

How does a business begin to become sustainable?

Sustainability. You hear about it everywhere. In the media that talks about new reporting regulations, your customers who are asking for more transparency, your employees who want to work for a company that takes its responsibility towards the environment and people seriously. You have a growing interest in the topic because you do want to be the person that will turn your company into a greener, more profitable business respectful of its workers, consumers and suppliers. But where do you start?

A life-cycle assessment (LCA) is a great first step. An LCA is a deep dive into the environmental footprint of a product through its life. Following international standards, a process map of a product is developed and using science-based data organized in different impact categories, it is possible to evaluate to what extent it affects our planet. Such an exercise is particularly helpful in a number of cases:

- when a company is looking to understand better the environmental footprint of one of its products, doing an LCA makes it possible to identify areas of greatest impact and therefore of biggest potential for improvements.
- This tool can also be particularly useful when wanting to investigate the impact of changing externals such as, for example, the deployment of a new technology.
- It can also be helpful when wanting to compare similar solutions and choose which one is exhausting our planet's boundaries the least. The results of an LCA are transparent, comparable and immediately actionable.

More generally, doing an LCA can highlight huge business opportunities. Using the findings of the exercise, there are countless examples of companies that successfully reduced costs for example through a process of waste valuation or reduced quantities of material as well as energy costs. In addition, businesses are able to lower operational risks by shortening their supply-chain, strengthening their relationship with their suppliers and improving their

resource efficiency. Also critical to the sustainable success of any business, by doing an LCA and implementing long-lasting changes that will benefit people and planet, companies improve their corporate image, can benefit from a competitive advantage but also see significant employee satisfaction.

An LCA is an interesting first-step towards becoming more sustainable because it can be relatively easy to complete in a short-time due to its focus on one product. Businesses are then left with concrete results that can be turned into actionable changes as they begin to understand what their material impacts (product's transport, type of material chosen etc.) are and what to do about it (change routes, reduce weight of product, substitute material or change supplier etc.). Finally, as a first insight into a company's environmental footprint, the results of an LCA can form the foundations for the development of a full-fledged sustainability strategy including planet and people, to integrate into its business strategy.