



FEATURE

Is Your Procurement Strategy Ready for the Next Supply Chain Shock?

by Doug Reitz - Maxim Consulting Group

Key Questions in Procurement

Procurement is more than purchasing. It is the act of building a stable path through uncertainty. The leadership mindset gets you out of the weeds and asks three questions:

1. Where are we?
2. Where do we want to be?
3. What must we build to get there?

These three questions are part of the "Listen. Plan. Build" process I outline in my book *BUILD: A Blueprint for Constructing Success in Leadership and Life*. When we approach procurement with intentional systems—early planning, diversified options, transparent information, flexible contracts, and strong relationships—we build a system that can absorb shocks rather than collapse under them.

In a world where disruptions are inevitable, the real question is not whether your procurement team can avoid the next shock. The real question is: have you built a procurement strategy capable of withstanding it?

Where We Are

Lead times have improved, but unpredictability continues to ripple across projects. While the crisis may no longer dominate the news cycle, its aftershocks continue to shape bids, schedules, and day-to-day field operations. Global logistics remain unstable due to geopolitical conflict, tariffs, and capacity constraints. These issues show up on projects as delayed transformers, extended lead times for mechanical equipment, and uncertainty around specialty materials that rely on

overseas manufacturing.

Compounding the issue is a national labor shortage affecting manufacturers, transportation providers, distributors, and contractors alike. When labor is constrained across the entire supply chain, delays compound quickly and unpredictably.

For leaders, this is not a time to relax, it is a moment to reset expectations with your team. When disruption becomes normal, procurement must be treated as a strategic discipline rather than an administrative function. Builders who anticipate risk, plan deliberately, and build resilient systems will consistently outperform those who rely on optimism and last-minute problem solving.

Where We Want to Be

Inconsistency is the only consistent thing in construction. Your job is to mitigate those inconsistencies by leading your team, and your team includes more than you might think. It is the client, design team, general contractor, trade contractors, agencies, inspectors and more. They all have an impact on your project. Submittal approvals, color selections, testing, coordination and communication affect the project schedule. Now you might be thinking: "How can I lead a project when I am not in charge of all of those entities?" The truth is you can lead from anywhere in the chain of command. You must build trust, relationships, and accountability.

While inconsistencies will still remain, please consider the advice that Patrick Lencioni discussed in his book "The Advantage". You can't predict but you can prepare. You can prepare systems for your team, the right mindset, communication strategies,

documentation techniques, and visual aids to give your team the best chance for mitigating the uncertainties.

LISTEN – PLAN – BUILD.

The BUILD philosophy applies directly to procurement. Builders must clearly understand where they are, identify the gaps between today's conditions and tomorrow's needs, and deliberately construct systems that allow the project to move forward despite uncertainty. Procurement is not about reacting to problems after they occur, it is about building foresight into the process. Using the "Listen. Plan. Build" process will help bring consistency to your team.

Listen · Plan · Build is a leadership and problem-solving framework rooted in the construction process. It is the deliberate practice of first listening to understand the situation and perspectives involved, then planning a clear and shared path forward, and finally building the solution together.

- Listen - Establishes understanding. It requires stepping back, gathering information, and hearing all perspectives to clearly define the real problem—not just the symptoms.
- Plan - Establishes direction. Planning turns understanding into a roadmap by identifying where you are, where you want to go, and what must be built to bridge the gap.
- Build - Establishes momentum. Building is the act of execution—constructing solutions, relationships, trust, and results through coordinated effort. It is where plans become reality and progress is made incrementally over time.

Together, Listen · Plan · Build is not

a one-time sequence but a repeatable process that leaders use to solve problems, gain buy-in, align teams, and move projects and people forward in a sustainable way.

What We Need to Build

There are four key areas that you can implement today to have the greatest impact on your projects.

1. Know your lead times
2. Confirm contracts are executed
3. Include alternate manufacturers
4. Mark up your CPM Schedule with lead times

Lead Times

Effective procurement begins early, during preconstruction, by gathering information on long-lead materials and equipment and integrating those procurement milestones directly into the CPM schedule. Communicate early and often with your team about the lead times to confirm nothing has changed. Having the lead times noted on the schedule will provide a visual aid for reference. Treating procurement activities with the same importance as physical construction activities creates visibility and accountability long before material shortages impact the project.

Contracts

Be sure your contracts are in place quickly. From the prime contract to the trade contracts, nothing can proceed until they have been executed. Whether you are a trade contractor, a prime contractor or a supplier, logging all your contracts and purchase orders and tracking them weekly with dates will keep you in the leadership role. Knowing where you are and following through will make you an effective leader and you will have a successful project.

Alternate Manufacturers

Relying on a single manufacturer or distributor creates unnecessary exposure. You must vet alternates

early, understand geographic risks, and suggest flexibility in specifications so you are better positioned to adapt when disruptions occur. You can discuss this with the client and the design team in preconstruction. If you are in a hard bid situation, be transparent with the team and discuss alternative manufacturers early in the project including time and cost implications.

A Practical Visual for the Field Team

For the field team, procurement challenges usually appear as missing materials, late deliveries, or trade partners arriving unprepared. With the daily demands of meetings, inspections, coordination, and issue resolution, procurement must be simple, visible, and actionable. One of the most effective tools available to the field is placing the CPM schedule directly on the wall.

Beyond showing activities, the wall schedule should visually identify procurement milestones. Pins or markers can be used to highlight submittal deadlines, the latest date materials must be ordered, and critical delivery windows. These visual cues allow the team to quickly confirm whether procurement is on track and identify risks before they turn into delays.

Daily huddles should include a brief review of both the CPM schedule and the look-ahead schedule. During these huddles, team members should be assigned responsibility to follow up with trade partners at key intervals—three weeks, one week, and two days before each trade is scheduled to be on site. These follow-ups confirm that materials are ordered, labor is available, and the jobsite is truly ready.

When Things Don't Go as Planned

The Four Mindsets of a Builder

Solve the Problem. A builder focuses on solving the problem, not assigning blame. This mindset requires putting

the issue on the table, understanding its root cause, and working collaboratively toward a solution.

Focus on What You Can Do. Builders concentrate on the actions within their control. Instead of waiting for others to change or for perfect conditions, they ask, "What can I do right now to move this forward?"

Always Be Curious. Curiosity keeps builders learning. Rather than assuming they already have the answer, builders ask questions, seek input, and remain open to new perspectives.

Always Improve Your Situation. Builders are committed to continuous improvement. They view setbacks as opportunities to learn and make incremental progress. Whether improving a process, a relationship, or their own leadership skills, builders focus on leaving the situation better than they found it.

Conclusion

Whether you are proactive or facing a challenge, implementing key processes will help you lead through adversity. Your mind set combined with the systems we just discussed will set you apart from all of the rest.

I challenge you to be a builder: Build trust, relationships, systems and accountability. When you do, it will lead to the success of your team and your project.

About the Author

Doug Reitz is a Director with Maxim Consulting Group, where he works with contractors across the country to strengthen leadership, operations, and project execution. He is the author of BUILD: A Blueprint for Constructing Success in Leadership and Life and has spent more than three decades leading construction teams and building projects throughout Central California. Doug is also an owner of a construction company in Central California and brings a practical, builder-focused mindset to every aspect of the industry—from the jobsite to the boardroom.