

TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE

The History of Triple Bottom Line (TBL) and Workshop Agenda

This definition for triple bottom-line is from the [Sustainable Management Program](#) at the University of Wisconsin. “Traditionally, business leaders concerned themselves with their bottom lines—or, the monetary profits their businesses made. Today, more leaders have begun to think *sustainably*. The triple bottom line theory expands the traditional accounting framework to include two other performance areas: the social and environmental impacts of their company. These three bottom lines are often referred to as the three P’s: people, planet, and profit.”

Josh Mailman and Wayne Silby founded the [Social Venture Network \(SVN\)](#) in 1987. They created a nonprofit membership organization composed of socially responsible business leaders who were committed to creating a more just and sustainable world.

The term “socially conscious capitalist enterprise” is thought to have been first used by [Muhammad Yunus](#). In an article in December, 1995 of [The Atlantic](#), the Grameen Bank founder predicted the success of his company’s novel approach to microcredit and microfinance through expanding the benefits of capitalism to those who needed it the most in developing nations. Although it had its beginning in 1977 the Grameen bank was officially founded in 1983. By that year they had 86 branches and 58,000 clients. By 1988 it had 501 branches and 490,000 borrowers.

The phrase “triple bottom line” was articulated by John Elkington in his 1997 book [Cannibals with Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business](#).

Patricia Aburdene’s 2007 exploration of more and more people turning inward to determine where their true values lie was titled “[Megatrends 2010: The Rise of Conscious Capitalism](#).” In the book, she spotlighted business leaders who, by placing social and environmental values ahead of the bottom line, were boosting profits.

Subsequently, the B Lab (a nonprofit that certifies B Corporations) was formed. The first generation of B Corporations was certified in 2007. Today, there are more than [1,700 B Corporations](#) in 50 countries

In January of 2013, Harvard Business Review published the first edition of a book that promoted the movement aimed at proving business as a force for good: “Conscious Capitalism: Liberating the Heroic Spirit of Business.” The book “[Conscious Capitalism](#)” was co-authored by John Mackey, co-founder and CEO of Whole Foods Market, and Raj Sisodia, then a Bentley University professor. The number of Conscious Capitalism Chapters today is more than [25](#) and more than [90 companies](#) are reported to be conscious capital companies.

Amidst all this were the ubiquitous Best Places to Work awards and the attention to workplace culture spurred on by the Gallup Organizations with data stating that worldwide [87%](#) of the workforce is not engaged.

Although there has been a barrage of publications one is hard pressed to find actual triple bottom line tools to support business decision making to achieve the TBL. The definition and philosophy of TBL is clear. The trick is having tools and processes for making decisions towards achieving the TBL principles.

Enter the city of [Fort Collins, CO](#). They are testing a triple bottom line scan that includes process and tools which they developed for making project investment decisions to achieve TBL. They call this a TBL-Scan. Examples range from Art in Public Places to E-Bikes. As with most “decision support systems” it does not tell you what it best. It helps decision makers to structure their collaborative thinking and use their good judgment. It is simple and intuitive requiring no math or computer expertise.

The city has about 10 members on the TBL core team who span multiple job functions across the City, but most are working in a job that impacts at least one area of the Triple Bottom Line. The TBL is not their full-time job rather an opportunity to cross train and expand their expertise in another work function.

They are also cultivating a Sustainability Leadership Program with 16 internal participants who are being trained up to facilitate future TBL exercises with groups across the City departments. They have matched up mentors with mentees and provide hands-on trainings with the tool for those interested in learning more.

Outline for Workshop

Overview

- Role and benefits of TBL decision-making
- Why the City uses it
- Applicability at the City - How City uses it

How to use tool

- Explain operationally how to do a scan
- Give examples of one question from each section
- Give examples of Direct / indirect impact

Practice with the TBL-S World Café Style

- Three tables, three 15-minute sessions
- Each session cover 3 different questions in the TBL-S
- Staff will facilitate and float to assist
- Record tradeoffs and mitigations

View Scan and Report Out

- Staff summarize scan visual
- Tables report out on trade-offs and mitigations
- Q and A

- Group input on how they might use this or similar tool

Session evaluation