

Business Model Design for Sustainability

Designing Innovative Startup Business Models with Sustainability as a Strategic Value Driver

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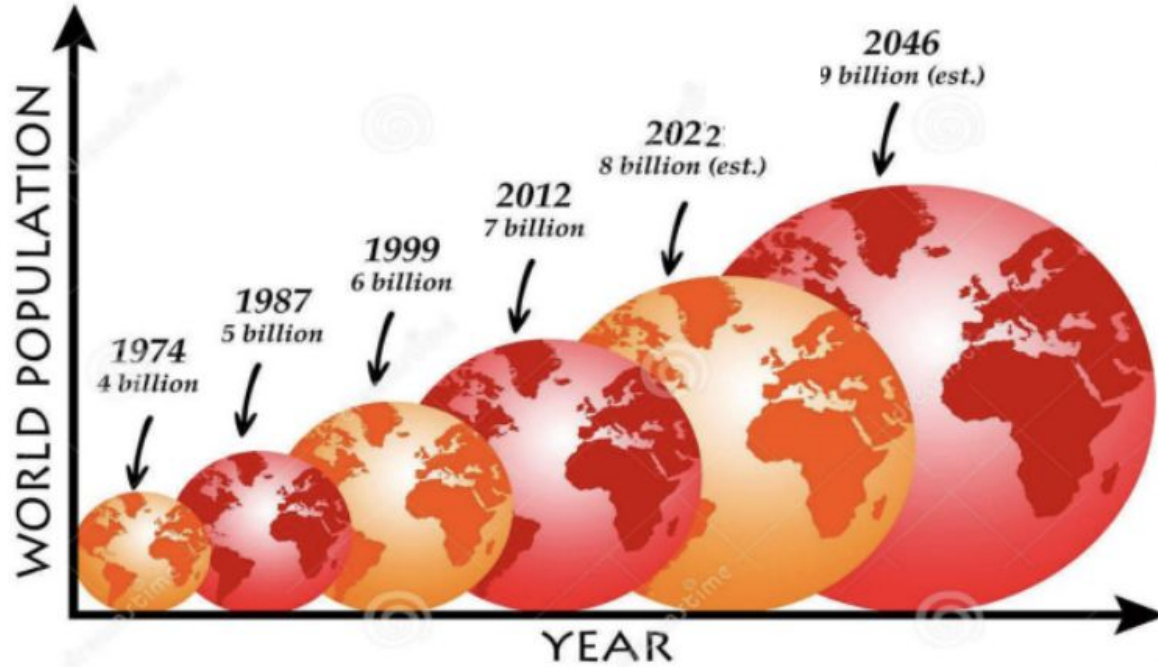
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Why This Matters Now



With a population of 9.2 billion people by 2040, we'll need:



Source: National Intelligence Council: Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds



A JOURNEY
IN 10 MEDAFRICAN
COUNTRIES FOR
ECO-INNOVATIONS

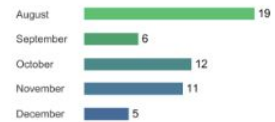
Why This Matters Now

Earth Overshoot Day

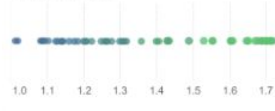
1971-2023

Earth Overshoot Day marks the date when humanity has used all the biological resources that Earth regenerates during the entire year. From Earth Overshoot Day until the end of the year, humanity operates on ecological deficit spending.

Earth Overshoot Day by month



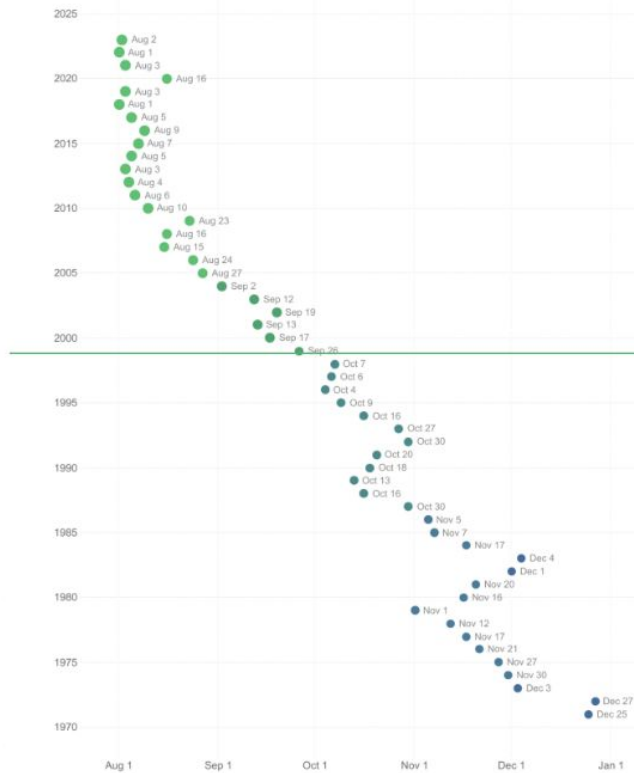
Number of earths needed to provide for humanity's Ecological Footprint



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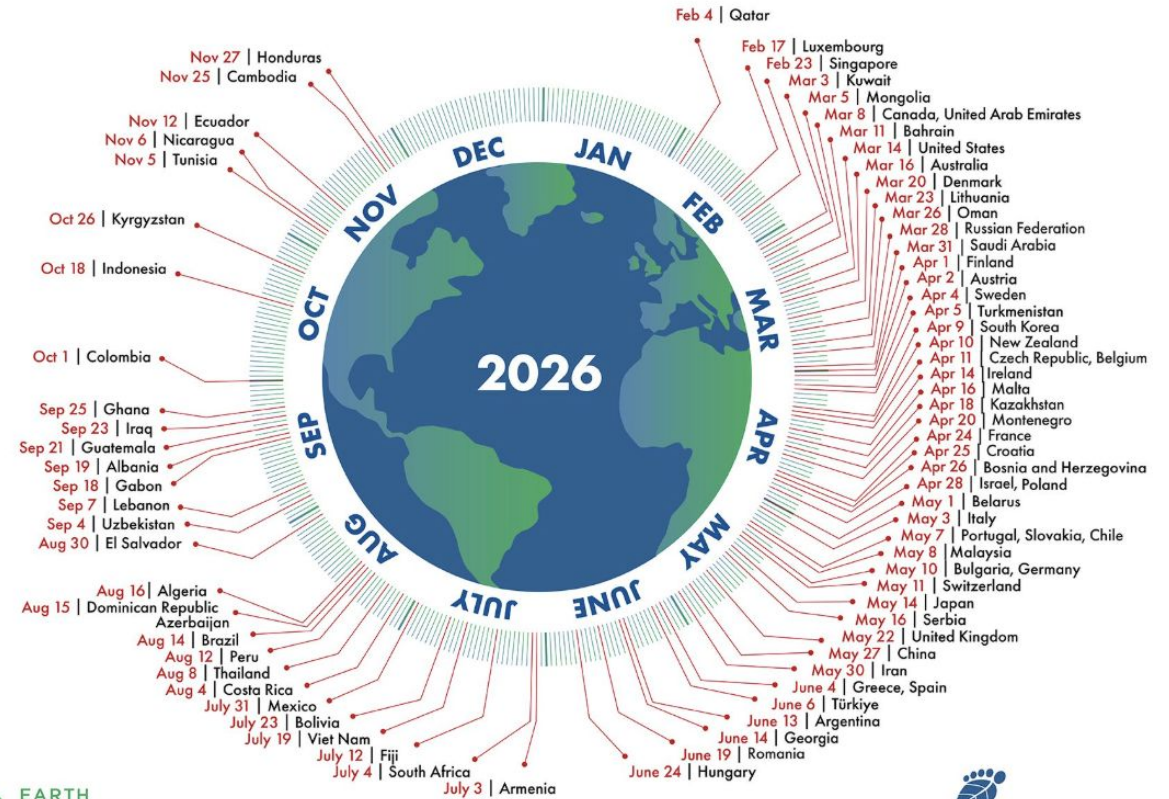


Source: National Footprint and Biocapacity Accounts 2023 Edition, <https://data.footprintnetwork.org/>



Country Overshoot Days 2026

When Earth Overshoot Day would land if all the people around the world lived like...



For more information, visit:
<https://overshootday.org/newsroom/country-overshoot-days>

Source: Country Overshoot Days 2026 are calculated using the National Footprint and Biocapacity Accounts' 2025 Edition (Lo et al. 2025), produced by York University for FoDaFo and Global Footprint Network, available at data.footprintnetwork.org



START UP TO 10 A JOURNEY IN 10 MEDAFRICAN COUNTRIES FOR ECO-INNOVATIONS

Why This Matters Now

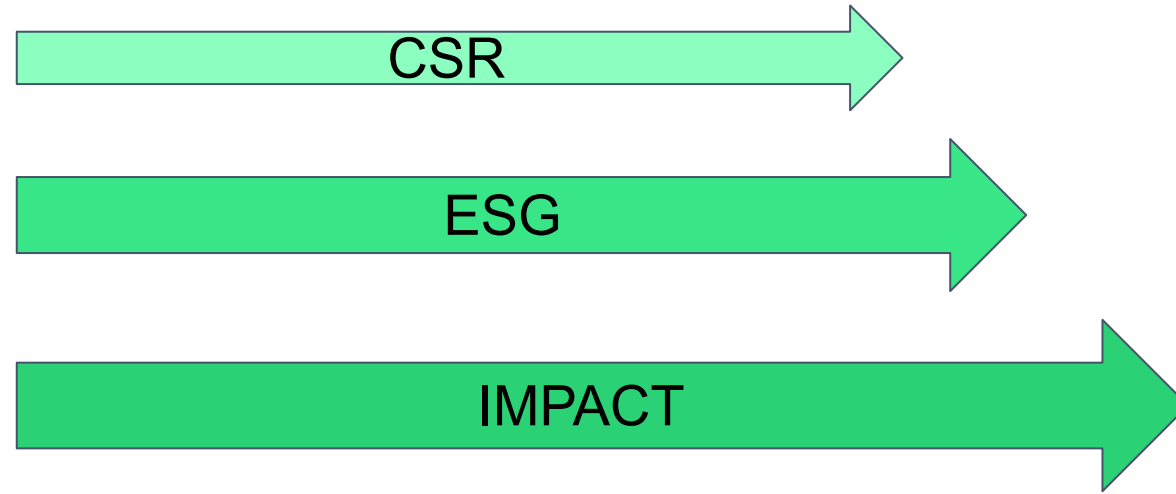
Sustainability has evolved from a peripheral concern to a core strategic variable for startups. Today's investors, customers, and regulators increasingly demand sustainable practices, transforming sustainability from a compliance checkbox into a competitive differentiator.

The link between innovation, risk mitigation, and long-term competitiveness is clear: startups that embed sustainability early gain resilience, attract capital, and capture emerging markets.



Reflection: Why can sustainability influence startup success today?

From Sustainability to Strategy



Sustainability has undergone a fundamental transformation. What began as Corporate Social Responsibility evolved into ESG frameworks that measure risk and performance. Today, we've reached the Impact era, where sustainability drives core business strategy and innovation.

Paradigm Shift in Value Creation

Triple Bottom Line

People, Planet, Profit

Purpose: Measurement framework tracking three dimensions of performance

Shared Value

Economic + Social Value

Purpose: Design logic that creates business success through addressing social needs

The critical distinction: Triple Bottom Line helps us *measure* impact across dimensions, whilst Shared Value guides how we *design* business models that inherently create multi-stakeholder value.

Sustainability and Competitive Advantage

Differentiation

Stand out in crowded markets by solving problems that matter to conscious consumers and partners

Resilience

Build adaptive capacity against regulatory shifts, resource constraints, and market disruptions

Innovation

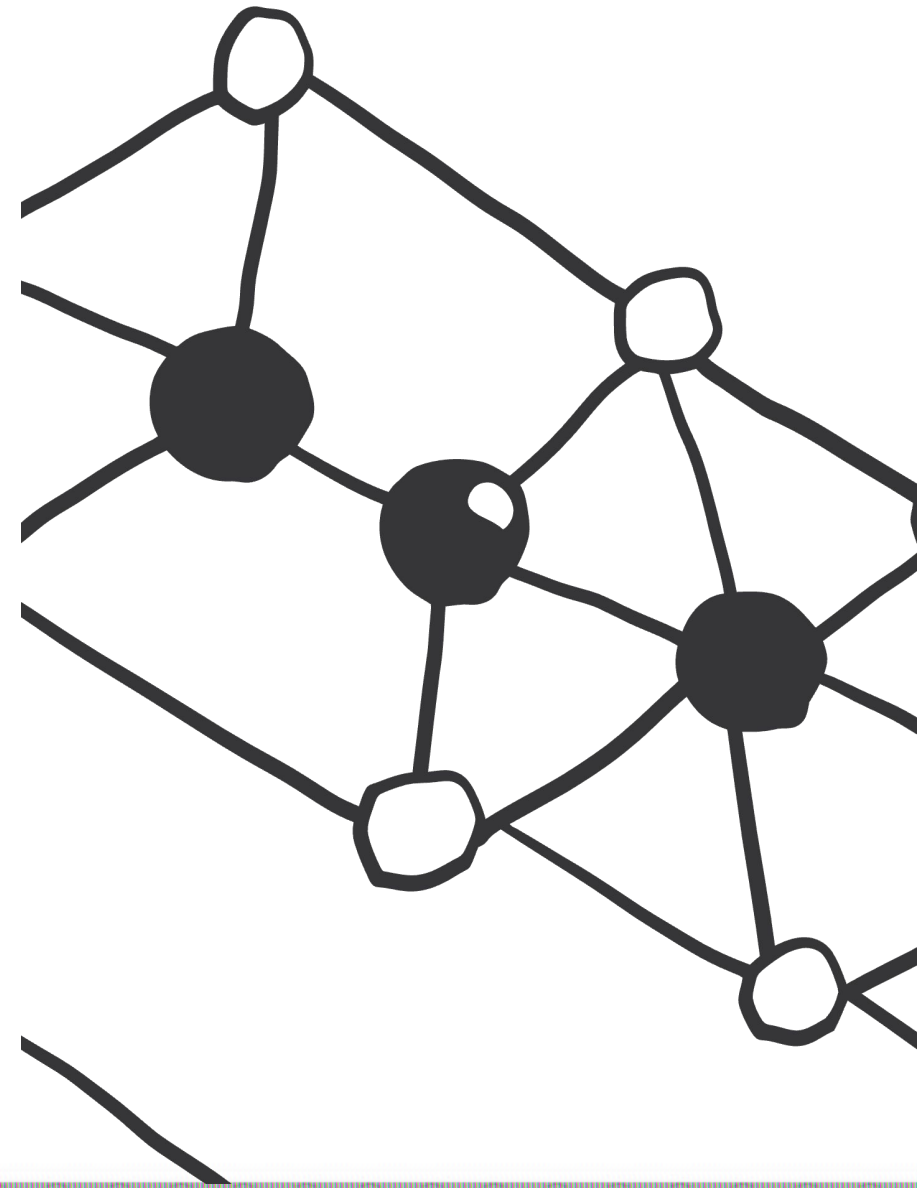
Unlock new opportunities by redesigning products, processes, and value chains with sustainability lenses

 **Reflection:** Can sustainability create market advantage? How?

What Is a Business Model Really

A business model is far more than a canvas tool, it's the fundamental logic of how your venture creates, delivers, and captures value. It defines who you serve, what problems you solve, how you operate, and why customers choose you

Technology enables solutions, business models make them scalable.

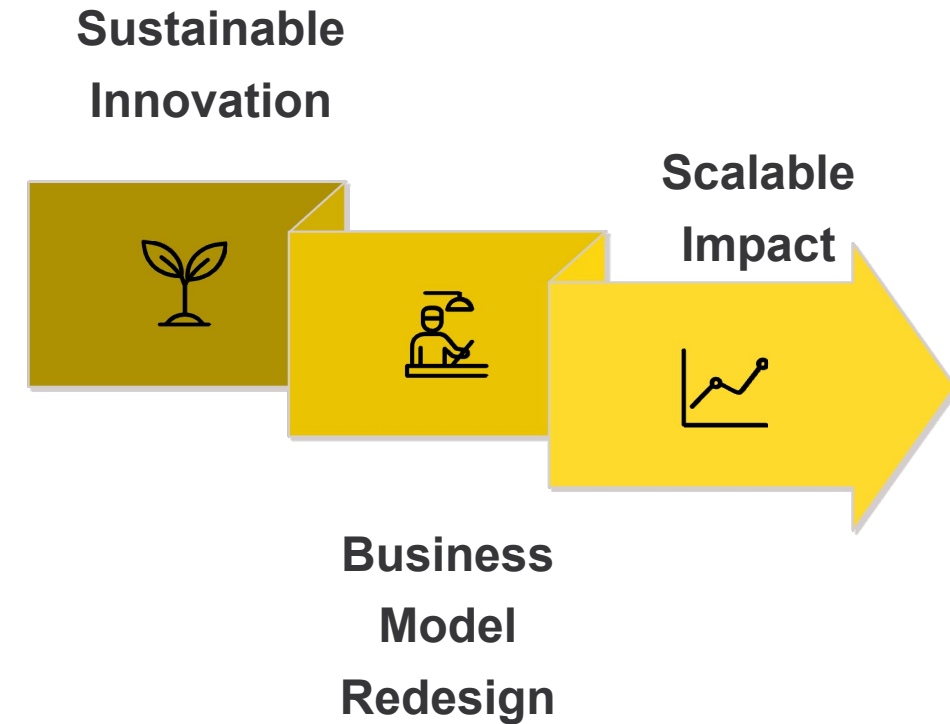


Why Business Model Innovation Matters

The Innovation Paradox

Many brilliant sustainable innovations fail not because of poor technology or weak impact potential, but because they lack viable business models. A solar panel that works is not enough, you need a model that makes it accessible, affordable, and scalable.

Business model redesign transforms impact from theoretical to structural, embedding sustainability into the revenue logic itself.



Startups and Sustainable Innovation

Agility

Startups can pivot quickly, testing sustainable business models without legacy constraints or institutional resistance

Experimentation

Built for learning and iteration, startups can validate assumptions about sustainable value creation rapidly

Ecosystem Thinking

Native to collaborative models, startups naturally leverage partnerships and multi-stakeholder value creation

Sustainable Business Model Archetypes

Archetypes are innovation patterns, not rigid templates. They provide lenses through which to reimagine your business logic, offering structured inspiration for sustainable redesign.

1

Circular Models

Waste as resource, lifecycle extension

2

Product-as-a-Service

Access over ownership

3

Regenerative Models

Restoring natural systems

4

Inclusive Models

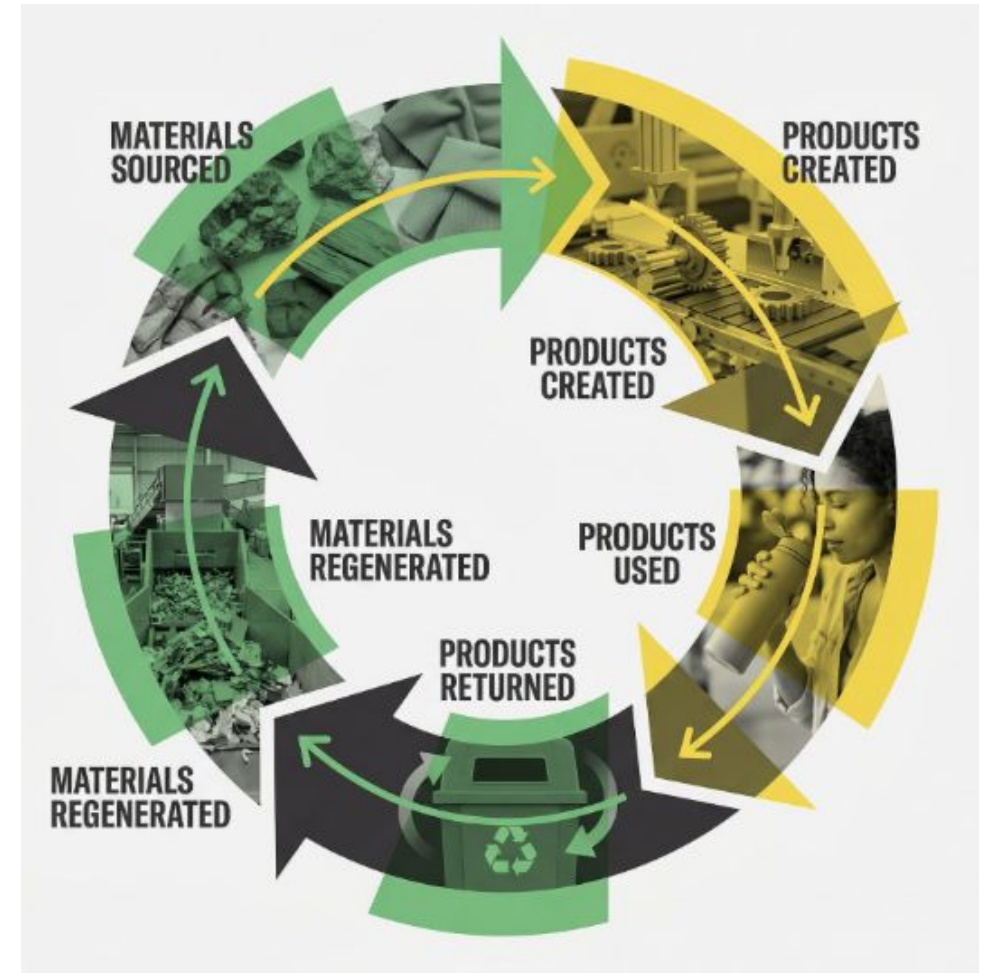
Fair value distribution

Archetype: Circular Models

Rethinking Waste

Circular models treat waste as a design flaw, not an inevitability. By extending product lifecycles, enabling reuse, and regenerating resources, these models decouple growth from resource depletion.

Agrifood Example: A startup converts food waste into high-value animal feed, creating revenue from what was previously a disposal cost whilst reducing methane emissions.



Archetype: Product-as-a-Service

This archetype fundamentally shifts value from ownership to access and performance. Instead of selling products, you sell outcomes, lighting instead of bulbs, mobility instead of cars, productivity instead of tools.

Sustainability Benefits

- Incentivises durability and quality
- Enables predictive maintenance
- Retains control over materials

Efficiency Benefits

- Optimises asset utilisation
- Generates recurring revenue
- Deepens customer relationships

Archetype: Regenerative Models

Beyond "Less Bad"

Whilst most sustainability efforts focus on reducing harm, regenerative models actively restore ecosystems and rebuild natural capital. These businesses don't just minimise their footprint—they leave environments healthier than they found them.



Think of agriculture that improves soil quality, forestry that increases biodiversity, or coastal businesses that regenerate marine habitats whilst operating.

Archetype: Inclusive Models

Underserved Stakeholders

Actively engage marginalised communities as customers, suppliers, or co-creators

Fair Value Distribution

Design revenue and benefit flows that ensure equitable participation and prosperity

Barrier Reduction

Remove access barriers through innovative pricing, distribution, or service design

How to Use Archetypes in Practice

Archetypes are lenses for redesign, not rigid frameworks to copy.


Using archetypes means asking structured redesign questions.

Where in my value chain could circular logic replace linear logic?

Where could access replace ownership?

Where could regeneration replace extraction?

Where could inclusion replace exclusion?

 **Reflection:** Which archetype could transform your current model?

Deconstructing Value Creation



Sustainable business model design demands rigorous analysis of value flows across all stakeholders and ESG dimensions. It's not enough to ask "Will customers pay?", you must examine who benefits, who bears costs, and who experiences impacts throughout your value chain.

- **Who truly benefits from this model?**
- **Who contributes to value creation but isn't compensated?**
- **Who captures the profit, and who absorbs the hidden costs?**

ESG Embedded in Business Models

Environmental, social, and governance factors cannot be bolted on as afterthoughts. They must be woven into the fundamental operations and value logic from inception.

Environmental

Resource efficiency, emissions, circularity designed into core operations and supply chains

Social

Labour practices, community impact, accessibility embedded in how you create and deliver value

Governance

Transparent decision-making, stakeholder engagement, accountability built into organisational structure

From ESG Challenges to Innovation Opportunities

Reframing Constraints

Every ESG challenge represents a potential innovation direction. Resource scarcity drives circular thinking. Social inequality reveals underserved markets. Governance gaps create opportunities for radical transparency.

There is no perfect model, only better-designed trade-offs.

**Risk →
Resilience**

Climate risk
becomes
adaptive
infrastructure

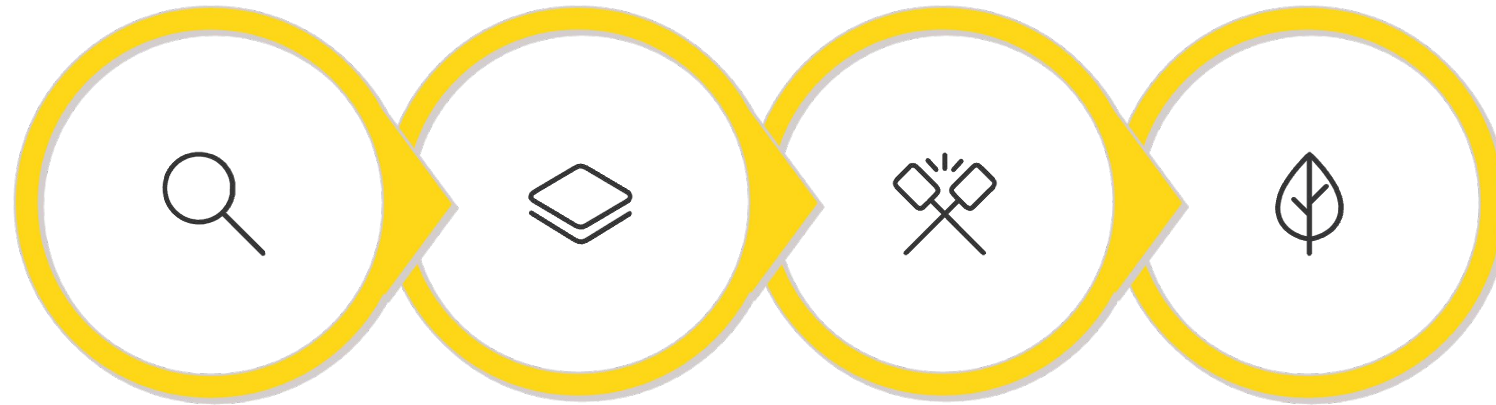
**Trade-off →
Integration**

Cost vs impact
becomes
synergistic
value

**Impact →
Revenue**

Positive
externalities
become
business
models

From Theory to Startup Design Practice



**Identify
Issue**

**Choose
Archetype**

**Redesign
Logic**

**Define
Value**

Application is iterative, not linear.

Key Takeaways



Design Variable

Sustainability is a strategic design variable, not a compliance burden



Scale Driver

Business models determine whether impact scales or stalls



Innovation Lens

Archetypes provide structured lenses for innovation thinking



Competitive Value

ESG factors can drive differentiation and competitive advantage

Thank you!

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