GreeNEWS #15

Keeping sustainability operational: a lightweight dashboard idea

In many SMEs, sustainability starts as a project: a new initiative, a workshop, a short-term plan. The intention is usually strong. What often proves difficult is keeping the topic visible once daily priorities take over.

One point worth considering is that sustainability tends to remain "alive" in organisations when it can be reviewed in a similar way to quality, output, or lead time: regularly, with clear ownership, and in a format that supports everyday decisions. Not necessarily a large reporting structure – sometimes just a small set of indicators that helps people notice trends early.

A common issue: dashboards that look good but don't get used

A frequent pattern is that companies build sustainability dashboards that are comprehensive, but not practical. They contain too many metrics, rely on data that is hard to collect, and appear mainly when reporting deadlines approach. In that setup, sustainability can start to feel like administration rather than management.

A different approach – at least as a starting point – could be to focus on a smaller dashboard that is simple enough to review consistently, even if it is not "perfect" from a reporting perspective.

A proposal: six numbers that might be enough to start

If the goal is to keep sustainability connected to operations, an initial dashboard could be built around a small set of manufacturing-relevant signals. For many SMEs, the following categories may be a reasonable starting point:

1. **Energy cost per month** (cost can be easier to discuss than kWh)
2. **Energy intensity per unit** (a basic "how much energy per product" view)
3. **Scrap rate** (ideally visible beyond a single company-wide average)
4. **Waste cost per month** (including handling and treatment, not only disposal)
5. **Share of waste recycled or reused** (even if approximate at the beginning)

6. **One stability indicator** that reflects process health (e.g., rework, downtime, late-stage rejects)

This is not meant as a definitive ESG model, it is simply a suggestion for an operational baseline that might help identify where losses and risks concentrate.

Why this might be useful

One reason this approach can be attractive is that it reframes sustainability as something measurable and reviewable, not only reportable. For example, if scrap or rework rises, this is not just a "waste" topic – it may signal process instability, quality variation, or maintenance issues. In that sense, even a small ESG dashboard can sometimes act as an early-warning system for operational performance.

A practical point to consider

If an SME tries this approach for a short period (for example, a few months), it may become clearer whether the indicators are meaningful, whether the organisation can own the data, and whether the review rhythm is realistic. Only then does it make sense to decide whether the dashboard should be expanded – towards supply chain topics, product footprint, or formal reporting requirements.