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THE FUTURE OF IT IS SUSTAINABLE IT:

Why Now Is the Time for Sustainable Technology Transformation

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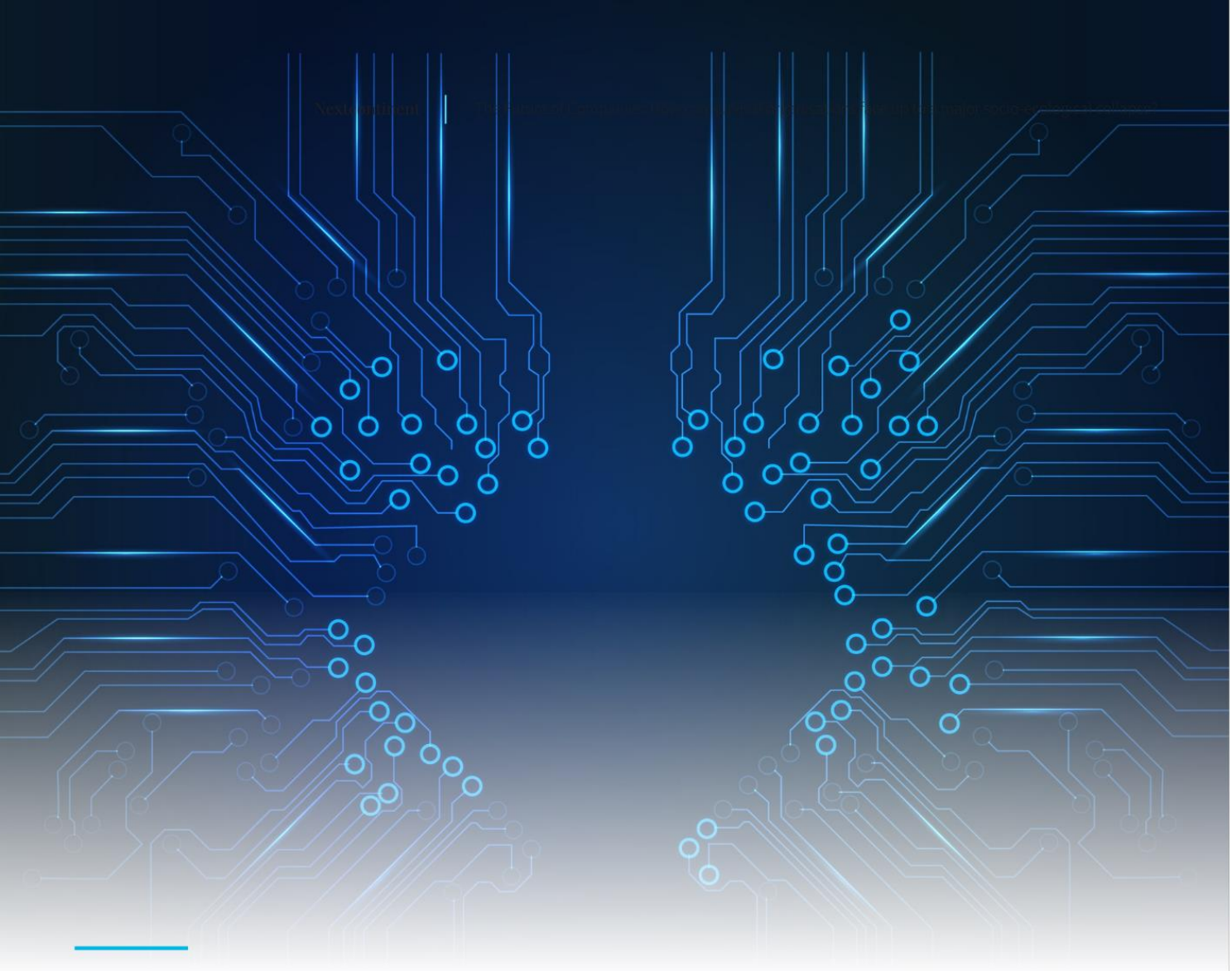

Introduction

The business landscape has shifted dramatically. Customers, employees, investors, and the broader public are demanding more responsible digital practices, and this pressure is reshaping how technology is funded, developed, and delivered across entire organisations. ESG alignment with IT commitments has moved from CSR departments to the core of business operations.

Regulatory frameworks are becoming stricter. European directives like the CSRD and AI Act are raising the bar on transparency, data governance, and accountability. Digital and IT functions now operate under the same ESG scrutiny as financial or operational departments.

But here's the real opportunity: sustainable IT creates value beyond regulatory compliance. It drives resource efficiency, opens new business models, and builds long-term trust.

The Stakes Are Real: Stakeholder Expectations and Regulatory Pressure

Stakeholders expect companies to align their technological practices with their ESG commitments. This stems from ethical concerns (algorithmic biases, privacy violations), environmental concerns (digital CO2 emissions now exceed civil aviation), and societal concerns (cybersecurity and misinformation risks).

Companies must assess technological choices based on overall impact through sustainable digital infrastructures, algorithmic transparency, systems security, and digital inclusion. Examples include Microsoft and Google's carbon neutral cloud infrastructures and Google's "Model Cards" transparency reports.

The CSRD requires European companies to provide standardised non-financial reporting. The European AI Act strengthens data regulation by integrating with existing GDPR frameworks.

Start with Diagnosis: The Sustainability Impact Assessment

Use Case - UK Insurance provider
This mission-led company wanted to cut paper use and IT-related carbon emissions. A baseline assessment revealed the main sources of impact. A carbon simulator was then built to compare footprints of different initiatives in build and run phases. With new governance and support tools, the company reduced paper use by half and set a roadmap to lower IT emissions by one third.
Lesson: Facts create momentum for change.

The first step is clarity: assess where your organisation stands and where impact can be made. The Sustainability Impact Assessment (SIA) provides this baseline, evaluating economic, environmental, and social impacts.

The SIA's value depends on high-quality ESG data. This requires rethinking data architecture to be decentralised, business-driven, and aligned with operational priorities. ESG data has unique characteristics requiring new data sources and applications.

We recommend a decentralised "data mesh" model organising data by business domains, fostering innovation through team autonomy and ownership.

Building and Acting on the Plan: Three Guiding Principles

Three principles should guide leaders in designing digital ESG strategies: transparency, collaboration, and innovation. Clear communication strengthens stakeholder trust. Engagement with ecosystems promotes initiative impact through collective action. Continuous innovation enables adoption of sustainable practices.

Companies can set clear ESG goals through "entreprise à mission" status or B Corp certification. Operationally, companies can achieve carbon neutrality through energy efficiency, sobriety, and offsetting.

Sustainable IT Throughout the Product Lifecycle

The pandemic showcased digital technology power. Remote work led to a 30% drop in greenhouse gas emissions due to reduced commuting in the UK. Digital transformation must serve a broader purpose: enhancing resilience, sustainability, and shared value creation.

Embedding ESG considerations throughout the product lifecycle is key. Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) software tracks products from design to disposal. AI supports improvements, balancing operational efficiency and sustainability.

Digital tools reinforce circular economy principles: 49% of companies have supply chain sustainability goals; 70% plan recycling investments. AI forecasts demand, identifies low-emission products, and plans efficient routes. Unilever illustrates blockchain-powered transparency in its tea supply chain.

Mobilising Stakeholders: The IT Engagement Roadmap

A 4-step framework addresses People, Process, and Culture:

1. Educate and engage employees through seminars and workshops
2. Establish taskforces—cross-functional teams beyond IT
3. Measure and report progress with KPIs aligned with sustainability targets
4. Foster continuous improvement through iterative processes

Use Case - Ethical AI in the public sector

A European public agency designed an ethical AI framework for employment services. Employees co-designed solutions to identify risks. An external ethics committee oversaw progress. A tailored "risk barometer" monitored AI issues as technology evolved.

This participatory approach fostered a culture of "AI with conscience" that continues to guide decisions, even with new challenges like generative AI.

IT departments should coordinate with communication teams to amplify sustainability messaging. Every digital channel should convey consistent ESG commitments.

The Time to Act Is Now

Sustainable IT is no longer a question of if, but how. The organisations that act now with structure, intention, and realism will be best positioned to meet tomorrow's challenges.

Start by setting a vision, defining KPIs, and capturing relevant data. The next step is to embark teams in the transformation movement and foster continuous improvement.

Sustainable Digital & IT represents regulatory demand, customer expectation, and employee requirement. This pressure can drive value creation and innovation. The question is not whether sustainable IT transformation is necessary : it's how quickly your organisation can implement it.

The organisations that embrace this transformation today will be the market leaders of tomorrow.

Thank you

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