

Episode 167: Leadership Under Pressure - Preventing supply chain failures through grip and accountability

Leroy: [00:00:00] The future of supply chain is in collaboration and partnership. We live in a globalized world and we have to embrace that new reality and we have to know how to coexist. There's no going back. When you're dealing with other global powers that have other interests you have to know how to navigate those issues sensibly.

Richard: Welcome to the Future of Supply Chain, a podcast where we discuss hot topics, the latest trends and innovations in global supply chain. My name is Richard Howells, and today, we'll I'm joined by Leroy Roberts in a very interesting discussion about how to prevent supply chain failures through grip and accountability, which is an interesting topic in itself. Leroy, maybe before we start, you could quickly introduce yourself your background and the company that you work for.

Leroy: [00:01:00] Thank you so much, Richard. It's great to be here with your amazing audience. As you rightly said my name's Leroy. My background has been in law enforcement and the British military, and during my time in the military, I function in a tripartite role, so as a combat engineer, of course, as a soldier as well, and also as a logistician, an engineering logistics specialist.

So I know a thing or two about that. And having left military service, I have gone on to start my own consultancy in the form of Team-Worth Solutions where I work with executive risk owners to manage culture and conduct risk. And the aim really is to provide this tripartite solution to help leaders at the executive level best fulfill their role and function and look after the people that work with them And also their external stakeholders and investors.

Richard: It's great [00:02:00] to have you on the podcast. Looking forward to a great discussion and learning from your experience. Supply chains have been nothing, if not disrupted and change seems to be the mantra for all supply chains at the moment In the last few years, in the last year, we've seen tariffs impact where we buy goods from shipping lane closures impacting how goods get to us and port strikes that can affect peak demand surges. In this environment of disruptions, how do leaders maintain a grip on supply chains

during these sudden changes without micromanaging their teams and letting their teams carry on doing their day to day activities.

Leroy: That's a great question. And you are you are right. The current climate at the moment is very disruptive as you have rightly states. And if you look particularly at what is going on right now in West Asia the impact of which is clearly felt by people around the world and which will lead to [00:03:00] devastating consequences. In fact, the latest bit I've heard put out by the United Nations is that the possibility exists that millions of people will be plunge into poverty if this crisis continued. if There is not a solution, very, very soon. So yes, that also formed the basis of the answer, which I'm going to give. And that is, unless you are living in a continental self-sufficient resources rich country like Russia, for example. You need to realize that in order for you to manage supply chain to ensure that goods and services flow freely and deliver solutions to people that can't exist in a vacuum, and that only will exist with collaboration with different stakeholders, with different partners, and also with people whom you may disagree with. And we just have to find a better way how to [00:04:00] conduct business within a framework which deliver outcomes for the betterment of all.

Richard: Absolutely. Most companies, except for those very few exceptions that you may have mentioned, there are reliant on a network of partners. They're reliant on companies from different geographies to bring together and deliver the goods to drive that customer service that we're all looking for. One of the things that we really need to focus on is roles and responsibilities, because unclear responsibility gaps can lead to supply chain hiccups. They can turn small issues into major failures. So what early warning signs of accountability, gaps of using that, that have led to these failures and how did you course correct, were advised to course correct?

Leroy: Now that's a great point, and it's important that we look [00:05:00] at this and give it the due attention it deserves. Supply chain management system, and a logistics system globally is nothing new. It has been an operation for the longest while, and as somebody who has served in the British military I know what it's like because we operate in various theaters around the world. Logistic is what we eat, breathe, sleep, and die. In fact, it's a well known saying, which goes as follows, that novices think about tactics. And geniuses an expert thinks about logistics. And that is key, you have to think about that. How are we gonna get the necessary things we need in the right place at the right time, in the right quality, quantity, and of course at the best price. And all those factors have to be carefully managed. Now you have to empower your people and you also have to give your people the opportunity to say what it is that is really [00:06:00]

happening and in a space like this, if we don't have clear delegation and clear responsibility and we allow people to feel free to share concerns and escalate issues when they do arrive, then we are going to have a lot of the issues that we are having now because case in point, anyone who understands.

If I go back to the West Asia area, who understand those critical waterways, would know that decision that was taken was a strategic failure from the onset, it would've inevitably led to the situation that it is now. And even though the evidence is clear, what you find are leaders who are still doubling down, and only compounding the failure.

And the question I asked myself is, the people were in the room who [00:07:00] were the experts who understand logistics, did they really feel free to speak up and to share the concerns and the risk, which were clear to see by taking that particular course of action. So the question I ask is to prevent those gaps, you have to employ your team and there has to be a safe space and an environment where they can challenge you in a constructive way and give you guidance as to what decision you, you will make going forward, because the impact can be devastating for many.

Richard: You made a really important point. Are about empowering people and giving them the confidence and the authority to share concerns and putting them in a safe environment to do that. And as situations become more and more pressurized, it becomes harder to stand up and do the right thing and [00:08:00] say the right thing. So what's one cultural shift that you've implemented to help companies surface hidden risks before they escalate within an organization or within a supply chain?

Leroy: Great question Richard. I like their knowledge of the three-legged stool because you see the organization system is that ecosystem with three legs, and I mentioned you have those strategic leaders at the top. You have their teams or their management operations teams.

But again, critically you have those external stakeholders, the partners. And there has to be a delicate balance, and we have to ensure that all areas are being appropriately looked after. The three legs are being rightly supported, and if one is neglected, then the whole thing crumbles. And the best way how to do that, like I said, [00:09:00] is to have an accountability system whereby there are clear goals and people are empowered to constructively challenge and also flag issues when they do arrive without fear of punishment, and again. The key question is why are we in business? Business is all about solving problems and

delivering outcomes for people, and you have to have the best interest of all stakeholders in mind.

But what we tend to find is this mindset where it is this one of man shape approach where our woman shape approach whereby. The focus has shifted on delivering outcomes and it's all individuals can carve out some advantage to suit their own selfish ends. And you can't operate like that. [00:10:00] We have to take it you a holistic manner and a holistic approach whereby we are looking after or people who are leading strategically and setting the direction of a company and what we want to achieve. We need to look after our operational staff or employees and all our internal stakeholders.

Richard: I love that example that you gave of the three-legged stool, because I say a lot on this podcast that supply chain has always been a balancing act.

Historically, it was about balancing cost and productivity. And supply chain was a big cost driver. But in the last few years, we've added sustainability. We've added resiliency, but to enable all of this and to balance all of these things now we need improved visibility. And we have so much data across the supply chain that sometimes even if we've empowered the people to speak up they can't work out what to speak up about because there is so [00:11:00] much data that they can't work out what's important or not. And this is where technology comes into play. And we've gone a long way through the podcast and we haven't mentioned AI yet. But AI is a huge influencer in managing risk across the supply chain. So how can AI support risk management and decision making while keeping human judgment and empathy at its core? Do you have any real life experience that you can share with us about how companies are leveraging AI to empower their people to manage risk?

Leroy: Now if you are not using AI, then you might not be in business for long. 'cause the game has changed entirely and we just have to embrace this new wind of change. And the last thing you want to do is to be left behind. Now you are correct. AI is great for some things, [00:12:00] and as a result of that, naturally some processes and some job rules will become obsolete. That's inevitable. And that has always been, if anyone has studied history and the development of the world that has always been whenever there has been a major shift. Whether it be from the agricultural age to the industrial age and beyond we have always had that. It's about the appropriate use of the technology.

You can't use it to replace those key core decision making processes. It should be human centered and it should not even be one person. It should be A committee or a group of people making that decision because of course,

it's about mitigating those major risk, which can have devastating consequences if left to one person [00:13:00] or a technology, which is has some inherent flaws.

Richard: Let's go back to the people discussion as well because supply chain leaders are under a lot of pressure because of the volatilities that supply chains have today. And leaders often struggle to keep teams accountable without pushing them too hard and pushing them too far and really putting too much pressure on them. So how can supply chain leaders balance firm accountability with preventing burnout in teams facing constant supply chain volatility?

Leroy: Again, another fantastic question and the key thing here is clarity. People need to know exactly what it is that they're responsible for and what their role is, and they need to know what they need to do next. And once that is communicated clearly [00:14:00] it reduces the fog and the grayness that is normally associated with a lack of clarity in terms of the decision making processes and those who has a ownership for what.

That's key. In addition to that, we have to accept the realities of modern life and technological advancement. It. It creates its own challenges and we just have to adapt to those changes to best support the people who work within these systems that we do create and as these systems evolve. And that is where I've noticed where companies, an organization, they have these support packages. Which is quite crucial for their staff. And again, it ties back to the three-legged approach and that tripartite model, which it's not just [00:15:00] about making profit and we being competitive in business, but it's about looking after our people and all our stakeholders, both internally and externally and the way in which to do is not to ignore that there are a lot of stress within the modern working world, and we need to support people or provide them an opportunity where they can be signposted to get the type of support and services that they need. We know that management comes with a lot of stress.

You're dealing with people and the different interplay of different personalities and the everyday challenges that just get in the way and a management team will have to. And those pressures. And also the pressures which the team is carrying as well. And they should be supported to do that role. And it's not just the salary sometimes they need somebody else beside them who can provide that support. So in other words, [00:16:00] what type of strategic support, what type of, extra advice that managers have access to and sometimes it might be best if there is some external support as well and that is crucial and the reason why I say so because there are some discussions which will never be handled

appropriately. And there are some challenges that will not be highlighted at certain tables.

And if they can have that opportunity where they can have somebody as a trusted advisor to raise those concerns. And get the support for them to get unstuck, then naturally they will [00:17:00] be able to deliver and deliver really well in their role. And I don't think it's a, is a case where people who operate in these spaces are not competent.

We have a lot of competent people who are well-trained who know their role and responsibilities very well. But given the fact that the landscape has changed drastically it just requires a lot of innovative approaches to support those leaders whilst they're carrying out their functions.

For example, case in point, you have a logistic senior leadership team who is operating key assets within, say for example, west Asia. When you see the risk and the challenges that has come about as a result of various happenings. These are people who are husbands, fathers, sons, the likes, [00:18:00] their families are trying to reach out to them. They are worried. They're worried for their safety as well, that they have to be thinking about their loved ones, whether they're gonna make it or all additional stress. If that is on your plate as a leader, you have a family of your own. You have those challenges as well that you have to deal with. You need that type of support. And the truth of the matter is the current setup that you have might not have. The mechanism in it to support you through that. And I think that is where you have to reach out and get expert advice from people who can help to to navigate around those challenges.

Richard: That was beautifully explained of having the right tools, technologies, infrastructure, but also people to support. You as a business person, but you as an individual as well, you as a human, because [00:19:00] there's lots going on around you as well, that has to be taken into account and that pressure can build and build.

And if you've got no release valve to to get support from it you'll ultimately crack and make the wrong decisions. Or make rash decisions talking about decisions from your experience. Do you have an example? What's the toughest decision that you've made under pressure or that you've seen made under pressure that saved a supply chain and what made it succeed?

Leroy: So I'm gonna go back to 2020 during the COVID crisis is a good place to start. And I personally was in charge in international, the logistic operation at the time being having that coordinated from here [00:20:00] to the Caribbean

and also in the Mediterranean as well, within a space of several months. And I think at that point.

Because we were never confronted with a situation of that kind on that scale. And I think that is where innovation comes in. Within that moment, that you have to support the people on the other side. Who are relying on these logistics and it's a life and death situation, and you have to make a tough call. And it's about balancing the needs of your role as a professional. And at the same time also had hearing to the restrictions and the legislation at the time. So it was a double-edged sword. It is a very difficult one to do to walk the line. And in those cases, we [00:21:00] just had to make some unorthodox decision to do things in an unorthodox way to ensure that legally we were above board and we were still able to deliver those outcomes. And it was tough because at the same time. It is about checking all the boxes and it creates that pressurized environment. And the toughest decision was to find innovative ways and means of navigating those challenges and Indian delivering. Now, was it successful? It did not work out according to plan because everything of course changed massively. But I think the outcome was not an unfavorable one because we were able to [00:22:00] meet the objectives. I think the massive one where I think we followed drastically on, and inevitably that would've been the case. Was meeting the timeline. So the timeline was out the window. We couldn't have met any of those timeline,

Richard: I think most timelines went out of the window during the pandemic. It wasn't that I needed tomorrow. I just needed some time.

Leroy: yeah, the timeline went out the window. So as far as that is concerned, that was out. And it's really tough too, because when you're thinking about moving. Life critical equipment. Timing is crucial. Timing is key, and just not being able to meet that requirement, it was a major factor. So I think we failed massively as far as getting the necessary kit equipment in the right place at the right time. It just arrived, but never in time.

Richard: I know you've recently published a book called "The [00:23:00] Risk Owner's Reset", maybe you could tell us a little bit about the book, but the follow on question from that is if you could audit one leadership habit in a 60 to 90 day period to build risk resilient, what would it be and how would you measure it?

Leroy: the book The Risk Owner's Reset was particularly written for executive risk owners who operate in high pressure environments, having come from that background myself. So they were principles and ideas and tips that I have taken

away from that. Then I noticed that people who carry these risks, whether formally or informally, needed more support. And I think once they were supported, they were in a better position to also support their management team and also manage the interests of all stakeholders on board, again, supporting that three legged ecosystem. So in terms of [00:24:00] the one risk to manage going forward? I would have to say the key thing there is decision making. Not only should leaders be able to make the right decision at the right time is because failing to do that can have catastrophic consequences. In order for you to make the very best decisions to have those best outcomes, you need to have the right amount of information, and also you want accurate information.

Now, how are you going to do that if the people that work with you do not feel safe to communicate the hard truth and to do so in a constructive manner? Let you know exactly where you stand. I think the key thing is knowing where you want to go, but you also need to know where you are so you can [00:25:00] adequately plan and strategize to do that. So decision making, but that's decision making that also empower other people to give you the appropriate feedback so your decision can be the right one, I would say.

Richard: This has been a really interesting conversation. If people wanted to learn more about you, about your company and about the book that you've published around the risk owners reset, where could they learn more?

Leroy: Lovely, in the show notes, there will be a link to my bio so they can find me my website and online, and of course the book is also available on Amazon and they can follow me from there.

Richard: Cool. Thank you. I have one question that I ask all of my guests and it's usually quite challenging 'cause I want a concise answer because I want to ask in a sentence or two. From a risk management perspective, what's the future of supply [00:26:00] chain?

Leroy: The future of supply chain is in collaboration and partnership. And the reason why I say that is because we live in a globalized world and we have to embrace that new reality and we have to know how to coexist. There's no going back. We are now living in a multipolar world and there are key resources that we need, I live in the West and that are not within the Western hemisphere. And when you're dealing with other global powers that have other interests you have to know how to navigate those issues sensibly. And I think that is why we have international law and other frameworks. And we just need to abide by those to ensure that we can safeguard all interests and that's the new reality. We just have to deal with that going forward.

Richard: Hey Leroy, this has been a really insightful conversation. I've really enjoyed it, and I will be getting a copy of your book and having a [00:27:00] read.

Leroy: Thank Richard, it was great. Be on and I look forward to following the great work that you're doing as well. And I hope your audience benefited from our conversation.

Richard: With that in mind, thanks everyone for listening. Please mark us as a favorite. You can get regular updates and information about future episodes. You can also get more information about Leroy and his company and book in the show notes, as we mentioned earlier. But until next time, from Leroy and. Thanks for discussing the future of Supply Chain.