

Advancing the Enterprise in Volatile Times: Supply Chain as a Source of Reason

“When you are going through hell, keep on going.” - Winston Churchill

In periods of global uncertainty such as tariff escalation, geopolitical tension, and macroeconomic adjustments, many organizations freeze. The best do not. They move thoughtfully, deliberately, and strategically understanding that every decision must drive measurable business impact. Competitive advantage does not come from avoiding disruption; it comes from seeing the opportunities to manage it better than others.

This is where DSCI’s [Constellation of Value](#) provides an adaptive edge - helping supply chain leaders adjust with speed where appropriate, patience where necessary, and discipline throughout. The goal is not reaction. It is coherent adjustment.

At the core of supply chain excellence in volatile times are six essential disciplines:

1. Distinguish Between Quantitative and Qualitative Shocks

Not all disruption is equal.

Quantitative shocks are measurable and can be modeled:

- Tariffs
- Transportation cost changes
- Commodity price fluctuations
- Confirmed regulatory changes
- 150-day window of trade certainty: short term actions

These are painful but calculable. They can be simulated, optimized, and managed with rigor.

Qualitative shocks are structural and less concrete:

- Iran and broader Middle East instability
- Greater China - Taiwan tensions
- Global and U.S. political realignments
- Protectionism embraced as a long-term shift

These reshape supply chains more fundamentally. They require scenario thinking, not spreadsheets alone.

“The strategic mistake is treating qualitative shocks as temporary noise.”

Tariffs may change after a negotiation cycle or political shift. Structural realignment, protectionism, friendshoring, nearshoring, and geopolitical fragmentation, may not. Qualitative risks must be evaluated alongside quantitative ones, not separately from them.

Define most likely scenarios and worse case. Have alternative plans. Assess implications of technology.

2. Control the Controllable

By in large everyone faces the same tariffs. That is not a differentiator. What separates leaders is how they manage what remains within their control:

- Refusing to use tariffs as an excuse for inefficiency
- Optimizing pricing architecture
- Monitoring commodities proactively
- Assessing bonded inventory strategies
- Deliberately choosing whether to accelerate or delay freight
- Making conscious, not reactive decisions

The discipline is simple: do not let macro chaos paralyze micro execution. Macro volatility is external. Operational excellence is internal. Competitive advantage lives there.

3. Return to the Playbook - Timing with Discipline

“Act early” does not mean move recklessly. It means revisit your playbook against current conditions and evaluate decisions with discipline. In today’s environment, where tariff announcements may reset after 150 days and political outcomes in the U.S. remain uncertain, measured positioning matters.

Key questions include:

- Do we file for refunds now or preserve optionality?
- Do we hold inventory or accelerate shipments?
- Do we adjust based on confirmed European tariff actions?
- Do we reopen negotiations while leverage exists?
- Do we observe competitors, or position ahead of them?

Many organizations are in holding patterns. Strategic patience, however, is different from indecision. The best supply chains spread bets across 18-24 months, build options, and maintain operational efficiency drive competitive advantage in rough seas.

4. Build Horizontal Strength - Partnerships as a Multiplier

The real advantage is not tariff arbitrage, particularly when there is little clarity on tariff durations or whether refunds will be issued or when. Advantage comes from building a horizontally connected supply chain ecosystem, the essence of the Constellation of Value:

- Strong supplier partnerships
- Shared visibility
- Pricing transparency
- Relationship-based negotiation
- Operational synchronization
- Aligned cybersecurity practices

Refunds and concessions are difficult to negotiate when relationships are weak. In volatile times, partnership equity becomes financial equity.

To think of supply chains as just a cost center is a mistake. It is a coordinated network of value. Small, synchronized adjustments across inventory positioning, freight timing, negotiation strategy, and digital collaboration can outperform competitors who focus on only one lever.

5. Think in Three Horizons

Volatility must be managed across timeframes. Given the likelihood of U.S. policy resets and election-driven uncertainty, tactical decisions may need to be revisited in recurring cycles.



Tariffs are episodic. Structural protectionism and geopolitical realignment may not be.

6. Be the Source of Reason - and Find the Advantage

Tariffs are visible. Geopolitical instability is systemic and harder to quantify. Boards and executive teams need structured, balanced leadership. Supply chain can be that source of reason:

- Build scenarios.
- Quantify where possible.
- Frame qualitative risks clearly.
- Prevent overreaction.
- Prevent paralysis.

Not alarmist. Not complacent. Structured.

But the mandate goes further. The role is not only to mitigate risk, it is to identify opportunities within disruption.

When others freeze:

- You reposition inventory.
- You strengthen partnerships.
- You spread sourcing bets.
- You prepare for structural shifts.

Some companies will simply survive this period. Others will “keep on going” and widen the gap.

The difference will not be tariffs.

The differences will be leadership, clarity, disciplined execution, and a supply chain organization willing to serve as the steady, strategic source of reason.