

What is *Sustainability?*



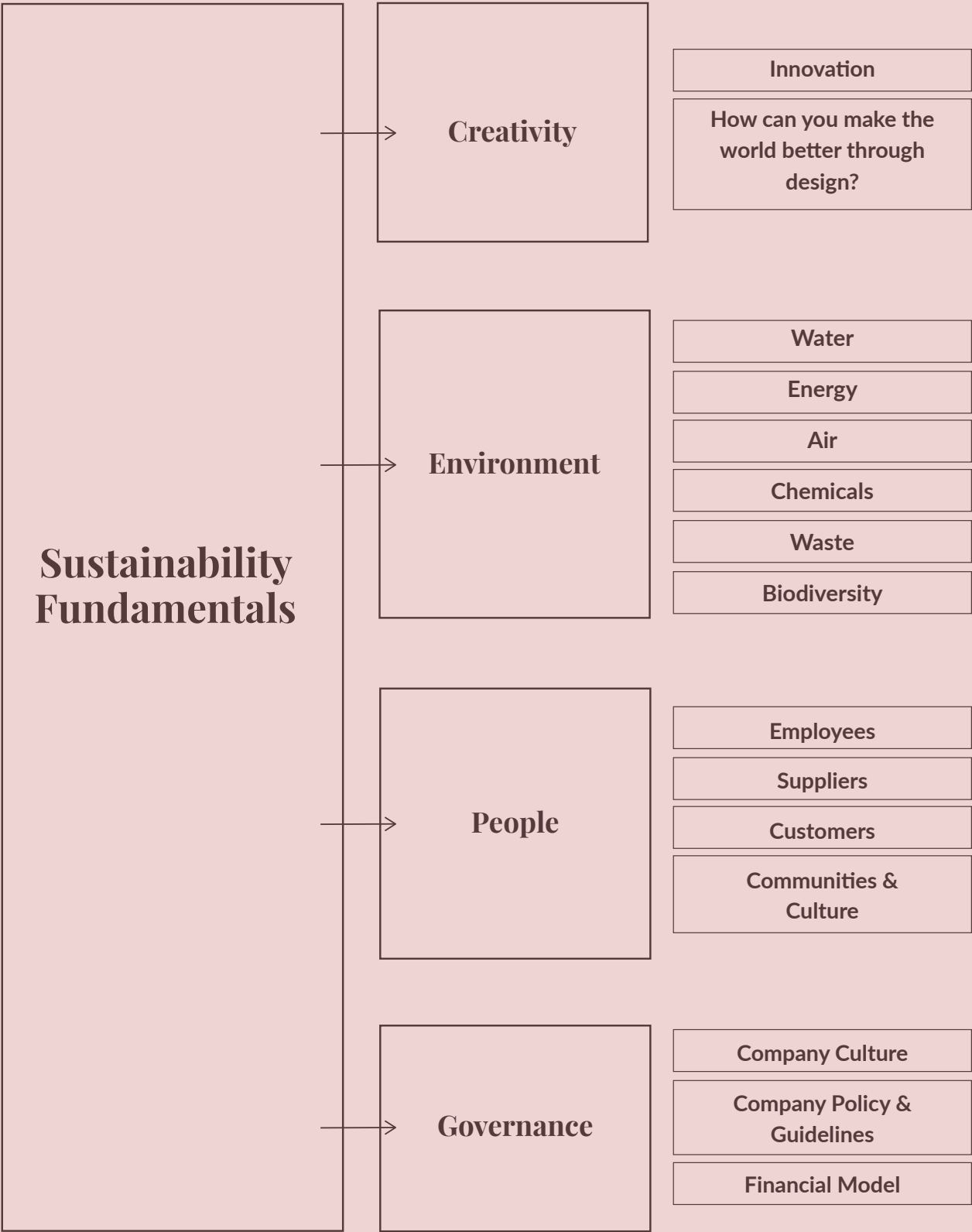
WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY?

Overview

Sustainability is great design. It is based on a deep understanding that all things are interconnected in this world. Sustainability provides the ability to design and produce indefinitely. This requires that the design, development, production and use of fashion products meets today's needs, without preventing them from being met by future generations.

The fashion industry is not currently sustainable. We are using up natural resources and exploiting people in ways that will deplete future generations of the resources they need, impacting future profitability and business opportunities. *We have the power to change the way fashion is made and consumed by creating a sustainable industry with greater influence and increased profit.* While many sustainability initiatives exist, there is no way to be 100% sustainable... yet.

Failure to embrace sustainable practices neglects a key factor for long-term success in business, you could read about [The Business Case for Sustainability](#) section of this guide.



WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY

Global consensus

Now is truly an exciting time for the sustainability movement in fashion. In addition to a plethora of new technology and material innovations, there is an unprecedented level of collaboration across the entire industry and its stakeholders.

Companies, governments, non-governmental organizations, academia, communities, and individuals on a global scale are committing to:

1. Common goals
2. A common system by which to measure sustainability
3. A common plan of action



GLOBAL CONSENSUS

01

Common goals

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals:

The [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) of the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development – adopted by 193 countries in a historic UN Summit and officially went into force on January 1, 2016. The goals universally apply to all countries, who committed to mobilizing efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind. Each of the 17 goals set forth specific targets to be achieved by 2030.

The goals call for action by poor, rich and middle-income countries to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. They recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and addresses a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection.





GLOBAL CONSENSUS

02

Common metrics

The [Sustainable Apparel Coalition](#) (SAC) and HIGG index:

The Sustainable Apparel Coalition is the apparel, footwear, and textile industry's leading alliance for sustainable production. The SAC developed the [Higg Index](#), a suite of tools that enables brands, retailers, and facilities of all sizes — at every stage in their sustainability journey — to measure and score a company or product's sustainability performance. The Higg Index delivers a holistic overview that empowers businesses to make meaningful improvements that protect the wellbeing of factory workers, local communities, and the environment.

The Sustainable Apparel Coalition was born from a dynamic and unconventional meeting of the minds. In 2009, Walmart and Patagonia came together with a radical mission: collect peers and competitors from across the apparel, footwear and textile sectors and develop a universal approach to measuring sustainability performance.





GLOBAL CONSENSUS

03

Common agenda

The Global Fashion Agenda:

The Global Fashion Agenda (GFA), based in Copenhagen, Denmark, is a leadership forum on fashion sustainability. The GFA works to develop, collect and spread the insights required for decision makers to implement sustainable practices. Additionally, they ensure industry collaboration across stakeholder groups to facilitate sharing of experiences and solutions. Their initiatives include:

The Copenhagen Fashion Summit

An annual, international gathering around sustainable fashion. It has become a nexus for agenda, setting discussions on the most critical environmental, social and ethical issues facing our industry and planet.

The CEO Agenda

A guide to what every CEO in fashion needs to prioritize to future-proof their company, with the idea that sustainability is no longer a trend, but a business imperative.





03

Common agenda

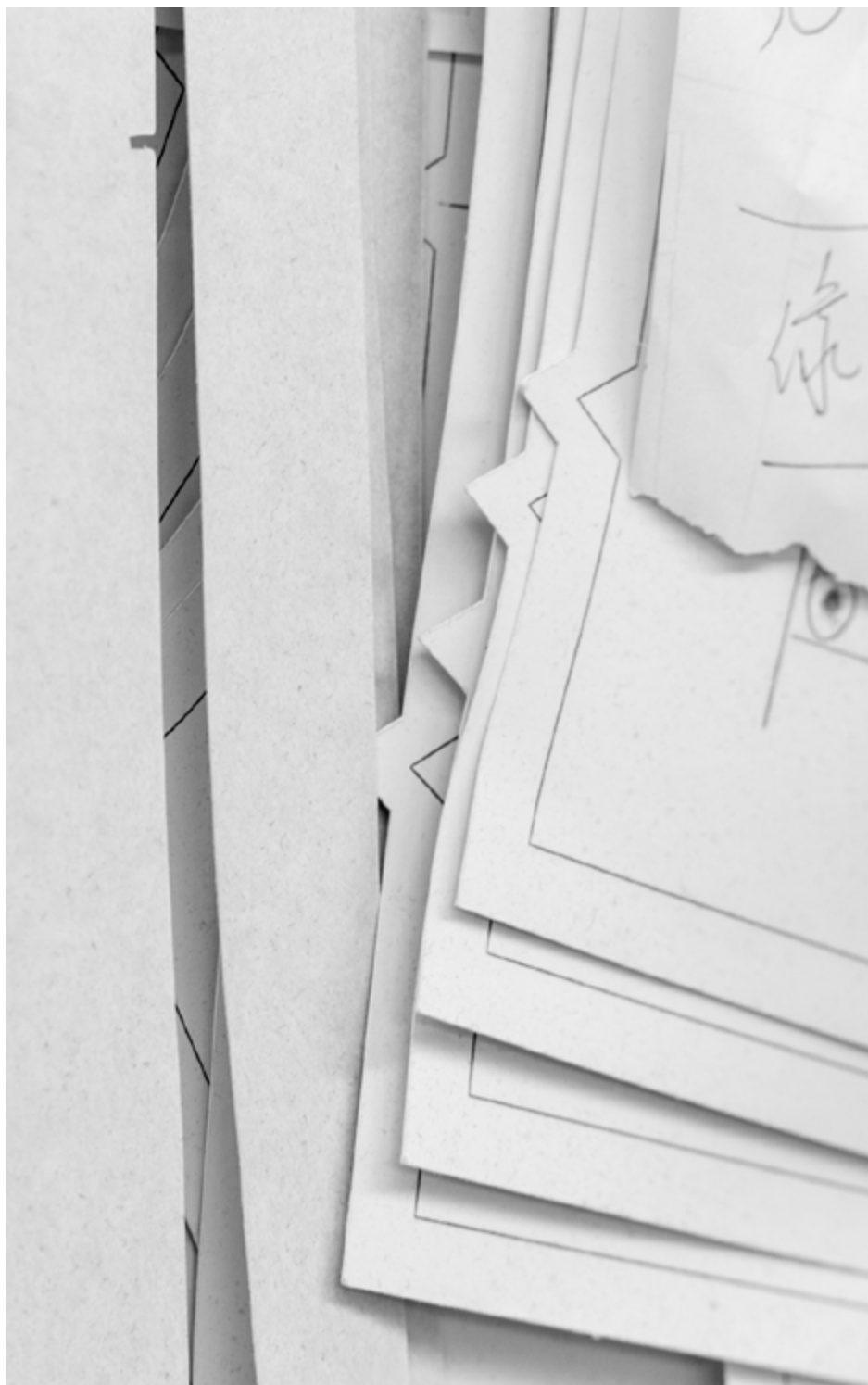
The Global Fashion Agenda cont'd:

[Pulse of the Fashion Industry Report](#)

This annual report, published in collaboration with The Boston Consulting Group, looks at environmental, social and ethical challenges as an immense untapped value creation opportunity. In the 2017 edition, an in-depth assessment was conducted to understand the industry's environmental and social performance. The 2018 edition looks at progress made and provides guidance to fashion brands and retailers looking to move toward more responsible ways of doing business.

[The Circular Fashion System Commitment](#)

An initiative that encourages the fashion industry to commit to action on circularity by signing the 2020 Circular Fashion System Commitment. As of June 2018, 94 companies (both large and small) had signed on.





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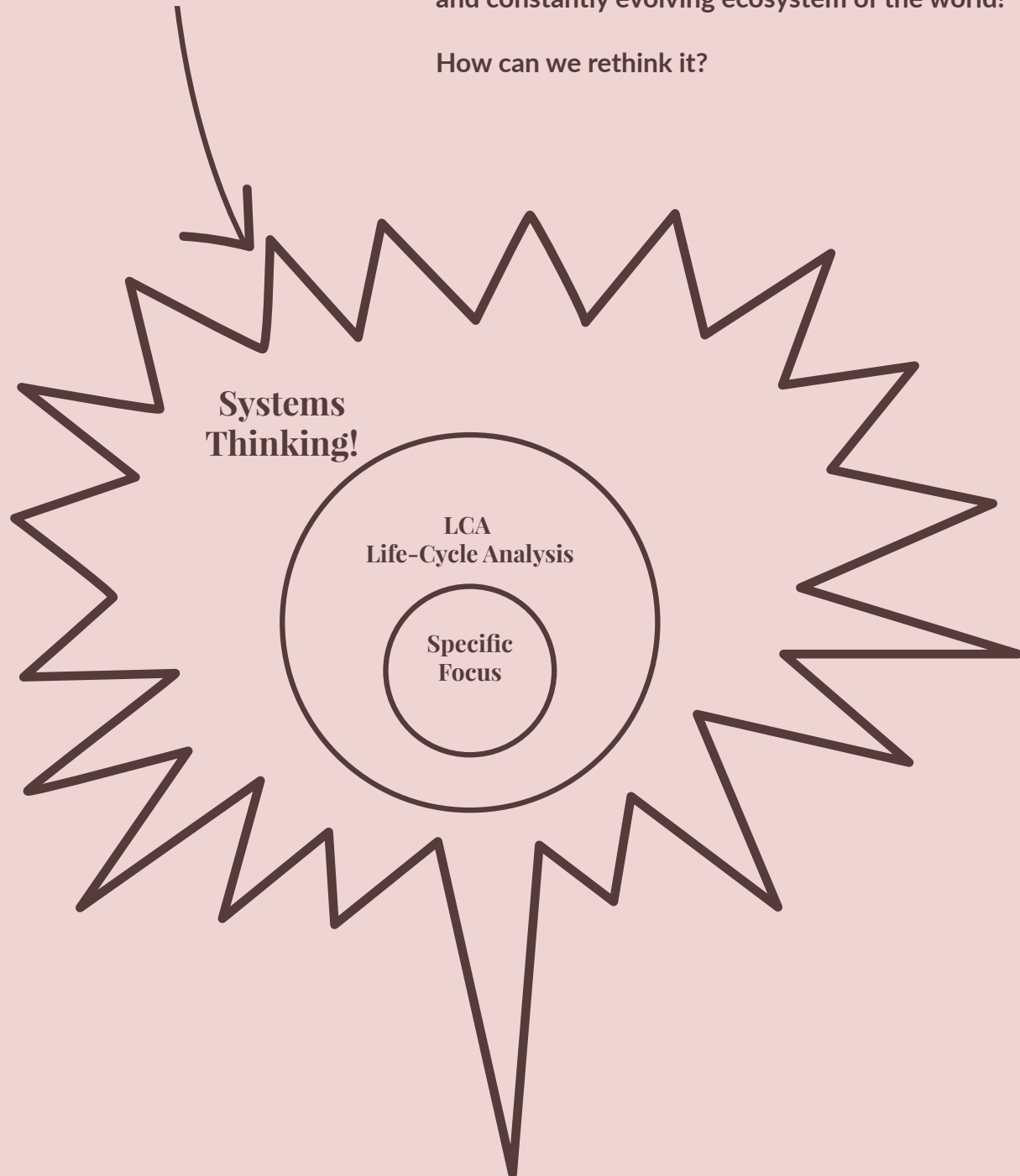
Sustainability can be approached at *multiple* levels

While it's useful to approach sustainability in manageable pieces, we don't want you to forget the big picture. It's important to question *all* assumptions about the fashion industry – including the very purpose and meaning of clothing.

The BIG PICTURE!

Think of fashion as part of the larger, interconnected and constantly evolving ecosystem of the world!

How can we rethink it?





APPROACHES

01

Systems thinking

The big picture

Systems Thinking allows us to look at fashion as a nonlinear, complex, interconnected and constantly moving system.

[In this video](#) from BEE Environmental Communications you can find a thorough explanation of what Systems Thinking is.

Examples of Systems Thinking include ideas like the Sharing Economy or the Circular Economy.

“The goal is to showcase a wealth of alternatives for building long-lasting environmental and social quality through the design, production and use of fashion and textiles that go beyond traditional ideas or expectations.” -Kate Fletcher, quoted from her book, [Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys](#).

Standards, strategies or tools that take a more Systems Thinking approach include:

- Cradle to Cradle
- B Corp
- Natural Step (ABCD)
- Okala



NATALIE CHANIN

“Sustainability relies on the *human skills* necessary to manipulate materials. It’s important to remind people that *everything comes from somewhere, someone*. We encourage consumers to ask these questions and to challenge designers and manufacturing to create in a sustainable, ethical, and healthy way As we work to honor the relationship between materials, products, and individuals, we create a sustainable community and as a result, an enriched product for not only the consumer, but the planet.”



APPROACHES

02

Impact over a product's life

LCA looks at the social and environmental impact of a product over its entire life, including raw material extraction, material processing, manufacturing, packaging, distribution, retail, use, maintenance/upgrading, and disposal or recycling.

One concern of LCAs as Kate Fletcher points out in her book [Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys](#), is that qualitative studies tend to generate equivocal findings. "LCAs, even though there are well-established internationally recognized methodologies, have a history of partisan results and methodological inconsistencies arising from different ways of defining boundaries around the problem being investigated."

Nonetheless, we recommend them whole heartedly as great tools to understand where your biggest impacts are. (It may suprise you!)

Standards or tools that utilize LCA:

- [The Sustainable Apparel Coalition's Higg Tools](#)
- [Textile Exchange](#)
- [The World Apparel and Footwear Life Cycle Assessment Database \(WALDB\) from Quantis](#)
- [Handbook of Life Cycle Assessment \(LCA\) of Textiles and Clothing 1st Edition by Subramanian Senthilkannan Muthu \(Editor\)](#)

Life-Cycle Assessment





APPROACHES

02

Life-Cycle Assessment

Examples of companies using LCAs:

Reformation:

Reformation created RefScale to track their environmental footprint by adding up the pounds of carbon dioxide emitted and gallons of water we use, and pounds of waste we generate. They then calculate how Reformation's products help reduce these impacts compared with most clothes bought in the US. They share this information on every product page of their website and tell customers exactly what impact each garment has on the environment. Their aim is for everyone to see the total cost of fashion so consumers can make empowered choices, and they can keep creating better solutions when it comes to making clothes.

**Levi's:**

Read Levi's ["The Life Cycle of a Jean: Understanding the environmental impact of a pair of Levi's® 501® jeans."](#)





APPROACHES

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Specific approach

Part of the whole

Most designers choose to start working on sustainability in a specific area. Examples include: sourcing more sustainable materials, eliminating bad chemicals from your product, or fair trade labor practices. Perhaps the issue you care most about is water and you want to focus only on that. There are a multitude of approaches and standards that tackle specific parts of a product's lifecycle.

There's nothing wrong with starting with a narrow focus. Just don't forget the big picture!

