



SDG Strategy Poster – Basic Approach (Bachelor)

GOALS OF AN SDG STRATEGY POSTER:

Composing an SDG strategy poster in a small group of students at the bachelor level – in a limited amount of the time – has several objectives:

- To apply the frameworks presented in Chapter 4 of *Principles of Sustainable Business*¹: understanding the complex (wicked) nature of societal challenges as formulated by the Sustainable Development Goals, and approaching them from a corporate point of view.
- To apply the frameworks of Chapter 5 of the book, in order to think of, and formulate, an integrated CSR strategy for a selection of SDGs – at four levels of intervention – and enable CSR business case formulation at:
 - Level 1: addressing market failure (Corporate *Self-Responsibility*);
 - Level 2: addressing negative externalities (Corporate *Social Responsiveness*);
 - Level 3: creating and scaling positive externalities (Corporate *Social/Strategic Responsibility*);
 - Level 4: collective action (Corporate *Societal/Sustainable Responsibility*).
- To align (fit) this integrated CSR-strategy with ‘an SDG nexus’ (section 10.5) in order to address, smartly manage and leverage contributions to multiple SDGs at the same time, for instance through a thought-out portfolio of partnerships (existing and desired).
- To think about the ‘governance’ dimension and related ‘agency challenges’ in addressing these issues. Publicly-listed, state-owned, family-owned, cooperatively or otherwise governed: how does it make a difference?
- Get acquainted with some vital analytical concepts and frameworks introduced throughout the book: various business cases for sustainability and SDG involvement at various levels of intervention; wicked problems (Scoreboard #1); societal triangulation (Scoreboard #2); the ‘nexus challenge’ (both external and internal); spheres of influence and responsibility; the societal license to exist/operate/scale/experiment; cross-sector partnerships (coalitions of willing vs. needed partners).

¹ Note that under ‘Resources: open access’ on this website, a shorter booklet (2018) is available that elaborates the basic techniques. Part II of this booklet covers the basics of ‘wicked problems’ and ‘wicked opportunities’ analysis. Both techniques are also available on this website (under ‘Tools & Skills’). Part III of the 2018-booklet covers corporate approaches – including the concepts of materiality, CSR intervention levels, partnership portfolio strategies. References in this hand-out relate to the more extensive information that can be gained by consulting the chapters in the book ‘Principles of Sustainable Business’.

- Apply a number of techniques that can help relatively uninformed people to nevertheless come to relevant common insights: wisdom of the crowd, interrater-reliability techniques, quick scans, (info)graphical design techniques.
- To consider and think about the *strategy dimension* of CSR, which includes addressing at least the following components:
 - The **levels of responsibility and intervention (1–4)** the company needs to commit to in order to effectively address its prioritized SDGs (or societal challenges), and the kind of **business case** needed for that ambition;
 - The **materiality** of at least one SDG to the company – now and in the future – linked to the CSR business case;
 - The establishment of a **‘smart’ portfolio of (cross-sector) partnerships** that includes relevant (thus: not just ‘willing’ but ‘needed’) primary and secondary stakeholders (Chapters 5 and 12).
- To find relevant additional information about the company, its appreciation of its societal context, and the SDGs selected.

PREPARATION FOR THE POSTER

Organized in workshops – or smaller group discussions – participants can bring together and share various insights on how company X is confronted with different SDGs (short-hand for societal challenges) and how it impacts the SDGs through its operations. By doing this in an exploratory fashion, participants are enabled to accumulate and align ideas on how a company can design an integrated CSR-strategy that helps achieve a selection of relevant SDGs. Key for the corporate strategy are the four levels of intervention and the adoption of a business case (see Chapter 8). Students have to assess at which level of intervention the company’s current business case for sustainability can be placed, and then assess whether a business case at a higher level of intervention is feasible – and if so, how.

The two major strategic aims should then be: (a) to ‘avoid doing harm’, and (b) to foster ‘doing good’ on the selected SDG. For this, basic information from **Chapters 5, 9 and 10** as well as **Tool 10.1** can be used to make a rough assessment.

The meeting is subsequently aimed at trying to think of specific policies, targets, stakeholder approaches, technologies, solutions, etc. that go beyond what the company is already doing. At the same time, students are invited to consider how this strategy also helps achieve (rather than counteracts) inter-related SDGs (i.e., the nexus challenge, see **section 10.5**), in particular through choosing ‘the right’ kind of (cross-sector) partnerships. A group can decide to take one to four SDGs – depending on the group size – that seem particularly relevant for the company as starting position. Leading questions that can feed the discussion and guide interrater-reliability checks include:

- Why are the SDGs selected relevant to the company? Use **Scoreboard#1** and try to establish ‘interrater reliability’ within the group. Link the company’s business and its

operational activities to the selected SDG(s). What issues is the company confronted with (e.g., according to the media and as defined by their own materiality assessment)?

- What is the nature of the problem and who is responsible for it (not) being solved? Apply societal triangulation (quick scan version of **Scoreboard#2**). In what domains do the problems become manifest? To what extent is this the responsibility of the market? Or are governments and/or communities also (partly) responsible? Take the governance structure of the company into account when assessing the societal position from which the organization can address the issue – is it a publicly-listed or state-owned organization, etc. (see **Chapter 6**). From there, can you clarify the nature of the problem, or provide a new angle on the problem?
- How can company X take responsibility and develop a CSR-strategy to help achieve some or all of the selected SDGs? Is there a business case for a specific SDG, perhaps even at a higher level of intervention than the company’s current business case (see **Chapter 8**)? Apply a materiality analysis (**Chapter 9**) and consider to what extent company X can break through a ‘reactive’ (do no harm; level 2) approach to CSR. Which partnering approaches are needed (see **sections 5.4.2 and 5.5** and **Chapter 12**)? You can consider, for example, whether these partnerships sufficiently cover the material issues you have identified. Can you think of promising new initiatives or current initiatives that the company should extend?

Note, that these questions are intended as *guiding or heuristic questions* to introduce some of the basic techniques elaborated in the book, to foster discussion and to steer group interaction towards a common approach. Wicked problems defy definition, after all, so out-of-the-box thinking, critical reflection, and creative angles on (part of) the problem as well as possible avenues for addressing them are highly encouraged. Feel free to fill out the blanks yourself and use the poster also – if time allows – for more creative purposes: for instance, to design a compelling graphical advice for the ‘winding road to take’.²

POSTER DESIGN AND EXECUTION

The group discussion is to result in an integration of all the insights and discussion points on how to incorporate multiple ‘single SDG’ ambitions into one overarching CSR strategy. A company’s CSR strategy should not pertain to one but rather to *all relevant* SDGs. Your challenge is, therefore, to try to formulate such an integrated CSR strategy. In doing so, you can build upon the prior workshop presentations and discussions with your peers.

The result (output) should be a poster of a limited number of words (approx. 500 words, excluding figures, tables and references) and informative graphics, with a focus on:

² Part III of the book elaborates how (multinational) companies can align their strategies with (prioritized) SDGs, internalize them, and integrate them into their core business. However, Part III (Chapter 11 in particular) also explains that even frontrunner companies experience a considerable gap between intention and realization in coherently integrating the goals into their organization and across all functional areas of management.

- The **business case** for sustainability at a particular level of intervention. Is it feasible to go beyond the current level of intervention, and can you persuasively outline specific strategies?
- The **interconnected nature of the SDGs** (the nexus challenge). Does your CSR strategy impact all relevant SDGs positively, thereby minimizing trade-offs between SDGs and optimizing contributions to the SDGs?
- Adequate coverage of **main materiality issues** and corresponding SDGs. Does the approach that you have come up with take sufficient responsibility at the relevant intervention levels (societal triangulation). Can that be improved?
- The **scope of your partnership portfolio**. Do you include and involve relevant stakeholders sufficiently?

[Status of SDG strategy posters: the examples of SDG Strategy Poster shown on this website were drawn from a database consisting of hundreds of (anonymized) company posters, created by several cohorts of Bachelor-2 students at RSM-Erasmus University that participated in the course on 'Responsible Business Leadership' (RBL). They engaged in intense sub-group discussions, one workshop and prepared their posters within a relatively short period of time – 2 weeks – for which they were assigned a company and a selection of SDGs]