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Is Your Life Sciences Company Ready for the Network of the Future?

Life sciences companies need collaborative supply chains that reliably serve patients, even as demand shifts and operating conditions change. Decisions about where to invest or how to source materials therefore need to account for more than cost and efficiency. They also need to reflect the therapies a company expects to deliver and how its network will support those needs.

As portfolios evolve, manufacturing capacity may need to change, while regulatory requirements influence how quickly new arrangements can be put into use. Demand volatility and geopolitical uncertainty add to that complexity, making it important to understand how a decision in one part of the network affects the rest. Our perspective on network design optimization emphasizes using connected scenario analysis to understand those trade-offs before disruption occurs.

The questions below can help you assess how well your current network supports your company's direction and where further work may be needed.

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How to use this guide:

Work through each area by identifying the evidence that supports your answers and noting any unresolved gaps. Supply chain and manufacturing leaders should guide the discussion, drawing on input from Quality and Regulatory. Involve Finance and Commercial where their decisions affect the network, and consider external expertise when your team needs additional perspective to evaluate a gap or determine how to address it.



1. Future Supply Chain Investment



2. Regulatory and Geopolitical Risk



3. Tax and Sourcing Strategy



4. Demand Volatility and Portfolio Changes



5. Organization and Talent



6. Internal and External Manufacturing



7. Digital and Technology



8. Direct-to-Patient and Final-Mile Models



9. Learning from Network Transformation

1. Future Supply Chain Investment



Are today's investments preparing your network for future product and patient needs?

- ☑ How are pipeline changes and anticipated growth influencing investment decisions?
- ☑ Where do you need additional capacity or stronger partnerships? What capabilities must be developed before those investments can deliver value?
- ☑ Are priorities grounded in future requirements, or are past disruptions leading you to overcorrect?
- ☑ Which investments should you phase in or test through a proof of concept before committing more broadly?

What readiness looks like

Your investment roadmap shows how anticipated product needs translate into capacity decisions, including the time required to bring that capacity into use. Teams can explain why certain investments take priority and where testing an approach would help before making a broader commitment. Those decisions take active initiatives and investment dependencies into account, with agreement on what would warrant revisiting the plan.

2. Regulatory and Geopolitical Risk

Can your network maintain supply if a critical site or sourcing region becomes unavailable?

- ☑ Which dependencies pose the greatest risk to supply, including those shared by multiple suppliers?
- ☑ What alternatives are available, and how long would they take to become usable?
- ☑ Where dual sourcing isn't feasible, do stocking policies reflect replenishment lead times and the potential length of a disruption?

What readiness looks like

Contingency plans establish which alternatives can be put into use and how long that will take. To understand whether inventory can cover the transition, teams test scenarios that include overlapping disruptions, such as transportation delays occurring alongside a regulatory hold. Where materials remain single sourced, stocking policies reflect that exposure while accounting for shelf-life and storage constraints.







3. Tax and Sourcing Strategy

Do sourcing decisions remain viable when financial assumptions or operating conditions change?

- ☑ How do tax considerations influence manufacturing locations and supplier selection?
- ☑ How are potential advantages weighed against total landed cost and continuity of supply?
- ☑ Would a change in trade policy alter the preferred network?







What readiness looks like

Finance and supply chain work from the same scenarios so that sourcing decisions reflect both the financial benefit and the risk to supply. Their analysis makes clear how sensitive the preferred option is to changes in the underlying assumptions, giving teams a basis for deciding when another approach would be more appropriate.

4. Demand Volatility and Portfolio Changes



Can your network respond to demand shifts across the product lifecycle?

- ☑ How do launch assumptions and competitive developments affect network decisions?
- ☑ How are generic entry and changes in dose or formulation reflected in planning?
- ☑ Where could demand exceed usable capacity, and where could a decline leave capacity underutilized?

What readiness looks like

Capacity and inventory plans reflect product-level demand scenarios, with enough detail to distinguish differences across channels that aggregate forecasts might obscure. Teams use those scenarios alongside manufacturing lead times and shelf life to determine when they need to act, allowing time to respond before a supply imbalance develops.

5. Organization and Talent

Does your operating model support coordinated network decisions?

- ☑ Who owns decisions that span functions or involve external partners?
- ☑ Do teams have the expertise to evaluate network alternatives?
- ☑ How are competing priorities resolved when a decision affects both financial performance and supply to patients?
- ☑ Where could university partnerships help address longer-term skill needs?
- ☑ How are consulting firms or advisors filling gaps in expertise?

What readiness looks like

When a network decision spans functions or partners, teams know who has the authority to make it and where to escalate disagreements. Shared planning assumptions give those discussions a consistent starting point, while an assigned owner follows through on each capability gap. Regular network reviews provide an opportunity to revisit decisions, with additional discussion when a significant change calls the plan into question.



6. Internal and External Manufacturing

Is your Make vs. Buy strategy suited to your future portfolio?



- ☑ Which products require internal control, and where can partners provide needed flexibility or expertise?
- ☑ How do technology-transfer timelines and access to capacity affect those choices?
- ☑ How much visibility do you have into partners' constraints?



What readiness looks like

Decisions about internal and external manufacturing reflect what each product requires and the capacity partners can realistically provide. Agreements support those decisions by making manufacturing responsibilities clear and establishing how the parties will share information.



7. Digital and Technology



Can your technology help teams evaluate network choices and act on them?

- ☑ Can you use reliable data to assess how a site disruption or an unexpected demand increase would affect supply?
- ☑ Where does limited partner visibility delay decisions?
- ☑ Which use cases have shown an operational benefit, and which need better data before they can be useful?
- ☑ Where could scenario modeling or a digital twin help test network alternatives before implementation?
- ☑ What role should agentic AI play in your future network?
- ☑ How would people and AI agents work together, and which decisions would require human review or approval?

What readiness looks like

Teams can use reliable data to compare network scenarios, with a clear understanding of where data gaps limit the conclusions they can draw. Each technology investment has a defined operational purpose and a way to measure whether it's delivering, such as reducing the time needed to evaluate scenarios or identifying capacity constraints earlier.

8. Direct-to-Patient and Final-Mile Models

Can your distribution network support the delivery models appropriate for your therapies?

- ☑ Where could direct-to-patient delivery improve access?
- ☑ What product characteristics or care requirements limit its suitability?
- ☑ How would it change distribution responsibilities and coordination with care providers?
- ☑ What can you adapt from industries with established home-delivery models, and where do therapy requirements call for a different approach?

What readiness looks like

The therapy's requirements and the patient's care setting guide the choice of delivery model, including which practices from other industries are appropriate to adapt. Where pilots are warranted, teams use them to understand delivery reliability and the burden placed on patients. Those findings inform the network design, with temperature controls or chain-of-identity requirements addressed where applicable.



9. Learning from Network Transformation

Are lessons from previous network decisions shaping your next investment?

- ☑ Which assumptions proved reliable, and which failed?
- ☑ What caused delays or prevented expected benefits?
- ☑ How are those lessons reflected in current network models and implementation plans?
- ☑ How are you using external experiences and benchmarks to challenge your assumptions?
- ☑ How comparable are those examples to your portfolio and operating constraints?



What readiness looks like

Comparing actual outcomes with the original business case helps teams identify which planning assumptions or decision criteria need to change. That learning continues once the redesigned network is operating, as teams track whether expected benefits materialize. External benchmarks provide additional perspective, with differences in business context made explicit so teams can judge how relevant an example is to their own network.

Case Study Call Out

In our work with a global pharmaceutical company, Clarkston used stakeholder interviews to establish the current state and document active initiatives as part of a strategic framework for network transformation. A cross-industry market scan provided additional perspective, informing a benchmark framework that covered more than 50 capabilities across six domains, categorized by maturity level.

Turn the Assessment into Action

Use the assessment to decide where your team needs to focus first, starting with gaps that could have the greatest impact on patient supply. The time required to address each gap should help shape the response, with a named owner and target date for each priority. Some issues may call for immediate action, while larger investments may need further analysis before a decision can be made.

For those investments, agree on the evidence needed to move forward and compare potential responses across multiple demand and cost scenarios. As your portfolio evolves, revisit the assessment to determine whether the available options still meet your needs or whether a material change warrants a different approach.

If the assessment reveals a significant supply risk your team isn't sure how to address, Clarkston can help evaluate the options and develop a practical response. For teams that need support conducting the assessment itself, we can work alongside you to understand where your network stands and determine where to focus first.

ABOUT CLARKSTON CONSULTING

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