

# Digital Product Sustainability Pulse

March 2025

 Green PO



# Executive Summary



**Digital products became an essential part of our daily lives.** While they solve problems, they do need resources and may trigger unintended social and environmental consequences.

Only within the last few years, institutions advancing sustainability in the digital world have been founded. Techniques, tools and standards have been developed. Yet, the **adoption rate of these sustainable practices remains low.**

**The Digital Product Sustainability Pulse Report examines the drivers and barriers of sustainability in digital product development,** based on 17 interviews with product professionals across Europe.

The interviews focus on **actual past behaviour and situations** and the assessment thereof. The interview results have been condensed, discussed and consolidated in this report.

This report **explores the organisational more than the technical dimension.** While there are plenty of resources out there that describe the technical measures a company can take to improve a product's sustainability, the report examines the organisation dimensions that determine to what extent this actually happens.

The **Key Findings** of the report are:

1. **Sustainability knowledge among POs is limited,** despite moderately high interest. Sustainability is a wide field. The elements relevant to digital products are not well known yet.
2. **Sustainability is not a core success criterion,** with most companies prioritizing profitability and customer needs. Sustainability is mostly disconnected from product success.
3. Companies adopt three **sustainability approaches: Compliant Sustainability** only prescribe the minimum required by law. **Opportunistic Sustainability** favor initiatives that have a selective positive business contribution. **Strategic Sustainability** integrate sustainability in the core value delivery.
4. **There is a low adoption of sustainable practices,** with only a few companies measuring their actual impact.
5. **Sustainability efforts are often initiated by individuals** and have a higher impact the more support it is provided by senior management.

While these findings paint a rather disillusioning picture, there are ways to level up and even benefit commercially from sustainability.

The **Recommended Actions** are:

1. **Increase sustainability education** and promote a comprehensive understanding among product teams.
2. **Integrate sustainability into product success metrics** through measurable KPIs and impact tracking.
3. **Adopt sustainability practices** via training, assigning sustainability champions, and measuring resource efficiency.
4. Strengthen leadership support to **embed sustainability into corporate strategy and culture.**
5. **Clarify the PO's role** in ensuring sustainability becomes a product priority.

This report shows that **knowledge about sustainability practices alone are insufficient.** It needs a **contribution to commercial success.**

Sustainable software gives access to a growing market segment, it saves resources, attracts and keeps talent and contributes to the conditions of doing business. **commercial, environmental and social success can go hand in hand.**

The Authors, March 2025

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*Knowing sustainable tools is one thing. Using them in your product is another thing.*

*You need an understanding of the rules of the game, relate the sustainable benefits to user and company benefits and educate colleagues.*

*Those who follow that path build a more robust and successful product.*

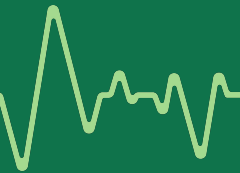


**Patrick Hypscher,**  
**Co-Founder & Steward, Green PO**



# 02

## Introduction



# The blind spot of digital product development

## The Objective

**The aim of this report is to understand the status of sustainability in digital products and the factors influencing the degree of sustainability.** It is meant as a neutral description of phenomena the authors observe. The intention is to identify enablers and barriers that influence the positive impact of digital products on people, the planet and profit together. The scope of this report is digital products only, which are pieces of software that are commercially created to solve users' problems.

## The Situation

**Digital Products are nearly everywhere.** At the beginning of 2024, there have been more than **5.6 billion unique smartphone users** worldwide<sup>1</sup>. People are using apps, websites, and digital platforms. On the business side, **91% of companies** are engaged in some form of digital initiative<sup>2</sup>. Many business processes like logistics, accounting, marketing, and production are no longer possible without software. In private and business life, communication and collaboration are shaped by software. **Technology can and does make life easier, richer, longer, healthier and safer.**

In 2011, the Venture Capitalist Mac Andreessen argued why **software is eating the world**<sup>3</sup>. This became true, even literally. **Digital products need hardware and energy to work.** Both require resources that are mostly fossil-based and limited. Additionally, **digital products change people's behaviour**, like new forms of entertainment, communication, social interaction, views about the world or easier access to services and products. In turn, this **changed human behaviour has an impact on the environment.**

**Meanwhile, global destabilisation of weather patterns change accelerated.** The Copernicus Climate Change Service states: "2024 saw unprecedented global temperatures, following on from the remarkable warmth of 2023. It also became the first year with an average temperature clearly exceeding 1.5°C above the pre-industrial level."<sup>4</sup>

**More and more sustainable good practices for digital products are being developed.** While individual pioneers have been emphasising social and environmental dimensions of technology ever since, it only recently got more institutionalised attention.

With the emergence of the Green Software Foundation in 2021, the incorporation of SustainableIT in 2022, publications like the Agile Alliance Sustainability Manifesto in 2023 and the Web Sustainability Guidelines in 2024<sup>5</sup>: organised environmental sustainability approaches are advancing.

**Nevertheless, the actual adoption of sustainable practices is still in its infancy.** The study's partners are united by the perception of a slow adoption rate of the measures that have already been developed, which sparked the initial impulse of this report.

Combined with the latest from PwC's 28th Annual Global CEO Report<sup>6</sup> showing that investment in **climate-friendly investments "were six times as likely to have increased revenue as to have decreased it".**

**Product professionals hold the keys to more sustainable products.** Based on their job description product owners and product managers shape the product. Product roles aim to design the product for customer happiness and commercial success. If products are supposed to become more sustainable, it cannot be done without product professionals. Therefore, involving their perspective in the discussion is paramount.

# Findings based on an European Survey

This report is based on **17 qualitative interviews with professionals in charge of digital products**. Interviews took place between July 2024 and January 2025. The interview questionnaire has been developed based on assumptions and hypotheses about the subject.

The interviewees were selected based on at least **5y of experience in digital product roles**. The attitude towards and knowledge about sustainability was no primary selection criterion. The background of the interviewed professionals is:

- 16 professionals are working internally on a product, 1 works for an external service provider
- 4 professionals are based in the UK, 4 in The Netherlands and 9 in Germany
- 6 professionals are female and 11 are male

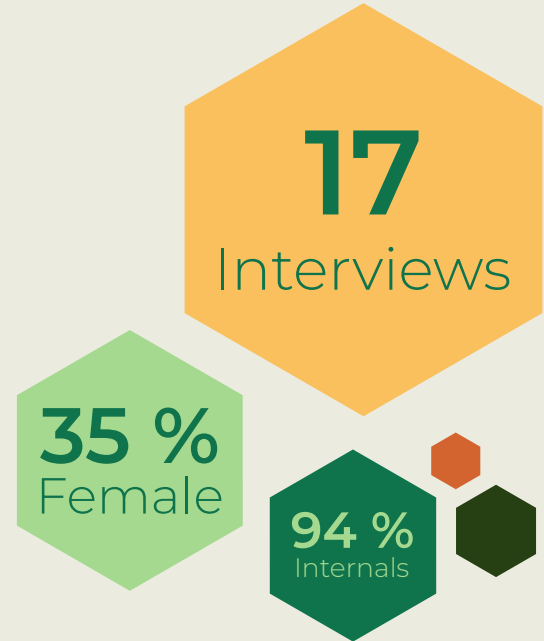
Statements in this report are limited to these 17 interviews. They can only be indicative for other product professionals and companies.

The interviews **focusses on actual past behaviour**. Interviewees have been asked to describe specific situations, ideally within the last six months, in which sustainability was part of the decision process. Moreover, interviewees gave their perspectives on supportive and sceptical stakeholders, as well as an estimation of the know-how, interest and influence of product owners on digital sustainability. The interview process did not define the term sustainability but used the individual interviewee's understanding of sustainability. On request, possible social and environmental practices have been given.

The report uses **“sustainable practices”** to refer to activities described in collections like the Web Sustainability<sup>5</sup>, Accessibility<sup>7</sup> and Responsible Tech Guidelines<sup>9</sup> as well as methods taught by the Green Software Foundation<sup>9</sup>.

The interview results have been analysed, clustered, discussed among the report authors and summarised in this report.

All the findings are supplemented with suggestions for **actions the reader can take**.





*Sustainability is the next transformation. Sustainable unicorns are reaping the benefits while leaving the rest behind, with digital sustainability the low hanging fruit, ripe for picking.*

*We have the tools and the techniques, but in the age of untruth, people need to see evidence to believe.*

*Why not try a controlled experiment and find out?*



**Joanna Masraff,  
Co-Founder & Steward, Green PO**





# Partners

This report was conducted as a collaboration among the following partners:



## Green PO

Green PO is a movement that helps product owners and product managers in building more sustainable products.

We want to connect the agile product and the sustainability community to accelerate change and help individuals enhance their personal impact.



## AND Digital

AND Digital is on a mission to close the world's digital skills gap. We do that by doing things differently when we work with our clients, communities and colleagues.

Instead of working FOR exciting brands (like British Airways, Heineken and Nike), we work WITH them, and that's not just a party line. We combine our people with our clients' people to form a single project team, so collaborative you can't tell our ANDis from our clients.

That means when we leave, they can own their apps, websites and future projects independently.



## Thoughtworks

Thoughtworks is a global technology consultancy founded in 1993, specializing in integrating strategy, design, and software engineering to enable businesses to excel in the digital age.

With over 12,000 professionals across 49 offices in 18 countries, it offers expertise in custom software development, digital transformation, and data engineering.

Renowned for its contributions to the agile movement and open-source software, Thoughtworks is committed to ethical technology use, inclusive digital experiences, innovation and sustainability.

# Partners

This report was conducted as a collaboration among the following partners:



## Improvov

improvov is a Munich-based organizational consultancy that has been guiding medium-sized and large companies towards sustainable success since 2011. Whether greater agility in dynamic markets, shorter time-to-market or increased innovation strength: we ensure that structures and processes are aligned with corporate goals – and that leaders make confident decisions in uncertain times.

Through training, coaching, leadership development, and interim solutions, we enable teams and talents to drive meaningful change and achieve lasting results.



## The Garage

The Garage is a creative team within Essent, blending user-centered design and hands-on expertise to build impactful solutions. We work together with Essent, energiedirect.nl, Vandebroen and local service partners to create high-quality projects that put customers first, drive real momentum, and shape strategic direction. With a fresh perspective and a collaborative mindset, The Garage is all about pushing boundaries and fueling sustainable growth in the energy sector



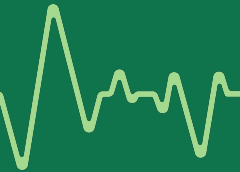
## Digital Natives

Digital Natives is a digital agency specialising in digital platforms. We help companies grow digitally and make an impact.

We constantly strive for progress. For continuous change that leads, step by step, to a better world. We see the internet as the tool to shape that transition. As the first generation to grow up in the digital age, we deal with the future of the web every day and advise our clients on where their opportunities lie.

# 03

## Findings & Actions



# Lower Knowledge than Interest and Influence

Interviewees have been asked: “On a scale from 0 to 10, how would you rate the average PO's ...

product-related sustainability **know-how**,



When asked about the level of product-related sustainability **know-how of Product Owners in general, a diverse picture emerges**. While some see a high level, others see a low level or a mixture.

The explanations refer to individual motivation or the lack thereof to educate themselves. This is sometimes seen with the organisational demand for or resistance to sustainable solutions.

**interest** in product-related sustainability,



**Interviewees declare that interest in product-related sustainability is higher than know-how**. Again, personal motivation and organisational conditions play an essential role here. Also, the lack of know-how about applying sustainable practices to the individual context causes frustration and, therefore, a lack of interest.

Furthermore, sustainability competes with other product skills and topics like product management methodology, market and customer insights, domain expertise, or technological innovation like AI.

**influence** on the product's sustainability?"



**Product owners attest to their high influence on the product's sustainability**. Shaping the sustainable style of the product is mainly seen as part of their role. Product owners orchestrate the decisions that shape the product and the product's hand and footprint.

However, senior management and stakeholders are seen as pivotal to driving sustainability. The conditions can enable or block the product owners. Moreover, product owners on the client side have a much higher influence than those on the agency or supplier side.

The bar charts reflect the frequency with which a number has been mentioned. Answers that provided a range from one to another number have been rounded down (4-5 was counted as 4), due to assumed social desirability.



*Product Owners carry a key responsibility – their decisions determine whether products change the world for better or worse. Sustainability and business goals are not a contradiction but an opportunity: Sustainable products create long-term value and open up new business possibilities. The key is to consider sustainability in a product-specific way and integrate it strategically into the development process.*



**Sabine Canditt,  
improuv GmbH**

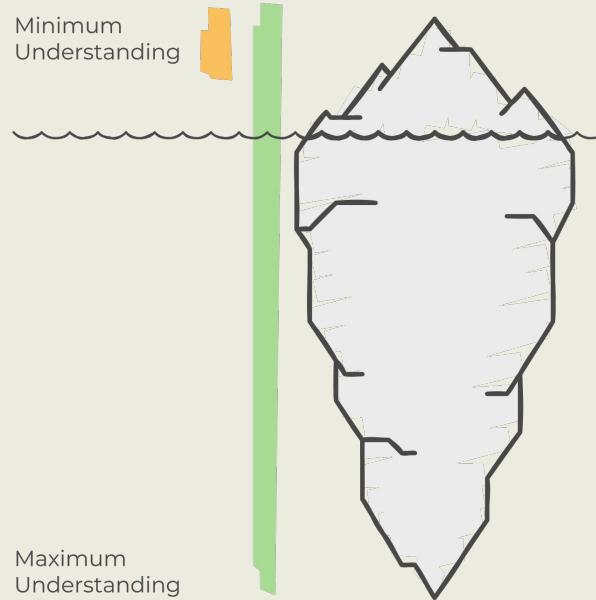


# 1. Understanding of Sustainability is mostly shallow

**Most product professionals have no or a limited understanding of sustainability.** The interview questions refer to the three high-level dimensions of sustainability: people, planet and profit. It is up to the product professionals to use their understanding. The understanding of sustainability differs among product professionals:

- The **minimum understanding focuses exclusively on the impact a product is intended to bring** to the market. Examples are products that accelerate the transition to renewable energy, resource reduction, and product lifetime extension. The product is sustainable as the consequences of its use are supposed to be better on key dimensions like energy use than an alternative scenario.
- The **maximum understanding of sustainability takes a holistic perspective.** It included direct and indirect aspects and the social and environmental conditions under which a product is created and maintained. This can consist of human and non-human systems that are required for and affected by the product, like mental health or clean air.

Moreover, **almost all product professionals do not have data to back up their sustainability promise.** One product professional describes regular impact measurements on the company level and on-demand analysis of specific features and projects. The majority refers to the presumed positive impact the product has on the world.



*There is a lack of information and transparency. The more effort you need to invest to source information, the higher the costs and resources to make sustainable choices.*

Interviewee

# 1. See and understand the sustainability iceberg

Awareness of the full scope of sustainability is the first step to improve the actual impact. It is based on the idea of the foot- and handprint. The footprint describes the resources necessary to create a product<sup>10</sup>. The handprint refers to the change a product makes in the world<sup>11</sup>.

## 1. Aspirational handprint

The intended social and ecological impact a product is supposed to have on the world is referred to as its aspirational handprint. It concerns the wider problem a product should solve. This handprint can usually be found on product slides or webpages, and gives the why of product.

## 2. Actual handprint

The actual handprint is the change a product really brings to the world. This requires measuring the change a product brings to the world. The actual handprint has a wider focus than the strategic handprint, as it includes rebound effects and the product's true consequences.

## 3. Actual social footprint

The actual social footprint refers to the social conditions required for delivering a product. These conditions include the employee of the company, its suppliers and affected communities. Health and safety, inclusion, child labour, and alike need to be considered here.

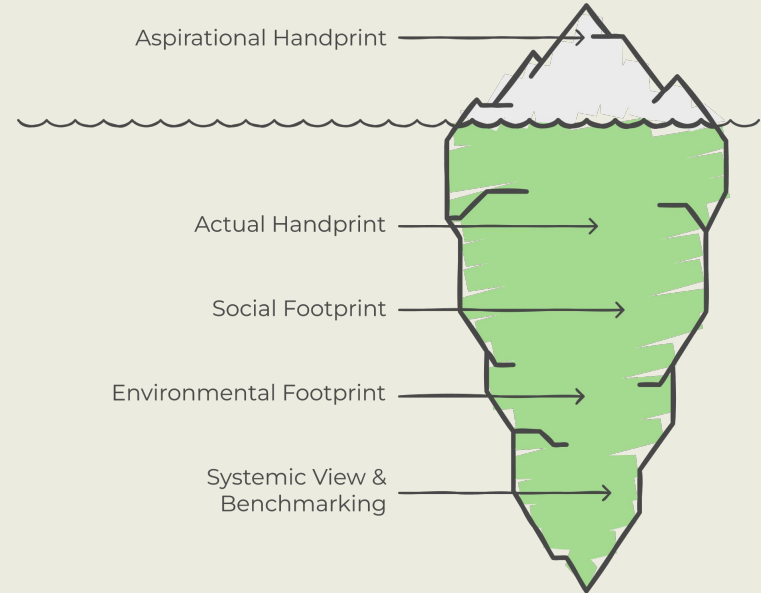
## 4. Actual environmental footprint

The actual environmental footprint refers to the total environmental impact associated with creating and delivering a product. Physical inputs like water, energy, and material use and their connected effects on ecosystems need to be accounted for. This includes the hardware, server, and cloud infrastructure necessary to create, distribute, and operate digital products.

## 5. Systemic View & Benchmarking

Almost all products stabilise different social and ecological settings, including the values they contain. Buying a service from a supplier contributes to the existence of this supplier, including its impact on the world. A comparative approach needs to be added: Does my product make the world relatively better? Moreover, a product has to be challenged from the perspective of regeneration: Does it enhance social and ecological capabilities?

Building knowledge about these layers is key. There are plenty of courses that provide a generic introduction to sustainability<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, organisations like Green PO have started to provide material dedicated to digital product professionals<sup>13</sup>.



## 2. Sustainability is not seen as a leading success criterion

**Product success usually does not include sustainability.** Naturally, all product goals are linked to customer problems or the organisation's commercial objectives. This is about solving customers' problems, feature use, profitability, and similar issues.

**Less than 18% of product professionals explicitly report environmental digital sustainability-related success criteria.** This means they measure the emissions of their digital product, the amount of energy use, or the amount of hardware used in order to reduce it.

However, almost **twice as many product people have success metrics for an aspect of digital social sustainability**, like accessibility and inclusion, for both regulatory purposes and to ensure the greatest number of customers can access their digital product.

Moreover, 5/17 product professionals are working on digital products that focus on the positive impact of the product, 3 of these go no further down the iceberg and have a minimal understanding of digital sustainability.

Organisations with sustainability as a cornerstone of their purpose are different. For them, improving sustainability is the ultimate goal; therefore, they see the product as an instrument to achieve higher levels of sustainability and reflect upon its delivery process. These organisations exist; yet in our research, **only two fall in this category.**



*Everyone said we want to produce in a sustainable way. But this has only ever been implemented when we had more money in our pockets.*

Interviewee



## 2. Decide how your product makes the world a better place

### 1) Identify your positive strategic handprint

Find the positive social or environmental change your product brings to the world. This goes beyond solving the problems of the customer. It is about **benefits wide parts of society or Mother Nature are grateful for**. That can be direct or indirect - also, superheroes need partners.

If you cannot find a convincing direct contribution of your product, **consider linking product use to a positive action your company takes**. With every product use, an additional positive change is brought to the world. For example, German consumer brand Share follows the one for one model: for each food or personal care item bought, Share gives one away for free<sup>14</sup>.

Inspiration about which problems are worth solving and how to connect it to the business can be found here:

- Sustainable Development Goals<sup>15</sup>
- Planetary Boundaries<sup>16</sup>
- B Corp Impact Business Models<sup>17</sup>

### 2) Break the positive strategic handprint down to the product level

Once every product use is tied to a clear positive social or environmental outcome, translate this connection to daily business. Product KPI, OKR or definitions of done could be affected. That might be easy if **every product use triggers a specific positive action** and you already track the usage intensity. Then, you know your positive contribution immediately. However, if this relationship is not so obvious, it has to be found and assessed.

### 3) Measure the positive strategic handprint and make sure you deliver

With a clear relationship between product use and doing good for society and the environment, **status and progress need to be measured**. Similar to measuring customer satisfaction and conversion rates, the positive impact of the product needs to be tracked. Again, the difficulty will differ on a product basis.

### 4) Screen your operations and partners for sustainable alternatives

Next to the sustainable impact of the product, review your operations and supplier network for sustainable practices. This includes significant aspects like the license model, your hardware equipment and the libraries your product relies on.

Digital products have a history of fueling social sustainability. Since the early days of computers and the World Wide Web, many applications have been distributed under open-source licences. In terms of social dimension, these products have low barriers and high transparency.

Find more inspiration about impact-positive business models here:

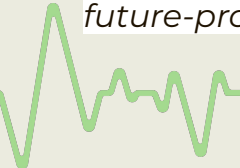
- B Corp Impact Business Models<sup>17</sup>
- Open Source Business Models<sup>18</sup>
- Circular X Case Database<sup>19</sup>



*As a consultant, I've encountered many different company strategies and contexts. While sustainability is often recognised as important, only few organisations embed it as a strategic imperative. Too often, it is prioritised due to lack of knowledge or competing business goals. But change starts with people. POs have a powerful lever to drive more sustainable product decisions and ask the right questions. By sharing knowledge, providing tools, and empowering teams, we can foster change from within — paving the way for more resilient and future-proof organisations.*



**Lina Bauer**  
**Lead Consultant, Thoughtworks**



# 3. Companies adopt different Sustainability Approaches

**An organisation's sustainability strategy determines the role of day-to-day sustainable practices.** All research conversations included the organisational context and the importance of sustainability for the whole organisation. Product decisions are typically based on commercial criteria, so the contribution of environmental and social changes to the bottom line are crucial. For many the link between commercial success and sustainability is not understood, in fact is seen as the opposite. However, for some, environmental and social sustainability drives commercial sustainability.

**Some organisations achieve commercial success through sustainability.** A sustainable practice helps them be more profitable directly (e.g., by reducing costs through fewer resources) or indirectly (e.g., via reputation effects).

In the case of **Strategic Sustainability**, organisations are committed to a strategy that includes or contributes to sustainable practices. For example, organisations facilitate the green energy transformation or provide digital products known for their greener consequences compared to alternatives. The board and directors pushes this approach. This is not (only) done because of normative concerns but because of pure business reasoning.

In such an environment, **product owners will find prioritising changes that enhance sustainability easier.** The willingness to make long-term bets and those with uncertain outcomes is higher.

However, interviewees reported **compromises when the companies come under pressure from competitors and might struggle commercially** or their products fall behind. During these times, all activities are under review, including the ones advancing sustainability.

**Opportunistic Sustainability** occurs when a behaviour you would consider sustainable - e.g., improving the accessibility of a page or using hardware longer - has **immediate commercial advantages**. These commercial advantages are the main drivers, as they either reduce costs or deliver customer value. The overall company strategy is not dominated by sustainable elements.

In this setting, **product owners must show the clear and convincing commercial benefit** of a sustainable practice. Sustainable changes are most likely not implemented for environmental or social reasons but for commercial reasons.

**Compliant Sustainability** can be found in organisations with little to no sustainability awareness. Sustainability is seen as a cause of extra cost. Knowledge about sustainable principles is low, so commercial benefits are not identified.

Here, **sustainability is irrelevant for product owners**. Sustainability practices are only implemented for compliance reasons. Green initiatives are usually of limited impact.



## 3. Inform yourself about paths to commercial success

Every company can commercially benefit from greater social and environmental sustainability. While a strategy is company-specific, it always starts with knowledge and education.

1. **Inspiration:** Learn about **pioneering examples by other companies**. Start your research with awards in your industry and sustainability, look for Meetups, assess working groups in federations and business communities or follow podcasts like Green IO.
2. **Consulting:** Bring in external **expertise to help identify relevant strategies** for your company. True experts know not only the popular cases but also the people and struggles behind them. They can support you in finding your way to success.

Once knowledge has been gathered and key stakeholders have been educated, these **insights have to be integrated into the strategy process**. Implementation can start with a few trials and pilots, it can span over a complete division or trigger a comprehensive strategy dialogue.

Inspiration and consulting can be applied on an opportunistic and a strategic level. Actually, both go hand in hand.

**It needs specific actions** that advance business success, the society and the environment and in doing so contributes to a more sustainable strategy. And **it needs a strategy** that gives employees orientation and supports them in making choices for the company's product.

### Forest

A productivity app that encourages users to focus by growing virtual trees, which can later be translated into real trees planted.

<https://www.forestapp.cc/>



### Too Good to Go

An app that combats food waste by connecting consumers with restaurants and stores offering unsold food at reduced prices.

<https://www.toogoodtogo.com/>



### leafcloud

Leafcloud uses server heat to substitute the use of fossil fuels. Securely built on OpenStack. Hosted in Europe.

<https://leaf.cloud/>



## 4. Adoption of Sustainability Practices is low

5 out of 17 interviewees report practices they perform to advance sustainability. **Practices that make products more accessible** for people from minority groups are the most prominent measures. 4 POs mention reducing resources, emissions, and e-waste, such as mindful hardware usage or dynamic infrastructure scaling.

**Only one company has procedures in place to track the environmental impact.** This is organisationally embedded from the strategy to planning and feature descriptions, while specific emission data is measured on an overall impact layer and for multiple specific use cases.

The **adoption of sustainability practices is low** compared to what would be possible. This can be due to the lack of knowledge and understanding about these instruments and other priorities, absence of these practices in product work or interviewees not being aware that certain activities can be regarded as advancing sustainability.



*Improving accessibility requires a lot of political persuasion. Many people find it difficult to understand why the stylish carousel element can't be used. This applies to many sustainability issues, you have to assert yourself politically and raise awareness.*

Interviewee

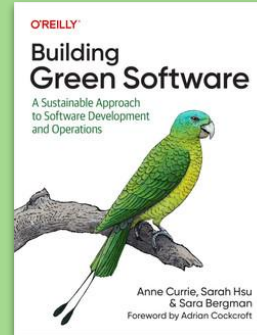
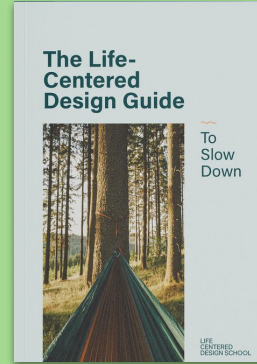
# 4. Train your Team and Start to Act

Over the last years, many sustainability practices for digital products have been described. Some of them can be found here:

- **Life-Centered Design** is an actionable design approach that gives designers and other creatives the mindset, opportunity, and ability to include all life forms in their work and advocate for biological ecosystems and communities.<sup>20</sup>
- The **Responsible Tech Playbook** helps teams identify strategies to be more inclusive, aware of bias, transparent and to mitigate negative unintended consequences.<sup>21</sup>
- The **Web Sustainability Guidelines 1.0** explains how to design and implement digital products and services that put people and the planet first.<sup>6</sup>
- The **Green the Web** podcast covers all things we need to care for in sustainable UX/UI design.
- **Green IO** with Gaël Duez explores how to reduce the environmental impact of our digital world.<sup>22</sup>
- **Building Green Software** shows how to build, host, and operate code in a way that's not only better for the planet but also cheaper and relatively low-risk for your business.<sup>23</sup>

To facilitate knowledge about these instruments the following measures can be taken:

1. **Conduct Training:** Educate employees on sustainable practices. There are formats for the different disciplines. It is crucial to play these learnings back into the team and transfer them to the product the team is in charge of.
2. **Appoint Sustainability Champions:** Creating a role responsible for adopting sustainability practices can facilitate implementation. Any existing team member can take this role. This helps select the measures relevant to each individual context.
3. **Measure Resource Use and Social Performance:** Starting to measure the status quo can be a powerful step towards change. Calculating, for example, the energy emission and social accessibility of the development and operations of a digital product will trigger multiple questions which in turn drive employee education. The Sustainability Team Assessment is a great starting point for that.<sup>23</sup>





Product Owners have a unique opportunity to embed sustainability into their processes, ensuring that every choice contributes to a product that is not only valuable but also responsible. This research highlights how PO's can turn awareness into action and therefore drive sustainable product development.



**Elize van der Steen**  
**The Garage**

## 5. It's on the individuals

**Irrespective of the role of sustainability within the corporate strategy and culture, it's up to individuals to develop more sustainable products.**

The interviews show that **passionate individuals who care about sustainability have initiated most sustainability discussions.**

When asked about the origin of these discussions, most interviewees refer to motivated employees. They may have different functions - product, development, or marketing - but the people triggering the conversation have a reputation for being sustainability-driven.

However, **sustainability-driven activities seem to remain small-scale when sustainability efforts are not embedded in organisational strategy and culture without management backup.** These solutions did not spark a company-wide implementation in other products. Without a strong sustainability strategy, only regulation ensures a broader adoption of sustainable practices.

**Either way, it's up to the people,** to set out a vision and strategy for a more successful and sustainable company. And to implement such a strategy. The interviewees describing a low level of sustainability implementation report that motivated people drive it. And the interviewees reporting a high level also refer to individuals executing and improving it.



*I believe that it always has to be the management that stands behind such issues, because otherwise it will be very, very, very difficult. On the other hand, it may actually be every single employee.*

Interviewee

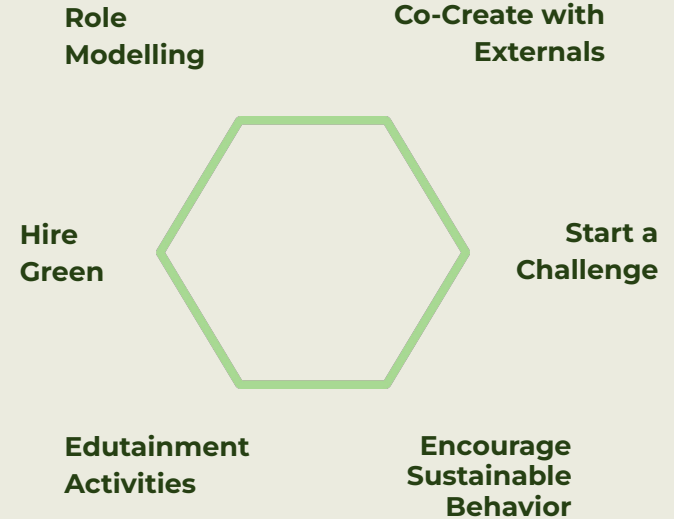


## 5. Get more people to embark on the green journey

If your organisation lacks sustainability-aware employees, various measures can be taken.

1. **Role Modelling:** Lasting change starts from the top. As soon as top management starts to investigate the field of sustainability, employees will follow. Addressing the topic and communicating about it will give the team implicit permission to generate ideas and educate themselves.
2. **Co-Create with Externals:** Sometimes, a fresh perspective will see opportunities that are invisible from the inside. Set up a workshop with partners, customers or suppliers who have a reputation for sustainable knowhow and know your company. Reach out to local universities and see if a group of students can provide you with new ideas.
3. **Start a Challenge:** Set up a challenge or hackathon on sustainable practices driving business success. Keep it internal, invite selected externals or run it open in the public.

4. **Encourage Sustainable Behavior:** As soon as the top management makes a credible start with sustainable initiatives, it's time to encourage team members to follow. Make clear what you expect and walk the talk yourself. Establish an internal community like a Green Team<sup>24</sup>.
5. **Edutainment Activities:** Run initiatives that educate and spark interest, like watching and discussing The Week<sup>25</sup>, playing the Climate Business Challenge<sup>26</sup> or Climate Fresk<sup>27</sup>.
6. **Hire Green:** Add sustainability know-how or a sustainable attitude to your hiring criteria. If you do not have this expertise in-house already, hiring can address this over time.



# 6. PO's influence on a product's sustainability varies.

Product owners' influence on a product's sustainability varies. While **some report a very high impact on a product's sustainability, others see limited power with product owners.** The interviewees provide two dimensions:

## 1. Company Size

**The bigger the organisation, the lower the influence of the individual product owners.** Large organisations typically have highly granular and specialised teams with a range of junior to director roles.

The product scope for the individual product owner might be small. More experts and regulations have a say on specific aspects of the product. Different product owners develop different ways of handling such a situation, where some create a space for more individual influence than others. In a small organisation, fewer colleagues naturally take part in product decisions.

## 2. Personality

**The more transformative the product owner's self-perception, the greater the influence on the product's sustainability.** This aspect is one about the personality and not about the role.

Some product owners consider themselves **implementers** of decisions made by product managers or business managers. In this case, stakeholders mostly make sustainability decisions, and the PO's influence is low.

Other product owners **claim more say** in shaping the product, so likely, their influence is higher. They lead and influence the discussion and, in doing so, transform the organisation.

It is essential to highlight that **there is no right or wrong character trait** here—it has to be a match between strategy, culture, team and individual style.



*I actually believe that deep down, most of us POs want to make the world a better place. I also believe that in our world, where there are so many issues vying for our attention, the topic of sustainability plays too small a role in our jobs. And I firmly believe that you have to start with small steps.*

Interviewee

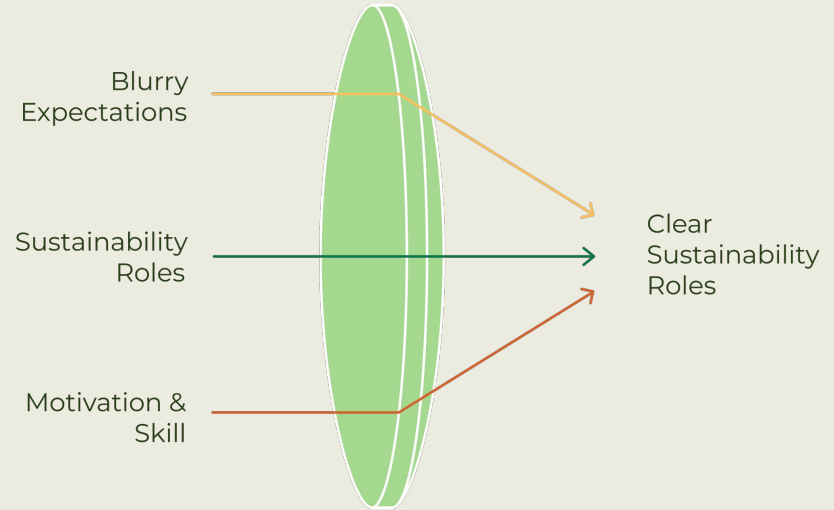
## 6. Clarify roles and expectations

The role of the product owner is specific to the person, the team and the organisation. While the Scrum Guide provides a codified description of the accountabilities a product owner has, there is no universal best incarnation of the product owner that works perfectly in all companies.

Additionally, the **generic product owner description is silent about sustainability**. It has user and business value in mind. It does not make explicit statements about sustainability, neither including nor excluding sustainable aspects. In times of rising sustainability expectations, this can create confusions.

Therefore, it **helps to be aware of mutual expectations and clarify roles and responsibilities**. The following questions can help to provide more clarity.

- Who is expected to enhance the commercial success of which elements of the product?
- Who is expected to integrate environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainability?
- Who is expected to support to what degree?
- Who is motivated in which aspect of the challenge?
- Who feels comfortable driving strategic conversations? Who feels comfortable driving implementation?
- What adaptations to roles and responsibilities might be necessary?





*A common theme across all the interviews I was involved in was low awareness around Digital Sustainability as a problem. It makes sense - with physical products you can literally see your waste pile up; with digital products it is often hidden away from the naked eye. There's definitely an opportunity here to make it more transparent.*

**Sophia Ashley**



# 04

## Conclusion



# Conclusion

The Digital Product Sustainability Pulse Report reveals a **growing awareness but slow adoption** of sustainability in digital product development.

While Product Owners acknowledge their influence over sustainability, knowledge gaps, competing priorities, and lack of organisational commitment hinder progress. Instead, sustainability efforts are often driven by individuals rather than embedded in corporate strategy.

While some sustainable practices are emerging (e.g., accessibility improvements and resource efficiency), their adoption remains low. **Only with leadership support and structured implementation, sustainability efforts will increase their impact** and start to create competitive advantages.

Nevertheless, **pioneers are already paving the way**. These are purpose-driven startups with a green value proposition. And there are also corporate frontrunners, that exploit the business opportunities created by new consumer preferences and regulatory adaptations. Social and environmental sustainability can be a driver of commercial success.

To advance sustainability in digital products, **companies must shift from unstructured individual-driven initiatives to integrated strategies**. Future progress depends on:

1. **Strategies that integrate sustainability** into the value generation process..
2. **Embedding sustainability KPIs** into product success metrics.
3. **Educating product professionals** about the elements of sustainability for digital products.
4. **Product Directors leading the change** from the top serving as role model to support team initiatives.
5. **Application of the agile mindset** the journey of digital sustainability is just about to start.

Sustainability in digital products is still in its early stages, but as awareness grows and best practices evolve, **organisations that embrace sustainability as a strategic priority will gain long-term business advantages**.

**Product Owners are well equipped for this journey**. POs have the motivation to shape the world through their products. POs have the mandate to make product decisions. POs have the experience to deal with trade-offs.

**Sooner or later, sustainability will be part of all major digital product KPI**. The environmental conditions will prescribe more and more awareness of that field. Also matters of social sustainability will remain relevant in significant areas of the world.

**The POs that start early will have an edge** in integrating the various aspects of sustainability and make it work for the product they are responsible for. They will be able to act, whereas the others will need to react.

Technology changes the world. **It's on us to make sure that these changes are beneficial to the customers, the business, the environment and society**.



*Product Owners play a key role in making software greener by shaping priorities and decisions. By keeping sustainability in focus from the start and throughout the development lifecycle, and by influencing teams and stakeholders, they help ensure software is not only useful but also long-lasting and environmentally responsible.*

**Liam Kerley,**  
**Product Principal, AND Digital**



# Thank you

Thanks to all the product owners who took the time for an interview and gave us an insight into their everyday lives.

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