



How to Create a Corporate Strategy Poster

CREATING A CORPORATE STRATEGY POSTER – HOW TO DO IT?

► LEADING PURPOSE AND QUESTION:

Research-oriented posters aim to create an ‘infographic’ that shows important components of the antecedents of an organization’s sustainability strategy. It helps students – but also (action) researchers and practitioners – to present and discuss with their peers, in a structured manner, the kind of argument they have come up with, based on what type of assessments and information.

Posters contain a leading question, for example:

- How can organization X move to the next level of sustainability?
- What partnership strategies are necessary to serve the SDG-agenda of organization X better?
- How can organization X overcome the intention-realization or promise-performance gap?

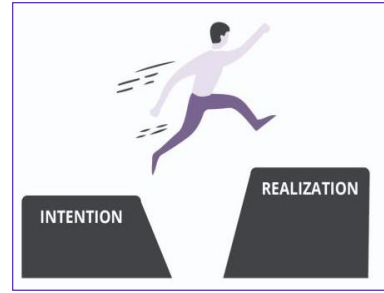
► TOPICS:

In order to come up with a convincing argument and cleverly use infographics formats, posters using the analytical frameworks of ‘Principles of Sustainable Business’ always include information on:

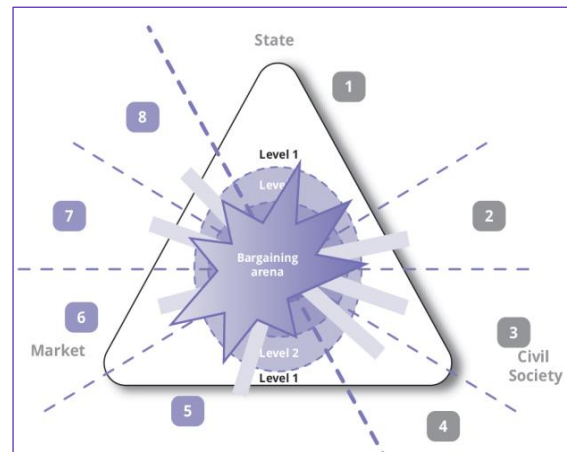
- **[1] GAPS:** a poster assesses the gaps that seem to exist between ‘intention’ and ‘realization’ – also discussed in *Chapter 9* as the gap between ‘talking’ and ‘walking’ or between ‘promise’ and ‘performance’. The Better Business Scan (BBS) technique is useful here (betterbusinessscan.org). The BBS can be applied to help score the gap by either: (a) asking managers to fill out the BBS, or (b) by making a ‘student assessment’, based on publicly available information and by discussing findings in a student-research group, to arrive at a first stage of ‘interrater reliability’.



In a more sophisticated assessment, the gap analysis can be made more fine-grained and concrete by classifying corporate motivations in all functional management areas (using the techniques elaborated in *Chapter 11*) as either ‘inactive/reactive/active/proactive’. The more sophisticated the analysis becomes, the more the reasons underlying the gap – as well as the consequences for the corporate strategy – can be revealed. However, even a relatively superficial assessment can already help in assessing the ‘strategic challenges’ the company is facing.



- [2] **POSITIONING:** the poster shows several historical positioning decisions that define, to a large extent, the room for manoeuvre the organization has in making strategic choices towards higher levels of sustainability (see *Chapters 6 and 10*). This includes: (i) the organization’s governance set-up [positions 1–8]; (ii) the organization’s position within value chains, markets, and within and across industries; (iii) its resource base (including particular technologies); (iv) its degree of internationalization.



The leeway, the sphere of control/influence and the strategic choices made on these aspects provide the organization with a smaller or larger ‘power base’ for creating change.

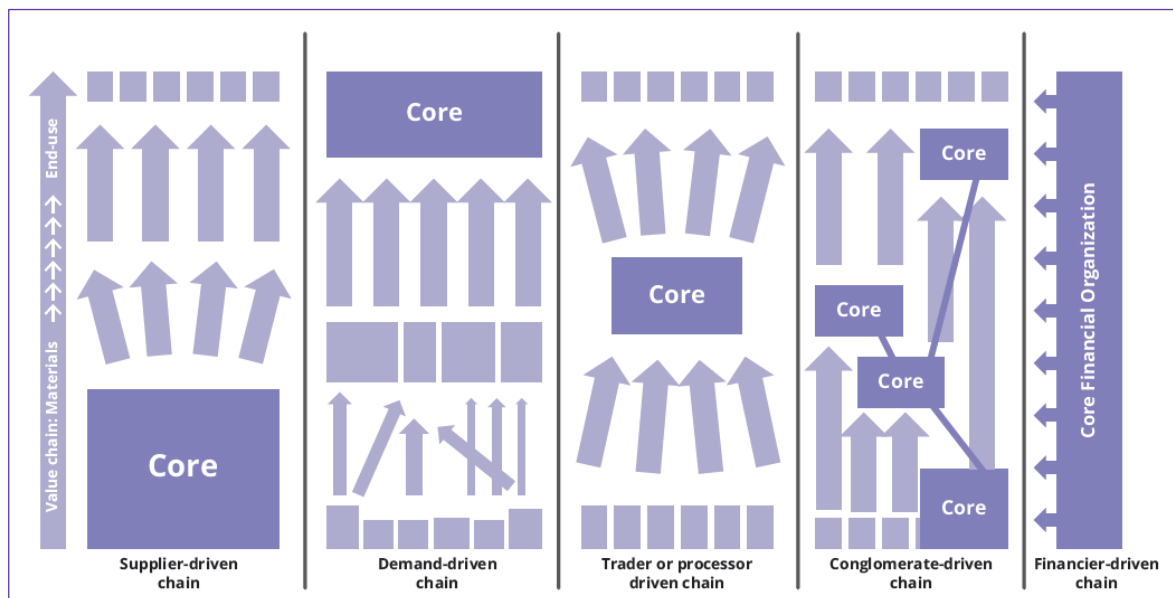


Figure 10.3 Structural power – five core positions – page 551

- **[3] SWOT AND MATERIALITY ANALYSIS:** this step considers the strengths and weaknesses that the organization’s societal position entails, as well as the (potential) opportunities and threats the organization faces (see Box 10.2). For such an assessment, the poster should include a ‘materiality’ analysis (see *Chapter 9*). Materiality assessments can be copied from the one the company itself has made (consult their annual reports) but, preferably, should cover several years in order to present patterns and reflect the logic in the approach taken and the substantive topics prioritized. A materiality assessment can also be based on own analysis – along the lines specified by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI).¹

Depending on the time available for the analysis, a distinction can be made between ‘single materiality’ (focusing on threats for the company’s economic value creation, often leading to reactive approaches to stakeholder pressure) and ‘double materiality’ (which additionally focuses on opportunities for sustainability impact for the benefit of multiple stakeholders, opening up to more proactive approaches).² The technique introduced for the latter – and in which the SDG-agenda has been integrated – is referred to in the book as ‘reversing the materiality’ and entails taking an outside-in/inside-out perspective.

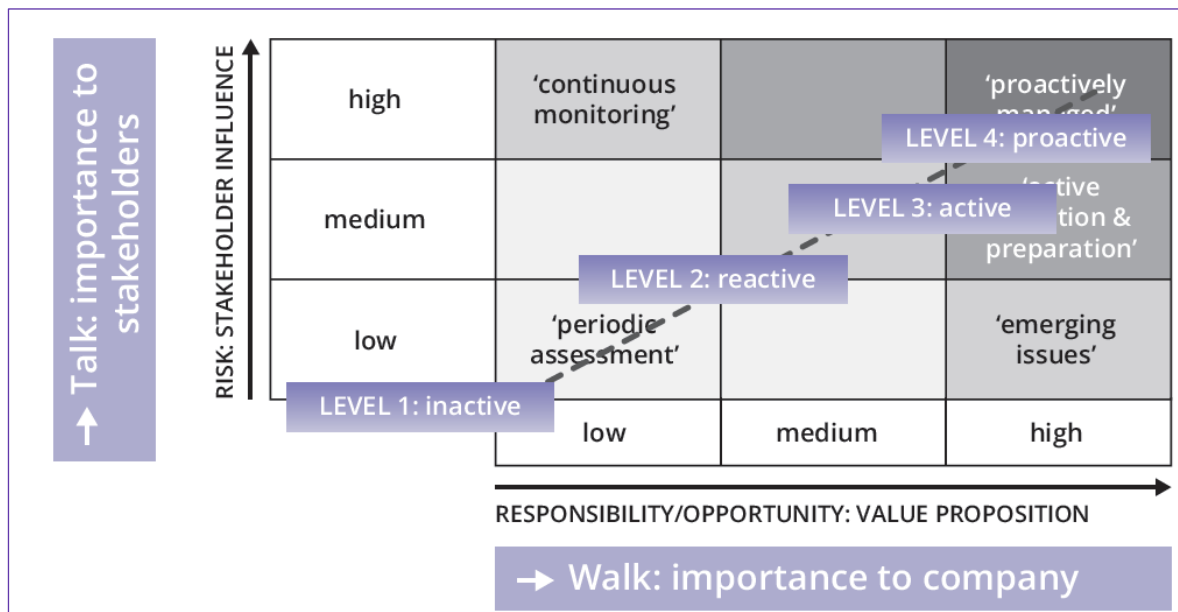


Figure 9.4 Materiality matrix and issue prioritization – page 475

- **[4] TRANSITION PHASE:** based on these generated insights, one can subsequently portray the (estimated) ‘transition phase’ that the organization is currently in (*Chapters 9, 10 and 11*) and the kind of barriers (popularly identified as ‘bears on the road’) it faces in its move to higher levels of sustainability. In general terms, this can be presented as the next level of CSR; when taking a ‘multinational organization’ perspective, this can be presented as the next level of ICR (see *Chapter 10* for further elaborations).



¹ See: ‘GRI Universal Standards - GRI 3: Material Topics 2021 (effective date 1 January 2023).

² The European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS), recently created by the EU as a central element of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), are based on the notion of ‘double materiality’.

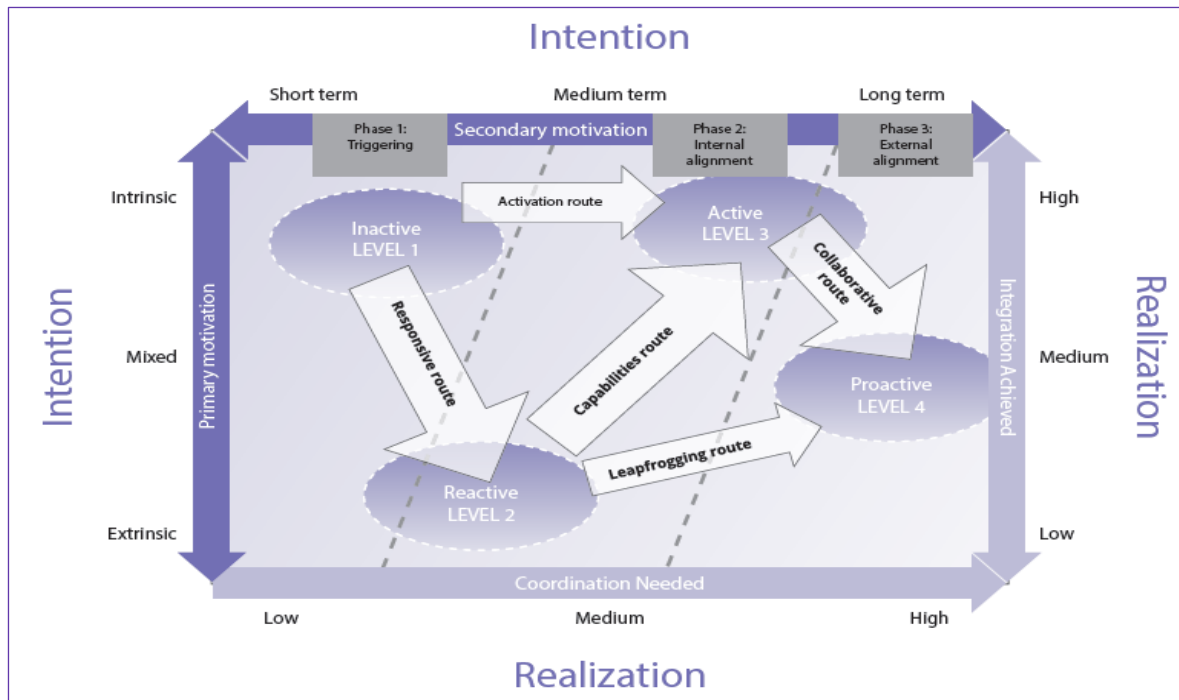


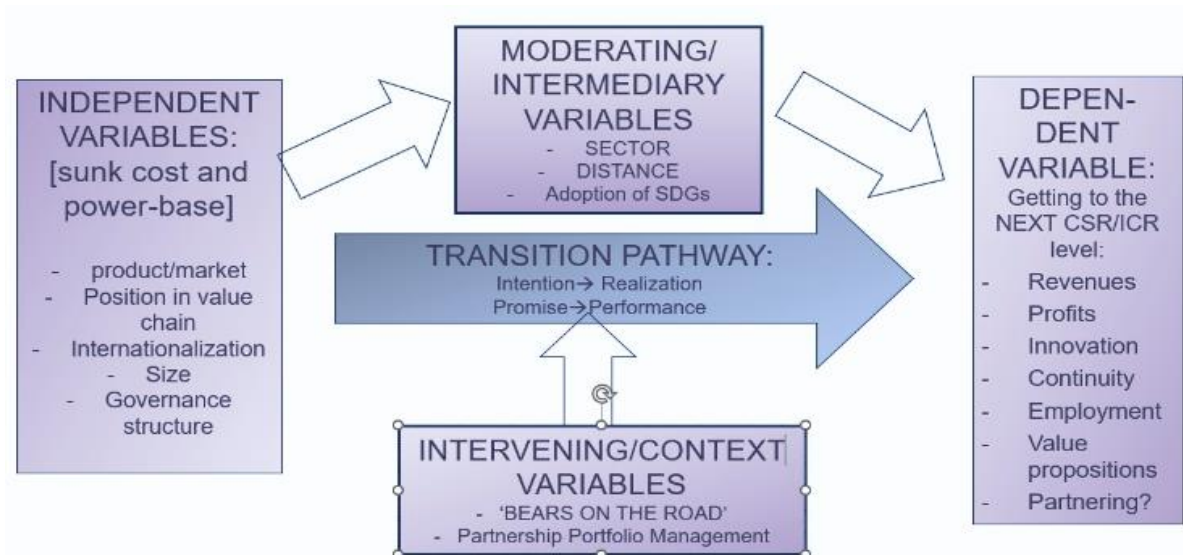
Figure 11.7 Mapping sustainable business intention and realization levels – page 665

KVIs	→	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4
			Key tipping point →		
KDIs KPQ/KPIs	→	1. Trigger		2. Internal alignment	3. External alignment
[1] STRATEGIC					
[2] PURCHASING					
[3] OPERATIONS					
[4] MARKETING					
[5] HRM					
[6] FINANCE					
[7] INNOVATION					
[8] COMMUNICATION					

Figure 11.25 Mapping internal alignment challenges: incoherent organization – page 806

- [5] **ANALYTICAL MODEL:** to increase the poster’s scientific foundation and open up the argument to further scrutiny, a corporate strategy poster aims to define different types of variables that form the background of a more robust analytical line:
 - **Independent variables:** related to ‘sunk costs’ and historical ‘positioning decisions’ that are not easy to change (Chapter 10);
 - **Dependent variables:** related to the strategy’s intended or anticipated outcome and impact (Chapters 8–9);

- **Intermediary/moderating variables:** related to dynamics such as home–host country distance (for multinational corporations), leadership characteristics, mindsets, coordination-integration challenges (Chapters 11) and the like, with a bearing on the company’s internal mode of organization;
- **Intervening or context variables:** ‘bears on the road’ that are often related to external dynamics: the triggering events the organization is facing in relation to the organization’s current transition phase (Chapter 7).



[6] **THE SDG-AGENDA:** including SDG-icons and SDG-targets in the poster helps to define those areas of management where societal relevance and impact can be reached through SDG-alignment and ‘strategic fit’ (*Chapter 10*). Obvious frameworks to incorporate in the poster include: ‘reversing materiality’ (on the materiality analysis), ‘goal orientation’ (on the business model, business case, and a possible sustainable corporate story), ‘partnering-portfolio’ strategies (see figure 12.6 below), and ‘functional’ SDG links (using the ‘SDG alignment fishes’ of *section 11.10*. See, for instance, the fiche on sustainable supply chain management below). Each of these components can be included to link independent and dependent variables in a more targeted manner (the arrow in the above model).

Of course, any other form of posters is possible. Yet the multi-year experience of students producing corporate strategy posters learns that with these components covered, more or less systematic comparisons between different organizations starting from the same societal position are possible. Also, if two posters on the same company/organization come up with different storylines and analyses, this creates an interesting platform for discussion and joint-insight development. To make this discourse part of ‘interrater-reliability’ checks and a platform for further research, all posters should reveal the sources used.

SDG ALIGNMENT FICHE #1 Sustainable Supply Chain Management (SSCM)						
Selected SDG lenses						
SDG-targets	1.1; 1.2	2.3	8.2; 8.5; 8.7; 8.8	9.3	10.1	12.a
Internally actionable targets (Tool #10.1)	Avoid doing harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Labour rights and practices in the supply chain Elimination of forced labour and child labour Collective bargaining for wages and benefits along the supply chain Equal pay and opportunities for men and women, at all levels 				
	Doing good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fair payment to small-scale suppliers Sustainable food production Socially responsible sourcing Transfer of sustainable technologies to developing countries 				

Example of one of the ‘functional’ SDG alignment fiches – pages 785–804

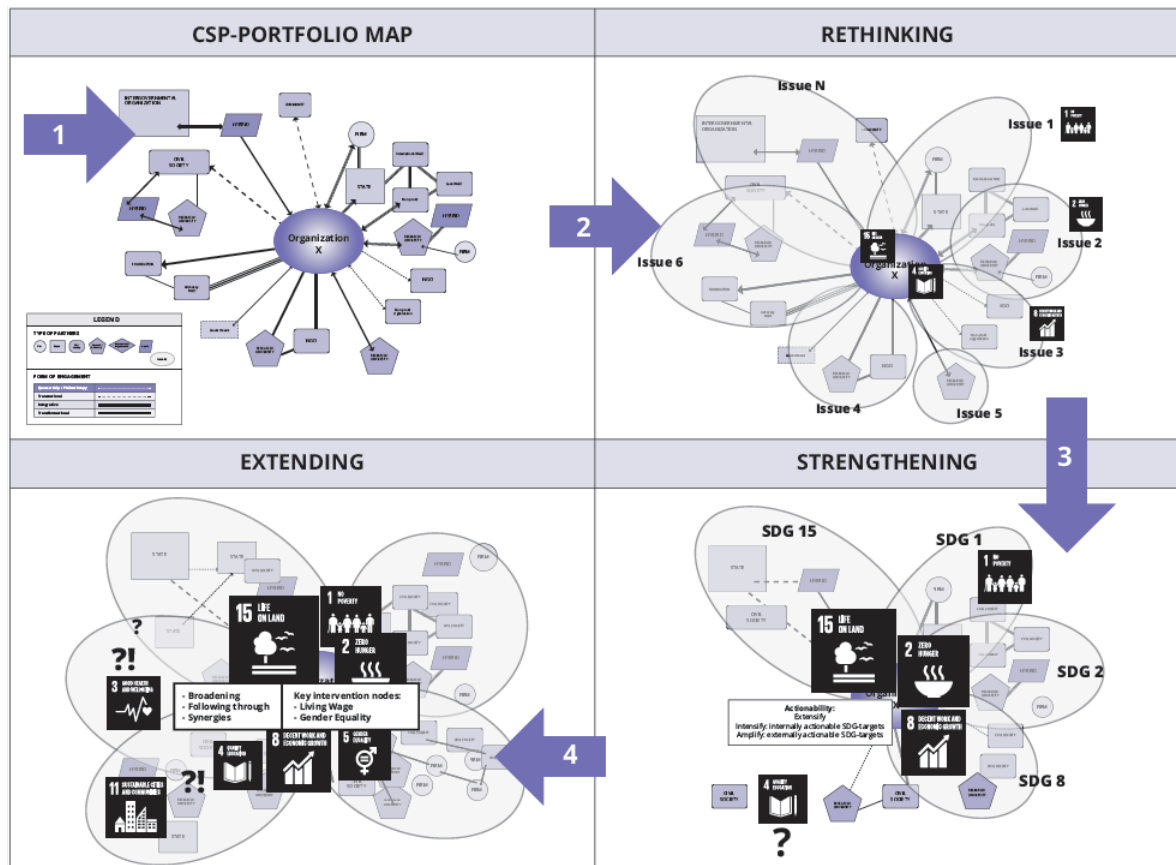


Figure 12.6 Increasing the SDG-fit of partnership portfolios – page 886