

Beyond the Horizon: The Future of Corporate Social Responsibility

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Abstract

As the Canadian corporate landscape continues to evolve, traditional models of corporate social responsibility (CSR) are facing increasing scrutiny and calls for transformation. This paper explores the necessity of rethinking these conventional approaches and embracing new paradigms to ensure future preparedness in the corporate world. By shifting the focus from solely measuring success based on profitability to encompassing a broader range of metrics, including climate justice, human rights, and collective liberation, organizations can better address the complex challenges of the modern era. Drawing on insights from literature review and secondary research, this paper advocates for a comprehensive approach to CSR that prioritizes the well-being of the planet, people, and purpose. Through this reimagining of CSR, businesses can not only enhance their sustainability and resilience but also contribute to the greater good of society and the environment.

Keywords:

Corporate Social Responsibility, Social Enterprise, Triple Bottom Line, Environmental Social Governance, Systems, Foresight

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Thank you to my primary advisor, Alexander Manu, who introduced me to a world larger than any MRP could produce. You encouraged me to think for myself, beyond convention, structure, and limiting beliefs. Thank you for sharing your innovative spirit with me throughout this journey.

To the home I call Tkaronto. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island, and I am grateful to have the opportunity to study, work, and live on this land.

I want to thank my support system, friends and family, who gave me the courage to go back to school and challenge myself in unknown and desired territory. To my classmates and professors, who opened doors to a new world and continue to inspire me to conduct work that is difficult, responsible, and important.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Corporate Social Responsibility: In Flux

In business and organization-building, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has historically acted as a reactionary measure to environmental and social issues, with maximizing profit as the guiding force for decision-making. In recent years, however, the landscape of CSR has witnessed a significant shift – evolving from a reaction to a fundamental ethos driving businesses forward and reflecting a deeper understanding of the role of corporations in society today. CSR is no longer being seen as a checkbox on a corporate to-do list – and why is that?

Mother Earth

We are conducting business on a finite Earth. In 1960, humanity consumed approximately half of the planet's potential resource capacity. By 1987, humanity exceeded the planet's capacity. Now, in 2024, humans are using the resource capacity of one and three-quarters of the planet's capacity (Stanley & Chouinard, 2023).

In the 21st century, we are in a transformative era in defining what social responsibility means to businesses. More than half of the global gross domestic product (GDP), the standard metric of the world's aggregated economic output, depends on the capacity of nature to deliver services to the ecosystem (Shellenberg, 2022). For today's businesses to continue to exist, their viability is fundamentally dependent on nature staying afloat.

As a result of this stark recognition, we are seeing growing innovative collaborations between businesses, nonprofits, and governments to address systemic issues like climate change, illustrating a paradigm shift from individual initiatives to collective efforts to achieve responsible development goals.

Servicing a New Consumer

A new set of consumers are driving a paradigm shift in the marketplace, pushing businesses to adopt more responsible practices that align with their values and aspirations for a better world. Companies that embrace sustainability, social responsibility, and transparency stand to gain loyalty of these younger generations as well as competitive advantage in an increasingly conscious consumer landscape (2018, McKinsey). In Canada, we see the impacts of this consumer shift with a 40% increase in the number of social enterprises with impact-driven entrepreneurs (2019, Startup Canada Census).

Governance in Artificial Intelligence

As businesses increasingly integrate artificial intelligence into their practice, governance frameworks are evolving to address ethical, legal, and operational challenges. Regulatory bodies worldwide are developing guidelines to ensure responsible AI use, with a focus on transparency, accountability, and fairness, to mitigate risks associated with AI, including bias, privacy breaches, and algorithmic transparency. While collaborative efforts between governments, industry leaders, and academia drive the development of standards and best practices to promote ethical AI deployment, businesses must be ready to receive and abide by these guidelines to meet the demands of the new consumer.

The rise of machine-generated artificial intelligence (AI), particularly advanced language models in the past year, has spurred a rapid evolution in business technology applications. However, along with this advancement comes a multitude of ethical concerns. These include issues relating to labour disruption, consent and privacy, the influence of biased data on business decision-making, and potential societal and individual harms arising from machines possessing human-like cognitive power. Such concerns underscore the critical importance for businesses to establish and adhere to ethical frameworks. These frameworks should safeguard not only the human capital within organizations but also the broader society they serve.

To conduct social responsibility within a corporation will be a journey towards a more responsible future; where big businesses can affect big change. But where do the businesses of today start in their path of change?

As system and futures designers, we aim to answer some of the following questions:

How might the businesses of today, with traditional CSR paradigms, transform for what future society requires?

Do businesses require a fundamental shift or one that can be systemically and transitionally designed?

How should businesses define success in a future world?

These are the thoughts and questions that guide the following research.

1.2 Research Questions

The primary area of investigation for this project will be to uncover areas of opportunities for traditional or long-standing Canadian businesses to re-imagine their CSR practice to meet the future needs of people and the planet. The research questions are as follows:

1. What gaps exist in traditional CSR paradigms?
2. How might businesses with traditional CSR paradigms meet the future planetary and social needs of their stakeholders?

1.3 Why Read This?

We first must identify the obvious – we live on a finite planet. Realists claim that we have done irreparable harm to nature and that the only solution is to reduce consumption, and once that is expended, we are to abandon Mother Earth in search of new planetary futures.

However, we saw something truly redemptive with the advent of COVID-19 – with the population’s overall reduction in movement due to stay-in-place measures, this change in human behaviour significantly decreased air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions within just a few weeks (NASA, 2021) of halting global travel. The sudden change has given scientists a new perspective on results that would have otherwise taken years of regulation to achieve. Other effects due to the restriction of cross-border travel included a reduction in smog belts over China and Italy, reduced symptoms for citizens with respiratory conditions, wildfire reclaiming lost land from urbanization, and clear sightings of distant Mount Everest and Sierra Madre, once too polluted to observe from afar.

Despite the devastating social impact of COVID-19 on the global population, humanity saw a glimmer of hope in the knowledge that the planet has its way of regeneration and can regenerate with the help of conscious decision-making of individuals and organizations. This research aims to investigate the potential for businesses to make decisions that positively impact the maintenance of planet Earth, knowing that their very existence is dependent on doing so.

This research will most benefit the following:

- Organizations operating on traditional paradigms of CSR
- Organizations that seek to make meaningful environmental and social change
- Organizations that seek to gain consumer trust in operating responsibly

1.4 Methodology

Systems thinking tools used to understand the system include actant mapping and causal loop mapping to identify system constraints, system variables, and areas of intervention and opportunities.

Foresight tools such as horizon scanning, scenario building, value proposition and an abridged Three Horizons framework will be used to support businesses in building re-imagined and desired futures and to shift viewing CSR as a strategy to an embedded design within businesses.

2 The Evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility

2.1 CSR: How It Started

The history of corporate social responsibility (CSR) traces back to the emergence of modern corporations, exemplified by the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), the oldest-known corporation in Canada. HBC, chartered on May 2, 1670, was originally a British company until its 300th anniversary year in 1970 when HBC became incorporated on Canadian lands.

The history of corporations has been defined as inherently colonial, acting as British colonial projects such as the HBC (Slow Factory, 2023). Driven by capitalist imperatives, corporations operated as *laissez-faire*, an economic and political philosophy that advocates minimal government intervention in economic affairs, with the underlying motive of prioritizing profit above all else (Smith, 1776).

However, gaps in the *laissez-faire* system showed in its practical application, noting that as the system involved human involvement, successful functioning of the system would require reasonable adherence to a moral code and failed to consider limited resources on earth (Bowen, 1953). As such, social and government intervention was subsequently brought in,

initially to address and manage the human rights of workers. This line of thought regarding a socially responsible business is also echoed in philosopher Aristotle's work, where he posits that businesses are self-created mini-societies geared to one goal, which in turn serves larger goals, which in turn serve the state and society as a whole (Mohammed, 2019).

Initially perceived as non-human legal entities with no inherent moral obligations, corporations faced a revelatory shift in the 1960s when Howard Bowen, considered the Father of CSR, challenged their industrialist nature in "Social Responsibilities of the Businessman." Bowen (1953) argued that social responsibility forms the foundation of human interaction and asserted that self-interest in the economic sphere could align with social interests. He argued one of the great tasks of economic engineering was to develop social arrangements under which individual self-interest and social interest become, so far as possible, mutually compatible.

Bowen's work can be seen as a precursor to the modern stakeholder theory, which suggests that businesses have multiple stakeholders (e.g., customers, employees, and the community) whose interests should be taken into account.

2.2 CSR: How It's Going

Across businesses that follow general Western capitalist worldviews, the understanding of corporate social responsibility can be understood through three general levels: philanthropy, strategic social responsibility, and integrated social responsibility.

Philanthropy

- Business value is goodwill

Strategic

- Understanding support for social causes is good for one's corporate image; business value is corporate reputation

Integrated

- Understanding support for social causes and products/services that are socially beneficial is good for corporate image and is competitively advantageous; business value is profitability

We can also understand these three levels from a chronological perspective. Initially reactive, CSR served as a means to enhance corporate image and increase profit. In an industrial age, most businesses began with profit as a driving force, rather than social benefit. As such, we see many existing businesses today adopting a reactionary measure to social responsibility and toggling between the 1st and 2nd stages of modern corporate social responsibility.

However, traditional CSR reporting at both the philanthropy and strategic levels has been critiqued for focusing solely on surface-level philanthropy metrics without addressing deeper environmental and social impacts. Without regulations on the type of disclosures businesses communicate in their reports, the following example often occurs:

“A company can tell you how much it gives to the symphony, but not how many square miles it destroys in the Niger Delta” (Stanley & Chouinard, 2023)

In considering the newer wave of social enterprises, not-for-profit corporations, and public benefit corporations, we see a more integrated approach to conducting social

responsibility within an organization, reflecting a shift from viewing CSR as mere philanthropy to recognizing its strategic and integrated value in enhancing corporate reputation and profitability.

Social enterprise: An organization that applies commercial strategies to maximize improvements in human and environmental well-being rather than maximizing profits for external shareholders. Social enterprises can operate in various sectors of the economy and typically aim to address social, cultural, or environmental challenges. They may generate income through the sale of goods and services, but they reinvest the majority of their profits back into their social or environmental mission" (Nicholls & Cho, 2006).

Not-for-profit corporation: a type of organization that is established for purposes other than generating profit for its owners or shareholders. Instead, its primary objectives typically involve serving a particular community or advancing a specific cause. Not-for-profit corporations may engage in charitable, educational, religious, scientific, or other socially beneficial activities. Any surplus funds generated by the organization are typically reinvested into furthering its mission rather than distributed to shareholders" (Smith & Lipsky, 1993).

Public benefit corporation: a type of corporate entity that is legally obligated to pursue specific public or social benefits in addition to generating profits for shareholders. These corporations are structured to prioritize social or environmental objectives alongside financial goals. Unlike traditional for-profit corporations, public benefit corporations have a legal responsibility to consider the impact of their actions on stakeholders beyond shareholders, such as employees, customers, communities, and the environment (De Bernier, P. C., & Hurst, S. M. 2015).

2.2.1 CSR Systems Overview

“To articulate the elements of business responsibility for our time, when everyone working at every level has to face the unintended consequences of a 250-year-old industrial model that can no longer be sustained ecologically, socially, or financially.”

- *Future of the Responsible Company*

Actors Map

An Actors Map is a tool used to identify and represent key participants (organizations, individuals, human and nonhuman agents) in a defined system. This map is a common tool used to understand mutual relations to the issues of concern or an outcome in the system between these participants (Jones & Van Ael, 2022). The following Actors Map (see Figure 1) shows the landscape of Corporate Social Responsibility in Canada, with key participants identified and mapped in a simple 2x2 quadrant overlaid over concentric circles. Each circle represents a level of social system or organization – in this instance, the levels are user, organization, society and ecosystem.

The axes scoring the model represent the influential potential of participants in the systems.

This is mapped based on their relative Knowledge (x-axis) and Power (y-axis) as common social forces that, when indicated, might reveal patterns of system influence.

Actant Map - Corporate Social Responsibility

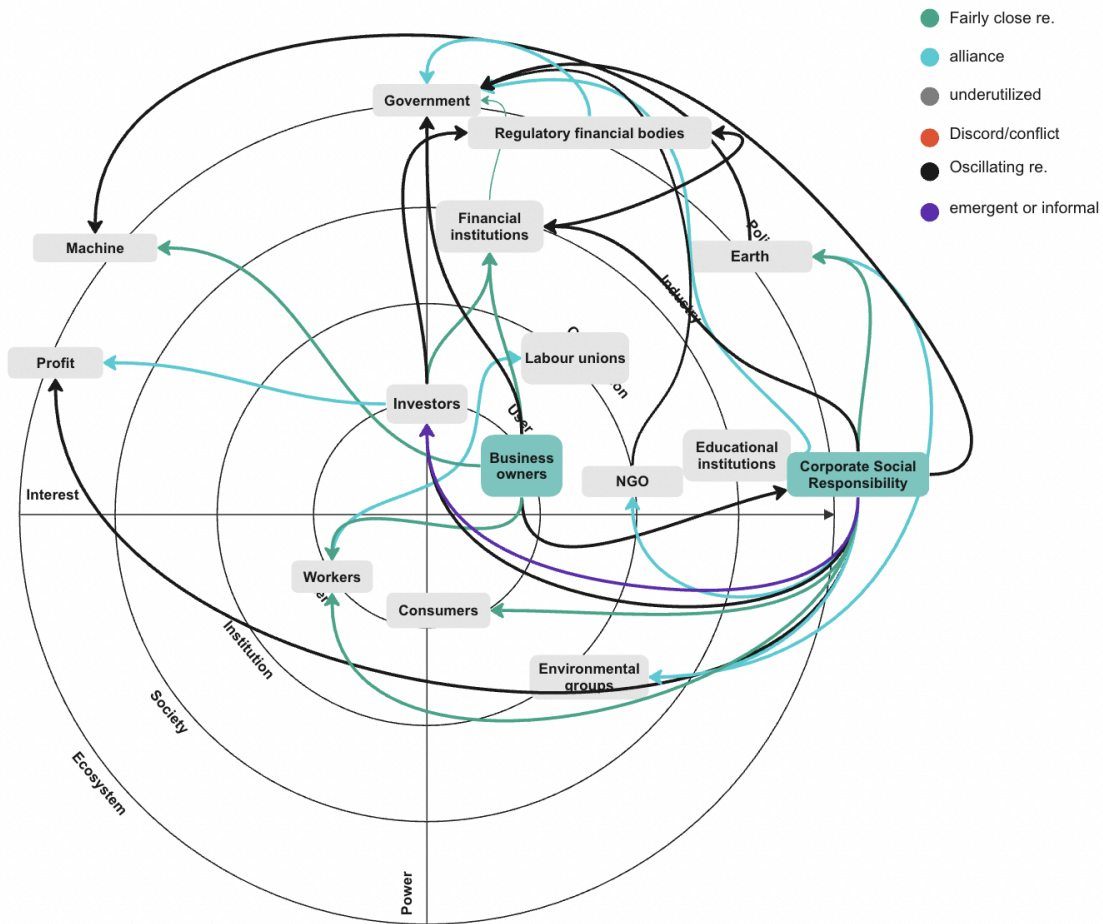


Figure 1

Insights

- Main actants, business owners (human) and CSR (non-human) have two primary relationship dynamics among actants in the system: **alliances** (positive relationships) and **oscillating** (toggling between positive and negative interactions).
- Oscillating relationship between Earth and Machine: though some may consider the two to be opposed, we have since seen advancements in machines that seek to repair the

harm done to the Earth and illustrate the potential for machines to work in favour of Earth.

- Emergent relationship between CSR and Investors: there has been a gradual shift in how business is measured, with the adoption of financial reports centred around CSR, industry-wide commitments to address global challenges, and as evidenced by the adoption of ESG (Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance) metrics by businesses for investors.

The following stakeholder matrix (Figure 2) maps the human actants as stakeholders onto different levels of needs. Stakeholders in the ‘Keep Satisfied’ and ‘Key Players’ quadrants will require increased attention and engagement to ensure success for business owners and CSR.

<p>Keep Satisfied</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investors 2. Workers 3. Consumers 	<p>Key Players</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Government 2. Regulatory Financial Bodies (IIROC, CIRO) 3. Financial Institutions 4. Educational Institutions 5. Labour Unions 6. NGOs 7. Business Owners
<p>Low Priority</p>	<p>Keep Informed</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Environmental Groups

Figure 2

2.2.2 System Archetypes

System archetypes are recurring, highly regular patterns of behaviour. The leading systems thinker Peter Senge defined a series of common, mostly dysfunctional, patterns within

organizational systems that frequently recur, dubbed 'system archetypes' (Jones & Van Ael, 2022). The following archetypes showcase examples of environmental concerns.

Shifting the Burden

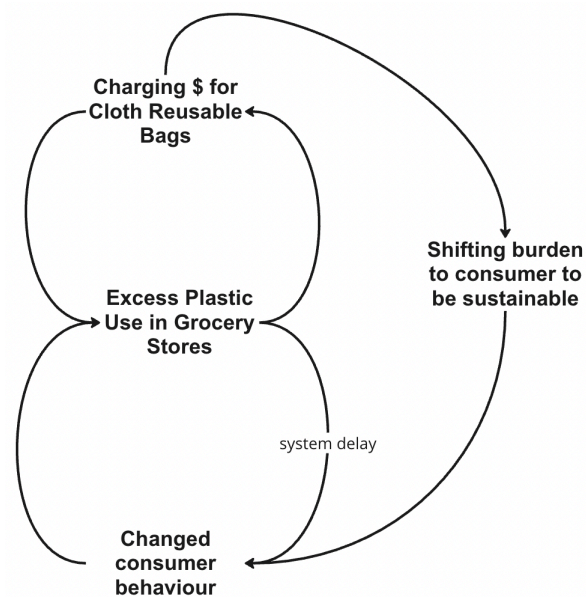


Figure 3

This archetype describes an example of a corporation's strategy to be "environmentally friendly". While it seems the corporation has reduced its plastic usage, they do not account for the knock-on effect of consumers not yet adapting to a system where they must bring back their reusable bags. As such, the corporation in this example simply shifts the burden of being "eco-friendly" to the consumer, all while continuing to make a profit by selling reusable bags and producing more material waste.

Fixes that Fail

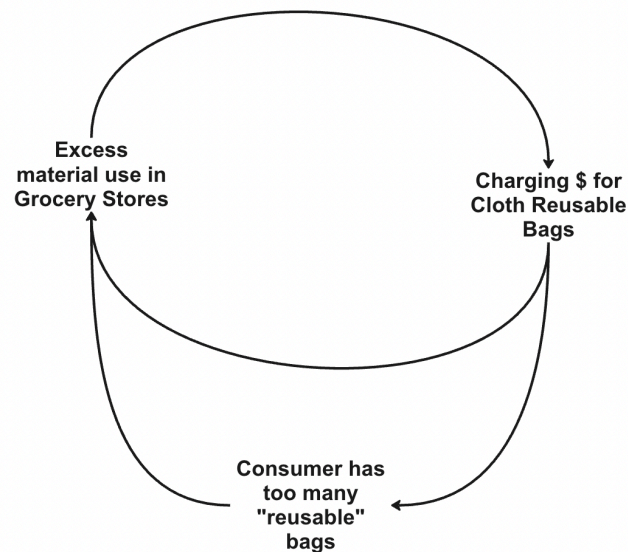


Figure 4

In the archetype of “Fixes that Fail”, we see a continued unintended consequence of the consumer now having too many “reusable” bags which are hard to recycle through traditional consumer means. While a solution could be to invest in producing biodegradable, reusable bags to continue meeting consumer preferences for convenience, corporations choose profit over research and development. As a result, single-use materials continue to be produced if the consumer has an excess of bags which do not have a continuing purpose

Shifting the Burden to the Intervener – Corporations

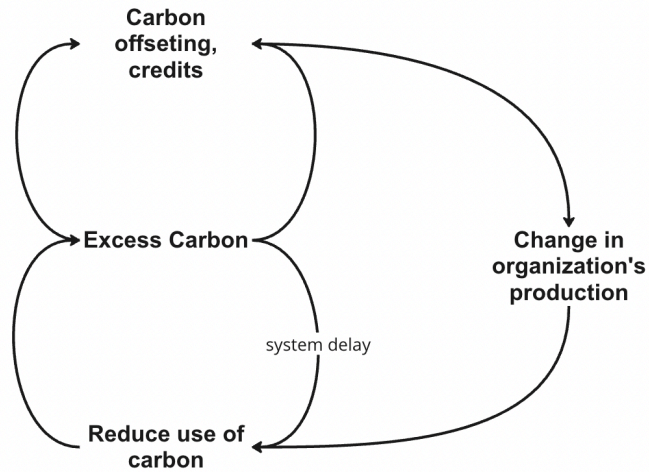


Figure 5

In this archetype, we see corporations focus on external solutions (carbon offsetting, carbon credits) as opposed to addressing and solving an internal solution (reducing carbon usage, switching to alternative fuels). We see here that these strategies are simply shifting the burden to an external actor (offset providers) and not looking inward to consider an internal shift in production decisions.

Shifting the Burden to the Intervener – Government

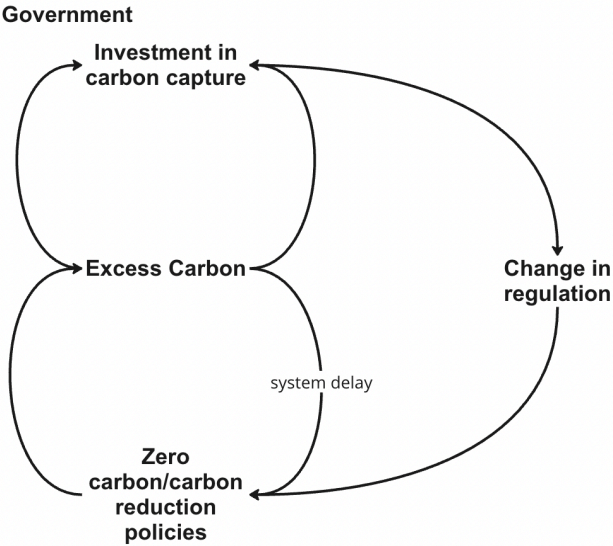


Figure 6

Similarly, we see governments also engaging in this pattern, with investment in carbon capturing to address their 'net zero' goals. This strategy can allow the government to invest in new industries while continuing to support existing industries reliant on carbon. However, in this decision, they are shifting the burden to new industries as opposed to considering internal measures, such as regulation changes to reduce carbon from the onset.

Tragedy of the Commons

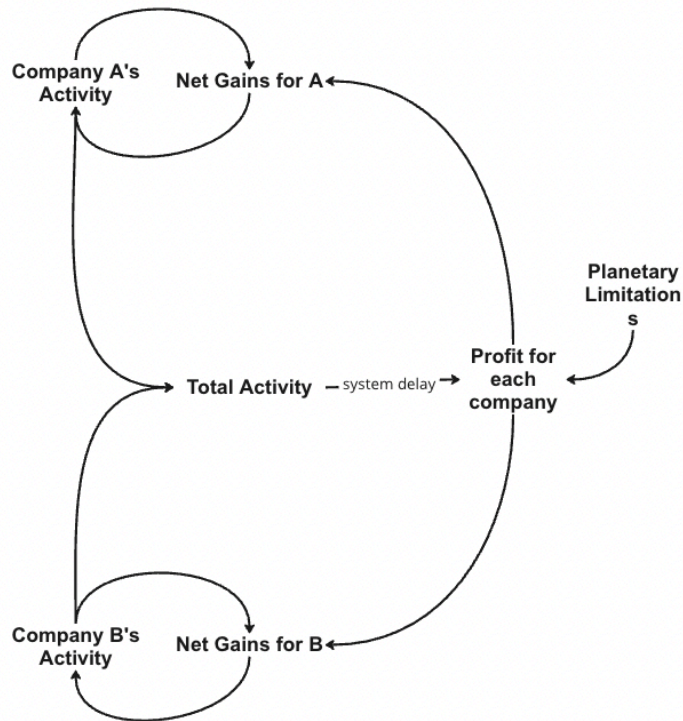


Figure 7

In this final archetype, we see a bird's eye perspective of the industrial and capitalist system at hand, noting that in all that is business decision-making, there is a common resource being depleted in the pursuit of profit—the planet.

2.3 CSR: Constraints and Variables

Business Metrics

Existing accounting paradigms lack standard, credible, and widely accepted principles for recognizing the value of corporate intangible assets (Zéghal and Maaloul, 2011) in the way traditional capital physical assets have been measured. Despite pressure for change, primarily from non-profits rather than corporations, historical attempts to develop standards for intangible value have faced opposition from major corporations resistant to change. Initiatives like the

"triple bottom line" and frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) aim to integrate social and environmental factors into accounting but face challenges due to the lack of standardization across organizations. Here lies an opportunity for powerful and influential actants such as the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada (IIROC), Canadian Investment Regulatory Organization (CIRO) and government bodies to mandate a new paradigm of accounting that quantifies socially responsible choices for both public and private entities. Mandatory disclosure trends can help lighten this weight of the past and drive further development of accounting protocols for intangible assets.

The Consumer Psyche

With **consumption culture**, there exists an unsustainable speed of changing trends for growing generations like Gen Z and Gen Alpha, and their desire for unique style threatens their contrasting desire for ethical purchasing and decision-making. With influencer culture infiltrating every corner of the human experience, in both the physical and digital worlds, these generations struggle to find fulfilment amongst overconsumption. It will be up to actants who influence media and technoculture to embrace a more circular model of consumption and lighten this weight of the past.

With **convenience culture**, modern society adapted to a culture that expects instant gratification and access as the normal way of life, which causes concerns about how long this culture can sustain, particularly among limited planetary resources. With signals indicating this culture is here to stay, it will become imperative for both creators of technological innovations and public infrastructure to solve the environmental repercussions associated with a disposable, single-use lifestyle. Raising awareness of consumption patterns and advocating for responsible practices can significantly contribute to reducing negative environmental impact.

3 Shifting Paradigms - The Future of Corporate Social Responsibility

3.1 Innovation Map

In envisioning a desired future for CSR, several foresight tools will be employed. First, the Sustainable Innovation Map (Manu, 2014) will be leveraged to inform future scenario building. The Sustainable Innovation Map endeavours to position CSR at the center, with intersecting driving forces and trends supporting CSR as a 'big idea.' By constructing various future scenarios across different time horizons, this process can mitigate the uncertainties surrounding CSR over time with minimal ambiguities:

Driving Forces:

Humanization

As technological innovations continue to disrupt ways of doing, seeing, and being, we are seeing an emphasis placed on the remaining qualities which technology has yet to disrupt – human nature and the need to be ethical with one another. With more energy poured into AI disrupting traditional industries, the value derived from human connection and human ethics, which cannot be replaced, will become more valuable. This driving force will continue to contrast and cause tension in the progress of technology in attempts to preserve humanity.

Quote: “The paradox of the AI era is this: as today’s imperfect learning language models improve, requiring less and less of us, we will need to demand more from ourselves” - Reid Hoffman, LinkedIn Co-founder

Decolonization

Colonial ideologies, which uphold the superiority and privileges of Western thought and approaches, are being actively deconstructed and challenged within various systems and institutions. Efforts are being made to rebalance power dynamics, returning agency and control

to Indigenous peoples. Indigenous ways of knowing and doing are increasingly recognized, valued, and integrated as equal counterparts to Western paradigms.

Climate Change

Climate change continues to catalyze corporate social responsibility, compelling businesses to transform their environmental stewardship. Businesses are responding to climate change in both positive and negative ways, continuing to fuel division and a greater need to bring unity to a resource impacting all stakeholders.

Gen Z, Alpha, Beta

Consumer values will be shaped by Generation 'Zillennials' (Millennials and Gen Z), Alpha and Beta – those who have grown up in an era of iPads, fake news, AI, and climate change at the forefront. These generations' lived experiences will determine the trajectory of how businesses respond to new demands and values expected of them.

Late-stage Capitalism

Late-stage capitalism renders corporate social responsibility as surface-level, driven by public relations rather than genuine commitment. Before system reform and a paradigm shift, a continuing prioritization towards profit may lead to diminished accountability for organizations unwilling to invest in a fundamental shift toward a more equitable and responsible future.

However, in a post-capitalist world, information technology will have reduced the need for work, blurring the lines between work and leisure. Automation, currently hindered by social infrastructure limitations, will further diminish the need for labour. Second, information abundance will have challenged the market's ability to set prices, leading to the formation of monopolies. Finally, collaborative production will be on the rise, with goods and services emerging outside market and managerial hierarchies (Mason, 2015).

Trends:

Trend: Generative AI Disrupting the Labour Market	
Signal	Factor
Consulting Giants See AI Shaving Years Off the Path to Partner (Bloomberg)	Economic
Avatars, robots and AI: Japan turns to innovation to tackle labour crisis (Financial Times)	Technological
Contemplation for an Age of Artificial Intelligence (WCCM)	Values
Quality > Quantity	
Signal	Factor
Chongqing 2035: Shifting away from quantity to quality to build sustainable cities in China (World Bank)	Political
As consumers demand more for their money, some clothing brands shift their messaging to quality (Marketing Brew)	Economic
More people turning to second-hand items, say Sudbury, Ont. stores (CBC)	Social
Mis + Disinformation	
Signal	Factor
Meta's Transparency Drive: Labels & Fact Checking on Threads (Analytics Insight)	Technological
Missouri lawmaker introduces 'Taylor Swift Act' to fight AI deepfakes (News Nation Now)	Political
Coronavirus: Outcry after Trump suggests injecting disinfectant as treatment (BBC)	Political
The Dark Side of Memes: Spreading Health Disinformation and Fueling Anti-Vaccine Sentiments (Medriva)	Social

Conscious Generations	
Signal	Factor
Millennials and Gen Z are now the biggest global generation, making up 64% of the world's population (Submittable)	Social
Millennials: "They're not just looking for a job and paycheck—they're looking for purpose in their work" (BC Business)	Social
EY Entrepreneurship Awards, the world's most prestigious business award for entrepreneurs has "Purpose" and "Impact" as 2 of the 5 criteria it's using to define the success of a business (EY)	Economic
87% of 13-15-year-olds agreed that it is up to their generation to stop climate change from worsening, per YPulse (Axios)	Social

3.2 Innovation Mapping - Alternative Future Scenarios

After a review of Driving Forces and Trends informing CSR, a series of scenarios will be crafted to describe the desired future from multiple points of view. The result is a large bank of scenarios that disclose new applications of intervention and use cases.

Time Horizon: 2023 - 2025

1. Ecological Nexus - Suzanne, Cascade Bay

In the coastal town of Cascade Bay, situated along Canada's rugged coastline, the impacts of climate change are becoming more evident. Once a bustling tourist destination renowned for its scenic beaches and thriving marine ecosystem, Cascade Bay now faces the challenges brought by extreme weather events and rising sea levels.

Each morning, the town's residents prepare for another day marked by uncertainty. For the owners of seaside resorts and tourist spots, every passing storm poses a threat to their

livelihoods. With each high tide, the waters creep and erode the coastline, endangering buildings along the shore.

Among those affected by these challenges is Suzanne, the owner of a cozy bed and breakfast overlooking Cascade Bay. Sarah's establishment has long been a haven for travellers seeking solace from urban life. However, as storms become more frequent and intense, Sarah finds herself facing new obstacles.

One morning, as Sarah surveys the aftermath of a recent storm, she is filled with a sense of dismay. The once-pristine beach that drew guests to her doorstep is now strewn with debris, and the air carries the scent of decay. With each passing day, Sarah grapples with the reality of climate change, wondering how much longer her business can endure the relentless forces of nature.

2. A New Consumer - Lumina

We take a stroll in the vibrant city of Lumina, where skyscrapers reached for the heavens and neon lights painted the night sky in a kaleidoscope of colours. For decades, capitalism has reigned supreme. Businesses have enjoyed wringing the Earth's resources to their liking and have exploited the consumer psyche of the limitless desire to consume for greater satisfaction. In essence, a good way to sell something is to make consumers believe they're worthless without it. However, in a city where the pulse of commerce thrums through the streets like a heartbeat, a quiet revolution is underway—a revolution sparked by a newfound belief in the power of purpose-driven businesses to transform not just the economy but the very fabric of society itself.

At the forefront of this movement stands Luminary Collective. Unlike the faceless corporations that peddled products solely for profit, Luminary embraces a different philosophy—one rooted in the idea that true prosperity can only be achieved when individual choices serve the needs of both individuals and communities.

Consumers of Luminary Collective, primarily made up of Zilennials, recognize where they are in the hierarchy of needs, and understand the Earth has provided them with more than enough – baseline needs of safety, shelter, food and resources. Recognizing that businesses can no longer hypnotize them from this reality, Luminary consumers seek more. They look for a deeper connection to the world around them and a sense of purpose that transcends the boundaries of self-interest.

Amidst shelves stocked with responsibly-produced clothing, locally sourced organic groceries, and community-driven initiatives, consumers found not just products but a pathway to a more meaningful way of life at Luminary Collective.

For Luminary, profit is part of the end goal, but not the only goal. Rather, Luminary aims to be a means to a greater end—a means to empower individuals to live with intention, to make choices that align with their values, and to contribute to the well-being of society as a whole. With every purchase, customers became collaborators in a shared vision of a brighter future—a future where people, planet, and purpose were valued above all else.

3. Labour Disruption - Paul, Higher World

Meet Paul, a 30-year-old engineer at Higher World, a visionary company at the forefront of artificial intelligence and automation. In a world where mundane tasks are relegated to machines and dangerous jobs are entrusted to robotic counterparts, the concept of "work" takes on new meaning with the disruption of AI.

The arrival of AI heralded a new era of possibility for Higher World and Paul. No longer bound by the limitations of manual labour, Paul finds himself liberated to pursue higher-order endeavours—to explore the realms of creativity, innovation, and self-actualization like never before.

For Paul and Higher World, the mission is clear: to harness the power of AI not as a replacement for human labour but as a catalyst for human evolution. With every algorithmic

breakthrough and technological innovation, Paul transcends the constraints of traditional employment and embraces a new paradigm of productivity—one defined not by the drudgery of repetitive tasks but by the pursuit of meaningful work that enriches both mind and spirit. With 90% of his regular tasks now outsourced to Machine, Paul fills his time with contemplation, discussing strategy and innovations with his co-workers, and most importantly – taking multi-day walks with his greyhound rescue dog.

In this brave new world, where the boundaries between man and machine are blurred, and the possibilities seem endless, the concept of "work" takes on a whole new significance. No longer viewed as a means to an end but as a pathway to fulfillment, purpose, and self-discovery.

Time Horizon: 2026 - 2029

1. An Indigenous POV - Better Business Bureau

The Better Business Bureau (BBB) is a non-profit organization with aims to maintain integrity and excellence in the world of commerce. For years, they have served as custodians of ethical business practices, guiding companies toward success while upholding the values of honesty, transparency, and accountability.

But as the winds of change sweep across the land, they bring with them new challenges and opportunities. Leaders of the CBBB find themselves at a crossroads. In an era of globalization and technological advancement, traditional models of business are being tested like never before. It is clear that the time had come for a fresh perspective, a different approach that would not only ensure prosperity for businesses but also foster harmony with the natural world and strengthen ties within communities.

And so, with a sense of purpose and determination, the CBBB turns their gaze toward the Indigenous peoples of Canada, whose rich traditions and deep respect for the land have sustained them for generations. In the wisdom of Indigenous business models, they saw a

roadmap to redefine success—one that prioritized expressive freedom, creativity, and the well-being of all.

As they delved into the cultural values and ecological principles that guided Indigenous businesses, the leaders of the CBBB were struck by the profound wisdom and insight they found. They learned of the passion that fueled these enterprises – the local supply chains that leverage personal and trusted relationships, the Haudenosaunee ‘Seven Generation’ principle asserting present-day decision-making must result in a responsible world seven generations into the future, and the innovative spirit that drives Indigenous businesses. Inspired by what they had discovered, the CBBB set out to integrate these principles into their practices, first forging partnerships with Indigenous businesses but ultimately succeeding the throne to Indigenous expertise to develop new standards of excellence. Together, BBB and those who hold indigenous knowledge work to promote ethical business practices honouring the earth, empowering individuals, and enriching communities – a vision of success that goes beyond profit margins to embrace the true essence of prosperity.

2. Responsible Accounting - IIROC + CIRO

In the year 2030, a new era of financial transparency and accountability dawns in Canada as the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada (IIROC) and the Canadian Investment Regulatory Organization (CIRO) announce a groundbreaking collaboration to revolutionize accounting standards.

Building upon years of advocacy and pressure from non-profits and advocacy groups, IIROC and CIRO are taking bold steps to address the shortcomings of existing accounting paradigms. Recognizing the need to quantify the intangible social value generated by corporations, they worked tirelessly to develop a new framework that integrated social and environmental factors into financial reporting.

Under the new standards, companies are mandated to disclose financial performance with new measures of impact related to society and the environment. From diversity and inclusion initiatives to environmental stewardship programs, investors and stakeholders have a wide and comprehensive understanding of a company's true value under a triple bottom line model (profit, planet, people).

As news of IIROC and CIRO's initiative spread, companies across Canada scrambled to adapt to the new regulatory landscape. Most embraced the change wholeheartedly, seeing it as an opportunity to differentiate themselves in the marketplace and attract socially conscious investors. Others resisted, clinging to outdated practices and fearing the potential impact on their traditional profit-based bottom line. These detractors eventually lost market share and crumbled among their competition.

With mandatory disclosure requirements driving further development of accounting protocols for intangible assets, Canada is well-positioned to emerge as a global leader in responsible business practices, inspiring other nations to follow suit.

Time Horizon: 2030 - 2035

1. Post-Growth Model - Backyard Farms

In 2033, the global business landscape has undergone a profound transformation guided by the principles of decolonization and post-growth economics. With new accounting standards in place, Canadian companies shifted away from the traditional pursuit of endless economic growth and embraced a new paradigm—one that prioritized well-being, social equity, and environmental sustainability. Successful companies have gone on to reject the notion that prosperity is synonymous with perpetual growth. Instead, they've recognized that true wealth lies in fostering thriving communities and nurturing the natural world.

At the heart of this shift is a commitment to redefining success beyond financial metrics. They embraced the tenets of post-growth economics, which calls for a fundamental

re-evaluation of economic goals and measures. Instead of fixating on GDP growth, companies focus on indicators of human well-being, ecological health, and social cohesion.

Backyard Farms, a new-age produce farm, adapted well to the new paradigm shift. They implemented regenerative farming practices in their agricultural supply chains, working closely with indigenous communities to restore degraded lands and preserve biodiversity. By prioritizing soil health and ecosystem resilience, they not only improved agricultural productivity but also enhanced the long-term sustainability of their operations.

In addition to their efforts in agriculture, Backyard Farms also invested heavily in renewable energy technologies, recognizing the urgent need to transition away from fossil fuels. But perhaps most importantly, Backyard Farms prioritized equity and inclusion in all aspects of their business. They actively sought out partnerships with the communities they served and where they sowed produce, empowering them to participate in decision-making processes and share in the benefits of economic development. Through initiatives such as community re-investment programs, they ensured that the benefits of their success were shared equitably among all stakeholders.

Backyard Farms is just one example of a business that forged a path towards a more just, responsible, and resilient future—one where prosperity was measured not by the size of profits but by the well-being of people and the planet.

2. Circular Ways of Being - Pleia

No longer bound by the constraints of traditional linear models of production and consumption, In 2034, businesses have embraced a new ethos of sustainability, resilience, and regeneration – one that is tied to a circular model of production and consumption.

Enter Pleia – a flourishing upscale leather goods retailer whose business model is a commitment to closing the loop on resource use and minimizing waste at every stage of the product lifecycle. Instead of following the linear make-use-dispose model, Pleia embraces a

circular approach, where items are designed for durability, repairability, and recyclability, by offering in-house repair shops, upcycling services, and secondhand marketplace. Leather goods were designed with modular components that could be easily repaired, upgraded, or repurposed, extending their lifespan and reducing the need for new resource extraction. Supply chains were reimagined as interconnected ecosystems, where waste streams were transformed into valuable resources through processes such as composting, recycling, and upcycling. Collaborative partnerships were forged with suppliers, customers, and stakeholders to create closed-loop systems that maximized resource efficiency and minimized environmental harm.

The environment in 2034 has made the climate ripe for regenerative capitalism to take center stage. Businesses like Pleia, which took note of the trends and signals relating to corporate social responsibility throughout the years, are too, ready to enjoy the stage.

3.3 A Closer Look: The Desired 2035

An Enriched Future

In Enriched Futures, we are seeing the full paradigm shift of a post-growth society, where both top-down and bottom-up approaches are working in tandem to maintain humanity in a physical resource-limited world. Built upon the various alternative future scenarios, this desired future remarks upon a world that has embedded social responsibility in every fabric of decision-making. As a result of various technological and social innovations, cognitive capital dictates the wealth of a nation, evolving capitalism towards a new paradigm.

Environmental

- Project Zero, committed to turning the tide on the climate crisis, is successfully working across the majority of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) goals including Life Under Water, Climate Action and Ending Poverty in All its Forms (#14, 13, #1; Figure 8)

- Responsible consumption (SDG #12) has been steered by a shift in new Gen Alpha and Beta consumer values, who enjoy slower consumption and demand a circular model for products and services they consume and render



Figure 8. Source: United Nations (2023). The content of this publication has not been approved by the United Nations and does not reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials or Member States.

Social

- A focus on reducing necessary work time as close to zero as possible is made successful as a result of AI innovation – alleviating mundane tasks and empowering humanity to focus on higher-order endeavours such as environmental and social justice
- Activist companies find success in the economic model of circularity, embedding new accounting models to consider purpose and planet as part of the traditional bottom-line
- Decolonization undergirds most of the SDG goals, with Indigenous peoples at the center of stewardship and universal sustainable development

In this desired future 2035 narrative, the focus is on the following themes:

- Labour disrupted with AI + High environmental stewardship
 - Stewardship has been made convenient and cost-effective with technological advancements such as AI and scalable innovation solutions
- Organizations operate under new and alternative economies + Top-down policies have proliferated alternative metrics of corporate success
 - Small social innovations leveraged the capitalist system and industrial growth to proliferate the concept of circular and innovative design to the general public
- Consumer values are to achieve living with and learning from nature, and everything is designed with circularity at the onset
 - Indigenous peoples who reclaimed general ownership of land and water are the primary stewards of the Earth and have a primary stake in environmental policy-making
- In a post-growth economy where human and environmental well-being is the core of consumption values
 - Fast fashion and traditional retailers either die out from an unsustainable business model or pivot to a fully circular model to meet consumer and environmental demands

In a world of continuing technological advancements disrupting business, and high environmental, civic and social stewardship, 2035 looks like the following:

In the year 2035, technological marvels and environmental stewardship have taken the grand stage across Canadian soil. The landscape of labour is now disrupted with artificial intelligence integrated into most industries, alleviating mundane tasks and empowering

humanity to focus on higher-order endeavours. Corporate social responsibility, once an ancillary part of a business, is now embedded deep into the core of organizations for survival.

A striking feature of this world is the high emphasis on environmental stewardship. Thanks to technological advancements and scalable social innovations, stewardship has become a convenient and cost-effective choice. Circular and innovative design, once an alternative concept, now pervades every aspect of design. This prevailing design ethos continues to shape the way people from all industries perceive and interact with their surroundings.

Corporations now embrace new circular and doughnut economies. Top-down policies reflect this paradigm shift, with the introduction and regulation of new metrics of corporate success. Success is now measured through positive impact on the planet, purpose-driven initiatives, and the welfare of people. Organizations once fixated solely on profit margins, now operate with a broader perspective, with the triple bottom line in effect.

While the ethos of circularity and innovation are now driving forces behind industries, this discourse was started bottom-up by the consumer values of Generation Alpha and Beta. In the new post-growth economy, Gen Alpha and Beta demand a new way of consumption, one that is responsible yet still convenient to their lifestyles. As such, industries armed with AI and technological advancements are called to innovate and provide solutions fit to consumer needs.

Equitable, diverse, and inclusive solutions became non-negotiable cornerstones of societal values for Gen Alpha and Beta. After growing up in a world faced with climate change and social justice issues at the forefront, this generation has positioned Indigenous peoples at the center of stewardship, allowing the reclamation of Indigenous land to be protected and treated. Indigenous communities take the lead in shaping policies prioritizing ecological balance over unchecked development.

3.4 Future System Value Proposition

Originally used as a value proposition to guide strategy, positioning, and prototyping, the Future System Value Proposition (Figure 9) tool seeks to understand the value which can be co-created for all stakeholders. The system value model assigns a value schema in three nested levels (e.g. micro, meso, macro): The individual (all people), organizational, and societal/planetary. Four dimensions capturing perspectives of economic, ecological, psychological, and social value split the concentric circles into quadrants. (Jones & Van Ael, 2022). With the desired future crafted, the future system value proposition looks like the following:

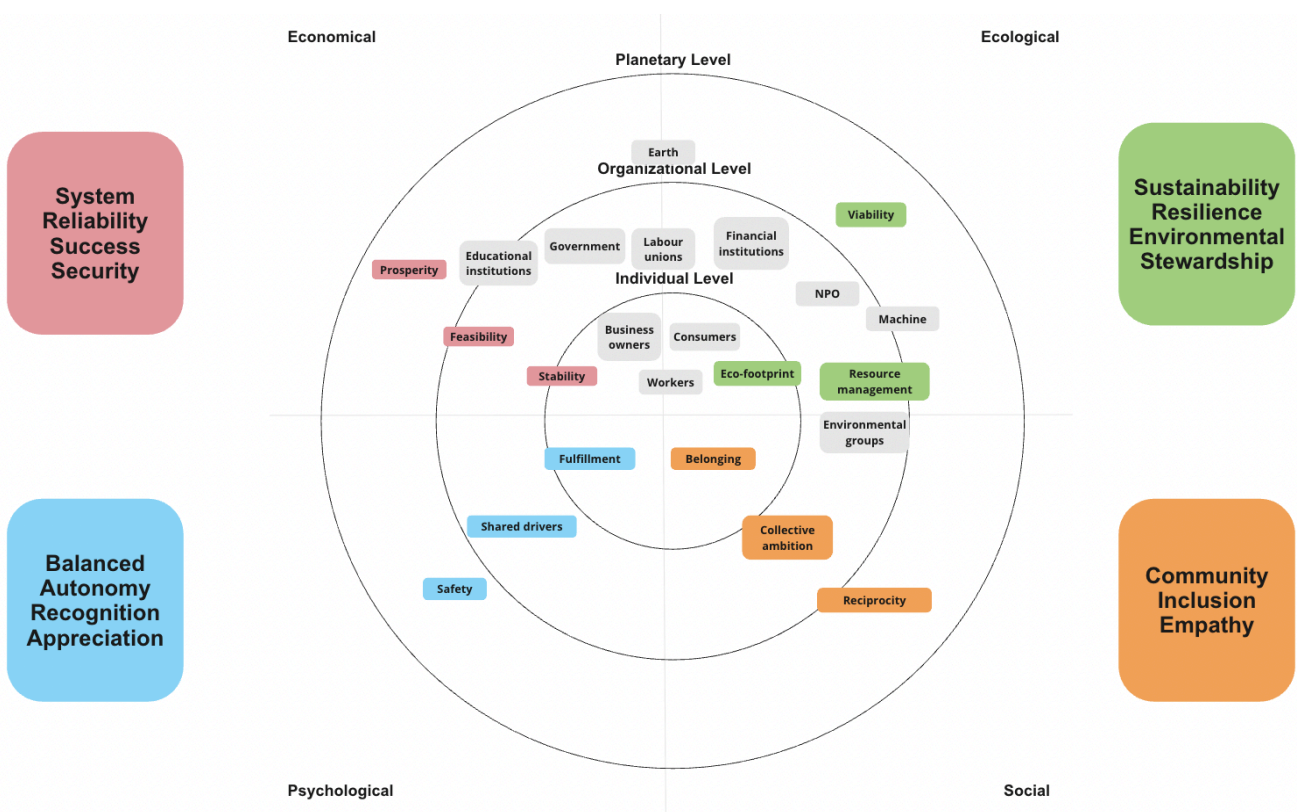


Figure 9

3.5 Three Horizons

Three Horizons is a framework used to help discuss a current system (Horizon 1), envision an improved system (Horizon 3), and identify changes that need to be made to

transition (Horizon 2). The transitory Horizon 2 stage helps to reveal forces that pull further from an ideal and those that foster positive change.

Throughout this research, Horizon 1, a current state assessment, was identified through a systems analysis and illustrated in an innovation map identifying trends and driving forces within CSR. Horizon 3 engages with the research question (how might businesses with traditional CSR paradigms meet the future planetary and social needs of their stakeholders), and was identified through a future value proposition and future scenarios along a time horizon to 2035.

Horizon 2 considers the path to move “from here to there” and is built upon the learnings from Horizons 1 and 3. Horizon 2 consists of activities, initiatives, stakeholders and capabilities needed to meet the desired future in Horizon 3. These are be categorized as:

- 1) Positive interventions that can be further amplified into the future, or
- 2) Tensions that detract from the successful fulfillment of Horizon 3.

Positive Interventions

Conscious Generations: 73% of Gen Z reported trying to purchase from companies they consider ethical, and nine out of ten believe that companies have a responsibility to address environmental and social issues (McKinsey, 2018)

Regenerative capitalism: Regenerative capitalism advocates for an economic system that not only aims for profit but also prioritizes environmental and social regeneration. Unlike traditional capitalism, which follows a linear economic model (make, use, dispose), regenerative capitalism embraces a circular model (make, use, repair, recycle). Companies like Coach (Coach ReLoved, their in-house upcycling workshop) and IKEA (announcing to become a fully circular business by 2030) are examples of regenerative capitalism in practice.

Decentralized Finance (DeFi): DeFi platforms have the potential to provide an investment ecosystem that is transparent, efficient, and inclusive. In place of centralized institutions that have limited transparency, DeFi can charter an alternate world for responsible investing.

Foundation-owned Firms: In Denmark, 25% of the country's 100 largest companies and 70% of its total market capitalization made up of foundation-owned firms (Hansmann, 2018). By intertwining business ownership and philanthropy, stakeholder capitalism garners momentum by advocating for conscientious governance, fostering success not just for business proprietors but also for society at large.

Tensions

Dissolution of the Labour Market: The landscape of labour is being disrupted with artificial intelligence impacting every industry, alleviating mundane, dangerous, and labour-intensive tasks, allowing the potential for humanity to focus on higher-order endeavours and usher in a new type of "work"

Companies Going Private: In 2021, private equity firms managed 20% of U.S. corporate equity, a significant increase from the 4% in 2000. This trend reflects the attractiveness of private companies to investors, who feel they get greater access to influencing the company and playing an active investor role, unlike in public markets. As investment flows into the private sector continue to grow, there is a greater risk of opacity in how corporations retain social responsibility.

3.6 Three Horizons and Causal Layered Analysis

Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) is a method used in foresight and systems thinking to explore deeper layers of causation and meaning behind a particular phenomenon. The four layers used in this method are as follows:

Litany: Represents the surface-level events, facts, and visible symptoms of the issue. It includes immediate, observable phenomena and often reflects the concerns and discussions in mainstream media and public discourse.

Structure: Underlying structures, policies, and institutions that shape behaviour and outcomes. This layer focuses on systemic patterns, relationships, and dynamics that contribute to the problem.

Worldview: Cultural narratives, beliefs, values, and assumptions that underpin the systemic causes. This layer examines the dominant ideologies, paradigms, and discourses that influence how people perceive and respond to the issue.

Metaphor: Examining the myths, metaphors, and symbolic meanings associated with the issue. This layer delves into the collective unconscious, archetypes, and cultural stories that shape perceptions, identities, and aspirations.

The following Figure 10 illustrates a summary of Horizons 1 through 3 paired with CLA, with CSR presented as the phenomenon in question:

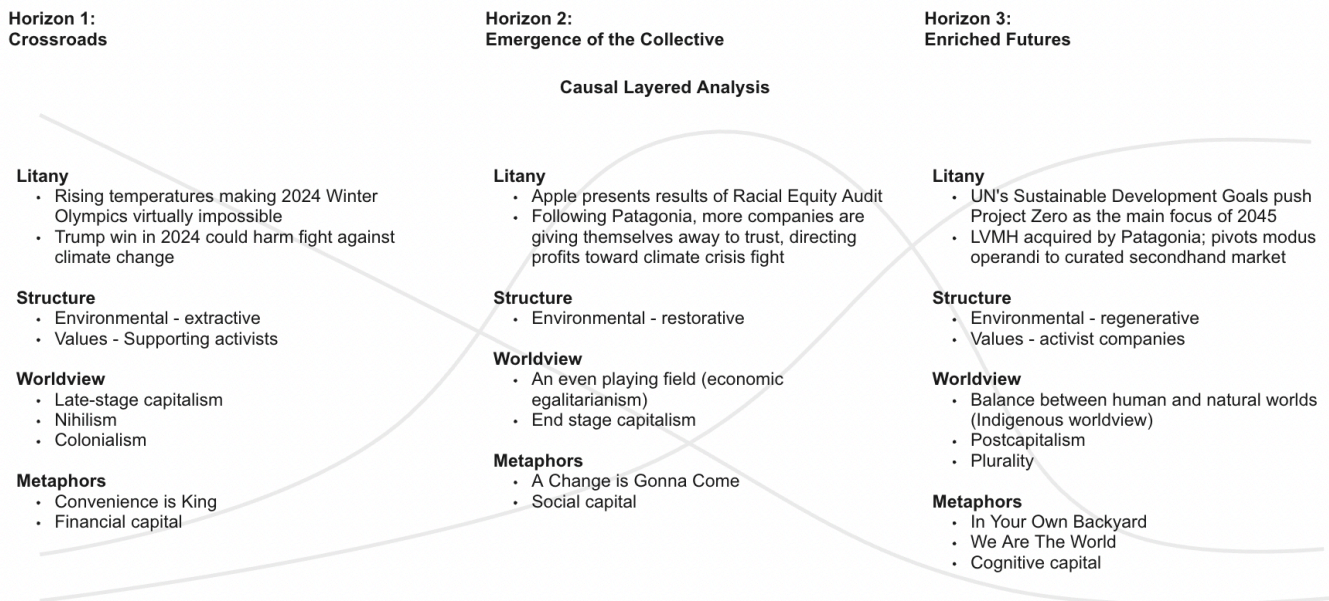


Figure 10

Horizon 1

Horizon 1's litany of rising temperatures presents a stark reality: the 2024 Winter Olympics face unprecedented challenges, with the very viability of the event hanging in the balance. The soaring temperatures and erratic weather patterns threaten to render traditional winter sports virtually impossible, casting a shadow over the future of the Games and igniting concerns among stakeholders worldwide. Simultaneously, the looming possibility of a Trump win in 2024 looms large, raising alarms within the global community about the potential ramifications for the fight against climate change. With the prospect of regressive policies and weakened environmental regulations, the momentum gained in addressing climate issues could face significant setbacks, exacerbating an already bleak circumstance.

Underlying structures and dynamics involve the environmental domain, reflecting an extractive approach where natural resources are exploited without regard for long-term sustainability. Concurrently, societal values are influenced by a culture of supporting activists as

grassroots movements and advocacy efforts gain traction in response to the urgency of the climate threat.

The prevailing worldview and ideologies of late-stage capitalism, nihilism, and colonialism shape perceptions and responses to the unfolding crisis. The pursuit of profit and convenience reigns supreme, driving short-sighted decisions and perpetuating a cycle of exploitation and environmental degradation. A sense of nihilism pervades consumers, and colonial legacies further compound the issue, as marginalized communities bear the brunt of environmental injustices and systemic inequities.

Metaphorically, “Convenience is King” in Horizon 1, symbolizes the prioritization of short-term gains over long-term sustainability. Financial capital serves as the primary currency of value, guiding decision-making and shaping societal priorities at the expense of ecological integrity and social justice.

Horizon 1 paints a sobering picture of the immediate challenges posed by climate change and political dynamics, highlighting the urgent need for proactive action and systemic change to address the root causes of the crisis.

Horizon 2

Horizon 2’s litany reflects a shift towards corporate accountability and social responsibility. Apple’s presentation of the results of a Racial Equity Audit signals a growing awareness and commitment to addressing systemic inequities within the corporate sector and signifies a departure from traditional profit-centric approaches a step towards greater inclusivity and social justice. Following Patagonia’s co-founders’ paramount decision to relinquish control and fully redirect profits towards addressing the climate crisis, businesses follow suit after and increasingly align their financial interests with broader social and environmental imperatives.

Horizon 2 is characterized by a restorative approach to the environment. Companies are recognizing the urgent need to mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change and are taking

proactive steps to restore ecological balance. This ethos of environmental stewardship reflects a departure from extractive practices towards a more holistic and regenerative approach to business.

Horizon 2 is bolstered by a worldview championing economic egalitarianism and the pursuit of an even playing field. This shift represents a rejection of the entrenched inequalities perpetuated by traditional capitalist systems and signals a desire for greater social cohesion and fairness. However, it also reflects an acknowledgment of the limitations and shortcomings of end-stage capitalism, prompting calls for alternative economic models that prioritize social and environmental well-being.

The sentiment of "A Change is Gonna Come" encapsulates the spirit of Horizon 2, evoking a sense of optimism and anticipation for transformative shifts in societal attitudes and behaviours, particularly concerning issues of racial equity and environmental sustainability. Social capital emerges as a key driver of change, highlighting the importance of collective action and collaboration in shaping a more equitable and responsible future.

Horizon 2 scenario paints a picture of emerging trends toward corporate accountability, environmental stewardship, and economic egalitarianism. While still in the early stages of development, these shifts hold the potential to catalyze broader systemic transformations.

Horizon 3

Horizon 3's litany offers a new era of sustainability and social responsibility. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emerge as the central focus of global efforts, with Project Zero leading the charge towards a regenerative and equitable future. This ambitious initiative signals a departure from business as usual and underscores the urgent need for systemic change to address pressing environmental and social challenges.

Meanwhile, the acquisition of LVMH by Patagonia marks a watershed moment in the corporate world. With Patagonia's ethos of environmental stewardship and social activism at its helm,

LVMH shifts its modus operandi towards a curated secondhand market and re-brands to meet the demands of a new consumer. This transformative move not only reflects a shift towards circular and responsible business models but also signals a broader reorientation of corporate values towards social and environmental impact.

Horizon 3 is characterized by a regenerative approach to the environment, where businesses prioritize the restoration and regeneration of natural ecosystems. This ethos of environmental regeneration embodies a commitment to nurturing the health and resilience of the planet. Values shift with activist companies emerging as key drivers of change, challenging the status quo and advocating for social and environmental justice.

New perspectives are prioritized, with growing recognition of the interdependence between human and natural systems, echoing Indigenous worldviews that emphasize harmony and balance with the natural world. This shift towards a more holistic perspective is coupled with a rejection of traditional capitalist paradigms in favour of post-capitalist alternatives that prioritize plurality and diversity.

"In Your Own Backyard" captures the essence of Horizon 3, emphasizing the importance of local action and community empowerment in driving global change. Similarly, "We Are The World" evokes a sense of collective responsibility and solidarity in addressing shared planetary challenges. Cognitive capital emerges as a valuable resource in this desired future, highlighting the importance of knowledge, creativity, and innovation in navigating complex and uncertain futures.

Horizon 3 scenario paints a bold vision of a future characterized by sustainability, social justice, and ecological regeneration.

4 The Odyssey Ahead

This body of research initially aimed to investigate the current corporate social responsibility system and identify gaps in its paradigm. Upon understanding and framing the system, this research delved into a foresight study on how businesses of today could work towards a socially responsible practice in order to meet the future planetary and social needs of their stakeholders.

After a deep exploration of corporate social responsibility as history, current system, and flourishing re-imagined future, one belief remains throughout: There is no time like the present. The choices we make today must serve a better future.

Businesses wield significant influence over societal and environmental outcomes in today's interconnected world. We've understood through system framing that big change requires big businesses' support and that industrial-scale harm needs to be reduced on an industrial scale. I hope that upon immersing ourselves in a richly imagined and desired future where businesses can continue to thrive within the planetary limits of the present, we strive to conduct business that is kind to our planet and community.

What is Next?

Though the initial research questions primed at the beginning of this project have been tested, explored, and answered, I believe the conversation for corporate social responsibility is only just beginning. Perhaps this research and analysis will be an inspiration to inspire strategic use-case scenarios for organizations seeking to shift their practices. Or, organizations can find themselves in the desired future and backcast their strategies to stay resilient in a changing world. However, my greatest wish is for the readers of this research to feel inspired, hopeful, and, most of all—insistent—that there is a better future on planet Earth for humans to conduct business.

One day—perhaps seven generations into the future—we will see the outcome of a better world due to the courageous decisions made today; ones that are in service to humanity on Earth.

4.1 Workbook for Change

To get your organization started, it is worthwhile to consider conducting a current state assessment of where you stand as a starting point with social responsibility. Here are two frameworks to consider:

1) Environment, Social – B Impact Assessment

The B Impact Assessment (BIA) serves as a comprehensive tool for businesses seeking to measure and improve their social and environmental performance. To take the B Impact Assessment effectively, follow these steps:

1. Start by reviewing the B Impact Assessment and its criteria, which cover various aspects of business operations, including governance, workers, community impact, and environmental practices. Understand the scoring system and benchmarks for achieving B Corp certification.
2. Collect relevant data and documentation related to your business operations, policies, and practices. This may include financial statements, employee handbooks, environmental impact reports, and community engagement initiatives.
3. Utilize the online platform provided by B Lab to complete the assessment. Answer questions honestly and thoroughly, providing evidence where required. Take your time to ensure accuracy and completeness.
4. After completing the assessment, review your scores and performance across different impact areas. Identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. Use the assessment as a diagnostic tool to understand how your business can better align with B Corp standards.

5. Develop Action Plan: Based on the assessment results, create an action plan to address gaps and enhance your social and environmental performance. Prioritize initiatives that will have the most significant impact on your business and stakeholders. See more details at www.bimpactassessment.net.

2) Social, Governance – Equal by 30

Equal by 30 is a Canadian campaign that works to accelerate gender equality and diversity and aims to close the gender gap by 2030. While the campaign is an initiative for the energy sector, organizations can use their non-sector-specific Self-Assessment tool to create a current state assessment of leadership, pay, employment, culture and management, culture, and workplace safety practices. See more details at www.equalby30.org.

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