How can we make products more sustainable?

Currently, a product's life cycle is generally a linear process: raw materials are extracted, components are manufactured, the product is used, then at some point it ends up on the scrap heap. A circular system in which products are fed directly back into the manufacturing process at the end of their lifespan makes more sense. Unfortunately, this circular economy is not well established and remains little more than a vision.

It would be good to extend the use phase, for example with companies not selling their products but offering services instead. So rather than buying a printer, you lease it and pay for the operating hours while the printer itself remains the property of the manufacturer. This would have the advantage that manufacturers develop a vested interest in producing durable products and remanufacturing them at the end of their lifespan.

Of course, it's vital that products are designed to cause as little damage as possible throughout their life cycle and across all social and environmental dimensions. I firmly believe that this can only be achieved through government regulation: in the long term, governments must set out a clear, reliable framework – and ensure that it aligns corporate and societal interests.

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Sustainability and Supply Chain Management