

# A modern approach to facilitate environmental management in business

Manuel Seidel; Rainer Seidel; Helene Sterzik; Mehdi Shahbazpour; Logan Wait  
ecoPortal  
New Zealand  
E-mail [manuel@ecoportal.co.nz](mailto:manuel@ecoportal.co.nz)

**Abstract:** *Organisations often struggle to effectively engage staff and create momentum in their corporate sustainability and Environmental, Health and Safety (EHS) initiatives. Generally they use standards such as ISO 14001 and AS/NZS 4801 to develop and implement management systems to mitigate their risks. However, many traditional 'folder on the shelf' systems are only good for 'getting the tick from auditors' and often fail to facilitate significant improvements in EHS performance. To engage staff and generate effective progress towards corporate sustainability the focus needs to be on effective collaboration and culture development rather than bureaucracy. This paper introduces the ecoWheel framework – a visual sustainability and environmental management strategy tool. The ecoWheel framework was developed based on an understanding of the typical organisational barriers to improved sustainability and EHS performance. The ecoWheel framework involves three elements which progressively take an organisation on a journey from a 'defensive' approach to an 'integrated' maturity level. Each element of the ecoWheel framework includes specific tools and principles to overcome the challenges that organisations face at their respective level of sustainability maturity.*

**Biography:** Dr Manuel Seidel is an engineer with a background in environmental management and sustainability consulting. He is a co-founder of ecoPortal, an online tool that simplifies the management of sustainability issues for organisations. During his PhD research and consulting experience he founded the ecoWheel framework, an environmental management and sustainability strategy tool for business. The ecoWheel serves as the central interface of an sustainability or EHS programme, allowing stakeholders of the organisation to understand and contribute to the improvement activities of the organisation.

Dr Rainer Seidel is a co-founder and director of ecoPortal and an academic at the University of Auckland, and has been involved in environmental management for more than a decade. He is passionate about supporting organisations, particularly Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs), to innovate by helping them adopt sustainable business practices, generate innovative new products, and develop and implement competitive business strategies.

Helene Sterzik is currently completing a PhD at Massey University in the area of Environmental Life Cycle Management (LCM). She completed her undergraduate degree in 'Industrial Management and Engineering' at The University of Chemnitz in Germany in 2009, and her Master of Engineering Management degree at The University of Auckland in 2010. Helene's Master's thesis investigated the implementation of product stewardship schemes in manufacturing companies.

The majority of organisations struggle to effectively engage staff and create momentum in their corporate sustainability and Environmental and Health & Safety (EHS) initiatives. To engage staff and generate effective progress towards sustainability the focus needs to be on effective collaboration and culture development rather than bureaucracy.

Based on our experience, organisations can be classified into one of four levels of maturity depending on their performance and commitment in relation to sustainability (Figure 1). At each level of maturity organisations face a range of challenges that prevent them from moving to the next level. In understanding where an organisation sits in the maturity model, the most appropriate tools can be used to facilitate change.

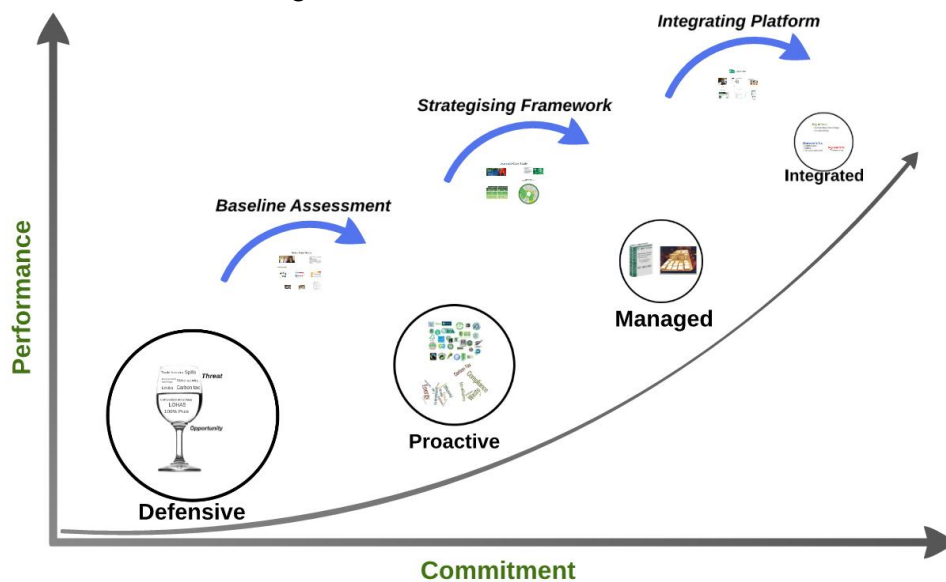


Figure 1: ecoWheel framework sustainability maturity model

The four sustainability maturity levels of the ecoWheel framework are:

1. **Defensive:** Defensive organisations are compliance focused. In many cases they don't understand the environmental and safety legal requirements that are applicable to them – let alone comply with them. Defensive organisations often operate in markets that don't have sufficient legal and market drivers and management typically see compliance as a cost to the business.
2. **Proactive:** Proactive organisations are focused on reducing their costs. They have ad hoc and 'end of pipe' approaches when it comes to managing their safety and environmental risks. Proactive organisations often lack the resources and knowledge to use more systematic approaches to improving their performance.
3. **Managed:** Managed organisations are driven by customer requirements. As a result their focus is often on gaining and maintaining certification to prove their credentials. Managed organisations typically have a 'lonely' Safety or Environmental Manager or small team to measure and manage their impact. However while the systems that they implement often tick the boxes of standards and certification requirements, in many cases they fail to engage staff and as a result don't always facilitate meaningful and sustainable change.
4. **Integrated:** Integrated organisations use sustainability as a competitive advantage. They have a strategic and holistic approach to sustainability which covers the entire value chain. Integrated organisations collaborate with relevant stakeholders for mutual benefit and communicate transparently about their successes and challenges.

As a sustainability change agent it is important to understand the maturity of your organisation to enable you to most effectively support your company or client in making progress on the journey.

If your company is Defensive it is important to prioritise your improvement efforts to ensure that the limited resources of the organisation are used in the most effective way and for optimising the potential return on investment. This is particularly important with respect to generating visible

outcomes and 'buy-in' from management and key staff in the organisation in order to overcome their concerns and perceptions.

For Proactive organisations it is important to develop a strategy that takes into account the key risks, challenges, opportunities and perspectives of stakeholders in relation to sustainability. While in the Proactive level of sustainability maturity, the organisation will likely focus on a limited scope, it is important that short-term projects and objectives are put into a wider context of longer term strategic goals. This allows the individual actors, functions and departments within the organisation to understand how their activities fit into the overall corporate sustainability strategy.

While certification is a fantastic means to promote an organisation's commitment to sustainability, Managed organisations need to move beyond ticking boxes of standards. In many cases where certification is the main driver for implementing a sustainability or EHS system - corners tend to be cut and there is limited value in a 'folder on the shelf' that no one reads. Therefore implementing an effective system that engages staff and supports systematic reduction of an organisation's impacts should be the main goal. Certification will come as a bonus for having well-functioning systems and processes.

Organisations at the Integrated level of sustainability maturity are few and far between. While many organisations claim to have sustainability embedded into all aspects of their business, this holy grail of corporate sustainability requires a paradigm shift in thinking away from business as usual. Integrated organisations should focus their attention on transparently communicating their successes and challenges to their stakeholders.