Adding "Sustainability Impact Assessments" to Your Toolkit

Why this talk?

When we look at the challenges facing the world today, we see

- Environmental problems resulting from waste and resource depletion
- Social problems, including working conditions, poverty, pollution, and waste
- Changes to the climate that are impacting working and living conditions. From extreme weather events to draughts to rising oceans, climate change is having a big impact

Organizations of all types (for-profit, non-profit, for-benefit, and governmental) play an important part in these issues. Many of their activities contribute to these problems as well as to solving them. And these challenges certainly impact the performance of organizations.

Considering an organization's **triple bottom line** – economic, environmental, and social – is one way to help organizations look for ways to do business that benefit all concerned.

Changes needed to support sustainability across that triple bottom line can be viewed as performance problems/ opportunities. Performance improvement practitioners are well positioned to help organizations become more sustainable. For some practitioners, this may represent a new area to expand their work into.

In this presentation we define sustainability, introduce a few key concepts, and then present a tool that can be used to begin helping an organization consider sustainability factors: The ***Sustainability Impact Assessment*** (adapted from Hitchcock & Willard, 2008). This is a useful tool that's easy to use at multiple levels – with organizations, groups, or teams.

What do we mean by "sustainability"?

Here are three definitions of sustainability:

- "Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs." - Brundtland Report ("Our Common Future" WCED, 1987)
- "How do we love all the children of all species for all time? Not just our children. Not just our species. Not just now. All the children, of all species, for all time." - William McDonough & Michael Braungart (2002) *Cradle to Cradle*
- "Sustainability creates and maintains the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony, that permit fulfilling the social, economic and other requirements of present and future generations." - United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) http://www.epa.gov/sustainability/basicinfo.htm

Where Sustainability Fits in the Performance Improvement Context

Calls for us to think beyond the organization itself—to consider the impact organizations have on society and the world—have existed within the field of performance improvement for many years. Of note:

- Roger Kaufman's long-time push to include "mega" in our thinking—to consider the broader impact our work has on society, and frame our thinking with that in view. (Kaufman, 2003)
- Tim Hatcher has argued that we have an ethical responsibility to consider social and environmental aspects, as well as economic ones. His Social Responsibility Performance Outcomes Model (2000) captures that well.
- Scott Schaffer and Therese Schmidt wrote about the integration of sustainable development strategies and HPT in a chapter of the 2006 3rd Edition of the *Handbook of Human Performance Technology.*
- Tony Marker, Elizabeth Johnsen, and Christina Caswell (2009) put together the 6-P evaluation framework that helps practitioners integrate a triple bottom line in their work.
- Roger Addison and Carol Haig have written about performance improvement work that spans the four levels of *worker, work, workplace, and world* (2012), and Lynn Kearny has developed wonderful illustrations for that concept, included in her 2014 article "What is Performance."

When you begin to read literature in fields that have a sustainability focus (outside/beyond HPT), you find models and mindsets that draw on many of the same roots that HPT does. These include:

- Systems thinking
- Change management, facilitation, and communication
- Process improvement
- Analysis, design, and development that focuses on impacts and results

In fact, a number of sustainability practitioners have their roots in instructional design, performance improvement, and organizational development. This includes the originators of the model we adapt here, Darcy Hitchcock and Marsha Willard (personal communication, 2014).

Sustainability emphasizes criteria that support and extend performance improvement values.

Two Entry Points

We see two entry points for helping organizations address sustainability:

1. By focusing on sustainability-related problems and opportunities.

   We can apply an HPT lens to performance analysis, identifying the gaps, and then identifying, developing, implementing, and assessing interventions to close the gaps

2. By integrating sustainability factors into other performance problems.

   As we work on other performance issues, we add a "sustainability lens" to consider and propose ways to help organizations become more sustainable as they address other issue. In the long run, these questions ideally become part of our professional way of viewing problems.

Integrating Sustainability Thinking into Existing HPT Models

We see myriad opportunities to integrate "sustainability thinking" into performance improvement processes. **Figure 1** shows some places it can be integrated into the flow of the ISPI PI/HPT Model presented by Van Tiem, Moseley, & Dessinger (2012). They are summarized in this list:

- **Organizational analysis**
  Facilitate dialogue to integrate the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) into mission & strategy
- **Environmental analysis**
  Create logic models that show desired outcomes & impacts across a TBL
- **Gap analysis**
  Use a tool such as the Sustainability Impact Assessment to identify and clarify the gap:
  - What is the desired sustainability state?
  - What is the current sustainability state?
  - What data needs to be gathered?
- **Cause analysis**
  Use a tool such as this Impact Assessment to generate questions for each causal category from the Behavior Engineering Model represented in the ISPI PI/HPT model
- **Intervention selection**
  - Strengthen systems thinking at this stage
  - Consider potential unintended/ unanticipated consequences
  - Consider diffusion of effect
  - Explicitly ask: What will the impacts be, across the Triple Bottom Line?

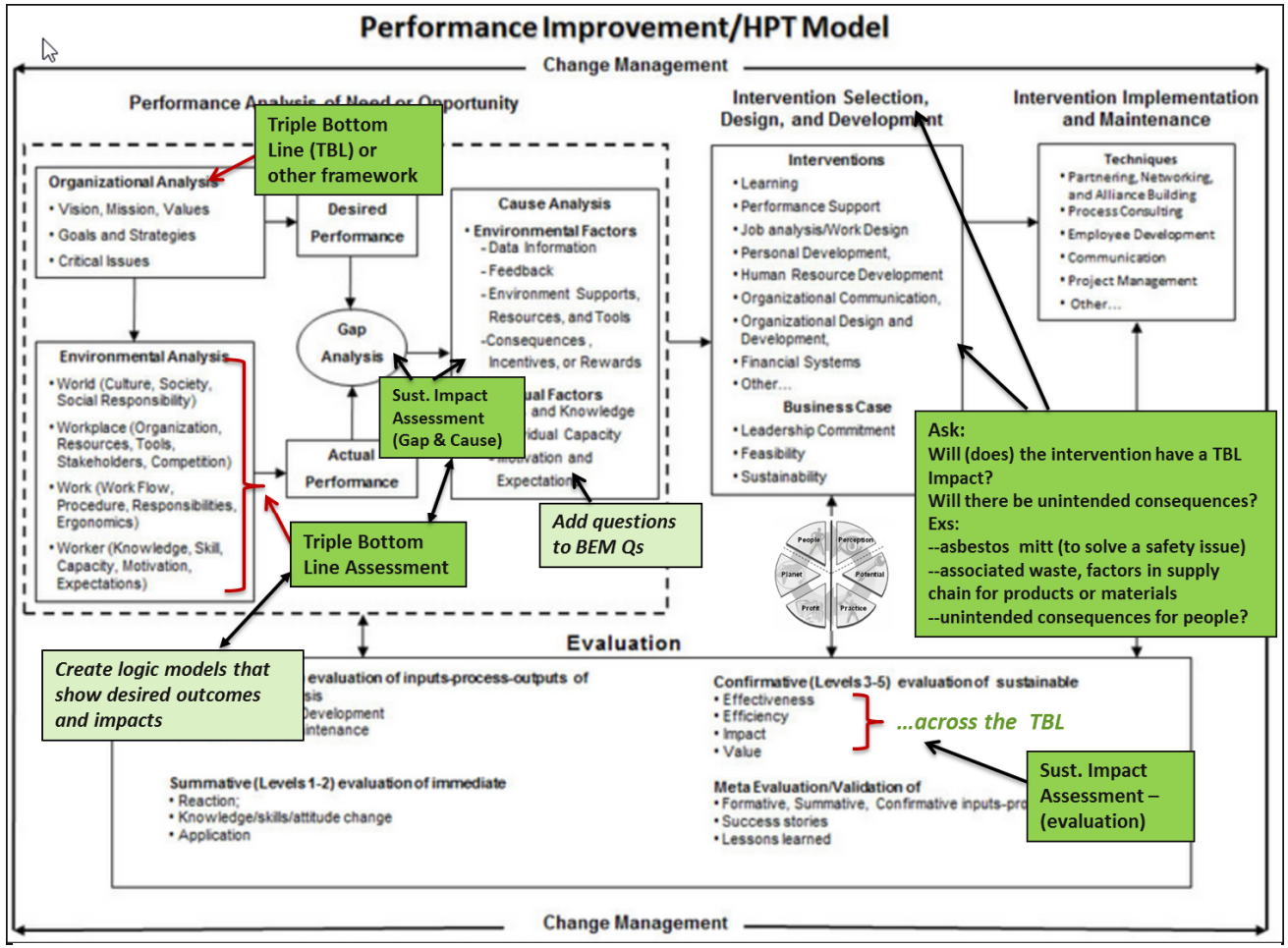


Figure 1. Comparison of Sustainability Impact Assessment and Triple Bottom Line to the HPT Model (based on Van Tiem, Moseley, & Dessinger, 2012, p. 43)

- **Evaluation – how are we doing?**
  - Use a tool such as this Impact Assessment to monitor progress.
  - Become familiar with other sustainability reporting and assessment tools (there are many!)

Building the business case

Bob Willard, an expert sustainability practitioner and author of *The New Sustainability Advantage: Seven Business Case Benefits of a Triple Bottom Line* , talks about these benefits that organizations are likely to see when they integrate changes that enhance sustainability in their operations:

1. Increased revenue
2. Reduced energy expenses
3. Reduced waste expenses
4. Reduced materials and water expenses
5. Increased employee productivity
6. Reduced hiring and attrition expenses
7. Reduced strategic and operational risks (Willard, 2012)

Organizational readiness levels

Some organizations are ready for "sustainability thinking"—it's already in their values mindset, and values. But that's not true for all organizations, by any means. A number of sustainability researchers and practitioners have created models that illustrate the stages companies are likely to go through.

Here is one from Bob Willard, who sees the process as a five-stage journey:

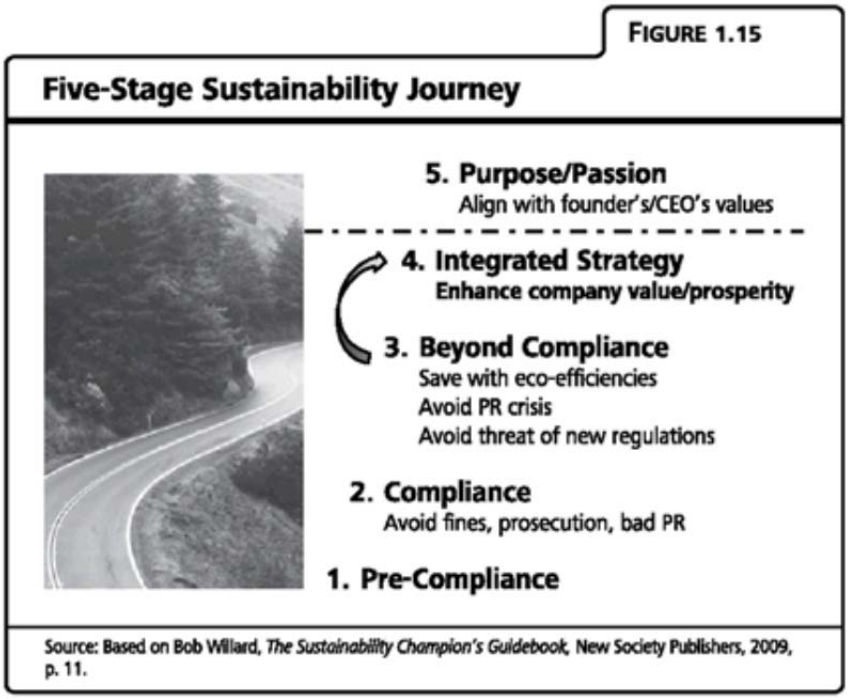


Figure 2. Bob Willard's 2009 Five-Stage Sustainability Journey

Using the Sustainability Impact Assessment Tools

In their 2008 book *The Step-by-Step Guide to Sustainability Planning*: *How to Create and Implement Sustainability Plans in Any Business or Organization,* Darcy Hitchcock and Marsha Willard include several ways to do sustainability impact assessments. We have adapted and fleshed out one of the approaches that they provide, which they call a "High Level Impact Assessment" (pp. 56-58).

We have found it useful to have two companion tools: a graphical Sustainability Impact Assessment Diagram, and an accompanying Sustainability Impact Assessment Worksheet, shown in Figures 1 and 2 below.

During early exploration and analysis, you can work through the areas shown on the diagram in Figure 3 to facilitate discussion and capture knowledge from key individuals or a group. Down the road, you can use these tools to guide more in-depth investigation in each area, and to monitor and assess progress.

Sustainability Impact Assessment Diagram

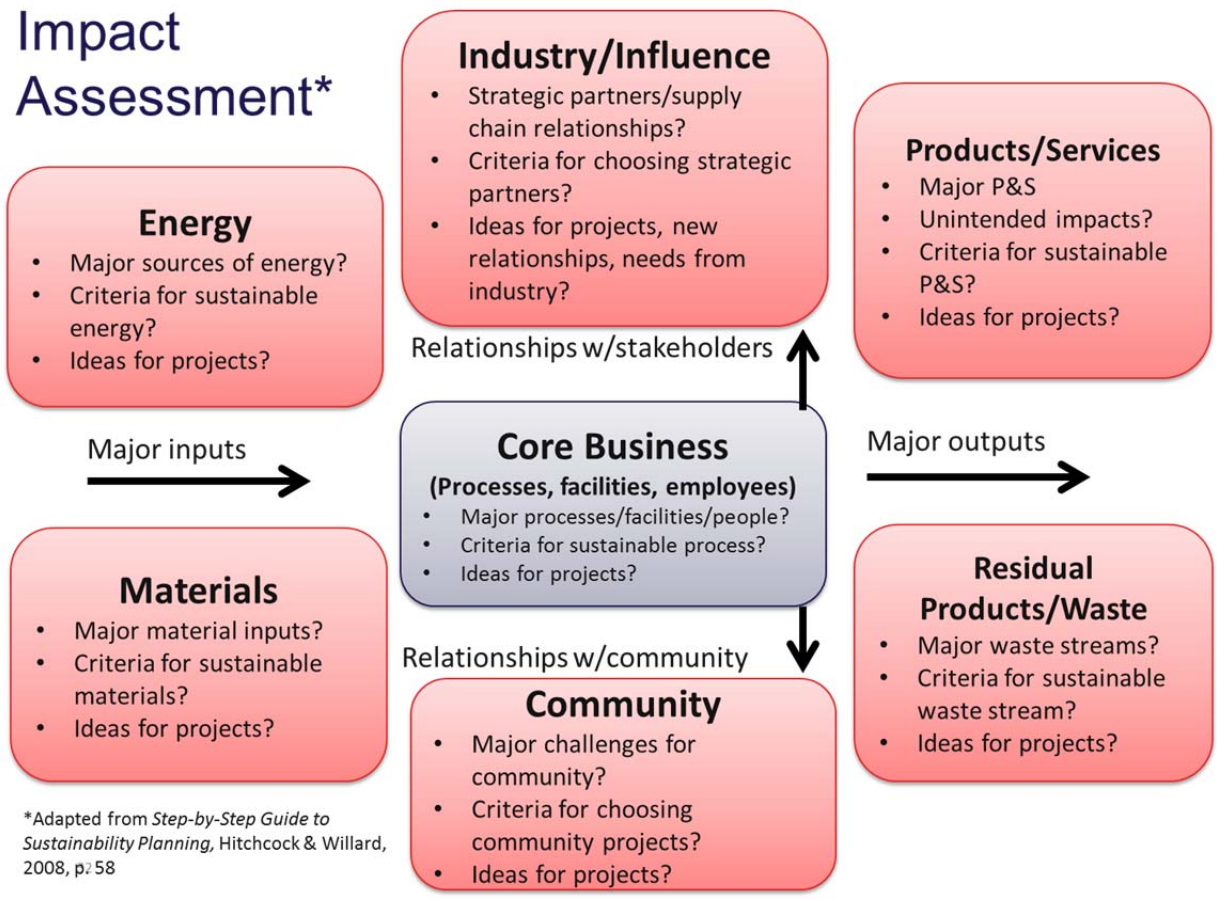
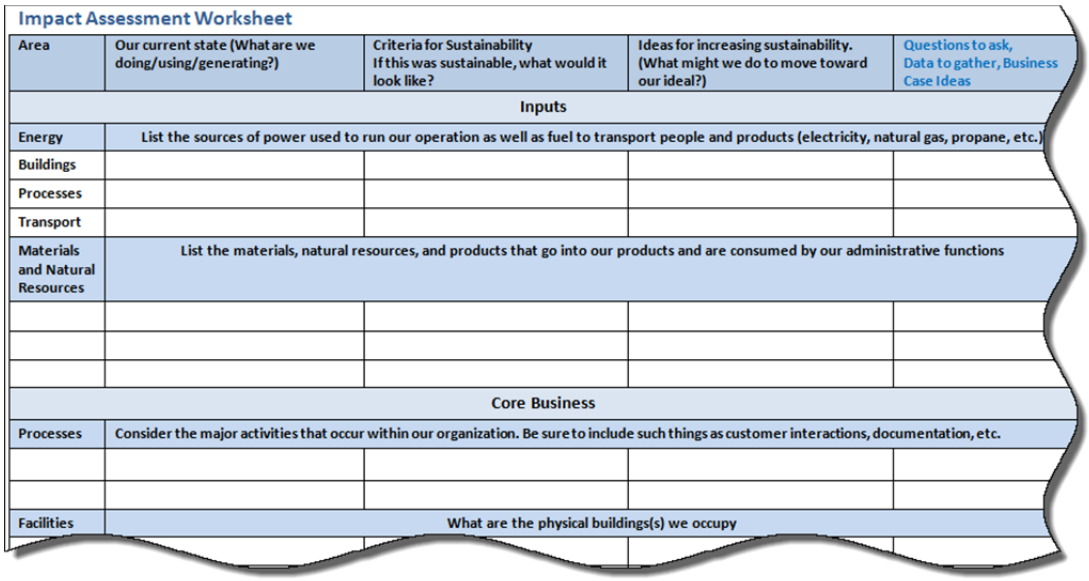


Figure 3. Sustainability Impact Assessment Diagram

Sustainability Impact Assessment Worksheet

Figure 4 shows the top part of the worksheet, to give you an idea of how the assessment areas are organized in table form. You'll find a complete worksheet for your use in a separate handout.



Impact Assessment Worksheet

Area	Our current state (What are we doing/using/generating?)	Criteria for Sustainability If this was sustainable, what would it look like?	Ideas for increasing sustainability. (What might we do to move toward our ideal?)	Questions to ask, Data to gather, Business Case Ideas
Inputs				
Energy	List the sources of power used to run our operation as well as fuel to transport people and products (electricity, natural gas, propane, etc.)			
Buildings				
Processes				
Transport				
Materials and Natural Resources	List the materials, natural resources, and products that go into our products and are consumed by our administrative functions			
Core Business				
Processes	Consider the major activities that occur within our organization. Be sure to include such things as customer interactions, documentation, etc.			
Facilities	What are the physical buildings(s) we occupy			

Figure 4. Extract from the Sustainability Impact Assessment Worksheet

Basic steps to work through the Sustainability Impact Assessment:

For each area, capture what you are learning on the worksheet shown in Figure 4. As you go along, identify areas for further research and data gathering.

For each area:

1. Identify current sustainability impacts (the current state)
2. Reflect on and capture the ideal state (what would "sustainable" would look like, in this area?)
3. Generate initial ideas for increasing sustainability in each area.

As you work through each area:

- Note any economic or "traditional business" advantages that may result from these ideas. As constraints or other things of note occur to you, capture them, as well.
- Identify areas where you know that data gathering and/or research is needed.
  - Data needed to get a better handle on the current state
  - Ideas for increasing sustainability that warrant research

Review what you've gathered so far

4. Identify "low-hanging fruit" – ideas for changes that could be done easily, in the short term – and note additional benefits the organization may see as a result.
5. Plan next steps. These might include additional research, or you might begin to:
   - Determine short and long-term goals and metrics (ow would you measure change?)
   - Prioritize changes
   - Begin to sketch out implementation plans and change facilitation strategies

References

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Hitchcock, D. E., & Willard, M. L. (2008). *The step-by-step guide to sustainability planning: how to create and implement sustainability plans in any business or organization*. London: Earthscan.

Kaufman, R., Oakley-Brown, H., Watkins, R., and Leigh, D. (2003). *Strategic planning for success: Aligning people, performance and payoffs*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

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Marker, A., Johnsen, E., Caswell, C (2009). A planning and evaluation six-pack for sustainable organizations: The Six-P framework. *Performance Improvement, 48*(8), 27-34.

Schaffer, S. P., & Schmidt, T. M. (2006). Sustainable development and human performance technology. *Handbook of human performance technology: Principles, practices, and potential, 3rd ed*, 1109-1121.

Additional Resources

Once you start looking for resources, they are abundant! Here are some we have found useful – but they are "the tip of the iceberg."

Atkisson, A. (2012). The sustainability transformation. New York, NY: Routledge.

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Your Notes