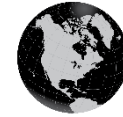


# Case Research with a Sustainability Mindset



**NACRA**  
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If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.

Dr. Wayne Dyer

## INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is defined as “meeting the needs of the present generation, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,” (United Nations Brundtland Commission 1987). We hope our article on building a sustainable mindset into case research may help you – our fellow case researchers – ‘change the way you look at things,’ and inspire you to write cases that consider broader, longer-term consequences and impact on stakeholders rather than a more traditional narrower focus on shareholder impact. To do so we present a lens to assist in framing business problems with a sustainability mindset and provide strategies to help apply this sustainability lens in case writing.

This approach, framing the problem (based in any discipline) with a sustainability mindset, can provide case researchers with ways to introduce new perspectives, tools and frameworks in their case writing such as the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME, n.d.), Impactful 5 meaningful learning (i5 PRME, 2024), Giving Voice to Values (GVV, Gentile, 2022), Triple Bottom Line (TBL, Elkington, 2020), systems thinking (Jackson, 2019) and regenerative thinking (East, 2020; Muñoz & Branzei, 2021). For how these work together in our model, see **Appendix A** – Case Research with a Sustainability Mindset (CRSM) lens.

As problems tend to be analyzed and solved based on how they are framed (Crane, Matten, & Moon, 2010) adopting the CRSM lens can help improve case researchers’ ability to recognize and highlight sustainability elements within the case problem by providing a view of the case situation from interconnected individual, organization, societal and ecosystem perspectives. We think this view will help case researchers identify consequences of decisions on a broader, longer-term, multi-stakeholder scale as opposed to traditional individualistic or shareholder viewpoint (Armon, 2021; Fath, Fiscus, Goerner, Berea, & Ulanowicz, 2019). CRSM can highlight often implicit assumptions behind business perspectives, including those built into the analytical tools used (e.g. highlighting the ridiculousness of externalities in closed systems; seeing the indirect costs of carbon emissions even if emissions are ‘free’).

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Organizations have identified that gaps in sustainability knowledge, skills, and expertise are major barriers toward achieving their goals (Microsoft, 2022) and we know there is an urgent need for solving global sustainability problems (UN 2024). Therefore, incorporating the CRSM lens into our case research to bridge this sustainability skills gap is more important now than ever. We hope the CRSM lens will inspire case researchers to apply new sustainable and regenerative business frameworks in their case writing to help fill this void in sustainability skills and increase the availability of sustainability-oriented cases to use in our classrooms.

The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) has recognized the need within business schools to develop curricula enabling impactful thought leadership, founded upon the principles of ethical behaviour, collegiality, and corporate social impact, and to promote the use of cases to support these efforts (Mills, 2024). Cases not only provide an intellectual contribution to research, they also directly engage students in the learning process and provide development of key innovative and creative skills required to solve the problems of the future (Mills, 2024). As such, case studies written with a CRSM lens can provide an ideal way to develop much-needed sustainability skills. Framing real-world case situations through the CRSM lens can improve students' analytical, problem-solving, and decision-making skills by encouraging them to consider broader consequences (longer-term and stakeholders rather than shareholders) in their analysis and decision-making, which are valuable skills for effective business leaders of tomorrow.

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## **CASE RESEARCH WITH A SUSTAINABILITY MINDSET**

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Case research with a sustainability mindset (CRSM) includes several key foundational frameworks, described below, and examines situations from interconnected individual (GVV and i5), organizational (PRME), societal (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals – UN SDGs) and ecosystem (systems thinking and regenerative) perspectives aimed to encourage case writers to consider the broader consequences of decisions and longer-term impact.

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## **SYSTEMS THINKING**

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Systems thinking, sometimes called holistic or circular thinking, considers problems as part of a whole rather than being viewed in isolation, and is a major component of sustainability as it highlights how individual elements of a problem are often interconnected in ways which may not be readily apparent (Clayton & Radcliffe, 1996; Robertson, 2021). Incorporating systems thinking into sustainability case research is important as it encourages case researchers to examine all relevant elements contributing to, and being impacted by, the problem, and provides impetus to incorporate cross-disciplinary information into the case story to incite students to consider a more multi-faceted view of the problem. When considering systems thinking approach in your case research, we recommend highlighting ways in which the focal challenge is interconnected with a broader social and/or ecological context. To some extent, all case challenges sit within a broader context, so reflecting upon the connections within this context is helpful to provide a foundation of content within the case, and guidance within the teaching note, to support integration of systems thinking into case analysis and discussion. This approach supports the more formalized use of some of the frameworks below to begin sensitizing students to the inherent

interconnectivity between individuals, organizations, society, and the ecosystem to consider in solving business problems.

## **TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE**

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The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework, also known as people, planet and profit (3P), supports a holistic view of sustainability as it extends the perspective of the case problem beyond the firm's and its shareholders' economic framework, to include consideration of the firm's ecological and social impacts of actions taken (Elkington, 1997, 2018, 2020). TBL is essential in understanding value-creation for businesses today because economic viability, environmental quality, and social justice are growing more tightly woven (Fisk, 2010; Hitchcock & Willard, 2006). Businesses are increasingly expected to both be financially successful and agents for positive societal change through addressing societal and environmental problems, even more than governments or non-government organizations (NGOs) in many settings (Elkington, 2020; Willard, 2012). Therefore, analyzing business problems through a balanced economic, ecological, and societal framework is critical for meeting the UN SDGs because organizations must develop radical solutions to become "economically more inclusive, more socially just and – crucially - environmentally restorative," (Elkington, 2020: 12). Like the above, when taking this approach in case research we recommend highlighting the broader context of the case challenge. For TBL, in particular, highlighting the diverse types of existing and/or potential impacts implied by the focal challenge can provide specific analytical content for students to consider the diverse types of value firms may create and for whom.

## **PRINCIPLES FOR RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT EDUCATION**

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Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME), a United Nations-supported initiative of more than 800 business schools globally, supports business schools to prepare society's future leaders with the mindset, skills, and resources required to effectively manage critical societal issues in economically, environmentally, and socially just ways (PRME, n.d. para). PRME does this through curricular and pedagogical guidance to support the UN SDGs and through supporting the United Nations Global Compact, a cross-section of businesses, UN agencies, civil society and labour organizations formed in 2000 which supports organizations to adopt more sustainable and socially responsible policies and develop actions in support of such policies (Rasche, Waddock, & McIntosh, 2013). In particular, PRME is built around a set of seven principles including Purpose, Values, Teach, Research, Partner, Practice, and Share, which encourage schools to develop and share sustainability-oriented teaching and learning to support educating society's future leaders with a holistic view of global social responsibility and sustainability management (PRME, n.d.; Sedlacek, 2013). The PRME Impactful Five (i5) toolkit was developed to support development of students' skills, knowledge, and attitudes through designed educational experiences. It presents five strategies based upon playful learning research (i.e., Nesbitt, Blinkoff, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2023) to (1) make learning meaningful, (2) facilitate active engagement (3) design for iteration (4) develop supportive social interaction (5) foster joy and well-being (Forbes, 2021; PRME, 2024). PRME i5 supports the development of cognitive, emotional, creative, social, and physical skills in the learning process, and is well aligned with the case-based approach to learning as it focuses on discussion and

analysis of relevant and meaningful real-world problems. When considering a PRME i5 approach in case research, we recommend bringing the protagonist more fully into the case. While a protagonist is always necessary in a decision-focused case, they are often used more as placeholders to focus action rather than opportunities to better understand their values and experiences as these relate to the case challenge. Yet, when seeking to instigate students to bring themselves more fully into a case (bridging their analytical selves with their own values and principles), a robustly described and personalized protagonist can help spark more meaningful, value-driven conversations. The teaching note can build on this deep personalization by providing opportunities for students to connect their analytical view of the case with their understanding of the protagonist. Such discussions could then progress towards students stepping into the protagonist's role and exploring how their own values and experiences may influence potential outcomes, and when they occur, provide space for students to explore and reconcile tensions between their personal views and the challenge of the case.

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## GIVING VOICE TO VALUES

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Giving Voice to Values (GVV) is an approach to teaching ethics which takes as its foundational assumption that most people want to act on their values and have a reasonable chance of success when doing so (Gentile, 2022; Gentile et al., 2015). In seeking to support students in integrating their analytical skills with their personal values, passions, and lived experiences, GVV is complementary to the PRME i5 pedagogical approach of developing educational experiences which support students in engaging in authentic, purpose-driven, meaningful, and results-oriented actions. The goal here is to encourage students to think of, explore, and envision innovative approaches outside of what they have been accustomed to thinking is feasible, and motivate them to make fully informed, authentic, and results-oriented decisions toward a more sustainable and socially-just future. When approaching GVV from a case research perspective, we recommend broadening the context of the protagonist and elaborating on relevant additional details, which can be used by thoughtful students to consider and explore innovative alternatives to achieve intended goals. A deeper view of the protagonist can support a discussion around values and experience – the protagonist's and the students' own – and this broader contextualization of the case challenge can provide some guidance and detail for students to explore more innovative and out-of-the-box ideas as they work through the case.

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## UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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The UN SDGs provide a common language for sustainable development (United Nations, 2024). It is important to address the UN SDGs through case research, given the urgent need for individuals, organizations, and societies globally to develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities to work together to achieve these goals for the health and well-being of all people and our planet (see **Appendix B** – UN SDGs). The 17 goals have an underlying framework of 169 targets and 231 indicators that help measure progress towards the goals. The goals are interrelated and mutually supportive and none of them can be achieved in isolation. The UN SDGs are inclusive as they come with the pledge to “leave no one behind,” (Marshall, 2019). When considering the approach for addressing UN SDGs in case research, we recommend categorising the 17 goals into relevant and non-relevant goals with respect to the organization and

problem being considered. To simplify this step, we recommend narrowing the selection to a few relevant UN SDGs to evaluate how addressing these will create long term value for the organization, while also anticipating risks and opportunities based on action and inaction by the organization. For geographic context and progress on the UN SDGs, it is beneficial to explore the Sustainable Development Report 2024 which visualizes global progress, country profiles, and interactive maps (Sachs, Lafortune, & Fuller, 2024).

## REGENERATIVE THINKING

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Regeneration refers to an inherent attribute of living systems and refers to the “capacity to bring into existence again,” (Muñoz & Branzei, 2021). Regenerative thinking is a critical component within the sustainability framework as it pushes the systems thinking, or circular thinking, further, to focus on actions that repair and regenerate systems to maintain the viability and integrity of solutions in dynamic environments (Buckton et al., 2023; East, 2020). From a business perspective, regeneration implies using a strategic approach of restoring and regenerating natural resources and social systems that goes beyond sustainability and seeks to create greater positive impacts on the environment, society, and economy (van Heel, 2023). The goal of a regenerative business is not merely to limit the impact that it has on the planet, society, and environment, but to contribute positively to the economy and the world around it, achieving a net positive - rather than net zero - impact. Regenerative businesses acknowledge their place in the entire system where they operate, the community, the industry, their resources, and use that knowledge of interdependence in strategic decision-making. They actively shift mindsets for long term value creation, be it corporate, social, or environmental (Sanford, 2017). Regenerative actions are important to accelerate sustainability efforts at a pace to match global environmental and social crises (Buckton et al., 2023; Camrass, 2020; East, 2020). A growing number of organizations like Patagonia, Natura, Seventh Generation, and Interface are moving beyond sustainability to regenerative principles as a corporate ambition and purpose for doing business. Cases on such organizations or projects can highlight the complexity and interconnectedness of business and sustainability issues, including pathways to regeneration that consider the longer-term viability and impact of decisions (Armon, 2021; Jackson, 2019; also see **Appendix C** - Beyond Sustainability: Regenerative Thinking for Longer-term Viability and Net Positive Renewal). When considering a regenerative lens for case research, we recommend including context that assists students in recognizing opportunities to not merely solve the problem but also improve the situation for stakeholders involved for the longer term. These types of cases will help students develop good habits toward regenerative thinking and develop tendencies to think of ways to leave the world – or case situation - better than they found it (i.e. adding context to suggest ways to include indigenous people in implementing the recommended solution where possible, ways to evaluate alternatives that solve the business problem and improve the environment, etc.). In other words, the goal here is to support students to seek out net positive solutions, rather than aiming for reduced negative or net zero impact.

## STRATEGIES TO ASSIST IN DEVELOPING CASE RESEARCH WITH A SUSTAINABILITY MINDSET

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In this section we provide a non-exhaustive collection of strategies to support case writing with a CRSM. As each case is unique, based on what the author wishes to focus on, and *Case Research Journal* and others have developed a wealth of resources to provide support and guidance on writing cases and instructor's manuals. Rather than duplicating these efforts, the strategies here focus on additional considerations for incorporating a sustainability and regenerative framework to case writing.

### CRSM STRATEGIES FOR CASES

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- *Choosing an organization and protagonist:* when thinking about a case to analyze sustainability impact, you'll want to consider the type of organization, challenge, and protagonist you wish to write about. Organizations with a strong sustainability orientation or those undergoing sustainability-oriented changes may have more readily clear challenges. As well, different protagonists (e.g. from under-represented groups, females, students, etc.) may have different perspectives worth highlighting (Woodward & Grandy, 2022). Organizations or protagonists with sustainability-oriented constraints or enablers provided in corporate strategic plans, policies, or industry regulations can be ideal candidates for writing cases with a CRSM. For example, Unilever has attained sustainability certifications and regulations such as International Organization for Standards (ISO): ISO 14000 certification for management practices for preserving and maintaining the environment, ISO 50001 for energy management best practices, ISO 45001 for occupational safety, ISO 9000 for quality management, and ISO 26000 as a guidance standard on social responsibility. Maintaining these certifications drives Unilever's corporate sustainability policies and guides the organization's processes and operations, as well as its subsidiaries, and alignment with these policies is measured on an ongoing basis (Unilever, 2024).
- *Framing the challenge:* accepting that firms are part of an interconnected society, one might argue that any case challenge has clear environmental and societal implications. However, when defining a challenge for a sustainability case, we recommend being explicit in framing the challenge within its broader societal and environmental context to help students become more aware of the bigger picture of the challenge and the organization. For a sustainability case, this will nudge students to take a more balanced (economic, ecological, societal) view of the challenge, alternatives, and longer-term impacts.
- *The organization:* given the goal of broadening students' views and providing opportunities to engage in more holistic and regenerative thinking, including integrating their own values with their more analytic perspectives of the challenge, context, and implications, the organizational context should provide that broader perspective of the organization. The case should provide sufficient information to provide students with a clear sense of the organization's history and values around taking sustainability-related action (e.g. how has sustainability been integrated into the organization and what past successes or failures inform this challenge; the key resources, capabilities and

constraints which may influence potential solutions; etc.; c.f., Subramanian & DeMoss, 2022 as an example). Context around the drivers and constraints influences the case situation including the broader implications of potential alternatives, and the direct and indirect impacts to stakeholders around particular actions may support certain alternatives. Further, the relevant organizational and stakeholder power and governance structures that students may be able to draw on can support a student's growing awareness of the challenges involved in effectively implementing sustainability-oriented actions within the organization.

- *The protagonist*: an understanding of the protagonist is key to the case because it is the protagonist's organizational position, power, and ability to muster relevant resources and support within the organization which is needed to make decisions and support the longer-term viability of the recommended solution in dynamic environments. Depending on the case and challenge, it may also be relevant to provide additional context highlighting relevant aspects of the protagonist's values, goals, skillsets, experiences, etc. to better situate the student into the protagonist's perspective.
- *External context*: the external context is especially important as sustainability focuses intentionally on the interconnectedness of an organization's actions on its broader societal and ecological contexts. Many challenges here will be influenced, if not outright dictated, by factors outside the organization, such as customer or supplier demands, regulations, industry practices, etc. Even for those cases where organizations seek out leadership positions supporting sustainability, such actions are influenced by changes in the marketplace and societal expectations. As well, it is important to highlight how key stakeholders, including the natural environment, may influence and be affected by potential alternatives.
- *Temporal implications*: in addition to integrating the broader context into the case challenge, it is important to offer some temporal context into the case. This piece may be more difficult given the tension between short-term business thinking (usually months to a few years) and longer-term societal and ecological thinking (years to generations). This is not a particular case section, but rather a view which should be integrated throughout the case as acknowledging and addressing these tensions is a key aspect of the difficulty of creating meaningful sustainability-oriented, regenerative action among organizations able to maintain integrity and viability within rapidly changing internal, external, and social environments in the longer-term.

## CHALLENGES WRITING CRSM CASES

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In addition to the usual challenges of case writing, you may face some challenges when writing cases through a CRSM lens. You may struggle to keep cases within standard length guidelines as you add content to support exploring the broader context of the case challenge and potentially more novel perspectives to addressing it. With this additional content and broader desired class conversations, you may also find it harder to keep the case clearly focused. For the authors, this is a constant challenge for any new case, though the remedy is the same: diligently work to clarify and refine the focal

challenge and make sure the case content aligns with the challenge and the types of conversations and analyses you expect from the students.

To further assist with tackling potential scope ‘drift and bloat’ challenges, it can be helpful to explicitly communicate boundaries in your case writing to indicate additional impact or voices that are relevant to the case story yet remain outside the scope of a particular analysis. Drawing these explicit boundaries, and recognizing the parts of the case story that are not included, is a helpful strategy to maintain an inclusive approach - recognizing broader impact - while remaining within case writing guidelines and maintaining focus. This approach of explicitly indicating relevant stakeholders or context not included in the case story also assists students in recognizing the shortcomings of many closed systems that ignore the impact of externalities.

## CRSM STRATEGIES FOR INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL

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- *Case focus and connection to course content:* as part of the process of choosing an organization, protagonist and challenge, you'll also want to clarify the case's curricular focus. Is this a discipline focused case (e.g. an accounting case which integrates sustainability issues) or an interdisciplinary case (e.g. a sustainability case which draws in multiple business disciplines)? As with developing any case, the clearer you are regarding the case challenge and course content, the more clarity you will have on the content and level of detail needed to support the students' work. With the goal of providing a greater level of interdisciplinarity and broader perspective to students, having clarity around the case focus is especially important for choosing what details to emphasize to support student learning.
- *Learning objectives:* in addition to the more typical types of objectives found in many cases (summarize, compare, assess, recommend, etc.), objectives for CRSM cases should acknowledge the need for students to undertake different types of work and consider different frameworks, all to support analysis and decision-making. Some examples include developing a plan for supporting your recommended actions over time, identifying all stakeholders involved in the evaluation of alternatives and explaining impact, identifying and prioritizing areas for regenerative action to increase the likelihood of longer-term viability and the integrity of the proposed solution, etc.
- *Discussion questions and activities:* with the caveat that each case is unique in its focus and orientation, there are some types of questions and activities which may be more readily adaptable to support students developing broader perspectives and more holistic solutions. Questions here may include points about the broader context of a challenge and its connection to particular organizational goals, alternatives and impacts for the organization and more broadly for relevant stakeholders, long-term potential impacts of proposed alternatives, etc. Questions also exist around numerous other topics. Some examples include a) the protagonist's own experiences, skillsets, values, and position (formal and informal) within the organization; b) how students' own values, experiences, and skillsets align (or do not align) with the protagonist and challenge; c) the resources and constraints for particular actions; d) key actors inside and outside the organization who are implicated or impacted and assessing how they may support or interfere with particular desired actions or outcomes; e) risks of particular actions and plans to address or mitigate them;



f) conversations with key actors to seek support and resources to implement proposed plans; g) whether and how to plan and role play conversations with key stakeholders to seek support for action; g) developing backup plans.

- *Integrating course content:* in addition to the case-situation question topics just discussed, it is important to also develop questions to explicitly connect to the specific course content (e.g. concepts, frameworks, tools, etc). Sustainability related cases should include questions asking students to make explicit the broader perspective of the case and impact (short and long-term) of alternatives considered. Such examples may include topics which address economic, ecological, and societal value creation and/or impacts, stakeholders' influence and power, short-term and long-term impacts, the role of one's own values and experiences in choosing alternatives, aligning outcomes and impacts with UN SDGs, and so on. In practice, case analysis and content integration questions are often intertwined through the case discussion itself.

## **CHALLENGES WRITING CRSM INSTRUCTOR'S MANUALS**

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When developing an Instructors' Manual from the CRSM perspective, the challenge is largely the same as with any other case: to provide an IM which guides instructors on how to support their students in addressing the case challenge. Given the broader focus of CRSM cases, however, some instructors may need additional support to prepare for teaching the case if they are not familiar with the integrated nature of sustainability concepts. That said, one of the coauthors of this article often describes IMs as a lifeline that instructors, whether new to cases or new to a particular case, cling to as they wend their way through their case discussions with students. In other words, to some extent these points apply to all IMs, though may be particularly valuable with sustainability-related cases, given that much of the content is relatively new. Curating high-quality supplemental material (e.g. readings, videos, interactive materials, etc.) is not only necessary in most IMs but may be crucial to supporting the case, as many of the concepts discussed here are not yet broadly integrated in business textbooks, meaning both instructors and students may need the support of these materials. Especially when there are no clear and succinct relevant materials, authors may wish to draft short technical notes on relevant case topics, accompanying the IM, for the instructors' benefit and/or to assign with the case itself. As well, you may find that certain questions you write for the case discussion may need additional explanation or analysis in order to support the intended learning outcomes.

CRSM IMs may include a section guiding discussion of any boundaries communicated in the case identifying additional context, impact, or stakeholder voices relevant to the case situation yet excluded from the case story. This guidance in the IM can assist instructors in drawing students' attention to the boundaries indicated in the case and to explore the reasoning for the exclusion, choice of protagonist, any relevant stakeholder voices missing, and balancing the necessities of writing case stories to meet case writing length and guidelines. Again, while these points are worth considering for all IMs, it may be of increased value to support teaching sustainability related cases due to greater complexity.

Finally, it is worth considering whether you can highlight other firms engaging in similar types of actions as those discussed in the CRSM case, either during the final case discussion wrap up or at interim summary points in the case discussion, to help students transfer and generalize their learnings from a particular case.

## OUTCOMES

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Adopting the CRSM lens, and applying some of the strategies recommended above, provides exposure to new and interesting perspectives, frameworks, or ways of thinking about case problems. The opportunity to view problems from a different lens such as PRME, GVV, TBL, systems thinking, or regenerative thinking can help broaden your mindset to consider alternative root causes, impact, or options that you may have otherwise entirely overlooked. Changing the way you look at things by adopting a CRSM lens can be an inspiring and illuminating experience that opens new case research opportunities and exciting, impactful areas to explore.

Including additional context in case writing, as per the recommendations above, can have a positive impact on awareness of sustainability among case researchers and, we hope, help perpetuate a sustainability mindset in the case research group for problem-solving and decision-making. As you write cases with a sustainability mindset and work to include the additional information and context required, it will become easier over time to recognize the many interconnections within case situations involved in the problem-solving and decision-making process. Developing this inclusive lens and recognizing broader impact represents the foundation of a sustainable mindset.

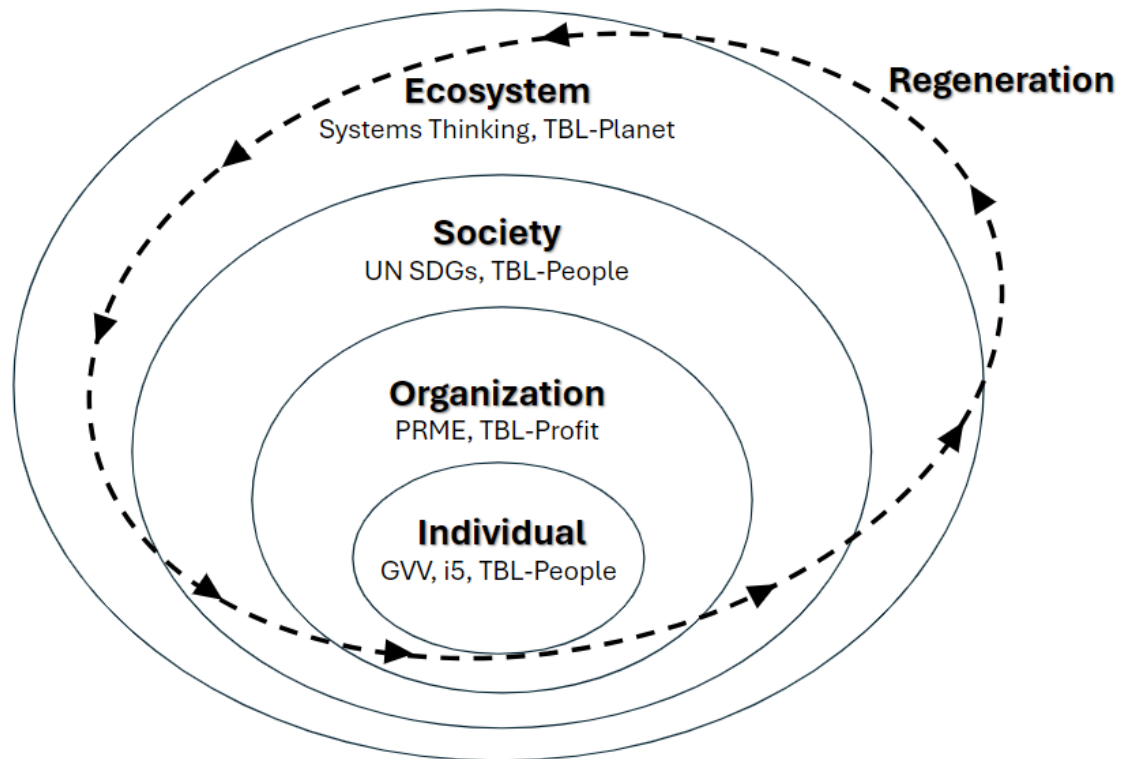
Writing cases using the CRSM lens can also result in a case-learning experience that will help our students develop essential sustainability skills for 21<sup>st</sup> century. Students will develop skills to analyze problems from an integrated multi-stakeholder perspective (rather than a shareholder focus), evaluate broader consequences of alternatives and decisions to solve problems, and consider the longer-term viability and renewal opportunities of recommended solutions in today's fast-changing environment. Class discussions based upon relevant and meaningful CRSM cases will help broaden our students' mindset and enable them to see things through a sustainable lens. As problems are generally analyzed and solved in the manner they are framed, framing case problems with a sustainability lens is a very effective way to advance our students' thinking and mindset in this way.

## CONCLUSION

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Given the current gap in sustainability knowledge, skills, and expertise within organizations (Microsoft, 2022) it is important for business schools to include sustainability-oriented material in their courses to help fill this gap. Cases provide an excellent way to achieve this objective (Mills, 2024). We sincerely hope this article will assist in bridging this sustainability skills gap by inspiring our fellow case researchers to '*see things differently*' and adopt a CRSM lens to consider new perspectives, tools, and frameworks in their case writing, thereby supporting awareness and advancement of sustainability skills. Developing cases that consider broader, longer-term consequences of decisions and stakeholder impact will help us prepare the business leaders of tomorrow for success in solving complex problems.

## Appendix A – Case Research with a Sustainable Mindset (CRSM) Lens



Source: Created by authors

## Appendix B – United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs)



Source: United Nations. “Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals.” United Nations Sustainable Development, n.d. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/> accessed August 14, 2024.

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) presented the *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* report that outlined a plan of action for people, planet, and prosperity (2015). The report set out a comprehensive and interconnected framework of 17 Goals called the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to tackle the world’s most pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges that should be accomplished by 2030 (World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2017).

The SDGs are the product of extensive multi-stakeholder negotiations involving a wide range of sectors, including business. The goals provide business with an equitable framework through which to translate global needs and ambitions into business solutions. These solutions are opportunities for companies to better manage their risks, anticipate consumer demand, build positions in growth markets, secure access to needed resources and strengthen their supply chains, while moving the world towards the realization of the SDGs (World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2017).

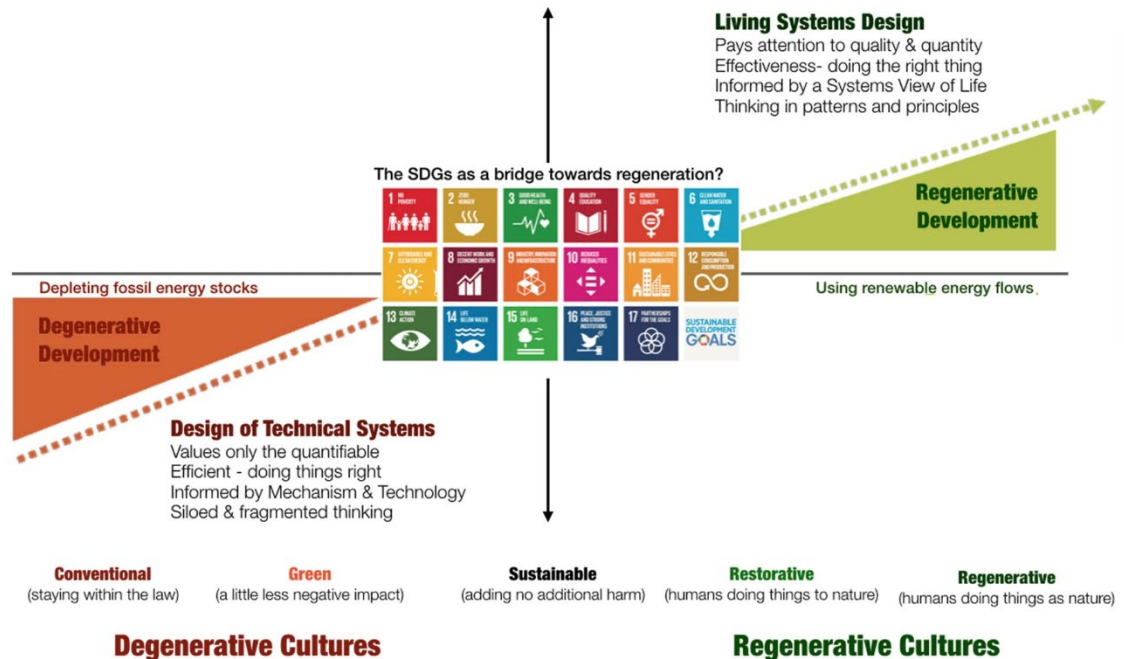
To consider the progress made on the SDGs so far, the recent *UN Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024* highlights that the world is severely off track to realize the 2030 Agenda (United Nations, 2015). Only 17% of the SDG targets are on track, nearly half are showing minimal or moderate progress, and progress on over one-third has stalled or even regressed (United Nations, 2024).

An important consideration at this time is that businesses cannot thrive in societies that fail, and long-term success hinges on the SDGs being realized. Businesses that take an active role in leading the transformation needed for sustainable development will be better placed to harness emerging market opportunities, manage risks, and

secure the license to operate through 2030 and beyond (World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2020). With just a few years left until 2030, urgent global action is required by all interest groups, including businesses and business schools. A valid question to ask is what happens beyond 2030: should we abandon the SDGs? There is a group of influential scientists, economists, and thinkers who have suggested that the timeline for the SDGs should be extended to 2050 (Nerini et al., 2024). To guide more urgent and less incremental change, in order to meet the radical transformations required, a new framing for sustainability includes regenerative systems thinking and focuses on actions that repair and regenerate systems to accelerate the learning and impact of sustainability efforts at a pace to match global environmental and social crisis (Buckton et al., 2023; East, 2020; Gibbons, 2020). It is no longer sufficient for organizations to reduce anthropocentric harm, if we are to achieve the SDGs timeline, a regenerative approach is required (Armon, 2021; Hahn & Tampe, 2021).

## Appendix C - Beyond Sustainability: Regenerative Thinking for Longer-term Viability and Net Positive Renewal

### Beyond Sustainability: Designing Regenerative Cultures



Graphic by Daniel Wahl based on Reed, 2006 & Roland, 2018; Dr. Daniel Christian Wahl ([contact@danielchristianwahl.com](mailto:contact@danielchristianwahl.com))

Source: Huntjens, P. (2021). Sustainability Transition: Quest for a New Social Contract. In: Towards a Natural Social Contract. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67130-3\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67130-3_2)

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