

# Rethinking traditional business models to prioritize sustainability

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Asper researchers are publishing work that rethinks traditional business models and prioritizes sustainability. Despite the lingering, outdated sentiment that sustain-centric business is an alternative perspective, they

demonstrate how and why sustainability is the future—and the now—of business.

Kelsey Taylor is an assistant professor of supply chain management at Asper. Her recent publication in the *Journal of Supply Chain Management* with co-author Eugenia Rosca explores how social enterprises use their relationships with suppliers, beneficiaries or customers (social capital), to navigate and balance the tensions between their mission and their financial viability.

For Taylor, one of the more exciting takeaways of this work is uncovering further evidence that profit is not the only language organizations need to speak to pursue their mission and build mutually beneficial relationships.

"Sometimes all that mattered for these organizations was that they spoke the same 'language' as their [potential partners](#). They could find partners who had similar missions and values and collaborate through their shared understanding and purpose," she says.

Social or purpose-driven enterprises subvert earlier business models by placing their mission above profit; they don't ignore profit, but they do reprioritize it.

"The organizations I spoke to understand that the numbers have to make sense—they need to be able to keep their doors open and pay their people—but their goal was always to get closer to achieving their mission rather than trying to squeeze an extra dollar out of a transaction," she explains.

Taylor and Rosca's work demonstrates that by using [social capital](#), social enterprises can maintain the delicate balance between [social impact](#) and viability without losing sight of their original purpose.

## **Marketing practices beyond profit**

Fellow Asper faculty Bruno Dyck [BComm(Hons)/84] and Rajesh Manchanda, as well as co-authors Savanna Vagianos [BComm(Hons)/19, MSc/23] and Michèle Bernardin [BComm(Hons)/21], also explore firms that are rethinking traditional business approaches in their paper, published this year in *Business and Society Review*.

This paper is part of a larger project in which they study around 60 firms. They discuss two exemplar firms here, including Winnipeg's Eadha Bakery, examining their marketing practices and contributing to the emerging field of sustain-centric marketing.

Their work begins with the premise that triple bottom line (TBL) approaches to business are not sufficient for combatting the social and ecological crises that profit-first business and widespread consumerism have produced.

They focus instead on sustain-centric approaches to business, where social and ecological well-being—people and planet—come before profit. In Dyck and Manchanda's work, reprioritizing profit also creates an opportunity to redefine it.

"I think the crux of the issue becomes what profit or money actually means to different companies, regardless of size. In sustain-centric firms, profit is a means for them to do good, to better the lives of their employees, suppliers or customers. Profit is not for the firm itself, and profit is not the sought after outcome. It is a means to help the entire ecosystem flourish," says Manchanda.

## **Replacing profit with purpose, inspiring possibility**

Sustain-centric business models engage creative and entrepreneurial thinking—expanding understandings of value and outcome beyond [profit](#), and in so doing, asking future [business](#) professionals to be more intentional, more creative in their pursuits.

From supporting local farmers and rewilding soil, to uplifting marginalized communities or simply making excellent sourdough, sustain-centric businesses are redefining the field, and Asper researchers are recording this progress and inspiring more possibility.

**More information:** Kelsey M. Taylor et al, Sink, swim, or drift: How social enterprises use supply chain social capital to balance tensions between impact and viability, *Journal of Supply Chain Management* (2022). [DOI: 10.1111/jscm.12295](https://doi.org/10.1111/jscm.12295)

Bruno Dyck et al, Sustainable marketing: an exploratory study of a sustain-centric, versus profit-centric, approach, *Business and Society Review* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/basr.12314](https://doi.org/10.1111/basr.12314)

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