iMPU survey results: Getting started

When starting out on the implementation of ecodesign activities within a company it is important to identify the drivers and barriers for ecodesign that exist. Understanding the drivers will enable you to focus the ecodesign activities on the key areas that will deliver business benefits for the company. Understanding the barriers will allow you to take action early in the implementation process to overcome these barriers, before they become a roadblock to progress.

Drivers

In the survey, we asked the question: *What do you think were the three main drivers for your company to start taking environmental initiatives in product development?* (Figure 1.).

Legislation (50%) was the most frequently cited driver for starting evironmental initiatives, with EU Directives on hazardous substances (RoHS, REACH), end-of-life recycling (WEEE) and energy use (ErP) specifically mentioned by several respondents in their comments.

The second most frequently cited driver was *our customer demanded it* (45%). Given that both customer demand and legislation are both drivers originating from outside the company, it would seem that the majority of companies are still responding reactively to drivers for ecodesign.

However, there are some companies that recognised the potential business benefits of ecodesign (and potential risks of inaction), with some 33% of respondents stating that a key driver for their company was *to be proactive and avoid potentially bad publicity.*

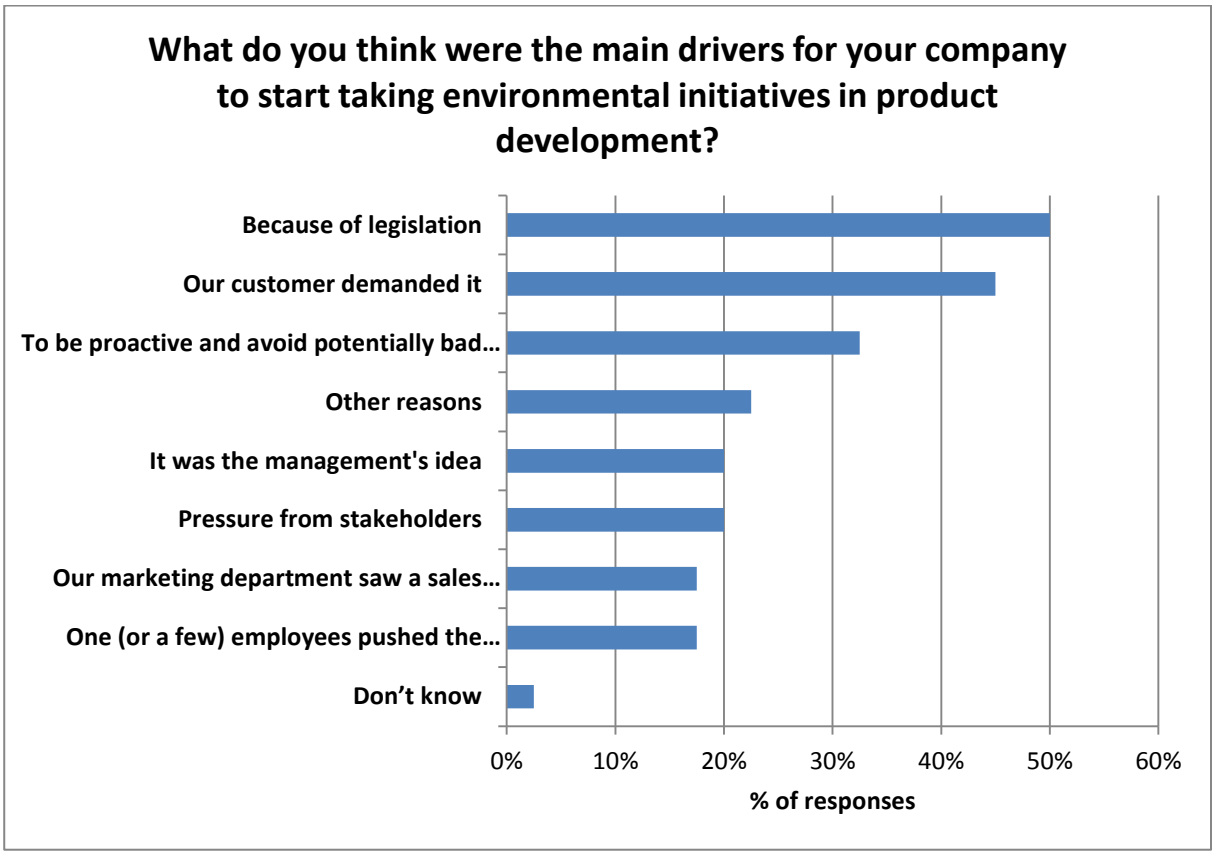

Figure 1. Responses (n=40) to the question: *"What do you think were the three main drivers for your company to start taking environmental initiatives in product development? "*

The main drivers for initiating ecodesign activities continue to be relevant , even when the company has been doing ecodesign for some time. When asked *what do you think are the drivers for the continuation of environmental initiatives in product development in your company?*, the four main drivers identified were (n=40):

- Sustainable products create a competitive edge (93% strongly or slightly agree)
- Customer demand for environmental initiatives in product development (85% strongly or slightly agree)
- Current legislative demands (85% strongly or slightly agree)
- To be at forefront of future legislative demands (83% strongly or slightly agree)

It was also found that the drivers for ecodesign appear to be strengthening as when asked "D*o you feel that the focus on environmental initiatives in product development in your company is increasing or decreasing?"*, the vast majority (76%) of respondents felt that the focus on environmental initiatives was increasing.

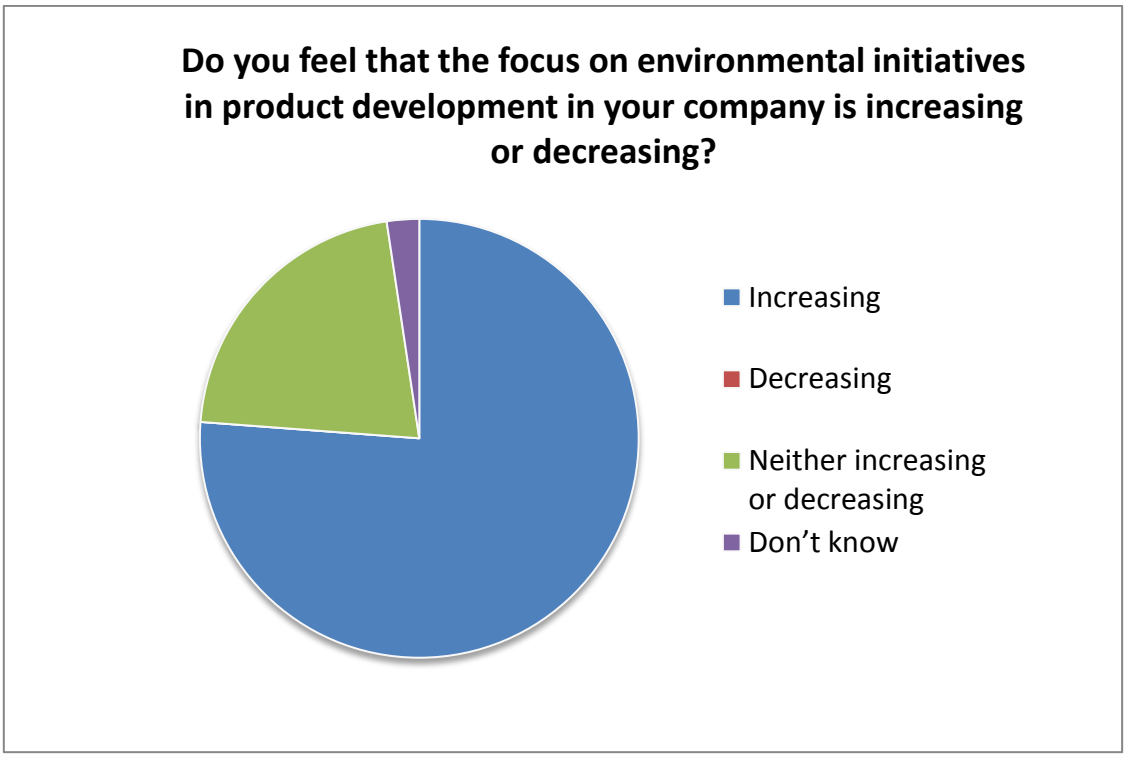

Figure 2. Responses (n=42) to the question: "*Do you feel that the focus on environmental initiatives in product development in your company is increasing or decreasing?"*

Barriers

The top two responses to the question: "*When you first started using environmental initiatives in your product development process what were/are the most difficult barriers to overcome?"* (n=25), both related to the difficulty in finding the necessary information on environmental impacts, either in general, or specifically on alternative materials and components. There is an obvious role for software tools in helping to overcome this barrier, which is discussed further in the Tools and Methods section. This confirms there is still an as yet unmet need for tools that can be used by designers and engineers that can provide them with quick and easy access to the information they need about the environmental impacts of products, components and materials.

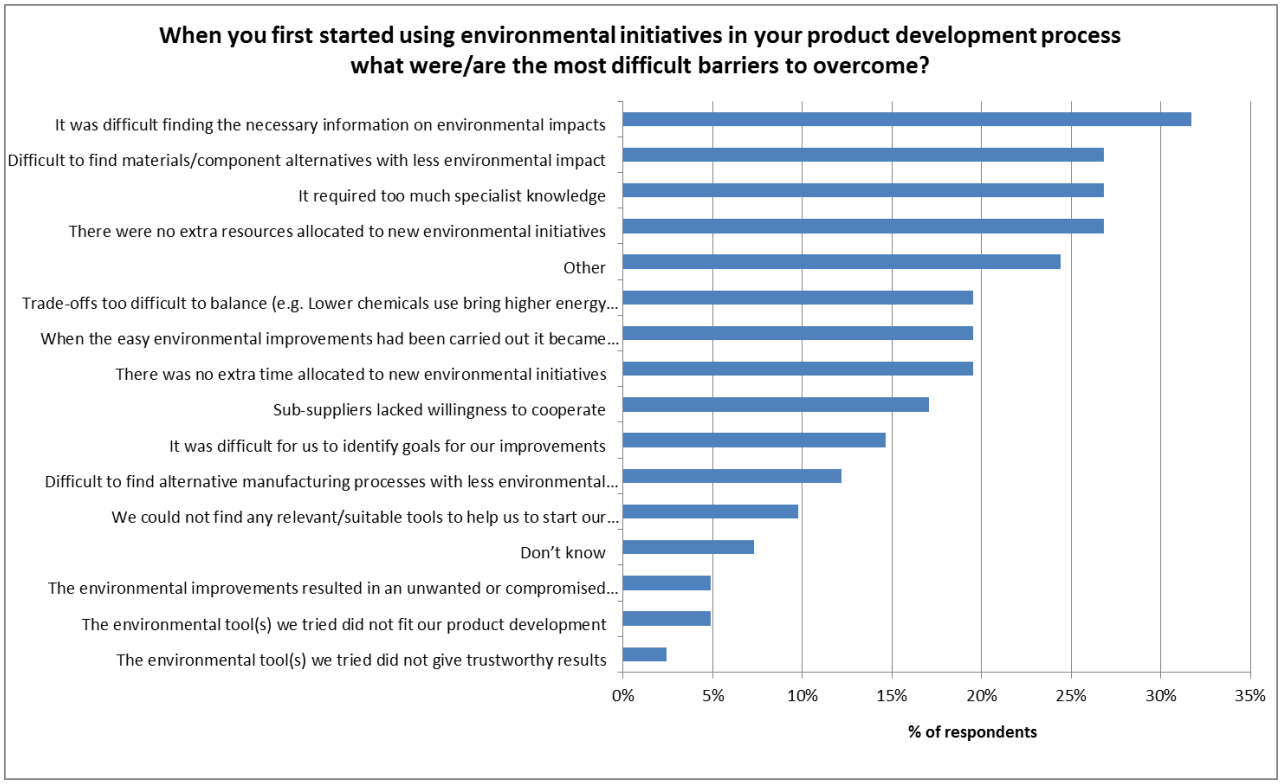

Figure 3. Responses (n=25) to the question: "*When you first started using environmental initiatives in your product development process what were/are the most difficult barriers to overcome?*"

Another significant barrier identified was the requirement for specialist knowledge in order to begin ecodesign activities (27%). From our experience, the theory and application of "Life Cycle Assessment" is often considered the most demanding topic by practitioners who are attempting to implement ecodesign activities for the first time. However, whilst it is important for everybody involved in the ecodesign activities to have a basic understanding of the life cycle of the product and its environmental impacts, it is not necessary for everybody to have in-depth knowledge of specialists areas such as Life Cycle Assessment. Hence, there is potential to overcome this barrier by implementing a smart organisational structure and training program in order to avoid overburdening practitioners with more specialist ecodesign knowledge than they require for their particular role – see the Competencies section for further information on this topic.

Including environmental considerations within product development will inevitably require some additional time and effort but it seems that most companies cannot afford to provide additional resource within projects to compensate for this. The lack of additional resources (27%) and time (20%) were therefore cited by many respondents as difficult barriers to overcome.

When asked about how to overcome the major barriers they had mentioned, the respondents had a variety of approaches and ideas, such as:

- *"Ecodesign must be seen as a way to increase the value of the product, rather than be seen as an additional cost (time and resources) in the development."*
- *"Sourced expertise from external consultants."*
- *"…we need quite simple methods to get an understanding of 80% of the impacts with 20% of the effort."*

- *"…Often the engineering and design specialists do not know where the issues are, so the next step is to start setting up improvement targets for the key issues."*
- *"...the lack of data was solved by performing a global LCA with simplified data. This was sufficient to work for internal purposes."*
- *"Trained our Procurement staff so that they in turn can educate suppliers on environmental issues."*

Overall, we see many opportunities to address the major barriers identified through smart organisational structures for ecodesign, training, and more effective use of tools. These topics are discussed further in the relevant sections.