3 Trends Shaping Intralogistics

With actionable insights to strengthen resilience

Warehouse Insights

kardex

Introduction

The statement “the only constant is change” has never been more accurate.

The world of intralogistics is transforming faster than ever before. Today's social and economic pressures are impacting the industry in ways never anticipated. The need for upskilled labor and improved working conditions is growing, while rising energy costs are driving the adoption of resource-efficient solutions. Additionally, new data privacy laws and trade policies require adaptable, secure supply chains.

By 2026, success will hinge on adaptability by building operations that are intelligent, connected, and resilient. The most forward-looking organizations will combine automation, analytics, and secure software ecosystems to anticipate change, optimize resources, and build smarter logistics networks. This report highlights 3 key trends shaping intralogistics in 2026.

The 3 key intralogistics trends

1. Supply Chain Resilience

2. Partial Automation

3. Software as a Service (SaaS)

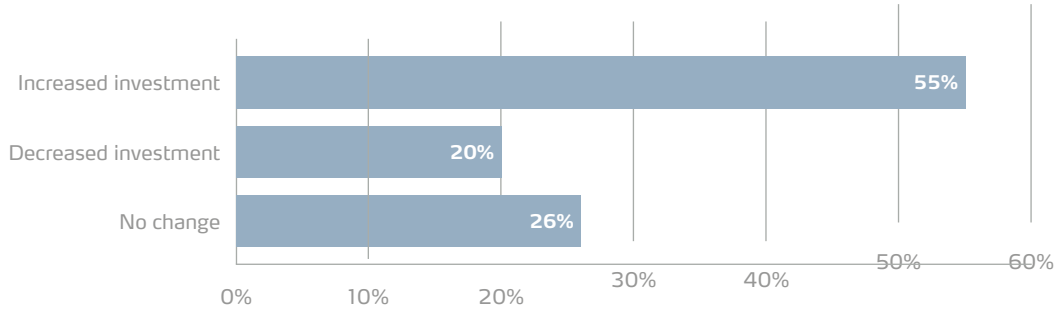
1. Supply Chain Resilience

The Shift from Reactive to Proactive Stability

In an age of uncertainty, resilience has shifted from being reactive to proactive. It's no longer about surviving disruption; it's about harnessing it to create a competitive edge.

Recent global developments—tariff fluctuations, energy volatility, and shifting trade dynamics—have made resilience a boardroom priority. According to the MHI Annual Industry Report, 55% of companies are increasing supply chain investments, emphasizing flexibility and technology integration.

Survey results—Planned investments in the next two years



MHI. "Publications Report." MHI, https://og.mhi.org/publications/report.

Automation as the Backbone of Resilient Operations

Automation is central to this evolution. Smart automated storage and retrieval systems (ASRS) enable scaling up or down without adding physical space or workforce. They deliver real-time visibility into stock positions, allow rapid reconfiguration of flows during disruption, and ensure continuity even under staffing or transport constraints. Many organizations view automation as a strategic safeguard that helps maintain performance when external conditions fluctuate. By creating elastic capacity, automated systems allow warehouses to absorb demand surges or supply delays without compromising throughput. When volumes spike, automated solutions can extend operating hours or picking intensity with minimal human intervention. When volumes fall, energy-efficient standby modes and dynamic slotting preserve resources, making automation both adaptive and sustainable.

Building Future-Ready Networks

Resilient supply chains are increasingly regionalized and digitally modeled. McKinsey reported that 64% of global executives are rebalancing their supply networks toward regionalization and nearshoring to reduce dependency and enhance responsiveness. Meanwhile, digital twins emerge as powerful tools for modeling disruptions and optimizing warehouse performance.

»With a digital twin, companies can map out and model supply chain adjustments before they go live, helping them reduce disruptions and pinpoint the best strategies.«

Johan Jonsson, Vice President of Life Cycle Service,
Kardex Remstar North America

For Kardex customers, this evolution means turning automation into a stability anchor, with systems that not only run efficiently but also flex intelligently to adapt to changing conditions. From modular system design to predictive service models, resilience is engineered across the entire life cycle. Continuous monitoring and data-driven maintenance ensure reliability, turning automation into a self-reinforcing stability system year after year.

Learn more about Kardex Analytics

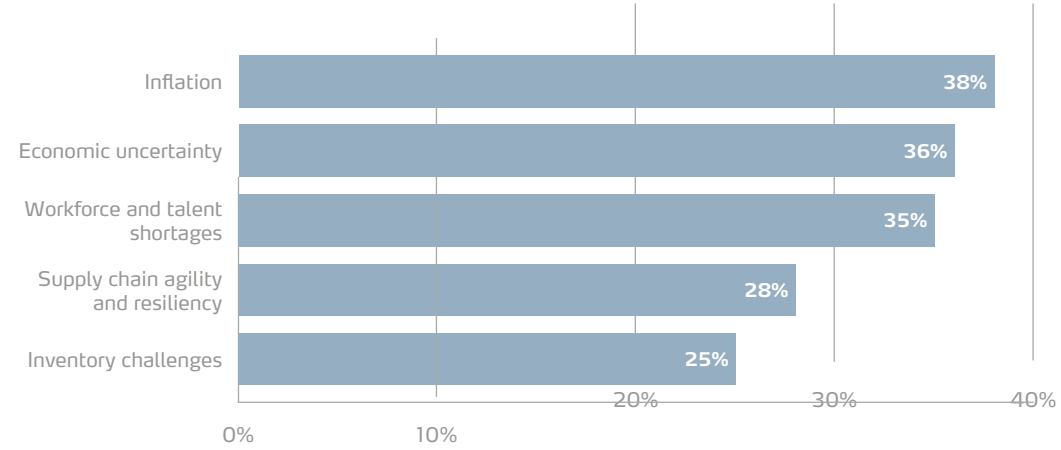
2. Partial Automation

The Bridge Toward Fully Autonomous Warehouses

According to the latest MHI Annual Industry Report 2025, the persistent shortage of skilled labor remains one of the biggest challenges in the logistics industry. Despite easing inflationary pressures, the talent gap remains severe.

Top supply chain challenges

Top 5 company challenges rated extremely or very challenging

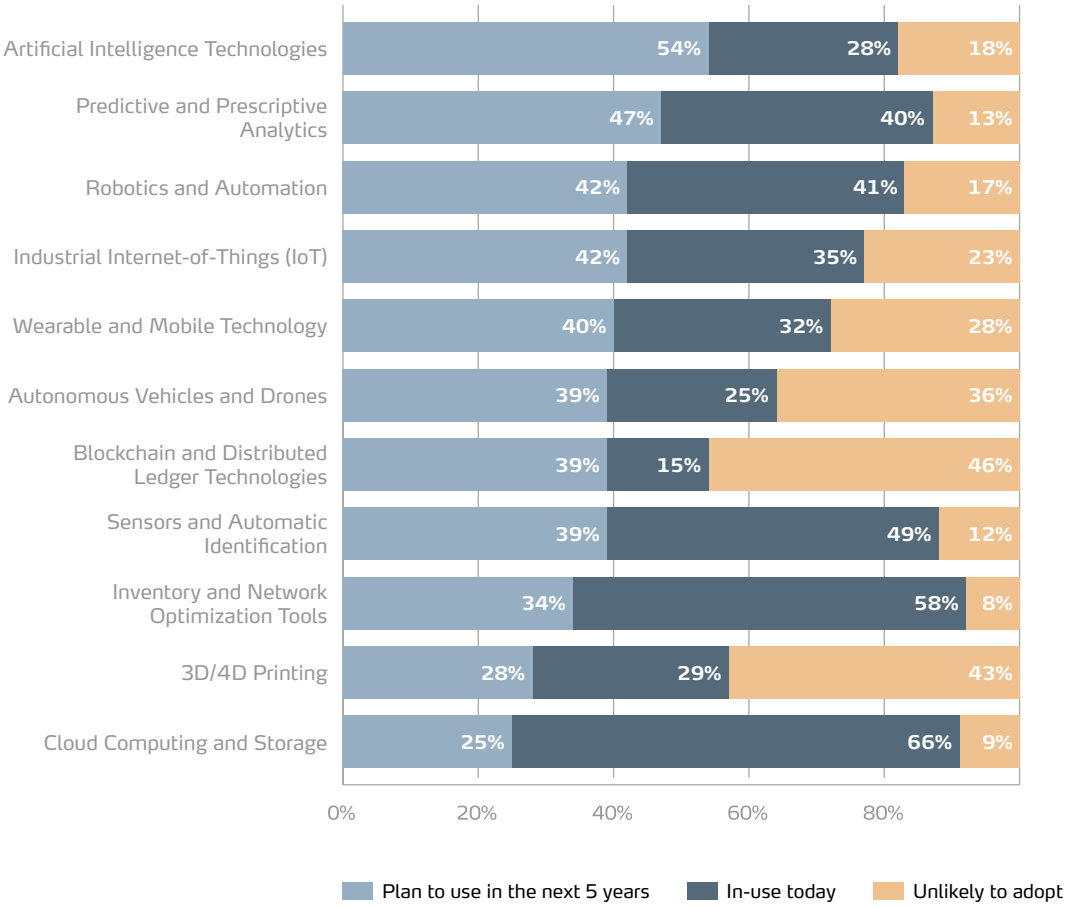


MHI. "Publications Report." MHI, https://og.mhi.org/publications/report

Automation has become the default response to labor scarcity, safety concerns, and rising service expectations.

According to the MHI 2025 Annual Industry Report, over 40% of respondents have already implemented, or plan to implement, some type of automation in their operations.

Adoption of innovations



MHI. "Publications Report." MHI, https://og.mhi.org/publications/report.

In 2026, partial automation is expected to be the leading model, where humans and robots collaborate fluidly. Instead of replacing the workforce, automation augments it, allowing employees to focus on value-adding activities while machines handle repetitive, precision-driven tasks.

Watch Emil Frey's smart warehouse in action

»When we consider the labor shortage against maintaining productivity, automation is the clear solution. Not only are gaps filled, but workforce experience and well-being are enhanced as well. It's about creating safer, more supportive workplaces where employees can focus on higher-value tasks.«

Daniel Hauser, Head of Business Unit, Kardex AS Solutions

According to DHL's Logistics Trend Radar 7.0, robotics, particularly stationary (pick and place) robot systems, are now classified as high-impact trends expected to be adopted in the next five years.

Pick and place robotics significantly reduce the time required for labor-intensive tasks such as picking, replenishment, and palletizing. These systems integrate seamlessly with warehouse management software, enabling 24/7 operation and addressing the shortage of human labor in picking processes. Stationary robotics, involving fixed-position robots, perform value-adding tasks. Advances in camera systems and machine learning are expected to further develop stationary robotics, leading to complex applications like robotic orchestration and automated handoffs between stationary and mobile robots.

Learn more about pick and place robots

The Path Toward Dark Warehouses

While partial automation may become the prevailing model, the next frontier is the dark warehouse, which is a fully automated environment where systems operate autonomously without human intervention. Once a futuristic concept, it's rapidly becoming feasible thanks to advances in AMRs (Autonomous Mobile Robots), AI-enabled orchestration, and real-time analytics. While full automation won't suit every industry, sectors such as e-commerce, healthcare, and high-tech manufacturing are already piloting 24/7 robotic operations to combat workforce volatility and rising costs.

In this context, Kardex solutions bridge the gap between today's partially automated workflows and tomorrow's highly autonomous, data-driven operations, enabling customers to scale their automation journey gradually and without disruption.

3. Software as a Service (SaaS)

The Software-Defined Warehouse

As warehouse systems become increasingly connected, software determines how efficiently, transparently, and securely operations run. The evolution towards highly integrative software platform ecosystems is redefining warehouse management—moving beyond traditional SaaS to embrace flexible architectures that unify legacy systems with modern cloud-native solutions.

This transformation enables scalable, interoperable platforms that adapt to diverse operational needs. While SaaS plays a pivotal role in reducing IT overhead and accelerating deployment, today's intelligent software ecosystems offer even greater potential: harmonizing existing infrastructures with agile, cloud-enabled capabilities to support innovation, resilience, and growth.

However, this digital evolution brings new challenges. According to Gartner's Top Cybersecurity Trends 2024, supply chain attacks and third-party vulnerabilities are on the rise, with nearly half of all organizations experiencing a breach in the past year. For intralogistics operators, where uptime and data integrity are mission-critical, this requires a new level of vigilance.

»As intralogistics systems become more connected, cybersecurity and cloud architecture aren't optional. They're foundational to business continuity. Software platforms, ecosystems and SaaS represents a shift toward continuous improvement, transparency, and secure performance.«

Stefan Peetz, Head of Software, Kardex Mlog

SaaS-based platforms also democratize access to advanced technology. Smaller facilities can leverage enterprise-grade analytics, while global networks centralize insights across multiple sites. By combining on-premises capabilities with cloud-based services, companies gain financial and operational agility, enabling continuous updates, scalability, and performance optimization without disruption.

As data-driven operations become the norm, the convergence of cybersecurity, cloud architecture, and integration capabilities is paving the way for the intelligent warehouse, a self-optimizing ecosystem where automation, analytics, and secure connectivity work in harmony to deliver resilient, future-ready performance.

Outlook

As 2026 unfolds, intralogistics is entering a new era defined not just by automation but by intelligence and integration. The industry's future lies in systems that can sense, decide, and act autonomously, combining resilience, flexibility, and insight into one connected whole.

Supply chain resilience will continue to evolve as a strategic differentiator. Hybrid operations will redefine the workforce, while SaaS and cybersecurity will safeguard and orchestrate these systems, ensuring continuity, scalability, and trust.

From automation systems to intelligent software platforms, Kardex empowers organizations to operate smarter, safer, and more sustainably. Those who invest today in flexible, secure, and automated infrastructure will be best equipped to thrive in the dynamic decade ahead.

Contact us

Resources

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