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Supply chain management has evolved drastically over the past decades, with market trends and methods of management changing due to changes in technology and globalization. One of the biggest - but also perhaps the slowest - change is the perceived need for sustainability at all levels of the supply chain. Although some companies have not yet integrated sustainable practices into their business models, sustainability is quickly becoming something that is both desired by customers and beneficial to companies' operations.

It's no exaggeration to say that sustainability is more highly valued among chain supply managers than ever before - however, it's nowhere near unanimous. In a recent PwC study, 42% of executives identified sustainability as "Highly Important" - but about 66% said that it would become more important in the future.

While some companies have already begun to integrate sustainable practices into various aspects of their supply chain, over the next years and decades these practices will become more common and more important. Climate change, combined with changes in the availability of certain resources, will make it both more profitable and more necessary to use sustainable practices when it comes to water, raw resources, and carbon. Below, we'll explore some of the [key practices](#) for sustainability in the supply chain.

Carbon Footprint

The carbon footprint is the most looming aspect of sustainability: it is the aspect the public is most aware of, and it is also the most strongly related to climate change. Reducing carbon emissions is a huge goal for companies, and can include methods as varied as:

- Sourcing locally when possible
- Using software to create more efficient routes
- Taking steps to reduce carbon output in factories and offices
- Installing green technology (hydro, wind, or solar) at factories

Although some degree of climate change will happen no matter what at this point, the degree to which it occurs can be mitigated by reducing carbon output. What's more, as oil, gas, and coal prices rise, companies will have no choice but to look for more sustainable forms of power.

Water

Access to freshwater is currently a problem in many of the countries where supply chains begin, and issues like drought and freshwater contamination are expected to become more widespread as climate change and environmental degradation take their

toll. Reducing water use is the most obvious part of the equation, but being respectful of water basin supplies and working to replenish supplies are equally important. At all levels of the supply chain, companies should work to minimize usage and avoid issues like contaminating or heating local water supplies.

Recycling

Many resources used in production are non-renewable, and for almost all resources, starting the production process from scratch has a bigger carbon footprint and impact on the overall environment than does recycling. What's more, recycled products continue to be popular among consumers.

Ethical Agreements

More and more executives are recognizing the importance of choosing to work with companies that have high ethical standards, both in regards to sustainability and in regards to the communities as a whole. In many countries, restrictions on things like the release of toxins, the un-renewed cutting of trees, and practices like strip-mining are not well-regulated. Choosing to work with companies who do sustainable work means promoting long-term sustainability.

Many executives are recognizing the importance of collaborating with suppliers as one of the biggest ways that corporations can promote overall sustainability, especially as environmental issues in developing countries are growing without a corresponding expansion in environmental standards.

Open Information

One of the most important aspects of sustainability is increased transparency regarding sourcing and industrial processes. Being able to trace the origins and production of a product is extremely important - especially since, as described above, not all suppliers adhere to the same ethical standards. Being able to prove your commitment to sustainability through tracking and tracing is key - it means you can prove your claims of sustainability, and that you can combat any accusations of "guilt by association" lodged against you.

Climate change and environmental degradation may have a destructive impact on future markets. Knowing this highlights the need to implement sustainable changes, to minimize damage and save as much as possible for the future. What's more, "business sense" and "environmental advocacy" are increasingly becoming compatible concepts.