



18 July 2025

Why your Social Value starts with strategy, not spreadsheets

We've got it backwards. Across boardrooms and strategy sessions, the conversation follows a predictable pattern: "How do we measure our social impact?" But this question reveals a fundamental misunderstanding about how genuine social value gets created. The measurement should follow the commitment, not the other way around.

Too many organisations treat social value like a software update—something to bolt onto existing operations rather than rebuild from the ground up. They skip the foundational work of connecting purpose to strategy and strategy to impact, then wonder why their measurement frameworks feel hollow. In my experience, here's generally what happens: Leadership decides they need better social impact metrics. A committee forms. Consultants arrive with frameworks. Spreadsheets multiply. Yet the organisation remains fundamentally unchanged, measuring what's easy rather than what's meaningful.

Missing the greater opportunity

While social procurement is genuinely valuable, treating it as the primary social value strategy misses the greater opportunity. True social value creation happens when every aspect of your organisation's ecosystem aligns with community needs. Your workplace practices, partnership choices, operational decisions, and strategic direction all become vehicles for meaningful change. Social procurement becomes one powerful tool among many, rather than the sole answer to complex social challenges.

Strategy First, metrics second

When you genuinely embed social value into your strategic DNA, something shifts. Instead of retrofitting measurements onto existing activities, you design activities that naturally generate meaningful impact. The right metrics emerge because they're measuring work that matters.

This means starting with harder questions: What change does our community and other key stakeholders actually need? How can our core business operations contribute to that change? What would success look like for the people we aim to serve, not just our shareholders?

The Strategic Foundation

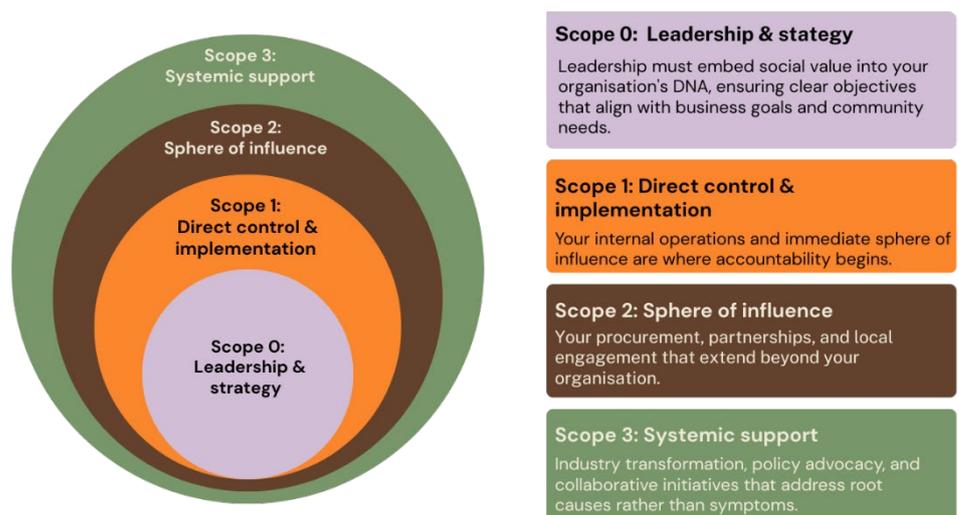
Building on the work recently published by the Centre for Social Impact, 'The State of 'S' reporting in ESG' I am proposing before you can meaningfully measure Scope 2 and 3 impacts, you need what we call Scope 0: the strategic foundation where social value objectives align with business goals and community needs. This isn't about corporate social responsibility programs. It's about organisations whose very existence advances social value.

The organisations creating genuine social value aren't the ones with the most sophisticated measurement frameworks. They're the ones brave enough to let community needs shape their strategy from the start. They understand that measurement is a tool for amplification, not justification. When your strategy genuinely serves social value, measuring impact becomes about understanding how to do more of what works, not proving you're doing something.

The question isn't whether your organisation can create social value. The question is whether you're ready to align your entire ecosystem—strategy, operations, partnerships—to make that value meaningful and lasting.

Because when strategy comes first, the measurements that matter will follow.

Image 1: Social Value ecosystem



Vanessa is the co-founder of PATHMAKER, is a social enterprise that provides strategic consulting to guide organisations to connect purpose to strategy and strategy to impact. Every framework we design starts with the strategic foundation that makes meaningful measurement possible.

www.pathmaker.au

Original article published here:

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/from-measurement-meaning-aligning-your-social-value-ecosystem-qzagc/?trackingId=TssUfEPS1%2BdE1bdb018iTg%3D%3D>

