

SDG Workshop:

In advance

For this workshop, the students and instructor must have a thorough knowledge of the SDGs and the way they work. This knowledge can be provided in a preparatory class (1 hour). It aims to situate the SDGs in the evolution of corporate social responsibility and to build a clear framework.

A lot of information can be found on:

- <https://focus2030.org/Focus-2030-and-the-Sustainable-Development-Goals-at-the-heart-of-our-work>
- <https://www.sdg.services/goals.html>
- [https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html#:~:text=The%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals%20\(SDGs,peace%20and%20prosperity%20by%202030.](https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html#:~:text=The%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals%20(SDGs,peace%20and%20prosperity%20by%202030.)
- <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

This workshop and brainstorming exercise is based on an exercise developed for companies working on the SDGs and was developed by VOKA, Unitar Cifal Flanders, and with the support of CSR Flanders.¹

The purpose of this workshop is to develop an action plan for an existing business or organization. You can take an organization that the students know well (e.g., your own University College) or take a company that wants to actively participate in this exercise. The company can then briefly introduce itself at the start and indicate what actions they are already taking around sustainability.

Preparation for the teacher

Good brainstorming starts with solid preparation. Make sure you have a good knowledge of the SDGs. It will enable you to explain to your students the various sustainable development goals and to translate them into action.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) does not come out of the blue, so, likely, a lot of things are already happening in the company around sustainability. It can be a good starting point for yourself to list these initiatives in advance and to frame them within the 5 pillars of sustainable business. In this way, you start with several concrete examples and you show that sustainable business can often be very practical and applicable to various domains. If this is not the case, then you start from a blank canvas and there is undoubtedly low-hanging fruit that can be tackled quickly. If necessary, think up several examples yourself and present them briefly to the group later.

In addition to proper preparation, it is best to provide:

¹ <https://www.voka.be/communities/voka-charter-duurzaam-ondernemen-vcdo-oost-vlaanderen/sdg-roadmap>

- A flipchart and projection (beamer / screen / ...)
- Tape (to hang the different pillars up in the room)
- Post-its, coloured stickers, and markers (same colour)

You can hang the 5 pillars (A2 or A3) in the room where you are organising the workshop. Make sure the sheets (see annex 1) are spread throughout the room. The participants will move from sheet to sheet during the exercise. Each sheet represents 1 of the 5 pillars. Under each pillar, icons will indicate which SDGs fall under it. All ideas will be attached to these later on.

Further, ensure that each participant receives a bundle with the following:

- The link between the SDGs and business objectives (see <https://sdgcompass.org/sdgs/>)
- Sufficient post-its
- 2 colours of stickers, with about 20 stickers of each colour
- Pen and paper

Action

Step 1: Silence

Introverts often find it difficult to openly unleash ideas on a group. To ensure that everyone's input can be fully utilised, you can start with six minutes of silence before the first action proposals are hung under the pillars. During these six minutes of silence, everyone gets the time to individually formulate proposals and to write them down on the post-its. Once these are hung on the relevant pillar or SDG, the brainstorming exercise can then begin.

Step 2: Brainstorm exercise

Divide the group into smaller groups of 2 or 3 people. Each group will work on one of the five pillars. At that point, each group is given 8 minutes to put down on paper as many ideas and actions as possibly linked to that particular pillar. It should be clear that during this phase, quantity is more important than quality. No account needs to be taken of budgets, context, company culture,... Every idea is good, but for the time being no value judgment is attached to it.

Encourage the participants to write as much as possible on the flipchart. Quantity over quality. Explain that they should write their ideas on post-its (one idea per post-it). These do not need to be organised under the appropriate SDG. Ask in CAPITAL LETTERS and be as CONCRETE as possible. Have the ideas written down with a marker. It is easier to read.

After 8 minutes, the groups move on to the next pillar. Again they have 8 minutes to generate as many ideas as possible. These can be new ideas, but can also be built on the ideas that the previous group put on paper. Again, the more ideas the better.

In this way, the participants move on and on, until they are back at the pillar where they started. Now that the pillar is full of potential actions, the idea is for each group to group the ideas under their pillar. Similar actions are grouped so that during the next round the overview can be given. This may take a few minutes so provide enough time for this.

Now have each group briefly go over the ideas that have been formulated. This will give everyone



a good idea of what potential actions have emerged. However, avoid discussions about ideas. Still, the rule here is quantity over quality.

Variations

Depending on the scope of the exercise, one may choose to brainstorm around a limited number of pillars or to work around some specific SDGs that, for example, linked with the core activities of the company.

One may choose not to brainstorm about the entire company, but to focus on a particular product, process or specific service.

Materiality versus nice to haves

After this intensive group exercise, it is crucial to come down to earth. Possibly the craziest ideas were formulated, there are a hundred actions on the boards and after this brainstorming session, the company seems to be the company of the future.

It is crucial from this stage onwards to start taking into account the materiality associated with the actions. By materiality, we mean whether an action has an impact on those processes and activities that are proprietary to the company and part of the effective sphere of influence of the company. The core business in other words.

Here we make the distinction between "nice to haves" and "material actions".

Example: A manufacturing company that invests in an insect hotel and a green area on its premises performs a nice action, but it has no impact on the daily business activity or processes. However, when it undertakes an action that integrates sustainability principles into the purchasing procedure for raw materials, then this has an impact on the company's crucial processes of the company and the materiality is much greater.

A good and attractive sustainability policy combines both material actions as well as nice to have. However, one must be vigilant that the company does not slip into window dressing or greenwashing, and that as much as possible the company focuses on those actions that have a fundamental impact on the company. To put this into practice, it is important to make the above concepts clear to the group.

Step 3: Material or nice to have

Once everyone is familiar with the concepts, each person may begin assigning the stickers that were handed out at the beginning of the session. One colour is used to indicate the actions that you as a person attribute to a high degree of materiality and on which you want to focus in the coming action year. The stickers with the other colour can be assigned to actions that are either quick wins and require little time or investments, or are nice to have.

Give the group about ten minutes, and motivate them to think broadly. Participants may place up to 2 stickers on the same idea, which allows for an idea that someone is convinced of to come out more.

Step 4: Selection

After all the stickers are handed out, everyone takes his or her place back at the table. It is now up to the teacher to go over pillar by pillar and select the action proposals with the most votes.

Link an action to a specific SDG. In this phase, it is useful to already make a note of the actions with the most votes (for example, in an Excel file), and link the number of votes for core business and nice to have to it. This makes it possible to actively use the list later and filter it by the number of votes.



Variation

This is where the SDG circle comes into play. You can print this out in large format, or you can project the circle. The ideas with the most votes are taken off the flipchart and stuck on the SDG circle (or on the projection).

In doing so, each idea is briefly discussed and placed under the most relevant SDG. An action can often be placed under several SDGs. Use the document linking the SDGs to the corporate goals for inspiration if you are unsure about a particular action. In this way, you make visual what you and the company want to focus on and what not.

The result of this intensive exercise is that each idea is discussed and linked to the most relevant SDG. Ideas are likely to be looked at with more realistic eyes at this stage. Participants are now also allowed to consider time commitment, return on investment, capacity planning, etc. It is important here as a teacher to make sure that not every idea is shot down and that the one who can shout the loudest determines which actions get through and which do not. The group has been able to vote, so any idea with enough votes deserves at least to be developed into a project proposal.

Step 5: Project sheets

In brainstorming, it is possible that many good ideas are suggested but that the good intentions quickly fade into the background when everyone gets back to work. To avoid this, each chosen action point will be developed into a project sheet.

These project sheets do not necessarily all have to be worked out into concrete actions. Certain ideas may require further discussion. It is possible that certain ideas need to be discussed further, that studies are necessary, and that planning and budgeting need to be considered.

However, the intention is to make the individual proposals more concrete and to give the structure of action as good as possible. You can use a template (annex 3).

Take these points into consideration:

- SDG: provide the definition of the SDG and explain why this action item falls under it.
- Objective: formulate your smart objectives: specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic and time-bound.
- Background: where is the action coming from? What is the history of the action item? Have there been certain issues in the past that prompted this action? What were the dynamics during the brainstorming?
- Implementation action: When is the action successful for you? What is the expected result?
- Project manager: Who will follow up the project and be responsible for achieving the result? This can be fine-tuned later if necessary.
- Budget: If an estimate of the required budget can already be made, it is always useful to add this as an indication.
- What is the proposed timing? When does the project need to be delivered?

The various detailed project sheets together form your action plan, and thus your SDG Roadmap.



Annex 1





PROSPERITY

7 AFFORDABLE AND
CLEAN ENERGY



8 DECENT WORK AND
ECONOMIC GROWTH



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE



10 REDUCED
INEQUALITIES



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES
AND COMMUNITIES



PLANET



6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



13 CLIMATE ACTION



14 LIFE BELOW WATER



15 LIFE ON LAND





PARTNERSHIP

17 PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS



PEACE



16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS



Annex 2: SDG Wheel



