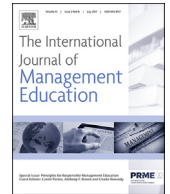




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## The Gap Frame - Translating the SDGs into relevant national grand challenges for strategic business opportunities



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### ABSTRACT

The global agenda of Grand Challenges until 2030 is set: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) enjoy broad global governmental acceptance and increasing business awareness. This paper takes a concrete look at how we can reach a state-of-the-world by 2030 that is 'safe for all of us'. Getting there requires relevant national measures that are easily accessible for business, which is considered a key transformative force with its innovation power. The global nature and focus of the SDGs make it challenging to serve as a relevant source for measuring national progress. This paper offers a solution to this challenge by introducing the Gap Frame; a normative framework built on the SDGs and developed in a multi-step expert-consultation approach. The Gap Frame supports the global SDG by enriching the SDG Compass, a planning tool developed by GRI, UNGC and WBCSD. Building on the SDG Compass, this paper shows how the Gap Frame translates the SDGs into relevant actions for different nations, and how it can be used as a strategic business tool and as an educational tool for business schools.

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## 1. Introduction

The **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** were agreed upon in September 2015 by the global community after an extensive political alignment process among multiple stakeholders including global business and NGOs. The SDGs replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that served to prioritize the global agenda between 2000 and 2015. For the period 2015–2030 the SDGs now set the new global agenda, with 193 nations having signed up to the 17 underlying goals.

Significant progress that been made in resolving some of the big issues addressed by the Millennium Development Goals. For example: extreme poverty has decreased from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015, with most progress having occurred since 2000. The number of child deaths has been reduced from 12.7 million in 1990 to almost 6 million in 2015 globally. ([The Millennium Development Goals Report, 2015](#)) Yet, at the same time, the planet, the state of government, the economy and our societies are in many ways worse off than at the turn of the millennium. Humanity's ecological planetary overshoot has grown from 36% to 64% in the period of 2000–2012 ([Global Footprint Network, 2016](#)). In 2014 the income gap between rich and poor has reached its highest levels in most OECD countries ([OECD, 2014](#)), resulting in increasing dissatisfaction with the economic and political systems around the world. It has become clear that a single player alone, be it

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government or business or civil society, cannot resolve these increasingly complex global challenges. Much hope rests, however, on the innovation power of business with its far-reaching global presence and influence.

The SDG Compass developed by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), the U.N. Global Compact (UNGC), and the World Business Council of Sustainable Development (WBCSD) provides a generic five-step process for business to apply the SDGs for business planning:

- Step 1: Understanding the SDGs
- Step 2: Defining priorities
- Step 3: Setting goals
- Step 4: Integrating
- Step 5: Reporting & communicating

This paper builds on the SDG Compass by enriching it with process knowhow and content expertise in order to facilitate its application in the strategy processes of business and in business school education. This paper will focus on the first three steps, by adding the Gap Frame in step 1, Business Sustainability 3.0 (BST 3.0) in step 2 and the Collaboratory in step 3 as additional tools (see Fig. 1).

Business schools as an educator of the next generation of leaders and partners of business, play an important role in unleashing this innovation power in the coming decade. UNPRME-schools represent a growing group of business schools around the world that endorse this challenge and actively seek to contribute to progress with innovative solutions in research and education. Helping business understand and embrace the opportunity the SDGs provide will be a key priority for business schools in the next decade.

While the Business Sustainability Typology (Dyllick & Muff, 2016) with its BST 3.0 proposition and the Collaboratory method (Muff, 2016) have been used already as tools to help business on their sustainability journey, the Gap Frame is a new tool. It has been developed in parallel with the SDGs and provides a framework with ideal objectives for the different goals where all citizens can live well on one planet. This paper will focus primarily on introducing the Gap Frame as a new tool, while it will only touch on BST 3.0 and the Collaboratory in order to provide a concrete pathway for working with the SDGs.

Section 2 provides a brief overview of the methodology and the systematic process used to develop the Gap Frame. The following three sections illustrate the application of the Gap Frame following steps 1 to 3 of the SDG Compass. Switzerland is used as a case in point. Section 3 outlines step 1 of the SDG Compass on understanding the SDGs, using the Gap Frame. Section 4 focusses on step 2 of the SDG Compass outlining how such a normative framework can help business to define priorities by adopting an “outside-in” perspective to identify long-term white-spot opportunities. Section 5 addresses step 3 of the SDG Compass and outlines how a co-creative multi-stakeholder process serves to translate the SDGs into long-term business opportunities. Section 6 focusses on how business schools might be using these tools and how PRME schools can make a difference in helping companies on their journey towards true business sustainability. Section 7 presents concluding thoughts on limitations and next steps forward.

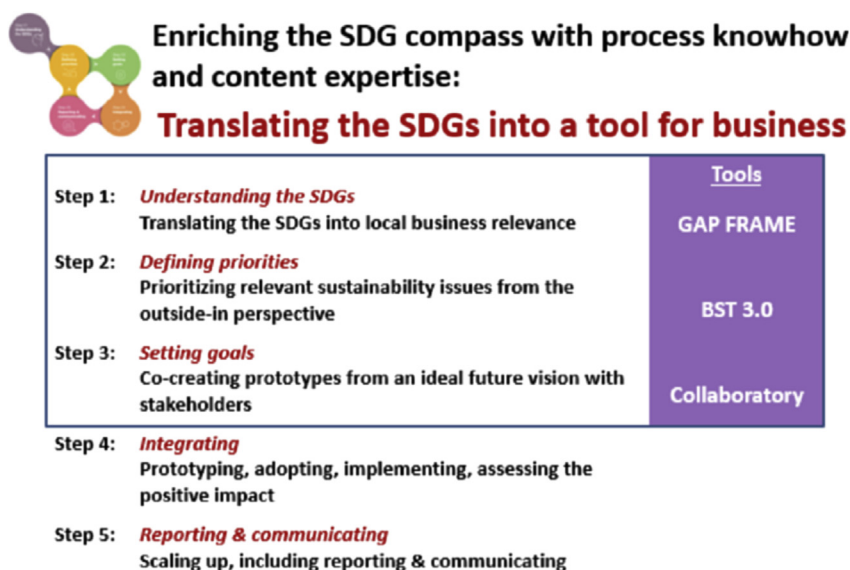


Fig. 1. The 5-step SDG Compass enriched in steps 1 to 3.

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