering visibility. The captured data has to be effectively channelized through validation and analytics to provide valuable intelligence in the form of insights to the stakeholders for making smart decisions.

As easy as data management sounds, the reality is quite a different story. With extensive data being generated with every supply chain transaction, the task of separating noise from useful data is critical. The time taken to generate data insights from disparate systems is time consuming and requires seamless collaboration. With both time and scope of collaboration challenging data management, by the time the data insights are generated the intelligence is no longer valuable.

Hence, the need of the hour is real-time data analytics. Today's technological innovations, including predictive analytics, machine learning, algorithm-based in-memory optimization engines, and deep learning, are enabling anytime anywhere visibility.

Leveraging Data Through The Command Center To Achieve Visibility

Visibility has indeed travelled a long road from enabling a unidimensional track-and-trace functionality to a 360-degree capability of

- providing data-enabled forecasts across the supply chain ecosystem,

- summarizing past events to assess partner performances,
- communicating warnings about disruptions,
- delivering effective alternate solutions,
- and identifying potential areas of improvements.

These proficiencies can be effectively managed only by a control tower approach - a centralized data management unit that orchestrates the capture, validation, and analytics of every piece of information generated at even the minutest level of interaction in the supply chain ecosystem. This approach in the supply chain world is rightly termed the command center. Armed with the complete ability to track data end-to-end, the landscape successfully closes the gap between planning, execution, and management of every supply chain transaction.

Although the benefits of setting up a command center are well-acknowledged across the ecosystem, there are still two main apprehensions around the concept:

1. The thought of setting up a command center with functionality spread across the landscape brings up concerns about heavy investments and technology.

The early days of the command center indeed required a lot of investment, but with evolving technological innovations, the command center approach can be implemented based on the organization's order of priority - collaborative operations, inventory control, revenue management, efficient order management, time management, or end-to-end functionality management for any organization.

2. Many organizations are concerned about the approach to take for fear of making irreversible changes that damage their current position in the market.

Command center is essentially a symbiotic collaboration between people, process, and technology. Implementing the command center in a phased manner is the ideal approach. Assess the current capability of the supply chain and set the benchmark for what you want the supply chain to achieve. Envision the extent of collaboration you wish to achieve between the supply chain partners. Audit the existing systems of every stakeholder of the landscape and create a roadmap of integration to achieve seamless data flow. Zero in on the specific technological solutions that will be a best fit for your supply chain ecosystem. Choose the right resources for your team and equip them with the right training so they are empowered to manage the command center smoothly.

Conclusion

Command center is at the crux of all disruptive changes that have completely changed the pace of supply chains. The precious data insights deliver not only a comprehensive overview of the status and performance of the landscape but also cognitive inputs too take timely supply chain decisions. Within the right technological framework and with a well-coordinated approach toward the goal of achieving purposeful visibility, every attempt at creating a command center will be a strong step towards creating the ideal supply chain network ■

ramco

Ramco Systems is part of the USD 1 Billion diversified conglomerate, the Ramco Group of companies and has 1600+ employees with 22 offices spread across USA, Canada, Australia, Middle East, India, Europe, South Africa and APAC. Ramco is a fast growing enterprise software player disrupting the market with its multi-tenanted cloud and mobile-based enterprise software for ERP, HCM and M&E MRO for Aviation.

Ramco's Logistics Software is a unified cloud based software covering the end to end needs of 3PL, Freight Forwarders and Parcel/ Courier Service Providers who are seeking a high performance logistics software. Ramco Logistics Solution, will not only help you manage your business with ease but also swiftly respond to evolving imperatives of business, regulatory changes, market conditions etc without having to go through the pains of integration.

To know how Ramco can help you create business value for your organization, feel free to reach out to contact@ramco.com