AGENDA

Opinion

# Moving from Signal to Action: Improving Your Supply Chain Resilience

Organizational readiness determines how quickly that signal becomes coordinated action

By Kevin Brown | November 16, 2026




Kevin Brown, Dell Technologies' executive vice president of global operations and chief supply chain officer, has spent more than 25 years advancing the company's manufacturing, technology and operational capabilities.

Supply chain disruption has become the norm, not the exception. After years of geopolitical volatility, natural disasters and shifting global trade patterns, it is now a priority on the boardroom agenda.

Organizations have responded by investing heavily in technology. Artificial intelligence, digital twins and simulation tools can map vulnerabilities, surface early warnings and compare response scenarios. These capabilities improve visibility, but they do not create resilience by themselves.

Many organizations can now see disruption early on, but fewer can predict what happens in the critical period after it hits. Resilience isn't defined by the signal; it's defined by what happens between the signal and the action that follows.

## From External Signal to Shared Understanding

The hard part isn't spotting disruption; most organizations can do that effectively. It's whether your organization is aligned and can respond as one unified team.

A single supplier constraint can affect forecasting, procurement, logistics, product development and customer service at the same time. If those functions work from different data, definitions and priorities, the signal creates debate instead of action.

AI can reduce internal wait times and make information available across functions. But it cannot compensate for fragmented workflows or unclear accountability. Boards should ask how quickly management can build a common fact base, distinguish risk from noise and identify who owns the response.

## From Shared Understanding to Decision

Senior executives cannot be close to every decision, especially during a crisis. The fastest organizations have decision systems that allow the right leaders to act without waiting for every issue to move through the hierarchy.

That speed comes from governance established well ahead of any disruption. Leaders must:

- Separate facts from assumptions and identify the underlying constraint.
- Establish decision ownership, authority and escalation paths.
- Distinguish reversible from irreversible decisions and act accordingly.
- Maintain one fact base as conditions change.

AI can identify patterns and compare options, but people must exercise judgment and remain accountable for the consequences.

A critical measure of resilience is the time from the first credible signal to the first consequential decision. Boards should ask management to test that capability through realistic exercises rather than assume it will work because the process exists on paper.

## From Decision to Action

A decision has value only if the organization can execute it, and execution depends on having options ready. Qualifying a new supplier or building a new manufacturing facility can begin during a crisis, but the required lead times often exceed the window for protecting near-term continuity.

The problem is that those options can appear inefficient in stable conditions. The challenge is to invest enough to have a credible alternative without building costly redundancy for every possible scenario.

Consider how tariffs played out for many companies. Organizations that began diversifying their supply base before new tariffs took effect were better placed when conditions shifted. The decision is a balancing act: Move too slowly and no viable alternative exists when conditions change; move too far or too fast and you carry unused capacity and unnecessary cost.

The most effective approach is staged investment, focused first on the areas of greatest exposure, and building the capability to respond before it is needed. When conditions do shift, prepared organizations can move faster because the alternative path already exists.

Not all resilience comes from having a backup site or a second supplier; much of it depends on suppliers and partners that leaders do not directly control. Relationships built before a disruption create the trust needed to share demand information, resolve trade-offs and co-engineer solutions under pressure.

## The Board-Readiness Check

Technology can shorten the time required to detect a risk. Organizational readiness determines how quickly that signal becomes coordinated action.

Seeing disruption coming isn't enough. Boards should ask how quickly the organization can make a decision and act on it — and whether the authority, operating options and partner commitments needed during the first 72 hours are already in place. That preparedness better positions the organization to recover quickly, protect customer commitments and act on opportunities created by disruption.

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