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ASSESSING THE DEGREE OF SUSTAINABILITY INTEGRATION IN CANADIAN PUBLIC SECTOR PROCUREMENT

Acknowledgements

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As a recognized, sustainability leader and multinational organization, HP is committed to making its business circular and working on the systemic changes required at a societal level to make the circular economy a reality. HP recognizes that a truly sustainable future requires the development of new business models, processes and overarching systems and in particular procurement being a critical element.

HP understands the urgent need to unlock sustainable procurement at scale in Canada. The organization's generous contributions to this research are a testament to its genuine commitment to sustainability and advancing the circular economy.

Monica Da Ponte
Shift & Build

Megan Foley
Schulich School of Business
York University

Charles H. Cho*
Schulich School of Business
York University

* Corresponding author

A Message from HP Canada

Foreword, Mary Ann Yule,
President and CEO, HP Canada

HP has an 80-year history of working to improve the lives of everyone, everywhere. Today we are continuing to reinvent by driving changes to transform the entire company into a circular model while fostering connections and partnerships to create market conditions that advance sustainable impact on a global scale.

Working in over 170 countries, HP is advancing its sustainability goals including:

- Achieving zero deforestation associated with HP brand paper and paper-based product packaging
- Using 30% post-consumer recycled content plastic across HP's personal systems and print portfolio
- Recycling 1.2 million tonnes of hardware and supplies
- Improving the wellbeing of 500,000 factory workers
- Reducing supply chain greenhouse gas emissions intensity

HP Canada is committed to shifting how Canada buys at all levels and across sectors. We are motivated by HP's Sustainable Impact Strategy to build momentum and invest in change towards the meaningful integration of sustainability into purchasing criteria. This research clearly points to the immense opportunity that sustainable procurement can contribute to meeting our Paris Agreement targets in this critical decade of climate action. HP Canada is proud to collaborate with Schulich School of Business and Shift & Build to advance the alignment of procurement actions with our Paris commitments and beyond.

Mary Ann Yule,
President and CEO,
HP Canada

Executive Summary

This report endeavors to assess the degree to which Canadian governments are using their purchasing power to advance sustainability goals. Society is facing a number of environmental and social crises including the climate emergency¹, the waste disaster² and the brewing economic inequality struggle³. Despite our efforts towards a more sustainable future, we are experiencing significant gaps in progress. Canada is projected to fall short on its greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction promise by 78 million tonnes⁴ and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are described as a work in progress with 3 million Canadians struggling to satisfy their basic needs.⁵

Meaningful progress on sustainability requires a commitment to science-based targets⁶ and effective usage of our available instruments including sustainable procurement. Public sector purchasing makes up 13.3% of Canada's gross domestic product⁷ and uses existing buying power to drive established policy objectives, making it an important point of leverage, a relatively low-cost tool and a stewardship mechanism for taxpayer dollars.

Recognizing the value of sustainable public procurement, we identified a need to better understand the current state of sustainability integration within public sector purchases. This research analyzes 50 Requests for Proposals (RFPs) within the construction, IT and large services categories. The research revealed that sustainability integration into RFPs is currently superficial. We found that 22% of RFPs had absolutely no mention of sustainability whatsoever; only 12% of RFPs included sustainability as an independent consideration in the evaluation; and no RFPs integrated sustainability into the evaluation with a weighting of greater than 10% with inclusion of language clarifying accountability and enforcement of sustainability criteria.

We identified four recommendations that will address the opportunities to integrate sustainability into government purchasing. The recommendations include:

- 1) Ensuring a deep understanding of the breadth and scale of social and environmental impacts associated with purchasing decisions,
- 2) Establishing specific goals, processes and systems to manage and monitor integration of sustainability within the procurement process
- 3) Restructuring RFP standards to meaningfully incorporate sustainability in the evaluation process and to require critical sustainability related information, as well as
- 4) Requiring incorporation of Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) into each RFP

Given the much needed and publicly made commitments to addressing the urgent environmental and social crises, it is our hope that leaders champion the integration of sustainability into procurement as well as allocate the human and financial resources required to enable said integration. We believe that doing so will provide significant benefits to stakeholders including advancing existing policy objectives around climate change and the SDGs, enabling market transformation by incentivizing change and enhancing stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

Background and Methodology

As a society, one can argue that we have made meaningful progress, significantly increasing our life expectancy over the years and dramatically improving our standard of living. This progress has come with serious environmental and social challenges. The world's leading climate scientists have warned that there are only a dozen years for global warming to be kept to a maximum of 1.5 degrees Celsius.⁸

Canadian society and governments recognize the urgency of these issues and are working to address them. The Federal Government has signed the Paris Agreement committing to reducing Canada's emissions by 30% below the 2005 levels by 2030.⁹ Supporting this initiative, there have been numerous efforts ranging from putting a price on carbon to investments in infrastructure and renewable energy¹⁰. Most recently, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced a ban on harmful single-use plastics.¹¹ From a social standpoint, Canada adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015¹² and has invested heavily in a breadth of efforts including Canada's first Poverty Reduction Strategy.¹³ Despite these efforts, our progress is limited. Canada is projected to fall short on its GHG reduction promise by 78 million tonnes¹⁴ and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are described as a work in progress with 3 million Canadians struggling to satisfy their basic needs.¹⁵

Meaningful progress on sustainability requires that we leverage all our available instruments. Sustainable public procurement, is one severely underutilized and highly impactful mechanism. From a strategic perspective, in utilizing purchasing as a social movement, sustainable public procurement works to use capitalism's fundamental principle against itself, replacing individual self-interest with broad-based sustainability concerns¹⁶. From a practical perspective, public sector purchasing makes up 13.3% of Canada's GDP¹⁷ and uses existing buying power to drive established policy objectives, making it an important point of leverage, a low-cost tool and a stewardship mechanism for taxpayer dollars.

"Collective ethical procurement and purchasing policies have a long and distinguished history in practice"¹⁸. Green procurement was first identified as a priority over 25 years ago when the federal government provided "instructions to develop a government-wide approach to green procurement in 1994"¹⁹. A recommitment to "develop and implement a government-wide green procurement policy by 2006"²⁰ was established in the 2004 Speech from the Throne. Most recently the government made a commitment to reduce the government's own emissions to 40% below 2005 levels by 2030 and established the Centre for Greening of Government at the Treasury Board that is responsible for advancing this goal, including actions related to procurement.²¹

Despite all our efforts, Canada is projected to fall short on its GHG reduction promise by

78M TONNES



That's the same amount of GHG as running 20 coal-fired powerplants for one year

Sustainable public procurement is defined as the procurement of goods and services by government entities that take into consideration social, economic and environmental aspects.¹⁵

Green procurement was first identified as a government priority over 25 years ago

Given the breadth of sustainability commitments, gaps in sustainability outcomes, the mandate on green procurement, and a belief that procurement can be a meaningful lever for change, we identified a need to better understand the integration of sustainability into public sector procurement.

We reviewed 50 publicly available Requests for Proposals (RFPs) with an estimated value of over \$1M issued between 2016 and 2019. In selecting focus areas, we considered categories that were both high dollar volume from a federal government spending perspective and high impact using carbon emissions as a lens. We used RFPs related to both building and maintenance/inspection for the construction category, while IT included any electronic-related product and service. The large services category was comprised of varying services including grounds keeping, janitorial, and food services.

We identified that a material influence in the evaluation criteria and coverage of the breadth of material sustainability impacts would be required to effectively leverage procurement to advance sustainability related policy objectives. As such, we designed and adopted two measurement schemes to assess both the significance and expanse of environmental and social considerations.

50

Public RFPs reviewed

- 58% Municipal
- 22% Federal
- 20% Provincial

Significance and Expanse of Sustainability Integration

In order to assess the significance of sustainability integration, we designed a measurement scheme (*see Figure 1*) with four distinct tiers ranging from inclusion of any environmental or social considerations to inclusion of such considerations as independent elements within the evaluation criteria combined with clarity around mechanisms for accountability to the criteria.

Figure 1:
Model of sustainability integration

TIER 4	Meaningful inclusion of sustainability as an independent consideration in the evaluation & mechanisms for accountability	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
TIER 3	Inclusion of sustainability as an independent consideration in the evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
TIER 2	Inclusion of sustainability considerations in the evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
TIER 1	Inclusion of any sustainability considerations	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO

The bottom tier encompasses RFPs that include any basic language relating to environmental and social sustainability considerations. Given the sparseness of sustainability language within the RFPs and that even some mention of

regulatory requirements can lead to minimal awareness of sustainability concerns, we elected to include mention of sustainability related regulatory requirements in Tier 1.

Tier 2 includes all RFPs where the sustainability considerations are included directly into the evaluation system in any category. Categories of inclusion range from technical, health and safety, as well as value add, to an independent sustainability category.

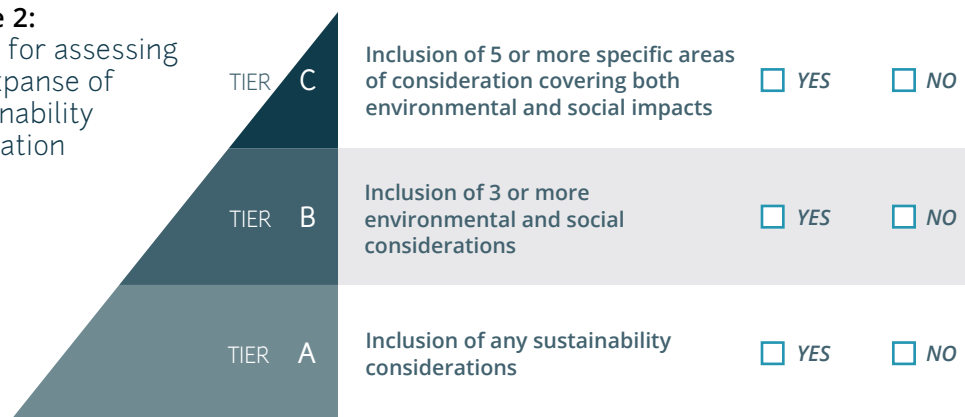
Tier 3 includes mechanisms that begin to more meaningfully factor sustainability into the evaluation process either through points or through the written requirements. The RFPs included in this tier are those where sustainability is being considered as a separate component within the evaluation.

The fourth and most rigorous tier includes RFPs that have sustainability evaluated separately as a category with a minimum of 10% weighting and include language discussing accountability to sustainable criteria. We opted to include language discussing accountability, given the many unrealized commitments in sustainability, examples of which include recycling plants with residual rates (% of material not recycled) ranging from 20%–40%²² and frequent mislabeling of foods as organic or sustainable.^{23,24} Language around accountability could range from requirements for third party certificates to demonstrate adherence to identified requirements such as end of life materials management to requests for documentation to demonstrate possible commitments to living wages or diversity.

Sustainability is complex and advancing towards it involves meaningfully addressing diverse areas of impact ranging from environmental considerations such as greenhouse gas emissions and waste to social considerations such as economic participation and health impacts. In order to understand the breadth, we assessed the number of specific impact areas being considered within the environmental and social categories.

Figure 2:

Model for assessing the expanse of sustainability integration



Our scheme for assessing the expanse of sustainability integration, outlined in Figure 2, evaluates RFPs based on the extent to which both social and environmental criteria are addressed. The bottom tier includes those RFPs that include any base level sustainability considerations from either social or environmental areas.

The second tier consists of RFPs that include considerations in a minimum of three separate impact areas covering both the environmental and social elements. To reach the third tier, an RFP must have established clear and specific considerations in a minimum of five environmental and social impact areas. To be scored in this tier, considerations would need to go beyond general statements or links to policies and include distinct areas of attention. For example, a general statement outlining a preference for environmental or sustainable products or services would not be considered specific while a statement outlining a preference for biodegradable or Forest Stewardship Council certified products would be considered specific.

Key Findings

In the section below we outline the key findings of the analysis. From an overall perspective, although sustainability language was found within many RFPs, it was often general, narrow, absent from the evaluation system and lacking in mechanisms for accountability.

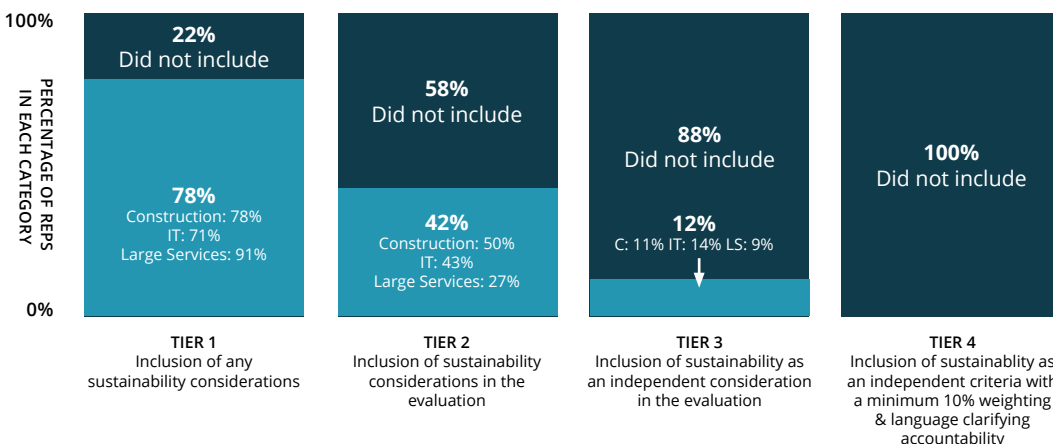
Although sustainability language was found within many RFPs, it was often general, narrow, absent from the evaluation system and lacking in mechanisms for accountability.

Finding 1:

Sustainability integration into RFPs is currently superficial with limited integration into the evaluation process

The level of inclusion of sustainability in the evaluation process was mostly superficial (see Figure 3). Environmental and or social considerations were often a minor component or omitted entirely within the process. 78% of the RFPs reviewed fell under the first tier and 22% of RFPs had absolutely no mention of sustainability whatsoever.

Figure 3:
Inclusion of sustainability in the evaluation process



0%

0% of RFPs reached the top tier. No RFPs included sustainability as an independent criteria with a minimum 10% weighting & language clarifying accountability where even the best had significant gaps.

Finding 2:

Sustainability integration into RFPs is currently narrow with limited consideration for material social and environmental issues

Sustainability is a complex issue. Advancing towards it requires advancement on a range of social and environmental impact areas. Reflective of this, the United Nations has outlined 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that aim to address core issues like climate change, inequalities, poverty as well as good health and well-being. Meaningfully advancing on sustainability requires that all RFP providers understand and commit to addressing their material areas of impact. Materiality should be considered using the Global Reporting Initiative’s definition which refers to “aspects that reflect the organization’s significant economic, environmental and social impacts; or substantively influence the assessments and decisions of stakeholders”.²⁵ As a whole, there was a demonstrated lack of understanding and incorporation of material issues within the analyzed RFPs.

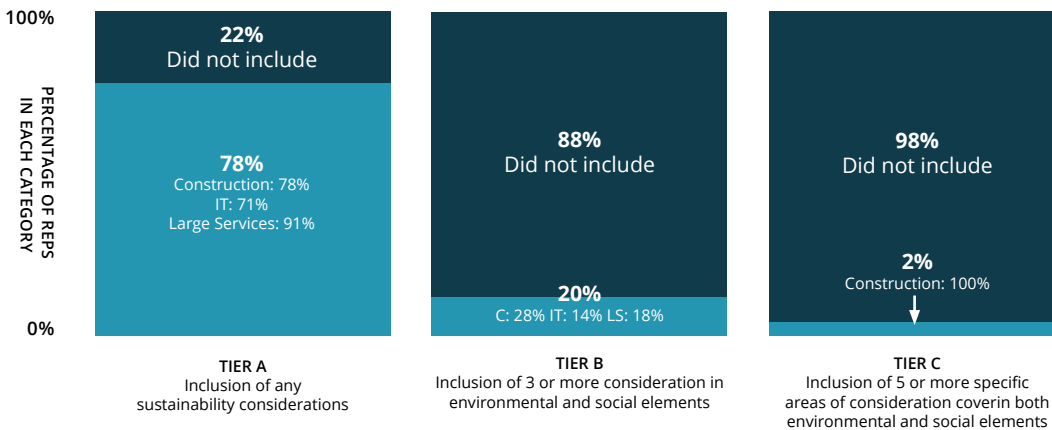
20%

Only 20% of RFPs incorporated three or more social and environmental areas of consideration

Only 78% of RFPs even reached the first tier by incorporating either base level environmental or social considerations. As we move to tier B, only 20% of RFPs incorporated three or more areas of consideration covering both social and environmental impacts. Only one RFP analyzed reached the top tier, which required incorporating five or more specific areas of consideration (see Figure 8).

Figure 8:

Inclusion of social and environmental elements



2%

Only 2% of RFPs incorporated 5 or more specific social and environmental areas of consideration

Finding 3:

There is limited consideration for Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) when looking at price

One common misconception is that sustainability is expensive. Traditionally, in an interest to ensure fiduciary responsibility through meaningful stewardship of taxpayer dollars, procurement has been focused on securing the best price, commonly believed to be the lowest initial price. Pricing can be misleading. The initial price does not include the total costs associated with acquiring, using

and disposing of a product or service²⁶. Elements with financial implications not typically included in price can range from maintenance, expected lifespan, reparability, energy usage, as well as disposal costs. Typically ignoring these costs feeds into lower quality and shorter-lived products.

Given this, it is evident that for meaningful evaluation, procurers require an understanding and comparison of total cost of ownership. Lack of understanding around TCO keeps pricing elements hidden and distorts pricing data. A focus on price, excluding TCO, can lead to the selection of a bidder with pricing that is in fact higher than competitors' and consequently poor stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

We found only 2 or 4% of RFPs made mention of total cost of ownership. Despite this mention of TCO, neither of the 2 RFPs requested any data that would enable the full costs to be calculated.

In order to provide an example of the impact of using TCO, we used an EPEAT calculator tool that allows users to compare EPEAT certified products with their non-certified counterparts. The calculator demonstrates the environmental benefits and shows users the overall cost savings through reduced energy use.²⁷ To demonstrate this point, we used an RFP for computing devices, requiring 3419 desktop computers and 1716 laptop computers. This RFP does not list any considerations or requirements for sustainable-certified products.

Using the EPEAT calculator and an imposed requirement for silver level certification, we found a cost savings of \$350,000 on energy usage alone. Given that there are a number of other elements associated with total cost of ownership including lifespan, reparability and disposal, we expect that using TCO would provide a significant savings to any organization.

Pricing can be misleading.

The initial price does not include the total costs associated with acquiring, using and disposing of a product or service.

4%

Just 4% of RFPs made mention of total cost of ownership.

\$350K

\$350k in energy costs could have been saved by imposing a requirement for EPEAT silver level certification

Opportunity Areas

Given the low level of sustainability integration into existing RFPs it is evident that there are compelling opportunities to better utilize procurement to help advance sustainability related government commitments and policy objectives. We have identified four specific recommendations that can enable a more effective use of this high impact tool.

Opportunity Area 01:

Ensure a deep understanding of the breadth and scale of social and environmental impacts associated with purchasing decisions

The analysis revealed a severe lack of clarity around material impact areas of the procured services and products. There is an opportunity for departmental and procurement professionals to be responsible for fully understanding the

breadth of impacts associated with their purchasing decisions. This process would require dedicating resources to understanding material impacts of purchasing as well as the implications of relevant policy commitments. Synergistically, there is an opportunity for policy leads to better incorporate procurement into their implementation strategies and dedicate resources to engaging and educating both departmental and procurement professionals around material impact areas and policies.

Opportunity Area 02:

Establish specific goals, processes and systems to manage and monitor integration of sustainability within the procurement process

Recent research found that existing policy goals are in most cases not reflected in the objectives, performance evaluation metrics, systems of reward and ongoing management metrics of the procurement function within public sector institutions.²⁸ Given that all meaningful change requires a commitment to that change combined with the allocation of resources to advance the change, we see the establishment of specific goals and management systems as critical to enabling the meaningful integration of sustainability into public procurement.

Opportunity Area 03:

Restructure RFP standards to meaningfully incorporate sustainability in the evaluation process and to require critical sustainability related information

It is natural that evaluation would drive behaviour and responses; bidders looking to be successful focus on what is clearly articulated as priorities in the RFP. Restructure the standard RFP design to meaningfully incorporate sustainability into the evaluation process will ensure that sustainability is being incorporated, evaluated and tracked. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, including:

- Requiring the identification of material areas of impact by the procurer and the request of specific and detailed information to enable the assessment of the bid with regards to these areas.
- Establishing sustainability thresholds for bid responsiveness. For example, for a bid to be considered, it must meet x,y and z requirements.
- Modifying the evaluation systems to meaningfully incorporate sustainability:
 - In bids with disclosed weightings within the evaluation, it is recommended that a minimum weighting for a sustainability category be applied. Although weighting would vary depending on categories and impacts, it is expected that meaningful integration would require a range of 10% – 20% allocation
 - In bids without disclosed weightings within the evaluation, it is recommended that sustainability be included as a separate category with specific requirements that will be considered in the evaluation.

- Outlining the requirements to enable validation of sustainability commitments. Including such mechanisms of accountability will ensure that bidders not only commit to integration of sustainability priorities but also allocate resources to the integration, management, monitoring and reporting on sustainability efforts.

Opportunity Area 04:

Require incorporation of Total Cost of Ownership into each RFP

Procurement is generally focused on obtaining a desired product or service at the lowest cost possible. The advancement of sustainable products/services is made even more difficult when the full scope of real financial costs, as well as environmental and social costs are not considered. In addition, the lack of consideration for the full costs of a product or service can be seen as inappropriate stewardship of taxpayer dollars. Requiring the incorporation of total cost of ownership into each RFP would ensure a more level playing field and better stewardship of collective funds.

Conclusions

Our analysis has exposed meager progress on the integration of sustainability into public sector procurement. Considering the breadth of urgent sustainability crises and a variety of commitments to advancing green procurement over the last 25 years, as well as a breadth of commitments to sustainability, such a superficial and narrow integration indicates deficiencies in public sector commitment and effort to integrate sustainability into procurement at scale.

We have a scientific consensus around the climate emergency²⁹, daily evidence of sustainability crises including the brewing economic inequality catastrophe³⁰, and the waste disaster³¹. Our disconcerting gaps highlight the compelling potential to meaningfully integrate sustainability into public sector procurement. Realizing this potential requires a vision with specific goals and commitments to allocate material and sufficient resources to this work. Meaningful integration will not be easy. It is however absolutely possible and urgently needed.

In conclusion, given the much needed and publicly made commitments to addressing the urgent environmental and social crises, it is our hope that leaders both champion the integration of sustainability into procurement and allocate the human and financial resources required to enable the integration. We believe that doing so will provide significant benefits to stakeholders including advancing existing policy objectives around climate change and the SDGs, enabling market transformation by incentivizing change and enhancing stewardship of taxpayer dollars.³²

About the Authors

Monica Da Ponte, MBA

Monica is the founder of Shift & Build. After spending 15 years working to drive impact in the private & not-for-profit sectors, Monica identified an opportunity to address root challenges in ways that serve to modify existing systems. Through Shift & Build, Monica supports organizations and governments seeking to increase their impact and return on resources. Monica's efforts in the area of sustainable procurement began with research to understand opportunities to catalyze the use of purchasing as a tool to advance sustainability at scale. Since this initial work, Monica has been designing and delivering projects to advance sustainable procurement.

Monica holds a Bachelor of Business with a major in Marketing and a Master of Business with a specialization in Sustainability, both from the Schulich School of Business.

Megan Foley

Megan is a recent graduate from the Schulich School of Business' Master of Business Management program. She also holds a Bachelor's degree in Socio-legal studies from York University. Megan is currently a Customer Success Advocate with EcoVadis, a global supply chain sustainability ratings and intelligence company. In her role, Megan collaborates with procurement teams to demonstrate the value of incorporating sustainability into their purchasing decisions through reporting and facilitating training sessions. She has a particular interest in procurement and building a more sustainable future through business.

Charles H. Cho, PhD, CPA

Charles Cho is Professor of Accounting and the Erivan K. Haub Chair in Business & Sustainability at the Schulich School of Business, York University. His research interests include Sustainability; Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR); and Social and Environmental Accounting. Professor Cho has published papers in prestigious academic journals and was an invited author of chapters in several books. He is regularly invited as plenary keynote speaker at international conferences and is actively involved in the academic community as a Council member of the Centre for Social and Environmental Accounting Research. Professor Cho has taught financial and managerial accounting courses and designed some CSR/sustainability and business ethics courses at the undergraduate, graduate (MBA, MSc), PhD levels as well as in executive programs for corporate managers.

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