

Insights on New Zealand Sustainability Professionals

2020 Report



Foreword

Over the last twenty years, sustainability has moved from being a grass roots movement in New Zealand organisations to executives and directors now increasingly having a fiscal responsibility for it. Sustainability is becoming embedded into their strategies and business practices and this has seen the rise of dedicated sustainability roles. Organisations are seeking to understand where these roles should sit in their business, their remit and support requirements. Students are seeking out these purposeful roles and learning institutes are increasingly integrating sustainability into academic pathways.

Oxygen Consulting in collaboration with the Auckland University of Technology (AUT), Sustainable Business Council (SBC), and Sustainable Business Network (SBN), provide an in depth look at the role of the New Zealand sustainability professional in this report.

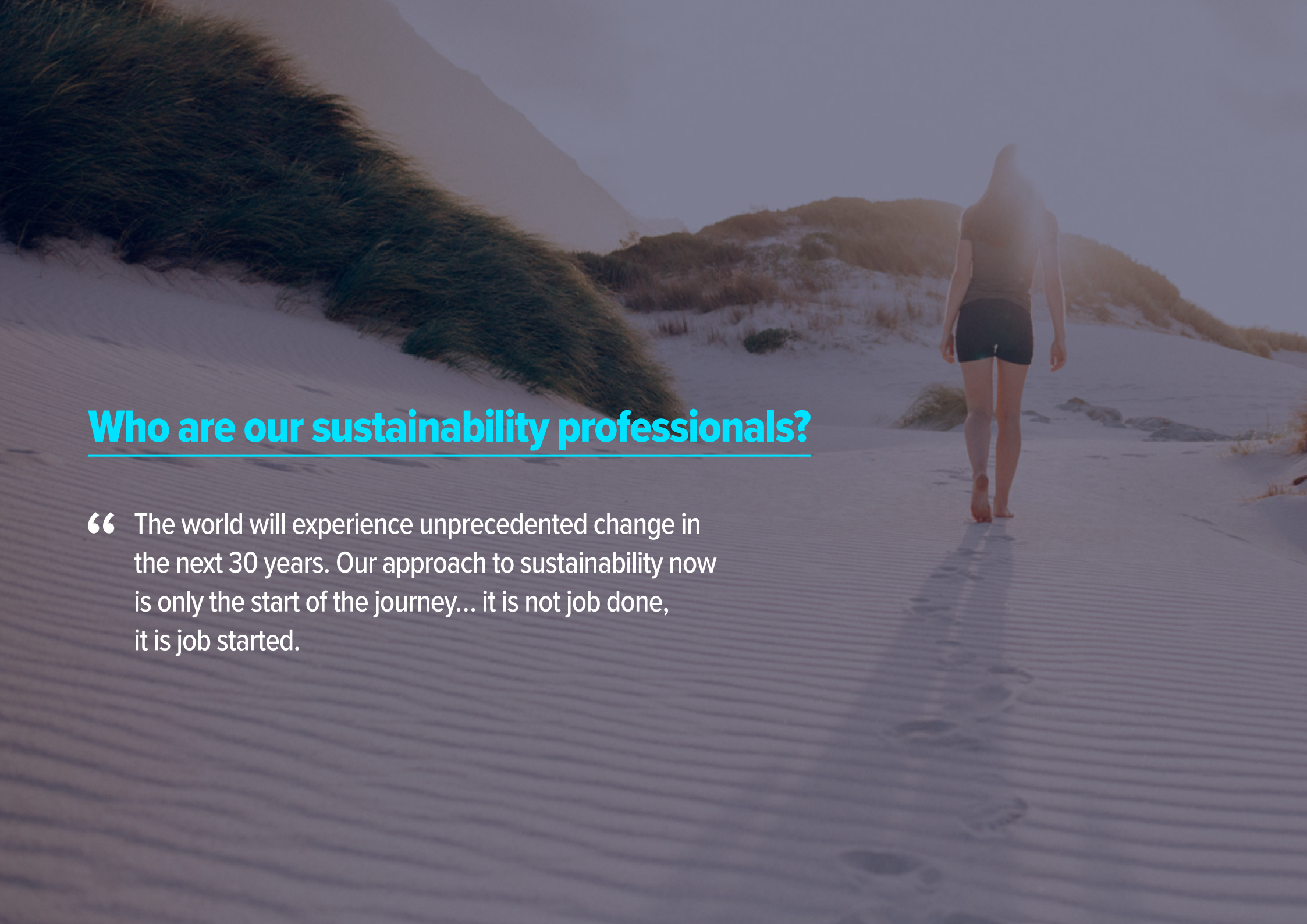
It follows the research that was undertaken during February – March 2020, which surveyed 130 New Zealand sustainability professionals. The research was conducted in accordance with AUT's Ethics Committee processes (AUTEK Reference number 20/35).

'Sustainability' includes responsibilities that address the social, environmental and economic risks to the organisation. Participants included those in full time, part time or contractual positions within public, private and not for profit sectors.

The purpose of this report is to help grow the sustainability profession. It removes the mystery of these roles so that they can become more accessible to individuals, and gives organisations a basis and structure for establishing and supporting them. It identifies the capabilities and technical expertise necessary in sustainability positions, to assist in guiding academic pathways towards careers in sustainability. It also provides insight to the key challenges faced in these roles and enablers for success.

We welcome your feedback and the opportunity to support your sustainability journey through this research.

Dr. Sarah Holden, Director Oxygen Consulting

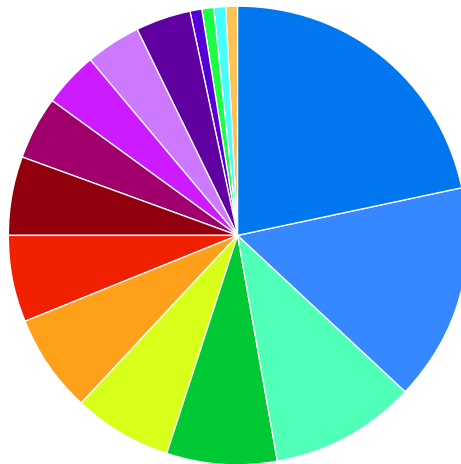
A person with long hair, wearing a dark top and shorts, is walking away from the camera on a sandy dune. The scene is set at sunset or sunrise, with a warm, golden light. The dunes are covered in sparse, dry vegetation. The sky is a mix of orange and blue.

Who are our sustainability professionals?

“ The world will experience unprecedented change in the next 30 years. Our approach to sustainability now is only the start of the journey... it is not job done, it is job started.

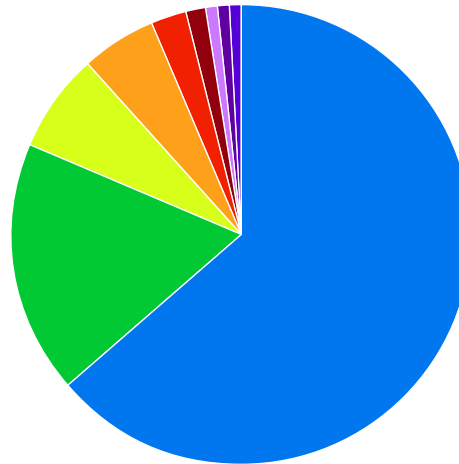
Sustainability professionals are employed across a broad range of sectors, mostly by larger businesses with a strong Auckland and Wellington presence

Sectors employing sustainability professionals



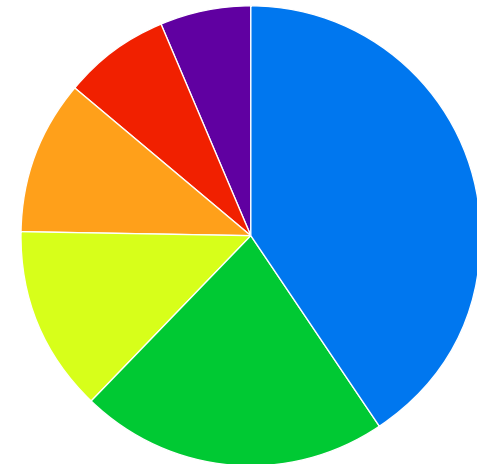
- 22% Professional, Scientific, Technical, Administrative and Support Services
- 15% Other
- 10% Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services
- 8% Public Administration and Safety
- 7% Education and Training
- 7% Financial and Insurance Services
- 6% Manufacturing
- 5% Agriculture, Farming and Fishing
- 5% Transport, Postal and Warehousing
- 4% Construction
- 4% Health Care and Social Assistance
- 4% Information Media and Telecommunications
- 1% Arts, Recreation and Other Services
- 1% Mining
- 1% Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services
- 1% Retail Trade and Accommodation

Location of sustainability professionals



- 64% Auckland
- 18% Wellington
- 7% Canterbury
- 5% Bay of Plenty
- 2% Waikato
- 2% Marlborough
- 1% Northland
- 1% Otago
- 1% Taranaki

Size of organisation where sustainability professional works

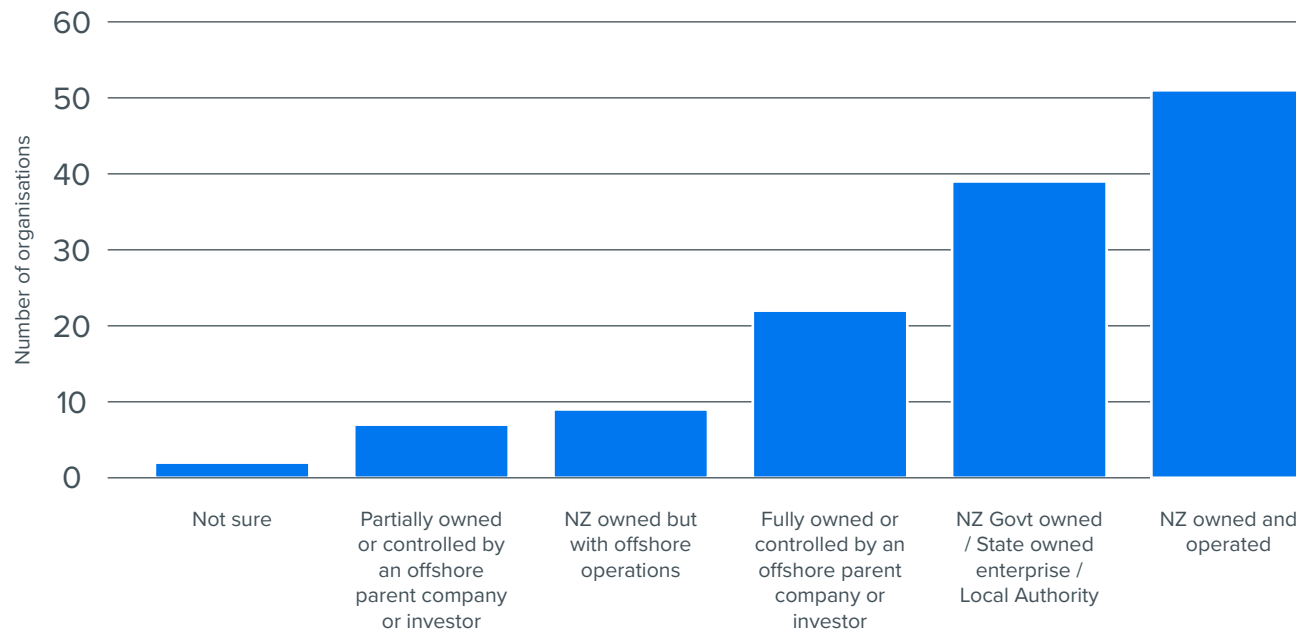


- 41% 1000+ employees
- 22% 250-1000 employees
- 13% 1-9 employees
- 11% 50-249 employees
- 8% 10-19 employees
- 6% 20-49 employees

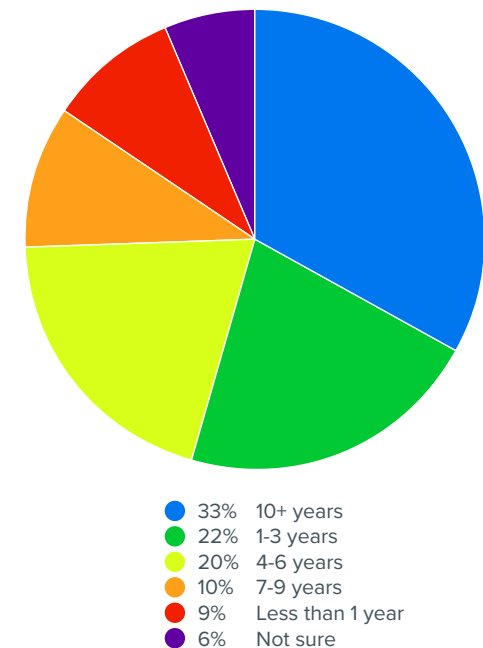
76%

of sustainability professionals are in New Zealand owned organisations. Most organisations have been on their sustainability journey for at least four years

Organisational ownership structures

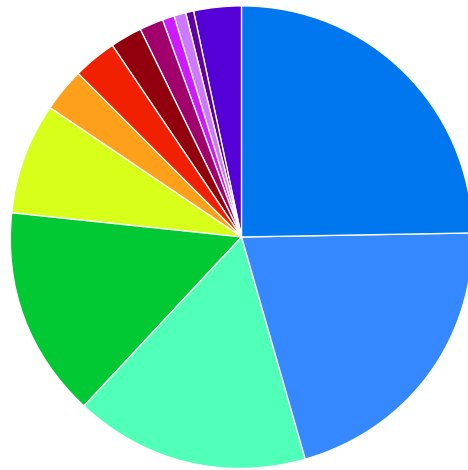


Length of time organisation has had a sustainability focus



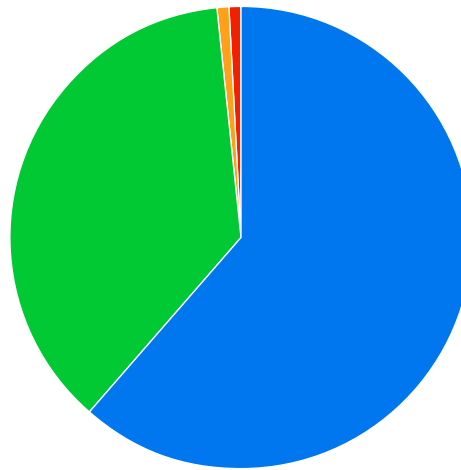
Females aged between 26-45 dominate the sustainability profession and most identify with New Zealand ethnicities

Ethnicity split of sustainability professionals



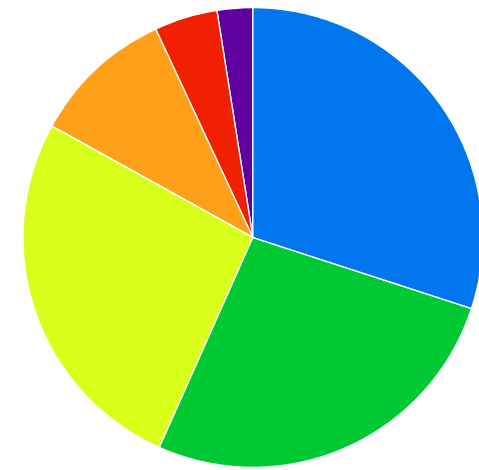
- 25% New Zealand European
- 21% Pākehā
- 16% New Zealander
- 15% European
- 8% Mixed ethnicity
- 3% Māori
- 3% UK
- 2% Indian
- 1% Chinese
- 1% Asian
- 1% Australian
- 1% South African
- 3% Undisclosed

Gender split of sustainability professionals



- 61% Female
- 37% Male
- 1% Non-binary
- 1% Prefer not to disclose

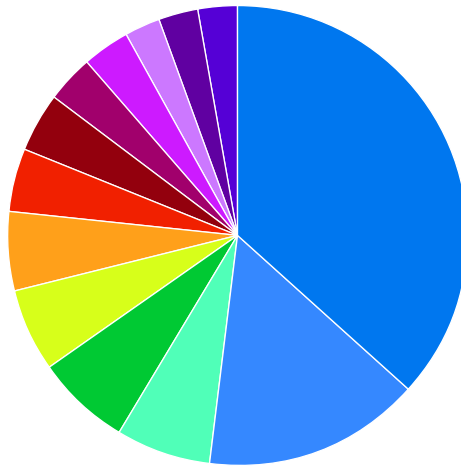
Age split of sustainability professionals



- 30% 36-45
- 27% 26-35
- 26% 46-55
- 10% 18-25
- 5% 56-65
- 2% Prefer not to disclose

95% of sustainability professionals hold a tertiary degree, with many having focused on science or business

Sustainability professionals' tertiary qualification spread



- 37% Bachelor of Science
- 15% Bachelor of Commerce
- 7% Bachelor of Arts
- 7% Other
- 6% No Tertiary Degree
- 5% Master of Science
- 5% Bachelor of Engineering
- 4% Bachelor of Applied Management/Business Management
- 3% Master of Business Administration
- 3% Diploma
- 3% Bachelor of Communications
- 3% Bachelor of Law
- 3% Bachelor of Design

“ I think people get the idea that learning sustainability is easy, but in reality, you need tertiary qualifications for this field.

“ Sustainability requires a variety of skills... I do not think there is one tertiary qualification out there that fully encompasses what is required of the role.

Sustainability professionals bring diverse skills and experiences to the profession, having held a wide range of vocations prior to their role in sustainability



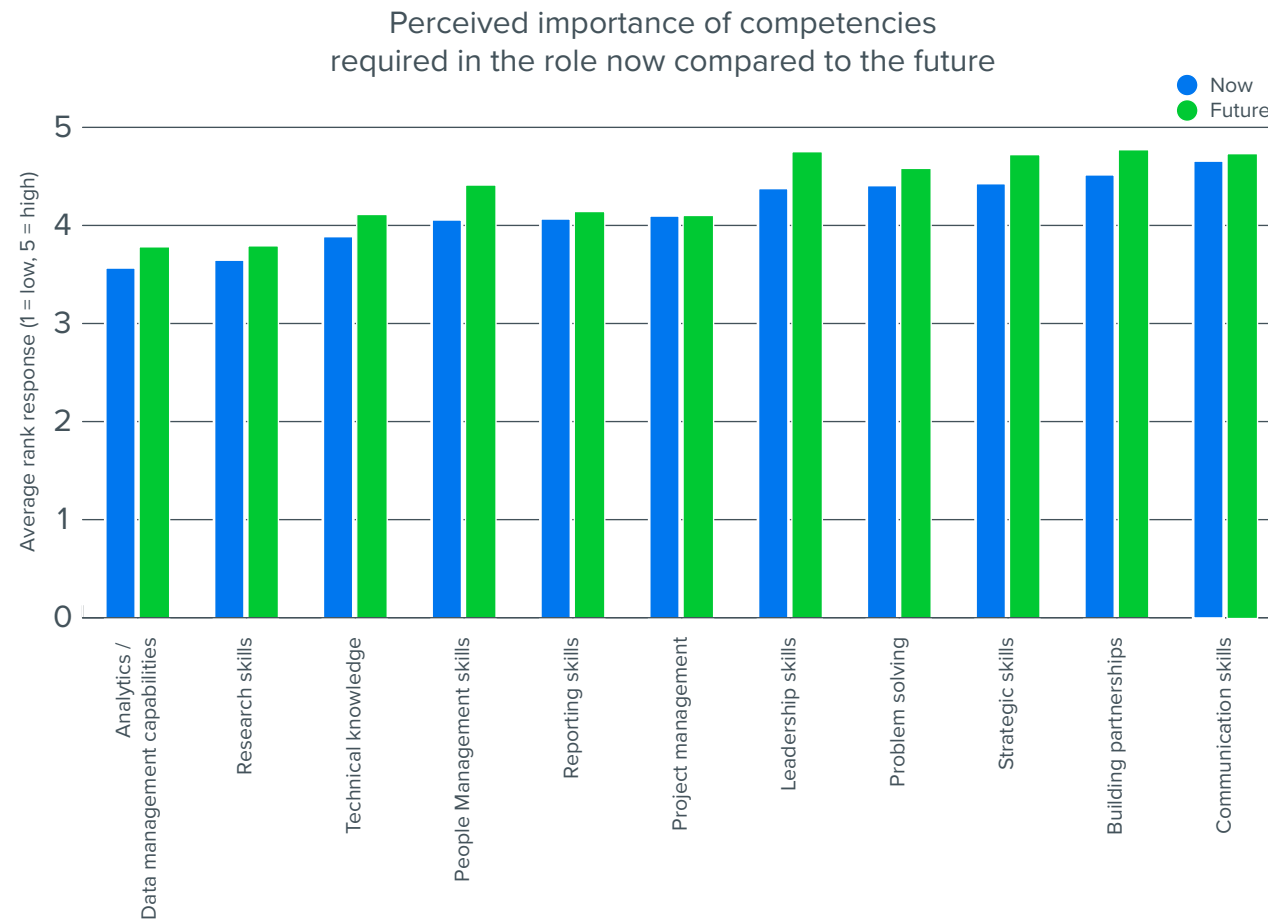
Word sizing relates to how frequently vocation was identified

What are the role competencies and responsibilities?

“ The key to this role is the ability to inspire and influence others and to be an effective ‘multi-solver’. Our best approach is to convene, facilitate and enable others to act. We must be a catalyst for change.



Communication skills, building partnerships, strategic skills, problem solving and leadership skills are the top five competencies for sustainability professionals now and into the future

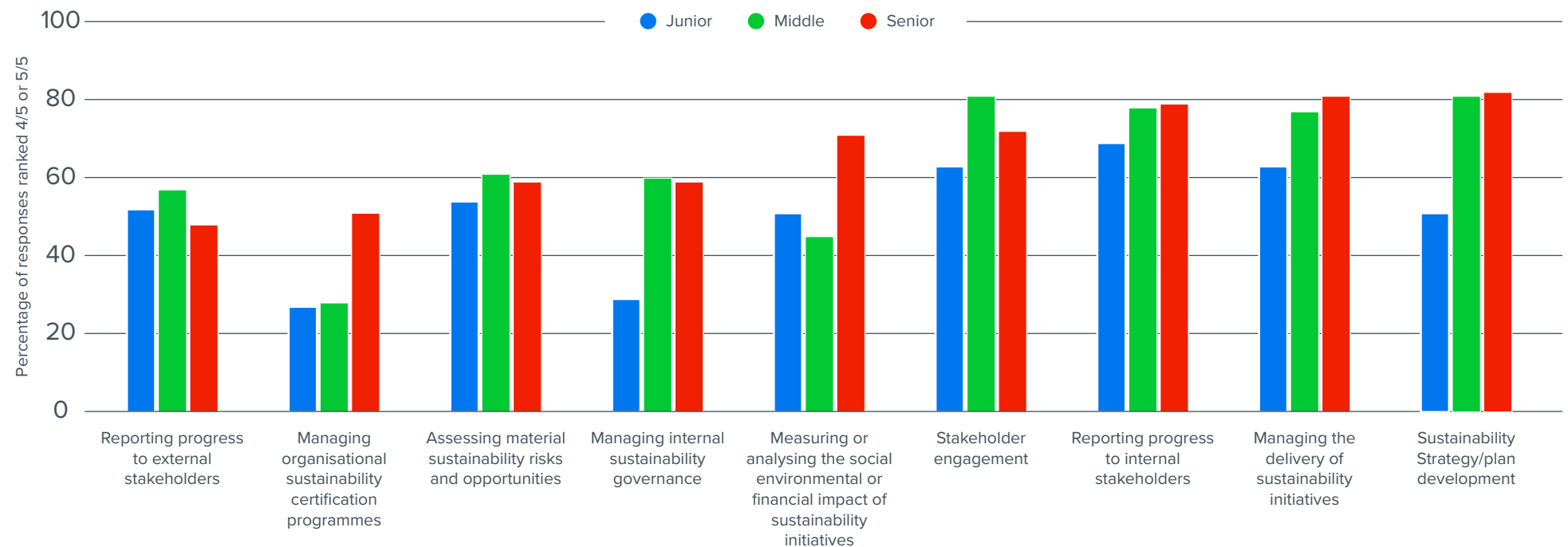


Communication skills are the most important competency now, while building partnerships will become more necessary in the future

“ Practical skills are required, rather than just theoretical idealism, to allow sustainability to be realised.

Senior and middle management roles take on the bulk of sustainability responsibilities, particularly in managing governance and strategy development

Split of sustainability responsibilities between role types



Junior includes: Graduates, Junior Consultants, Consultant, and Advisor roles

Middle includes: Managers and Senior Manager roles

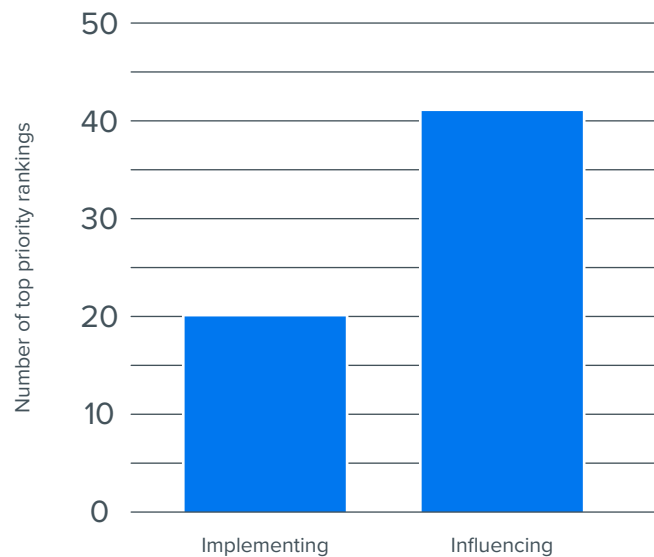
Senior includes: General Manager, Head of Department, Executive, and Managing Director roles

Ranking based on the priority of the activity within the role, where 1 = low priority, 5= high priority.

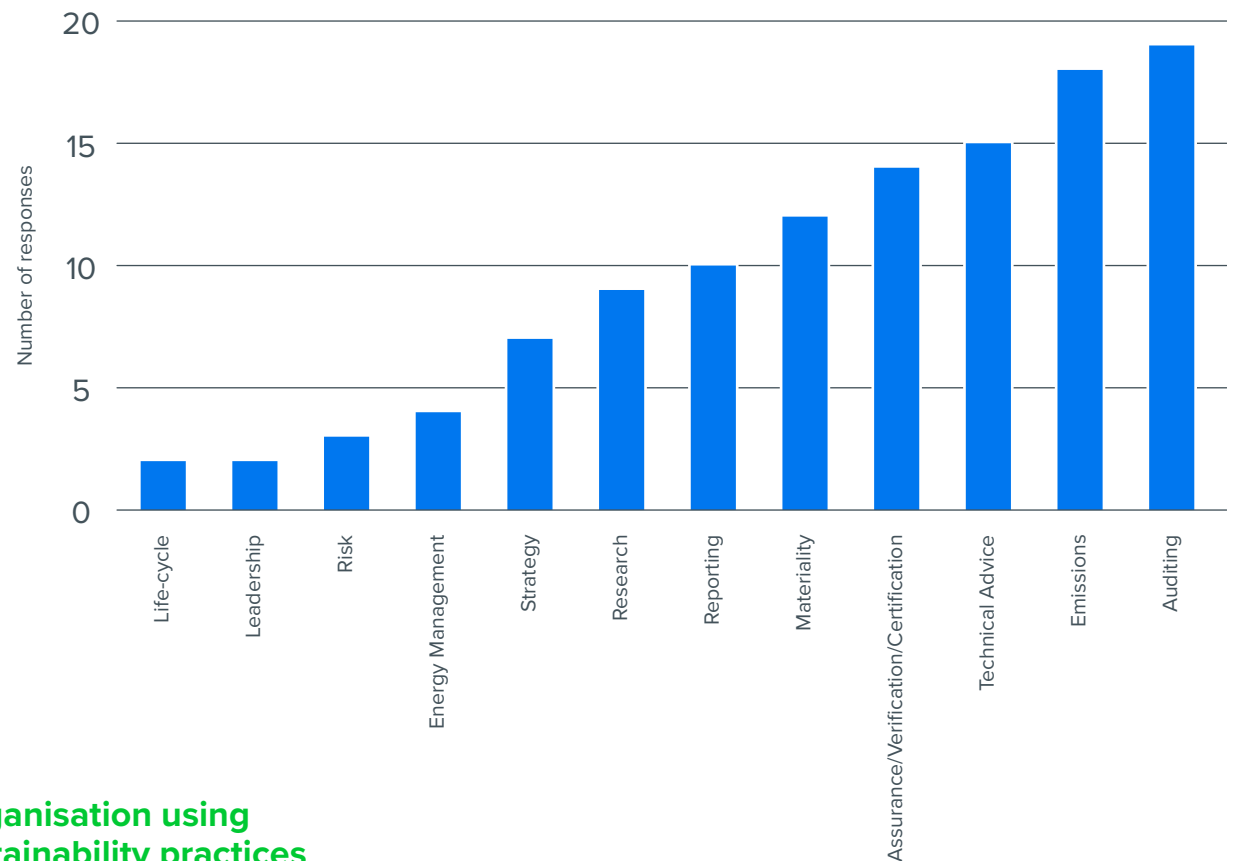
This chart shows the percentage of people that ranked the activity 4/5 or 5/5.

Sustainability professionals spend most of their time influencing uptake of sustainability within their organisations, with technical support from external consultants

Time spent influencing versus implementing sustainability initiatives



Expertise provided by external consultants for organisations

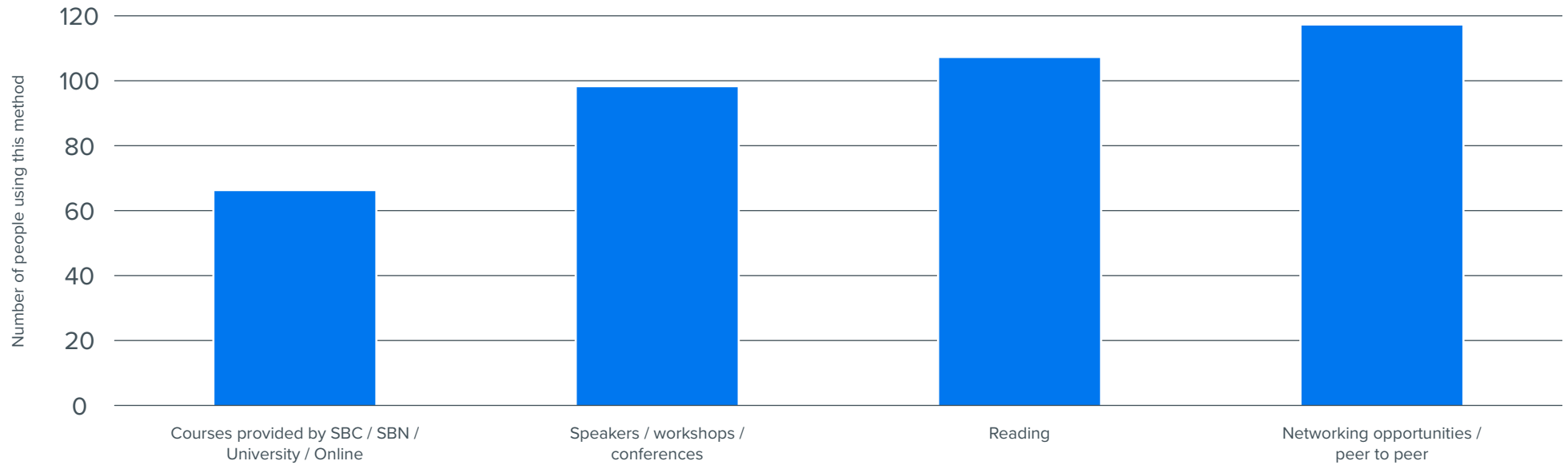


Implementing/Influencing were on a scale of 1-5.
Top priority ranking corresponds to a 5/5 ranked response.

65% of practitioners reported their organisation using external consultants for their sustainability practices

Peer-to-peer learning is a key way sustainability professionals develop capability in their roles

Key methods for role capability development

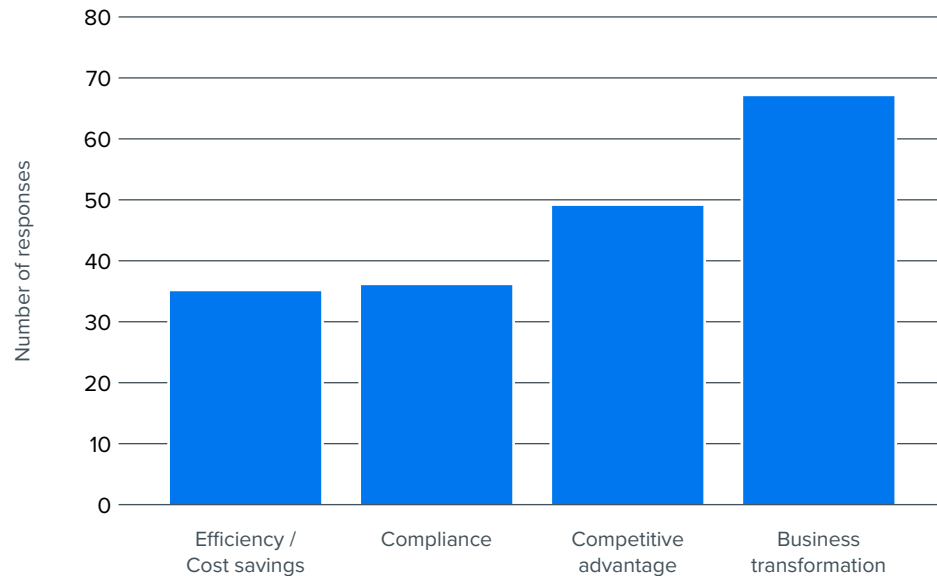


How are organisations structuring sustainability into their business?

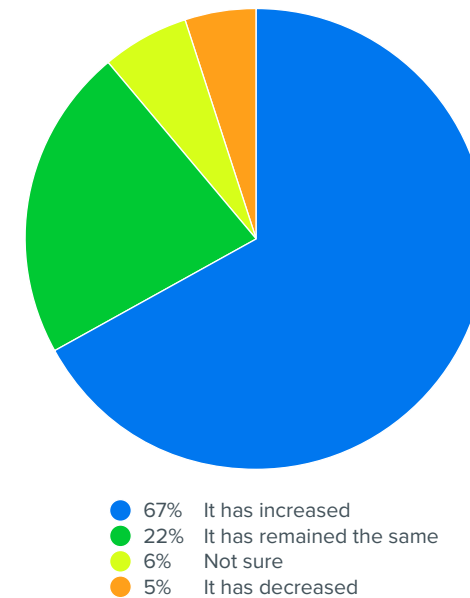
“ It is critical that the CEO and senior management buy into this agenda. Once sustainability is embedded in the strategic planning process and senior leadership have a personal commitment to sustainability, everyone else gets on board.

Organisations are using sustainability to transform their business and are boosting their sustainability resourcing to do so

Motivations for organisational sustainability



Sustainability resourcing changes in last 12 months

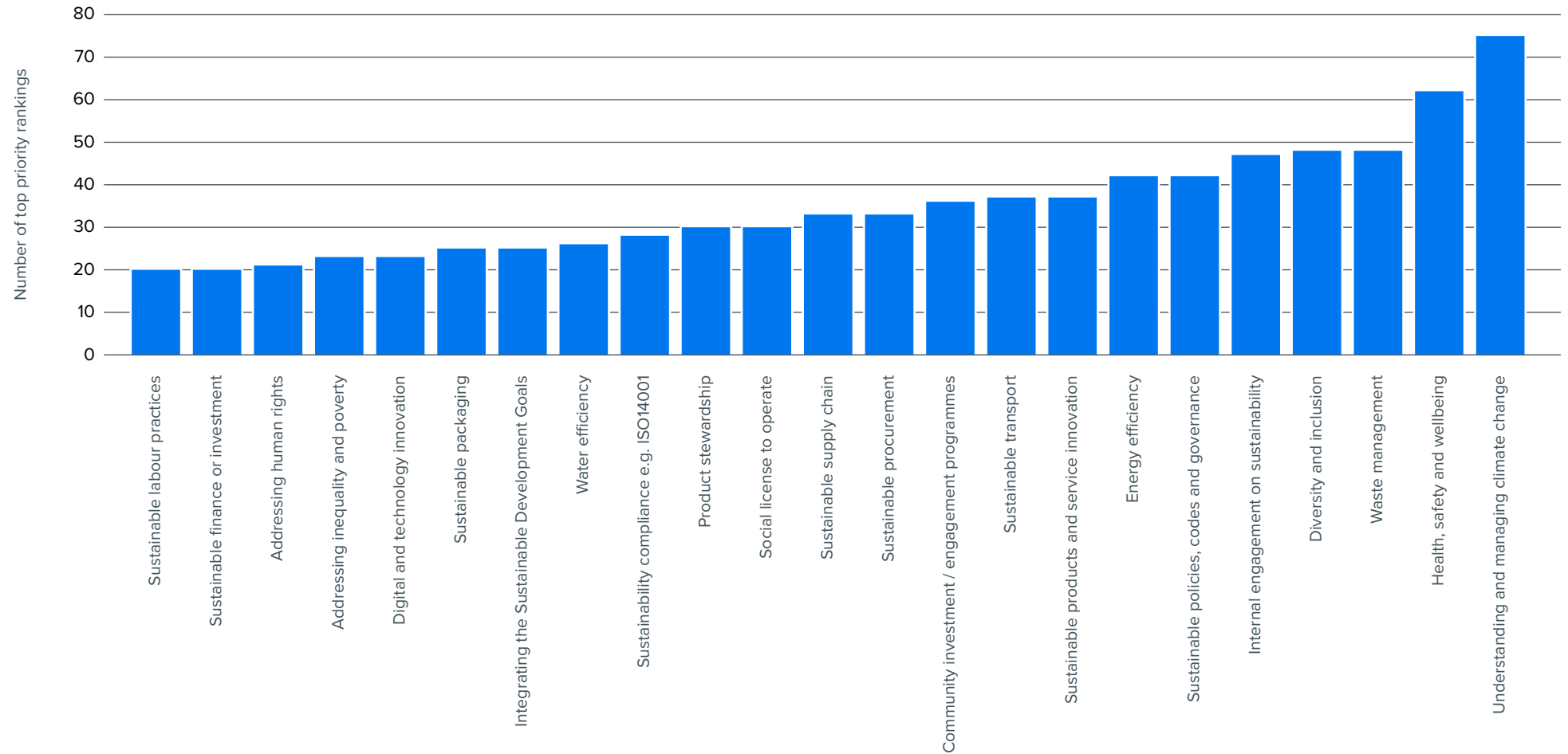


'Resourcing' is defined as 'budget, staff and investment in solutions'.

71% of participants saw an increase in sustainability resourcing in their organisation in the last twelve months,

Climate change is the highest sustainability priority for most organisations now...

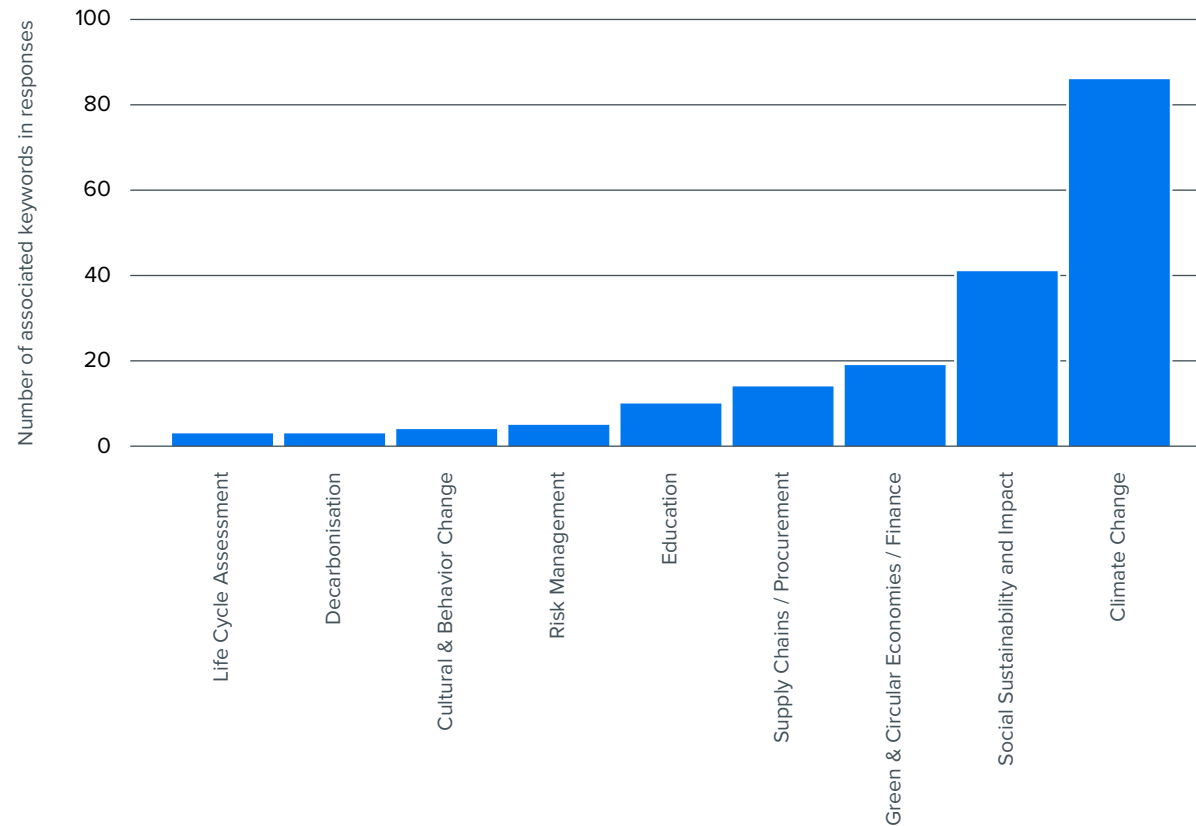
Sustainability topics within organisations ranked top priority by practitioners



Sustainability topics were on a scale of 1-5. Top priority ranking corresponds to a 5/5 ranked response

...and into the future

Future growth areas for sustainability identified by participants



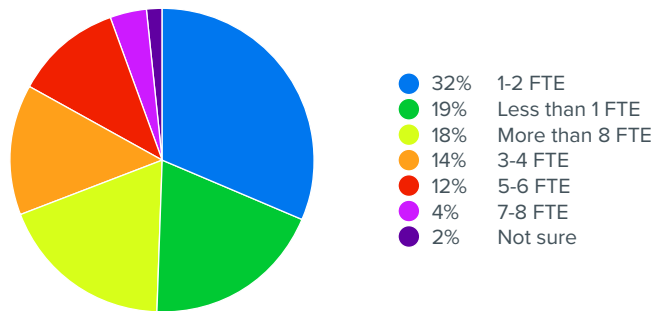
Climate change compiles four categories of climate change related issues. These included keywords relating to climate change leadership, climate change adaptation/mitigation/resilience, solutions/innovation for climate change and simply 'climate change'.

“ Humankind urgently needs to find ways of supporting 7.5+ billion people to live within ecological limits. This will require profound change to our economy and society - sustainability is at the heart of this.

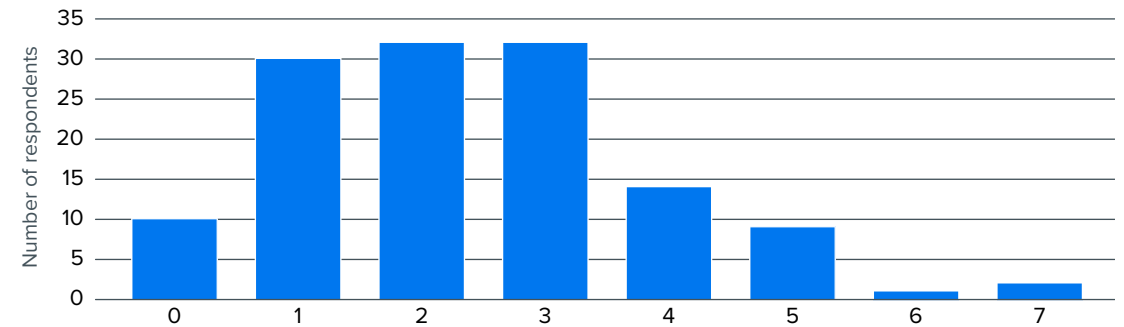
The clearest driver is the need to address climate change, which will require shifts in many areas, such as technology, policy and finance.

Organisations typically have at least 1- 2 sustainability roles that can report into a wide variety of business units, usually placed within three positions from the CEO

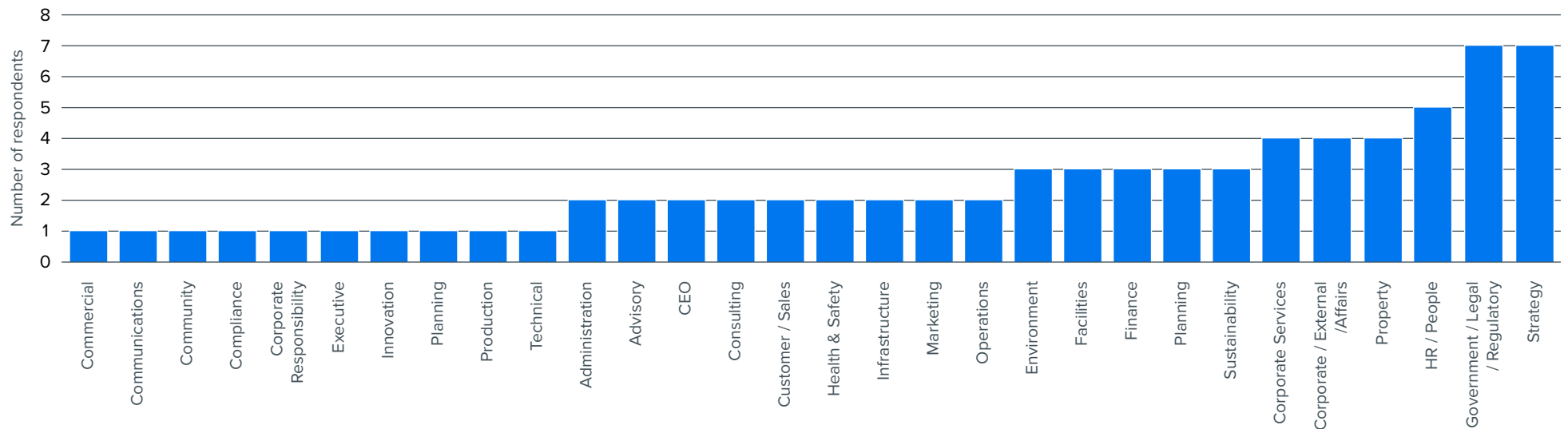
Number of sustainability roles per organisation



Number of positions removed from the CEO

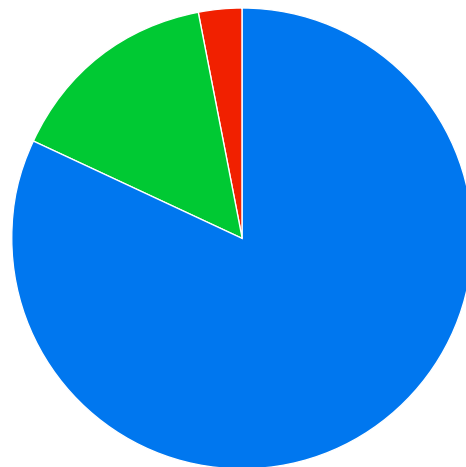


Location of sustainability roles within the organisation



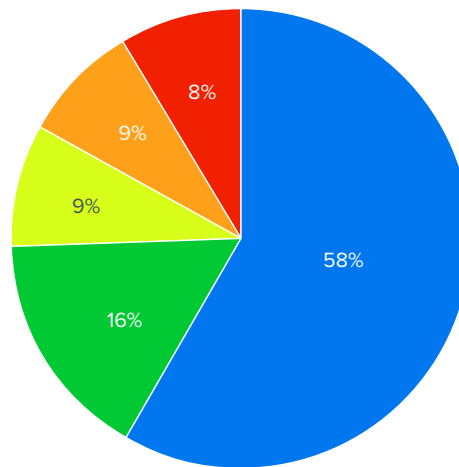
Most sustainability professionals are in full time roles, but nearly half of them are juggling other responsibilities within the organisation

Individual role capacity within the organisation



- 82% Full time
- 15% Part time
- 3% Contractor

Amount of role focused on sustainability



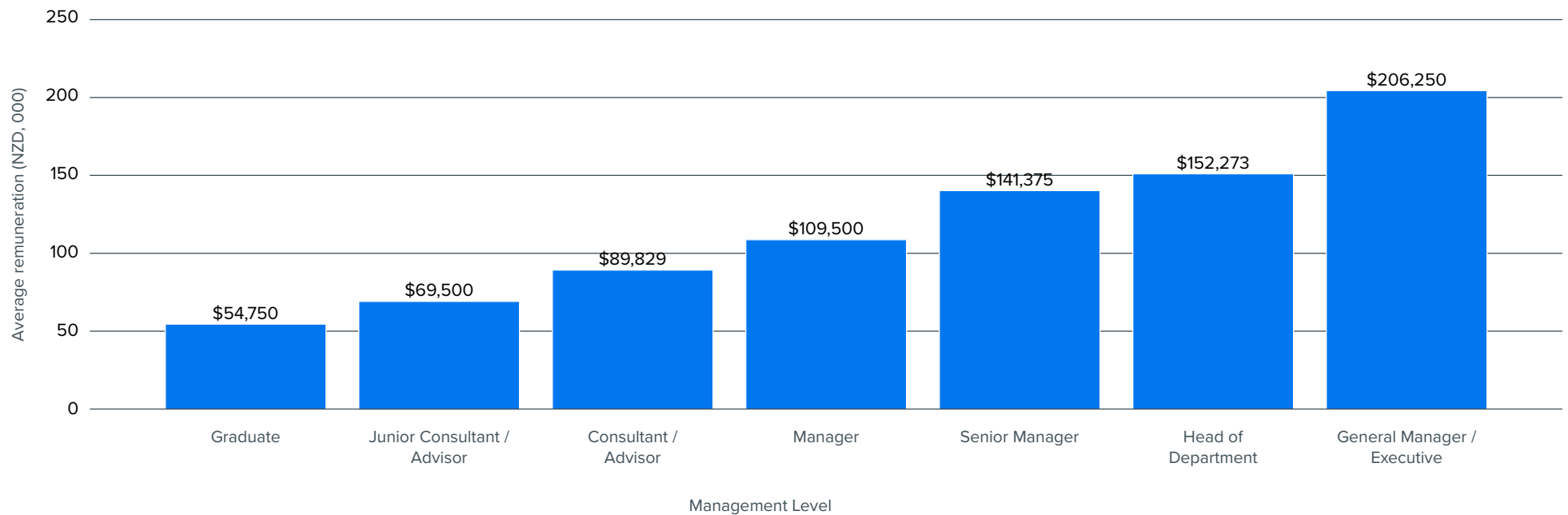
- 100% focus
- 1-24% focus
- 25-49% focus
- 50-74% focus
- 75-99% focus

Other responsibilities held by sustainability professionals within their organisation



Organisations are remunerating sustainability professionals in line with their seniority, enabling opportunities for financial progression through the profession

Average total remuneration of sustainability professionals



From graduate to GM/executive, sustainability salaries range from <\$50,000 to >\$300,000

Graphs indicate the average total remuneration across each of the role segments

How well are organisations supporting sustainability professionals?

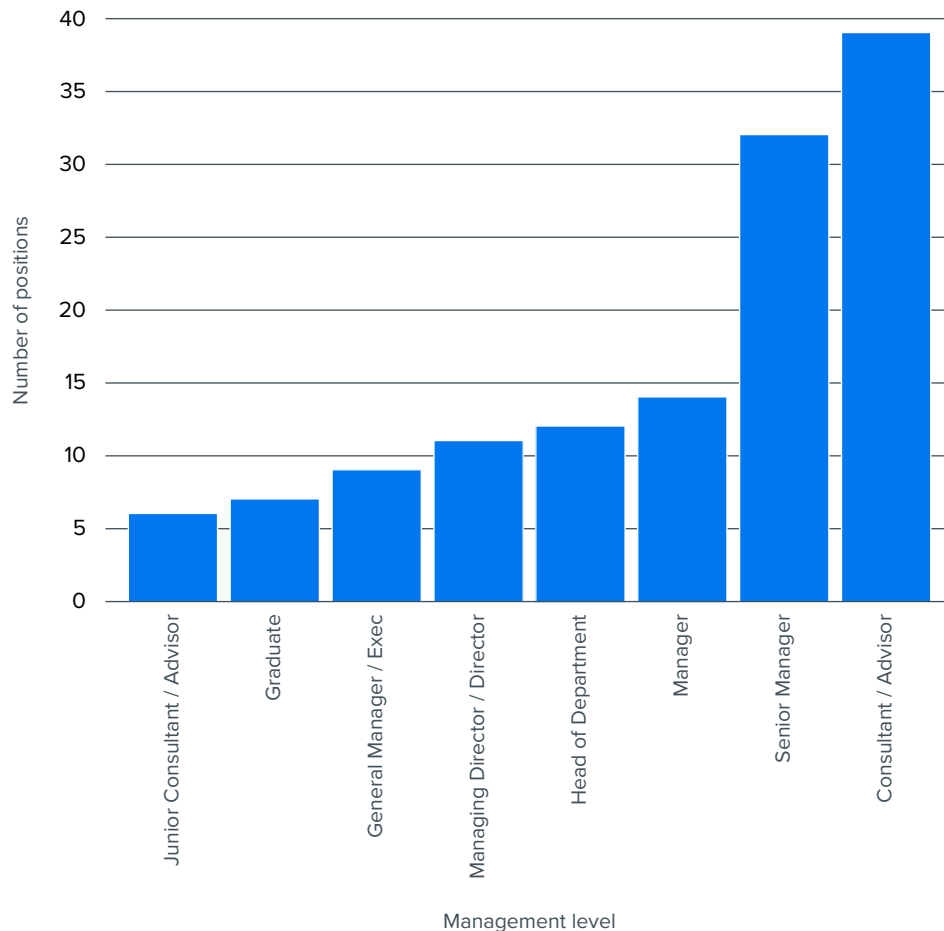
“ I love working in sustainability and will not shift away from it now that I am here. The hardest part is working in an area that I am passionate about but lacking the resource to deliver effectively and to the best of my ability.



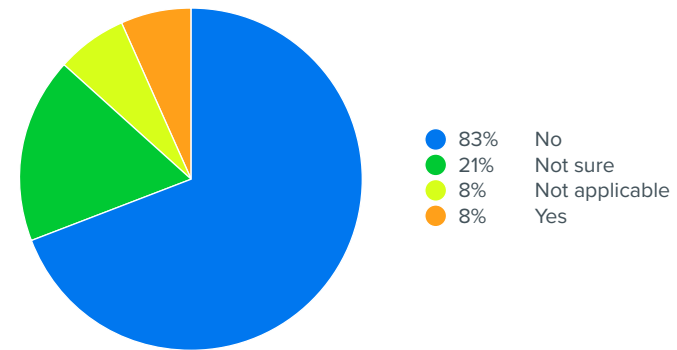
Most sustainability professionals are in mid-career roles, however there are no clear pathways into other organisational roles, despite sustainability professionals having cross-functional capabilities

“ Sustainability is still pretty siloed...and you can get pigeon-holed as the ‘sustainability person’, people don’t necessarily recognise what else you might be good at.

Distribution of sustainability professional roles



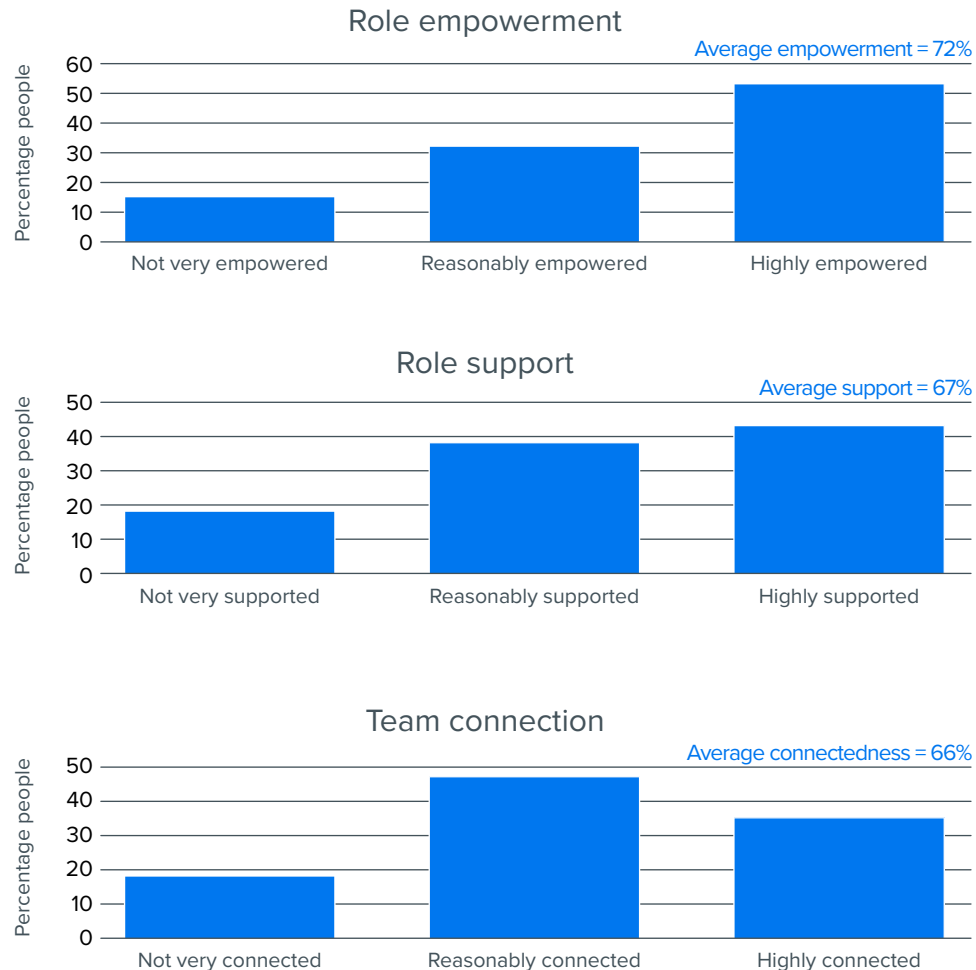
Is there a clear promotion pathway from sustainability into another role in your organisation?



Competencies required by sustainability professionals (1 = low priority, 5 = high priority)



Most sustainability professionals feel empowered and supported in their roles and connected to other teams within their organisation

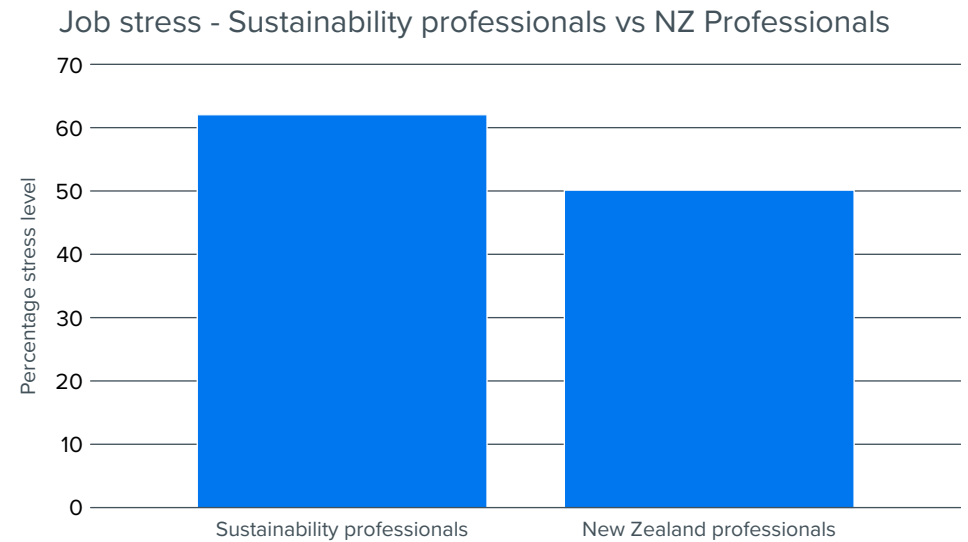
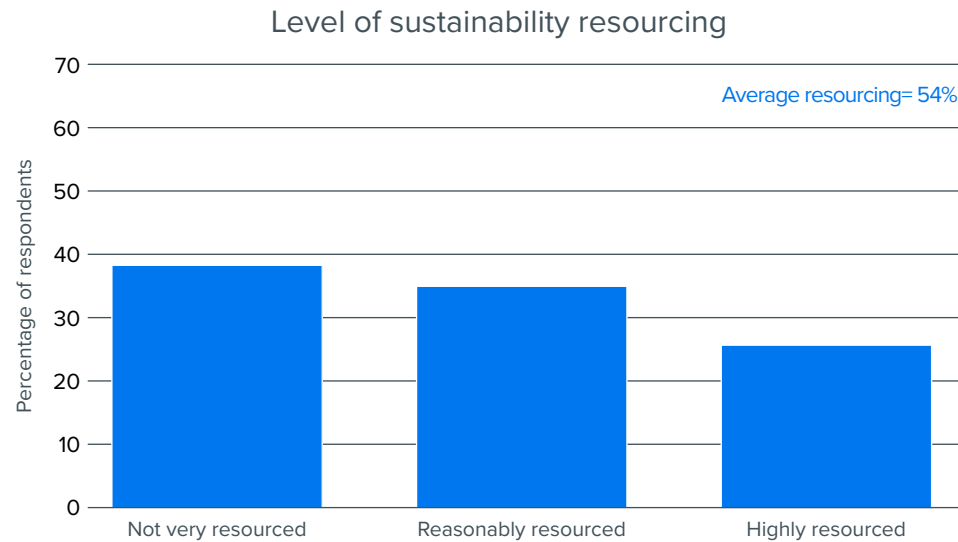


Participant rating levels 1-10 scale, groupings for descriptors: 'not very' = 1-4; 'reasonably' = 5-7; 'highly' = 8-10

“ We are fairly well connected due to the relationships we have built, but there are still silos to be broken down.

“ I have a junior position but am encouraged to suggest initiatives and they are taken seriously, because it is a unique role but also an important organisational agenda.

However, organisations may be under-resourcing their sustainability agendas, leading to higher levels of job stress amongst sustainability professionals

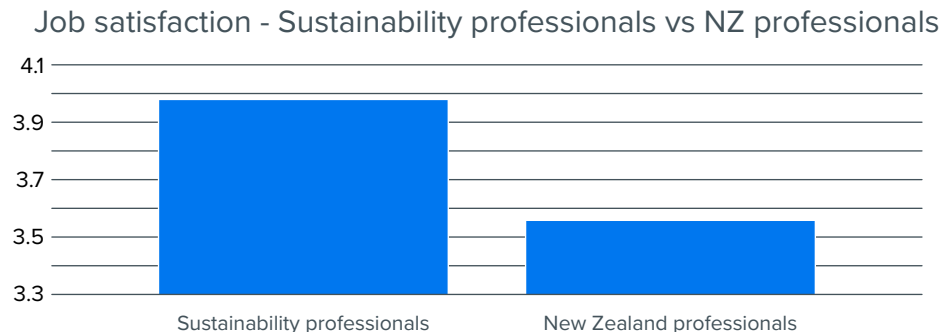
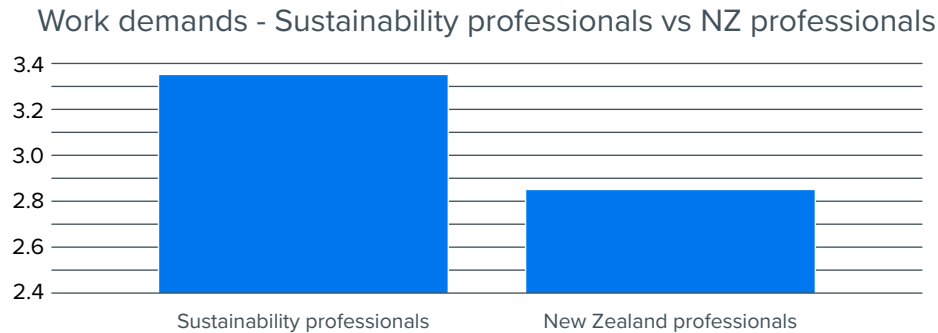


'Resourcing' is defined as 'budget, staff and investment in solutions'
Participant rating levels 1-10 scale, groupings for descriptors: 'not very' = 1-4;
'reasonably' = 5-7; 'highly' = 8-10.

Job stress measured on a scale of 1-10 (no stress – extreme stress) and compares Sustainability professionals (n=130) with a sample of New Zealand professionals from all other sectors (n=442)

“ Sustainability is hugely important for our business and while we have the people power, we don't have the budget to deliver the ambitious strategy and work programme the organization has on this front, which can be frustrating.

Work demands are significantly greater for sustainability professionals, yet their overall job satisfaction is much higher than other New Zealand professionals



“ Most of us experience stress because we find it difficult to stop. This is the result of a profoundly felt responsibility for sustainability and recognition of the potential impact we can have.

Work demands reflects participants aggregated average rating of three questions on a 1-5 scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree): (A) I often feel that I am being run ragged from work; (B) I am given too much work to do; (C) I can't complete my work in a normal work-day

Job satisfaction reflects participants aggregated average rating of three questions on a 1-5 scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree): (A) Most days I am enthusiastic about my work; (B) I feel fairly satisfied with my present job; (C) I find real enjoyment in my work

Results compare this survey sample of sustainability professionals (n=130) with a sample of New Zealand professionals from all other sectors (n=442)

Acknowledgements

The following people provided valuable contribution to the development, design and execution of this research and insights report:

CONCEPT AND LEAD SPONSOR

Dr. Sarah Holden - Director, Oxygen Consulting
Magnus Williams - Research & Analytics Consultant, Oxygen Consulting

CONTRIBUTING PARTNERS AND REVIEWERS

Professor Marjo Lips-Wiersma – Director Ethics and Sustainability, Auckland University of Technology
Dr. Peter McGhee – Senior Lecturer, Auckland University of Technology
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEK)
Jay Crangle – Manager Strategy, Sustainable Business Council
Alison Herft – (Former) Manager, Members & Consumer Programme, Sustainable Business Council
Robert Perry – Manager Sustainable Leadership, Sustainable Business Council
Catriona Robertson – Communications Manager, Sustainable Business Council
Rachel Brown ONZM – Chief Executive Officer, Sustainable Business Network
Fiona Stephenson – National Communications Manager, Sustainable Business Network
Xan Hamilton – Events Manager, Sustainable Business Network

DESIGN AGENCY

Kieren Smith – Director, Incognito Design

Contributing organisations



OXYGEN CONSULTING

Oxygen Consulting provides organisations with technical advice and guidance on sustainability practices, assisting clients to maximise their long-term business performance by strengthening social, environmental and economic outcomes.

Its services support all aspects of the organisational sustainability journey, including: assessing material risks and opportunities; developing a sustainability strategy and key performance metrics; building sustainability capability and capacity; project management and impact measurement; research and insights, and; reporting and communicating progress.

Oxygen Consulting is a member of the Sustainable Business Council, the Sustainable Business Network, and the Climate Leaders Coalition.

Contact: Sarah Holden – Director: sarah@oxygen-consulting.co.nz, 027 620 4406

Web: www.oxygen-consulting.co.nz



AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY (AUT) SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH

The sustainability team at AUT researches at the intersection of engagement, resilience and sustainability action and regularly works with business and NGO's to promote employee engagement in sustainability. Its student research also gives it a strong voice to youth engagement in sustainability. AUT scored high in the Times Social Impact awards and sustainability teaching is integrated throughout all degrees in the Business School. At present the AUT Business School runs 7 sustainability courses at both undergraduate and post-graduate level.

Contact: Marjo Lips-Wiersma – Professor of Ethics and Sustainability Leadership: marjo.lipswiersma@aut.ac.nz; 022 409 3809

Web: www.aut.ac.nz



SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS COUNCIL (SBC)

SBC is a membership organisation, with a long-term aim to make sustainability mainstream within New Zealand businesses. They do this by inspiring businesses by creating a community of positive change, supporting members to go further and celebrating their leadership and success. SBC is part of the BusinessNZ network and is the New Zealand Global Network partner to the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. Membership now comprises more than 100 companies representing over 30% of GDP.

SBC's Current projects include: Sustainable leadership, climate action, consumer decision-making and the future of work. It is also the backbone organisation for the Climate Leaders Coalition.

Contact: Catriona Robertson - Manager Communications: crobertson@businessnz.org.nz, 021 242 7936

Web: www.sbc.org.nz



SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS NETWORK (SBN)

The Sustainable Business Network (SBN) is the largest sustainable business organisation in New Zealand, with more than 600 members ranging from corporates to small businesses and social enterprises. Its purpose is to empower business so people and nature prosper. Our team of sustainability experts provides practical advice, tools and training, and collaborates on system change projects. We focus on the urgent issues of the circular economy, climate and water.

Contact: Fiona Stephenson - National Communications Manager: Fiona@sustainable.org.nz, 021 233 1053

Web: www.sustainable.org.nz