meet
Marijke Frielink

our ESG lead in a spotlight interview

Meet Marijke Frielink, our ESG Lead. Marijke brings unbridled energy and fierce ambition when it comes to sustainability. In this spotlight interview, she shares her take on sustainability in IT and how her contribution to Exellyn benefits our clients and partners.

MARIJKE FRIELINK
ESG Lead

THE 360 APPROACH, THAT'S WHAT WE WANT

It was meant to be. Not that she was a 'green hippie', but sustainability was – and still is – a core value in her family, shared by her parents, sister, and herself. 'It was about conscious choices and actions, and curiosity for the great outdoors, 'says Marijke Frielink, our ESG Lead. That's exactly why she went on to study environmental science. 'Some people at my high school thought it was a bit of a waste. Why not study medicine? Wouldn't that be more useful? The environment wasn't really a topic yet. The lack of interest was obvious by just looking at the sheer number of people I started studying with that year: there were just sixteen of us. But since I finished my studies, only eight years ago, I've seen an enormous change – fortunately.'

Before she started working at Exellyn, she was a sustainability manager at a large engineering firm. 'That was fun, and I learned a lot,' says Marijke, but she was ready for a new challenge. Preferably in a different sector. She was drawn to fresh perspectives and was looking for something bigger, a sector with potential for major impact. That's how she ended up at Exellyn, a company in an industry that, Marijke believes, we all need, and that will always be there, but that could be a lot more sustainable. 'I am an ESG Lead, which means that I am involved in driving and improving sustainability in our business. This, for example, includes making the building in which we work more sustainable, or taking a closer look at our purchasing methods. But it goes beyond that: we also look at how we can get our employees excited about that sustainable approach, so that they can talk about it with customers. Because it is not just about us, but also about our suppliers and partners: we are happy to help them become more sustainable as well. That's why I'm always on the lookout for opportunities to improve sustainability performance. Last year, a UN report was published outlining which sustainability themes are important for IT companies. It was a valuable read, and we used its insights to help shape our sustainability program and set clear objectives for the future.'

'What helps is that our partners and suppliers share the same view: sustainability is important to them too, and they want to take steps in this area, just like we do. So we strive to support them on that journey. By, for example, looking at the best choices for customers when it comes to the lifespan of their products: when is the right time to switch to new equipment? We continue to learn in this regard. For example, I found it interesting to learn that in certain cases, you can extend the lifespan of laptops by replacing them earlier with the first user. So, maybe after three years, instead of five, so that the next buyer can use them longer because they are in better condition. That was an eye-opener for me, because you'd think a customer would be happier if they could use their laptops for six years instead of four. But sometimes the conclusion is that it is better to replace them after three years, because the second life of such a device is then longer – so, it will last longer overall. And the first user also gets a little more in return by 'giving back' the laptops to the market a bit earlier. So that is a win-win situation.'

That positive attitude characterizes Marijke, she says: 'For many people, sustainability is still something complicated, they don't know exactly what to do with it. I like to show what we can do, which possibilities we have, which ideas. I truly believe that many processes can be smarter, better and more sustainable, and inspiring others gives me energy. A bit nerdy perhaps, but I like complexity. I'm happy to take on the challenge of changing things that are dif-ficult to change – without losing sight of the business aspect.'

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Can you explain why ESG is important within the IT industry?

'Let me first take a broader view. People always think that we have to be sustainable to save animals and plants, but it is also about us: how do we ensure that we can continue to live on our planet? If things continue like this, it will become impossible. That said: the IT sector is here to stay. We all need it; we use it every day. Even the most eager climate change advocates rely on phones and IT technology in their daily routines, which highlights just how much everyone depends on IT. And although the manufacturing of phones, laptops and other hardware is becoming more sustainable, we also need more and more of them, and we will use more and more data. So, at some point, there simply won't be enough. That's why everyone has to take a close look at their business model; everyone has to figure out how we can make it more circular. I find it very interesting to explore how we can deal with it smarter, how we can solve this problem.'

Do you see potential for a positive outlook?

'Yes, because of course it is a kind of a doomsday story, but I don't think there is much point in constantly harping on about it. Together with our partners and suppliers, we are in a good position to really make a difference. In collaboration with them, we'll keep finding ways to extend the lifecycle of IT assets, a goal primarily supported by our maintenance services and Buyback as a Service program. And we'll keep looking into the most sustainable forms of transport. The 360 approach, that's what we want. That circle has to be complete, that's the goal.'