



Tangible Accountability

Tangible accountability is accountability that is “in our own hands”—both literally and metaphorically. In 2020, we have mobile tools for measuring, tracking, reviewing, and reporting the world around us. More important, we have tracking frameworks for Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) impacts that make sense out of the billions of individual ad hoc measurements and reports, linking them to policy and performance alike. Accountability is not abstract or distant: it’s right here in the physical world we perceive. For individuals, corporations, and governments, it’s as direct and immediate as turning a knob and hearing the sound level change.

- Most standard industry rating services include ESG data for companies in their rating reports and databases, and financial news databases stream up-to-the-minute ESG ratings for companies.
- Basic eco-monitors are built into all kinds of personal mobile devices to automatically sense and report readings from any location. In addition, many people have dedicated eco-sensors that have more robust tools to profile air, water, and variety of material surfaces, from carpets and walls to clothing fabric and food packaging.
- Abundant data from bottom-up eco-monitoring systems is analyzed and aggregated into a variety of local, regional, and country-level profiles, much the way that Twitter streams are analyzed today.
- The growing popularity of citizen science and tools for connecting citizen observers to eco-monitoring projects have led to a strong DIY eco-monitoring ethic, especially among young, college-educated people.
- Landscape-scale models of climate change link real-time measures of local carbon emissions (as well as other particles) to near- and long-term measures of climate change. They also show the impacts of climate change on local water availability.
- DIY-style media are linked via bar code to specific products: someone working in a manufacturing plant in Vietnam can post a video linked to a specific product or product line for viewing at the point of sale by a consumer in the United States or Europe.
- Personal carbon footprints are calculated in real time, tracking custom behavior sets and personal household data. Footprinting becomes a political and scientific flash-point as people debate the accuracy of footprints as guiding metrics for policy and behavior.
- High-def virtual worlds allow people to see their future selves in a future environment modeled on current ESG measurements as well as personal carbon footprints.
- Personal reputation is increasingly linked to emergent measures of sustainable behavior and choices in a variety of venues, from online buying sites to homes and public transportation and even waste production.

signals from 2009

New online and mobile tools help individual consumers review sustainability scores of products and make informed choices as they shop. For example, an iPhone version of the GoodGuide provides social and environmental impact ratings for over 70,000 products on the go: “Check a product, see top-rated products in a category, and access your personalized favorites list to quickly find safe & healthy products.”



GOODGUIDE:

[HTTP://WWW.GOODGUIDE.COM/ABOUT/MOBILE](http://www.goodguide.com/about/mobile)



Peer-to-peer transparency can drive more sustainable behavior: for example, when we see our neighbors’ energy use drop, we tend to reduce our own. And now, a DIY hack of a Kill-A-Watt power meter puts that information in your Twitter stream. The hackers are encouraging the open-source community to develop the tool, saying, “Energy change and consumption can happen many ways, we feel there is a social imperative and joy in publishing one’s own daily KWH – by sharing these numbers on a service like Twitter users can compete for the lowest numbers and also see how they’re doing compared to their friends and followers.



TWEET-A-WATT:

[BLOG.MAKEZINE.COM/ARCHIVE/2009/01/TWEETAWATT_OUR_ENTRY_FOR_THE_CORE77.HTML](http://blog.makezine.com/archive/2009/01/tweetawatt_our_entry_for_the_core77.html)



Walmart, which has been venturing into environmentally sustainable products and business methods for the last few years, recently announced its most ambitious effort yet: the creation of an electronic indexing system meant eventually to help Walmart and other retailers determine the social and environmental impact of every product they place on their shelves. At the heart of the index are a set of 15 key questions that Walmart wants its more than 100,000 suppliers worldwide to answer.



WALMART SUSTAINABILITY INDEX:

[NYTIMES.COM/2009/07/16/BUSINESS/ENERGY-ENVIRONMENT/16WALMART.HTML?_R=1&HPW](http://nytimes.com/2009/07/16/business/energy-environment/16walmart.html?_R=1&HPW)

Sustainability Index: Supplier Assessment Questions	
Energy and Climate Reduce energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have you measured your corporate greenhouse gas emissions? (Y/N) 2. Have you opted to report your greenhouse gas emissions to the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP)? (Y/N) 3. What are your total greenhouse gas emissions reported in your most recently completed report? (Enter total metric tons CO2e, e.g. CDP's Questionnaire, Section 20 - Scope 1 and 2 emissions) 4. Have you set publicly available greenhouse gas reduction targets? If yes, what are those targets? (Enter total metric tons and target date; 2 fields or leave blank)
Material Efficiency Reduce waste and enhance quality	<p>Scores will be automatically calculated based on your participation in the Packaging Scorecard in addition to the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. If measured, please report total amount of solid waste generated from the facilities that produce your product(s) for Walmart Inc for the most recent year measured. (Enter total lbs) 6. Have you set publicly available solid waste reduction targets? If yes, what are those targets? (Enter total lbs and target date; 2 fields or leave blank) 7. If measured, please report total water use from the facilities that produce your product(s) for Walmart Inc for the most recent year measured. (Enter total gallons) 8. Have you set publicly available water use reduction targets? If yes, what are those targets? (Enter target date; 2 fields or leave blank)
Natural Resources High quality, responsibly sourced raw materials	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Have you established publicly available sustainability purchasing guidelines for your direct suppliers that address issues such as environmental compliance, employment practices, and product/recycled safety? (Y/N) 10. Have you obtained 3rd party certifications for any of the products that you sell to Walmart? If so, from the list of certifications below, please select those for which any of your products are, or utilize materials that are, currently certified.





In a sustainable world of tangible accountability, personal reputation may be built on micro-measurements of personal sustainable behaviors—such as which products you buy. In 2009, you may build an intangible reputation shopping at local merchants, carrying reusable bags from your favorite “green” grocer, or wearing clothing brands that broadcast their commitment to sustainable practices. In 2020, however, you may choose to broadcast these intangible reputations with much more precise measures based, for example, on the individual choices you make as you load your grocery cart. Common-place software for your mobile device not only shows you the footprint of products you’re buying; it computes the impact on your status in a variety of social networks with sustainability goals.

The footprint of this half-gallon of milk is measured not only by its carbon impact but also by its localism rating.

Using sustainability filters set up by your social networks, your product scanner reports the impact of this purchase on your sustainability reputation with your friends.



You get product-specific social responsibility alerts about the producer, aggregated from bottom-up feeds.

A simple personal purchase recommendation, based on the networks you belong to, helps you manage your reputation for your unique social context—in this case, a variety of social networks with different values.



how to live this scenario: try one or more

Meet your new auditors

In a world where everyone is accountable for sustainability—what new kinds of auditors will be monitoring and rating you and your organization? What new tools will you share to make sure you're meeting targets, to estimate your impacts on human well-being and the natural world? For a company, who in your organization will have access to these tools? What new skill sets will you need inside your organization and even on your own team? What internal audits will you do routinely? What external audits are likely to be mandated and by whom?



For every meeting that you have today or this week, try to imagine the sustainability measures that could have an impact on your discussions. Then imagine who in the meeting might be responsible for knowing those measures, for meeting the targets. Think about the tools they might use and how those tools might change your processes. Jot down a few notes about each meeting.

Check your personal reputation

In this 2020 scenario, where every choice you make becomes a sustainability reputation marker, how will you build the reputation you need to be a leader in your organization? How will the increasing transparency of your personal sustainability profile impact your professional reputation? What new organizations will you join to help build your sustainability reputation? How might you convert carbon credits or sustainability credits to internal organizational or local municipal privileges and perks?



Simulate this future world where sustainability measures define success. Set up a “sustainability feedback box” on the desks of everyone in your team for one week. Anonymously put cards with sustainability points in one another's boxes as you see your colleagues making good and poor sustainability choices, both in your work processes and in your personal habits. At the end of the week, discuss the experiment as a group.

Market to reputation-based networks

When people have value-based networks, how will you leverage market reputation based on these networks in your efforts to reach market segments? What will change in your marketing strategies when sustainability reputation ratings become a better predictor of market behavior than more conventional demographic segmentation? How will you demonstrate your “accountability” to these networks? How will you build and audit your own brand reputation in these networks?



As you go through your day or your week, think about the ways you or your organization could increase the sustainability reputation value of every product or service you touch. Then think about the kinds of networks that would measure that value. Finally, think about how you can reach those networks. At the end of the week, capture three action steps designed to build reputation value for your organization.

Rethink decision-making

In a world where accountability for sustainable outcomes is built into the material environment—as well as the social fabric of daily life—how will your decision-making change? What business decisions that you currently take for granted will be subject to sustainability audits? What decisions may actually be taken out of your hands as they are automated using targets set elsewhere? What new kinds of decisions will you be able to model—and how will your organization need to change to make the best use of those models and their results?



For every major decision you make today or this week, imagine you could model the impact on a specific customer five years from today. Create a mental avatar of that customer and think about him or her, five years from now, as you make your decisions. Jot down the kinds of things you would like to model to tell you about him or her in order to improve your decisions. See if the decisions change their form a little as you do this exercise. Ask your colleagues to do the same. Compare your avatars—and your results.