Achieving Digital Transformation and Sustainability Goals Simultaneously

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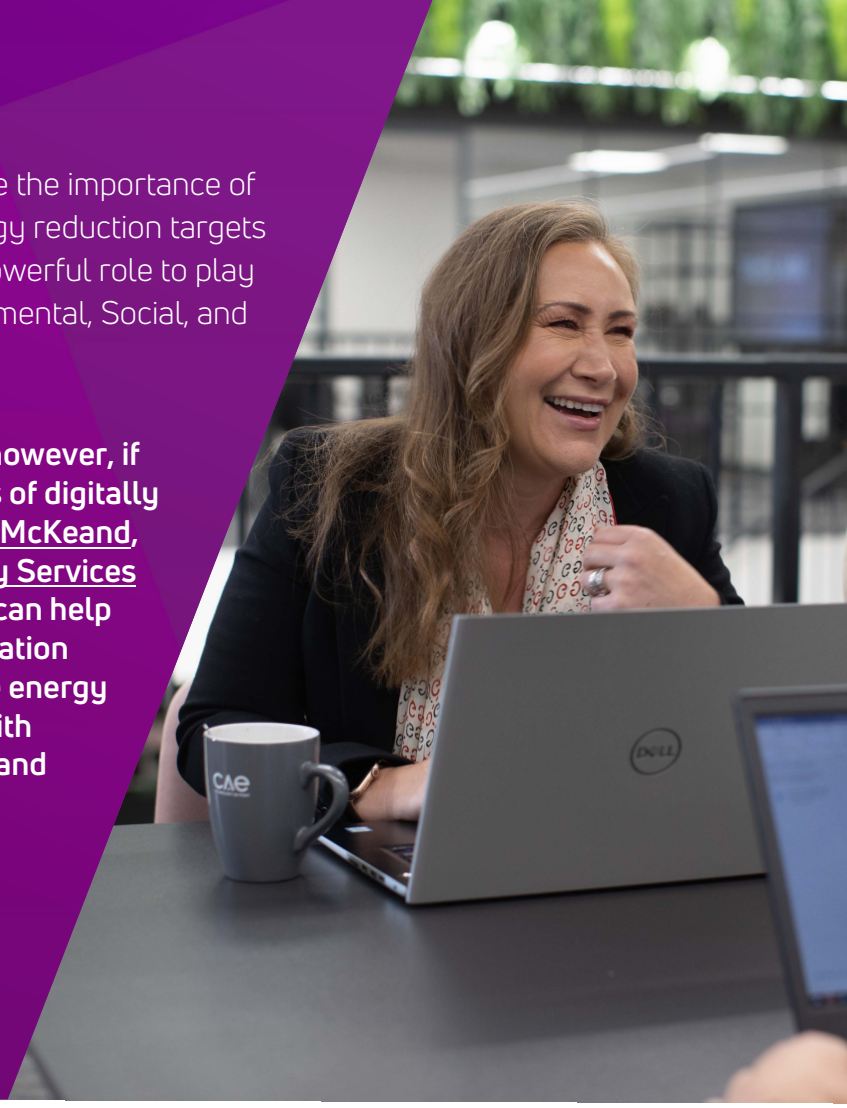
While digital transformation continues apace, delivering much-needed improvement in operational performance across both public and private sectors, there is growing recognition that IT cannot remain the villain in climate change.

With the government continuing to reinforce the importance of sustainable goals and supporting new energy reduction targets with dedicated funding, technology has a powerful role to play if organisations are to achieve their Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) commitments.

A significant mindset change is essential, however, if organisations are to achieve the twin goals of digitally enabled automation and sustainability. Ali McKeand, Strategic Innovation Lead, CAE Technology Services Ltd (CAE), explains how the right partners can help organisations to combine digital transformation with sustainability to both radically reduce energy consumption, and provide organisations with the foundation for continual improvement and innovation across the entire ESG strategy.



Digital Enabler

The conflict between IT investment and carbon reduction commitments has been long acknowledged. Data centres alone account for up to 1.5% of global energy consumption, projected to rise to 8% by 2030 if changes are not made.

For organisations, especially those in the public sector facing ever more severe and punitive carbon scrutiny, the balance between technology innovation to support essential change and meeting environmental pledges has appeared hard to reconcile.

But is this really the case? Growing numbers of organisations are transforming energy consumption strategies across the existing IT infrastructure, in part by changing the thinking.

Why, for example, is the super-efficient network infrastructure used to deliver teaching across an entire school system still running when the school is closed? Why is a communications cabinet powered up all weekend when no one is in the building? New thinking, backed up with effective power monitoring and management tools, is cutting both environmental and financial costs.

This is a very significant shift in perspective and IT partners have a key role to play in supporting organisations of any size and across all industries to challenge the norms. Technology acquisition and implementation should not be considered solely upon an immediate operational need, such as improving the quality and security of communication across a business, but in its potential to also support green objectives.

Continuous Thinking

Challenging the 'always on' mentality is not straightforward when IT operations have been predicated on 24x7 running for decades.

A different approach will only be achieved if organisations have access to frictionless solutions that can not only automate the switch on and off management processes but also provide the information to support cultural change and collaboration between digital and sustainability teams.

With fast access to intuitive power information, organisations can both make and prove quick wins that will save costs and support green pledges.

At one UK council, for example, the use of our energy cost reduction and decarbonisation solution, has eliminated 52% of wasted energy, saved an estimated 1.5 tonnes of carbon emissions each month, and significantly reduced operational costs with zero impact on the 20,000 pupils and teaching staff.

Crucially, the platform – which is free to public sector organisations – took under five minutes to identify and measure energy consumption, define and implement a power management strategy across the Cisco network environment that supports its 70 schools.

Just consider the impact: in under five minutes, the entire network was power optimised, saving £3,000 per month and making huge strides towards meeting the council's 2030 carbon neutral target.

While this one-off change delivered immediate environmental and financial value, the ongoing reporting is also a significant asset. It allows the organisation to address one of the biggest challenges in maintaining the sustainability journey namely, measuring the impact.

Month-on-month reports updating everyone from the IT and carbon reduction teams to the Chief Financial Officer (CFO), significantly increases insight into and understanding of the progress achieved across the ESG strategy.

Continuous Improvements

Digital technologies offer organisations so much more than simply measuring their carbon reduction journey. They have the ability to make a circular economy possible, by supporting an organisation's entire sustainability strategy through enabling innovation and collaboration, as well as monitoring sustainability progress and optimising the use of resources.

In addition to improving awareness of environmental performance, better understanding and reporting of power consumption can inspire different teams to come together to find solutions. For example, it can encourage collaboration with IT and facilities management, using IoT monitoring to embrace not only more energy-focused building management but also creating a better working environment to improve health and wellbeing.

One school using our IoT sensors to track air quality within classrooms, for example, discovered a significant disparity in temperatures across the building, with the temperature peaking at an unacceptable 30 degrees Centigrade.

This information was used to hold the building contractor to account, leading to new windows and better ventilation. Additional insight can highlight simple and easily remediated problems, such as cleaners using products that affect the quality of the teaching space.

Simply monitoring the humidity, temperature and noise within buildings can provide organisations with crucial evidence to make important changes to deliver individual health and well-being.

Digitally delivered information is the foundation for effective strategies that support every part of the ESG strategy.

Collaborative Thinking

Attitudes are changing fast as organisations in both public and private sectors recognise the value of building bridges between IT and sustainability. 40% of respondents in a recent survey believe that digital technologies are already having a positive impact on their sustainability goals, while a report by the European Commission's science and knowledge service (JRC) insists, "successfully managing the green and digital 'twin' transitions is the cornerstone for delivering a sustainable, fair, and competitive future."

Furthermore, Gartner named environmental sustainability an "IT sourcing imperative" for 2023. It predicts that by 2026, 70% of tech and procurement leaders will have sustainability-aligned performance objectives in place. There is, of course, a difference between setting and delivering objectives: organisations will struggle to achieve this shift if technology suppliers fail to adapt.

The right partner is key to supporting, even enabling, the collaboration between IT and sustainability. Businesses need to work with a supplier that is not just selling digital transformation, but actively seeking value realisation across a wider remit that includes carbon reduction and green initiatives.

A supplier that can also help with access to 'green' grants and supportive funding will also fast-track sustainability strategies. To successfully embrace a new era of sustainability-led digital transformation will require different thinking – from both organisations and their IT partners.

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