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**N E X T**  
A G E N T S

Sustainability-driven Innovation

# **MATRIX**

# **GUIDING QUESTIONS**

VERSION 0.1

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# Introduction to Sustainability-driven Innovation

In today's rapidly evolving global landscape, businesses are increasingly recognizing the inherent interconnectedness between innovation and sustainability. Both domains demand the ability to navigate high-risk environments, manage complexity, and thrive amidst uncertainty. While innovation drives the creation of new products, services, and business models, sustainability ensures that these advancements are ethically sound, environmentally responsible, and socially beneficial.

Sustainability-driven innovation refers to the proactive and iterative integration of environmental, social, and economic sustainability principles into the process of managing innovation and developing of novel solutions. By developing capabilities for both sustainability and innovation management, organizations can better adapt to consumer demands, technological advancements, and evolving regulations.

Unlike traditional business approaches, sustainability-driven innovation transcends conventional boundaries and silos, fostering a culture of growth based on continuous learning, adaptation, and responsible stewardship.

By integrating innovation and sustainability into their core strategies, organizations can uncover new opportunities for growth, differentiation, and long-term resilience. This approach equips businesses to address complex societal and environmental challenges while driving shareholder and stakeholder value. Embracing this dual approach enables businesses to not only mitigate risks but also capitalize on innovation and ensure their relevance and success for the future.

Focusing on sustainability-driven innovation and unlocking new business opportunities empowers companies to actively pursue positive change.



# Sustainability-driven Innovation

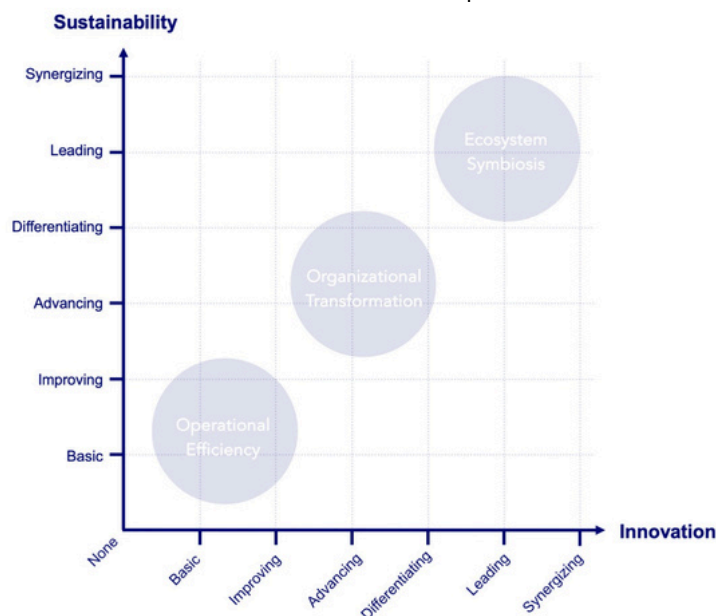
## Guiding Questions

The Sustainability-driven Innovation Matrix is a strategic framework created by Fernanda Torre and Henryk Stawicki at Next Agents. It is designed to help organizations assess their maturity in both sustainability and innovation. It serves as a tool for businesses to evaluate where they currently stand, determine their ambitions, and map a path forward to integrate sustainability and innovation into their core strategies.

The Sustainability-driven Innovation Matrix is divided into three key areas that correspond to different stages of maturity across both the sustainability and innovation axes. These areas are based on a systematic review of sustainability and innovation practices, authored by Dr. Richard Adams, Dr. Sally Jeanrenaud, Dr. John Bessant, et al. The three key areas are: Operational Efficiency (Doing the Same Things Better), Organizational Transformation (Doing Good by Doing New Things), and Ecosystem Symbiosis (Creating Positive Impact Together with Others).

In a workshop setting, the matrix serves as an engaging discussion starter. A multidisciplinary team, involving representatives from different departments (e.g., operations, finance, sustainability, marketing), can collaborate to explore where the organization currently stands on both the sustainability and innovation axes. Different parts of the organization, or even functional areas within a single business unit, may be at varying levels of maturity.

To make the most of the discussion, the guiding questions associated with each level of the matrix serve as a valuable resource for facilitating deeper discussions. These questions, presented on the table below, are designed to challenge teams on their current approaches and to stimulate thought around the real level of maturity of the organization. By incorporating the guiding questions into a workshop or assessment, organizations can move beyond surface-level conversations and ensure that the dialogue is comprehensive and relevant.




Maturity Levels	Sustainability Guiding Questions	Innovation Guiding Questions
<p><b>None</b> Sustainability is not on the agenda and no innovation efforts exist.</p>	<p>How does the current business model account for long-term environmental risks? What stakeholders, if any, are requesting more sustainable practices from your organization? Could ignoring sustainability create future operational or reputational risks? What internal or external resources could help begin addressing basic sustainability concerns? Are there any external pressures or regulations that could impact the organization if sustainability remains unaddressed?</p>	<p>Are there any external threats or opportunities that could prompt the need for innovation? How is the organization managing risks associated with a lack of innovation? Are competitors gaining a market advantage through innovation? Could small, incremental innovations improve current processes or products? What internal resources or capabilities could be leveraged to start exploring innovation opportunities?</p>
<p><b>Basic</b> The organization is aware of sustainability-driven innovation but operates in compliance mode.</p>	<p>How well does the organization understand its environmental and social impact? Are there opportunities to reduce waste, energy use, or resource consumption in day-to-day operations? What compliance measures are in place to address sustainability? Are they being fully implemented? Does the organization engage in any sustainability initiatives? What minimal changes can the organization make that require little investment but improve sustainability outcomes?</p>	<p>What incremental innovations are currently being pursued to improve efficiency? Are there low-risk opportunities to test small-scale innovations? How are innovations currently aligned with the organization's overall business strategy? Are there any internal processes that can be optimized for better performance through innovation? How is the organization collecting feedback from customers or stakeholders to inform innovation?</p>
<p><b>Improving</b> The focus is on incremental sustainability and innovation improvements.</p>	<p>What low-cost technological improvements can reduce environmental impacts (e.g., energy efficiency, water conservation)? How can the organization support social initiatives like improving workforce diversity or enhancing employee well-being? How does the organization engage with its supply chain to ensure responsible sourcing and waste reduction? How can governance structures support a more proactive approach to environmental and social issues, such as tracking key sustainability metrics? How can you ensure the company's public commitments to sustainability align with internal practices to avoid greenwashing?</p>	<p>Structured innovation processes are in place, focusing on enhancements. What processes are in place to capture and prioritize innovation opportunities? How does the organization foster a culture that encourages innovation across teams? How are innovation initiatives aligned with organizational goals for sustainability or market growth? Are there dedicated resources, including time and finances, for innovation? How are potential risks and opportunities of innovation initiatives being evaluated?</p>
<p><b>Advancing</b> Sustainability-driven Innovation is embedded in business processes and strategy.</p>	<p>How can the company's products or services be redesigned to minimize environmental impact throughout their lifecycle? What social value is the organization delivering, both internally (e.g., fair wages, safety) and externally (e.g., community engagement)? Are there opportunities to improve stakeholder engagement, ensuring that employees, suppliers, and customers are part of the sustainability conversation? How can the governance structure be adapted to regularly review sustainability risks and opportunities across all departments? What metrics are in place to track sustainability progress, and how are they communicated to investors, regulators, and the public?</p>	<p>Innovation is integrated into organizational culture and is part of strategy. How are new business models being explored through innovation to meet market demands? What partnerships or external collaborations are being utilized to enhance innovation efforts? How are innovation portfolios being managed to balance short-term and long-term goals? What mechanisms exist to ensure that innovation aligns with customer and stakeholder needs? Do you have an innovation strategy? And how are new markets or technologies being explored as part of this strategy?</p>

Maturity levels	Sustainability Guiding Questions	Innovation Guiding Questions
<p><b>Differentiating</b> Sustainability-driven Innovation is a core differentiator in the organization's strategy.</p>	<p>How can sustainability initiatives (e.g., circular economy models, zero-waste processes) be leveraged as a market differentiator?            What innovative social programs can be introduced to address inequities or improve employee well-being, beyond compliance requirements?            How can the company engage in broader social movements or issues, such as climate justice or education, that align with its core values?            What governance policies can ensure that sustainability is a core part of decision-making at the board level?            How is the organization ensuring that all sustainability claims are backed by data and transparent reporting to avoid reputational risks?</p>	<p>How is innovation setting the organization apart from competitors?            What radical or disruptive innovations are being pursued that align with broader sustainability goals?            How are innovation initiatives being scaled across the organization to maximize impact?            How is the organization maintaining flexibility to adapt and evolve its innovation strategy?            How are stakeholders involved in shaping and driving the innovation agenda?</p>
<p><b>Leading</b> Sustainability and innovation drives business decisions, and the organization sets industry benchmarks.</p>	<p>How is the organization influencing industry-wide sustainability standards and environmental policies?            How does the organization ensure that its innovations are creating significant positive social impacts (e.g., affordable access to essential services)?            What role does the company play in addressing global challenges like climate change, poverty, or inequality through its core business activities?            How does the organization foster cross-sector partnerships to tackle environmental and social issues that go beyond its immediate business scope?            How is governance structured to ensure that sustainability performance is integrated with financial performance, and what accountability measures are in place?</p>	<p>How is the organization leading industry trends through its innovation efforts?            What global challenges are being addressed through the organization's innovation initiatives?            How are innovation successes being communicated internally and externally to build momentum?            How are diverse perspectives (internal and external) integrated into the innovation process?            How is the organization preparing for future market disruptions and opportunities through its innovation strategy?</p>
<p><b>Synergizing</b> Sustainability and innovation are fully integrated, creating systemic positive impacts.</p>	<p>How does the organization ensure that sustainability and innovation are inseparable, driving systemic positive environmental impacts on a global scale?            How is the organization collaborating with other industries or sectors to address complex societal issues such as inequality, access to healthcare, or education?            What mechanisms are in place to ensure continuous governance improvements, ensuring long-term resilience and alignment with national, regional, and own sustainability goals?            How are leadership and governance practices ensuring that sustainability initiatives can be scaled globally, influencing policy, markets, and society?            How are all stakeholders—employees, suppliers, communities—actively involved in co-creating and benefiting from the organization's sustainability initiatives?</p>	<p>How are innovation and sustainability integrated to create transformational impact across the ecosystem?            How are cross-industry collaborations being leveraged to scale innovation efforts globally?            What systems are in place to continuously measure and improve innovation outcomes related to sustainability?            How is the organization pushing the boundaries of both innovation and sustainability to create entirely new solutions?            How are innovation efforts being used to create lasting, positive impacts on both society and the environment?</p>

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Fernanda Torre is a leading expert in the field of sustainability-driven innovation, currently CEO of Next Agents, a consulting firm with a mission to generate value for people and the planet, today and tomorrow.

Fernanda is a co-founder of Boards Impact Forum (BIF), the Nordic Chapter of the Climate Governance Initiative from the World Economic Forum. Today she is the Operations Director at BIF where she engages and trains board directors across the Nordics and internationally to accelerate climate actions and foster sustainable business practices.

Fernanda is affiliated to the House of Innovation at the Stockholm School of Economics (SSE) at the House of Innovation, and part of the faculty at the Stockholm School of Entrepreneurship (SSES), where she is the co-director of the "Trendspotting and Future Thinking" program, and leads the global entrepreneurship education program SSES Learning Lab Roundtables.


A co-author of the book "AI Leadership for Boards – The Future of Corporate Governance," Fernanda's research seeks to empower corporate boards in the governance of sustainability and responsible AI. The latest research paper was published in 2024 on the concept of board dynamic capabilities.


At Next Agents she is an active member of Cradlenet and Nordic Circular Hotspot, as well as part of the Swedish Climate Startup Map. Next Agents is furthermore, the affiliated for the Nordics for Rapid Learning Cycles (RLC) and Agile project management framework that supports businesses accelerating the development and deployment of cleantech and sustainable innovations.

Fernanda has MBA from Stockholm School of Economics (President's list for outstanding academic achievement), an MFA in Experience Design from Konstfack, and a Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design from Porto University. She served as a board member of Innovationsledarna, and is since 2018 a Swedish Expert in the technical committee for the development of the 56000 ISO standard on Innovation Management.

Fernanda Torre stands out as a leader whose career is a testament to the power of bridging design, innovation, and strategic management to create a sustainable and equitable future.


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