



Integrated Sustainability in 20 Words or Less

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Are we on a safe and just path to a future in which humans and other life can flourish? The challenge of sustainability is setting that path for humanity on a planet limited by finite resources. Integrated Sustainability (IS) is a holistic view that responds to the sustainability challenge by integrating self and contextual awareness and analytical approaches with thought and action.

IS includes the fundamental logic of systems thinking. In this logic, a system is an integrated whole whose essential properties arise from the relationships between its parts. In taking a systemic view, you work with a mindset that considers interdependencies and mutual impacts of your decisions among society, environment, and economics. The IS-driven mindset will break through real and perceived tradeoffs—between profit and purpose, performance and impact, economic development, environmental protection, and social justice. This mindset will be created through four interdependent components of the IS method:

1: Purpose

IS view starts with discussion of purpose. What is the purpose of your activity? You will explicitly name and critically examine your purpose in terms that include social, environmental, and economic impacts simultaneously rather than sequentially. These are highly complicated and connected issues that require a systematic approach. Identify your purpose as aligned with how you define your responsibility. Your purpose is contextual. If you set the boundaries too narrow, you will miss seeing your real impacts. If you set the boundaries too wide, you will be overwhelmed with all issues of IS.

2: Strategic Intent

To be successful at driving a business strategy with IS view, you have to translate shared purpose into action with those involved in the process. Seek a concise and balanced purpose that generates action. What assets and competencies can you bring for sustainability goals? What needs, risks, and opportunities can we address? Think “small”! It is much easier and more effective to start “small” and build your way up to bigger issues. For example, before tackling big social issues, it may be more effective to improve your workplace and give back to your community. Remember IS view proposes a continuous method; you will build on your achievements, learn from your setbacks and revisit your purpose..

3: Stakeholders

Each stakeholder’s values and perspectives influence how and which issues are emphasized. Who is and who is not involved in your consideration of purpose? What is at the table? And, who is at the table? Engaging multiple stakeholders with your purpose will increase your understanding of the connected living systems. You need to expand your thinking on who should be a key stakeholder, going beyond shareholders and customers. Once you identify your stakeholders, you need to consider the perspectives of, the impacts on, and the rights and responsibilities of each stakeholder. How do you prioritize the responsibilities, rights, and power of key stakeholders?

In your discussions of sustainability, financial viability remains central to any decision. You must examine financial calculations without being constrained by them. Your purpose may seem financially risky at first, and not be ready for prime time. Who should you partner with then? Answer the following: Who are you? Whom do you know? What do you know? Reaching your purpose may mean new collaborations with existing stakeholders and discovering new partnerships with stakeholders. Your purpose may seem reachable when you engage others, increase your resource base, and expand the possibilities available.

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4: Process and Metrics

How are we going to design, develop, launch, and evaluate sustainability initiatives? Answer the following question: Do you ask how to achieve a sustainable solution to a particular challenge or simply whether you can do so? By asking whether, you set up a situation in which the choice is either/or—whether or not to do something. Asking how unleashes creativity. You cannot understand what you don't measure. Performance metrics show what is being measured and what is not. Do your metrics consider your purpose as evaluated across the social, environmental, and economic areas? Are you including different timeframes—long term, midterm, as well as short term? Do you seek to measure externalities—the impact of your actions outside the organization? Through your background in science, the humanities, operations, accounting, and finance disciplines, you must build transparent and accountable sustainability-related metrics that may be unique to your purpose.

5: Results

How do you know if you are indeed conceptualizing sustainability with rigor? Take a look to what extent you integrate your metrics into decision making and performance measurement. Your metrics will allow you to compare actual performance with targets. They will help you monitor your progress and assess performance of your actions. They facilitate new valuable learning. What are the benefits to our business? To our workplace? To community? To society?

Integrated Sustainability is a living method for ethical and responsible decision-making. In the manner of ET&A, IS seeks action—no matter how small. You are to build on what you learn and assess performance of your actions. It requires concerted effort with multiple stakeholders and informed decision making with metrics. As you learn more about the impacts of your decisions and actions on stakeholders, you will revisit your purpose, identify new stakeholders, and change metrics accordingly.

Business Transformation with Integrated Sustainability



- **Purpose** What is our mission? What is our vision?
- **Strategic intent.** What assets and competencies can you bring for sustainability goals? What needs, risks and opportunities can we address?
- **Stakeholders.** Who should you partner with?
- **Process and Metrics.** How are we going to design, develop, launch and evaluate sustainability initiatives?
- **Results.** What are the benefits to our business? To our workplace? To community? To society?

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