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Building a More Sustainable Future through B Certification

Aligning with the pillars of what it means to be a Certified B Corporation could be part of what ushers language professionals into the future.

By Jeffrey D. Stewart

Today's global landscape is changing before our very eyes. Consequential questions around climate change and human rights, among other contemporary challenges, have become central missions of many initiatives throughout the world. Nowhere are these efforts more urgent than in the world of business, where a historically hallowed devotion to shareholder primacy—that is, maximizing profit for owners, come hell or high water—exposes and only further intensifies the pressing issues of our times. It's time to recognize that people matter, and the well-being of the planet matters. To put it plainly, the blatant disregard of these stakeholder groups in business operations is no longer tenable.

Today, consumers want to patronize companies that align with their values—companies that invest in their local communities and generate positive social and environmental impact through their operations. With shareholder primacy now seen as an untenable option, a different way of doing business has emerged in its place: the decision to use business as a force for good. It's for this reason that Certified B Corporations are considered a trailblazing alternative to shareholder primacy. These companies run a different playbook, one that puts people and the planet on an equal playing field with profit. This playbook is sometimes called “stakeholder capitalism.” But what do these shifts mean for the T&I industry?

One of the things on our minds as language professionals is how to build a sustainable future for our careers. The advent of artificial intelligence and the passing of the baton in a globalized race to the bottom on the rates we charge have led some of us to an inflection point in our careers. Will we even have jobs as translators and interpreters in the coming decades? While I don't have a blanket solution to these concerns, what I do have is a proposal that could grant us some assurance about the future.

Building a sustainable future starts with ensuring that there even is a future at all. We have only one planet, and its current inhabitants are packed with potential to preserve it for the coming generations. Building a sustainable future means shifting our mindset and framework for doing business. Certified B Corporations personify the push toward a sustainable future by embarking on a journey of continuous improvement in social and environmental performance to institute economic inclusion and equity. Aligning with the pillars of what it means to be a Certified B Corporation could be part of what ushers language professionals into the future.

What Exactly Is a B Corp? And What's the Other B Corp?

You'll often hear the term "B Corp" used to loosely refer to both a Benefit Corporation (or a Public Benefit Corporation) and a Certified B Corporation. While the

"B" in both instances stands for "benefit" (to simplify matters), these two B Corps are not the same.

The first "B Corp," a Benefit Corporation, is a legal structure available in most U.S. states. Think of it as one of the incorporating options available to you, along with the Limited Liability Company (LLC) and the C Corporation, among other forms.

The other "B Corp" is a Certified B Corporation. This B Corp is not a legal status; rather, it's a for-profit entity that adheres to a few key tenets:

- A legal structure or governing mandate that calcifies the company's mission to include generating a positive impact on society and the environment. (For some companies, that could mean converting to a Benefit Corporation.)
- Completion of the [B Impact Assessment](#), a digital tool that can help measure, manage, and improve positive impact performance for the environment, communities, customers, suppliers, employees, and shareholders. Receiving a minimum verified score of 80 points on the assessment is the first step toward B Certification.
- Maintaining a minimum level of performance throughout an in-depth audit conducted in accordance with the standards set by B Lab Global, a nonprofit global network recognized as a leader in economic systems change dedicated

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to transforming the global economy to benefit all people, communities, and the planet through the creation of standards, policies, and tools for business. As part of this mission, B Lab Global certifies companies as B Corps.

- Commitment to transparency of the company's performance in its B Directory listing. (The B Directory lists all the companies that are certified. You can search by business name, keyword, location, or industry.)

So, being a B Corp doesn't automatically make you a B Corp. Electing B Corp as a legal status, however, could be part of what's required for your company to effectively become a B Corp. All clear?

But then, how do companies reach and maintain the required level of performance in the B Impact Assessment? This threshold is met by measuring companies' positive impact across five key impact areas. Among the questions addressed in each area are the following:

Governance: What portion of the company's management is evaluated in writing on

their performance with regard to corporate, social, and environmental targets?

Workers: What percentage of the company is owned by full-time workers (excluding founders/executives)?

Community: What percentage of management is from underrepresented populations? (This question includes women, minority/previously excluded populations, people with disabilities, and/or people living in low-income communities.)

Environment: Does the company monitor and record its universal waste production?

Customers: How does the company verify its product improves the impact of its client organizations?

This review process really gets under the hood of what companies are doing. That's why it's so relevant for a sustainable future. It fosters a deep dive into how we can better align ourselves with the shifting needs of the 21st century.

Building a sustainable future means shifting our mindset and framework for doing business.

The B Factor of Attraction

With now over 9,000 Certified B Corporations in the world, what's certain is that we're not going back. We can no longer afford business as usual. Certified B Corporations are winning the favor of many stakeholder groups. But don't take my word for it. Let the numbers speak for themselves. According to data analyses conducted by B Lab U.S. & Canada, in comparison to non-certified companies:

- Certified B Corporations are **1.1 times more likely** to pay 100% of their employees a family living wage.
- Certified B Corporations are **2.4 times more likely** to donate more than 1% of top-line revenue to charity.
- Certified B Corporations are **4.5 times more likely** to use 100% renewable energy.
- Certified B Corporations are **4.2 times more likely** to have supplier diversity policies or programs that give preference to suppliers with ownership

from underrecognized populations.

The Certified B Corporation intellectual property (that "B" you see on many a product pack) has also proven to be a differentiating factor. B Lab U.S. & Canada further reports that, for medium-sized Certified B Corporations in the food industry, 80% of potential customers affirm that B Certification is a strong deciding factor in their purchasing decision.

The Relevance of Certified B Corporations for Language Professionals

As entities and individuals that are for-profit, it's important to maintain good financial health to remain viable. After all, financial viability is what allows us to generate positive social and environmental impact in the world. Whether we have our own companies or seek more fulfilling employment, adopting a triple-bottom-line approach to doing business (that is, people, planet, and profit) could be part of how we future-

proof our careers and foster abundant longevity.

Certified B Corporations are bound by a [Declaration of Interdependence](#), meaning that only through reliance on each other can scalable transformation occur. As such, Certified B Corporations have a heightened enthusiasm to work with each other and with values-aligned, mission-driven companies in general. This element is most salient when it comes to vendor relationships, because part of being a Certified B Corporation means rethinking the supply chain. Being able to recognize the "B" logo may direct the attention of language professionals everywhere to certain partnership possibilities they know will benefit the world.

Strengthening the alignment of language use will also be essential as the B Impact Assessment becomes more refined and malleable across different markets and cultures. As translators and interpreters, we have a unique value to offer in this area. The B Impact Assessment was created in English, with versions currently available in French, Italian, Portuguese,

and Spanish. Achieving a more sustainable future means having buy-in and participation beyond the Romance family of languages. And it doesn't stop there. Not only is it vital to expand language availability, but it must be accompanied by accurate cultural context. Part of this movement's growth potential lies in making the B Impact Assessment and its standards more accessible on these fronts. With greater access comes more conversations, and more conversations beget more collaboration among nations and cultures. It's at these junctures that language professionals are in their prime.

What began as a single spark in 2007 has since ignited a brilliant fire of creativity and sustainability development. Yet, from a general awareness angle, Certified B Corporations have flown somewhat under the radar throughout the years. One thing for language professionals to consider in building a more sustainable future is how we show up. Shifting our mindset to contemplate the benefit of a wider group of stakeholders will be paramount in those considerations. 



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