



DRAGON

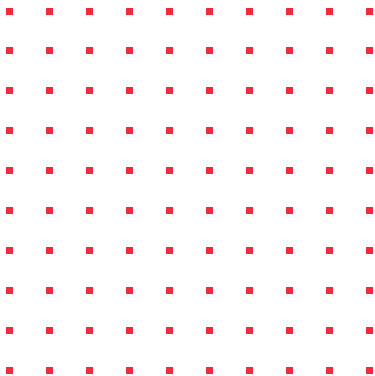


## A new 'cloth' for sustainability

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## Intro

The so-called, 'sustainable fashion'<sup>1</sup> is now more than a theory. Consumers today are taking a closer look at the food they consume and the chemicals they put into their bodies, they are also shifting their purchasing decisions to create a cleaner environment through the clothes they wear. One of the biggest culprits in the fashion industry is "fast fashion," or clothes made cheaply to meet demands for the hot new styles. Yet, fast fashion is putting our future planet at risk. (Cotler, 2019)

***"Sustainable fashion considers the entire supply chain and life cycle of a garment, from where and how it is made to when it ends up in our landfills. It is important for consumers to think about how their purchase affects the environment, the lifecycle of their garment, and how to invest in clothes that last longer."***

Sustainable sourcing is fast becoming a top priority for fashion companies. McKinsey's 2019 Chief Purchasing Officer (CPO) survey of sourcing executives reveals ambitious targets – and highlights the transformation needed. It also shows that social and environmental sustainability has become a main priority for apparel companies, just as it is becoming an increasingly important matter for consumers and governments. (Achim Berg, 2019)

**A sceptic might ask: does this spotlight on sustainability represent a move towards the long-term transformation of the industry or is it simply the fashion of the season?**

Most survey respondents expect the industry to transition to a much more sustainable model by 2025. They predict wider use of sustainable materials, and improved ecological footprint, increased transparency, and strengthened supplier relationships and purchasing practices. But most apparel companies will need to shift current practices dramatically if they are to deliver on such bold expectations. (Achim Berg, 2019)

<sup>1</sup> Sustainable fashion is a movement and process of fostering change to fashion products and the fashion system towards greater ecological integrity and social justice. Sustainable fashion concerns more than addressing fashion textiles or products. It comprises addressing the whole system of fashion. (Wikipedia)

## A catwalk towards sustainability

Apparel companies must shape a full-bodied sustainability agenda that addresses both social and environmental imperatives. And they must deliver it at speed and scale, harnessing innovations in technology, standards, processes, materials, and communication. According to this report, these are the four key areas for that sustainable-sourcing transformation to happen (Achim Berg, 2019):

- **Embracing sustainable materials.** The share of products containing sustainable material remains low today, but CPOs imagine a major scale-up in upcoming years. The majority aspire to source at least half of their products with sustainable materials by 2025. Yet, it'll not be an easy task: CPOs cite several obstacles to implementation, including availability, cost, and quality of materials.
- **Driving transparency and traceability.** Apparel companies are under scrutiny to create transparency on their supply chains and to share that information with consumers – but for most of them, it's still a mirage to guarantee such a level of transparency. Eight in ten CPOs surveyed have ambitious plans to step up transparency by 2025. Six in ten plans to go further and share information about their suppliers at the point of purchase. Again, the change required will be dramatic.
- **Turning supplier relationships into strategic partnerships.** In supplier relationships, social and environmental sustainability is growing importance: two-thirds of CPOs surveyed said it would likely become a top factor in their supplier ratings. This is encouraging garment manufacturers to invest proactively in environmental sustainability, worker well-being, and fair wages. CPOs recognize that more is needed: collaboration across the value chain is crucial to accomplishing an industry-wide transformation in sustainability.
- **Reinventing purchasing practices.** This survey emphasizes the fact that sustainable and responsible sourcing has noteworthy implications for purchasing practices, from planning to negotiation to order placement. Two-thirds of CPOs expect sustainable sourcing to add between 1 and 5 percent to their costs, with most agreeing that this is an investment in building competitive advantage. That said, there are important opportunities to improve the efficiency of internal product development processes. (Achim Berg, 2019)

***“The willingness and ability to change is what’s going to be the distinguishing characteristic of the winners and the losers in the next ten years.” – Edwin Keh, CEO of the Hong Kong Research Institute of Textiles and Apparel***

## Conclusion

This report makes it clear that it will be challenging to deliver true progress in the complex arena of sustainability. The industry lacks a common language on sustainable sourcing, let alone a shared set of standards. However, due to consumer awareness and demand for sustainable fashion is a matter of time for all apparel companies to see sustainable sourcing at scale as a must. At the same time, margin pressure is making it even more important for companies to improve the efficiency of end-to-end product development and sourcing processes. (Achim Berg, 2019)

It's also obvious that companies need to make progress on sustainability while navigating a volatile, fast-changing environment. Many external factors are detracting a stronger move on sustainability namely the impact of "Trade 2.0" – increasing trade tensions exemplified by the US-China trade war, which is intensifying country shifts in apparel sourcing. That, combined with ongoing demand volatility, is pushing companies towards a more flexible, demand-driven sourcing model. (Achim Berg, 2019)

Therefore, availability, cost, and quality of materials are the biggest bottlenecks for the scale-up of sustainable materials. A company operating in the fashion arena you should know that moving away from petroleum-based raw materials will certainly be a major step. Yet to moving away from very water-intensive, chemical-intensive materials or traditional cotton is also a big opportunity. (Achim Berg, 2019)

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