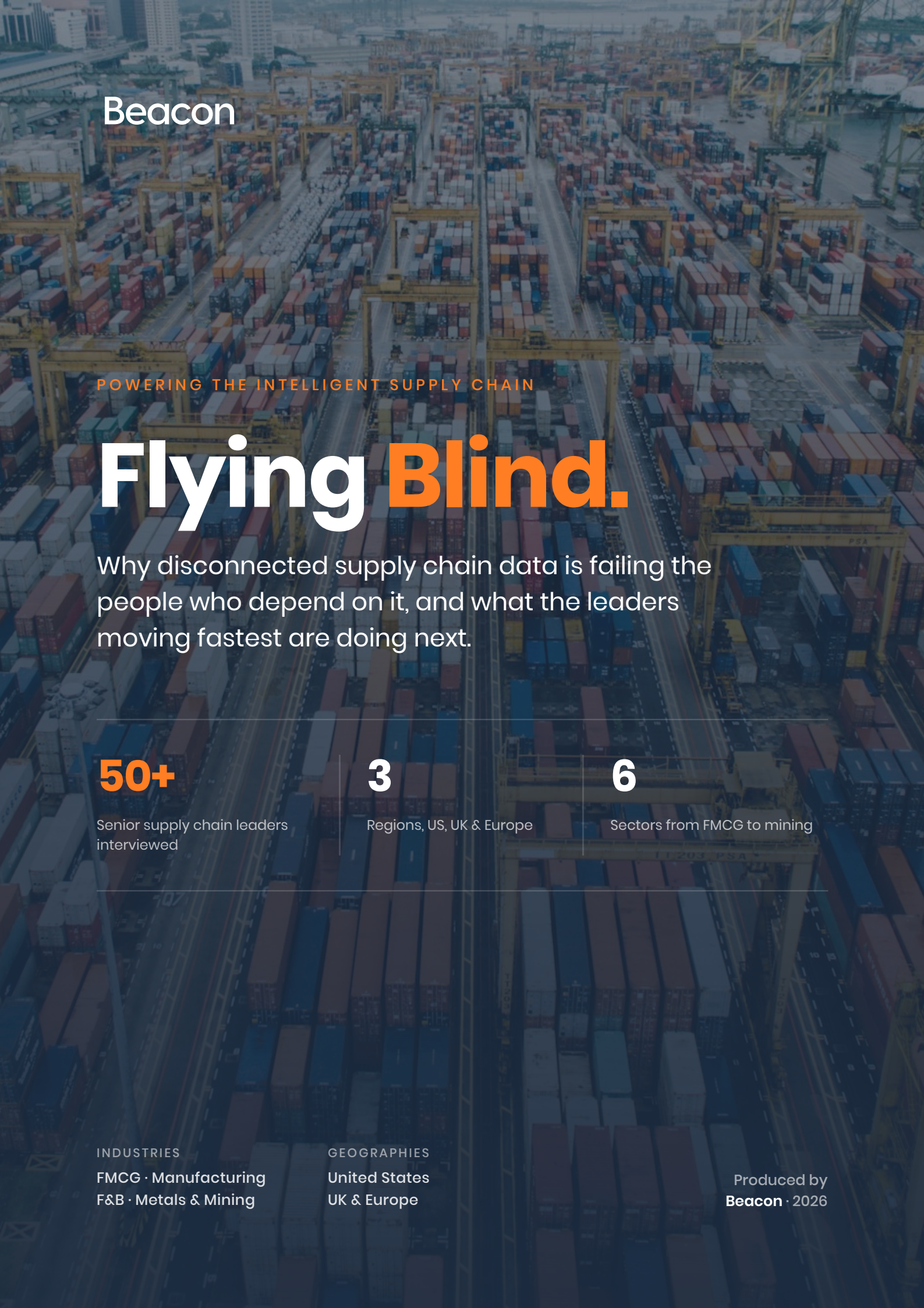


Beacon

POWERING THE INTELLIGENT SUPPLY CHAIN

Flying Blind.

Why disconnected supply chain data is failing the people who depend on it, and what the leaders moving fastest are doing next.

50+
Senior supply chain leaders interviewed

3
Regions, US, UK & Europe

6
Sectors from FMCG to mining

INDUSTRIES
FMCG · Manufacturing
F&B · Metals & Mining

GEOGRAPHIES
United States
UK & Europe

Produced by
Beacon · 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The industry's blind spot isn't technology. It's data.

We conducted in-depth interviews with over 50 senior supply chain leaders across FMCG, manufacturing, food and beverage, metals, mining, and industrial filtration — spanning the US, UK, and Europe, from 280-person specialist manufacturers to multi-site global enterprises.

The findings are notably consistent. Regardless of sector or size, organisations share a common challenge: **supply chain data lacks the structure and context that good decisions, and good AI, depend on.**

Every pain point translates into a line item the CFO is already watching. **The pain shows up in operations. The cost shows up in finance.**

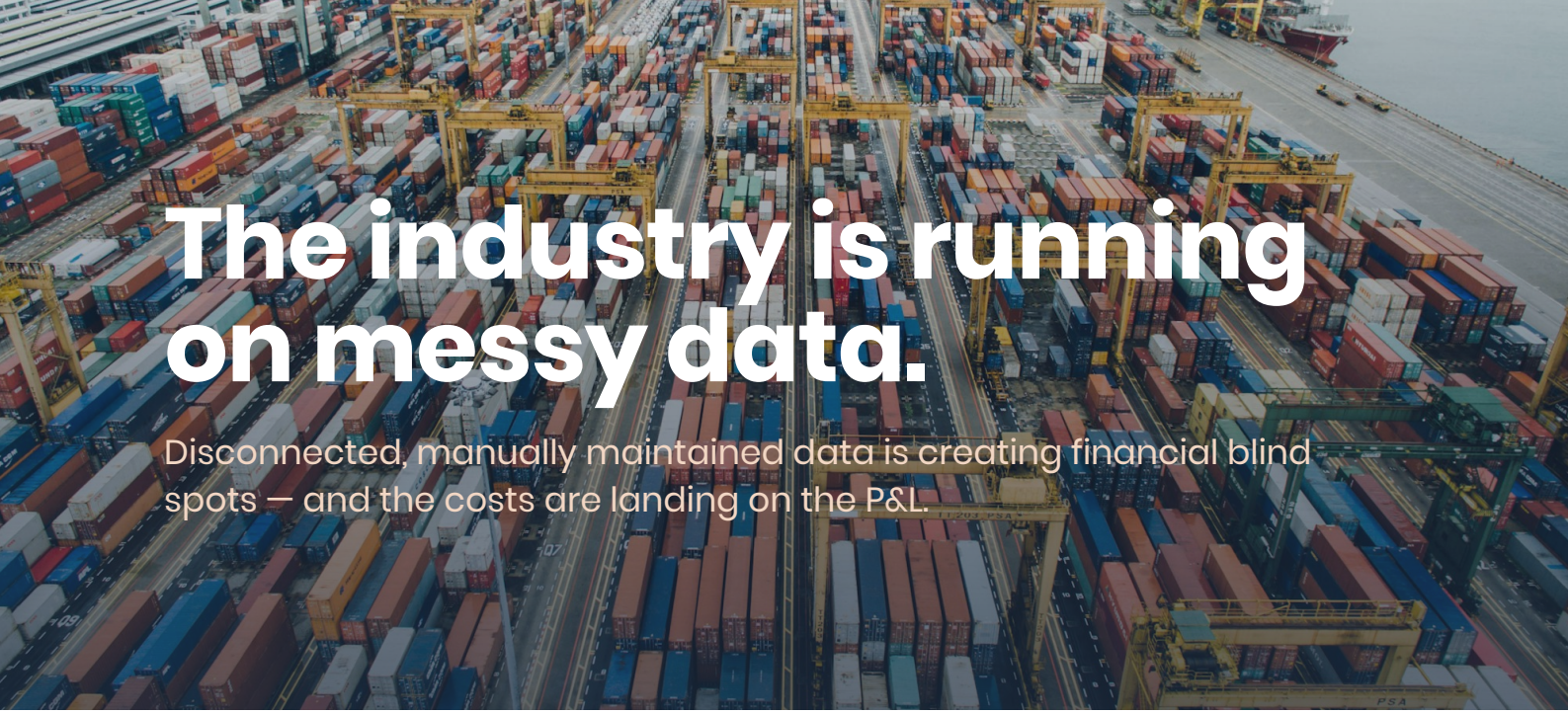
INSIDE THIS REPORT

FREIGHT OVERPAYMENT
3–5%
of freight spend overcharged — paid, uncontested, absorbed.

EMERGENCY AIR FREIGHT
4–6×
ocean cost, to recover shipments that slipped unnoticed.

D&D CHARGES
Daily.
Demurrage & detention accrue before the missed window is seen.

TRAPPED CAPITAL
Idle.
Excess safety stock held as a hedge against untrustworthy data.



The industry is running on messy data.

Disconnected, manually maintained data is creating financial blind spots — and the costs are landing on the P&L.

Across every conversation we had, the same pattern emerged. Supply chain data is scattered across forwarder emails, carrier portals, spreadsheets, and ERP records that rarely speak to one another — manually maintained, frequently outdated, almost never reconciled across functions.

This is not, in most cases, a tracking problem. **It is a financial control problem dressed up as an operational one.**

Without independent performance data, freight invoices go unchecked — 3–5% of spend is typically overcharged. Without connected milestone data, demurrage and detention charges accrue before anyone notices a container has missed its window. Without reliable transit information, last-minute air freight is booked at 4–6× ocean cost.

The downstream effects compound. Stockouts force premium local purchasing. Teams hold excess safety stock not because the case is there, but because the data underneath cannot be trusted. Working capital sits idle as a hedge against uncertainty the business has come to accept.

From a Dutch dairy cooperative exporting to Australia, to an Italian agricultural manufacturer shipping to the Persian Gulf, to a UK industrial filtration business managing pan-European flows, the story was the same. **The pain shows up in operations. The cost shows up in finance. In most organisations, no one has connected the two.**

> *"Once the shipment starts moving, there is no visibility. That is the biggest challenge."*
>
> — **SENIOR SUPPLY CHAIN CONSULTANT**

Manual is the default — and everyone knows it's costly.

Spreadsheets, emails and pen-and-paper remain the operational backbone.

3,000+

EMAILS PER WEEK
Per 100 shipments, to keep stakeholders informed.

30

EMAILS PER SHIPMENT
Just to co-ordinate one movement.

Daily

PORTAL CHECK-INS
Multiple carrier logins, every morning.

One of the most surprising findings of this research is not that manual processes exist. It is how deeply embedded they are, and how aware leaders are that they are operating below the standards their businesses need.

This sentiment, self-aware, resigned, but hungry for change, was nearly universal. Leaders are not failing to adopt technology through ignorance. Many have seen what good looks like in previous roles at larger organisations. The challenge is **the gap between knowing what is needed and having the operational headspace, budget, and internal alignment to get there.**

The broader cost is focus. Teams spend a significant portion of their time on data administration rather than analysis, planning, or supplier relationships.

> *"We are really old school. All of our ocean and air freight tracking is done manually by email."*
>
> — **LOGISTICS LEAD, PRECISION MANUFACTURER**

Decisions are being made without context.

When data is static, siloed and buried, it cannot become insight.

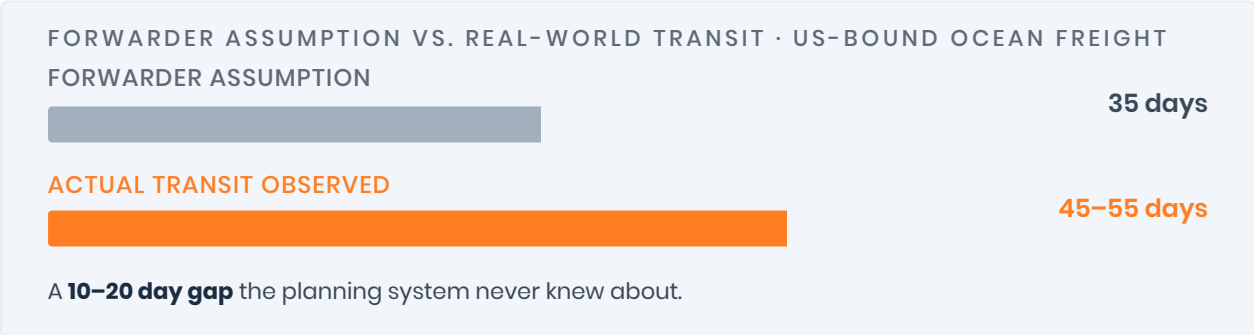
When data is scattered across systems and inboxes and frequently outdated, the insights it could generate never form. Each team sees its own fragment of the supply chain — a shipment status in a forwarder's email, a transit-time assumption from years ago that no one has revisited, a cost variance finance picks up weeks after supply chain already knew.

The clearest example is transit time. One interviewee was running US-bound shipments on an assumed **35-day transit**. Actual times were **45 to 55 days**. Nobody had flagged it — the stockouts that followed were the first signal.

Safety stock exists largely as a hedge against this uncertainty. Excess inventory is held not because it's the right commercial decision, but because **data that was last accurate months ago cannot be trusted.**

When data is siloed, problems compound. Finance works from figures Supply Chain has moved on from. Production plans against delivery dates that have shifted. Each function acts rationally on what it has — the dysfunction sits in **the disconnected information between them.**

The bar is not high. When one manager began sharing a one-week container-arrival schedule with their warehouse team, the response was disbelief.



> *"Better planning, better visibility so that I don't look stupid. If I'm telling production they're not getting the motors today, they're going to ask why. And I don't know."*
>
> **— PROCUREMENT MANAGER, INDUSTRIAL EQUIPMENT**

> *"When I started telling them what was going to show up that week, they were like: oh my God, you can see that far ahead?"*
>
> **— SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGER, CONSUMER GOODS**

A world of volatility, and no system built to absorb the shock.

Geopolitics, tariffs, and disruption are the new normal. Most organisations are not built to withstand it.

Three themes came up repeatedly: **US tariff volatility, Red Sea disruption,** and **post-COVID trade route changes.** Each presents its own planning challenge, and their combination puts immense pressure on organisations relying on manual, fragmented processes.

The Red Sea crisis has added weeks, in some cases months, to transit times on key routes. A Venice-to-Persian-Gulf journey that previously took 15–30 days now takes 60–75 as vessels reroute around the Cape of Good Hope, with freight costs doubling due to naval escort requirements.

For organisations without a reliable, live dataset, disruptions like these surface late. Without automated alerts, the first sign of trouble is often **a customer chasing an overdue shipment.**

> *"Before the Red Sea crisis, through the Suez route, transit time was approximately one month. Now they are going around Africa. Two, two and a half months."*
>
> — EXPORT MANAGER, ITALIAN AGRICULTURAL EQUIPMENT MANUFACTURER

The financial cost is real, and routinely underestimated.

These are not operational costs absorbed quietly in the background. They are cashflow items the finance team is already paying for, often without knowing the root cause.

01

Freight contracts negotiated without independent performance data

Carriers bring years of performance data to every negotiation. Shippers rarely do. The result is contracts priced against the carrier's view of the relationship, not the shipper's. Cash baked into the cost base, every lane, every year.

02

Invoice error rate

Typically 3–5% of freight spend is overcharged. On an enterprise freight budget this is material. Without systematic reconciliation, these charges are paid and never recovered.

03

Demurrage & detention

Charges accrue when containers are not collected from port due to missed notifications.

04

Excess safety stock

Buffer inventory tying up working capital, held because the data can't be trusted, not because it should be.

05

Emergency air freight

Routinely 4–6× the ocean cost, used to compensate for delayed ocean shipments that weren't flagged in time.

06

Avoidable stockouts

Missed deliveries force local purchasing at premium prices, eroding margins.

FOR THE CFO

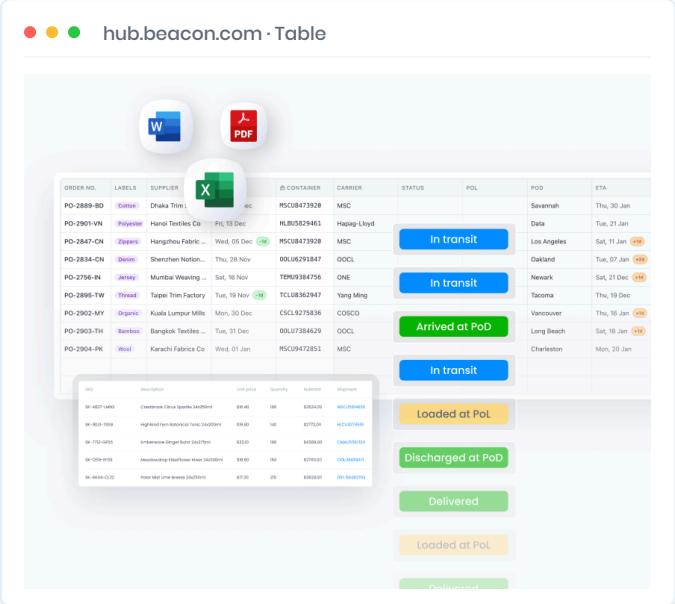
Every item on this page is either cash leaving the business that shouldn't be, or working capital locked up for the wrong reason. Freight overpayment, uncontested invoice errors, D&D charges and trapped safety stock are not operational inefficiencies to be absorbed. **They are recoverable cash.** The ROI case for a connected supply chain workspace sits in this column.

The cost of a connected supply chain workspace is typically less than the cost of one mismanaged disruption. The harder question for most leadership teams is not whether the ROI is there. **It is why this has not been prioritised sooner.**

WHERE TO START

Your AI supply chain workspace.

Table, Documents and Live Boards: three surfaces built around the same live data, so every team works from one shared operational picture.



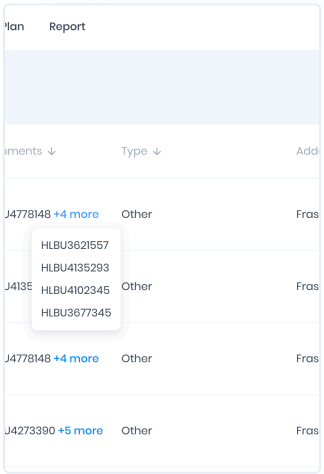
TABLE

Imagine if your spreadsheet could update itself.

Table looks like your familiar spreadsheet, but it is so much more – it is a workspace to view shipments, send automated updates, share and store documents and communicate with your teams and customers.

One Table, visible across all teams. Aggregated real-time data flows in — no lagging reports, no competing spreadsheets.

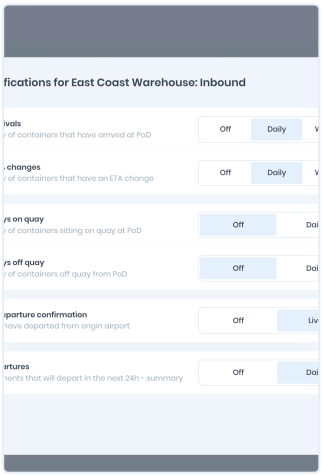
BUILT AROUND THE SAME LIVE DATA



DOCUMENTS

Stop chasing vital supply chain documents.

Invoices, packing lists, customs files and certificates linked directly to each shipment. No more hunting through inboxes and shared drives — teams save 6+ hours a week.



LIVE BOARDS

Each team's slice of the supply chain.

Focused views, shared with exactly who needs to see. Warehouse sees inbound arrivals, customers see their shipments, finance sees exceptions — one truth, many views.

THE PATH FORWARD

Centralise. Standardise. Connect.

Three foundations for AI-ready supply chain operations.

The findings point to a consistent set of priorities for enterprise supply chain leaders. Organisations that invest in their data foundations earlier tend to build advantages that are difficult for others to close quickly.

STEP 01

Centralise

Every element of supply chain data in one place: shipment tracking, carrier milestones, exceptions, and the documents behind every movement. Packing lists, BoLs, invoices, contracts, SKU data. Without this context layer, any AI built on top has nothing reliable to reason over.

STEP 02

Standardise

Data that cannot be compared cannot be analysed. Standardising how milestones, ETAs, costs and exceptions are captured across every business unit, geography and forwarder turns disconnected data points into actionable intelligence.

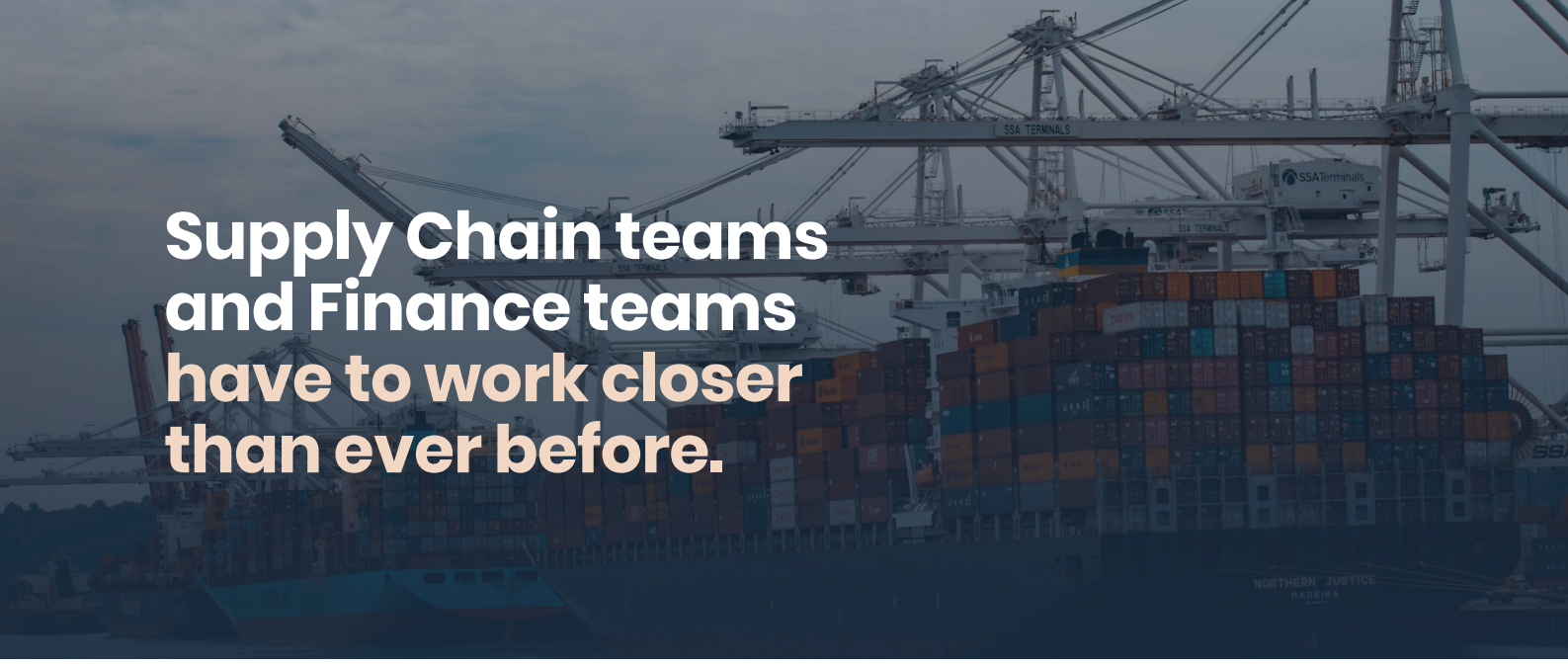
STEP 03

Connect

A platform that shows yesterday's positions has limited value when conditions shift in hours. Live data from carriers via direct API connections ensures every team is working from a current picture, without relying on manual updates.

With these three foundations in place, the AI layer becomes practical rather than theoretical.

Predictive ETAs. Automated exception alerts routed to the right person. AI-assisted demand sensing that factors in live shipment data. **The same data that once sat locked in spreadsheets and email threads becomes the foundation for a smarter, faster supply chain operation.**



Supply Chain teams and Finance teams have to work closer than ever before.

The supply chain leaders we spoke to are experienced and clear-eyed about the gaps in their operations. The missing ingredient is not intent or capability. **It is the data infrastructure to act on both.**

Fragmented data, manual processes, and siloed operations create real operational constraints. Without a clean, structured data foundation, **the AI capabilities that will define the next generation of supply chain operations are simply unavailable.**

The solution is not to replace existing systems. **It is to build the data layer that sits across them** — centralising, standardising, and continuously updating the intelligence every function needs.

Organisations that build this foundation operate more efficiently in the near term, and position themselves to adopt more advanced capabilities — AI-powered exception management, predictive demand sensing — **that depend on clean, structured data.**

The leaders moving fastest have stopped treating supply chain as an operational cost centre and started treating it as a cashflow function. Connected data releases working capital, recovers overcharged spend, and gives finance a clean line of sight into a part of the business that has historically been opaque. **That is the shift.**

GET STARTED

Are you ready for an intelligent supply chain?

Book a conversation with the Beacon team and see what a connected, AI-ready operational picture looks like for your business.

Book a working session →

beacon.com

Based on qualitative interviews conducted between 2024 and 2025. Interviewee names and company details have been anonymised.