

# Sustainability series: The role of the People in organizations and across the Value Chain

## Introduction

As Supply Chain professional, you might wonder what you can do about sustainability and how you can contribute. This series of four white papers is for you.

Starting with the environment, the first article reflected upon the energy challenges focusing on providing a global understanding of the situation and suggesting levers to act. The second article explored the question of wastes, scarcity of natural resources and highlights the opportunity of circularity. This one is dedicated to People and the role a company can play in Society. To finish the series, a summary of the challenges facing Supply Chain professionals and paths to act will be published.

## A short recap on Sustainability

To make it simple, sustainability considers long-term value creation. This means that a company not only focuses on profitability but also on the impacts it has and the perennity of its operations. Usually, the environmental and the societal/social impacts are considered as the key drivers in Sustainability while maintaining economic profitability.

With increasing sensibility from the public on those challenges, investors are bringing their focus on the so-called Environment Social Governance (ESG) indicators.

Starting a transformation journey of your Value Chain is thus beneficial for your company, generating long-term profitability, securing capital allocation while preserving the Planet for the current and future generations.

## Starting with your employees

As a company you have a great influence and responsibility over the people you employ. It is important to keep in mind the structure of modern society, your teams spend most of their life working for your company,

supporting your business and its growth while receiving a salary to bring home and to live from. With this in mind, employees can be either considered as resources or assets. The former generates a mutually beneficial situation where the employee strives in a secured and positive environment leading to strong performance for the company. While it may be easy on the paper, it is not easy to genuinely think that way.



Figure 1 - three pillars of John Elkington (medium.com)

COVID brought new challenges on the table with the rise of home office. This changing environment creates an opportunity to rethink and develop new ways of working based on outputs and not on inputs. Why not reconsidering

productivity and really moving away from hour-driven jobs? Such thinking creates a striving work environment particularly appreciated to handle work-life balance.

As companies, we have an important influencing role over our employees. We can lead by example and take our societal role further than just providing a work environment and a mission. An organization can develop tools to help its people to grow, it can educate them on subjects that matter and those may not be directly related to the organization. For instance, why not training your teams on reducing their environmental impact, why not supporting their mobility with a dedicated incentive program, or even promoting holidays closer to home. As a company you can also educate your teams on the food challenges, on waste reductions, etc. Last but not least, you may also give your team time to get involved in the local communities.

As company, you can also support life-changing project. Why not granting substantial time to your employees when a child is born? Why not promoting long trips? Those bring strong link and loyalty to your company while helping your employees to strive and develop new sensibilities and approaches that will for sure become beneficial for your organization.

Finally, a company creates a cluster a people with similar values and objectives. This group of people that know each other (or at least share something in common) can be leveraged. On large company sites, new ideas could be brought such as assets sharing. Instead of having a thousand employees buying this special piece of equipment for home, this camping equipment or this trailer for their car why not mutualizing?

## Diversity & Inclusion

The “Diversity” concept has been around for years but it recently became one of the “buzz” word and may mean very different things. Companies have a moral duty to design organization that do not discriminate. Each individuals bring their set of eyes, their own perspective of the world which is extremely valuable. Such differences of background, abilities, attributes create a dynamic work environment and opens new territories and a better global understanding.

Sadly, many traditional C-level management teams focus mainly on productivity and profitability. But why not setting different targets for some part of your organization? Referring to Supply Chain, could we envision slower leadtime and source from better suppliers? Could you consider working with people with disabilities capable of supporting you but may be creating some volatility in your Supply Chain? Such questions should be raised and discussed in organizations. Creating jobs, even the simplest, can really changes someone’s life.

## Communities

Start by finding what matters to your organization! Investing in communities can be seen as a financial burden or simply a “box to tick” but it can be more than that. Communities is a great way to think and map your value chain. All the stakeholders that contribute directly and indirectly to your product or services should be listed. Those represent an easy entry point that should be considered in priority and investment should be focused on where it matters most.

In addition, investment may not be financial. Other systems are possible with material donation for instance; a great way to transform potential wastes

or old assets in a positive impact. Employees may also offer part of their time to local communities. Why not offering 1 day or 1 week per year for volunteering purposes? As a company you will get involved in the local system and your team will get fresh eyes leading maybe to a great solution while contributing to several of the 17 Sustainability Development Goals (SDG) from the United Nation.



Figure 2 - SDGs from the United Nation

In addition, let's not forget that the management has to show the example. Sending your board of directors on a "simple" beach cleaning may not be beneficial however truly embracing the idea of giving back to the community is a great way to set the example and to be reminded of the different realities and priorities of others. As such, reflect upon inviting the senior management to actively participate in your local Communities and allocate some of their time to live the experience from the ground.

### Conclusion and key takeaways

As Supply Chain leaders, we can contribute to the future of our society by helping our teams to be part of something bigger. Trainings can be offered to raise awareness and educate your teams. Actions on the workplace may create momentum on positive actions and willingness to change.

Other tools such as investment in Communities either in terms of time and/or money will be greatly appreciated both from your neighbors and your employees while creating new perspectives in your organization. Last but not least, let's embrace our differences and create an environment making us all stronger both as individuals and as organization.

Tim Foetisch



[tim.foetisch@supplychainoperations.ch](mailto:tim.foetisch@supplychainoperations.ch)  
+41 79 919 47 06