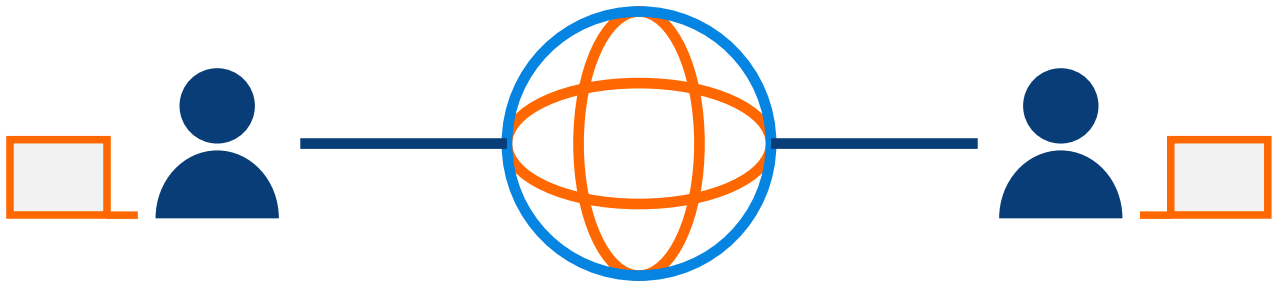


5 Best Practices for Managing Inventory Operations in Distributed and Remote-Working Teams



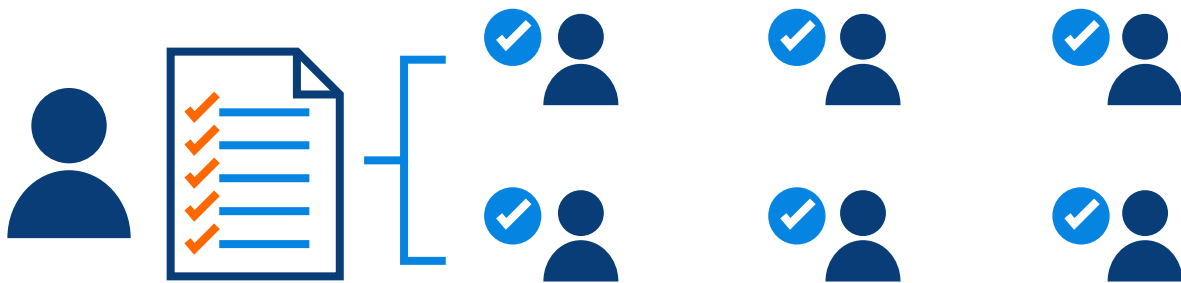
As global supply chain organizations work to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, your procurement team may be under intense stress. Supply chains are disrupted, widespread shortages are impeding production, and your buyers are bogged down with daily fire-fighting. Many manufacturers are reworking their factory staff structures to include multiple smaller shift teams throughout the day. Add to that the rapid transition to remote-work arrangements for much of your team and day-to-day work becomes even more challenging.

A sudden absence of normal structures, routines, and facetime not only amplifies an already stressful situation, but also makes it harder to know which urgent shortage and inventory issues to tackle first, and who's accountable for what. As your entire business focuses on taking the most critical actions to retain customers, you need to find ways to quickly recreate some of that missing structure and routine, and enable communication across your distributed team. Below are some best practices your team can adopt to better manage inventory operations when everyone can't meet face-to-face.

- 1 Prioritize and simplify daily work for your buying team.
- 2 Monitor results to identify which buyers need more support.
- 3 Manage accountability with task ownership and clear timelines.
- 4 Standardize agendas and reports used in virtual meetings.
- 5 Share resources to help everyone act quickly to keep production moving.

1

Prioritize and Simplify Daily Work for Your Buying Team



For buyers, working remotely can make it even more challenging to know which tasks to knock out first each day. If you haven't already, institute a triage process and establish a simple standard workflow for your buying team to follow so they can focus on the most critical items first.

“Standard daily work for your buyers is a quick, simple way to drive focus and help everyone feel empowered to tackle their day in a structured way,” says LeanDNA CEO Richard Lebovitz. “It keeps fire-fighting from derailing productivity, especially during uncertain times like these.”

For example, an individual buyer's workflow might look like this:

- 1 Address the top five critical shortages, including checking for item availability at your company's other sites, exploring alternate part number availability, and reaching out to primary and alternate suppliers.
- 2 Tackle the most urgent planned purchase orders to firm to avoid future shortages.
- 3 Address any other outstanding high-priority procurement tasks, like communicating the criticality of certain materials to suppliers, or following up on late POs.
- 4 Take action on the most valuable inventory savings opportunities to avoid excess, given increased volatility in demand.

Get alignment internally about which criteria your team should use to prioritize items in these focus areas, and communicate this strategy to buyers. By establishing a triage approach to surface and address the most critical items first each day, you can reduce some of the stress on your buyers and provide much-needed structure as they strive to stay organized and efficient while working in a distributed team.

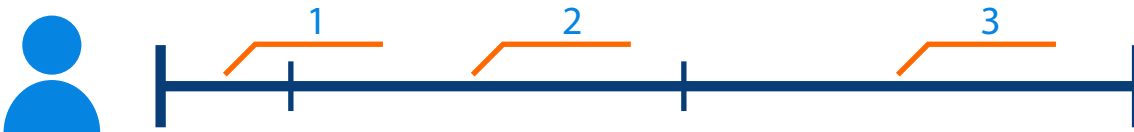
2 Monitor Results to Identify Which Buyers Need More Support



As you monitor KPIs and risks across your procurement organization, keep a pulse on which team members need additional support or mentoring while everyone's working remotely.

A spike in metrics like current shortages or POs inside lead time owned by a particular team member could highlight instances where buyer workloads could be rebalanced. These are stressful times for everyone, and knowing their manager and peers have their back can relieve some of the burden on your team members.

3 Manage Accountability with Task Ownership and Clear Timelines



When working in distributed teams, accountability is crucial. Clarify—or re-communicate, if necessary—key operational processes to keep activities moving forward while some team members are working remotely and others are working in shifts on-site.

Assign owners and due dates to critical items related to shortages or excess, document clearly defined next steps, and report out on item statuses in regular daily or weekly remote meetings.

If certain team members can't access your ERP remotely, define a process to record and organize changes that need to be made in the ERP, including who's responsible for performing the update, when, and the current status. Other team members (either on-site or with remote ERP access) can then perform the updates as needed. If your team doesn't have good tools in place for collaboration and communication, consider using cloud-based document-sharing platforms like Office 365 or Google Docs in the short term.

4

Standardize Agendas and Reports Used in Virtual Meetings



For daily or weekly remote video-conference calls, define a consistent agenda, and communicate expected preparation work to be done in advance to make the most of the meeting time. Help all distributed team members refer to the same data by aligning your procurement team around a set of standardized reports or metrics as you talk through the most pertinent inventory and shortage issues.

“We hear from a lot of procurement teams that are overwhelmed with a variety of different reports built by individual buyers, analysts, and planners,” says Lebovitz. “This leads to confusion and a lot of time wasted haggling over which data is correct. Your virtual meetings will run more smoothly if you settle on a standard set of reports immediately.”

Identify the critical set of results each stakeholder should review in the remote meeting. This could be certain results for managers, a different set for buyers, and another set for analysts. The key is for everyone to standardize their metrics and the order of review so you can make virtual meetings run efficiently and productively.

If you can, pre-filter and save the inventory, supplier, or shortage reports that are most important to you so you have them at your fingertips in recurring remote meetings. This lets you standardize the way you’re reviewing metrics at each recurring check-in and helps all the key players work from a consistent data set. For example, customize and save your shortage report with the filters and columns set for review with a specific supplier or customer, or for your remote team’s regular internal review.

“Your virtual meetings will run more smoothly if you settle on a standard set of reports immediately.”

—Richard Lebovitz, CEO, LeanDNA



5

Share Resources to Help Everyone Act Quickly to Keep Production Moving



Make sure your entire team has access to the tools, reports, knowledge, and data that they need to act quickly on shortages and other procurement issues so you can avoid production stoppages.

Align all team members on which parts, end items, or customers are most critical, and which suppliers are most vulnerable. With the most accurate information in everyone's hands, you can prioritize the supply needed and determine how to allocate constrained supplier and production resources.

Bringing It All Together

As supplier capacity issues and supply disruptions continue, it's more important than ever to stay on top of the most impactful tasks each day. By establishing the right workflows, processes, and communication channels, you can help your distributed team adapt quickly to new remote-working arrangements and equip them for success as they navigate change in the coming months.

For more best practices on managing inventory operations remotely, [reach out to our supply chain experts](#). Our team is here to help however we can.

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