

RESTARTING OPERATIONS:

What Leaders in Each Department Need to Do First

After a prolonged shutdown, getting back to business requires flexibility and constant communication. Use your first 30 days to assess demand, supply, and resources and to prepare your team for executing successfully over the next few months.

Key Takeaways:

- Restarting a manufacturing plant that has been shut down for eight or nine weeks will require coordination, collaboration, and constant communication between all departments.
- Leaders will need to work quickly and remain nimble to create an initial restart plan and adjust it accordingly as information about demand, supply, and available resources changes.
- The goal should be to create a plan you can regularly adjust and manage against for the next 90 days. Forecasting further out may not be accurate.
- Now's the time to focus on adjusting to new ways of working and reestablishing relationships with customers and suppliers.

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With more states announcing plans for reopening their economies, your manufacturing facility may be getting ready to go back to business for the first time in eight weeks or more. Even if your facility is used to temporary shutdowns for the holidays or ramping lines up or down for seasonal demand, coming back online after such a long period, with so many things fundamentally different, is going to be a lot more complicated than giving the team a pep talk, flipping a switch, and going right back to business as usual.

First, throw out the old model

For starters, there is probably no such thing as business as usual for your manufacturing facility anymore. Your historical data isn't going to be much help when it comes to getting back to some semblance of normal or eventually returning to full capacity. Indeed, your first 30 days are going to be dedicated primarily to figuring out what normal even looks like for the short term. At this point, it's probably not an effective use of resources to plan further out than 90 days as those forecasts won't have a high degree of accuracy.

Accelerate your reconnaissance

What you need most right now are strong leaders across all the functions of your business—demand, supply, operations, maintenance, and human capital—who are able to work quickly, collaboratively, and simultaneously to size up the current situation and determine how all the puzzle pieces fit together. In other words, as you figure out what demand is at the moment, do you have the resources across all aspects of the business to meet it in the short term? And can you do it safely while protecting your workers and staying in compliance with emerging rules and regulations?

Here are some key steps each functional area of your business can take to paint the picture and get you back up and running:

CUSTOMER-FACING RESOURCES

Just because you're re-opening doesn't mean your customers are on the same timeline. Different states are opening at different paces and different industries will recover along different schedules as well. Your sales and marketing leads will be essential to understanding actual demand and keeping a pulse on it as things change for your customer base. Ask these leaders to help:

- Determine where key customers stand in terms of their own restart timelines.
- Estimate demand for the short term and keep those estimates as up to date as possible.
- Be realistic about the frequency of change. Demand is going to be inconsistent for a while before you can identify a trend. Build a good cadence of communication with your customers so you can stay up to date.
- Take this opportunity to strengthen relationships. You may find that customers are more straightforward than ever about the state of their business and that a new level of trust and transparency can emerge.

SUPPLY/PROCUREMENT TEAM

All the inconsistencies you see on the demand side will be mirrored on the supply side. You need to do all the same work here to understand the status of your suppliers and inventory. Supply chain leaders need to:

- Talk to suppliers to determine their ramp up schedules and ability to meet your expected level of demand. Be prepared to seek out new sources of supply in the event some simply don't re-open.
- Calculate current inventory for raw materials, work-in-process, and finished goods and determine where that inventory is currently located (in the DC, at retail, etc.) and if it needs to be moved.
- Think about your inventory mix and how it may need to change to support a manufacture-to-order model. You might find you need more raw material on hand so you can customise it to meet demand.
- Do out-of-the-box product audits. Check the status of inventory that may have been sitting in your warehouse or staged in your shipping areas for a couple of months during the shutdown. Make sure customers won't open the box to find dirty or contaminated components.

OPERATIONS TEAM

Shopfloor leaders need to be prepared to operate in a manufacture-to-order model at least for the short term until demand and supply both become consistent. Now's the time to:

- Create a realistic ramp-up schedule and use it to begin mapping out what percentage of the staff needs to come back to work and when.
- Create hour by hour targets based on actual demand. Treat the restart like you would a new product launch and plan on gradual, daily increases that are easier to supervise and manage.
- Keep social distancing and safety practices in mind and consider creating new shifts, schedules, and processes that can help limit the number of people in the same space at the same time.
- Review problem-solving and countermeasure processes. As people adjust to the workflow, these skills will be critical. But you need to keep things safe. If you have a **digital management system**, think through how to use it to support collaboration from a safe distance.
- Put quality control processes in place. You can't assume employees will hit the ground running from a quality standpoint, so put measures in place, such as sampling plans, to double check until everyone has time to get back on track.

MAINTENANCE TEAM

How smoothly the factory restarts will depend a lot on how gracefully it was shutdown. Before flipping the switch on any piece of equipment, your maintenance team will need to thoroughly assess the situation on the ground. To ensure your equipment is ready to go when you are:

- Create an equipment start-up checklist and make sure you have the tools you need, including infrared cameras, and other predictive equipment ready to use.
- Walk all equipment areas to identify abnormalities that should be addressed before start-up, such as leaks, broken or loose bolts, or faulty belts, chains, or guards.
- Review your CMMS work history and PM backlog. Prioritise due and overdue maintenance tasks, putting safety systems and plant facility equipment at the top of the list.
- Assess MRO supply inventory and make a plan for stocking up on spare parts and PPE. You can count on repairs being needed upon start up, so having spares in place is crucial. Be aware that suppliers may not be able to fill demand immediately (especially for PPE), so be sure to identify any potential delays in getting what you need and factor these into your start-up plan.

EH&S AND HUMAN RESOURCE TEAMS

Before people can come back to work safely, many new processes will need to be put into place and clearly communicated with the team. Your environmental, health, safety, and human resources professionals can help to:

- Establish and prepare to implement new safety policies. To meet any emerging local and state guidelines along with new OSHA requirements, manufacturers will likely need to put new procedures in place. These will probably include health screening for entrants to the facility, providing masks and gloves, planned sanitation breaks for both workspaces and break areas, and break room social distancing policies. Absenteeism rules may also need to be updated to ensure compliance and help support the health of all employees.
- Conduct a safety walk to make sure the space is ready. Place taped lines around the plant to show what six feet social distance looks like. Make sure PPE is clean and readily available, check fire extinguishers, eye wash stations, and safety barriers.
- Create a plan for helping employees adjust to being back at work. Communication will be critical before employees start back and a new safety orientation is probably a must to educate everyone on updated policies. Helping employees become productive within the new environment is going to take some time, so think through how to accelerate and support the process.

Stay nimble and work together.

Remember that a successful restart takes every department working together and that ambiguity is the name of the game. The information you're gathering and using to make decisions is evolving constantly. So frequent conversations and updates between all members of the team will be critical. The right mindset is vital as well: don't wait for perfect information, accept that you're going to have to make adjustments on the fly, and keep a back pocket full of plans B, C, D. Being as flexible and collaborative as possible right now to figure out what works for your business will help you work through the restart phase, execute successfully in the short term, and position your business for long-term success in a post-pandemic world.

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