

# Lost in transshipment

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In today's ever-changing global supply chains, seamless communication between terminals and shippers is more critical than ever – yet it remains one of the industry's biggest challenges. ***The Great Divide: Closing the Communication Chasm Between Terminals and Shippers*** study, commissioned by Kaleris, explores this continued division, shedding light on the operational inefficiencies, delays, and frustrations that arise when the supply chain is misaligned. Based on its own survey and industry-wide figures, the report outlines the causes of the communication gap, besides providing constructive solutions towards collaboration, transparency, and a common understanding of mutual needs within the logistics ecosystem.

Incidents like Hurricane Katrina, the Suez Canal blockage, and COVID-19 have shown just how vulnerable logistics networks can be. Supply chain disruptions, brought on by events ranging from natural disasters to labour disputes and other global crises, cost organisations around \$184 million annually. The report discusses one critical factor affecting these situations, namely the lack of cargo visibility affecting the ability of stakeholders to monitor their shipments across various checkpoints.

## Before chaos erupts

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fact that supply chain visibility – estimating the location and arrival times of cargo – falls short due to limited ability to share the information across stakeholders. Delays were usually addressed after the fact, and the flow of data left a lot to be desired. As the coronavirus pandemic unfolded, it became clear how fragile global logistics actually are. Everything from lockdowns through panic buying to labour shortages triggered a breakdown of order. The unfolding crises highlighted the need for more in-depth and real-time

systems with the capability of improving overall coordination. Today, as visibility is no longer just desirable but expected, the supply chain stakeholders want instant access to reliable data to anticipate issues and minimise disruptions before chaos erupts.

According to the study, achieving this level of transparency stands on three key pillars: high-quality data, clear communication, and strong collaboration. Accurate data collection across various operational areas – such as vessel berthing, yard logistics, rail, and gate flow – ensures better decision-making. Next, the data must be shared in a timely and trustworthy manner using secure channels, across parties that sometimes do not share contracts or direct relationships. Building powerful cooperation between such disconnected entities demands high-tech tools that, thanks to modern satellite communication networks, can enhance chain visibility and information exchange, facilitating consistent tracking from origin to destination.

The report found that at the moment many systems remain incompatible with each other, leaving clusters of valuable

information unutilised. To meet expectations from key stakeholders like shippers, freight forwarders, and terminal operators, the industry must create fully integrated and interoperable platforms that support real-time visibility and timely operations across the entire supply chain.

## Mismatched perceptions

The report used a survey to help analyse the current situation and narrow down key issues within the supply chain. The results highlight a growing disconnect between terminal operators and shippers, revealing differences between perception and reality in cargo visibility.

The research reveals that terminal operators most commonly share loading and unloading schedules, as well as real-time cargo locations; they mostly rely on electronic data interchange (EDI) and terminal operating systems (TOS) to manage and share that information. However, while terminals tend to make better use of their execution technologies – most using 60–75% of their functionality – only 36% of terminal customers (shippers, beneficial cargo owners, freight forwarders) report similar utilisation of those.



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Further, the survey reveals that while terminal operators generally believe they are delivering strong performance, many shippers disagree. Some 57% of terminal operators rate their visibility information as good or very good, but only 43% of shippers call the visibility “adequate,” and nearly 30% report poor or very poor experiences.

Some of the bigger problems concerning cargo movement are the lack of automated alerts on key shipment events (reported by 61% of shippers) and discrepancies between system data and actual shipment status (experienced by 82% of them). For shippers, poor visibility translates into delayed handling and inability to make informed decisions, both of which can disrupt supply chains. On the terminal side, the consequences are also significant, with 42% acknowledging business losses because of poor visibility.

When asked what the main barriers to visibility are, the terminal operators named lack of data integration across systems and, interestingly, resistance to change. On the other hand, the root of the problem for shippers and other terminal customers is data privacy or security concerns.

Regional differences also emerged in the findings. Terminals in Europe (number one) and North America (number two) offer good visibility according to shippers, while those in Africa and

South America fall short. This divide illustrates the need for more advanced technology and global partnerships to improve the situation. In one regard, though, there is agreement: both parties, the terminal operators and shippers, accept that ownership of data is shared.

#### **Data that hides in plain sight**

There is some level of effort within the industry to enhance transparency, particularly regarding investments in digital solutions. As the report shows, however, many systems do not work well with each other. Data silos result from this disintegration within organisations, leading to decisions based on incomplete information. One key issue is that different technologies use their own data configurations and standards, making seamless integration nearly impossible. Further complicating matters, vendors are sometimes reluctant to share data openly. Consequently, valuable information is often underutilised or remains inaccessible within individual systems, preventing those who need it from accessing it.

Systems that are not designed to connect with one another worsen the problem. For example, TOS and port community systems (PCS) perform well enough within their intended environments, but their inability to work with other platforms means that the visibility they provide does

not extend across the supply chain. For instance, a terminal might have detailed information on cargo handling, but without integration with shippers’ logistics platforms, that insight remains in the terminal. Even advanced tools like PCS cannot give a full picture unless they are properly connected with other platforms, such as maritime/trade single window systems.

Another major concern is that these technologies are often not used to their full potential. Many terminal operators and shippers are unfamiliar with all the features of their systems, and a lack of proper training intensifies this problem. In many cases, employees are forced to rely on inefficient manual processes or workarounds. This leads to mistakes and duplicated efforts and creates digital friction, as people become frustrated and disengaged with the technology. Staff turnover is also a worry, as experienced employees who leave take their knowledge with them, creating gaps that slow down operations and reduce efficiency.

In addition, manual processes are still surprisingly common in the communication between terminals and other stakeholders. Information is frequently shared via outdated means, such as emails or phone calls, which hampers coordination and increases the likelihood of human errors, including duplicated data and security risks.

The research further shows that within the supply chain, various stakeholders have different goals. For instance, terminals focus on serving the shipping lines that pay them, while shippers are preoccupied with cargo monitoring in the most holistic way possible. This divergence creates frameworks that support one group's objectives but lack value for others. As a result, information silos persist, and technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and the internet of things (IoT) cannot be fully leveraged due to inconsistent or incomplete data. Misaligned business processes and priorities make integration even more difficult and slow down innovation across the supply chain.

Lastly, several external factors further contribute to the visibility gap. As the survey found, North America and Europe generally offer better visibility than regions like Africa and South America, which is also where digital capabilities vary widely. Also, regulatory requirements, political stability, and economic resources shape the advancement of supply chain technology in different regions. For example, ports in countries like the UK and Japan have widely adopted PCS systems, while others may still face challenges with outdated infrastructure. Disagreements over data ownership, rights and privacy concerns reduce trust and discourage open data sharing – key ingredients for achieving true visibility across the logistics ecosystem.

### Escaping the logistics black hole

Certainly, the report highlights that the success of terminal operations depends on resolving this information gap – the so-called 'black hole' – between terminals and shippers. Real-time connectivity plays a key role in achieving this by ensuring that every stakeholder along the supply chain has immediate access to live, actionable data. This kind of access facilitates real-time changes to logistics strategy in the case of unexpected disruptions caused by congestion or equipment failure. Further enhancing responsiveness are automated alerts that notify stakeholders of shifts like unloading delays or sub-optimal temperatures in perishables, allowing proactive measures to be taken to safeguard schedules and the value of the cargo.

Another critical factor the research found is the availability of standardised and trustworthy data. To achieve seamless interoperability across systems and

stakeholders, terminals must invest in rigorous data validation and standardisation processes. Technologies like EDI and application programming interfaces enable data sharing. By clarifying who owns the data and who can access it, terminal operators feel more confident, paving the way for broader involvement in data-driven networks. A thoughtful data strategy – treating data as an ongoing asset rather than a one-time resource – adds to long-term visibility and supports innovation.

Additionally, integrated technology solutions are essential for translating visibility into execution. The research shows that tools used in isolation serve a limited purpose only, but in a combined platform, such as transportation management systems or PCS, they provide a comprehensive operational overview. Mandates like the International Maritime Organization (IMO)'s Maritime Single Window promote global standardisation and integration within the supply chain, simplifying port calls and improving transparency. Connecting these systems to data-as-a-service platforms further expands real-time visibility and improves coordination across logistics points, making scaling more manageable and reliable.

Moreover, despite the availability of powerful tools, many stakeholders underutilise existing technology, limiting its benefits. Maximising the potential of these tools requires placing users at the centre of digital adoption. This means providing tailored training that meets the actual operational needs of employees and partners rather than generic instructional programmes. Also, choosing technology vendors that commit to regular updates makes sure that all stakeholders continue to derive value from innovation. The technology strategies must always find a perfect middle ground between fully benefiting from available resources and anticipating changes down the line.

The report also emphasises that unified execution platforms should serve as a type of central nervous system for the modern supply chain, integrating inputs from multiple systems into a single, cohesive platform. These platforms offer a comprehensive end-to-end view of cargo movement and operational events, enabling all parties – from terminals to shippers – to make informed, proactive decisions.

Finally, incorporating AI and transportation management systems (TMS) comprehensively could significantly reduce the eponymous 'great divide' also between marine terminals and trucking providers.

Greater adoption of TMS among both large and small trucking companies facilitates better integration with terminal systems. This digital alignment enables smoother coordination of container movements, faster turnaround times, and more accurate, real-time information sharing – all of which are critical for building efficient, customer-centric logistics networks.

### More than just tech

The research reveals a 'great divide' between what terminal operators believe they are delivering in terms of supply chain visibility and what shippers feel they are receiving. While a vast majority of terminal operators consider their visibility offerings to be adequate or better, only a quarter of shippers share that view. This gap is further complicated because both parties often underutilise their current execution systems, with many reporting that they are only tapping into about 70% of their available capabilities. These inefficiencies are not without consequences, as respondents lose business.

A major reason behind the communication gap in supply chain management is the lack of system interoperability because advanced technologies like visibility platforms and analytics often fail to integrate seamlessly. This disconnect allows vital information to get lost, undermining the potential benefits of innovative technologies. To change the situation, the report recommends a more strategic, people-focused process. Management teams should evaluate their current technologies to ensure they align with their broader data and visibility goals. Cost-effective solutions such as IoT sensors and real-time tracking can deliver immediate improvements, but reaching their full potential requires technical expertise as well as active employee engagement. Investing in training and encouraging staff to fully utilise these tools are crucial steps toward improving return on investment and minimising digital friction.

Ultimately, the report stresses that success depends on more than just technology – it requires the 'three Cs' of collaboration, coordination, and change management. These are essential for building trust, fostering a culture of technology adoption, and guiding teams through transitions. Leadership must clearly communicate the vision and provide steady guidance to avoid overwhelming employees. By combining the right tools, interoperability, and human engagement, companies can close the visibility gap and strengthen the supply chain ecosystem. ■