

hawkeye planner



THE PLANT MANAGER HATES ME!

The theory behind Supply Chains is so basic it is downright silly. The goal is to optimize resources across sites, functions, and partners to deliver highest service at lowest cost. The method is to plan holistically, use analytical methods, and make decisions that are best for the whole. Ah, those idealistic supply chainers!

We at Hawkeye Planner love those Supply Chain zealots. Unfortunately, they have a natural enemy. He is called the Plant Manager. Plant Managers hate almost all supply chainers. Of course, other functions may be irritated by the planners, but plant managers take it personally. It boils down to “kill or be killed,” real jungle stuff. And most Plant Managers have some battle experience, or else they wouldn’t last long in such an environment.

Hold on, why the hostility? After all, doesn’t everyone work for the same company? Perhaps, but Supply Chain planners and Plant Managers often have completely different objectives. The supply chainers’ motives are pretty clear. It is time to turn attention the behavior of the Plant Manager.

First, the Hawkeye Planner team will tell you that the Plant Manager is one of the hardest jobs in any company, hands down. Bull spit rolls down hill, and the production site is at the bottom of that hill. Regardless of whether forecasts were off, inventory was poorly planned, or that schedules were delayed, the final burden of execution lies with the plant. And the plant has real problems (and not always problems on paper that can be seen in an office). If the plant’s power is disrupted, it is the responsibility of the Plant Manager. If the equipment breaks down at a critical time, it is the responsibility of the Plant Manager. If the people at the site are not happy because of erratic schedules, it is the responsibility of —you guessed it—the Plant Manager. Quality, Service, Inventory, Cost, Innovation, and People are all his metrics. Like we said, it is a tough job.

So how does one approach such a beast? With respect and understanding, clearly. Supply Chain planners need to understand the forces at work in the plant as well as the forces at work on the Manager. The Supply Chain planner needs to make the Plant Manager successful, while at the same time managing the full network. Can

the planner find a solution that can make life easier for the site? If not, then there will be problems.

In a successful operation, the central supply team and the local site form a bond of support. If the Supply Chain team pledges support and equitability to the plant, in short they will help the plant to be successful. The Plant Manager commits to support the business while managing the company's assets and people. The Supply Chain planner works together with the Plant Manager with constant communication. They give and take to get a result that is both effective for service and efficient for cost. Ideally the Plant Manager is brought in monthly to discuss the state of the business, discuss risk areas, and give input to the planning process. All parties have the opportunity to walk away feeling involved and satisfied. With this solid foundation, the team can work smoothly. Even if conditions get bad, both sides will have established a rapport to give each other leeway to get things done.

Does your Plant Manager hate you?