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Review

# A literature and practice review to develop sustainable business model archetypes

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### Highlights

- The literature and practice of sustainability innovation is vast but fragmented.
- This research seeks to develop a unifying research agenda.
- The paper introduces sustainable business model archetypes.
- These seek to serve as exemplars for sustainable business model innovation.

## Abstract

Eco-innovations, eco-efficiency and corporate social responsibility practices define much of the current industrial sustainability agenda. While important, they are insufficient in themselves to deliver the holistic changes necessary to achieve long-term social and environmental sustainability. How can we encourage corporate innovation that significantly changes the way companies operate to ensure greater sustainability?

Sustainable business models (SBM) incorporate a triple bottom line approach and consider a wide range of stakeholder interests, including environment and society. They are important in driving and implementing corporate innovation for sustainability, can help embed sustainability into business purpose and processes, and serve as a key driver of competitive advantage.

Many innovative approaches may contribute to delivering sustainability through business models, but have not been collated under a unifying theme of business model innovation. The literature and business practice review has identified a wide range of examples of mechanisms and solutions that can contribute to business model innovation for sustainability. The examples were collated and analysed to identify defining patterns and attributes that might facilitate categorisation.

Sustainable business model archetypes are introduced to describe groupings of mechanisms and solutions that may contribute to building up the business model for sustainability. The aim of these archetypes is to develop a common language that can be used to accelerate the development of sustainable business models in research and practice. The archetypes are: Maximise material and energy efficiency; Create value from "waste"<sup>TM</sup>; Substitute with renewables and natural processes; Deliver functionality rather than ownership; Adopt a stewardship role; Encourage sufficiency; Re-purpose the business for society/environment; and Develop scale-up solutions.



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## Keywords

Business model innovation; Industrial sustainability; Value creation; Stakeholders; Sustainable consumption; Sustainable production

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