How can you check your business is on the right track to social and environmental sustainability

A case study of Zest café

Kenneth Worden and Karis Lonie

Kenneth Worden is a fourth-year undergraduate student at the University of St Andrews studying Sustainable Development and International Relations. He is most interested in exploring policy and its influence on sustainable development and world politics. He enjoys analysis and seeks to continue to develop these skills from a conflict and environmental perspective.

Karis Lonie is a fourth-year undergraduate student at the University of St Andrews studying Geography and Sustainable Development. She is interested in researching climate change mitigation opportunities and sustainable futures. She aims to focus on nature-based solutions for climate change, specifically reforestation.

Received date 12 April 2023; Acceptance date 5 October 2023; Publication date: 30 November 2023

Abstract
Assessing the sustainability of independent cafés can be challenging as there is currently no effective framework for doing so. Having been tasked with assessing the sustainability of Zest, a specialty café in St Andrews, Scotland, that focuses on providing opportunities for people with barriers to employment to develop personally and professionally, we designed a self-audit.

DOI:10.13169/jfairtrade.4.2.00051
to determine the sustainability of the cafés business practices and provide future suggestions. The audit was inspired by Lean, an anti-waste business philosophy and the B-Corp impact assessment. By using this audit, we were able to analyze Zest’s business practices and provide suggestions regarding where it needs improvement. The following article will explore our development of the audit, how we used it and what we found.

**Keywords:** Zest¹; Lean²; B-Corp impact assessment³; key stakeholders⁴; governance⁵; community⁶; sustainability⁷; economic sustainability⁸; environmental sustainability⁹; social sustainability¹⁰

**Introduction**

While studying at the University of St Andrews, both authors took part in a supportive training and development programme made up of four workshops that focused on communicating important skills and knowledge that are valuable for employability. The workshops covered self-motivation, leadership,

---

¹ A specialty café in St Andrews, Scotland, that focuses on providing opportunities for people with barriers to employment to develop personally and professionally. We designed a self-audit to determine the sustainability of the cafés business practices and provide future suggestions.
² An anti-waste business philosophy that identifies eight main ways that businesses can eliminate waste from their practices.
³ A questionnaire that uses a scoring mechanism to analyze the sustainability of businesses globally.
⁴ Stakeholders are typically wide-ranging and include local businesses, governments, the local population, staff members and their families.
⁵ For the purpose of this report and small businesses, Governance is focused on the expectations that management set out for the business and where these expectations can be found and come from.
⁶ People in a particular interest group, physical area or place that are considered collectively.
⁷ The ability to maintain or support a process continuously over time at a level that avoids causing harm (Investopedia, 2023), for example, in this case Zest, can avoid causing environmental harm through reducing avoidable waste and choosing products with environmental certifications. Sustainability can be divided into three core concepts: economic, environmental and social.
⁸ Economic sustainability or financial sustainability involves conserving natural and financial resources to ensure long-term financial success (Indeed, 2022).
⁹ Action to conserve natural resources and protect various global ecosystems to support health and wellbeing, now and in the future (Sphera, 2020).
¹⁰ Ensuring that communities and societies thrive and continue to exist in a healthy, fair and equal way (Diversity for Social Impact, 2022).
mindset, professionalism, communication, teamwork, creative problem solving and technology. Following the completion of the programme, students were offered an opportunity to take part in a week-long internship. Students were matched with an appropriate internship, in this case both authors were connected with Lisa Cathro, the owner and manager of Zest, for a sustainable development-based internship. This article captures the process and methodology of designing a self-audit to determine the sustainability of Zest’s business practices and analyzes the findings of how the business performed to provide future suggestions. The self-audit is a valuable assessment tool designed for small businesses.

**Methodology**

We obtained a basis for how to create and structure our report through an initial meeting with Lisa Cathro. In this meeting we discussed Zest equipment, products and procedures in relation to the social and environmental sustainability of Zest. We also explored both resources supplied by Lisa and external resources to gain an understanding of how best to design and create a self-audit for small businesses, in this case with a focus on cafés. Additionally, we completed various empathy mapping exercises in order for us to further explore different types of cafés, their qualities, priorities, best practices and the various barriers to developing sustainably. An empathy map is a visual tool that is used to map out a particular topic, in this case types of cafés, to dissect what influences them such as surroundings and customers (Atlassian, 2023). This helped us to design a self-audit for social and environmental sustainability that was suitable for all cafés, regardless of their current social or environmental position. The self-audit can be used by various different types of cafés and is suitable regardless of their focus. Since the writing of the report for Zest, its suggestions have begun to be implemented.

More specifically, to assess the sustainability of Zest and other small businesses we designed the self-audit based on research influenced by Lean methodology (https://www.gray.com/insights/lean-and-sustainability-where-the-two-intersect/) and by analyzing the B-Corp impact assessment (https://www.bcorporation.net/en-us/programs-and-tools/b-impact-assessment). Lean methodology is an approach to business that focuses on reducing all forms of
waste. Lean focuses on eight different forms of waste: defects, waiting, transportation, motion, overproduction, non-utilized talent, inventory and extra-processing. Lean’s focus on these different forms of waste allowed us to develop questions that are applicable to running a small business. These questions would help business owners and management identify any possible waste in the eight categories of Lean. Using this in combination with the B-Corp assessment and its division of questions into governance, workers, environment and community allowed us to develop a questionnaire that covered social and environmental sustainability. This framework was something that we felt was crucial to employ as it ensured that our assessment fell within the frameworks of sustainable development. Using this questionnaire and the ample material provided to us, including but not limited to contracts, staff handbooks, lists of training provided to staff, information regarding equipment and staff members, we were able to analyze the social and environmental sustainability of Zest, where it prospers and where it has room for improvement.

The Self-Audit Tool
A self-audit is a tool implemented to complete a systematic review for the purpose of examining and evaluating the operations and practices of a business. A self-audit tool effectively outlines the performance, structure and quality of management within a business (Process Street, 2023). Self-auditing is also useful for identifying and prioritizing areas of a business that need improvement, depending on specific and agreed goals or standards (Process Street, 2023). A self-audit is an excellent tool for inspiring continuous improvement and innovation (Process Street, 2023). If utilized effectively, the output of a self-audit tool can provide a framework for clearly outlined strengths, weaknesses, risks and areas that require improvement (Process Street, 2023).

The self-audit tool created for Zest takes the form of a questionnaire, which can be found in the appendix. The questionnaire is comprised of written multiple-choice questions, with the exception of two ‘yes’ or ‘no’ questions and three questions containing percentage answers. Most questions are designed to offer an ‘other’ option for businesses to define their sustainability efforts if
they are not included in the multiple-choice options. The self-audit was devised to have this format in order for other business owners/managers to use the tool themselves and apply it to their business’s practices. For Zest specifically, the self-audit tool assessed and highlighted areas in which the café could improve its social and environmental sustainability. From analysis of the self-audit tool outputs, a proposed action plan was created to provide suggestions for how Zest can further its development as a sustainable café. The self-audit tool and action plan were influenced and inspired by the B-Corp assessment and Lean methodology approach as mentioned in the methodology section. To produce the action plan itself, the self-audit tool outputs were analyzed to create an understanding of Zest’s structure and approach to highlight the most important factors for the sustainable development of the café and consequently, what was therefore chosen to be included in the action plan.

**Zest Findings: A Case Study**

The following section provides the results of our audit of Zest’s sustainability. It will first explore the governance and workers components of our assessment, followed by the environmental and community elements. To provide clear, concise and helpful results within each component we will list what Zest is doing well, followed by what could be improved upon.

**Zest’s Positive Social Elements**

In order to effectively analyze the relationship between customers, workers and management at Zest, they will be analyzed together, highlighting their interrelation, as governance influences the workers in addition to the business. Zest’s strongest point comes in the form of its social sustainability. Zest has made clear its social ambitions and focus on people above profit. This is inherently socially sustainable as it ensures that staff and workers are well taken care of and encourages continued loyalty to the business. It does, however, evidently have some financial drawbacks. The business is also clearly involved in various initiatives offered by local stakeholders relating to these social ambitions, including involvement with the NHS. This relationship helps maintain Zest’s social goals and ensures support for their initiatives from local governments. Furthermore, from speaking with Lisa we gathered that Zest’s
presence online and in the local community is well-defined, they make clear
their social ambitions, lead discussions about changes that may be necessary
and continue to ensure their voice is heard in online and local forums. This
provides Zest with the ability to continue to develop and encourage the
sustained use of environmentally friendly business practices.

With regards to its workers, while we did not interview or discuss directly
with any employees, we were able to understand that in accordance with their
clear mission and vision statements that focus on staff development, Zest’s
employees are offered accessible opportunities for personal and professional
development via various leadership training courses. These courses include:
food hygiene, health and safety, emergency and mental health first-aid,
allergen certification and barista skills courses. In addition to this, to ensure
continuous support and strong relationships between employees Zest also
offers courses focused on inclusive communication, customer service, autism
awareness, coaching skills and leadership courses. Furthermore, as the
business is built around social sustainability Zest is in an excellent position to
continue to develop sustainably. Lastly, from Zest’s clear mission and vision
statements, clear contracts, staff handbooks and accessible training, the café
eliminates a variety of waste possibilities by defining its expectations in an
accessible manner and training staff effectively. By doing so Zest management
avoids extra-processing, non-utilized talent and waiting amongst its customers
and staff who constantly seek to improve.

Zest has an excellent base for sustainability. The café’s social ambitions are
incredibly thought out and clear and provide the café with an excellent
framework for a new environmental focus. The clarity of these ambitions both
online and directly to Zest’s staff is crucial for continued sustainable
development and should be maintained when introducing potential
environmental ambitions.

While Zest has incredible social ambitions, the environmental perspective
while still there is not as present as it could be. By analyzing the governance
and workers elements of Zest we discovered various things that could be
improved. First, Zest lacks a clear environmental ambition. While there are
certain initiatives in place, there is no concrete ambition. Clarifying the
environmental ambitions of Zest in the mission and vision statements and to
staff would help set a framework for future environmental initiatives and could help contribute to continued Sustainable Development at Zest. Second, while staff are extensively trained, the training lacks a focus on environmental sustainability. Introducing sustainability training could lead to waste reduction and even stronger environmental practices at Zest. Third, Zest is clearly involved in various social initiatives and plays a major role in local small business initiatives. Zest, however, fails to take advantage of this position to promote environmental change or simply a discussion surrounding environmental change and sustainability. Using this position as a well-respected social enterprise to push for environmental change could further improve Zest’s already stellar reputation and effectively contribute to sustainable development within the local community. Finally, Zest should take advantage of sustainable development initiatives offered by local organizations at both management and staff levels. Zest should continue to develop collaborative practices with other local businesses, which can help build a relationship that can develop into further collaboration and communication regarding social, environmental and governance ambitions.

Zest’s Positive Environmental Approach
The following section will highlight the positive procedures that Zest takes to become environmentally sustainable.

Zest effectively uses environmentally preferred materials such as recycled paper bags and Vegware. Vegware is award-winning, plant-based, compostable foodservice packaging. ([The company’s green credentials can be found at https://www.vegware.com/uk-en/page/our-materials/#materials-plants](https://www.vegware.com/uk-en/page/our-materials/#materials-plants)) More importantly, Zest realizes the importance of tracking the transparency and process of recycling or composting goods after they are disposed of. For example, through discussion with the owner of Zest and analysis of the audit questions, results show that the business does not only use Vegware but also checks how it is processed to ensure the correct measures are taking place to guarantee waste is effectively composted. Similarly, Zest has researched the recycling company that the business uses and has discovered that they have an impressively high rate of recycling, at 98 per cent. Additionally, Zest conducts frequent staff training on appropriate bin disposal, for example, general waste
versus recycling, which is highly advantageous for integrating sustainable practices into the business.

Zest is a specialty coffee café and demonstrates great knowledge and detail about the coffee that their business sells. Zest also effectively combines environmentally friendly methods to make the sale of their coffee more sustainable. For example, coffee is sourced through direct trade models. Direct trade is a type of sourcing that involves building direct relationships with the producers and processors who sell the products which the company purchases. Roasters also use ethical green coffee merchants, for example, DRWakefield and Mercanta. (DRWakefield’s green credentials can be found at https://drwakefield.com/about/our-accreditations; information about Mercanta can be found at https://coffeehunter.com/about-us/) Zest does not require specific certifications from coffee suppliers. However, Zest does hold expectations that suppliers must be transparent about their supply chain, have a good reputation, meet food hygiene standards and are a certified premises, especially for small producers. For larger producers and suppliers such as Brakes, Zest makes sure to check that there is a Modern Slavery Policy present and review their sustainability practices.

Additionally, the business also uses effective sustainable practices such as using china crockery or glassware for sit-in, selling multiple-use Huskee cups made from coffee waste (https://uk.huskee.co/partnerships/#awards), selling vegan options and dairy-free alternatives, using insulated coffee machine boilers and machine eco modes. Zest’s specialty coffee also provides more sustainable options through its quality and specialty coffee staff training. Through discussion with the owner of Zest, it was discovered that better quality specialty coffee aided the business in saving up to £600 on Fairtrade sugar expenses. Zest has trained staff to encourage customers to try coffee before adding sugar. This often leads to them being pleasantly surprised by the taste and quality leading to no extra sugar being used which is beneficial to the environment and reduces the company’s expenses.

It should also be highlighted that Zest uses practical energy-conserving methods to reduce its environmental impact. For example, Zest has a self-cleaning oven that is 30 per cent more efficient than regular ovens and uses LED lights throughout the facility. The self-cleaning oven conserves energy and
How can you check your business is on the right track to social and environmental sustainability
Kenneth Worden and Karis Lonie

reduces its impact on the environment through staff being able to mix loads, running for a shorter period of time and reducing water usage. The company, Rational, also makes it easy for buyers to access and purchase replacement parts and recycles equipment when it reaches the end of its lifecycle. (Rational’s green credentials can be found at https://www.rational-online.com/en_xx/company/about-us/sustainability/) Overall, Zest shows a positive and promising commitment to reducing its impact on the environment and increasing its use of sustainable products and processes.

Zest’s Excellent Social Sustainability and Community-Based Approach

The following section will highlight the positive and sustainable aspects that Zest has within the business in terms of staffing and Zest’s impact on the surrounding community.

Zest has an exemplary commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion within the business. Zest has an impressively high percentage (75 per cent) of staff from historically underrepresented groups including women, people with disabilities and people in the LGBTQ+ community. Zest effectively communicates its commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion through social media, in the press and through the radio. Zest offers excellent support to staff on these topics such as inclusive and clear language and handbooks, staff training on diversity, equity and inclusion to all employees and frequent discussion with staff to obtain and work with feedback. In terms of pay, staff at Zest are paid above the minimum wage but do not receive a Real Living Wage unless they are management staff. However, Zest makes sure to pay for staff breaks, allow flexible breaks if required, provide lunch for a value up to £6.50 and a 20 per cent discount on food, drink and retail products.

Additionally, from analysis of the audit Zest shows a very positive result for local staff. Most staff live locally, many of which walk, use public transport or car share which is highly advantageous in reducing the company’s carbon footprint (unfortunately, Zest does not have a current calculation of their carbon footprint). It is also recognized that Zest has good engagement with other businesses, which helps promote social development across businesses in St Andrews. For example, Zest has worked collaboratively with a neighbouring
small restaurant, Combini Co, using thoughtful leadership, signposting and providing free advice which has a clear positive social impact. The signposting, in particular, has a huge positive social impact through helping disabled people find services that they did not know about previously, helping parents find resources for their child’s education or employment and for finding social support.

Furthermore, Zest effectively promotes good practice towards dealing with social and environmental issues through community groups, forums and social media. For example, Lisa Cathro, the owner and manager of Zest, is a Trustee at the Community Hub and also commits herself to talks and presentations to raise awareness and teach other employers about how to create a supportive work environment. Lisa has also been involved in a talk for Inspire Scotland on supporting autistic staff in the Highlands and featured on BBC Radio. Overall, Zest has an outstanding commitment to employing and educating staff and customers on the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion and has a clear positive contribution to the community and social sustainability.

**Areas Where Zest Could Improve Their Environmental Approach**

The following section will highlight the areas where Zest can improve to increase its sustainability and reduce its impact on the environment.

Although Zest uses free-range eggs and Fairtrade sugar there is much room for improvement in this category. From analysis of the audit, the results show that Zest does not source environmentally certified fruit and vegetables, meat products or bread products. Additionally, the environmentally certified products that are used by the business are sourced infrequently. Zest also lacks in seasonal produce, only using seasonal products in soup. However, this is due to the set menu which is fixed so that it is easier for people with learning difficulties to familiarize themselves with. Regarding monitoring and recording waste, Zest requires considerable improvement. Despite Zest’s knowledge of the transparency of recycling and compost waste, Zest should improve on monitoring and recording the volume of waste produced to make waste reduction targets and measure their progress. Zest does communicate
environmental ambitions and targets to staff, however, there is a lack of formal policy and assessment. The business should invest in adopting a simplified version of an environment management system (EMS) to effectively assess and report waste regeneration, energy usage and carbon emissions. This can be achieved by implementing SMART goals that can be easily measured and achieved by smaller budget local cafés. Overall, although Zest does use sustainable products and encourages sustainable procedures, Zest can improve by investing in formal policies and monitoring systems to assess its environmental impact more accurately.

**Areas Where Zest Could Improve Their Community-Based Approach**

The following section will highlight the areas where Zest can improve upon regarding its sustainability within the business in terms of staffing and Zest’s impact on the surrounding community.

Although Zest demonstrates an impressive level of diversity, equity and inclusion within the business there is room for improvement in carrying this out into the community. This can be achieved through sourcing suppliers with ownership diversity. Zest does source from two companies called Bagel Lady and Cake Co, which are suppliers led by women, an underrepresented group. However, through analysis of the audit questions, Zest fell into the boundary of 1–9 per cent of products coming from suppliers owned by women or individuals in another historically underrepresented group. Therefore, Zest could improve its social sustainability by increasing the number of products it sources from minority or underrepresented groups. Zest can further improve by sourcing from a greater number of local suppliers. Currently the business reports that approximately 50 per cent of expenses are spent on local suppliers such as Penman Butcher and Barnetts Baker. Zest should aim to create a new target for increasing the use of local suppliers. This would be beneficial for the community and the environment through reduced transport emissions. Overall, Zest can improve its contribution to the community and social sustainability through sourcing more local suppliers and suppliers with ownership diversity.
Balancing Zest’s Social and Environmental Sustainability with Financial Sustainability

One of the biggest considerations when running a small business/café is its financial sustainability. While this was not at the base of our investigation as a lot of the focus was on Zest’s social and environmental sustainability, it is important to consider the financial impacts of running a socially based enterprise such as Zest.

One of our biggest findings was the strong relationship that Zest has with its employees, particularly with regard to the support they receive. Employees are paid above minimum wage but not the full £10.90 Real Living Wage per hour unless they are management as mentioned previously. However, workers receive benefits, mentioned in the social sustainability section, and in addition receive counselling if required as well as personal training sessions. For example, one employee received training sessions to help with knee issues. Zest’s financial resiliency, however, remains a struggle, much like many small businesses during the post-Covid era. For one thing, the cost of operating in St Andrews specifically has been immense. Lisa described during follow-up conversations on our study that Zest’s rateable value has increased by 28 per cent over the national average, increasing costs significantly. She also described that to be financially secure, Zest would have to charge £5 per coffee which would leave Zest with a lower customer retention rate than the excellent one they have now. Financial sustainability is thus becoming increasingly harder to achieve as Lisa described to us how it is crucial to maintaining the strong social and environmental purpose of Zest. She also pointed out that she would like Zest to be as independent as possible and not rely on unreliable funding, which is a fantastic goal, but unfortunately one that may not be achievable should things continue to become increasingly expensive in the hospitality industry.

The basis of future success for Zest is financial. Without a strong financial base their ambitions to achieve social and environmental sustainability will become increasingly challenging. What is incredibly commendable is Zest’s continued focus on social and environmental sustainability despite increasing costs and how reducing the number of services available to their staff or using cheaper and less environmentally friendly products could decrease costs.
Financial sustainability is thus a challenge and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. By having follow-up conversations and re-assessing the business after performing the study we discovered that a further focus on financial sustainability is crucial to any future investigations into the sustainability of a café as it is at the crux of any maintained success financially, socially and environmentally. We also learnt, however, that the focus does not need to be entirely financial, businesses can still achieve their financial goals while providing social benefits and using environmentally beneficial products as demonstrated by Zest, while also attempting to achieve financial security.

Summary

Analysis of the results from the self-audit highlighted that Zest performs stronger in social sustainability compared to environmental sustainability and is continuing to focus on achieving these despite not yet being fully financially sustainable. The business demonstrates clear social sustainability through positive social ambitions, loyalty to staff, involvement with local initiatives and social media influence. Zest effectively supports a sustainable work environment through effective training courses, clear mission and mission statements, clear staff contracts and staff handbooks. Zest does also show a positive and promising commitment to improving its environmental sustainability using environmentally preferred materials, recycling transparency and eco-friendly practices and equipment. Additionally, Zest has shown a strong commitment to the sustainability of the community through educating staff and customers on the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion, employing staff from underrepresented groups and supporting and collaborating with local businesses.

Nonetheless, Zest must balance the strength of the business’s environmental ambitions with the strength of its social ambitions. Zest lacks a clear environmental ambition which should be altered to provide clarity to staff and help to set up a framework for future environmental initiatives. The importance of environmental sustainability should be emphasized to staff through increased training and an increased promotion of environmental change through using the various social initiatives that the business is involved in. Zest can also improve its environmental sustainability through an increased
use of environmentally certified products and investing in formal policies and monitoring systems such as waste management to assess its environmental impact more accurately. In terms of community, Zest can improve its sustainability through supporting more local suppliers and suppliers with ownership diversity. Overall, Zest has excellent social sustainability and a great base for environmental sustainability. In future, in order to improve Zest’s balance of social and environmental sustainability it is recommended that Zest uses more clarity and formal action for its environmental ambitions to ensure there is a significant and noticeable improvement in the environmental sustainability of the business.

Reflections on the Zest Audit and Recommendations for an Action Plan

We found that some of the solutions to improving Zest’s sustainability were obvious. However, due to Zest’s excellent social sustainability framework a lot of our suggestions were less obvious and relatively specific. Therefore, we designed our assessment to explain and justify the importance of each question. In doing so we believe that future users of our assessment will be blatantly aware of the suggestions that are less obvious.

Following the completion of the assessment questions and the analysis of Zest’s self-audit results, we decided to create an action plan for small businesses. This action plan consists of advice regarding the goals and opportunities that businesses should be taking to improve their social and environmental sustainability. The action plan is split into three sections based on how long the goals are likely to take to implement, and for change to be achieved: 6 months, 12 months and 18+ months. Goal setting is critical to any business as it provides a framework for implementation. We felt this section would be very beneficial to assist and inspire small businesses to work towards feasible goals for improving their social and environmental ambitions. Additionally, local café owners could seek to develop a framework for implementation in their region. They could work with key stakeholders like other businesses, community members and local governments to analyze sustainability challenges and how they could be addressed.
Action Plan Model

6-month ambitions
The following are suggested goals that could be achieved within 6 months of completing the self-assessment.

General
1. Introduce environmental, social and governance ambitions into the mission and vision statements

Staff
2. Create a staff handbook if the café does not have one
3. Register for some form of environmental training for staff members
4. Ensure staff are trained in topics of diversity, equity and inclusion
5. Encourage staff to commute to work in a way that is sustainable, where possible

Environment
6. Increase the volume of environmentally preferred materials and business practices

12-month ambitions
The following are suggested goals that could be achieved within 12 months of completing the self-assessment.

Staff
1. Complete staff sustainability training
2. Make your business accessible to all potential employees if it was not previously (via inclusive hiring practices)

Environment
3. Take advantage of at least one programme that offers environmental or sustainability advice for your business (e.g. Zero Waste Scotland programmes)
4. Introduce equipment that is energy efficient, if not already present
5. Assess the volume of waste the business produces and create waste reduction targets and mechanisms (e.g. Too Good To Go)
18-month+ ambitions
The following are suggested goals that could be achieved within 18 months of completing the self-assessment.

General
1. Introduce social and environmental ambitions on an equal scale in your business practices. (Same focus in mission and vision, well-trained staff and a clear emphasis on social and environmental sustainability via these things as well as signage)
2. Contribute to local social media groups encouraging environmental sustainability

Staff
3. Introduce accessible health coverage to all staff regardless of time worked per week

Community
4. Source suppliers from underrepresented groups, if not already achieved
5. Work collaboratively with other businesses to improve social and environmental standards

Environment
6. Adopt or increase the number of environmentally certified products within the business

Conclusion
Overall, this report influenced by Lean and B-Corp impact assessment questions, has produced a self-audit to assess the social and environmental sustainability of small businesses, particularly independent cafés. The self-audit was used to assess and analyze the sustainability of Zest, a specialty coffee café in St Andrews. Zest demonstrated excellent social sustainability and had a great base for environmental sustainability with promising commitment to reducing the business’s impact on the environment. Following the results from the self-audit, suggestions were proposed for how Zest could work to improve
its social and environmental sustainability including the addition of an action plan model. This action plan model provides suggested goals to inspire Zest and other small businesses to set goals and provides a framework for implementation. It should be noted that while the focus of this report is clearly on the local level of a small café, it is nonetheless crucial to consider a focus on human rights with regards to where cafés source their products to recognize the importance of people across the full value chain of operations. Further investigation into sourcing from and developing relationships with reliable, local producers at the beginning of the agricultural supply chain is incredibly important for addressing this concern. In summary, this report provides a valuable and relatively simple framework for assessing the sustainability of small businesses. Together with other sustainable business assessments, it can have a collective impact towards inspiring future research and improving sustainable business. To conclude, we would like to formally thank Lisa Cathro, the owner and manager of Zest, for her devotion to making Zest a sustainable speciality coffee café and for her time and generous support towards producing this self-audit report.

References


Appendix

**Self-audit questionnaire:**

**Sustainability assessment of Zest**

**Introduction**

The following are questions that are to be used to assess the sustainability of a business. They take on four of the five pillars outlined in the B-Corp sustainability assessment. Using these in combination with the Lean philosophy we will be able to determine the environmental and social sustainability of Zest.

**Governance**

The following section will analyze the governance component of sustainability. The need for good governance is crucial to a small business. Governance in small business is focused on the expectations that management sets out for the business and where these expectations can be found and come from.

**Mission and vision statements**

Does the business have defined mission and vision statements? Please check all that apply to the business’s mission and vision statements.

- A mission statement identifies the specific environmental, social or economic ambitions of the business. A vision statement builds on this by identifying how the business aims to address these ambitions.
  - □ A focus on environmental ambitions
  - □ A focus on social ambitions
  - □ A clear way for these statements to be available to staff and customers


How can you check your business is on the right track to social and environmental sustainability
Kenneth Worden and Karis Lonie

☐ The inclusion of the statements in the staff handbook or contract
☐ The business does not have a mission or vision statement

**Environmental and social ambitions and information**

Environmental and social ambitions are two major components of sustainability for businesses and need to be understood by all staff and management. Environmental ambitions could be, for example, focusing your business on waste reduction. Social ambitions are objectives like including a diverse workforce with diverse backgrounds and social situations.

Does the business have clear environmental and social ambitions?

☐ These ambitions are made clear to staff through contracts and handbooks
☐ These ambitions are made clear to customers through things like social media or internal signage

As a small business, it is also important to engage major stakeholders in achieving your environmental and social ambitions. Stakeholders include but are not limited to customers, suppliers, staff’s family members, governments, and the local community. Therefore, it is important that stakeholders are aware of and understand the environmental and social ambitions and the vision and mission of a business.

Does the business make its social and/or environmental ambitions clear to stakeholders through any of the following?

☐ Internal signage (signs indicating social and/or environmental ambitions)
☐ Trained staff in how to answer customers’ questions regarding social or environmental ambitions
☐ Blog posts about social and environmental ambitions
☐ Use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) to highlight ambitions
Structure of governance with regard to policy and people

Communication between staff and management is essential to the functioning of a small business and a defined method of communication saves time over the long term.

Is there a defined and straightforward process for staff to discuss potential issues with management?

- There is a defined and straightforward process for staff to discuss potential issues
- There is a defined but harder-to-access process for staff to discuss potential issues
- There is no defined or straightforward process for staff to discuss potential issues

Furthermore, ensuring the business expresses its expectations for its staff prevents potential future confusion and promotes a socially sustainable approach to management.

Does the business have any of the following that makes the expectations of management on staff clear? Tick all that apply

- Defined ethics code in contract or staff handbook
- A document that defines and makes clear the expectations of staff behaviour
- Defined work hours and expectations
- Clear method for accessing work timetables and documents related to employment
How can you check your business is on the right track to social and environmental sustainability
Kenneth Worden and Karis Lonie

□ None of the above
□ Other (please define)

Providing accessible training for staff can help promote personal and professional development and ensure that the work environment continues to develop positively. Accessible training is either free or at a limited cost. Business practices could be a variety of different things, including interacting with difficult customers or professionalism in the workplace.

Does management provide staff with accessible training in business practices and ethics?

□ Staff are provided with accessible training in business practices and ethics
□ Staff are not provided with accessible training in business practices and ethics

Staff handbooks and contracts are the most accessible way for businesses to communicate their ambitions and expectations to their staff. Ensuring they are accessible to all staff is crucial as some staff may have limitations that prevent them from using a typical written approach.

Are the staff handbooks and contracts accessible for people with potential learning challenges or any disadvantages that could make reading a contract challenging, for example, dyslexia, English as a second language, limited access to technology or reading/writing barriers?

□ The staff handbooks and contracts are available in non-traditional forms including audiobooks or something similar
□ The staff handbooks and contracts are only available in traditional written documents
□ The staff handbooks are available both in hard copy and digitally
□ The business does not have a staff handbook

The staff handbook should also be comprehensive to ensure clarity to staff members from management regarding business practices and expectations.
Does the staff handbook include any or all of the following? Tick all that apply

- □ A non-discrimination policy
- □ Policies on health benefits
- □ Disciplinary procedures
- □ Statement on potential work hours
- □ Holiday pay information
- □ Anti-harassment policy
- □ The business does not have a staff handbook
- □ Uses pictures of good and bad practices
- □ None of the above

**Workers**

The following section will analyze the relationship between the business and its employees and the sustainability of this relationship. An effective relationship between staff and management is crucial to the success of a small business and its sustainability.

*Utilizing the talent of workers effectively*

Ensuring that the business has the flexibility to adapt to personal circumstances is important for small businesses as it ensures that day-to-day function is efficient and effective.

Are workers designated specific roles or does the business have the flexibility to adapt the roles to personal circumstances, for example, childcare needs?

- □ Roles are adapted daily to accommodate various personal circumstances
- □ Roles are not flexible and cannot be adapted to different personal circumstances
Allowing workers, the opportunity to develop personally and professionally ensures staff continue to have an incentive to work hard and increases productivity. Are workers afforded the opportunity to inform management of skills they would like to develop and focus on? Tick all that apply

- Management considers the desires of workers and can ensure that staff have opportunities to develop specific skills
- Management offers staff the opportunity to participate in online training platforms
- Management does not take into consideration the desires of specific workers to improve specific skills

Open communication between staff and management is crucial. Employing a variety of different methods can ensure that staff and management are on the same page regarding the ambitions of the business. Are there effective ways for staff to inform management and vice versa of changes to daily routines that would be beneficial for the daily operations of the business? Tick all that apply

- Feedback meetings where staff could inform management of any changes they feel could be made
- Availability of management in person to connect on a one-to-one basis
- Weekly e-mails evaluating the performance of the business; what could be improved and what is going well
- None of the above
- Other (please define)

Offering workers various forms of training can improve business performance, ensuring continuity and operational efficiency. These training programmes can be entirely free or can cost money but are continuously beneficial to a small business. Training can also be used to reduce waste, contribute to environmental benefits and save businesses money.
Does the business have any of the following training opportunities? Tick all that apply

- □ Induction training
- □ Compliance training
- □ Wellbeing training
- □ First-aid training
- □ Mental health first-aid training
- □ Leadership training
- □ Modern apprenticeships
- □ Coffee or food making or similar training to help build a worker’s skill set to reduce potential mistakes and waste
- □ None of the above
- □ Other (please define)

**Accessibility for workers**

Ensuring your business is accessible to all possible workers opens your field of employment and allows you to employ people from varying backgrounds, which can improve your day-to-day operations and provide you with a greater selection of potential employees.

Is the business constructed in a fashion that makes it accessible to all potential employees? Tick all that apply

- □ The business employs people who have learning challenges
- □ The business employs people who are previous offenders and are seeking reintegration
- □ The business employs people with mental health and physical disabilities
- □ The business employs people from the LGBTQ+ community
- □ The business advertises positions in various locations, such as through third-sector agencies
Inclusivity is crucial to any business in the twenty-first century and is a core component of sustainability.

Does the business make clear that it is an inclusive employer to potential and current employees? Tick all that apply

- The business highlights its inclusivity in its contracts
- The business highlights its inclusivity in its staff handbooks
- The business highlights its inclusivity in employment advertisements
- The business fails to hire in an inclusive manner
- The business fails to highlight its inclusive hiring practices in any form

Guidelines and clear health benefits for employees prevent future confusion, ensure that staff morale and expectations are consistent. Furthermore, effective guidelines and benefits ensure that the business continues to function in a socially sustainable manner.

Does the business have clear health-related time-off guidelines in its staff handbook or contract?

- The staff handbook or contract provides clear health-related time-off guidelines
- The staff handbook or contract fails to provide clear health-related time-off guidelines

Are any of the following health benefits available to staff? Tick all that apply

- Defined maternity leave
- Defined paternity leave
- Medical appointment leave
- Accessible method of reporting sick days
- Defined psychological leave
- Other family leave options
Are health benefits available to all staff regardless of their hours worked per week?

- Health benefits are available to all staff
- Health benefits are not available to all staff
- Health benefits are determined by the number of hours worked per week

Providing workers with feedback is critical to ensuring that the business continues to operate effectively and can also encourage staff to continue to work effectively. Furthermore, it allows management to identify flaws and strengths in their staff members and prevents continued errors in business practices.

Is there an accessible way in which employees are provided with feedback on their employment progress? Tick all that apply

- Employees are given feedback on an annual basis
- Employees are given feedback on a consistent basis
- A feedback process where employees and management openly discuss progress
- When employees ask for feedback on their job performance
- None of the above
- Other (please define)

**Environment**

The following section is used to determine the environmental impact of a business. The questions below are used to analyze a business’s environmental footprint and its sustainability.

**Environment management systems**

An environmental management system is a system that integrates business procedures and the training of staff. It is important because it’s used to report on the environmental standards and impact of a business. An EMS covers waste regeneration, energy usage and carbon emissions.
Does your business have an environmental management system?
Please select all that apply.

- [ ] There is a policy statement regarding the business’s dedication to protecting the environment
- [ ] Does assess and report on the environmental impact of the business’s activities
- [ ] Designs and sets feasible targets for limiting the business’s environmental impact
- [ ] The business does not have an environmental management system

**Facility energy efficiency**
Businesses use a large amount of energy to power their services. It is important to reduce and conserve energy wherever possible. This not only reduces energy costs, it also reduces the carbon footprint and environmental impact of the business.

Please state the systems that your business currently uses to conserve energy and act sustainably:

- [ ] Equipment, e.g. automatic sleep modes
- [ ] Lighting, e.g. occupancy sensors, LED bulbs
- [ ] HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning), e.g. double-paned windows
- [ ] None of the above
- [ ] Other (please define)

**Reducing the impact of travel/commuting**
Reducing the impact of travel/commuting to work is an important step towards creating a better carbon footprint. Encouraging employees to think about and reduce their carbon footprint is essential for limiting environmental impact.

Has your business created programmes or policies regarding travel/commuting to reduce its environmental impact?
Please select all that apply.
Subsidies are provided to employees that use public transport or other sustainable transport options, e.g. cycling

The business facilities are designed to encourage public or sustainable transport, e.g. bike rack or electric car charges

Employees are encouraged to create meetings virtually

The business has a written policy that limits corporate travel

None of the above

Other (please define)

**Monitoring and recording waste**

Monitoring and recording waste are important measures to record a business’s environmental impact. It is also important for a business to investigate where its waste goes after it is disposed of.

Does your business conduct any of the following?

Please select all that apply.

- Train staff on appropriate bin disposal, e.g. general waste versus recycling
- Train staff to communicate the waste reduction ethos of the company
- Monitor and record the amount of waste produced
- Check if disposables are recyclable
- Investigate the transparency of recycling companies
- Use downstream waste-reducing/reusing companies, e.g. Too Good to Go (https://toogoodtogo.ie/en-ie )
- None of the above

**Zero Waste Scotland**

Zero Waste Scotland is an organization that exists to give free advice, consultancy and assessment to businesses to help them gain knowledge about how they can best use products and resources responsibly to reduce their environmental impact.
Has your business engaged with Zero Waste Scotland?

- Yes
- No

**Environmentally preferred materials**

Environmentally preferred materials limit the volume of general waste produced and therefore a business’s environmental impact.

Does your business use any of the following environmentally preferred materials?

- Recycled material, e.g. paper bags
- Reused material
- Sustainably sourced material
- Compostable material, e.g. Vegware or similar
- None of the above

**Environmentally friendly business practices**

Introducing environmentally friendly business practices is vital for becoming more sustainable and protecting the environment. Small, more sustainable changes within a business can provide a long-term positive environmental impact as well as a better brand image to increase customer numbers. For example, selling vegan and dairy-free products will reduce the business’s carbon footprint because farming cows for milk and meat products can be very destructive to the environment ex. a latte is the equivalent of driving 1 mile in a car.

Does your business use any of the following?

Please select all that apply.

- China crockery for sit-in
- Sell multiple-use take out cups
- Sell dairy-free products
- Sell vegan products
Source equipment with a long-guaranteed lifecycle

None of the above

**Environmentally certified products**

Environmentally certified products are products that deliver high-quality results whilst also having a minimal or much improved environmental impact such as Fairtrade, Bird Friendly, Rainforest Alliance, Organic. These are good for the business because of their high manufacturing standards but are also important for reducing the business’s carbon footprint.

Which of the following environmentally certified products does your business currently use?

- Dairy products
- Fruit and vegetables
- Meat products
- Bread products
- None of the above
- Other (please define)

How often do you source environmentally certified products?

- Often
- Regularly
- Sometimes
- Infrequently
- Never

**Community**

The following section is used to determine the community impact of a business. The questions below are used to analyze whether a business can provide a positive and sustainable impact on its community.

Community can be defined as an area or place together with its inhabitants.
Diverse ownership and leadership
Is it important to give underrepresented groups equal opportunities in business to have a truly sustainable social impact? An underrepresented group can be defined as a non-dominant group. This can refer to race/ethnicity, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ and gender.

Is your business owned or led by individuals from any of the underrepresented groups below?

Please select all that apply.

- Led by a woman
- Led by an individual from an underrepresented group
- Owned by a woman
- Owned by an individual from an underrepresented group
- None of the above

Staff from underrepresented populations
How many of your staff identify as from an underrepresented social group?

- 0%
- 10–30%
- 30–50%
- 50–70%
- 75% +
- Don’t know

Supplier ownership diversity
It is beneficial to find and do business with suppliers in underrepresented groups to provide opportunities and build a positive community environment.

What percentage of your products come from suppliers that are owned by an individual or people from an underrepresented group?

- 0%
- 1–9%
Supplier diversity policies or programmes
Does your business conduct any of the following to promote diversity with suppliers?
Please select all that apply.

- We track the diversity of suppliers
- We have a policy for specific targets on purchases from suppliers with diversity
- We choose suppliers with diversity
- None of the above
- Other (please define)

Creating and managing inclusive work environments
Inclusive work environments are essential for creating a positive team spirit and work ethic. All members of the business should feel included at all times in order for a business to make positive social impacts.

Does your business conduct any of the following to promote diversity, equality and inclusion within the workplace?
Please select all that apply.

- We communicate our commitment to diversity, equality and inclusion in job advertisements, e.g. social media, in the press
- We conduct blind reviews of job applications (no names or identifiable characteristics)
- We make the language within our workplace inclusive and clear, e.g. staff handbooks
How can you check your business is on the right track to social and environmental sustainability
Kenneth Worden and Karis Lonie

☐ We offer training on diversity, equality and inclusion to all employees
☐ We have diversity improvement targets
☐ None of the above
☐ Other (please define)

Spending on local suppliers
It is highly beneficial for the community and the environment to source local suppliers. The community will benefit because it is supporting and enjoying local products and the environment will benefit from the reduced transport emissions to deliver the product. For the purpose of this report, local is defined as within 20 miles of the business.

What percentage of expenses have contributed to suppliers that are local to the business’s facilities in the last year?
☐ < 20%
☐ 20–39%
☐ 40–59%
☐ 60% +
☐ Don’t know

Local staff
Do the majority of staff (over 50%) live locally in relation to the business’s facilities?
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don’t know

Type of commute
Investigating the type of commute that employees use is important for analysing the business’s carbon footprint. Investigating the type of commute employees use can often result in more environmentally friendly solutions, for example, car sharing.
What is the most popular mode of transport among staff from your business?

- Car
- Car sharing
- Public transport
- Bike
- Walk
- Other (please define)

Advancing social and environmental performance
Advancing social and environmental performance is crucial to moving towards a more sustainable future. Both social and environmental aspects should be considered when advancing a business's performance.

How has your company worked with other businesses to improve performance around social or environmental issues?

- We have worked collaboratively with other businesses to improve social and environmental performance standards
- We have provided data towards research into social and environmental issues
- We use and contribute to public forums on social and environmental issues
- None of the above
- Other (please define)