DOCUMENT 00 · WHAT SPHERES IS AND HOW IT HELPS

What SPHERES is and how it helps

Nine spheres and three ambition levels so that a board can talk about artificial intelligence in business language: where to play, with what ambition and what to ask

Fernando García Varela Version 0.1 17-09-2026 Under construction

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impact spheres	ambition levels	sphere types	documents

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01

What SPHERES is

SPHERES is Fernando García Varela's methodology for **placing artificial intelligence in the business** before talking about technology. It organises everything that AI can change in an organisation into **nine impact spheres** and grades each bet with **three ambition levels**: Optimise, Augment and Transform.

The name comes from the English word *spheres*. It is not an acronym: it describes the central idea of the method, which is that AI is not a project for the technology area but a change that reaches customers, the offering, people, processes, data, knowledge, decisions, obligations and governance.

SPHERES answers three questions that any board or management committee should be able to answer clearly:

Question	What SPHERES contributes	Where it is developed
Where do we play?	A map of nine spheres that covers the whole organisation and forces priorities to be chosen.	Documents 02, 03 and 04
With what ambition?	Three levels with different cost, risk, timescale and resistance, which are chosen deliberately.	Document 01
What do we ask?	Questions for the board, warning signs and a conversation script for each sphere.	Document 05

> **Why it matters.** Without a common language, each area talks about AI in its own way: technology talks about models, finance about savings, the business about use cases and compliance about risks. SPHERES gives everyone the same map, so that the board can compare bets, detect gaps and decide where to invest without having to understand how each system works.

SPHERES is a **supporting methodology of SEVEN-G**, Fernando García Varela's framework for value, governance and transformation with AI. It constitutes its component A (impact map). This library explains the method in detail and with examples; the operating rules, the indicators with a formula and the tools are in SEVEN-G (section 8).

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02

The problem it solves

Most organisations do not have a problem of a lack of AI use cases, but of a **lack of direction** over them. The symptoms are recognisable:

Symptom	What usually lies behind it	How SPHERES addresses it
The board receives a list of "use cases" that it does not know how to prioritise.	The technology is described, not the effect on the business.	Each use case is placed in a sphere and at a level; the list becomes a map.
All the effort is concentrated on automating internal tasks.	Efficiency is easier to justify and to measure.	The map shows at a glance that there are no bets in Customer or Product, nor at the Augment or Transform level.
A "transformation with AI" is announced that changes nothing visible.	The narrative is confused with the effect.	Ambition levels are defined by what changes in the business, not by how the programme is presented.
Use cases are delayed or stopped in advanced phases.	Data, accessible knowledge or decision rules are missing.	The enabling spheres (05, 06 and 07) are diagnosed before the ambition is set.
Regulation appears at the end, when the system has already been built.	It is treated as a formality and not as a design boundary.	Sphere 08 is on the map from the outset and has its own grades.
Nobody knows who is accountable for AI in the company.	There is no governance with the formality of finance or risk.	Sphere 09 is the meta-sphere: it connects the others and is assessed separately.

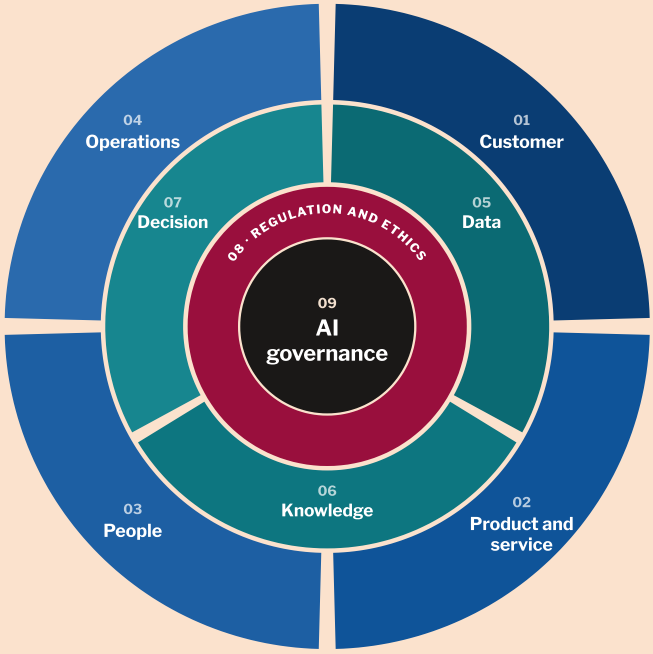
> **Why it matters.** These symptoms are not corrected with more technology or more pilots. They are corrected with a well-structured management conversation. SPHERES makes that conversation repeatable: the same spheres, the same levels and the same questions at every review.

03

The nine spheres at a glance

Impact map: nine spheres

From the outside in: where value is created, what enables it, the boundaries and the governance that connects it all



Where value is created

01 Customer · 02 Product and service · 03 People · 04 Operations

Enablers

05 Data · 06 Knowledge · 07 Decision. This is where the uncomfortable questions arise.

Boundaries

08 Regulation, ethics and accountability. Assessed in terms of compliance, anticipation and ethical leadership.

Meta-sphere

09 AI governance. Connects the other eight with the formality of finance, risk or compliance.

Source: SPHERES

The spheres cover **all the areas of relationship of a company**, regardless of its sector. They are grouped into four types that are read from the outside in:

Type	Sphere	Motto	Essential question
Where value is created	01 · Customer	Knowledge, relationship and anticipation	Do we know and serve our customers better than the competition?
	02 · Product and service	AI inside, on top of or as the product	Are we protecting the current product or building the next one?
	03 · People	Recipients, subjects and promoters of AI	Does AI replace, augment or reorganise work?

Type	Sphere	Motto	Essential question
	04 · Operations	Processes, value chain and efficiency	Are we automating tasks or redesigning processes?
Enablers	05 · Data	The material substrate of all AI	Do we know what data we have and whether we can use it?
	06 · Knowledge	Organisational memory and collective intelligence	What is lost if the people who know the most leave?
	07 · Decision	Who decides, with what information and with how much delegation	What does AI decide on its own and what is never delegated?
Boundaries	08 · Regulation, ethics and accountability	Regulation, principles and chain of accountability	Do we govern proactively or do we wait for the regulator?
Meta-sphere	09 · AI governance	The sphere that connects the other eight	Does AI have governance as formal as finance?

Four ideas explain the structure:

1. **Spheres 01 to 04 are the only ones in which AI generates direct value** for the company: revenue, retention, margin, productivity, cost or quality.
2. **Spheres 05 to 07 do not generate value in themselves, but they constrain it.** A high ambition in Customer without reliable data, without accessible knowledge and without clear decision rules is a high-risk bet.
3. **Sphere 08 sets the boundaries** within which the company can act: the law, ethical principles and accountability when something goes wrong.
4. **Sphere 09 is the centre**: the governance system that decides, oversees and corrects across the other eight.

Why it matters. A map with only value spheres would invite the pursuit of opportunities without checking whether the company can execute them or whether it should. By including enablers, boundaries and governance in the same picture, SPHERES forces the opportunity, the capability and the accountability to be looked at together.

04

The three ambition levels at a glance

Three ambition levels

Three types of bet, not a ladder: investment, uncertainty and organisational resistance increase from left to right

	Optimise Do the same faster, cheaper or with fewer errors	**Augment** People do what they could not do before	**Transform** Changes what is offered, how it competes or how it is organised
Main value	Avoided cost	Cost and performance	New revenue and operating model
Investment	● ○ ○	● ● ○	● ● ●
Uncertainty	● ○ ○	● ● ○	● ● ●
Organisational resistance	● ○ ○	● ● ○	● ● ●
Who decides	Business area management	Management, with the AI committee	Board or senior management

Source: SPHERES

Each sphere from 01 to 07 is analysed with three ambition levels. **They are not a ladder**: it is not mandatory to go through Optimise to reach Transform, nor is Transform better than Optimise. They are three different types of bet.

Level	What it means	What changes	Illustrative example
Optimise	Doing the same thing faster, more cheaply or with fewer errors.	The efficiency of a task or process. What is done and who does it do not change.	Automatically classifying the enquiries that reach customer service.
Augment	People do what they could not do before.	The role and capabilities of people. The business does not change.	A copilot that enables analysts to review transactions that they previously referred to specialists.
Transform	What is offered, how the company competes or how it is organised changes.	The value proposition, the revenue model or the operating model.	A paid service that exists only because there is a proprietary model behind it.

Investment, uncertainty and organisational resistance **increase** from Optimise to Transform. That is why each level requires different decision criteria: measuring a Transform bet against the payback period of an automation kills it before it can demonstrate anything. Document 01 develops the three levels in detail.

Spheres 08 and 09 **are not assessed with these three levels**, because they do not generate value in themselves. They are assessed by dimensions with four grades (Absent, Basic, Systematic and Advanced), as explained in document 04.

> **Why it matters.** The ambition level is the question that distinguishes a company that **is transforming** from one that **is only becoming more efficient**. Both are legitimate, but they are not the same thing, they do not cost the same and they are not governed in the same way. Calling an automation with a good narrative a transformation is one of the most expensive and most common mistakes.

05

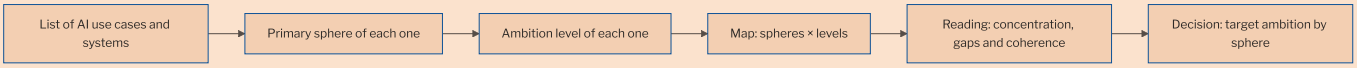
How the map is read

The SPHERES map is read by crossing spheres and levels. In its simplest form it is a table of nine rows in which each of the company's AI use cases occupies **one cell**: its primary sphere and its ambition

level.

How the map is built

From the list of use cases to the management conversation



Source: SPHERES

The map is read at **three points in time**:

Point in time	Question	What is looked at
Current situation	Where are we?	Which use cases and systems exist, in which sphere and at what actual level.
Target ambition	Where do we want to be?	What priority and what ambition level management sets for each sphere.
Portfolio	Is what we are doing taking us there?	Whether the use cases under way cover the ambition or whether there are gaps and dispersion.

Three readings almost always appear in the first session:

- **Concentration**: most of the effort is in Operations and in Optimise. That is not bad in itself, but it should be a decision and not inertia.
- **Gaps**: priority spheres without any use case, or an Augment ambition in Data with nothing delivering it.
- **Incoherence**: a Transform ambition in a value sphere supported by weak enablers.

> **Why it matters.** A map does not decide for the board, but it makes visible decisions that were being taken unintentionally. Concentration, gaps and incoherences are exactly the matters on which a board must take a position.

06

How it helps

SPHERES has specific uses, each with a verifiable outcome:

Use	Question it answers	Outcome	Who uses it
First conversation with the board	Do we understand everything that AI can change in the company?	The board's initial position on priorities and on people.	Board, chair, director with AI experience
Diagnosis	Where are we today?	Current map of use cases by sphere and level, with grades for spheres 08 and 09.	AI office or AI committee
Setting the ambition	Where do we want to play and with what ambition?	Priority and target ambition by sphere, approved by management.	Senior management, board
Prioritising the portfolio	Which use cases close gaps and which disperse resources?	Ordered portfolio with sphere and level per use case.	AI committee, finance
Overseeing	Are we moving towards the ambition or drifting away from it?	Quarterly map with gaps and alerts.	Board, board committee
Communicating	How do we explain to the organisation what we are doing with AI and why?	An understandable narrative, the same for all areas.	Management, people, communications
Screening ideas	Does this proposal fit with what we have decided?	Sphere and level proposed from the very start.	Area heads, employees

> **Why it matters.** A method that is only useful for a workshop is forgotten the next day. SPHERES is used from the first conversation with the board to the annual portfolio review, with the same vocabulary. That continuity is what makes it possible to compare one year with the next.

07

A complete example

Fictitious company. Illustrative data, unrelated to any real organisation.

A medium-sized distribution company has twenty AI use cases at different stages. The management committee presents them as "our AI strategy". When they are placed on the map, the following emerges:

Sphere	Optimise	Augment	Transform
01 · Customer	3	1	—
02 · Product and service	—	—	—
03 · People	2	—	—
04 · Operations	11	1	—
05 · Data	1	—	—
06 · Knowledge	1	—	—
07 · Decision	—	—	—

In addition, the company has not classified its systems according to the applicable regulation (sphere 08, Compliance: Basic grade) and there is no single owner of AI (sphere 09, Structure: Absent grade).

Reading the map

1. **Nineteen of the twenty use cases are Optimise** and eleven are in Operations. The company is becoming more efficient, not transforming.
2. **Product and service is empty**, even though the company's strategic plan talks about launching digital services.
3. **Decision is empty** and there are three Customer use cases that recommend prices and discounts. Nobody has defined what the system decides and what a person validates.
4. **Data has a single use case**, for data cleansing, while several Customer use cases depend on behavioural data that has not been catalogued.
5. **There is no governance**: nobody can stop a use case or is accountable to the board.

Decisions it prompts

Board decision	Sphere	Consequence
Maintain the efficiency bet in Operations, but with an investment limit.	04	It is reviewed whether the eleven use cases deliver actual savings or only released hours.
Set Transform as the ambition in Product and service.	02	A first use case is commissioned with learning milestones and an investment limit per stage.
Set Augment as the ambition in Data before scaling Customer.	05	Priority is given to cataloguing customer data and documenting its legal basis.

Board decision	Sphere	Consequence
Define autonomy levels for pricing decisions.	07	No price recommendation is executed without validation until approved rules are in place.
Designate an owner of AI and a committee with the power to stop use cases.	09	Sphere 09 moves from Absent to Basic in the first quarter.

> **Why it matters.** None of the above requires technical knowledge. The five decisions come from looking at the map and asking the questions for each sphere. That is the purpose of SPHERES: that management decides on AI as naturally as it decides on investment, risk or talent.

08

Relationship with SEVEN-G

SPHERES was created as an independent framework for conversation with the board and is today **component A (impact map) of SEVEN-G**. The division of work between the two libraries is deliberate:

Aspect	SPHERES (this library)	SEVEN-G
Purpose	Explain what the spheres and levels are, why they matter and how to use them in a management conversation.	Govern, measure and audit AI in the company and in each use case.
Content	Concepts, examples, questions, warning signs and conversation script.	Classification rules, indicators with a formula, decision gates, templates and tools.
Readers	Board, senior management and anyone who needs to understand the map.	AI office, AI committee, product owners, audit.
Rule in case of doubt	Refers to SEVEN-G.	It is the source of truth for the operating rules.

SEVEN-G documents that develop SPHERES:

SEVEN-G document	What it contributes
SEVEN-G 10 · Sphere map and ambition levels	Primary and secondary sphere rules, indicators by sphere, grades for 08 and 09 and heat map.
SEVEN-G 12 · Transformation index	The five questions for classifying the ambition of a use case and the company's profile.
SEVEN-G 13 · AI thesis, ambition and risk appetite	How the target ambition by sphere is set and approved.
SEVEN-G 14 · Portfolio management	Use of the map to prioritise and balance the portfolio.
SEVEN-G 61 · Board conversation guide	Full script, response formats and difficult questions.

SEVEN-G tools that use the map: the use case register (T01), where each use case carries its sphere and its level, and the board AI dashboard (T17), which shows the portfolio heat map.

> **Why it matters.** Separating the explanation from the rule avoids two risks: that the board receives an operating manual it does not need to read, and that the AI office applies criteria different from those explained to the board. Both use the same spheres, the same levels and the same names.

09

Who it is for

Profile	What they gain	Where to start
Directors and chair	A language for overseeing AI without going into technology, and the questions worth asking.	This document and document 05.
Senior management	A map for setting priorities and ambition, and for explaining the AI strategy to the organisation.	Documents 00, 01 and the one covering the spheres they lead.
AI committee or AI office	Common criteria for classifying use cases and detecting gaps.	Document 01 and SEVEN-G document 10.
Area heads	A way of proposing use cases that management understands and can compare.	The document for their sphere (02, 03 or 04).

Profile	What they gain	Where to start
People in the organisation	An explanation of why and for what purpose AI is used, and of their role in it.	Document 02, sphere 03 · People.
Internal or external consultants	A recognisable and open method for structuring the diagnosis and the conversation with the board.	The whole library and SEVEN-G.

10

How to use this library

Document	Content	When to read it
document 00 · What SPHERES is and how it helps	Overview of the methodology, the problem it solves and a complete example.	First.
document 01 · Ambition levels	Optimise, Augment and Transform in detail, how to classify and common mistakes.	Before classifying any use case.
document 02 · Spheres where value is created	Customer, Product and service, People and Operations, with examples by level.	To diagnose opportunities.
document 03 · Enabling spheres	Data, Knowledge and Decision: why they constrain everything else.	Before setting a high ambition in any value sphere.
document 04 · Regulation and AI governance	Spheres 08 and 09, their dimensions and their grades.	To assess boundaries and governance capability.
document 05 · Conversation with the board	Sixty-minute script, question bank and first ninety days.	To prepare the session with the board.

Documents 02, 03 and 04 follow the same structure for each sphere: what it is, why it matters, what it covers, examples by level, questions for the board, warning signs and how it is measured.

11

Principles of use

#	Principle	Mistake it prevents
1	**The map talks about business, not technology.** A use case is placed according to what it changes, not the tool it uses.	Classifying as Transform everything that uses generative AI or agents.
2	**Each use case has one primary sphere and a single level.** The primary sphere is the one of the metric that justifies the investment.	Spreading a use case across several spheres to make it look more important.
3	**The levels are not a ladder.** They are chosen according to the strategy, not according to the maturity the company wants to appear to have.	Thinking that every company must end up in Transform.
4	**The enablers are looked at before the ambition is set.**	Promising a transformation that the data or the decision rules cannot sustain.
5	**Spheres 08 and 09 have grades, not ambition levels.**	Presenting "Transform regulation" as if it were a business bet.
6	**If a use case does not fit into any sphere, its objective is not clear.**	Keeping projects without an identifiable business purpose.
7	**The map is updated, not archived.** It is reviewed at least every quarter as part of oversight and every year in the strategy review.	Using the map in a workshop and forgetting it.

12

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SPHERES is **under construction as an independent methodology**. This first version explains the method and refers to SEVEN-G for everything operational. It will grow with new examples, sector cases and application experience.

13

Version control

Version	Date	Changes
0.1	17-09-2026	First version. Presents SPHERES on the basis of the original sphere framework and its integration into SEVEN-G: problem it solves, nine spheres, three levels, reading the map, uses, complete example, relationship with SEVEN-G and library.

External sources cited

Links to the official or primary source, checked before publication. Always verify the version in force on the date of use.

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