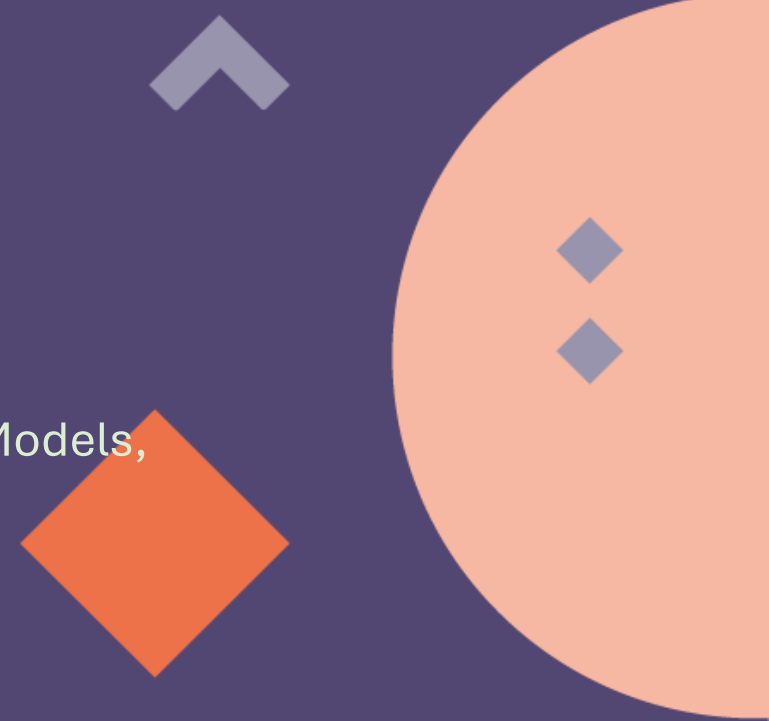




YOUTH GREEN INNOVATORS TRAINING

Theme 2: From Problem to Green Business Idea

Problem Identification, Human-Centred Design, Green Business Models, Ethics and Safeguards



Yesterday's Key Takeaways



Climate change is a system problem



The green economy is not about sacrifice



Green innovation is diverse



Mindset matters



Your choices connect to global systems

What We Will Cover Today



Problem Identification and Validation

Identifying real problems through exercises like Problem Cards to uncover root causes.



Human-Centred Design

Learning human-centred design methods like empathy interviews to uncover real user needs and frustrations.



Green Business Models

Exploring environmental, social, and economic value through circular business models and hands-on activities.



Ethics and Safeguards

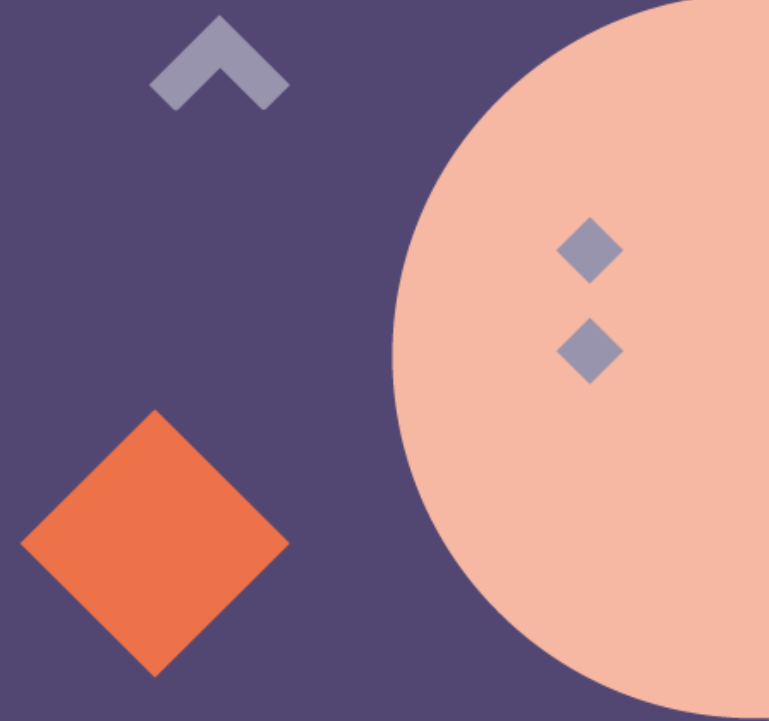
Reflecting on ethical responsibilities, inclusion, and sustainability claims in green innovation.

Timings

Session	Topic	Time
Welcome	Welcome Day 2 (CTU)	9.00–9.30
1	Problem Identification and Validation	9.30–11.00
Break	Morning Break	11.00–11.30
2	Human-Centred Design	11.30–12.30
Break	Lunch Break	12.30–13.30
3	Green Business Models	13.30–15.30
	Green Ethics and Safeguards	
Break	Afternoon Break	15.30–16.00
4	Wrap up	16.00–16.45
Closing	CTU	16.45–17.00

Theme 2: Problem Identification and Validation

Session 1 — Understanding and validating real problems



What You Will Take From This Session



What makes a good problem to solve

for a green business idea



Root cause vs. surface problem

and why the difference changes your solution



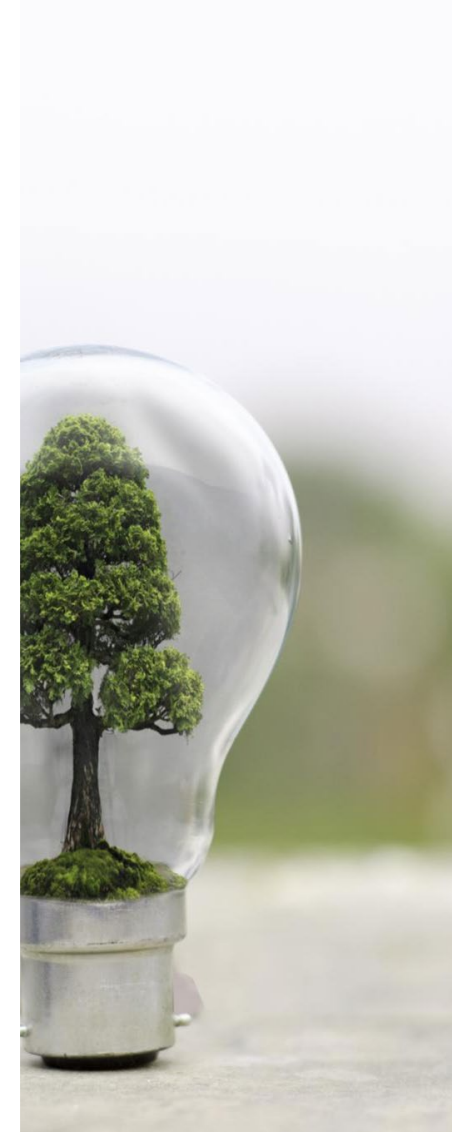
Why it matters to know who is affected

and how perspectives differ



Why we need to identify who will pay

the user and the buyer aren't always the same



Why problem identification comes first

It's tempting to jump straight to a solution.

But a product only becomes useful when it responds to a **real, meaningful need**.

Many environmental problems persist not because people don't care — but because habits are hard to change, alternatives feel inconvenient, or costs seem too high.



Lesson: The clearer the problem, the stronger everything built on top of it.



*“Solve the wrong
problem fast,
and you've still
failed.”*

When a clever idea still fails



The bamboo toothbrush

with a compostable handle

Looks impressive on paper. In practice, it can be:

- Too expensive for everyday use
- Too inconvenient to recycle (mixed materials)
- A basic necessity turned premium and impractical



The lesson

A solution that looks good in theory may fail if it doesn't fit how people actually live, work, or spend money.

Green business ideas are especially dependent on getting the problem right — environmental challenges are rarely simple.



KEY TAKEAWAY

**Before reaching for a solution,
invest time in understanding the problem fully.**

*The more specific and grounded your problem definition is in real people's daily experiences,
the more purposeful and effective your green business idea will be.*



PAUSE & REFLECT



Think of one environmental problem you've noticed — at school, at work, in your community, or your neighbourhood.



What happens?



Who notices it most?



Why does it matter?

What makes a good problem to solve?

Not every frustration is a viable starting point for a green business idea. A good problem is one that is real, specific, and significant enough to act on.



Real

Experienced by actual people, not assumed



Specific

Narrow enough to investigate and act on



Significant

Matters enough that solving it creates value

Vague problem vs. specific problem



Too vague

“Plastic waste is bad for the environment.”

- No clear who, where, or why
- Nothing specific to design a solution against



Specific & actionable

“Students on campus use single-use plastic cutlery daily because reusable options aren't available nearby.”

- Names the people, place, and cause
- Gives a clear starting point for a solution

Signs you have found a good problem

- ✓ People already feel frustrated or inconvenienced by it
- ✓ It happens repeatedly, not just once
- ✓ It costs people time, money, or wellbeing
- ✓ You can describe who experiences it and when
- ✓ Solving it would noticeably improve daily life or the environment





PAUSE & REFLECT



In Hanoi, food delivery riders often leave engines running while waiting outside restaurants — adding to noise and air pollution in dense urban streets.

Is this problem specific enough to act on? What's missing, if anything?

Who exactly is affected?

When/where does it happen?

What would “solved” look like?

Surface problem vs. root cause

The first problem you notice is often just the visible symptom. Underneath it usually sits a deeper, structural cause.



SURFACE PROBLEM — what you observe

“People aren't recycling.”



ROOT CAUSE — what is actually causing it

Bins are confusingly labelled, inconveniently placed, or it's unclear what counts as recyclable.

Digging deeper: food waste in canteens

1

OBSERVATION

"There's a lot of food waste in canteens."

2

WHY 1

Portion sizes are fixed and too large for many people.

3

WHY 2

The canteen doesn't offer smaller or flexible portions.

4

WHY 3

The canteen's revenue depends on volume sold, not food actually eaten.

5

ROOT CAUSE

The serving model rewards selling more food, not reducing what's wasted.



KEY TAKEAWAY

Design for the system, not just the behaviour.

Blaming individual choices rarely solves anything on its own. The strongest green business ideas redesign the conditions that shape behaviour — not just the behaviour itself.



Who is affected?

A strong problem definition is about people, not just the environmental issue itself. Every problem is experienced by someone — often very differently.



Who feels the problem most often?



Who is losing time, money, or comfort?



Who might benefit if it's solved?



Who might resist the change?

The same problem, seen differently

Example: packaging waste at a cafe



Cafe owner

Thinks in terms of cost and storage



Student / customer

Thinks about convenience and habits



Waste collector

Thinks about sorting, contamination,
efficiency

None of these perspectives are wrong — a useful solution accounts for all of them.

Who would pay?

The person who feels the problem is not always the person who pays for the solution. A green business needs a clear path to value.

Situation	Who feels it	Who may pay	Motivation to pay
Litter in public spaces	Residents, workers, visitors	Local authority	Cleaner streets, lower cleanup costs
Plastic waste in a school	Students, teachers, staff	School leadership	Reputation, lower waste costs
Packaging waste in a cafe	Customers, cafe staff	Cafe owner / manager	Cost savings, efficiency
Limited water access on campus	Students and staff	University admin	Health, reputation, waste reduction

The person who feels the problem and the person who pays to fix it are often not the same.



PAUSE & REFLECT



Think about a situation of high-volume plastic waste.



Who feels it day to day?



Who would pay to fix it?



Who controls the budget or decision-making power?



If those are different people, how might their motivations differ?

Exercise: “Problem Cards”

Goal: distinguish surface problems from root causes, and match problems to the most appropriate solution direction.

1

Distribute problem & solution cards

One person reads each problem card aloud; another reads the solution cards. (2 min)

2

Match problems to solutions

Discuss as a group and match each problem with its best-fitting solution. (10 min)

3

Revisit the matches

Would you change any matches now? How do you justify them? (5 min)

4

Justify & reflect

Explain why you matched the cards. Did any solution only address the visible symptom rather than the root cause? (8 min)



Anatomy of a Problem Statement

A strong problem statement names four things. Here is the same sentence, broken apart:

WHO

“Office workers in Hanoi”

WHAT HAPPENS

“regularly receive single-use plastic cutlery and packaging with food delivery orders”

WHEN / WHERE

“even when they do not need it”

WHY IT HAPPENS

“because restaurants include them by default”

WHO + WHAT HAPPENS + WHEN/WHERE + WHY = a problem statement someone can act on.

Before you move on



Reflect on the problem first



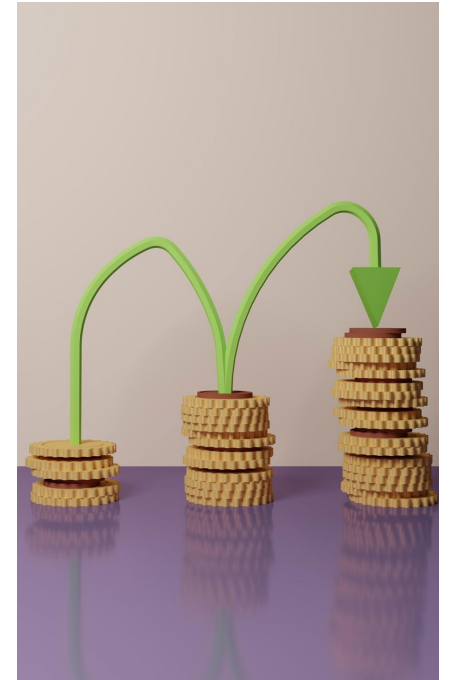
Distinguish surface symptoms from root causes



Identify who is affected - and how perspectives differ



Clarify who would actually pay for a solution



Do not forget to capture anything important in your workbook!

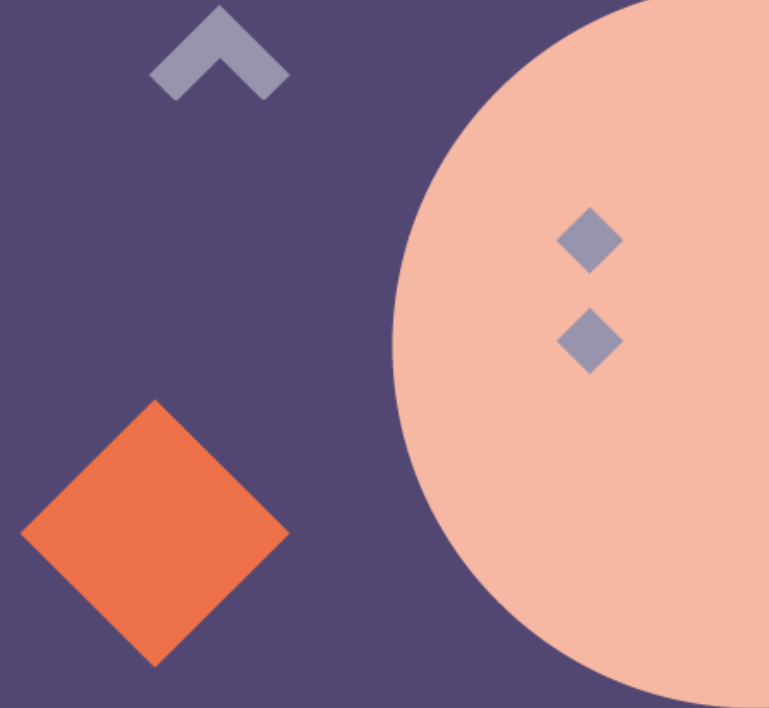


Coming up next: Human-Centred Design

Now that you can define a problem clearly, the next theme explores how empathy interviews and observation help you understand the people behind it.

Human-Centred Design

Understanding people before designing solutions





What You will Take From This Session



Why understanding users and communities is the starting point for better solutions



How empathy interviews help you discover real needs, habits and frustrations



How observation reveals what people actually do — not just what they say



How field-based research helps you design solutions that fit everyday life

Start With People, Not Products

Begin by asking who you are trying to help and what they actually experience day to day - not simply what could be built.



An idea that looks impressive in a planning meeting can still fail in the real world if it is too costly, too complicated, or a poor fit with local habits.



Green ideas only succeed once people are both willing and able to use them - good intentions are not enough.



Human-centred design reduces this risk by grounding thinking in everyday behaviour and real constraints.



IN PRACTICE — VIETNAM

- Households and small businesses already reuse containers, bags and materials out of habit and cost-saving necessity.
- A green idea that ignores this - by costing more or demanding big lifestyle change - struggles to gain acceptance.
- Build on what people already do, rather than asking them to change everything at once.

Lesson to learn: *A solution that fits into people's lives will always outperform one that asks people to change.*

Look at the Person — and the System Around Them



USERS

The people who directly face the problem, or would use a future solution. What they do often reveals more than what they say - their lived reality, decisions and pressures matter most.



COMMUNITIES

The wider people, places and systems around the user. Shared infrastructure, social norms and trust shape whether an idea is actually adopted - no problem exists in isolation.

WHEN UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE, PAY ATTENTION TO:



Daily routines



Pain points &
frustrations



Workarounds
already in use



Social norms &
community influence



Cost, time &
convenience

Empathy Interviews: Learning in People's Own Words

Short, open conversations

Not sales pitches and not surveys - they create space for honest talk about real routines and challenges.

Learn, don't confirm

The goal is not to prove an idea is good. Trying to "prove" it can limit what you actually learn.

Focus on stories

Ask people to describe what happened, what they felt, and what they did next — concrete events, not general opinions.

Past and present, not future

People are poor at predicting hypothetical behaviour, but can describe accurately what they recently did.



WHY IT MATTERS HERE

Many people support sustainability in theory but face real barriers in daily life - cost, access, habit or trust. Listening closely uncovers these barriers and grounds your understanding of why problems persist.

Ask About What People Did — Not What They Would Do

TYPE	EXAMPLE QUESTION	WHY IT WORKS — OR DOESN'T
Good	Tell me about the last time this happened.	Focuses on a real event — gives richer detail.
Good	What did you do next?	Reveals behaviour rather than opinion.
Weak	Would you use this if we built it?	Produces polite, unreliable answers.
Weak	Do you think this is a good idea?	Too vague to be useful.



REFRAME IT

Instead of: *“Would students use a refill station?”*
Ask: *“Tell me about the last time you needed water on campus. What did you do?”*

Better Questions, Better Insights

STRONG OPENERS



Tell me about...



Walk me through...



What happened when...



How do you usually...

FOLLOW-UP & LISTENING



If someone says a system is “too complicated,” push gently: which part, when, what do you do then?



Talk less, listen more — interrupting shifts attention away from their experience.



Silence is a tool. It often invites people to think more deeply and share more.



When several people describe the same frustration, that is a strong signal the problem is real.

Lesson to learn: *A strong opinion is a prompt to ask for an example — not a reason to stop questioning.*

ACTIVITY

Empathy Interview Role-Play

35 MINUTES

GROUPS OF 2–3

1

5 min

Set up the roles

In a pair : one interviewer, one “user,” one observer (if numbers allow). Take a simple role — student, trader, household member, cafe owner.

2

20 min

Run the interview

Interviewer asks open questions: “Tell me about the last time this happened,” “What was difficult?,” “What did you do next?” Take notes. Switch roles after 10 minutes.

3

10 min

Capture & reflect

Write down the most important needs, frustrations and workarounds you heard. Identify any questions you asked that did not give a useful answer.

Key learning: Avoid leading questions like “Would you use this?” or “Do you think this is a good idea?” — they produce polite answers, not useful insight.

Watching What People Actually Do



People's actions often differ from their stated intentions — someone may care about sorting waste, yet still drop everything in one bin when rushed or confused.



Step into where the problem naturally happens: a market, cafe, bus stop, factory floor, or home — context reveals pressures a survey cannot.



Focus on systems, not individuals. Time pressure, layout, signage, lighting and crowding shape behaviour, often without conscious choice.

REFRAME THE QUESTION

Not: *“Why don’t people behave correctly?”* **Instead:** *“What makes the current behaviour the easiest or most logical option?”*

Reading the Signals

WHAT TO OBSERVE	WHAT IT TELLS YOU	EXAMPLE
Where people hesitate	Confusion or friction in the system	People pause before using a bin
What people do first	Habits and priorities	They walk past one bin to find another
Which tools or signs they use	Whether guidance is clear and usable	Labels are ignored because unclear
Workarounds people create	Where the current system is failing	Staff improvise their own storage
How others influence them	Social norms and copying behaviour	People follow what others nearby do

Case Study: Recycling Behaviour in a Vietnamese factory



Even when separate bins are provided, workers often place off-cuts, packaging and general waste into the nearest container during busy production shifts.



Bins located close to machines or workstations are used far more than bins placed farther away in designated waste areas.



In shared spaces such as canteens, workers tend to follow the behaviour of others nearby rather than the formal system.



LESSON TO LEARN

Waste practices are shaped by production pace, bin placement, workflow design and social cues — not by intention alone. Observing real work settings explains why recycling behaviour looks the way it does.

From Observation to Insight

Write insights in plain, everyday language. They are not solutions - they define the real conditions any future idea must work within.



Users are often busy and prioritise speed.



People hesitate to engage with systems they don't understand or trust.



Location and placement influence choices more than expected.



Convenience often matters more than awareness or intention.

Turning Insights into Design Principles

A design principle turns a plain-language insight into a rule your solution must follow.

WHAT I LEARNED

Users are busy and prioritise speed.



DESIGN PRINCIPLE

The solution must take less than 30 seconds to use.

WHAT I LEARNED

People ignore unclear labels or instructions.



DESIGN PRINCIPLE

Instructions must be visual, simple, and immediately obvious.

WHAT I LEARNED

Cost is a barrier to changing behaviour.



DESIGN PRINCIPLE

The solution must cost no more than the current behaviour.

Identifying a Problem Statement

15–20 MINUTES

GROUPS

1

3 min

Choose a context

Pick a green innovation context — waste, energy, transport, food, or water. Briefly discuss and agree on the problem area your group will explore.

2

10–12 min

Clarify the problem

Identify specific user challenges and discuss different perspectives within your group. Draft 1-2 clear problem statements, then write one sentence on why it matters and one on who benefits or pays. Propose an idea to solve it your team can explore.

3

3–5 min

Reflect on teamwork

Discuss as a group: did everyone have a chance to speak? Did different viewpoints deepen your understanding? What helped, and what made the discussion challenging?

Key learning: Effective teamwork deepens understanding of complex problems. Focusing on shared understanding — rather than jumping to solutions — leads to more meaningful and inclusive innovation.

Key Takeaways



Start with people, not products



Real behaviour is more important than stated opinion — ask about the past, observe the present



Insights, not assumptions, are the foundation for design

Do not forget to capture anything important in your workbook!



NEXT UP

Green Business Models

CTU GREEN SKILLS INNOVATORS TRAINING · DAY 2

Green Business Models

Session 3 — Designing ideas that work for people, planet and finances

What You Will Take From This Session



How to explain a value proposition in environmental, social and economic terms



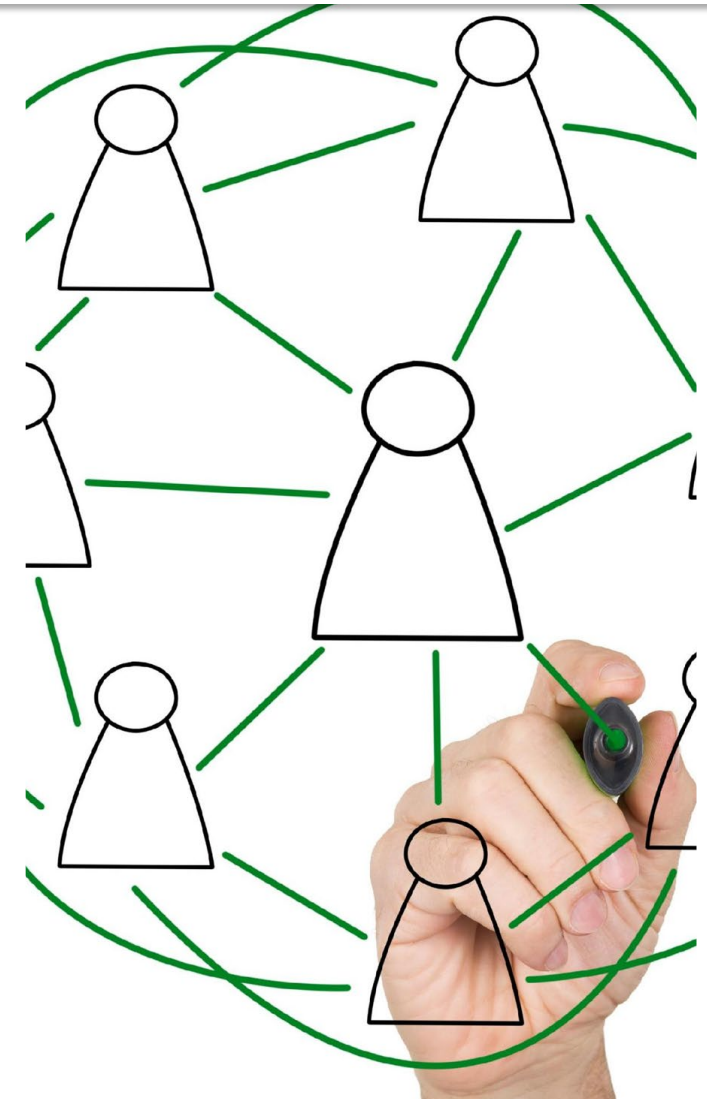
How to identify customers and beneficiaries — and why they may not be the same person



The difference between revenue and impact, and why both need to grow together



Why circular business models are useful in green innovation



Ideas Create Possibility. Models Create Durability.



A good idea on its own is not yet a business — it needs a clear way to create value, deliver it to the right people, and keep operating over time.



In green innovation, success is measured by more than profit. Environmental, social and financial goals must work together, not compete.



Many promising green ideas fail not because they lack environmental value, but because they depend on temporary funding, goodwill, or unrealistic assumptions about behaviour.



Lesson to learn: *A green business model only works when people, planet, and finances reinforce each other.*

What Value Does This Create — And For Whom?

A value proposition answers one question: why would someone choose this over doing nothing at all? Strong ones combine all three types of value below.

VALUE TYPE	WHAT IT MEANS	EXAMPLE IN A GREEN BUSINESS
Environmental	Reduces waste, emissions, or resource use.	A refill system lowers plastic packaging waste.
Social	Improves convenience, wellbeing, fairness, trust or access.	Refill stations make access easier for students and staff.
Economic	Saves money, improves efficiency, or creates income.	Cafés reduce packaging costs and improve repeat use.

Test it: *Why would someone care enough to choose this? If the answer relies only on good intentions, the value proposition likely needs more work.*

Case Study: Food Waste Collection in Tây Hồ, Hanoi



A dense cluster of restaurants, cafés and street food vendors generates large volumes of food waste daily — currently mixed with general rubbish and sent to landfill, where it produces methane.



ENVIRONMENTAL

Waste is diverted to composting or biodigestion instead of landfill. The compost is sold to urban farms, rooftop gardens and parks — closing a loop between the food system and city green spaces.



SOCIAL

Restaurants get a simpler, cleaner waste process instead of overflowing bins that attract pests. A cleaner, better-managed neighbourhood strengthens the area's reputation for residents.



ECONOMIC

Participating restaurants lower general waste fees. Revenue comes from collection subscriptions and compost sales — and routes get more efficient as more venues join.

ACTIVITY 1

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What Makes It Green?

30 MINUTES

GROUPS OF 3–5

SCENARIOS: Refill station in a supermarket for household cleaning products · Food waste collection for cafés & restaurants where organic waste is composted and sold to urban farms and rooftop gardens · Bicycle repair workshop that offers youth training sessions

1

3 min

Introduce scenarios

The three scenarios are shared with each group.

2

15 min

Analyse each one

The group discusses and Completes a 4-column grid per scenario:
Environmental value, Social value, Economic value, and Who Pays / Who Benefits.

3

8 min

Share & compare

One person per group shares the group's grid responses for one scenario.
What did other groups identify that was different?

4

4 min

Apply to your idea

Now re-visit your earlier idea to solve a green problem statement and identify in one sentence its environmental, social and economic value.

Key learning: Green business models only succeed when environmental benefit, social usefulness and financial logic all work together.

Who Pays, Who Benefits, Who Decides?



CUSTOMER

The person or organisation that pays for the solution.



BENEFICIARY

The person or group that experiences the benefit — not always the same as the customer.



DECISION-MAKER

Budget holders, managers or landlords who influence whether a solution is adopted.

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK



Who uses the solution?



Who benefits from it?



Who pays for it?



Who influences the decision to buy?

Example: A reusable container service: the restaurant is the customer who pays; the diner is the beneficiary who enjoys a convenient, waste-reduced meal; the environment is a secondary beneficiary, through reduced single-use packaging. A strong business model understands both the payer and the user — and designs value for each.

Revenue Keeps It Alive. Impact Gives It Purpose.



REVENUE

The money a business earns.



IMPACT

The change a business creates in the world.

Ideally these reinforce each other — but they are not the same thing. A business can earn well while creating little positive change, or create real impact while struggling to survive financially.

TEST IT — ASK:

What money comes in?

What costs go out?

What impact is created each use?

Do revenue and impact grow together?

Refill example: *The environmental impact of a refill system grows every time someone uses it. Revenue only grows if it charges per refill, is funded by a partner, or is bundled into another service — designing that revenue stream is what turns impact into a lasting business.*

Do Revenue and Impact Really Grow Together?

Sometimes, yes. Sometimes, not as clearly as it first appears.

ALIGNED

Reusable cup scheme

Every cup returned and reused both saves waste and earns a small deposit fee. Revenue and impact rise together, on the same transaction.

WORTH QUESTIONING

Carbon-offset marketing service

Selling more offset certificates increases revenue immediately. Whether real-world emissions actually fall depends on the underlying project — growth in sales does not guarantee growth in impact.

Why this matters: *Two businesses can both look “green” and both grow revenue — but only one is genuinely scaling its positive change. When you test your own idea, ask what would happen to your impact if your revenue doubled. If the answer is “not much,” that is worth redesigning.*

Designing Out Waste From the Start

A circular business model keeps materials, products and value in use for as long as possible — instead of the linear pattern of take, make, use, throw away.

FIVE COMMON CIRCULAR MODELS



Repair & reuse

Products are designed to be fixed instead of discarded.



Refilling & sharing

Reduces the need for single-use packaging or ownership.



Leasing, not selling

The company retains ownership and responsibility.



Take-back systems

Used products are collected for reuse or recycling.



Material recovery

Captures value at end of use instead of losing it to waste.

Why it works: *These models succeed when designed around convenience, trust and good user experience. Systems that rely only on good intentions tend to struggle.*

Case Study: Áo Dài Rental as a Circular Model



- ➔ Renting áo dài for festivals, school ceremonies, graduations and celebrations is already a widely accepted practice across Vietnam.
- ➔ Families rent, return, and the garment is cleaned and repaired before going to the next customer — one garment replaces many, and materials stay in use longer.
- ➔ Most people do this for practicality and affordability, not because they think of it as sustainability — yet the circular logic is exactly the same.

Lesson: *The most adoptable circular models are often ones people are already practising — without calling them circular.*

ACTIVITY 2

Close the Loop

35 MINUTES

GROUPS

1

3 min

Choose a product

Pick an everyday item commonly thrown away: a water bottle, textbook, food container, piece of clothing, or phone.

2

5 min

Map the linear journey

Write or draw its current path: Take → Make → Use → Throw Away. Note the material, energy or waste at each stage.

3

15 min

Redesign it

Apply one circular model (repair, refill, lease, take-back, recover). Decide why, how revenue changes, and who benefits.

4

12 min

Present & challenge

Share your redesign in 2 minutes. One other group asks a single challenging question.



Key learning: Circular models require a fundamental rethink of how value is created and who holds responsibility for a product throughout its life — not just recycling.

Fit the Model to How People Already Behave



Not every green idea needs the same model — services, products, subscriptions, leasing and institutional partnerships can all work.



A strong model reflects how people already behave, rather than how you wish they would.



If users want convenience, a complex multi-step system will struggle — even if it is environmentally sound.

BEFORE MOVING FORWARD, ASK:

- Is the model genuinely useful and convenient for users?
- Does it reduce environmental harm or use resources more wisely?
- Is it financially possible with realistic assumptions?
- Can it grow without losing its impact or becoming too complex?

Case Study: Reusable Cup Deposits at Vietnamese Coffee Chains



- Millions of cups are sold daily through chains such as Highlands Coffee, The Coffee House and Phúc Long — most served in single-use packaging.
- Customers pay a small deposit, refunded when the cup is returned. The business owns, cleans and redistributes the cups.
- It builds on a habit people already have: returning glasses and bowls at phở shops and bia hơi stalls.
- The deposit removes the most common failure point in reuse schemes — remembering to bring your own cup.

Lesson: *The right model fits the way people already behave, not the way you wish they would.*

Why We Use the Business Model Canvas

A business model canvas puts your whole idea on one page — value, customers, costs and revenue — so weaknesses show up before you've spent months building them out.



One Page, Full Picture

Every part of the business sits side by side, so you can see how a change in one box — like price — affects another, like who can afford it.



Reveals Gaps Early

An empty box — no clear customer, no revenue stream — is a warning sign worth investigating now, not after launch.



Built to Be Revised

It's a working draft, not a final document. Expect to redraw boxes as empathy research and testing teach you more.



Makes Impact Visible

Adding externalities boxes forces environmental and social effects into the conversation — not just profit.

Lesson: *If you can't fill a box honestly, that's not a canvas problem — it's a sign your idea needs more research.*



Sample Completion: Reusable Cup Deposit Scheme

Based on the case study from earlier in this session



Users

Daily coffee drinkers across chain stores



Customer / Payer

The coffee chain; customers pay a small refundable deposit



Value Proposition(s)

Convenient reusable cup, refundable deposit, less single-use waste



Positive Externalities

Less plastic/paper cup waste; builds on existing reuse habits



Key Activities

Collecting, washing and redistributing cups; tracking deposits



Revenue Streams

Deposits kept on loss/breakage; lower packaging costs over time



Negative Externalities

Water and energy for washing; extra collection logistics



Key Partners /Resources

Washing/logistics partner; deposit-tracking system; trained staff



Cost Structure

Cup manufacturing, washing facility, staff time, logistics

ACTIVITY 3

Green Business Model Canvas

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35 MINUTES

GROUPS OF 3–5

Users	Customer / Payer	Value Proposition(s)
Positive Externalities (environmental + social benefit)	Key Activities	Revenue Streams
Negative Externalities (environmental + social cost)	Key Partners / Resources	Cost Structure

Step 1 (2 min): form groups & use the canvas components above. Step 2 (30 min): fill each section using words and sketches — keep it simple and visual. Step 3 (5 min): note one thing you still don't know and need to test.

Output: An early visual green business concept, ready to test — plus one (or more) open questions for further input.



Key Takeaways



Value works best when environmental, social and economic benefits reinforce each other



Know who pays, who benefits and who decides — they're not always the same person



Design revenue and impact to grow together, not apart



Circular models turn waste into value — built on habits people already have

Do not forget to capture anything important in your workbook!



NEXT UP

Green Ethics & Safeguards

Green Ethics and Safeguards

Building honest, inclusive and responsible green ideas

How today's session is structured



Core content

Ethics, greenwashing, responsibility, inclusion, safeguards



Activity

"Ethics Check" exercise — small groups

Topics covered: avoiding greenwashing · environmental & social responsibility · inclusion & accessibility · safeguards

What You Will Take From This Session



How to avoid greenwashing

and make honest, specific claims



Why environmental and social responsibility

must work together, not separately



How inclusion and accessibility

make solutions fairer and stronger



Why safeguards matter

when building and scaling green ideas



Why ethics matter

A green idea is not automatically a good idea.

Even if a solution reduces waste or emissions, it can still cause harm — by **excluding groups, shifting burdens, or making misleading claims.**

Ethics should guide decisions from the beginning — not be added at the end as a final check or marketing layer.



An ethical approach asks:

Who benefits? Who might be left out? Who bears the cost if something goes wrong?



*“A green idea
that causes harm
or excludes people
is not truly green.”*



Ethics affects more than direct users

Decisions about pricing, access, materials, labour, and data can either widen or reduce inequality.



Who benefits?

From the solution as designed



Who might be left out?

By cost, access, or design choices



Who bears the cost?

If something goes wrong



KEY TAKEAWAY

**Ethics are not a barrier to innovation —
they are a foundation for it.**

Green businesses that are honest, inclusive, and transparent are more likely to earn trust and create lasting impact.



PAUSE & REFLECT



Think of a green product, service, or campaign you have seen recently.



What did it promise to do?



**Could you tell if the promise was
real or measurable?**



**What information was clear — and
what was missing?**

Avoiding greenwashing

Greenwashing happens when environmental claims are misleading, vague, or exaggerated — sometimes without bad intent, often through unclear language or marketing buzzwords.



A helpful guide:

“If you cannot explain your claim clearly and specifically, you may not be ready to make it publicly.”

Once customers find that a “green” claim doesn't hold up, they may grow sceptical of other environmental claims too — trust, once lost, is hard to regain.

To avoid greenwashing



Be specific about what has actually changed or improved



Use evidence — data, certifications, or clear processes



Avoid exaggerated language like “completely” or “zero impact”



Explain limits as well as benefits, so people understand trade-offs



Be careful with broad terms like “eco-friendly” unless you can support them



A vague claim vs. an honest one



Exaggerated

"This product is completely sustainable."

- Implies an impossible standard
- Ignores real costs like transport and packaging



Honest & specific

"This product uses recycled materials and reduces single-use plastic."

- Acknowledges what still has a footprint
- Respects the customer's ability to understand nuance



PAUSE & REFLECT



Think of a sustainability claim in a business you have seen recently.



What evidence is provided?



What information is missing or unclear?



Would you trust this claim if buying?

Environmental and social responsibility

A solution that protects nature but harms people — or exploits inequalities — is not truly sustainable. They belong together.



Outcomes only

Reduced waste, lower emissions, improved efficiency — but ignores who does the labour, who has access, and who carries the risk.



Full picture

Also considers production, labour conditions, fair pay, and whether the solution fits local culture and economic realities.

Some useful questions to ask



Who benefits the most from this particular solution?



Who bears the financial, social, or environmental cost?



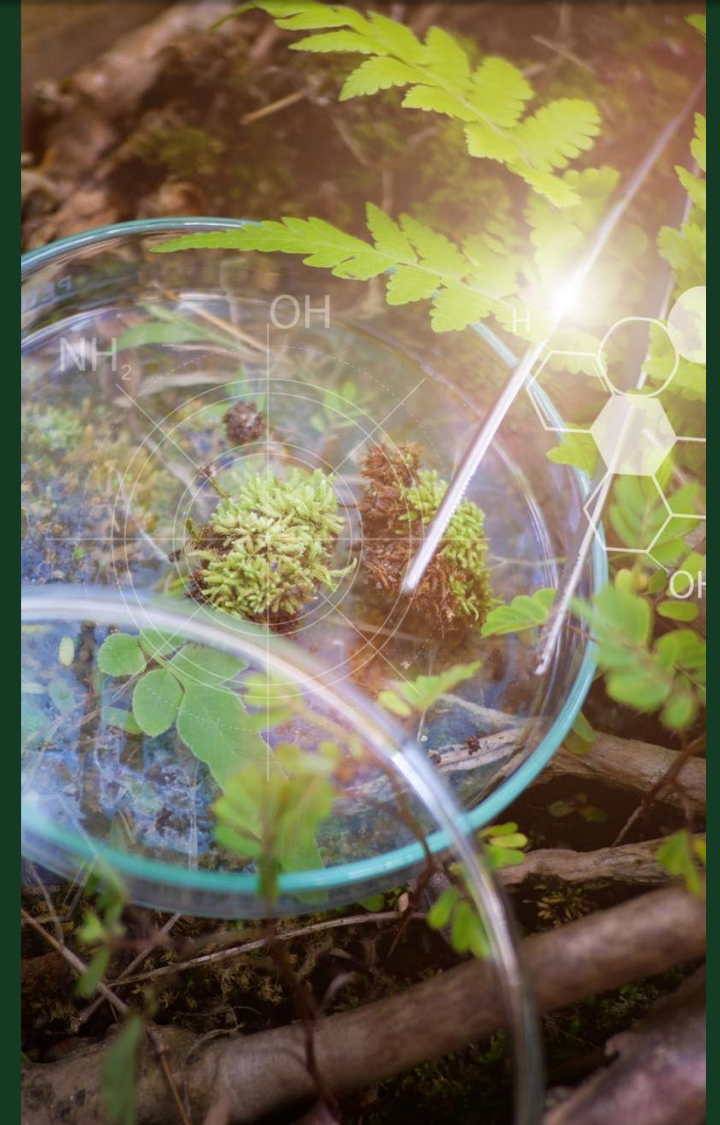
Are workers paid fairly and treated safely?



Does the solution create hidden or indirect harm?



Does it respect local context, culture, and community needs?



Example: refill systems in Hanoi



A refill system in urban Hanoi may significantly reduce plastic waste — but if it's only available in wealthier neighbourhoods, it may deepen inequality by limiting access for others.

A more socially responsible approach explores affordability and partners with local businesses and communities to broaden reach.



KEY TAKEAWAY

Sustainability in practice means caring for both the planet and the people who live on it.

Inclusion and accessibility

Inclusion means different kinds of people can participate. Accessibility means they can actually use it in practice. A solution that only works for a privileged few rarely creates lasting impact.

Common barriers that quietly exclude people:



Cost



Language & literacy



Physical access



Digital access & time

Designing for real conditions

- Can people with different backgrounds understand it easily?
- Is it affordable for the people it's meant to serve?
- Does it work across language and literacy levels?
- Does it still function in crowded, noisy, low-resource settings?



Example: a recycling app

If a recycling system relies only on a smartphone app with strong internet access, many people may be excluded.

In contrast, clear printed signage, colour-coded bins, and local guides may reach far more users.

Sometimes, low-tech solutions are the most inclusive and effective.

High-tech vs. low-tech solutions



High-tech only

“Sort your waste using our smartphone app and live bin-tracking map.”

- Excludes anyone without a smartphone or reliable data
- Assumes confidence with apps, language, and literacy



Low-tech, inclusive

“Colour-coded bins with simple pictures, plus a printed map at every entrance.”

- Works without a device, internet access, or strong literacy
- Reaches the widest possible range of people, by default



PAUSE & REFLECT



Think about a solution you know or use.



Who might struggle to use it?



What barriers exist — cost, language, access, ability, or time?



What changes could make it more accessible without adding complexity?

If people cannot access a solution, they cannot benefit from it — no matter how good the idea is.

Establishing safeguards

Safeguards are the checks, limits, and processes that protect people, communities, and the environment as an idea develops and grows.



Claim rules

What the solution should and
shouldn't say



A pilot phase

Test with a small group before
wider rollout



A feedback process

Let users report problems or
harm



Regular reviews

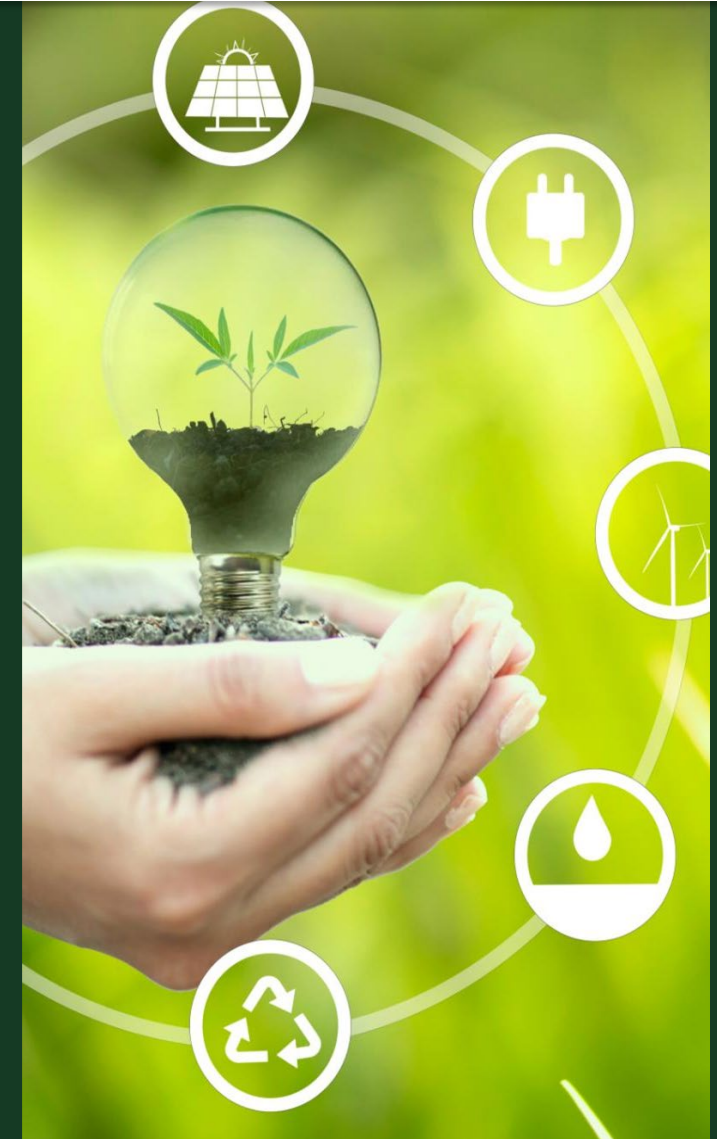
Ask if benefits are shared fairly

Safeguards aren't about blocking progress — they're about responsible progress.

Mini checklist: before sharing or scaling

- ✓ Can I explain this solution clearly and honestly?
- ✓ Can I provide evidence for its main claim?
- ✓ Does it help both people and the planet — not just one?
- ✓ Is it fair, inclusive, and accessible?
- ✓ Have potential risks and downsides been considered, not ignored?

If the answer to any of these is unclear, that is a signal to pause and reflect — not to push forward blindly.



Exercise: “Ethics Check”



In groups

Goal: understand how different perspectives improve ideas.

1

Reflect on your earlier business model canvas idea (10 min)

Who could be left out? What could go wrong? What claim should we be careful about?

2

Add a safeguard (5 min)

Write one safeguard you would build into the idea.

3

Share an ethical concern (5 min)

Share it with another group. Would it stop them from buying? What could change?

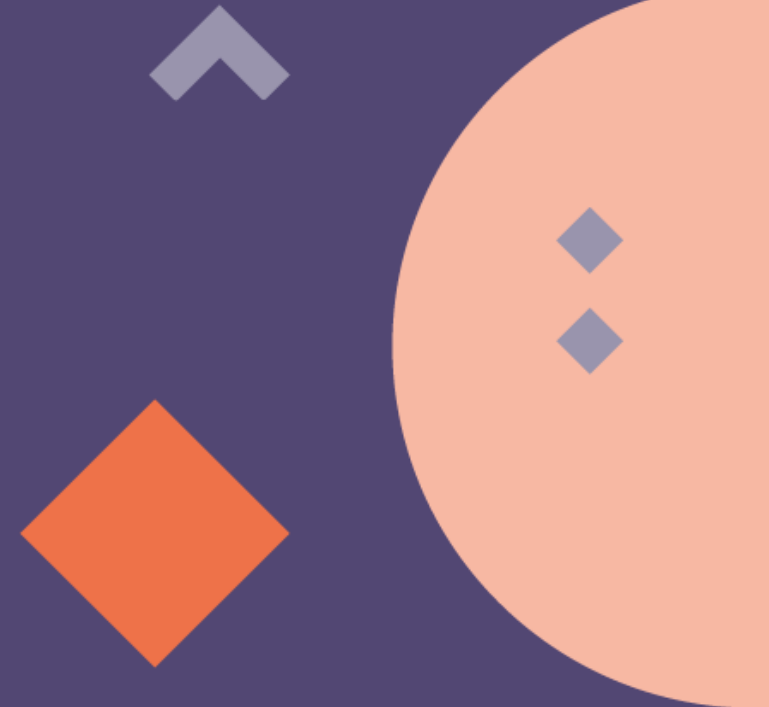


Key learning: responsible innovators consider users, communities, and environments together.

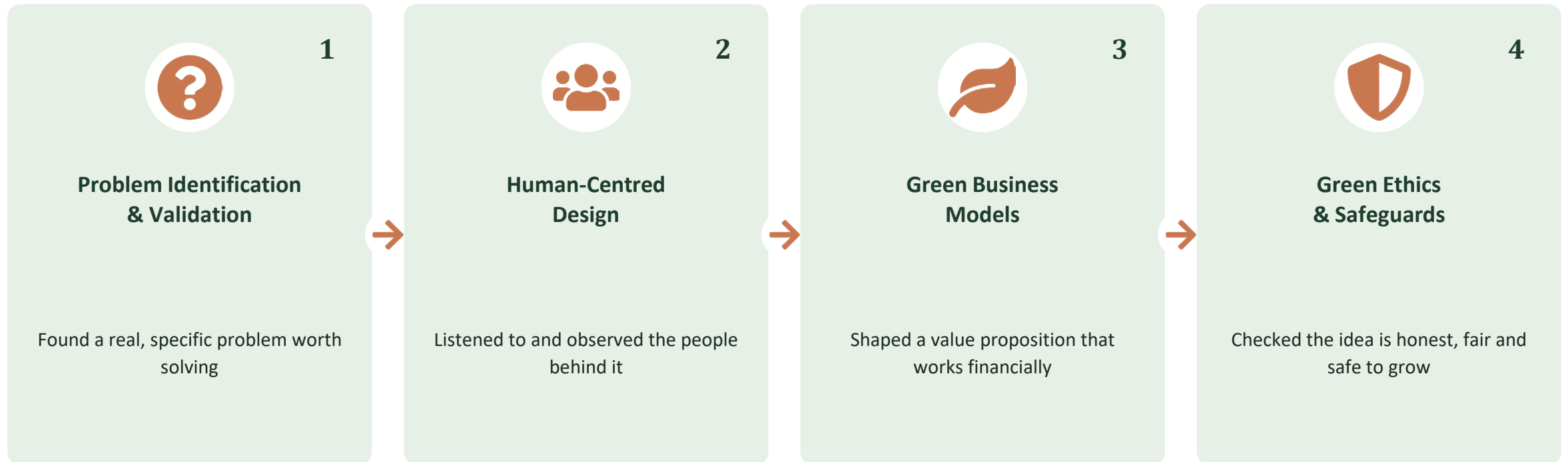
Do not forget to capture anything important from this session in your workbook!

Day 2 Wrap-Up

Reflecting on problems, people and possibilities



Today's Journey, From Problem to Possibility



The thread: *Each theme builds on the last — a clear problem leads to better empathy, which leads to a stronger model, which still needs honest safeguards.*

Key Lessons From Today



PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

The clearer the problem, the stronger everything built on top of it.



HUMAN-CENTRED DESIGN

A solution that fits into people's lives will always outperform one that asks people to change.



GREEN BUSINESS MODELS

A green business model only works when people, planet and finances reinforce each other.



GREEN ETHICS & SAFEGUARDS

Safeguards turn good intentions into responsible action — they are not about blocking progress.



Activities You Completed Today



Problem Cards

Problem Identification



Empathy Interview Role-Play

Human-Centred Design



What Makes It Green?

Green Business Models



Close the Loop

Green Business Models



Green Business Model Canvas

Green Business Models



Ethics Check

Green Ethics & Safeguards



Over 3 hours of hands-on practice today — *turning session concepts into real, tested thinking.*

Reflect on Your Own Idea

Before you leave today, look back at your own emerging idea through each of today's four lenses:



PROBLEM

What's the real problem you're solving — and for whom?



PEOPLE

What did your empathy research or observation reveal that surprised you?



MODEL

Does your idea create environmental, social and economic value — and who would pay for it?

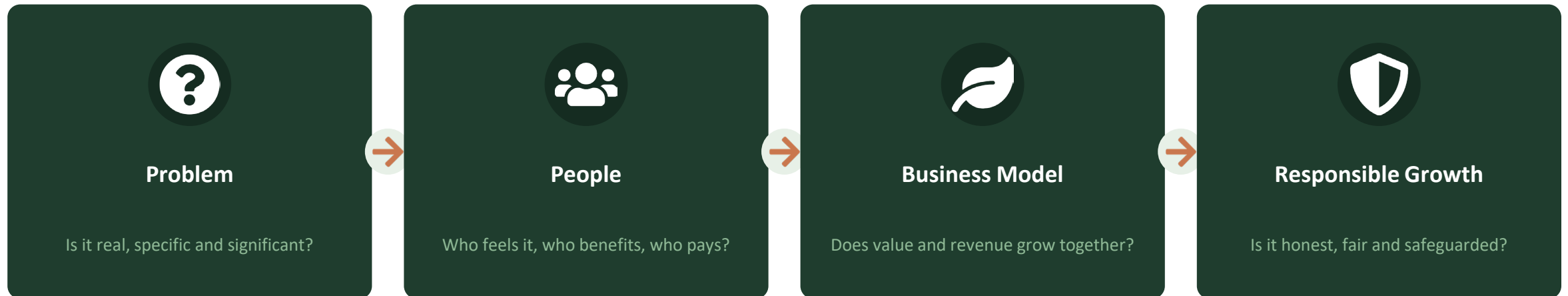


ETHICS

What's one safeguard your idea would need before it grows?

A Framework You Can Reuse

Whatever idea you work on next, the same four checkpoints apply — in this order:



Keep this close: *Strong green business ideas are rarely built in a straight line — expect to revisit earlier checkpoints as you learn more.*



Looking Ahead to Day 3



Day 3 begins at 9:00 and shifts focus from defining ideas to bringing them to life and communicating them well.



Understanding Innovation Labs

How structured spaces help ideas
develop faster



Clear Communication

Explaining your idea simply and
persuasively



Teamwork & Cultural Intelligence

Working well across diverse teams and
perspectives



Growth Mindset & Reflection

Learning from setbacks and iterating
with confidence

STUDENT EXERCISE

End of Day

Edinburgh Napier
UNIVERSITY

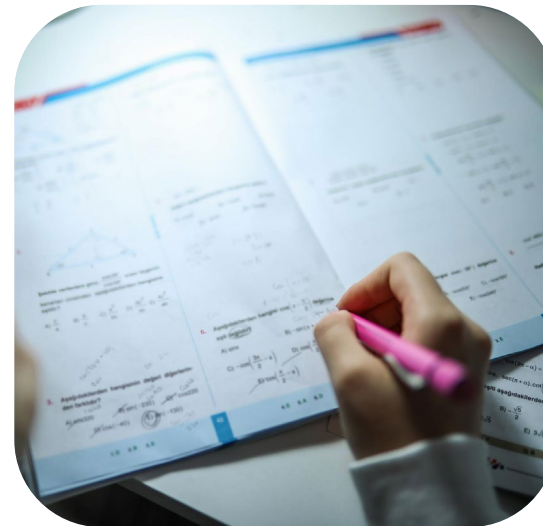


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Participant workbook

Continue to complete your course workbook.

Short answers are fine. The goal is to reflect on your learning from today and reflect on your progress!



GREEN YOUTH INNOVATION LAB · DAY 2

Thank You for a Thoughtful Day 2

You've defined a problem, shaped a business idea, and checked it stays honest and safe.