

True value creation starts with leadership and vision

Jacobs' *Emily King, global principal of social value & equity advisory*, explains how driving social value using four proven lessons can earn triple-bottom-line benefits.

With stagnant economies and bleak forecasts, 2023 is a year scarred with scepticism and tighter budgets. As we face inflation shifts, tightening regulations and geopolitical impacts, the pressure on delivering and evidencing the value you offer your clients and end users has ramped up. Add in the increasing impact of climate change and it creates a complex operating environment. The challenge is that value must now be defined (and proven) in social and environmental terms – not just financial. The good news: improving financial results and delivering social value are not mutually exclusive. There is increasing demand and opportunities for social value from government policy, impact investment, and broader trends of employee expectations, environmental awareness, and increased understanding of inequality.

Articulating a clear approach to social value is more likely to attract talent and investment, drive a more resilient business, and leave a lasting community legacy.

According to Social Enterprise UK, levels of awareness and adoption of the idea of social value have increased over the past decade, with

increasing importance in central and local government guidance. In 2016, Social Enterprise UK reported 24% of councils had a social value policy; by 2019, this had increased to 45%.

Social value is a growing field punctuated with different definitions, standards and approaches. Within most companies, there are pockets of maturity on social value, but with a lack of a clear vision and collaboration, there are varying approaches to government policies and teams going in different directions. At best, you're duplicating effort; at worst, you're missing vital opportunities.

Companies must also be wary of creating noble social goals without backing them up with discernible, authentic action. Delivering social value that benefits people, communities, the environment and the business requires a strategic approach connecting every employee on social value and harnessing four key lessons.

Success starts with empowered leadership and an overarching vision

Top management must define bold, measurable goals that are clearly aligned to your broader strategy, tied to material ESG issues, and tailored to your organisation's unique offering, industry and context. These must be effectively cascaded throughout all projects, programs and procedures and embedded into your organisation's DNA.

The more successful you are at clearly articulating, measuring and evidencing social value, the greater your impact on

people and communities. It's a partnership built on trust and shared understanding. At the start, you may not have a clear idea of what you need and want; involve the right people from the start to create, test and deploy the best approach.

Partner up to strengthen your approach

Social value is a fast-evolving field, and its successful delivery requires a wide range of specialisms in unique areas.

Simetrica-Jacobs offers access to the best minds in social value, impact evaluation, and wellbeing analysis. As the global leaders in social value, they deploy unparalleled expertise to give clients the confidence they are making the right decision, the first time. Simetrica-Jacobs has contributed to internationally endorsed methods set out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and government-produced guidelines, including HM Treasury's Green Book.

Collaboration between businesses, governments and civil society is also critical to long-term growth and success. To help gain momentum here, we've helped launch the Social Value 2023 Roadmap with Social Enterprise UK (SEUK), which will help ensure that social value remains a priority in value-led procurement for the next decade.

Technology is only as good as the prompt

Artificial Intelligence has proven this year that even though it wields incredible iterative potential, the quality of the output is still defined by human prompts and the fit for purpose. The same can be said for the fast-growing technologies within social value. While off-the-shelf



HS2 Ltd has awarded £13,445,843 to 236 community projects since 2017, including Brackley Town FC

technology can be hugely informative, it must be tempered with research, testing and tailored approaches. These three domains are still best served by humans, as they help to define the how, when, and, crucially, the why that's paramount to making the digital tools work effectively and not become an expensive investment that's hard to justify.

Attract the next generation of leaders

Younger generations are actively choosing occupations that most closely align with their values. A global study in 2022 of over 17,000 employees by Ernst & Young found that Gen Z and millennials are the most likely to leave their roles in the short term.

Attracting and retaining this talent starts with an inclusive organisational culture, flexible working, and a human-centred, empathetic employee experience. However, the real crux requires ensuring younger generations feel directly connected with a broader purpose, which goes far beyond corporate social responsibility. Research shows that younger employees expect your business to stand for something meaningful today and have a clearly defined vision to create social value in the future. If we create and reinforce a culture that rewards the right behaviours – putting people at the centre of decision-making – it will generate better business outcomes.

The power of people-centred decision-making

Harnessing the right specialists, partnerships and industry collaborations empowers Jacobs in several ways, but the most important is that we can help our clients define and measure what matters most – the positive value their work can bring to communities and society. If this strategy is done correctly, it also improves business outcomes, offering true triple-bottom-line benefits.



Emily King is global principal of social value & equity advisory at Jacobs.