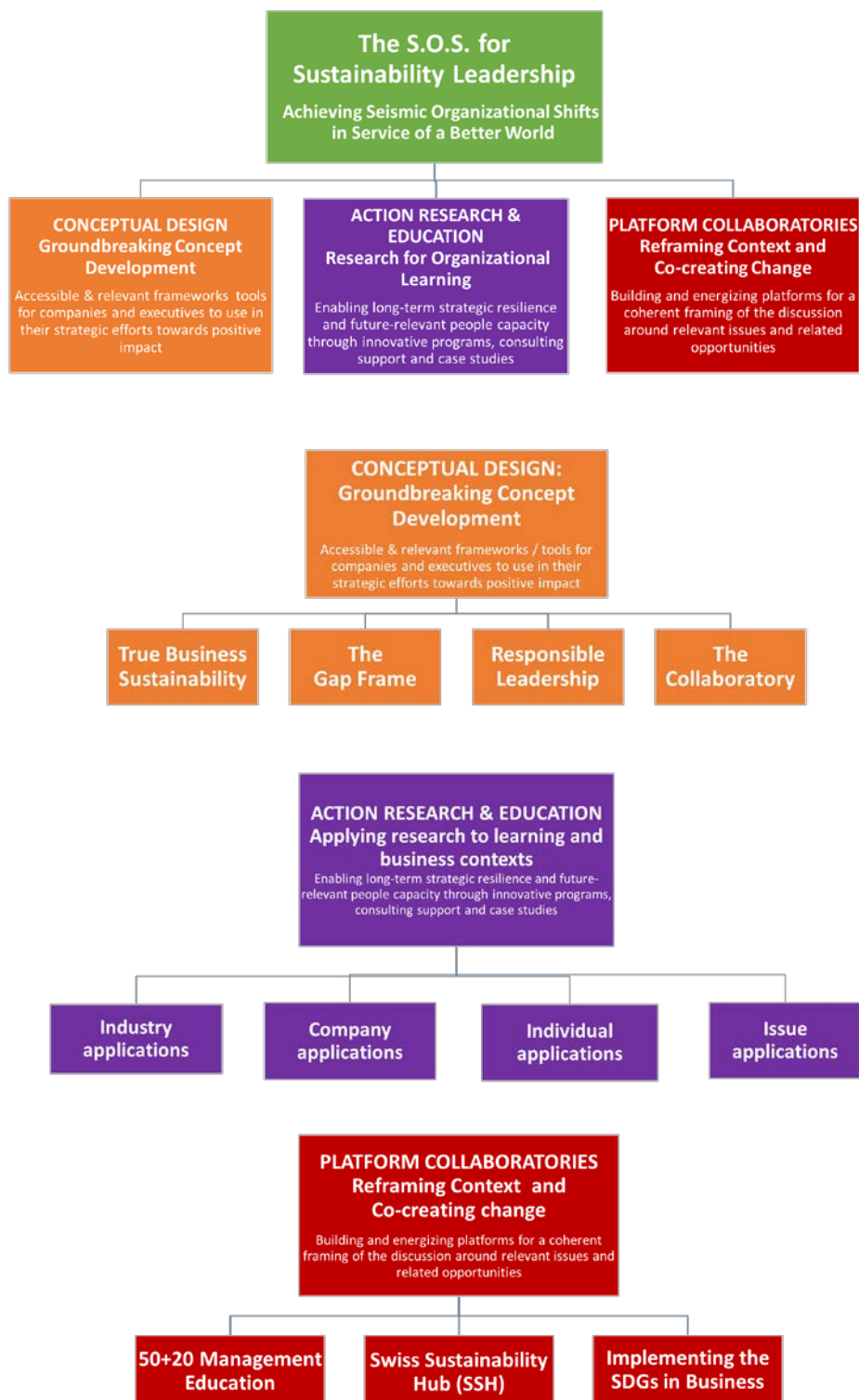


TO PROVIDE A LEARNING PLATFORM THAT ENABLES INDIVIDUALS & ORGANIZATIONS TO THRIVE BY CO-CREATING VIABLE BUSINESS SOLUTIONS FOR OUR PLANET AND ITS PEOPLE.

In line with our overall mission, the **BSL thought leadership strategy** seeks:

To contribute to a transformation of the economy and society by enabling business to positively contribute to a better world through the development of strategic resilience and responsible leaders.



A Foundation supervised by a united advisory board of the B&HR, the SSH and the BAAB boards.

The BSL Thought Leadership Strategy

Aileen Ionescu-Somers / Katrin Muff

1. Framing the context for BSL thought leadership

After several decades of incremental efforts by companies to integrate social and environmental issues into business strategy, it is apparent that traditional CSR approaches are not leading to the more “giant steps” required for true sustainability. Oceans, rivers and forests are struggling to cope with growing pressure from increasing consumption worldwide, the world’s wildlife has halved in less than a generation and social inequity (the gap between rich and poor) is growing even in developed countries. Although many global corporations have committed to some level of strategic focus on sustainability, the corporate focus is still primarily on reaching short-term financial goals. The so-called “Triple Bottom Line” (TBL) – a more balanced long-term approach which expands the business perspective to a social and environmental bottom line as well as an economic one - has not been fully embraced by companies. Recent examples of deviant corporate behavior may even indicate a distancing by global firms from the overall objectives of transparency, integrity and responsibility implied by the TBL logic: Siemens, Volkswagen, Nestlé, and BP are cases in point.

However, in 2015, for the first time, more than 193 countries agreed to integrate social, economic and environmental agendas through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to work toward a decarbonized future through the Paris Climate Agreement. Governments have agreed new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but how ready is business to help them achieve them? What’s their intention and their vision? Will they be business as usual or business critical? In an ideal world, every business would know how their activities and the consequences of them (even the unforeseen elements), map across to the SDGs. Their operations would have identified, valued and be measuring how they contribute to each global goal, monitoring their impact, and implementing new ideas to effect improvement. SDG impact awareness would not be confined to showcase projects, but be embedded in a new way of working that prioritizes the impact on global goals alongside its business objectives.

These developments have profound implications for companies and present an opportunity for business schools and academic institutions to help companies to leapfrog, become responsible leaders and innovate for sustainability. The most pioneering companies (such as Unilever, Patagonia, Marks & Spencer and others) fully recognize that sustainability will be a driver of their strategies into the future, and that their longer term existence depends on tackling relevant challenges right here and now, but in considerably more radical ways that go beyond “business as usual”. While most of businesses are still pushing their businesses to take incremental measures towards change, these businesses have already reached a limit to what they can individually achieve. More partnerships and collective initiatives are called for, and multi-stakeholder dialogue and platforms will play a much greater role into the future.

In Switzerland, controversies surrounding the banking sector in particular have meant that the country’s overall global reputation has greatly suffered. Yet, internally in companies, substantial personal courage is required to be able to venture the idea that the purpose of business is not to simply satisfy its shareholders but that companies can and should have a more expanded purpose in society. There is a pressing need for more responsible leadership and a highlighting of what good companies are doing. Furthermore, the importance and potential influence of both family businesses and SMEs in Switzerland needs to be more highly profiled.

2. BSL's Thought Leadership Strategic Goal

In line with the overall BSL mission:

**TO PROVIDE A LEARNING PLATFORM THAT ENABLES INDIVIDUALS
& ORGANIZATIONS TO THRIVE BY CO-CREATING VIABLE BUSINESS
SOLUTIONS FOR OUR PLANET AND ITS PEOPLE.**

BSL seeks to leverage its thought leadership initiatives:

**To contribute to a transformation of the economy and society by enabling
business to positively contribute to a better world through the development
strategic resilience and responsible leaders.**

3. BSL's Thought Leadership Activity Streams

BSL carefully allocates the resources of its thought leadership team in three areas:

- a) **Conceptual Design: Groundbreaking concept development**
Creating accessible and relevant frameworks and tools for companies and their executives to use in their strategic efforts towards positive impact
- b) **Action Research & Education: Applying research to learning and business contexts**
Enabling long-term strategic resilience and future-relevant people capacity through innovative programs, consulting support or case studies
- c) **Platform Collaboratories: Reframing context and co-creating change**
Building and energizing platforms for a coherent framing of the discussion around relevant issues and related opportunities

4. The collaborative umbrella "hub"

BSL has a number of existing thought leadership activities that are loosely linked to each of the above-mentioned objectives. To create strategic coherence in its activities and to better leverage its resources, BSL endeavors to focus in future on high impact activities under one thought leadership umbrella. This enables BSL to have a clear message internally and externally about how each of its activities adds value to its overall efforts and helps to achieve the BSL thought leadership goal and objectives.

Given its available resources to achieve these ambitious aims, BSL focusses on creating a fertile research and learning "hub" involving leaders and partners from academia, business, government, multilateral and bilateral organizations and NGOs. The "hub" serves as an umbrella initiative allowing strategic focus on collaborative - high impact - research and learning activities. This collaborative initiative is used as a catalyst by each partner organization individually and collectively to:

- **Empower:** increase the profile of all initiatives of all partners, thus strengthening their leadership positions and thus influence in the area of sustainability to achieve goals;
- **Energize:** lead by example and thus encourage courageous actions and thinking at other organizations and by individuals;

- **Enable:** pool strengths, talent, experience and competencies, thus gaining more leverage on a national and international level;
- **Ensure effectiveness:** attract additional resources to hardwire the initiative, allowing it to grow and accelerate efforts and actions towards each organization’s overall goals.

5. The BSL Thought Leadership activities as an umbrella Hub

The umbrella initiative encompasses all of BSL thought leadership, research activities and executive education activities under a “beacon” (or “guiding light”) for the school, potentially bearing the following name: **The S.O.S for Sustainability Leadership (or Sustainability Leadership Hub)**:

Achieving Seismic Organizational Shifts in service of a better world.



Terminology is important, particularly when an initiative needs to differentiate from other multiple initiatives, as is the case today in the area of sustainability. The acronym S.O.S seems appropriate since S.O.S is the international Morse code distress signal which has been adopted worldwide to signify urgency. This is in keeping with the distress surrounding the sustainability of our planet and the need for business to adopt a more urgent stance to shifting towards more sustainable business models, as described above.

In popular usage, S.O.S. is recognized as a visual distress signal that is already associated with such phrases as “*Save our Ship*” or “*Send our Succour*” (or help). However, in our case, the acronym will mean “*Seismic Organizational Shifts*” at the same time as preserving the sense of urgency conveyed in the acronym. The word “seismic” means “having highly significant consequences”. With this terminology, we also recognize that a substantial shift towards a sustainable future for the planet and business will only occur when innovations start to reach a tipping point contributing to the disruption of business as usual. To do this, isolated examples of pioneering practice urgently need to enter the mainstream to create new ways and means of doing business into the future.

Two substantial bodies of existing research by BSL thought leaders form a strong “backbone” to BSL’s SOS for BSL Hub:

- 1) The first represents a robust baseline for further building knowledge around the “Inside Out Perspective” based upon the “Where we are now?” more traditional route of businesses seeking and finding a business case for sustainability **within the current business system**. We suggest that a strong industry by industry understanding of the current business system is an essential pre-requisite to understanding what needs to happen in order for a “shift” to take place. It also allows for identification of industry potential for change and the identification of the right strategies to act upon that change (the “Seismic Shift”). It is also essential that BSL keeps a keen academic eye on ongoing business realities and the existing barriers to change.
- 2) The second represents a robust baseline for building knowledge around the “Outside-In Perspective” – and is based upon a “Where do we want to be?” much more visionary route by which businesses start to play a lead role in transforming their business models and framing their markets so that more substantial “seismic shifts” can be achieved. Dyllick and Muff have carried out substantial research on a true business typology, and some of the documents describing the research are listed in the endnotes (TO BE ADDED).

6. Aligning thought leadership with the Hub

These baseline frameworks can be applied to the three strategic activities outlined earlier, namely:

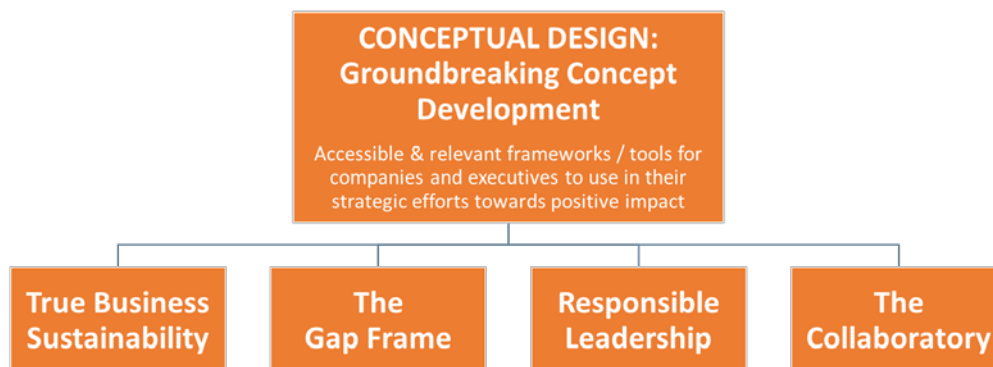
- Conceptual Design
- Action Research & Education
- Platform Collaboratories



The working principle of all three areas of activities of the S.O.S. for BSL is that each initiative feeds on and grows as a result of activity not only within its own area, but also the two other defined areas. For example, all Action Research & Education contributes to general thought leadership including Conceptual Design. Conceptual Design work contributes to Action Research & Education that in turn can also be applied and tested within the Platform Collaboratories.

A. Conceptual design

Activities in the area of conceptual design contain all basic research activities that deliver the underlying content for the other two activity streams. This conceptual development space is focused on leading edge; “outside-in” based thinking in order to deliver frameworks and concepts to enable the strategic resilience of business and to develop the competencies of its people.



There are four areas of focus for Conceptual Design, as follows:

True Business Sustainability

- Continuous conceptual development (application to business transformation)
- Applications to specific domains (strategy, product design)
- Applications to specific industries

The Gap Frame:

- Reviewing the Beta version with experts
- Completion of data across all 150 countries

- Finalizing and publishing the first issue (position and conceptual support paper)
- Annual updates and publications

Responsible Leadership

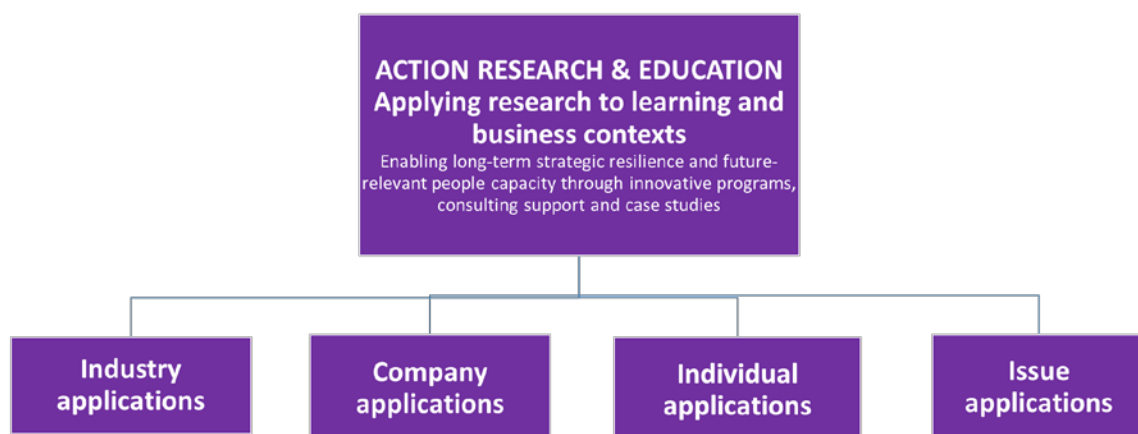
- Translating the RL Grid into an assessment tools (with partners, possibly Fehr Advice)
- Including and reflecting the developmental dimensions (possibly with Lectica, Harvard)
- Developing business applications
- Developing business school applications (measuring students at beginning & end of studies)

The Collaboratory

- Contributing to the international research project LiFT2 (funded by the EU)
- Expanding its framework as a transformative space (Book project due in 2017)
- Publishing existing research of the collaboratory (St. Gallen)
- Ensuring that all new Collaboratories at BSL feed into our assessment data

B. Applied research

There are four areas of focus for Action Research & Education: industry, company, individual and issue applications.



Examples of industry applications:

- Developing practitioner guides for selected industries (focus: food industry)
- Working with the MBA class twice a year to frame the Gap Frame sustainability issues (see Conceptual Design) into an annual trends update;
- Teaming BSL DBA students up with University of St. Gallen PhD students in Sustainability to develop industry-based best practice examples (this would require either an amendment to the existing Phase 3, or a creation of a new, BSL DBA program)
- The creation of industry innovation hubs that can generate ideas for and benefit from applied research and case studies. Existing examples are the partnerships with SAI Platform on sustainable sourcing of agricultural raw materials and the Google Food Lab.

Examples of company applications:

- In phase 1 and 2 of the BSL DBA program, students develop 2 types of different company case studies: in Phase 1 they write a best practice example based on the True Business Sustainability typology (see Conceptual Design), in Phase 2 they undertake an action research project as action research with a company.

- The BSL faculty will be trained to write teaching case studies on companies we identify and approve for them.
- There is an opportunity to share our experience in organizational structures (incl. Holacracy) with companies.
- The following are examples of existing opportunities for consulting support (more can be developed): 1) Assessment of opportunities for companies against the Gapframe 2) SCALE assessments 3) People capacity building, 4) Development of strategic organizational competencies.

Examples of individual applications:

- Applying the Responsible Leadership Grid in the Impact Leadership Program
- Developing and applying a Responsible Leadership Coaching Program

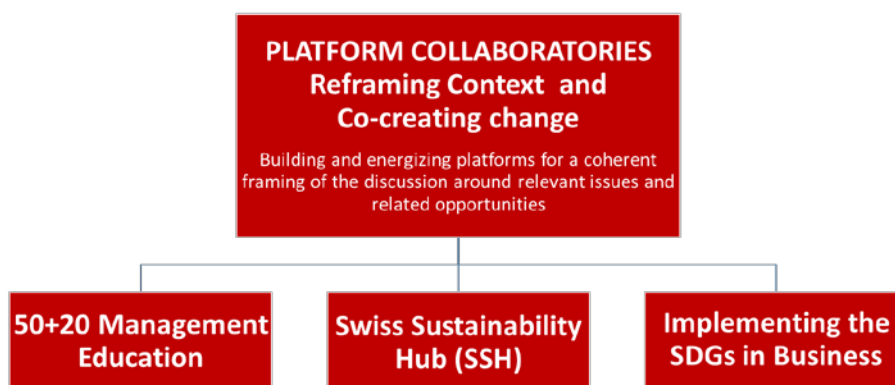
Examples of issue applications:

- Industry driven Sustainable Consumption project emerging from the Swiss Sustainability Hub workshops
- Industry driven *Waste* project emerging from the Swiss Sustainability Hub workshops

C. Platform Collaboratories

Although all of what we have described so far will contribute to the hardwiring of the SDGs in corporations, there is a great opportunity for BSL to promote expertise and location as a meeting place for multiple stakeholder groups that have a vested interest in achieving the SDGs within the specified time framework (2030). The Platform Collaboratories is where the multi-stakeholder hubs are created with which the school can benchmark, test, discuss and generate ideas.

Given its close proximity to significant international NGOs and multilateral/bilateral institutions in Geneva, BSL – especially with its developed expertise on collaborative and co-creational techniques (the Collaboratory) – could play a significant role in bringing stakeholders together for dialogue and even projects involving multiple stakeholder groups.



There are three areas of focus for the Platform Collaboratories, as follows:

50+20 Management Education activities, for example:

- The creation of a new b-school ranking with WWF and other players
- Integrating b-school faculty development into BSL executive training
- Being a prototype for other business schools to learn about future-relevant pedagogy, applied research and institutional management

Swiss Sustainability Hub (SSH) activities, for example:

- Prototyping workshops for Food, Financial Services and Energy industries
- The potential best-practice exchange globally (to be financed)

Implementing the SDGs in Business activities, for example:

- The existing Human Rights platform addresses an important dimension of the SDGs reflected in a number of goals, as well as in the Gap Frame (see Conceptual Design).
- Equality in the workplace (gender and integration issues)
- Stopping of human exploitation across the value chain
- Other focus areas to be identified in line with the BSL strategies and activities in conceptual design and action research & education

7. Governance and organizational structure of the S.O.S. for BSL

The above-mentioned thought leadership activities are carried out under the auspices of an independent Foundation in order to attract relevant academic and business partners, funding and the necessary governance independence essential for such work.

BSL currently has a number of advisory boards that would benefit from being streamlined:

- the BSL Academic Advisory Board (with 5 representatives from academia, business and alumni)
- the Business & Human Rights Platform Board
- the Swiss Sustainability Hub Board.

In order to move strategically, we are exploring the possibility of forming a unique oversight Board for the entire thought leadership umbrella initiative as described in this paper.



The new Board would be made up of a mix of invited members from the above-mentioned existing boards, and carefully selected senior business and organizational leaders. In some cases, this would elevate the already important participants to be involved in even broader activities. We are also examining the possibility of forming an Expert Advisory Committee for Human Rights made up of any remaining members of the Business & Human Rights Platform, in order not to lose valuable existing high level support for this important issue.