

Being purposeful about linking our sustainability activities with the business value they generate is a critical, but often missed, step. To do so effectively we must know which aspects of business value we are aspiring to affect. Are we looking to engage new customers? Attract or retain talent? Cut our operating costs? Reduce risks in our supply chain? Each of these will involve different strategies, stakeholders, tools and approaches to truly drive value generation. In other words, if we can't answer these questions with precision, the likelihood of optimizing our efforts or achieving clear tangible value will be lucky at best and minimal at worst. **To be purposeful we need to 'start with the end in mind' and take specific steps to link our activities with activating the specific aspects of business value we are pursuing.**

For example, a manufacturer saw internal employee engagement as a business value they aspired to realize from their annual sustainability reporting efforts. To activate that value, they took a step back to ask what actions they could take to 'push' the information out to these key stakeholders. One strategy that they pursued was to develop a short brochure that summarized the highlights of the report and distribute it widely amongst employees. This raised awareness and helped them to realize the employee engagement they had aspired to see.

Speaking in language that resonates with your audience is always key and is no different in the context of business. However, we all too often get caught up speaking in our "own language" – materiality, CDP, SDGs, triple bottom line, SASB, Hotspotting, LCA, etc. – and fail to translate our activities into a language that our peers in other business functions understand or can see the value created. In our experience, going back to the principles of business (e.g. growing the top line or cutting the bottom line or revenue, brand, costs and risks) provide a great starting point for discussions. From there, exploring how our activities contribute value to specific strategic priorities or an individual's KPIs drives further understanding and engagement. Further, it is invaluable to consider the language that stakeholders use and value.

For instance, if an organization is metrics-driven, providing a qualitative description is likely to result in limited or no support. **To engage other parts of the business and individuals make sure that you are 'speaking their language' rather than expecting them to understand ours.** At Anthesis we have used the framework below – adapted from Esty and Winston – to translate our sustainability services into business value language.



Adapted From: Eitz, D & A. Winston "Green to Gold" 2006, pg. 902

Anthesis Business Value Framework; click to enlarge.

Finally, we should not underestimate the value that sustainability, when done well, can generate to a business. The tangible value realized spans everything, from Walmart saving nearly \$1B from fleet efficiency improvements^[1] to Johnson and Johnson's Earthwards products which represent more than \$8B in revenue generation for the company^[2]. Both are associated with substantial impact reductions as well, including a reduction of 650K MTCO_{2e} per year for Walmart and multiple material, packaging, and energy reductions for Johnson & Johnson. In both cases, the organizations embraced the power of business to drive positive, mutually beneficial (i.e. business and sustainability) results with clear benefit.

In conclusion, if we want to 'declare business on the environment' what do we need to do? First, we need to be purposeful about which aspects of business value we can affect and commit to carrying our efforts through to that realization. Second, we need to engage our colleagues, business tools, and power by translating our efforts into a language that resonates with them. And finally, we need to see business value not as something peripheral to our activities but rather as critical to achieving the scale and scope of reductions we are aspiring to.