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In This InfoBrief

This InfoBrief explores how **future-ready sustainable enterprises** align **sustainability** and **digital transformation** to drive substantial **business value**. By embedding sustainability as a strategic advantage rather than just a compliance necessity, companies can achieve resilience and growth.

This document analyzes **digital solutions** that drive sustainable practices, enabling European companies to strengthen resilience, gain a competitive edge, and navigate evolving regulations like the **Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)**.

Today, with heightened expectations from governments, investors, and customers, sustainability influences all facets of a business. By proactively addressing these expectations, companies are opening paths to **innovation** and lasting **value creation**.

This InfoBrief presents **practical steps** for embedding sustainability across operations and the value chain, offering a road map to becoming a future-ready enterprise that succeeds in today's complex regulatory and environmental landscape.

Why Sustainability Matters

Sustainability is a moral, business, and regulatory imperative, driving a collective movement among diverse stakeholders focused on decarbonization goals.

Sustainability is a *must* for sustained long-term value.

STAKEHOLDERS

Business partners
Requiring ESG criteria in procurement and RFPs due to companies setting decarbonization goals across their value chains

Regulators and organisations
Making the adoption of ESG standards compulsory

Employees, customers, and communities
Becoming more engaged with and loyal to sustainable companies

Your Company

Investors, shareholders, and insurance
Making capital available for ESG investments

NGOs and activists
Influencing public opinion and launching physical attacks or cyberattacks

Governments, intergovernmental organisations
Setting mandatory national/ international decarbonization targets

The Urgency of Sustainable Action

The momentum toward sustainability is accelerating in Europe, driven by regulatory imperatives and the weight of corporate net-zero pledges. The EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), which mandates greater transparency and stringent reporting on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices, is at the center of this push. As a result, businesses are compelled to report their sustainability efforts and to align them with verifiable metrics that influence investor confidence, consumer trust, and regulatory compliance.
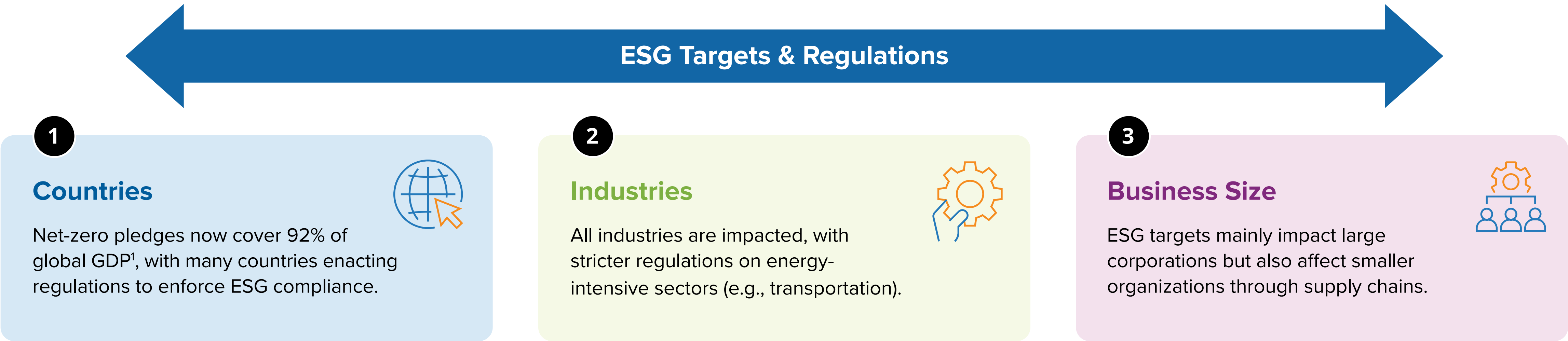
Why are European companies investing in sustainability?[1] (% of companies)

42%
To comply with regulations
(Some 77% of European companies either fully or partially comply with CSRD.)

39%
To improve operational efficiencies and reduce costs

38%
To create new business value

36%
To support brand reputation

432%
To meet customer demand
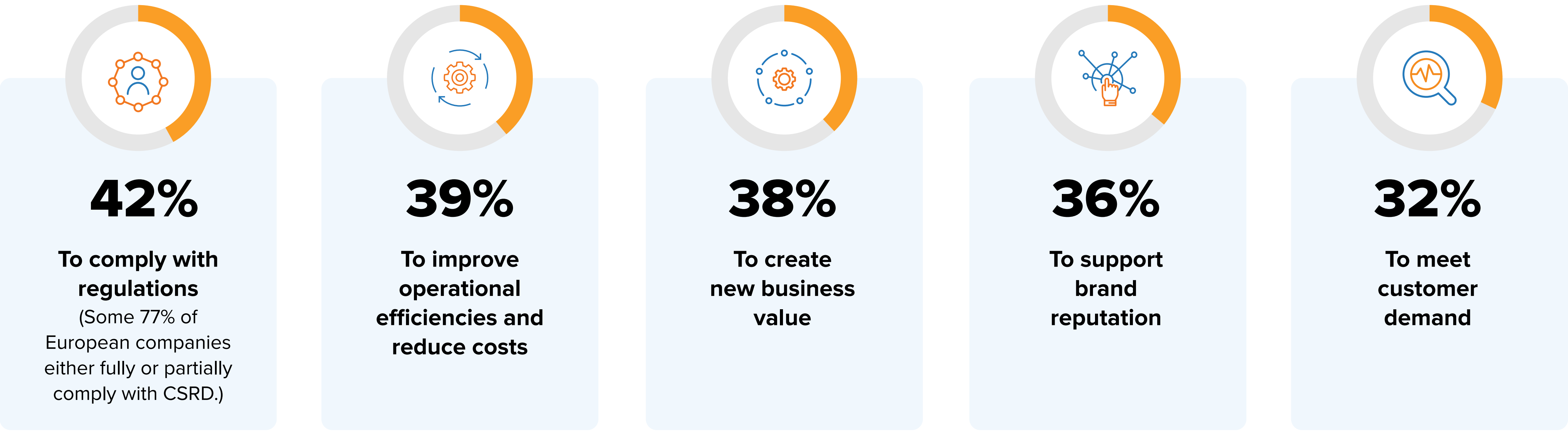
The **urgency is clear**. Failing to act today means not only missing out on competitive advantages but also risking compliance setbacks as regulations become more rigorous and interconnected across regions.

All companies face the ripple effects of sustainability requirements.

Sustainability requirements impact entire industries and regions. As large corporations set ambitious ESG targets, ripple effects reach small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and partners, making sustainability a baseline expectation for all businesses in Europe. These connected companies create an ecosystem in which sustainability and "doing business" work together.

ESG Targets & Regulations

1 Countries

Net-zero pledges now cover 92% of global GDP[1], with many countries enacting regulations to enforce ESG compliance.

2 Industries

All industries are impacted, with stricter regulations on energy-intensive sectors (e.g., transportation).

3 Business Size

ESG targets mainly impact large corporations but also affect smaller organizations through supply chains.

"You're as sustainable as your value chain."

% of companies that include ESG criteria as "must haves" in their purchases, RFPs, and tender calls to suppliers[2]

30%
Net-Zero Targets and Road Map

55%
GHG Emissions 1 and 2

29%
GHG Emissions 3

54%
Independent Certifications and Awards

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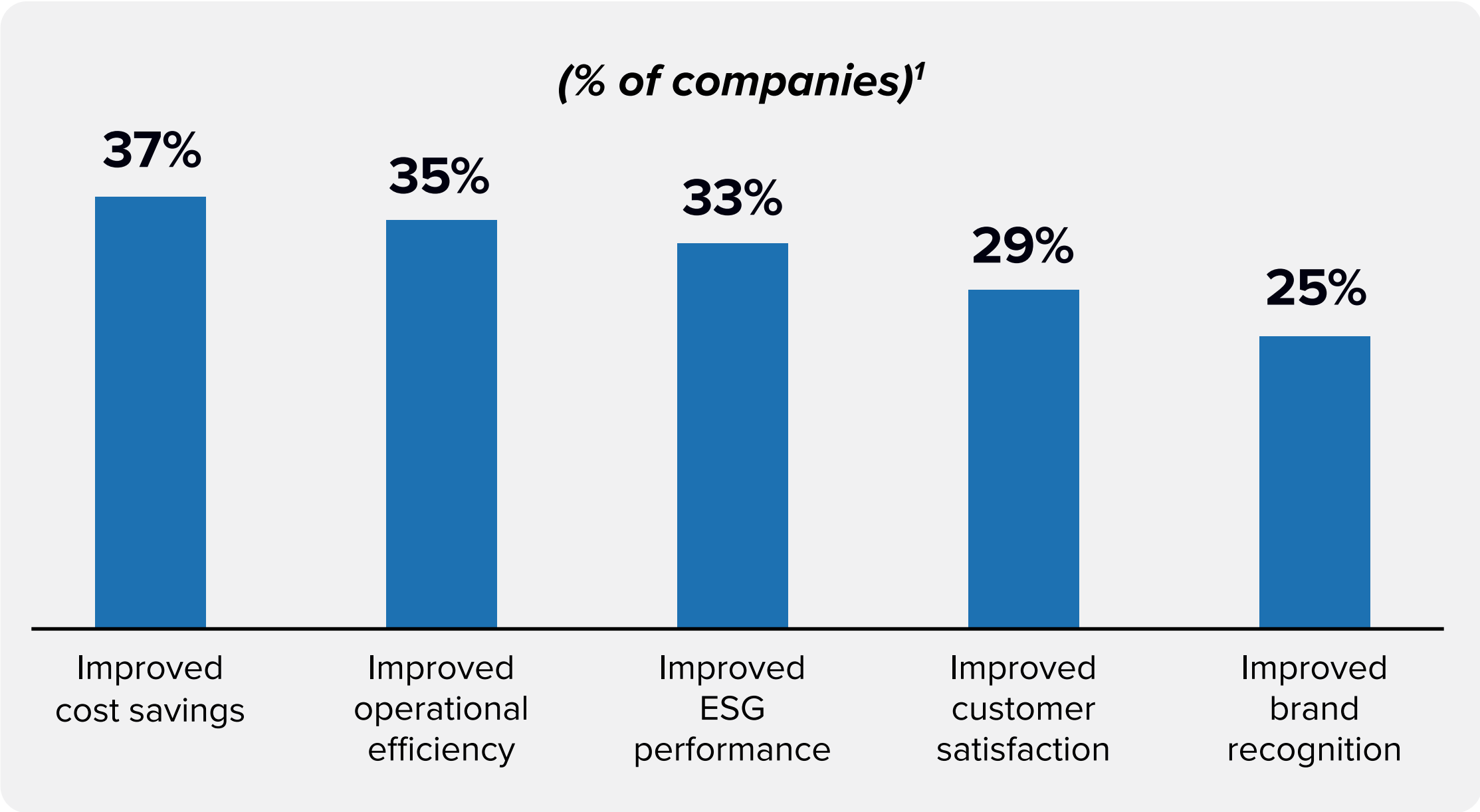# How to Become a Future-Ready Sustainable Enterprise

Progressing Through Incentives and Requirements

The journey to becoming a future-ready sustainable enterprise is complex. It requires organizations to respond to the "carrots" of market opportunities and value creation and the "sticks" of enforcement and regulatory compliance. This carrot-and-stick approach is essential for pushing companies to comply and innovate, creating solutions that align profitability with sustainability.

Stick

Risk management

Compliance (costly)

Long-term value

Business opportunity

Carrot
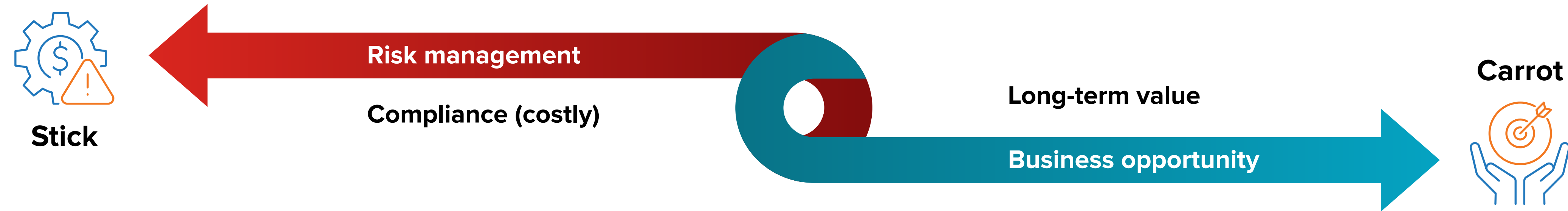
Companies must comply with various European regulations and frameworks aimed at promoting sustainability, including:

- Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)
- Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD)
- EU Circular Economy Action Plan
- Waste Framework Directive
- EU Water Framework Directive (WFD)
- EU Air Quality Directive
- EU Nature Directives (Habitats and Birds Directives)
- Environmental Impact Assessment

(% of companies)[1]

37%	35%	33%	29%	25%
Improved cost savings	Improved operational efficiency	Improved ESG performance	Improved customer satisfaction	Improved brand recognition

Key Challenges on the Path to Becoming a Future Ready Sustainable Enterprise

Transitioning to a sustainable business model presents complex challenges beyond compliance, as companies contend with budget pressures, data management hurdles, and limitations in digital capabilities[1]. European firms must balance ambitious long-term sustainability goals with immediate business demands, leveraging digital solutions to stay agile in an evolving and competitive landscape.
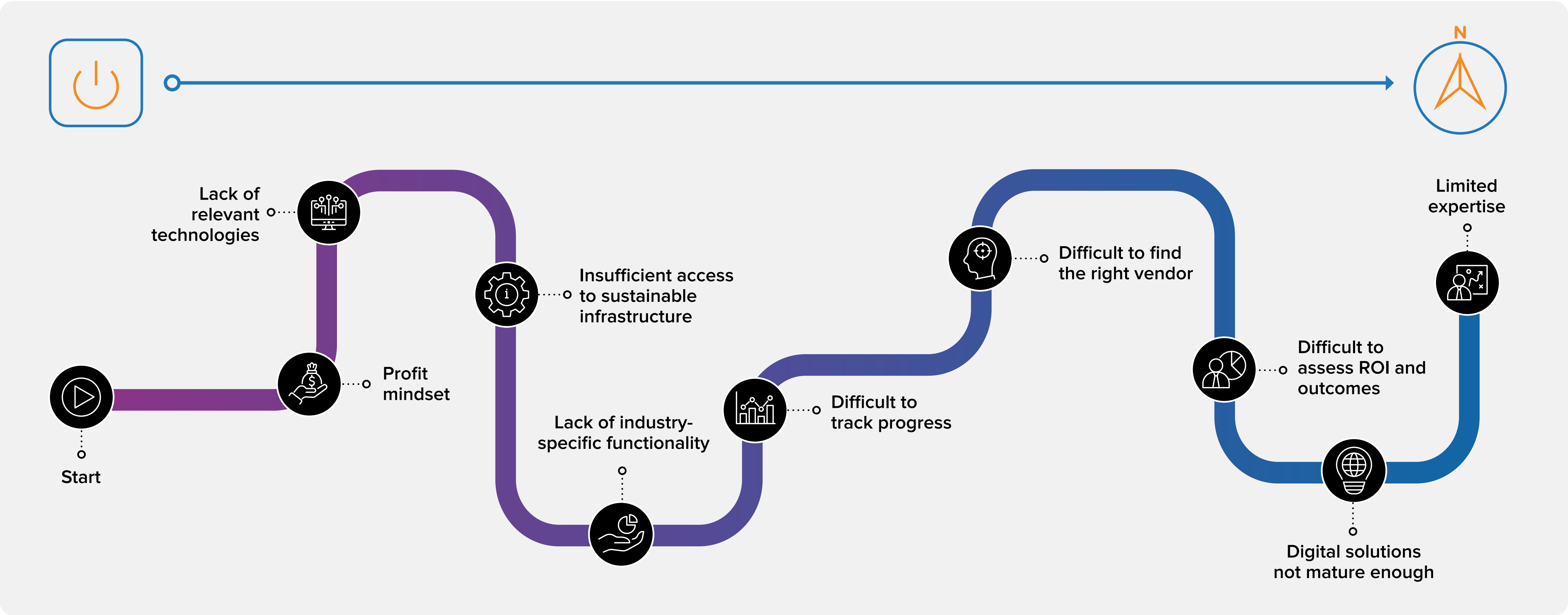
To become a future-ready sustainable enterprise, organizations must incorporate the following four key components:
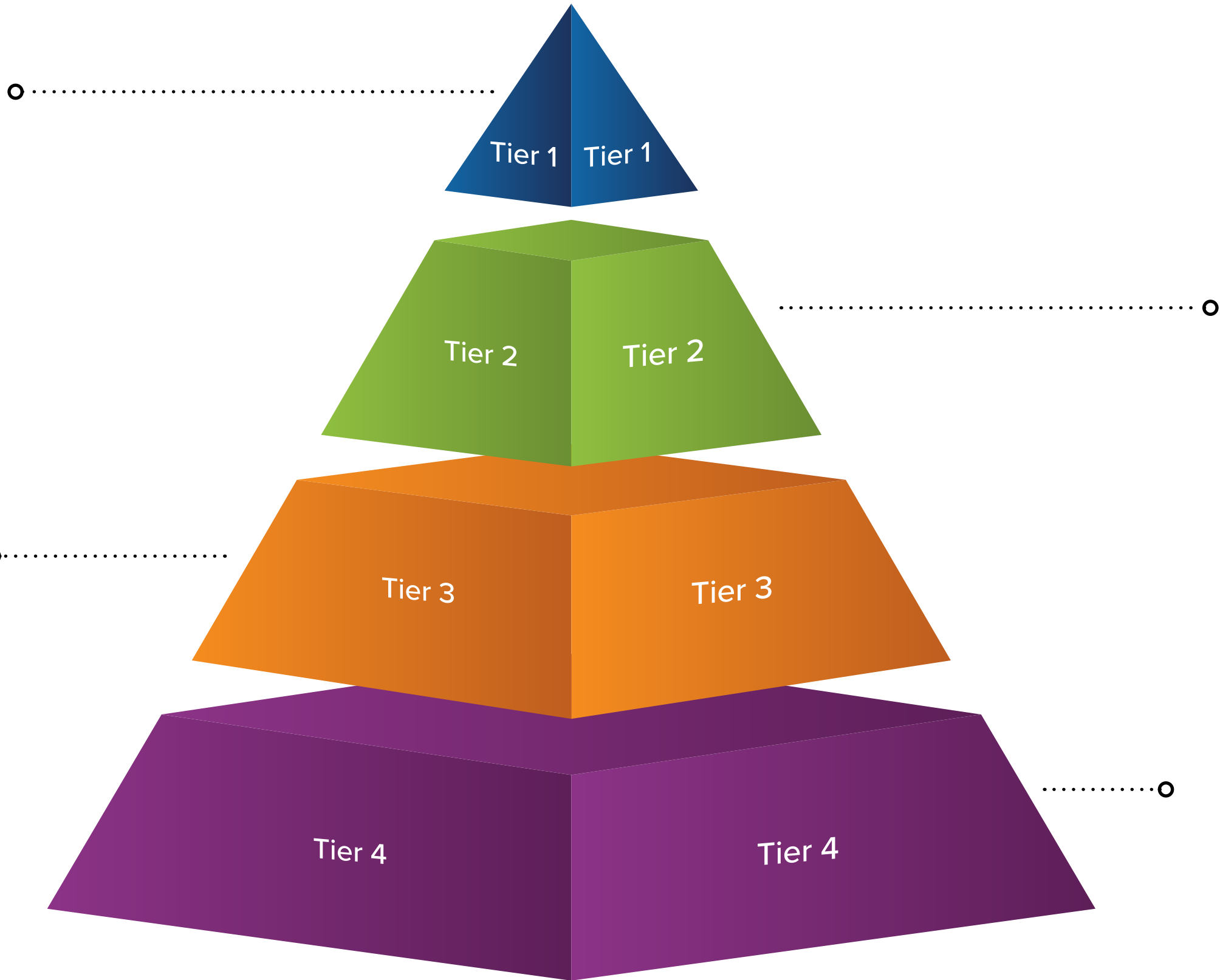
1 **Purpose/Strategy**

Multi-stakeholder approach, with sustainability at its core for long-term value & resilience and for branding & corporate reputation

2 **Governance**

Accountability and transparency in sustainability efforts; risk management; and compliance with regulations
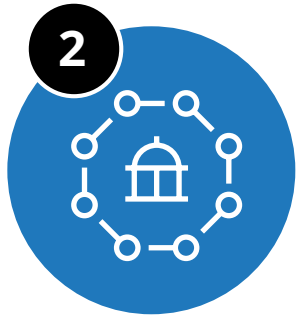
3 **Long-term business value**

Aligning profit with sustainability by rethinking value creation to include sustainable practices (e.g., waste management)
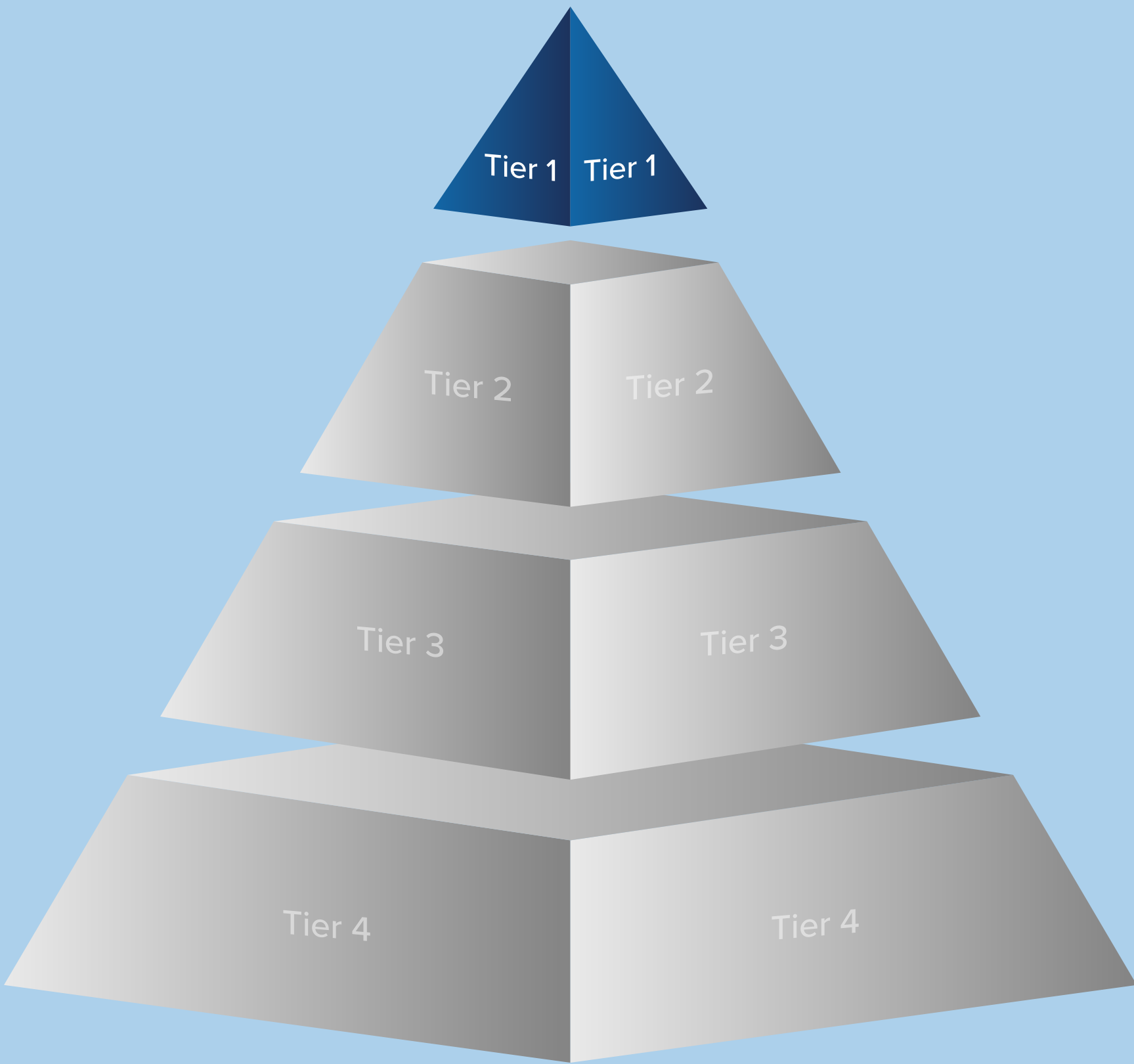
4 **Sustainable digitalization**

Managing and reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions with digital technologies to meet sustainability goals

Tier 1 Tier 1

Tier 2 Tier 2

Tier 3 Tier 3

Tier 4 Tier 4

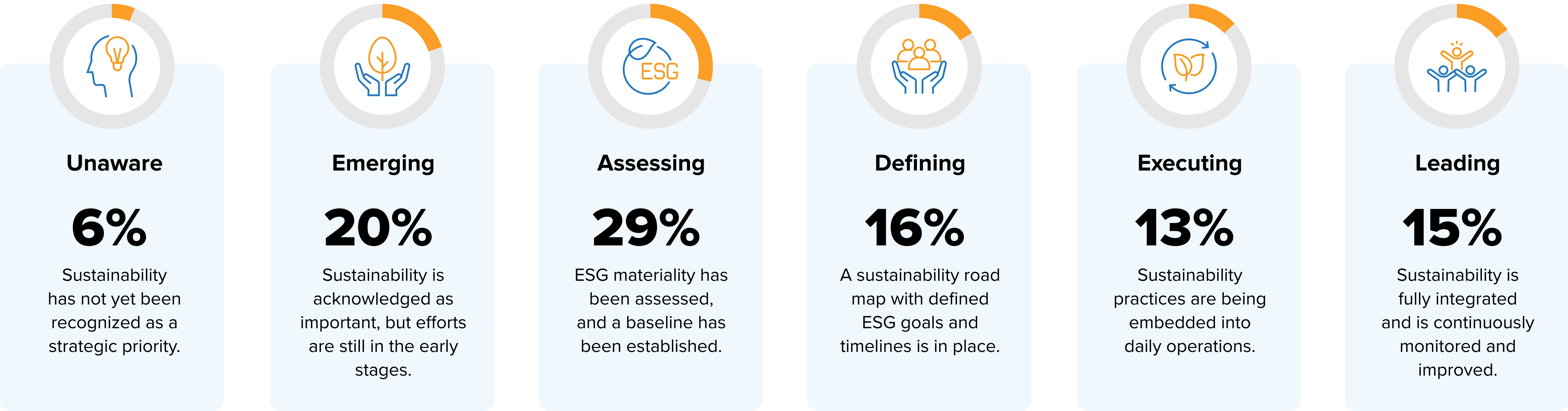# Tier 1: Building a Strategy for Impact and Corporate Reputation

Tier 1: Building a Strategy for Impact and Corporate Reputation

A successful sustainability strategy is built on a multi-stakeholder approach, with sustainability at its core to drive long-term business value and resilience. Companies aligning their purpose with sustainable practices are better positioned to enhance their brand, improve their corporate reputation, and build trust with customers and investors.

Companies progress through various stages of maturity as they integrate sustainability into their strategies and operations. According to recent survey data, less than half (45%)[1] of European companies currently have a sustainability strategy in place.

At which stage in the sustainability journey is your organization?[2]

Unaware	Emerging	Assessing	Defining	Executing	Leading
6%	**20%**	**29%**	**16%**	**13%**	**15%**
Sustainability has not yet been recognized as a strategic priority.	Sustainability is acknowledged as important, but efforts are still in the early stages.	ESG materiality has been assessed, and a baseline has been established.	A sustainability road map with defined ESG goals and timelines is in place.	Sustainability practices are being embedded into daily operations.	Sustainability is fully integrated and is continuously monitored and improved.

IDC

InfoBrief, sponsored by Axians
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Source: 1, IDC's *Energy Transition Survey,* October 2024, European companies (n = 468)
2, IDC's *Sustainability Software Survey,* June 2024, European companies (n= 664)

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Aligning EU Double Materiality with Global UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
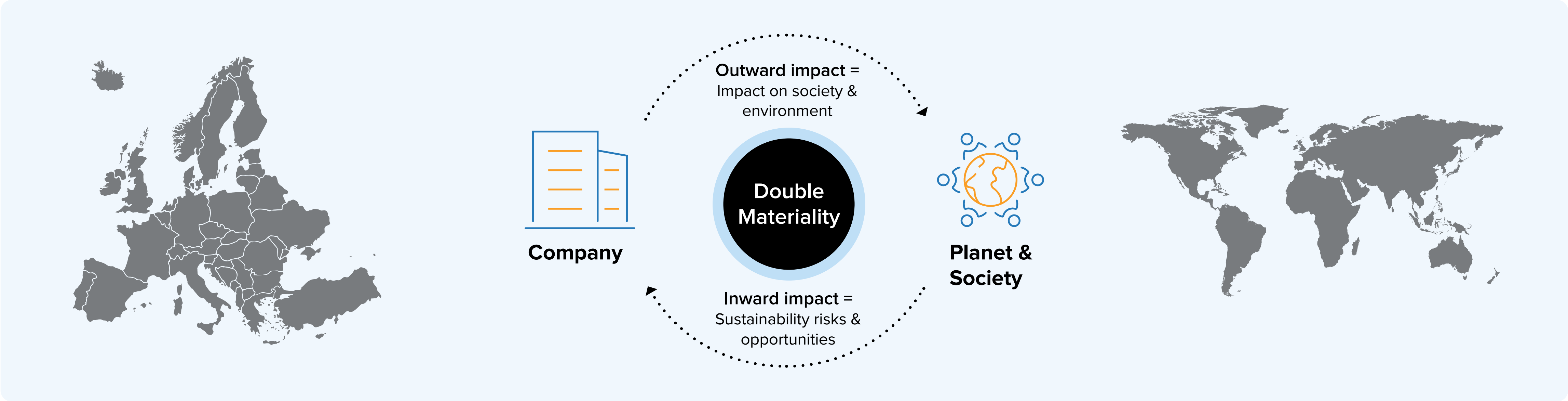
In many ESG regulations around the world, a **single materiality** approach is common, focusing primarily on **financial risks** relevant to investors and shareholders.

In Europe, EU taxonomy and ESG regulations, such as the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive **(CSRD), uniquely adopt a double materiality** approach[1]. This requires companies to evaluate both the financial risks and the environmental and social impacts of their activities.
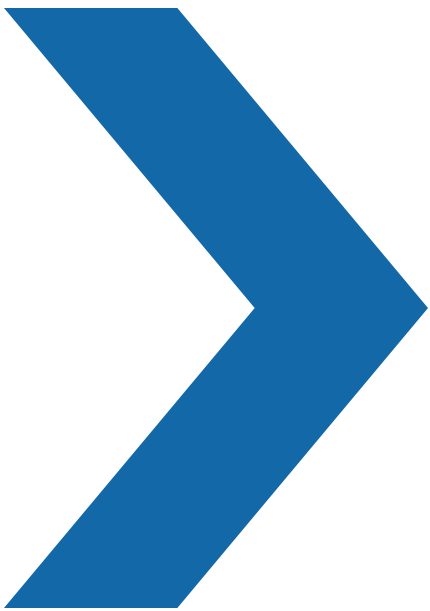
EU regulations on double materiality are aligned and drive action toward global **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, such as:

- SDG 13: Climate Action
- SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
- SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
- SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Outward impact = Impact on society & environment

Double Materiality

Company

Planet & Society

Inward impact = Sustainability risks & opportunities

Customer Case: The City of Detmold leverages Axians IKVS for sustainable impact and reputation, aligning finance systems with SDGs to drive long-term value.

> "The appealing presentation and the transparency of the Axians IKVS solution have been received well by politicians and citizens. They make understanding complex issues easier."

- Dr. Miriam Mikus, First Deputy Mayor and Treasurer of the City of Detmold, and Cathrin Herrmann, Project Management of the City of Detmold

What's the problem?

The German city of Detmold wants to improve how global sustainability goals are included in financial plans. The aim is to think globally and act locally, aligning local actions with the United Nations SDGs and creating a transparent connection between budgets and sustainability goals.

Critical data points:

- **Integration gaps:** difficulty embedding sustainability goals into financial systems, and limited alignment with global SDGs
- **Data challenges:** lack of real-time data for effective decision-making
- **Transparency needs:** poor visibility into how budgets align with sustainability priorities
- **Holistic approach:** the need to address the full range of SDGs (ecology, economy, and social aspects) comprehensively

What's the solution?

With Axians IKVS' SDG Compass in place, Detmold has connected its sustainability goals with its financial systems for greater transparency and impact. Software settings enable customized adjustments without the need for programmers, simplifying the process. Tailored reporting tools help align actions with SDGs, improving stakeholder collaboration and alignment.

Sustainability initiatives:

- Linked financial systems with sustainability goals to create a transparent and integrated reporting structure
- Created customized reporting settings for alignment with the SDGs
- Promoted collaboration between administration, politicians, and stakeholders to align local actions with global goals
- Provided a broad view of progress by integrating real-time data and flexible reporting tools

What's the impact?

By increasing transparency in sustainability reporting, Detmold has strengthened its engagement with the public and made progress with key SDGs. Processes have become more efficient, and communication among stakeholders has improved notably.
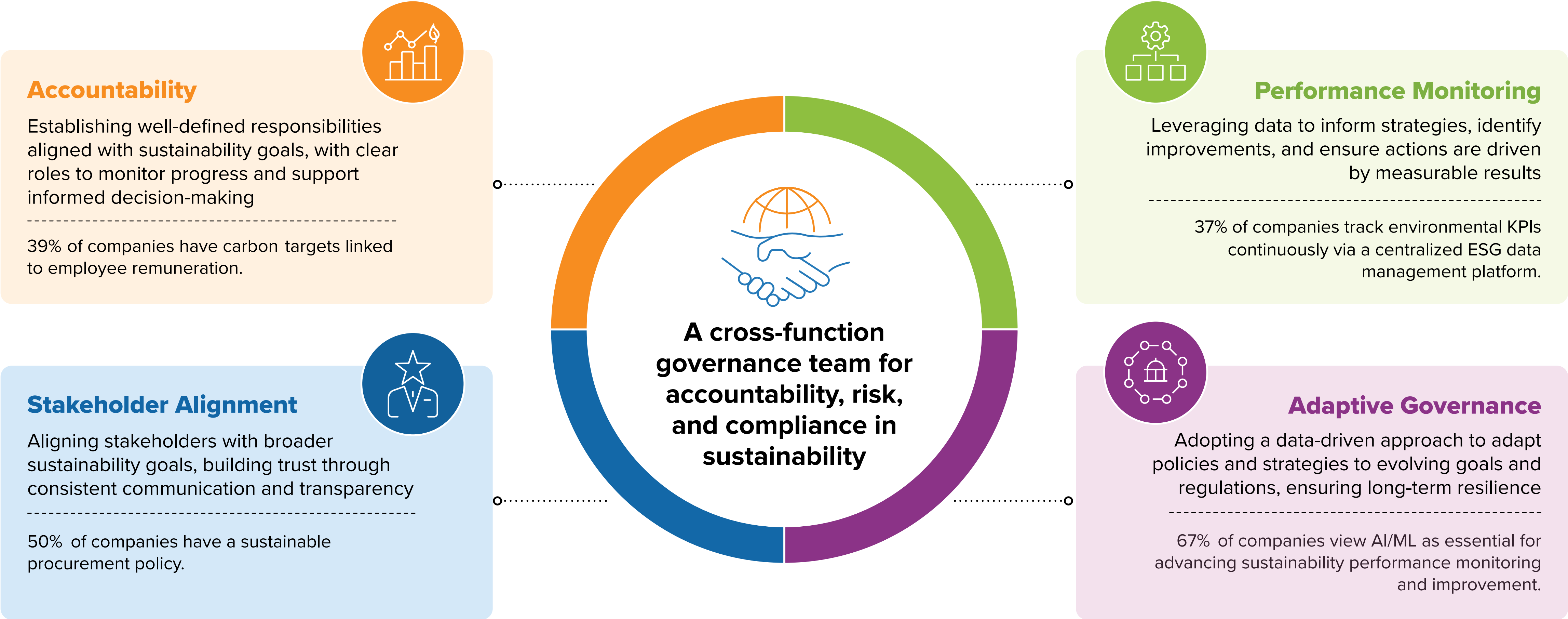
Impact and key results:

- **Public engagement:** increased access to sustainability reports (from a few hundred to about 2,000 users), improving social awareness and involvement
- **Efficiency gains:** reduced errors and manual effort through streamlined reporting and more efficient processes
- **Enhanced transparency:** enhanced trust with stakeholders through clear alignment between financial systems and SDGs
- **SDG progress:** Initiatives in climate action (SDG 13) and sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11)

Tier 2: Governance for Accountability, Risk, and Compliance in Sustainability
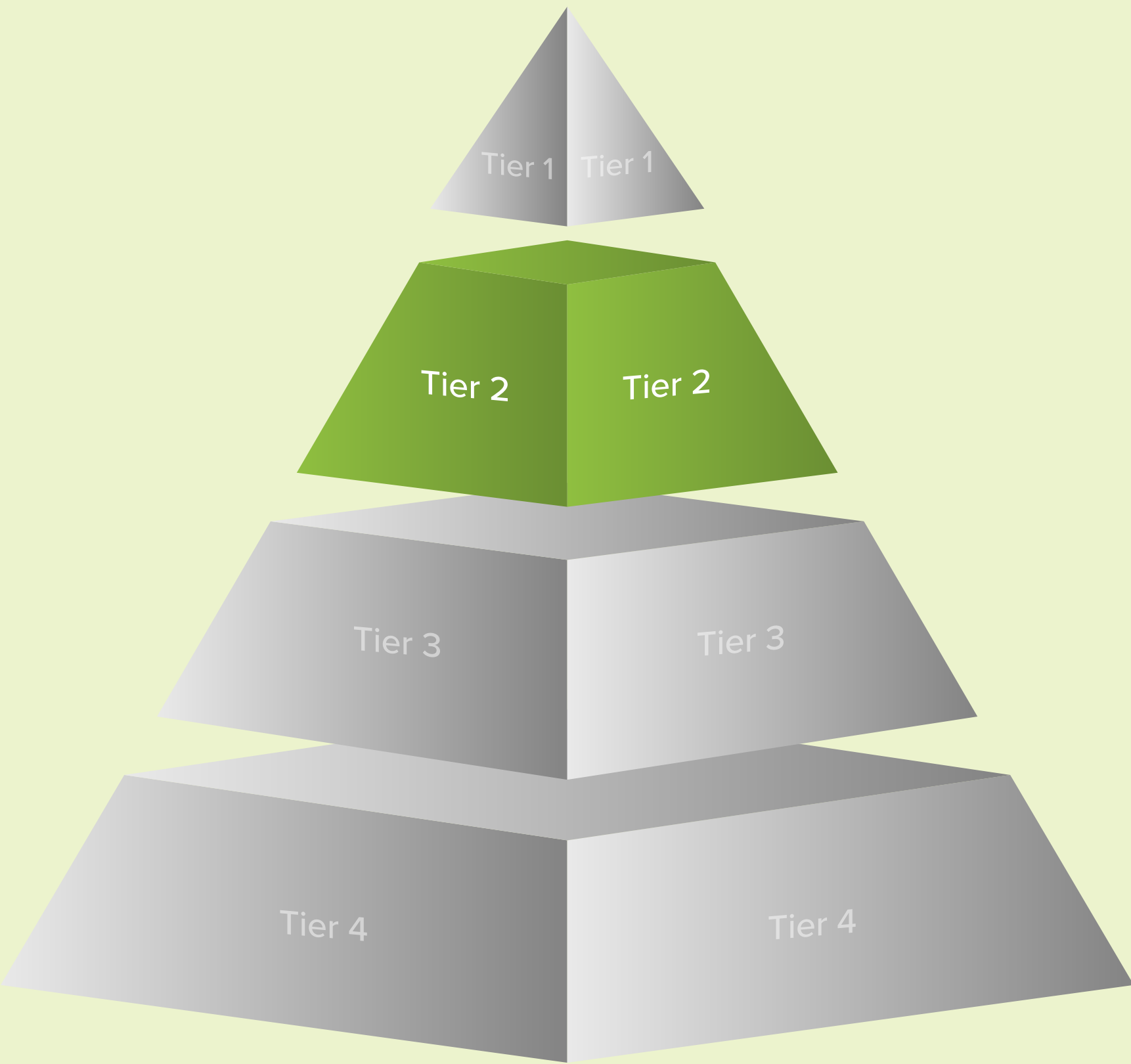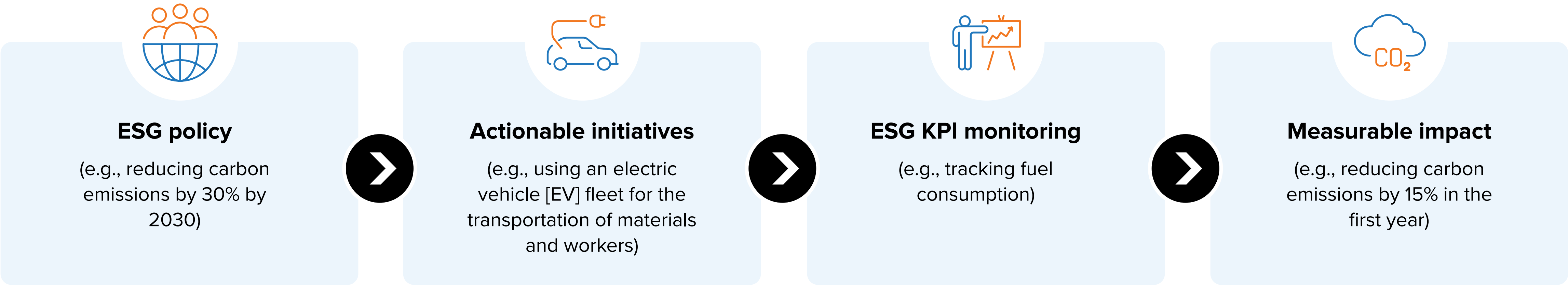
Tier 2: Governance for Accountability, Risk, and Compliance in Sustainability

Effective governance is the backbone of sustainable impact. By embedding accountability, actionable insights, and adaptive practices, organizations can turn sustainability commitments into business resilience, fostering stakeholder trust.
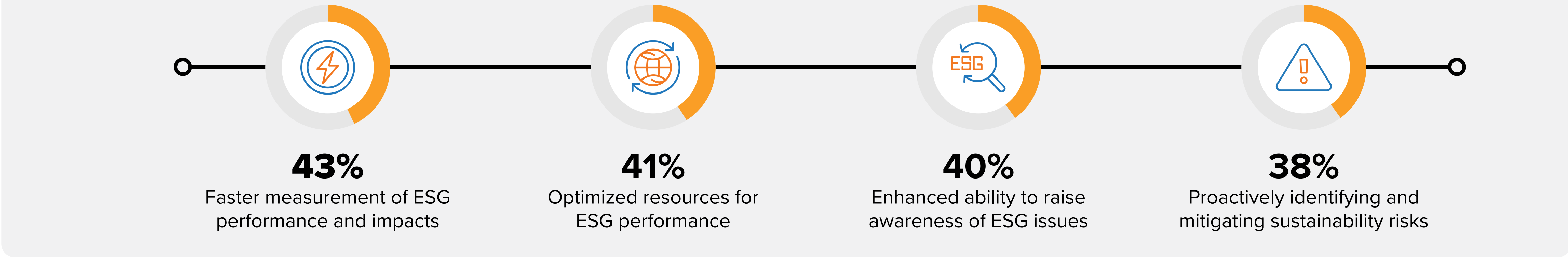
Accountability

Establishing well-defined responsibilities aligned with sustainability goals, with clear roles to monitor progress and support informed decision-making

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39% of companies have carbon targets linked to employee remuneration.

Performance Monitoring

Leveraging data to inform strategies, identify improvements, and ensure actions are driven by measurable results

----

37% of companies track environmental KPIs continuously via a centralized ESG data management platform.

A cross-function governance team for accountability, risk, and compliance in sustainability

Stakeholder Alignment

Aligning stakeholders with broader sustainability goals, building trust through consistent communication and transparency

----

50% of companies have a sustainable procurement policy.

Adaptive Governance

Adopting a data-driven approach to adapt policies and strategies to evolving goals and regulations, ensuring long-term resilience

----

67% of companies view AI/ML as essential for advancing sustainability performance monitoring and improvement.

From Policy to Measurable Impact: Operationalizing ESG

Transforming ESG policies into actionable practices and measurable impact involves embedding ESG KPIs into operations and continuously monitoring them. This approach enables organizations to adjust policies in real time to achieve desired results.

ESG policy
(e.g., reducing carbon emissions by 30% by 2030)

>

Actionable initiatives
(e.g., using an electric vehicle [EV] fleet for the transportation of materials and workers)

>

ESG KPI monitoring
(e.g., tracking fuel consumption)

>

Measurable impact
(e.g., reducing carbon emissions by 15% in the first year)

Organizations that digitalize ESG data and monitor KPIs report multiple operational benefits[1].

43%
Faster measurement of ESG performance and impacts

41%
Optimized resources for ESG performance

40%
Enhanced ability to raise awareness of ESG issues

38%
Proactively identifying and mitigating sustainability risks

GRUMBACH
RECYCLING

Customer Case: Grumbach Recycling and Axians strengthen governance with emissions reporting, ensuring accountability, compliance, and sustainability in the supply chain.

> " *Together with our partners, we have developed a process that allows us to respond to our customers' inquiries easily and efficiently. Thanks to eNature, this is possible without significant effort and without relying on standard factors.*"
>
> - Andreas Grumbach, Managing Director of Grumbach GmbH & Co. KG

What's the problem?

Grumbach Recycling is a medium-sized waste management company that is under pressure from its supply chain partners to report emissions. Currently, the company lacks information about its own carbon footprint, and the data is unstructured and decentralized. The goal is to establish a centralized data structure that enables automatic emissions calculations.

Critical data points:

- **Centralized data storage** to provide consistent, reliable responses to customer inquiries

- **Simple structure** for transparent and comprehensive emissions calculations

- **Familiar communication channels** with minimal manual input for customer interactions

- **Use of real data** for calculations rather than relying on statistical factors

What's the solution?

With Axians eWaste and NETFACTORY, Grumbach Recycling has developed a solution that enables quick and accurate emissions reports from the company's raw data. The raw data is imported into the software and automatically mapped to the required reporting structures. The existing ERP system is integrated for seamless communication with customers. This enables the company to issue accurate emissions values based on real data for every quotation and invoice.

Sustainability initiatives:

- Emissions balance based on real data that is imported in just a few steps

- Multiple analyses with no additional effort, including specific key figures

- Automated emissions data for invoices and quotations integrated into the ERP system

What's the impact?

With the developed process, Grumbach Recycling can efficiently calculate and analyze its own emissions without significant resource investment. By connecting to the ERP system, real Scope 3 data is directly communicated through invoices and quotations. This enables the company to make a meaningful contribution to the sustainability efforts of its customers.

Impact and key results:

- **Improved communication** with customers regarding emissions in the supply chain

- **Both historical and current emissions data** evaluated in various report formats

Tier 3: Creating Long-Term Business Value
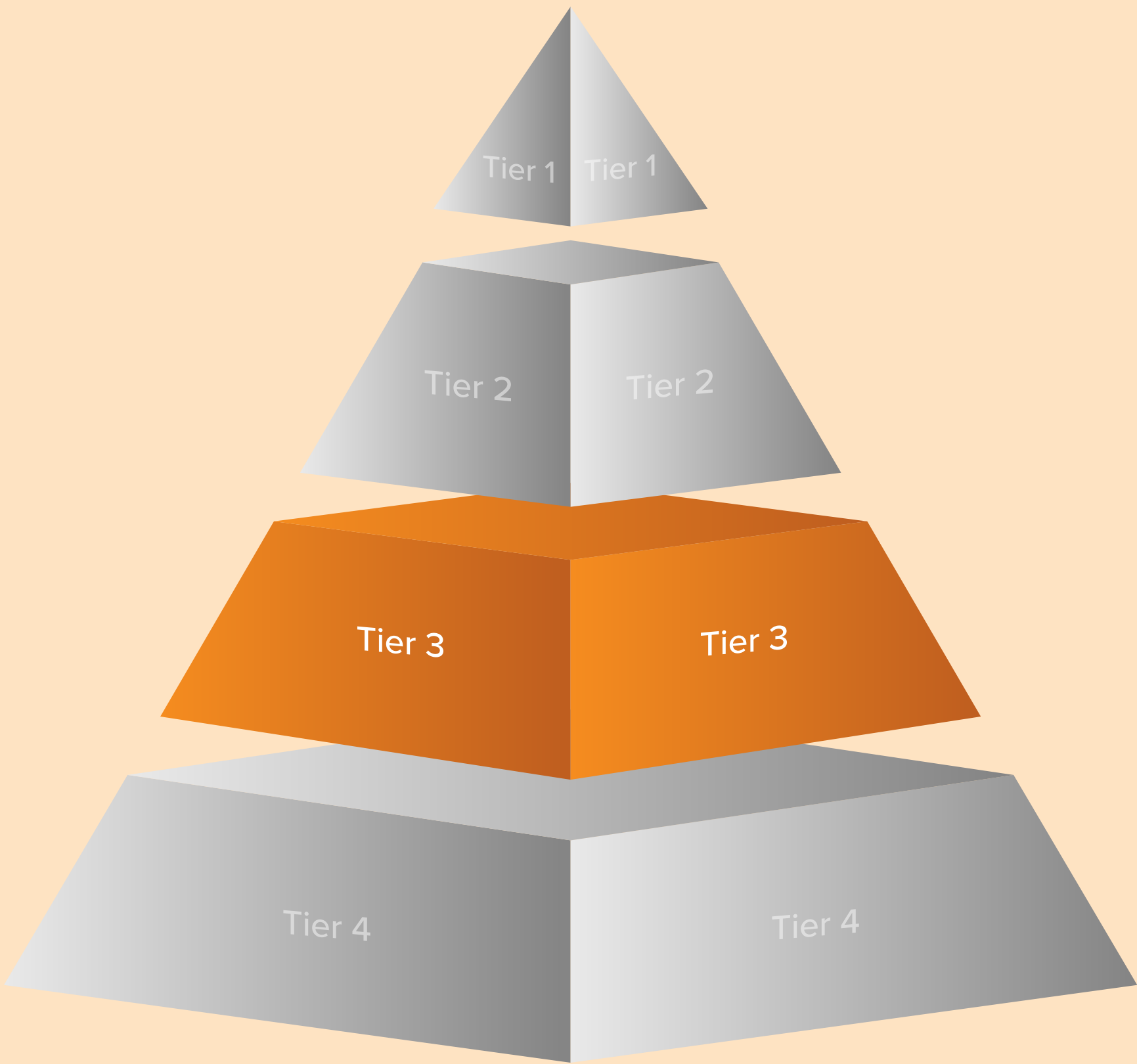
Tier 3: Creating Long-Term Business Value

Companies that commit to sustainable practices can better navigate regulatory landscapes, meet evolving market needs, and strengthen business resilience[1].

1

Brand Reputation

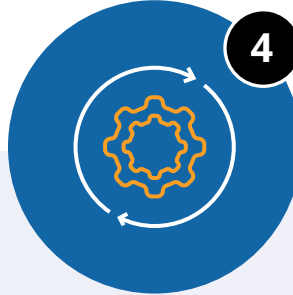Enhancing brand equity by building trust with customers and partners to, provide a long-term competitive advantage

2

ESG Performance

Aligning with regulations, reducing compliance risks, and attracting responsible investors through transparency

3
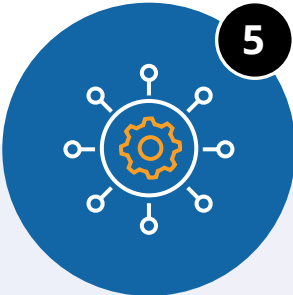
Cost Savings

Reducing operational expenses by optimizing resources, extending product life, and cutting waste

4

Operational Efficiencies

Reducing resource use and environmental impact and enhancing operational productivity

5

New Revenue Streams

Generating new revenue and competitive edge through sustainable innovation

6

Customer Loyalty & Satisfaction

Building loyalty by aligning brand values with consumer expectations for sustainability

7

Talent Attraction & Retention

Attracting and retaining talent by aligning company values with employees' ethics and purpose
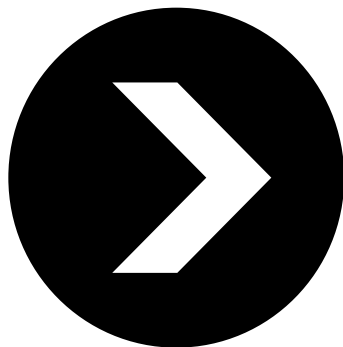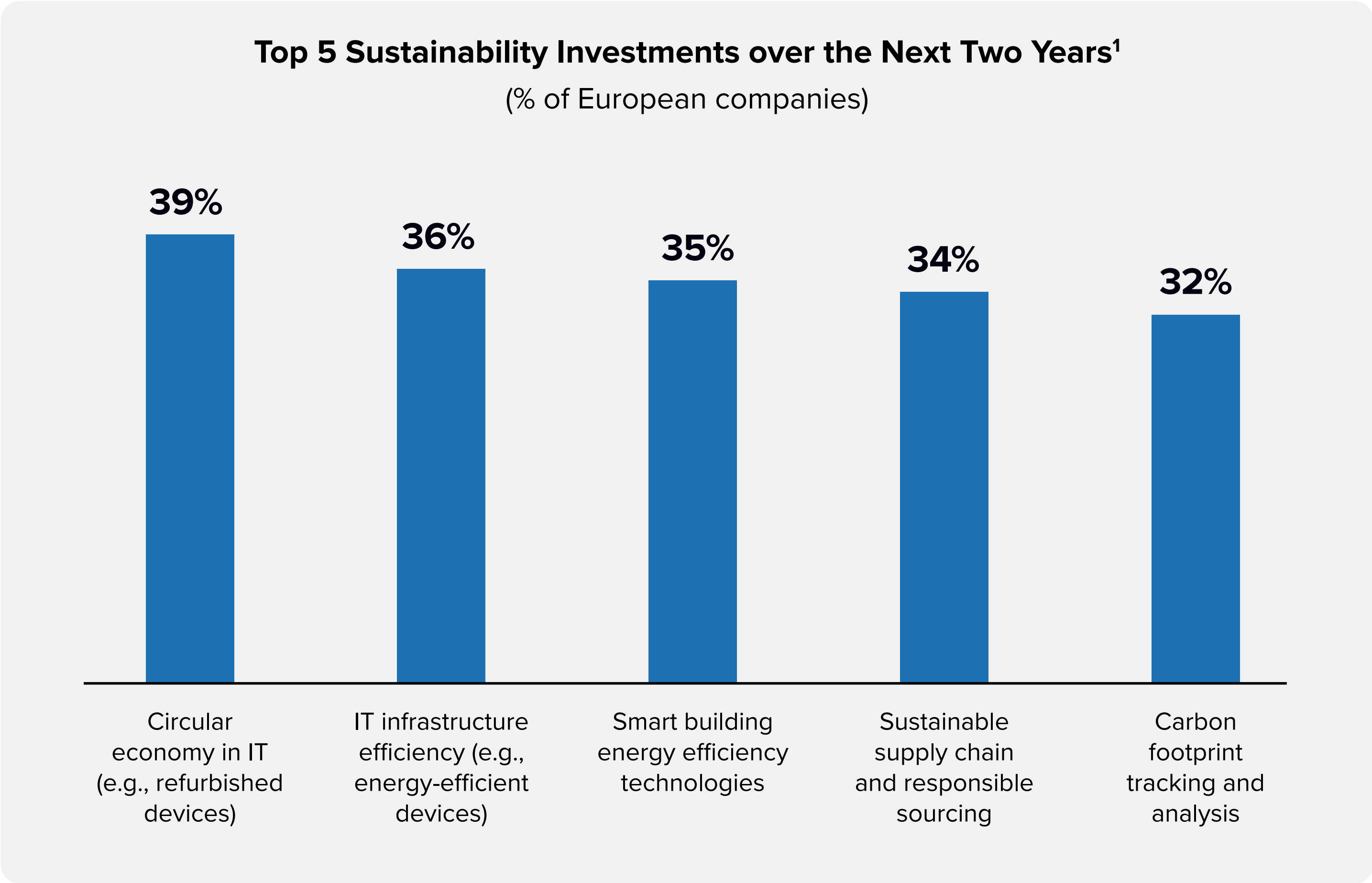
8

Long-Term Partner Engagement

Strengthening collaboration and mutual growth by fostering shared values with partners

Returns on Sustainable Investments

Companies that prioritize sustainability investments are focused on driving impactful business outcomes. They are optimizing resources, enhancing efficiencies, reducing waste, and extending the life cycles of assets to impact companies' bottom lines while building a foundation for long-term growth.

Top 5 Sustainability Investments over the Next Two Years[1]

(% of European companies)

39%	**36%**	**35%**	**34%**	**32%**
Circular economy in IT (e.g., refurbished devices)	IT infrastructure efficiency (e.g., energy-efficient devices)	Smart building energy efficiency technologies	Sustainable supply chain and responsible sourcing	Carbon footprint tracking and analysis

The Impact of Sustainability Initiatives (Past 12 Months)[1]

Decreased costs by
15%
(average response)

Increased revenue by
21%
(average response)

Improved customer NPS by
23%
(average response)

Customer Case: Swisscom and Axians partner for a Green Tower solution, reducing emissions, cutting costs, and driving operational efficiency.

> " *Our NetZero targets combined with rising prices, especially for steel and energy, were the driver for the Green Tower project together with Axians.*"
>
> - Peter Tschudin, Mobile Network Infrastructure, and Oliver Oberli, Head of Sustainable Procurement, at Swisscom

What's the problem?

Swisscom is committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2035, aligning with the SBTi to secure its future and improve operational efficiency. One of the challenges in this transition has been the high energy consumption and emissions of its mobile towers, which affect both sustainability objectives and long-term cost management.

Critical data points:

- **Operational costs & efficiency:** high energy consumption per tower due to outdated systems, leading to increased expenses and slower sustainability progress

- **Sustainability goals:** the use of inefficient materials and legacy energy systems, making it more difficult to meet net-zero targets

- **Resource optimization:** limited tracking and energy management, resulting in missed opportunities for cost savings and reduced environmental impact

What's the solution?

To address these challenges, Swisscom turned to Axians to redesign its mobile towers, embedding sustainability into design and operations.
This transformation has supported its net-zero strategy and led to cost savings, such as reducing steel usage, while enhancing operational efficiency.

Sustainability initiatives:

- Replaced heavier tower materials with lighter eco-friendly alternatives, reducing transportation costs and overall carbon footprint

- Integrated renewable energy and high-efficiency systems, lowering dependence on carbon fuels and improving network operations

- Strengthened collaboration between teams to ensure sustainability remains a core focus in design and daily operations

What's the impact?

Swisscom's redesign of its mobile towers has advanced its sustainability efforts. By adopting renewable energy and sustainable materials, the company has achieved measurable environmental and operational improvements while reinforcing stakeholder trust.
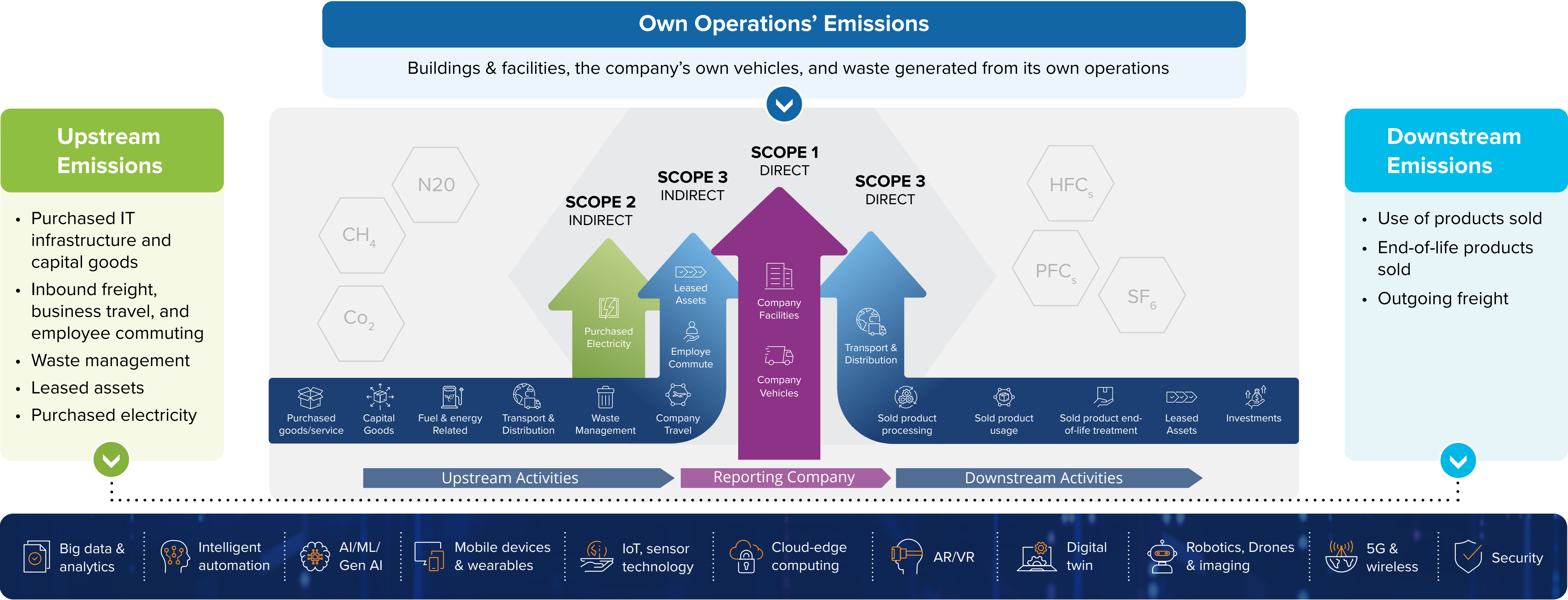
Impact and key results:

- **CO2 reduction:** a 43% decrease in CO2 emissions per mast through sustainable materials (e.g., 50% less steel used) and energy-efficient systems

- **Energy optimization:** improved energy efficiency and reduced use of carbon fuels

- **Stakeholder trust:** transparent reporting and measurable results, building stronger trust with customers and regulators

Tier 4: Sustainable Digitalization in Managing, Reducing, and Reporting GHG Emissions
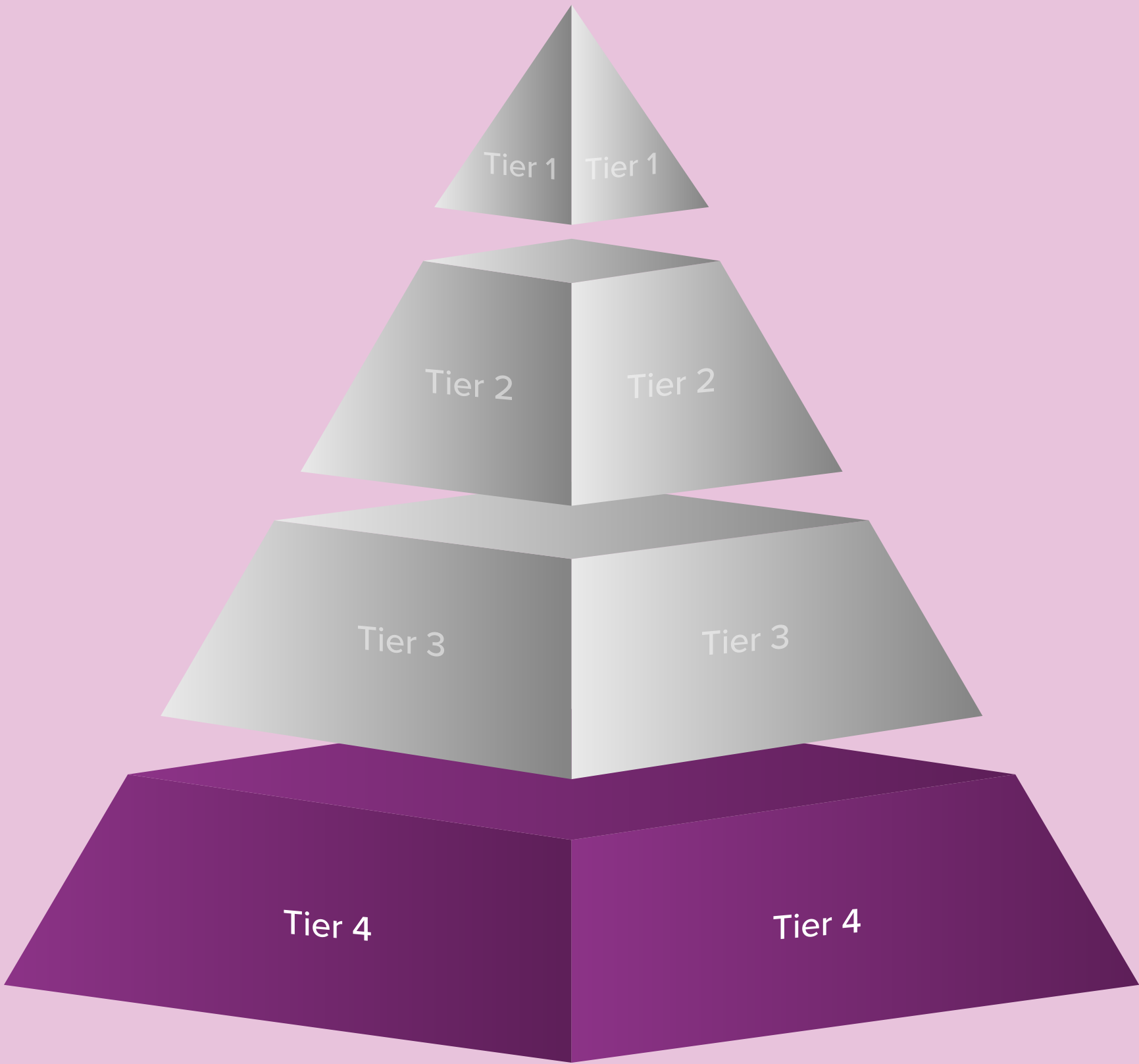
Tier 4: Sustainable Digitalization in Managing, Reducing, and Reporting GHG Emissions Across the Value Chain

Sustainable digitalization leverages advanced technologies to manage GHG emissions throughout upstream, operations, and downstream activities. It enhances efficiency, enables real-time monitoring, and supports accurate emissions reporting to meet sustainability targets.

Own Operations' Emissions

Buildings & facilities, the company's own vehicles, and waste generated from its own operations

Upstream Emissions

- Purchased IT infrastructure and capital goods
- Inbound freight, business travel, and employee commuting
- Waste management
- Leased assets
- Purchased electricity

Downstream Emissions

- Use of products sold
- End-of-life products sold
- Outgoing freight

SCOPE 2 INDIRECT

SCOPE 3 INDIRECT

SCOPE 1 DIRECT

SCOPE 3 DIRECT

$N2O$ · CH_4 · Co_2 · HFC_s · PFC_s · SF_6

Leased Assets · Purchased Electricity · Company Facilities · Employe Commute · Company Vehicles · Transport & Distribution

Purchased goods/service · Capital Goods · Fuel & energy Related · Transport & Distribution · Waste Management · Company Travel · Sold product processing · Sold product usage · Sold product end-of-life treatment · Leased Assets · Investments

Upstream Activities · Reporting Company · Downstream Activities

Big data & analytics · Intelligent automation · AI/ML/Gen AI · Mobile devices & wearables · IoT, sensor technology · Cloud-edge computing · AR/VR · Digital twin · Robotics, Drones & imaging · 5G & wireless · Security

Top Technologies and Sourcing Models to Efficiently Achieve an Organization's ESG Goals and Business Objectives

(Ranking by European company)[1]

#1

Hybrid IT infrastructure efficiency

Optimizing hardware, software, and services for reduced energy use and enhanced performance
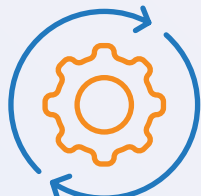
#2

Carbon-emissions monitoring

Tracking and managing carbon emissions through software tools for better sustainability reporting

#3

Intelligent automation & data integration

Using automation and data tools to improve efficiency and reduce resource consumption

#4

Digitalization of energy transition infrastructure

Using digital tools to optimize and control energy systems in the transition to clean energy

#5

Optimized infrastructure utilization

Maximizing existing IT resources to enhance performance, reduce waste, and minimize environmental impact

#6

Energy efficiency software

Using digital tools to monitor, analyze, and optimize energy consumption in operations and IT systems
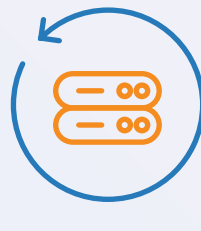
#7

Software Lifecycle Efficiency

Minimizing energy use and waste during software development, deployment, and maintenance

#8

Datacenter performance efficiency

Improving datacenter performance by reducing energy consumption and enhancing cooling (e.g., PUE)

Source 1,: IDC's *Sustainability Readiness Index Survey,* August 2024, European companies (n = 361)

Customer Case: Frutura and Axians transform sustainability management with ESG tools, streamlining compliance, reducing GHG emissions, and enhancing insights.

> " *The tool will help us identify key figures and goals, such as power consumption and waste management. Having these indicators in one place is a good starting point."*
>
> - Gerald Goldgruber, Head of Process Management, Andreas Kogler, Process Manager, and Robert Goldgruber, SAP Process Manager, at Frutura

What's the problem?

At Frutura, the need to comply with EU taxonomy and CSRD reporting obligations has created urgency to streamline the management of sustainability data. The company needs to bring together extensive fragmented data to meet compliance requirements, while embedding sustainability more deeply into the business.

Critical data points:

- **Regulatory pressure:** compliance with EU taxonomy and CSRD reporting deadlines
- **Data complexity:** ESG information dispersed across multiple systems and teams
- **Time constraints:** Aiming for initial readiness by June 30, 2025, and full compliance by mid-2026

What's the solution?

With Axians' professional services, Frutura has implemented advanced ESG tools to meet its complex reporting needs. Integrated into the company's existing data systems, these tools have enabled the company's teams to centralize sustainability efforts, improving how ESG data is tracked and managed.
The company has worked closely with Axians to develop solutions tailored to its specific requirements.

ESG solution capabilities:

- Tools tailored to Frutura's data landscape, ensuring compatibility with supplier systems
- Comprehensive support and close collaboration with Axians

What's the impact?

With the solution in place, Frutura is streamlining its ESG processes and consolidating sustainability metrics. This strengthens compliance efforts and enables smarter data-driven decisions. Though the journey continues, the tools foster efficiency and provide deeper sustainability insights to the organization.
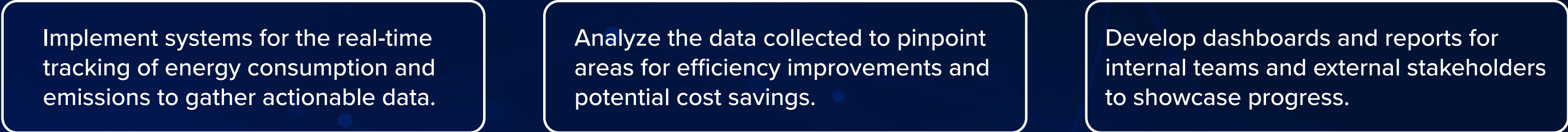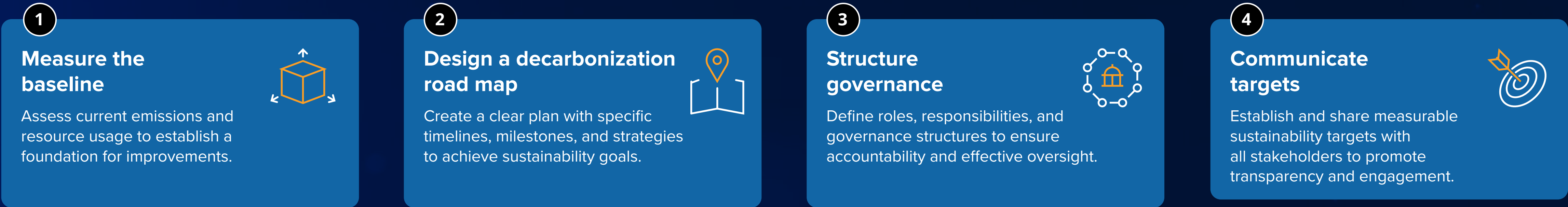
Impact and key results:

- **Centralized data:**
  - Unified access to metrics like energy consumption, waste reduction, and GHG emissions
  - A "single source of truth" for sustainability data
- **Enhanced insights:** tools supporting both operational clarity and strategic planning
- **Continuous improvement:** regular double materiality analyses to maintain accuracy and relevance

Where to Start: A Road Map to Become a Future-Ready Sustainable Enterprise

A Technology-Driven Road Map to Decarbonization

Technology innovation and digitalization are enabling and accelerating decarbonization initiatives

1

Measure the baseline

Assess current emissions and resource usage to establish a foundation for improvements.

2

Design a decarbonization road map

Create a clear plan with specific timelines, milestones, and strategies to achieve sustainability goals.

3

Structure governance

Define roles, responsibilities, and governance structures to ensure accountability and effective oversight.

4

Communicate targets

Establish and share measurable sustainability targets with all stakeholders to promote transparency and engagement.

Implement systems for the real-time tracking of energy consumption and emissions to gather actionable data.

Analyze the data collected to pinpoint areas for efficiency improvements and potential cost savings.

Develop dashboards and reports for internal teams and external stakeholders to showcase progress.

Reduce the carbon footprint

Enhance digitalization efforts for operational efficiency and implement energy optimization strategies.

Electrify operations

Transition to electric vehicles, electrify industrial processes, and implement microgrids to enhance access to renewable electricity.

Replace the energy supply

Shift to renewable energy sources (solar and wind) and explore carbon credit programs for residual emissions.

Engage the supply chain

Collaborate with suppliers to drive sustainability initiatives, focusing on circular-economy practices and value creation.

Decarbonization Initiatives

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About the Analysts

Angela Salmeron
Research Director, IDC

Angela primarily focuses on energy efficiency, decarbonization and electrification initiatives across industries, particularly in energy intensive sectors. Beyond sustainability, she examines the business implications of the energy transition, particularly its impact on companies' competitiveness and resilience. She believes that for the energy transition to succeed, it must also be financially advantageous.

More about Angela Salmeron

Message from the Sponsor

Axians

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Uniting digital and sustainable transformation: As part of its commitment to sustainability (Axians: Building a Greener Future with Sustainable Solutions), Axians has launched its Green Offer strategy, which aligns with European Green Deal legislation.

The strategy encompasses three key pillars:

1. **Developing innovative Green Offers:** Axians is dedicated to creating green ICT solutions that reduce energy consumption, waste, and emissions while conserving materials and natural resources.

2. **Partnerships in supply chains with suppliers:** By collaborating with suppliers, Axians aims to reduce indirect emissions in Scope 3, fostering a more sustainable supply chain.

3. **Sustainability for customer growth:** Axians offers sustainability expertise across all verticals, helping customers grow while adhering to sustainable practices.

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IDC

IDC UK
5th Floor, Ealing Cross, 85 Uxbridge Road, London, W5 5TH, United Kingdom
T 44.208.987.7100

X @idc   in @idc   idc.com

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