Making materiality determinations in the …

The world's most advanced integrated measurement and reporting system

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Contents

Executive Summary

- The MultiCapital Scorecard™ (MCS) is the world's first and only multicapital- and context-based integrated measurement and reporting system
- Materiality in the MCS, like sustainability, is determined by reference to norms or standards for organizational impacts on vital capitals:
  - Materiality pertains only to impacts on vital capitals
  - An impact is material if it corresponds to a duty or obligation an organization has to manage its impacts on capitals in ways that can affect stakeholder well-being
- Materiality determinations follow a 2-step process:
  1. *Absolute Materiality* identifies impacts that must be included in measurement, management and reporting
  2. *Relative Materiality* then further qualifies the same impacts in terms of their priority, size, etc.

Multicapitalism: *The New Economics*

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“Value created by an organization over time manifests itself in increases, decreases or transformations of the capitals caused by the organization’s business activities and outputs.”

International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC), *<IR> Framework*, 2013

“Ultimately value is to be interpreted by reference to thresholds and parameters established through stakeholder engagement and evidence about the carrying capacity and limits of resources on which stakeholders and companies rely for well-being and profit, as well as evidence about societal expectations.”

IIRC Background Paper, *Value Creation*, 2013

See article *The Carrying Capacities of Capitals* for more information:
http://www.greenbiz.com/blog/2013/06/18/carrying-capacities-capitals

Materiality in the MCS

Materiality in the MCS

- **Basic materiality principles in the MCS**
  - Materiality is only about impacts on vital capitals vis a vis the role they play in support of stakeholder well-being
  - Organizations, in turn, have duties and obligations to manage their impacts on vital capitals so as to help ensure stakeholder well-being
  - An impact on vital capital, therefore, is material if it corresponds to a duty or obligation owed to stakeholders, whether the impact is already occurring or not
- **MCS Materiality determinations occur in 2 steps**
  1. *Absolute Materiality* determinations
  2. *Relative Materiality* determinations

Materiality in the MCS (cont.)

1. **Absolute Materiality**
   - Materiality in performance measurement and reporting is a binary question: a thing is either material or not
   - The “things” of interest in MCS are impacts on vital capitals
   - Absolute materiality determinations, therefore, are required to determine which impacts on vital capitals should be included versus excluded in a program or report
   - In MCS, if an impact on capital can be shown to correspond to a related duty or obligation owed to a stakeholder group, it is material in the absolute sense
2. **Relative Materiality**
   - All “Absolute” material impacts on vital capitals are not necessarily alike
   - In MCS, we differentiate between them, accordingly

Materiality in the MCS (cont.)

2. Relative Materiality (cont.)

- In the MCS, managers can relativize material impacts on capitals using standardized scales in three ways:
  - **Weight**: Managers can decide which impacts on vital capitals are most important and accord them more weight in performance measurement and reporting than others
  - **Progression**: All actual or current impacts are further qualified in terms of how they compare to sustainability norms or standards of performance
  - **Sizing**: The MCS allows users to adopt a mechanism for characterizing the scale of each impact so as to accurately reflect the impact's proportionate size relative to every other's; this is especially important in the case of consolidated reporting

Duties and Obligations

Duties and Obligations

- **Materiality in the MCS is grounded in the view that organizations have certain duties and obligations to manage their impacts on vital capitals so as to ensure stakeholder well-being**
  - Performance is all about impacts on vital capitals relative to what they would have to be in order to be sustainable (i.e., to be consistent with associated norms and standards)
- **It is up to each organization to (a) determine who its stakeholders are, and (b) identify duties and obligations it owes to them to manage its impacts on vital capitals, accordingly**
- **All such impacts should be expressed in terms of the carrying capacities of vital capitals**

Duties and Obligations (cont.)

Our use of the phrase "duties and obligations" is a very careful and intentional one and largely follows from the work of John Rawls and others as set forth in Rawls' book, *A Theory of Justice* (1971). Both duties and obligations involve responsibilities owed by one party to another, but otherwise differ in some important ways. Starting with duties, Rawls explains them as follows:

> *"…there are many duties, positive and negative…The following are examples of natural duties: the duty of helping another when he is in need or jeopardy, provided that one can do so without excessive risk or loss to oneself; the duty not to harm or injure another; and the duty not to cause unnecessary suffering. The first of these duties, the duty of mutual aid, is a positive duty in that it is a duty to do something good for another; whereas the last two duties are negative in that they require us not to do something that is bad…Now in contrast with obligations, it is characteristic of natural duties that they apply to us without regard to our voluntary acts."*

Duties and Obligations (cont.)

Turning next to obligations, Rawls explains them as follows:

> *"There are several characteristic features of obligations which distinguish them from other moral requirements [such as duties]. For one thing, they arise as a result of our voluntary acts; these acts may be the giving of express or tacit undertakings, such as promises and agreements, but they need not be, as in the case of accepting benefits. Further, the content of obligations is always defined by an institution or practice the rules of which specify what it is that one is required to do…As examples of institutions, or more generally social practices, we may think of games and rituals, trials and parliaments, markets and systems of property… And finally, obligations are normally owed to definite individuals, namely, those who are cooperating together to maintain the arrangement in question."*

It is the moral force of duties and obligations, then, for what an organization's impacts on vital capitals must be that forms the basis of the MCS approach to making materiality determinations.

MCS Materiality Template with Examples

MCS Materiality Template with Examples

	Absolute Materiality					Relative Materiality		
	Areas of Impact (AOI)	Corresponding D/Os Exist[1]	Associated Stakeholder Groups	Impacts are De Minimis (Y/N)[2]	Impacts are Material (Y/N)	Weight	Progression	Sizing
Social	Product Safety	Yes	Consumers	N/A	Yes	OS[3]	OS[3]	OS[3]
	Charitable Giving	No	N/A	N/A	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Economic	Owners' Equity	Yes	Owners	N/A	Yes	OS[3]	OS[3]	OS[3]
	Provision of Employment	No	N/A	N/A	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Environ.	Water Use at Plant A	Yes	Local Community	No	Yes	OS[3]	OS[3]	OS[3]
	Water Use at Plant B	Yes	Local Community	Yes	No	N/A	N/A	N/A

1. This column asks whether or not corresponding duties or obligations (D/Os) exist for each AOI, by which norms for impacts on vital capitals are defined at levels required to maintain the capitals and ensure stakeholder well-being.
2. Applies only to impacts on Natural Capitals, which unlike other capitals exist only in limited supplies.
3. Organization-specific (OS) assignments of values for these variables are made using standardized MCS scales.

Annotations of Examples

- **Product Safety**
  - *Duties & Obligations*: All companies have a duty or obligation to ensure that the products or services they provide are safe when used
  - *Impacts are De Minimis*: This consideration only applies to impacts on Natural Capitals and is therefore not applicable to this particular area of impact
  - *Impacts are Material*: Yes, because the impact corresponds to a duty or obligation owed by the organization to a stakeholder group to manage its impacts on vital capitals in a particular way
- **Charitable Giving**
  - *Duties and Obligations*: All such giving is discretionary and therefore immaterial to performance reporting

Annotations of Examples (cont.)

- **Owners' Equity**
  - *Duties & Obligations*: All companies have a duty or obligation to preserve and/or grow their owners' equity
  - *Impacts are De Minimis*: This consideration only applies to impacts on Natural Capitals and is therefore not applicable to this particular area of impact
  - *Impacts are Material*: Yes, because the impact corresponds to a duty or obligation owed by the organization to a stakeholder group to manage its impacts on vital capitals in a particular way
- **Provision of Employment**
  - *Duties and Obligations*: Organizations are under no obligation to employ anyone and the employment they provide, therefore, is immaterial to performance reporting

Annotations of Examples (cont.)

- **Water Use at Plant A**
  - *Duties & Obligations*: All companies have a duty or obligation to constrain their use of water resources to fair and proportionate levels so as not to deprive others of their own fair and proportionate shares
  - *Impacts are De Minimis*: In the example we give, we assume actual impacts on water use at Plant A are not de minimis; this criterion applies in this case because water use constitutes an impact on Natural Capital
  - *Impacts are Material*: Yes, because the impact corresponds to a duty or obligation owed by the organization to a stakeholder group to manage its impacts on vital capitals in a particular way, and the impacts already taking place are not de minimis

Annotations of Examples (cont.)

- **Water Use at Plant B**
  - *Duties & Obligations*: All companies have a duty or obligation to constrain their use of water resources to fair and proportionate levels so as not to deprive others of their own fair and proportionate shares
  - *Impacts are De Minimis*: In the example we give, we assume actual impacts on water use at Plant B are, in fact, de minimis; this criterion applies in this case because water use constitutes an impact on Natural Capital
  - *Impacts are Material*: No, because even though the impact corresponds to a duty or obligation owed by the organization to a stakeholder group to manage its impacts on vital capitals in a particular way, the impacts involved are de minimis

How We Define De Minimis

- **An impact that is otherwise material in the Absolute sense can be treated as immaterial if the impacts involved are de minimis**
- **We define de minimis in terms of an impact's effects on the carrying capacity of a vital Natural Capital, if and when generalized**
  - First we determine what the extent of the impact is
  - Then we generalize it to a contextually relevant population as if everyone involved were having the same impact
  - Then we compare the generalized impact to the carrying capacity of the capital involved (e.g., to the volume of renewable water in a watershed)
  - If the generalized impact is extremely low (e.g., <5%), the organization's own impact is considered de minimis

Appendix:

Definitions of Vital Capitals

Vital Capitals

Human	*Internal Economic* *Financial & Non-Financial*	*Natural* *Natural Resources & Ecosystem Services*
Social & Relationship	*External Economic* *Financial & Non-Financial*	
Constructed		
Social Bottom Line	**Economic Bottom Line**	**Environmental Bottom Line**

Vital Capitals and the Triple Bottom Line

(see capital definitions on the slides that follow)

Definitions of Vital Capitals

Natural Capital

- Natural Resources

Consists of air, land, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ecosystems and other natural material resources that humans and non-humans alike rely on for their well-being.

- Ecosystem Services

Consists of services or functions provided by ecosystems that humans and non-humans alike rely on for their well-being. Examples include climate regulation.

Human Capital

Consists of knowledge, skills, experience, health, values, attitudes, motivation and ethical entitlements of individuals. This therefore includes the intellectual capital held at the level of the individual.

Definitions of Vital Capitals (cont.)

Social & Relationship

Consists of teams, networks and groups of individuals working together. It includes their shared knowledge, skills, experience, health, values, attitudes, motivation and ethical entitlements. This therefore includes the shared intellectual capital of the group. Groups may be wholly internal to an organization, external to an organization, or inter-organizational, and may or may not be controlled by the organization of interest. They may be physical groups, virtual groups or blends of both.

Constructed Capital

Consists of material objects, systems or ecosystems created and/or cultivated by humans, including the functions they perform. It is the world of human artifacts and the functions or services they provide, in which other capitals will usually be embedded, although in modified or designed forms. It is the world of human design.

Definitions of Vital Capitals (cont.)

Internal Economic Capital

- Financial

Consists of the pool of funds available to an organization, including debt and equity finance. This description of financial capital focuses on the source of funding (liabilities on the balance sheet) rather than its application, which usually results in the acquisition of assets such as land, buildings, plant and inventories or other forms of capital (e.g., intellectual property).

- Non-Financial

Consists of net assets not recognized in internal financial capital. This category captures assets pertaining to an organization that are not recognized as financial capital. They may or may not also be monetized and reflected in the *Financial* category. An example is the value of brands that have been developed organically internally, but not recognized in the financial accounts.

Definitions of Vital Capitals (cont.)

External Economic Capital

- Financial

Consists of all financial funds available to all parties outside an organization. MCS takes account of the impact an organization has (or should have) on the financial capital of entities other than the reporting entity itself. For example, an investment in a factory, outlet or warehouse may reduce the financial value of other owners' properties in the vicinity. Impacts, too, may impose costs on society, such as the healthcare or municipal costs of dealing with an adverse impact on the environment.

- Non-Financial

Consists of external non-financial capitals and the externalities that generally escape the financial accounting system (e.g., impacts on natural resources, ecosystem services, socio-economic systems, etc.). Some such impacts may also be monetized and reflected in the *External Economic Financial* category. However, simply accounting for the monetary value of impacts is seldom sufficient to effectively maintain the resource or its carrying capacity intact; there usually needs to be a social or biophysical obligation that goes alongside a monetized financial impact even if it is satisfactorily treated as a cost. Indeed, in indigenous societies, vital economic capitals are often not monetized at all. Nevertheless, MCS may still recognize them as either economic or non-economic capitals, whichever makes more sense to the organization in its own context. The choice of categorization is, in our view, secondary to the capture of impacts on vital capitals and their proper treatment under the principles of MCS.

Contact Information

For more information about the MultiCapital Scorecard™, including opportunities to pilot the method in your own organization, feel free to contact us at the following coordinates:

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Click here for an *Overview of the MCS*
Click here for a *Prospectus on Piloting the MCS*

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