

‘It is Impossible to Effectively Balance the Needs of the Economy, Society, and the Environment in the Contemporary World’. Critically Discuss this Statement with Reference to Sustainability Theory and Practice.

If a values-driven approach to business can begin to redirect this vast power toward more constructive ends than the simple accumulation of wealth, the human race and Planet Earth will have a fighting chance.

(Cohen and Warwick, 2006)

Firstly, we should ask ourselves “*why was the initial statement made*” To which we look to the imbalances within the global ‘Triple Bottom Line’ (TBL), also known as People Profit and Planet (3PS). The term TBL coined by John Elkington in 1994 is a sustainability framework that scrutinises a corporation’s social, economic, and environmental impact (Elkington, 2004). It is a framework used to visualise the balance between each discourse. Below will depict an example of how the TBL is unbalanced.



Source accessed from: Ethical Property (2020). *The Triple Bottom Line*.

Empirical evidence implies that modern humanity is living beyond its means to survive and there is a need for sustainable and ethical change within enterprises, corporations, and societal culture (Princen et al., 2002; Brower & Leon, 1999; Higgins, 1995). To support this statement, data derived from The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) (2020) states, from the years 2005-2020, the world’s CO₂ emissions have increased each year from 381 parts per million (ppm) to a staggering 414 ppm. This further suggests that the continuation of over-consumerism, over-manufacturing and unsustainable practices made by modern-day

organisations provide little-to-no promise for the wellbeing and environment that we leave to our future generations (Ehsan & Kaleem, 2012; HRH et al., 2010; Coady et al., 2019).

When exploring into the socio-economic issues within the United Kingdom (UK), we recognise yet another balancing issue. We notice that there are a lack of employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Statistics show that 3.4 million disabled people are economically inactive or unemployed. This creates little opportunity for inclusion amongst the community, sense of purpose and personal growth (Powell, 2020; Bonaccio et al., 2019; Maslow, 1943).

Worldwide, the resulting waste caused by overconsumption of the global populous is causing a chain reaction of issues contributing to destabilising the balance within the TBL (Goldin, 2014; Brown et al., 1999). Each year 2.12billion tons of waste is accumulated and put to landfill. This amount of waste is created from a throw away nation as 99% of items people buy is thrown away within 6months (The World Counts, 2020). A linear product life-cycle contributes to further issues, conveying that a more circular economic approach is required. Governmental and corporations' primary goal is economic growth, where the rich get richer and poorer more poverty stricken (Jackson et al., 2020; Lyu & Zhang, 2019).

It should be noted that this paper aims to prove or disprove whether is it “impossible” to balance the needs of the economy, society, and the environment in the Contemporary World. This task will be achieved by, analysing the role of sustainable development in building a prosperous community based on principles such as, justice, equity, participation and transparency, in a Pembrokeshire context. To critically evaluate strategic frameworks and theories, which support social justice and sustainability. This will be related to the communities within Pembrokeshire and further afield. To reflect upon a Pembrokeshire enterprise's harmonious values and attitudes in relation to sustainable development - The chosen enterprise that has selected for this paper is known as FRAME Ltd.

Not only in a Pembrokeshire setting but further afield, global warming is an ever-baring issue. Due to consistent air pollution and waste disposal, the Earth's environment and atmosphere are in detriment (NASA, 2020; Raval & Ramanathan, 1989). James Lovelock (1979) argues within his research that humanity has pushed the Earth beyond its limit; this is portrayed through the creation of his theorem named 'Gaia Theory'. The Gaia Theory represents the Earth's natural cycles and how they coincide with each other in order to maintain its own habitability,

alongside all life on Earth. The planet, in contrast to Gaia Theory, has been seen to be a 'self-regulating system', although; humanity has continuously jeopardised this balance to maintain natural order (Tyrell, 2013; Lovelock, 2009; Lenton, 1998).

However, within Kirchner's (1989) journal entry named, "The Gaia hypothesis: Can it be tested?", the Gaia theory has been scrutinised. Kirchner states that, 'Gaia may be useful as metaphors but are unfalsifiable, therefore misleading as hypotheses'. Subsequently, many other scientists and researchers have attempted to disprove the theory.

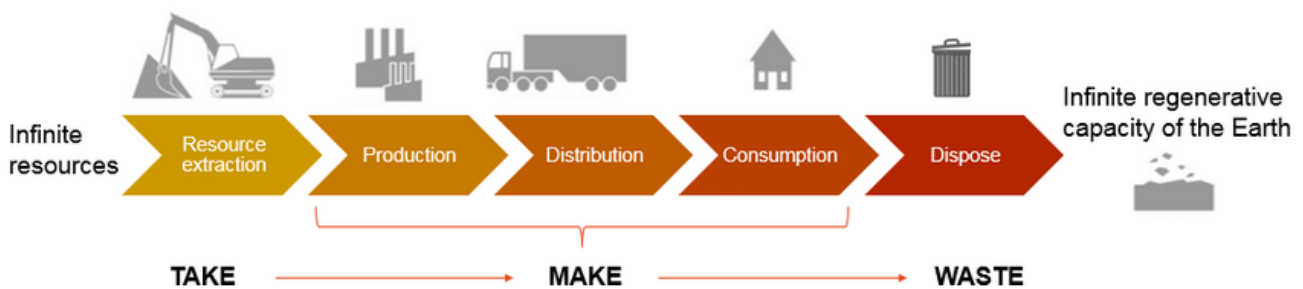
Furthermore, although Gaia Theory suggests that the earth is known to naturally balance its environment, it does not consider the concept of maintaining man-made economies. Therefore, the planet alone cannot effectively balance all three discourses of the TBL solely; making this a responsibility for humankind to fulfil (Ismail, 2009; Waddock, 2008). If humankind requires to balance the economy, we must also consider the planet alongside 'profit' and 'people'. Opposed to humanity living beyond its means for profit. The 3Ps shall never become truly balanced unless we as the Earth's inhabitants act to change the world on a global scale for good (Steffen et al., 2009; McIntosh, 2008; Victor & Rosenbluth, 2007).

The ability for a business to balance all aspects of the TBL is complex (Clarke, 2001). However, small local businesses within Pembrokeshire are finding ways to create an equilibrium, for example, FRAME Ltd Pembrokeshire.

FRAME was instituted in 1997 with the intentions of enhancing the well-being of Pembrokeshire's community and relieving poverty; which underpins Kantian principals (Frame, 2020; Holtug, 2002; Korsgaard, 1985). In 1994, FRAME became a registered charity with the focus purpose of creating opportunities for personal growth, employment, training and education for individuals with disabilities who may be socially excluded. In 1997, the organisation established their initial second-hand goods store and headquarters in Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire. Within these headquarters, FRAME demonstrates circular principals as the disabled employees recycle, reuse, remanufacture and repair household-goods and furniture that has been donated by the public (Reike et al., 2018; Marks, 2017; Kirchherr, 2017). Presently, FRAME uphold a gross revenue of over £1million and now have organisations within three Pembrokeshire towns. The expansion of FRAME has permitted some of their social projects also to grow such as, 'The Community Fridge Project' (TCFP),

‘The One-of-a-Kind Project’ (TOOAKP) and ‘The Green Shed’ (TGS). Since its first establishment, FRAME has enabled over 217 disabled individuals to obtain work training and practice (Frame, 2020). With this information in mind, FRAME can be known to balance all aspects within the 3PS; creating a consistent circular economy. Further within the paper will depict how.

Traditionally, profit-driven businesses follow a linear economy; this consists of a ‘Take-Make-Dispose’ product lifecycle (Lahti et al., 2018; Jørgensen & Remmen, 2018). This lifecycle consists of:



Source accessed from: Wautelet (2018). *The Linear Cycle: Take, Make, Dispose*.

Firstly, the raw finite resources of the earth being extracted such as trees being cut down, precious metals being mined. Secondly, the production stage where energy and toxic chemicals are combined with the natural materials creating toxic products; National Center for Biotechnology Information Search database (2020) states, between 25,000 and 84,000 chemicals are used in commerce in the United States alone.

Thirdly, the distribution, where products are provided at affordable prices to increase its demand (Cohen et al., 2013; Markandya et al., 2010). However, this would not exist without its shortcomings a within industrial design and capital-driven economy's, built-in-obsolescence is a common practice, where products are purposely designed to be flawed, limiting their lifespan, functionality or perceived value. This concept consequentially increases consumption, the need for product replacement, upgrades and the sales of unneeded product warranties; typically generating profit, increasing the consumption of natural resources (Maycroft, 2004; Keeble, 2013).

Lastly, humanity wants to keep up with the latest trends and lives beyond its means, cluttering homes until the unused items are discarded as waste in the Disposal Stage (Chirisa, 2013; Bardi

& Lavacchi, 2008). Instant gratification and the ability to order anything one desires from anywhere in the world, alongside consistent prompts and pushes from advertisers and society, promotes the over consumption of items (Salguero-Puerta et al., 2019; Cheng et al., 2011; Alexander et al., 2011). A figure of approximately 350,000 tonnes of clothing was disposed of through landfill in 2018, out of every 30kg of clothing discarded, a mere 4.5kg of it is recycled (Clothesaid, 2020). The unnecessary disposal of items is alarming as landfills grow larger and take up more of the earth (Ferronato & Torretta, 2019; Singh et al., 2014).

Presently, alongside businesses which use a linear economy, there are others that use a circular economy. The Circular Economy, coined by Walter Stahel (1976), is an economic system that promotes the continual use of resources to reduce waste (Stahel, 2016). An example of this could point towards FRAME's use of a 'reuse, repair, remanufacture and recycle' production lifecycle (Gharfalkar et al., 2016; King et al., 2006). Below will depict how FRAME functions under a circular framework.



Source accessed from: Janeiro (2020). *Circular Economy*.

FRAME's TOOAKP project uses circular principles that intend to sustainably reinstate refurbished furniture back into society, to alleviate economic, environmental and social issues. This is attained by lessening the production of CO₂ by raw material refinery, through reducing

the need for the distribution, the manufacturing process and transportation of newly mass-produced goods (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017).

FRAME offers a free collection service, enabling the public to donate furniture items that they wish to discard. Additionally, they collect from local refuse sites any furniture that could be renovated. Thus, preventing items being unnecessarily put to landfill (Nyemba et al., 2018; Radhakrishnan, 2015). Once items have been retrieved, the items are remanufactured through the TOOAKP project.

The donated furniture is then redesigned into functional and unique pieces, which is subsequently re-manufactured by FRAME's carpenters within their headquarters. Once refurbished, the furniture is then distributed at one of FRAME's retail outlets, ready for (ethical) consumer purchase. It is from here the decision of what happens with the furniture lies with the consumer, when they are done with the item as to whether it is re-collected, recycled or sent to landfill (Akil et al., 2015; Tonglet et al., 2004). Ethical consumers value businesses like FRAME, due to their circular approach and are more likely to buy from a local ethical corporation. However, Statistics for Wales (2020) states that from 2018-19 40% of all household waste was put to landfill, although this is less than half of the full figure of waste including recycling, it is still an alarming percentage. Although the circular economy is a prodigious concept, it does not solve all the issues. Every job that is made through a circular framework creates a job loss for another. For instance, if the demand for raw materials decreases, this will impact employment rates of raw-material sourcing in third-world countries, thus, impacting third world economies. The framework creates a one in and one out system globally, which is a challenge to resolve (Ghisellini et al., 2016; Angelis, 2015, Preston, 2012; Stahel, 2010).

On a socio-economic standpoint, the current unemployment crisis is rising as the Office for National Statistics (2020) testifies for June to August 2020, the unemployment rate for all UK citizens was estimated at 4.5%, which is 0.6% points higher than the previous year.

FRAME is creating carpentry, joinery, retail and human relations jobs; providing the training and work-based experience needed to those with disabilities and disadvantages in the community by collaborating interdependently with The Pembrokeshire College. This training enables the workers to gain desirable qualifications while working on shift. Providing jobs for

disadvantaged individuals grants a heightened sense of well-being, life-fulfilment, along with the means to be economically active, and become a part of a supportive community which helps to cover basic and psychological needs. These benefits aid in individual self-fulfilment enabling one to reach self-actualization (Kenrick et al., 2010; Koltko-Rivera, 2006; Maslow, 1943).

FRAME promotes the value of well-being in the workplace by providing the workers with a well-being garden on site, which the public are also encouraged to visit. Through focusing on employee wellbeing and horticulture, this gesture of good-will promotes an increase in worker output and loyalty (Frame, 2020; Perrins-Margalis et al., 2000). FRAME is a positive asset for aiding the environmental issues in society and unemployment issues in Pembrokeshire, nonetheless it does not solve employment issues further afield.

On an economic viewpoint, food poverty is on the rise as The Trussell Trust (2020) reported that 122% more emergency food parcels were given to children in the UK compared to the previous year; and 81% were distributed generally. FRAME's TCFP aims to combat food poverty issues within Pembrokeshire. Local supermarkets often have excessive food that has to be removed from sale, which is still safe to consume. FRAME collects this food and hygienically stores it at the head quarters and offers it to the community (FRAME, 2020). In Maslow's Hierarchy of Need's highlights that food is a physiological essential and needed for wellbeing, TCFP aids this by offering the food for free to help the community (Maslow, 1943). Large corporations that donate food to TCFP engage more with the community, creating more connections between the small local, and larger organisations (FRAME, 2020; HRH et al, 2010). This exemplifies businesses working together to help solve the issue of food poverty. Although FRAME continues to achieve so much, there are a few disadvantages. They must rely on when the food is available, which is variable and public donations to continue its work.

When humanity takes from the environment it must give something back to help replenish the resources taken in return or the balance is lost and the environment suffers. Consequentially, this makes the inhabitants suffer and causes issues for future generations (Commissioner for Wales, 2020; Nelson, 2013; Crompton & Kasser, 2009; Watkiss et al., 2005). It is apparent by the research through this paper that it is easier to change a smaller enterprise than a larger one.

FRAME displayed a positive example of a form of balance through circular approaches. However, larger corporations may find it more difficult to adhere to such standards unless in collaboration with an enterprise like FRAME. There is not one single answer to find a balance so that neither one of the 3Ps is neglected. Western society is not very sustainable and thrives on a materialistic world where instant gratification is priority. The contemporary world's supply does not entirely cater for the demand causing ill-balance globally. The ever-growing economy and consumer need is of high focus and can in many ways leave those who cannot keep up behind, such as certain individuals and the environment. Although it is now common knowledge the damaging effects on the environment being in a convenient throw away nation, much of the population still portray this lifestyle. Again, even for those who want to make a positive impact on the environment sometimes struggle to make a mass of changes which in turn causes cognitive dissonance. This is sometimes due to financial reasons and other factors that make ecologically friendly changes a challenge.

Individuals need to be aware of what they do today impacts the future, as highlighted in the Well-being of Future Generation of Wales (2015) Act. Much of society does not consider the effects of being consistent consumers of products that utilise finite materials. Human consumption will always rise as the world's population grows. Unless change is made the finite materials of the world will one day run out. The harvesting of all the finite raw materials causes more pollution and destruction of natural environments. This causes a higher percentage of anthropogenic environments on the planet to tailor the ever-growing consumer need. There are businesses with unsustainable practices and world governments engaging in unsustainable projects. The damage that they have done has taken its toll on the planet, they have created an unsustainable culture, an economy fit for more people than there are in the world. However, it does not seem 'impossible' to create harmony between the economy, society and environment. If the governments and corporations all worked together alongside the people, with the environment in mind changes could happen. FRAME has proven that in small steps and with the right values many things are possible.

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