

Bill's Building Blocks

Supply Chain Transparency

On the demand side: *The Washington Post's* covid-vaccine-states-distribution-doses website reported that in New Jersey 1.33 million had received first doses out of 7.17 million people eligible (Feb 28th). According to the July 2019 population estimate by the US Census Bureau 1.47 million people in New Jersey are 65 years old and older.

On the supply side: Both the State and the Counties operate scheduling websites. New Jersey opened six mega sites for COVID-19 vaccinations. The Counties list an increasing number of vaccination sites with medical groups, CVS targeting nursing homes, and soon sites at Walgreens retail stores. All have had supply difficulties due to weather and vaccine shortages. Some medical groups do not operate scheduling websites but reach out to patients based on underlying conditions and age as vaccine is available. Local citizen groups have started scheduling sites based on the availability of unused dosages.

Presently, when you become eligible to register for a vaccination, say age 65, these sites mostly display, "There are no appointments at this time." Once you do make it through the "I am not a robot" filter and if no vaccine supply is available, there is no transparency regarding future scheduling opportunities. "Please try again later."

In commercial supply chains there are at least two reasons for a lack of transparency. The first is that a network cobbled together from multiple legacy information systems often lacks digital connectivity as the applications cannot talk with each other. This may be the state of the COVID-19 vaccination information systems. Just imagine if the American Airlines or Expedia reservation systems serving millions of customers operated like this!

A second reason is one of intent where a supply chain echelon faces the risk of being disintermediated as the supply chain seeks to drive down its costs. Disintermediation means that an upstream echelon connects directly with a downstream echelon eliminating the middle echelon in a supply chain network. Here are two examples. A factory tries to connect directly with end customers eliminating cost for the distributor; the distributor stops sharing customer data. A seller tries to connect directly with a carrier eliminating cost for freight forwarding; the freight forwarder stops sharing carrier information.

A lack of supply chain transparency can be driven by legacy system data roadblocks and by middle echelons working to avoid disintermediation.

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