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SOUTH AFRICAN BUSINESS SCHOOLS SDG INTEGRATION –MBA CURRICULA, RESEARCH, AND PARTNERSHIPS.

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Keywords

MBA; Business School; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Abstract

Business schools have an important role to play in developing future leaders of business and industry, and more specifically, to encourage the emergence of socially responsible behaviour in companies whilst simultaneously enhancing corporate performance. Unfortunately, business schools are facing criticism regarding the capabilities they claim to impart. Among this criticism are views of business schools failing to impart suitable skills, prepare leaders, or instil norms of ethical behaviour; that business schools have historically inculcated depraved values contributing to the unethical behaviour visible in most corporate boardrooms and public policy formulation. Many are of the view that business schools give too little attention to ethics and values-based leadership, and that more need to be done in terms of ethics and socially responsible leadership and behaviour.

In 2007, the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME), an UN-supported initiative, was founded to raise the profile of sustainability in schools around the world through Six Principles to which business schools commit to ensure they provide future leaders with the skills needed to balance economic and sustainability goals, while drawing attention to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). If South African business schools pursue the objective of building intellectual capital for the country and industries, and providing knowledge relevant to sustainable business management practice, demonstrable commitment to the SDGs in relation thereto should be paramount. The question then beckons to what extent South African Business Schools integrate the SDGs into MBA curriculua, research, and partnerships. By running the information of South African business schools' mission, vision, values, and MBA curricula found in the public domain through the "LinkedSDG" application, this paper sets out to answer this question. The application extracts key concepts related to sustainable development from text documents and linking them to the most relevant sustainable development goals, targets, indicators, and series. The aim of the investigation is to highlight the SDGs with limited foci by SA business schools, and to propose recommendations for improving SA business schools SDG Integration into MBA curriculum, research, and partnerships.[*]

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Introduction

The Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree is a widely sought-after qualification for career progression and personal growth (Herrington, 2010:63), and regarded as an important differentiator in a crowded employment market (Herrington, 2010:75). Globally, the MBA remains in high demand as evidenced in the Association of MBA's (AMBA) Application and Enrolment Report of 2020 (AMBA, 2020). Locally, in South Africa, the trend is aligned, with the compound annual growth rate of MBA applications being 2.7% over the past decade (2011 – 2020) (South African Business Schools Association (SABSA), 2020).

Amidst the MBA's popularity though, it is yet to shed the shackles of criticism that MBA graduates are not adequately equipped to deal with the challenges of the contemporary dynamic and global business requirements, and that business schools should do more to impact students to make decisions and act in ways that reflect globally responsible leadership (Usher et al., 2019:1375). Ensuring that MBA graduates can lead and manage in an ethical and sustainable manner is subsequently essential if business schools are to remain relevant and legitimate to society (Usher et al., 2018:302). Against the backdrop of the current major global challenges (e.g., financial system failure, natural resource depletion, climate change, inequality, extreme poverty and hunger, and lack of education), exacerbated by management and leadership challenges (e.g., abuse of power, unethical practices, and a disregard for matters of sustainability), business schools have a moral obligation to demonstrably commit to responsible management education (Oosthuizen et al., 2018:1).

According to Nikolay Ivanov, Manager at Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME, 2019:2), "the global landscape for business and management education continues to change more rapidly than ever before with increased focus on sustainability, responsible

management and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).” PRME, in its ongoing efforts to incorporate the Principles of Responsible Management Education into educational activities, and thereby placing significant emphasis on the SDGs state that it is time to evaluate how business schools have responded to the ambitious agenda of the SDGs (PRME, 2020:5).

Weybrech (2019) in a report summarising approaches to reporting on the SDGs by business schools, state that the SDGs are noticeably more prominent in business school discussions on curriculum, programmes, partnerships, operations, and strategy. However, the report also highlights, among others, that too few schools are mentioning the SDGs and seldom are the SDGs connected to institutional and educational strategy.

In the South African context, it is also evident that responsible management education, ethical and sustainable business practice, and the SDGs are receiving significant attention when visiting the websites of business schools. Via the country’s business school association, these themes are also frequently discussed at the Deans and Directors meetings. The actual extent to which the SDGs are integrated into MBA curricula, research, and partnerships, is, however, not documented, and this study thus sets out to fill that void.

Problem Statement and Objectives

The reason why business schools are important for the SDGs and vice versa is simply because the SDGs represent the greatest social, economic, and environmental challenges facing current and future leaders and managers in all sectors, particularly in business. Increasingly businesses, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and policymakers are using the SDGs as a framework to guide and shape strategies and business policy. By so doing, organisations and institutions of all types

acknowledge that issues such as climate change, poverty, health and wellbeing, gender equality – *in fact all the SDGs* – are interrelated and material to their interests, risk management and future competitiveness. Subsequently, developing education and research about the SDGs and related organisational challenges and opportunities is imperative for business schools to enhance their purpose and relevance (PRME, 2020:12).

Rocha et al (2020:1) argue that business schools, however, appear to be followers rather than leaders in the social change taking place; while consumers and businesses are experimenting with new models of capitalism, business schools have been slow to change. Business schools, Rocha et al (2020:1) posit, need to lessen their emphasis on rational and efficient business and instead focus on how businesses can help address more fundamental questions of the human condition. Despite the efforts of business schools to advance programmes to better develop the next generation of responsible business leaders, Maloni et al (2021:1) state that some scholars have raised concerns about the effectiveness of responsible management education (RME), particularly the decoupling of pedagogical practices from stated responsible management education objectives by business schools (a school's actual RME implementation does not match its stated commitment). Maloni et al (2021:13) go further to state that business schools must critically evaluate their values, commitment, and accountability, and take ownership for forging future leaders who are both motivated and trained to curb the negative environmental and social impacts of business. Failure to do so questions the legitimacy of business schools. Khurana (2007:383) observes that "when institutions lose their legitimacy or find it called into question, the times are ripe for their reinvention."

Against this backdrop, the primary objective of this study is to determine how South African business schools are faring in relation to integrating the SDGs in its MBA curriculum, research, and partnerships.

Literature Review

Business schools have the potential to play a significant role in terms of both practice and policy for implementing the SDGs, applying theory in new ways to the "wicked problems" underpinning the SDGs. Working collaboratively and across disciplines, business school researchers can incubate imaginative new models which produce progress towards reaching the SDGs. At the same time, research in business schools accumulating around one or more of the Global Goals can become a site of cross- fertilisation internationally, drawing in a range of stakeholders to devise new ways of tackling sustainability issues. Delivering on the targets laid out in the SDGs will require new knowledge, mindsets, skills, practices, and in some cases, profound transformations of businesses and organisations. Five years into the implementation period of the SDGs, business school academics have a role in ascertaining the progress made since they were adopted in September 2015. They can also pinpoint what factors will help or hinder upcoming progress towards the SDG targets in different countries and environments (PRME, 2020).

Setó-Pamies et al (2020) argue that business schools should be held accountable for their responsibility towards society, and that the integration of SDGs in management education is a step in that direction, with specific roles as (*ibid*):

- ***responsible educators*** that develop students to appreciate the complex challenges faced by businesses and societies and

empowering them with the skills, values, and knowledge related to the achievement of the SDGs;

- ***responsible knowledge creators*** concerned with the social implications of research while ensuring that the knowledge generated is visible and useful for different stakeholders;
- ***sustainable institutions*** that control their own social and environmental impact;
- ***active participants*** in the dialogue taking place for any of the issues covered by the SDGs.

The SDGs need to become the bedrock of management education to make sustainable development a reality and improve the world. Curricula should therefore be reviewed through the lens of SDGs, for both degree and non-degree programmes. Thousands of students graduate annually from business schools across the world (more than 250 000 students enrolled in MBA programmes globally in the 2020-2021 academic year (AACSB, 2021), and these graduates are the leaders and influencers of the future. If, collectively, they actively engage with the SDGs in their business conduct, it will significantly contribute towards achieving the sustainability goals (Setó-Pamies, et al., 2020).

An overview of the SDGs

On 25 September 2015 all United Nations Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Resolution 70/1) at a General Assembly of the United Nations (UN, 2015). It serves as a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, and central to it, are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries in a global partnership. The SDGs recognise that ending poverty and other deficiencies must go together with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and stimulate economic growth, while also addressing

climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests (UN, 2020). Figure 1 below provides a visual representation of the 17 SDGs (UN, 2015:14).

Progress has been made since 2015 when the goals were conceptualised, with some favourable trends – extreme poverty has declined considerably and immunisations against disease have increased. More people have access to electricity. Many more countries are taking real action to protect our planet and ensure the sustainability of the economic activity. National policies have been developed to manage rapid urbanisation. However, notwithstanding this progress, there are many areas that still require urgent action (UN, 2019:2).

Figure 1: The 17 Sustainable Development Goals

Source: UN (2021)

Why and how do the SDGs matter to business and business schools?

PRME (2020:14) provides the rational for the importance of the SDGs to business, as well as business schools. For business the SDGs can strengthen an enabling environment, outline future business

opportunities, enhance sustainable business practices, and allow for better stakeholder engagement. In addition, business has a need for sustainability literate students, to which the SDGs can serve as framework. In terms of business contributing to the SDGs, its scope can be defined by a company's strategic priorities as they cover all dimensions of sustainable development and the entire value chain. The SDGs are also specific, timebound and measurable, and based on key performance indicators (KPIs) for impact or outcomes. They are furthermore explicitly linked to financial value drivers and can be integrated into performance evaluation and incentives.

For business schools the SDGs can empower and enable current and future business practitioners, thereby adding value to business and society. The SDGs create a paradigm for teaching, learning, and understanding sustainability as core to the business model, which provide current and future business leaders with the tools to recognise and maximise opportunities for sustainable development. Business Schools can also connect with a network of stakeholders reaching beyond the business sphere, into signatories and supporting organisations, and meet the increasing demand from business and policy makers to educate and graduate sustainability literate students. As far as contributing to the SDGs, business schools can demonstrate commitment thereto via their mission, strategic vision, accreditation standards and external partnerships. As the SDGs cover the value chain and all business school stakeholders, all dimensions of sustainable development can be implemented on an interdisciplinary scale. In view of them being specific, timebound and measurable, they can be linked to value creation, financial drivers and future investment, and integrated through all levels of the business school and through strategic engagement with students.

The rationale for why and how the SDGs are important for both business and business schools is compelling and emphasises the moral

obligation to contribute to the achievement of the goals. The urgency is also clear in that there is less than a decade left to the achievement thereof.

The SDGs and business school curricula

In the context of education, the most obvious interpretation of the word 'curriculum' is to view it as a course for 'learning', and the very short definition of curriculum as a 'plan for learning', is deemed adequate (Taba, 1962). This simple definition allows for elaboration for specific curricular levels, contexts, and representations. This plan for learning thus incorporates the planned interaction of students with instructional content, materials, resources, and processes for assessing outcomes, inclusive of the explicit, the implicit, the excluded and the extra-curricular (Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development, 2009:9).

Considering the growth in PRME signatories with the associated requirement of submitting progress reports every second year, business schools are increasingly demonstrating commitment to producing sustainability literate graduates and building the intellectual and changemaking capacity of students. Many schools also initiate transnational education, knowledge transfer, research, and exchange activities around the world. Business and management schools therefore need to ensure that education programs are designed to equip students with the knowledge, understanding, skills and motivation that will enable them to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. In essence, there are two important issues for transforming business school education in the spirit of the SDGs, namely, rethinking content from a cross-disciplinary and systems approach, and rethinking pedagogy through innovative ways of teaching and learning (PRME, 2020:15-17).

Managers and leaders of the future need to be equipped to understand the complexities and the consequences of their actions, able

to deal with uncertainty and conflicts of values. The responsibility of business schools as catalysts for developing the leadership fibre of students that pass through their institutions is thus paramount. Therefore, business schools should pursue the building of intellectual capital for countries and industries on the bedrock of the SDGs.

South African Business School Community

South Africa has 22 business schools that offer MBA or MBL programmes accredited by the South African Council on Higher Education (CHE)[362]. These 22 schools are all members of SABSA, with the association's aim being to strengthen ties with the business fraternity and the education sector, and to improve the recognition of the organisation as a representative of SA business schools with government and regulatory bodies (SABSA, 2021). The 22 South African business schools are:

1. The Da Vinci Institute of Technology School of Business Leadership
2. Durban University of Technology - Faculty of Management Sciences
3. Gordon Institute of Business Science - University of Pretoria
4. Henley Business School
5. Independent Institute of Education
6. Johannesburg Business School
12. Regent Business School
13. Rhodes Business School
14. Richfield Graduate Institute Business School
15. Tshwane School for Business & Society
16. Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership - University of Limpopo
17. University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business
18. University of the Free State Business School

[362] https://www.sabsa.co.za/list-of-members/

7. Management College of Southern Africa
8. Milpark Business School
9. Nelson Mandela University Business School
10. North-West University Business School
11. Regenesys Business School
19. University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Graduate School of Business & Leadership
20. University of South Africa Graduate School of Business Leadership
21. University of Stellenbosch Business School
22. University of Witwatersrand Business School

With a collective MBA student body from 13 of the 22 schools of close to 5500 students in 2020[363], the potential impact by these student leaders and influencers coming from private and public sector in terms of contributing to the achievement of the SDGs is evident, considering the size of the South African economy. Another noteworthy contribution in 2020 from the 13 participating schools, was the total of 400 research publications produced. Research publications that contribute to theory and practice relating to the SDGs could potentially add significant value towards achieving the sustainability goals. More than half of the participating schools in this survey indicated that ethics and sustainable development are a core module of their MBA programmes, whilst others indicated that the ethics and sustainability themes are integrated across modules and not as standalone modules.

Methodology

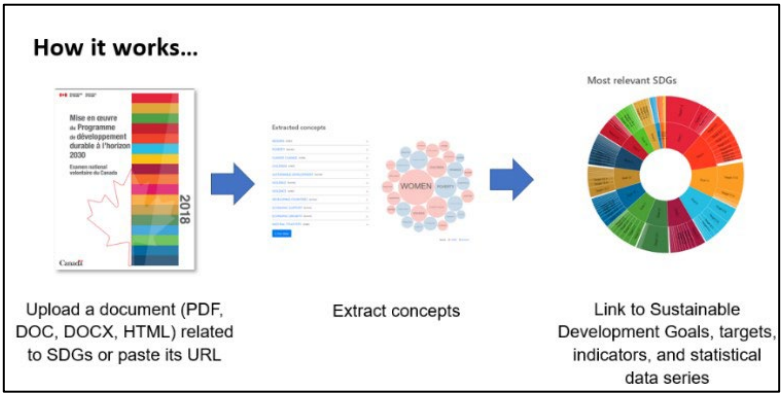
The UN has developed an innovative platform designed to support the 2030 Agenda implementation, called "LinkedSDG." The platform

[363] The Financial Mail South African Business School MBA survey 2020 (n = 13), conducted by Sylvia Jones from Lodestar Marketing Research (Pty) Ltd.

makes SDG data interoperable by means of advanced data modelling techniques and a common system of permanent identifiers for each of the 17 goals, their individual targets, their individual indicators and related statistical series. It also promotes data sharing and collaboration among stakeholders who are involved in producing and analysing SDG data. In essence, the platform provides all stakeholders and the public with open-source tools to make SDG data interoperable for easier data integration, analysis, and monitoring (UN, 2021b).

The pilot application, available at LinkedSDG, showcases the usefulness of adopting semantic web technologies and Linked Open Data (LOD) principles for extracting SDG related metadata from documents and establishing the connections among various SDGs. The application automatically discovers the semantic links between text documents, relevant SDG entities and the statistical data (UN, 2021b). Figure 2 below highlights how the platform functions.

Figure 2: How the LinkedSDG application works



Source: UN (2021b)

In pursuance of the objective of this study, and to enable the utilisation of the LinkedSDG platform, information on South African business schools and their MBA programmes available in the public

domain had to be secured. MBA.co.za, a website that features "all things MBA" in the South African context proved the ideal source for securing qualitative data. The MBA.co.za website hosts 15 of the most prominent business schools in South Africa, namely[364]:

1. Gordon Institute of Business Science
2. Graduate School of Business and Leadership, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal
3. Henley Business School
4. Independent Institute of Education
5. Johannesburg Business School
6. Milpark Business School
7. Nelson Mandela University Business School
8. North-West University Business School
9. Regent Business School
10. Rhodes Business School
11. Tshwane School for Business and Society
12. University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business
13. University of South Africa Graduate School of Business Leadership
14. University of Stellenbosch Business School
15. University of Witwatersrand Business School

[364] https://www.mba.co.za/sectiondirectory.aspx?s=48

Information on each of the above schools were sourced from MBA.co.za, with specific extraction of, (1) overview of the business school, (2) overview of the MBA programme of the particular school, and (3) structure of the MBA programme of the particular school. This structure of the extracted information was standardised across all 15 schools and subjected to the LinkedSDG application. The application then extracted key concepts related to sustainable development from each of the sets of information and linked them to the most relevant sustainable development goals, targets, indicators, and data series. Figure 2 highlights the process, i.e., uploading a document or a URL, after which the platform then extracts the concepts, and presents a donut-graph which links the concepts with SDG targets, indicators, and statistical data series. When hovering the cursor on the platform over the goals and targets, an explanation of each is then present in real time. As the donut-graphs of each school was copied and presented in section 5 below, this functionality will not be available in this text document.

The results of the analysis resulting from the LinkedSDG modelling process is presented and discussed in the next section.

Results / Findings

The 17 SDGs are articulated into 169 targets, 230 indicators, and over 400 data series that help to measure the progress towards achieving the SDGs. The full SDG Taxonomy is officially published and maintained as linked open data at: http://metadata.un.org/sdg/ (UN. 2021c).

The individual 15 South African business schools' results derived from the LinkedSDG application are presented via an individual "SDG wheel" that highlights the goals, targets, indicators, and data series that

are most relevant to the processed MBA information, based on the extracted concepts and geographical areas of activity.

The inner layer of the SDG wheel indicates the specific SDG goals emerging from the data as well as the prominence of each expressed with the extent of its prominence. The outer layer indicates the targets coming to the fore the strongest from each goal.

The SDG wheel of each of the 15 schools along with the strongest emerging SDG are presented in Table 1, with the goal associated with each colour below.

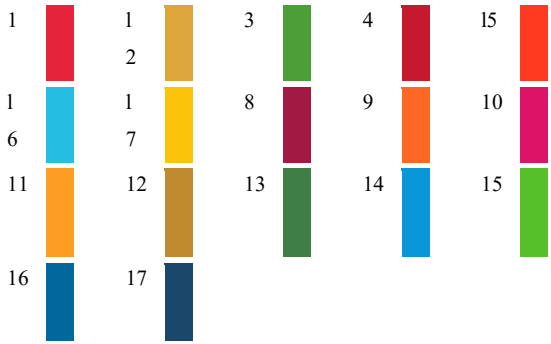
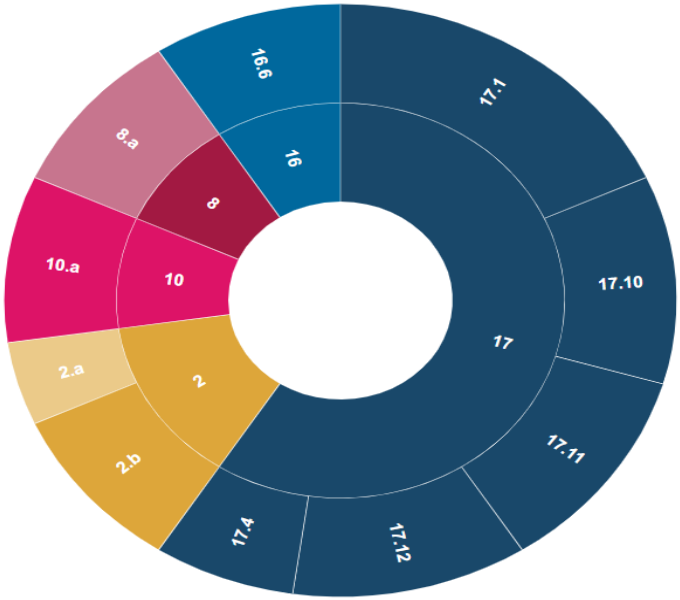


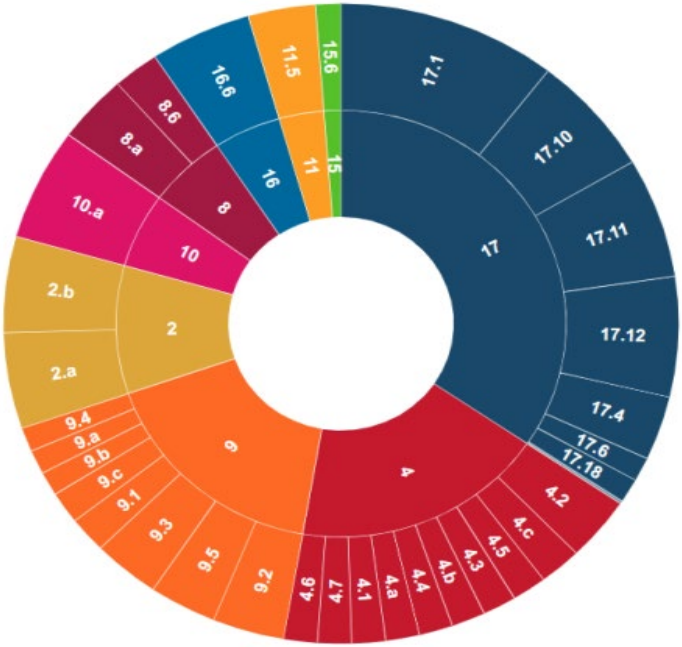
Table 1: Individual business schools' SDG wheels highlighting SDG goals, targets, indicators, and data series that are most relevant to the processed MBA information

Gordon Institute of Business Science



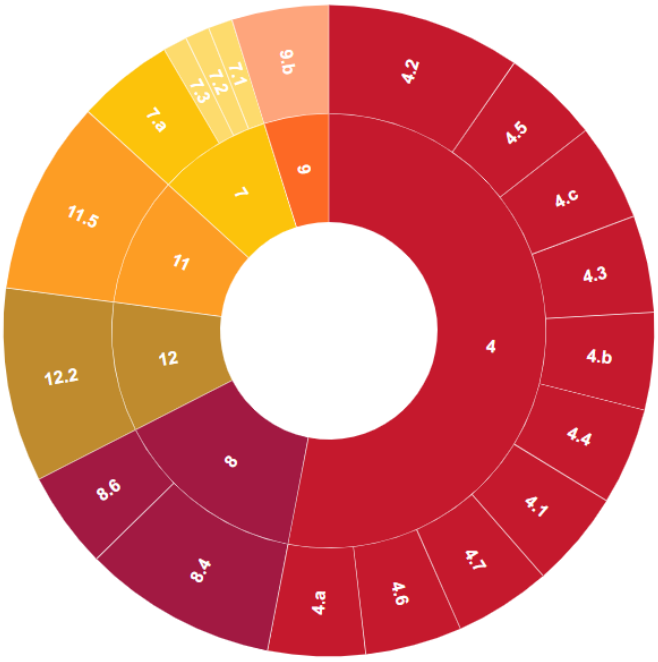
Strongest emerging SDG: Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

Graduate School of Business and Leadership,
University of Kwa-Zulu Natal



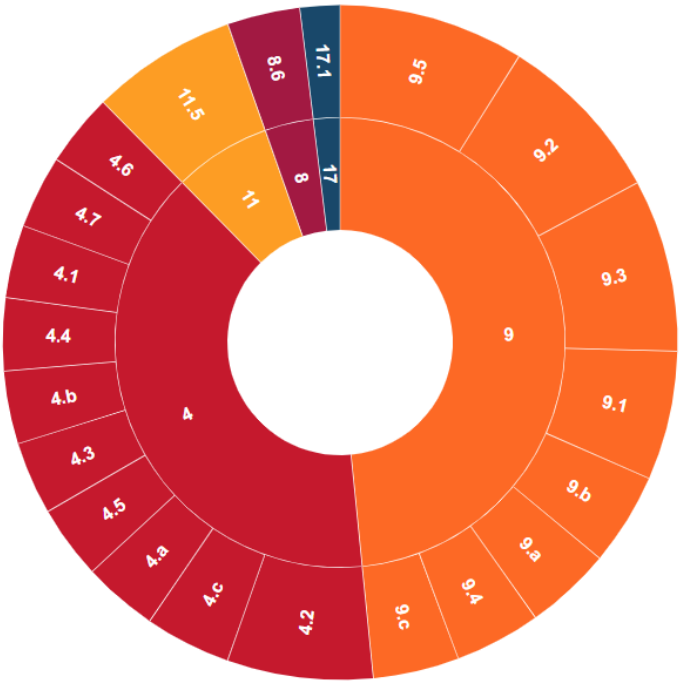
Strongest emerging SDG: Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

Henley Business School



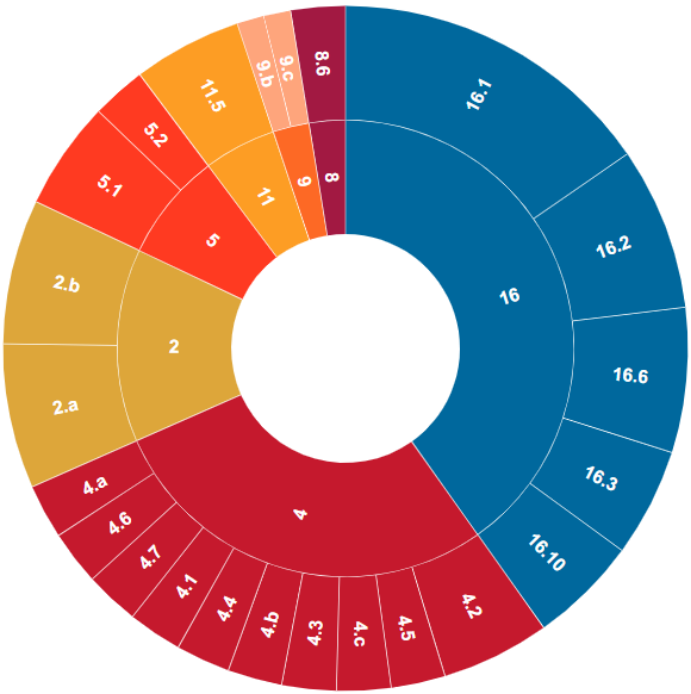
Strongest emerging SDG: Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

IIE MSA



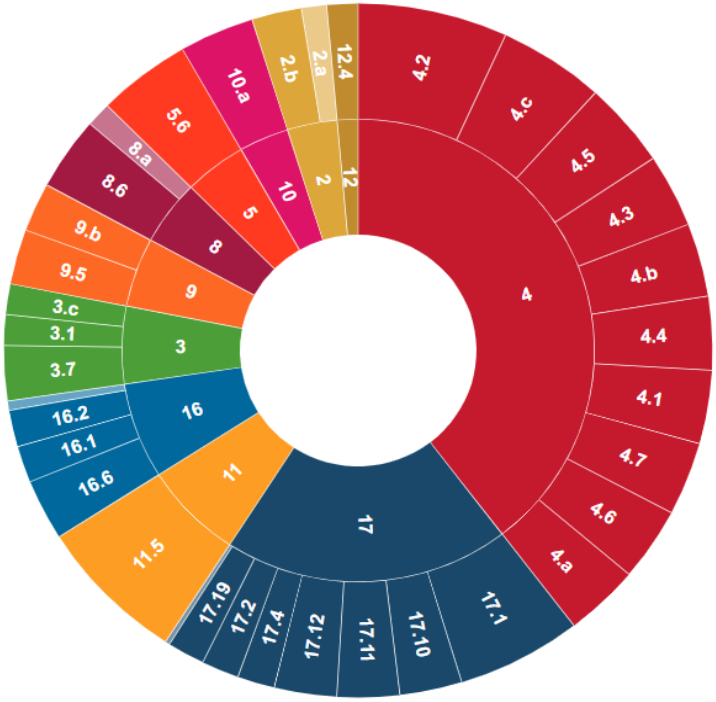
Strongest emerging SDG: Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.

Johannesburg Business School



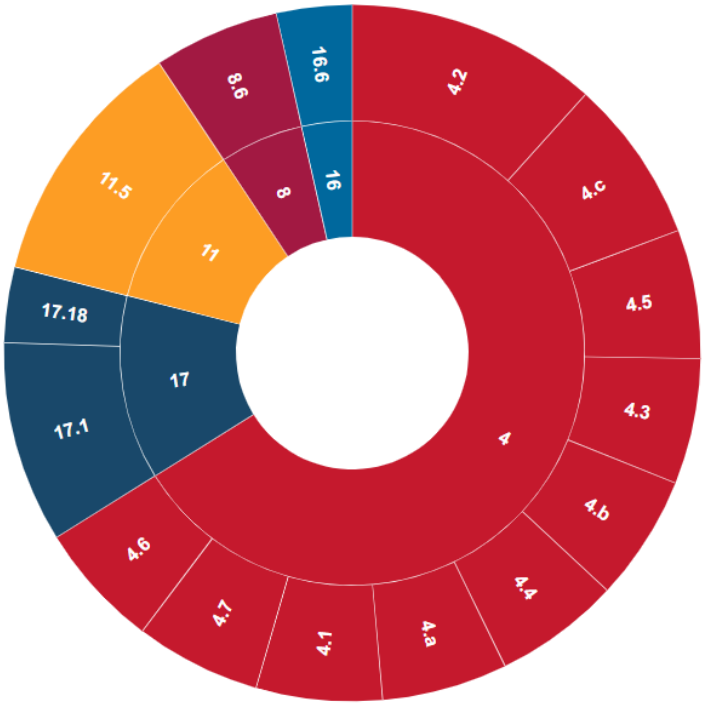
Strongest emerging SDG: Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Milpark Business School



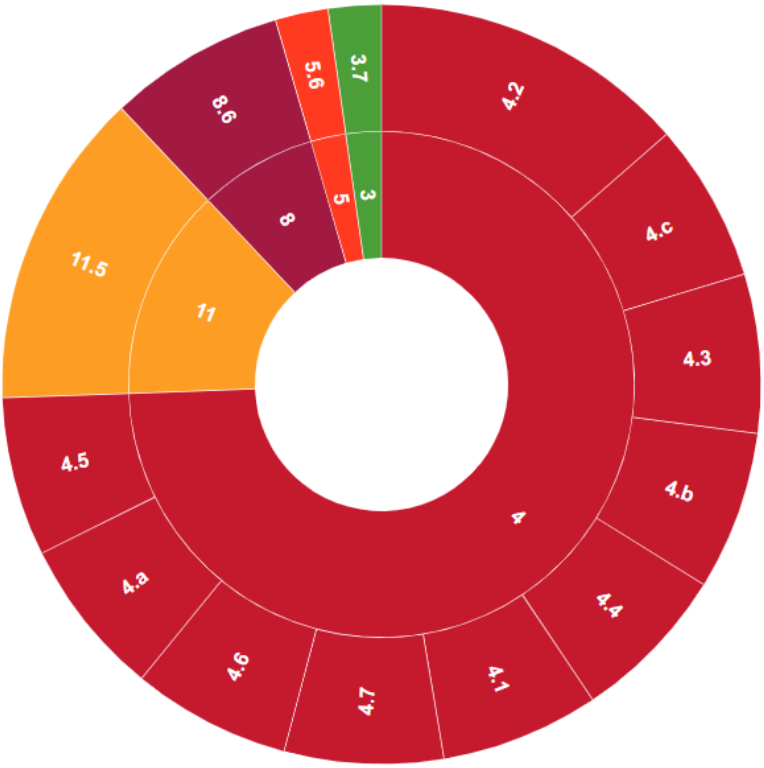
Strongest emerging SDG: Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Nelson Mandela University Business School



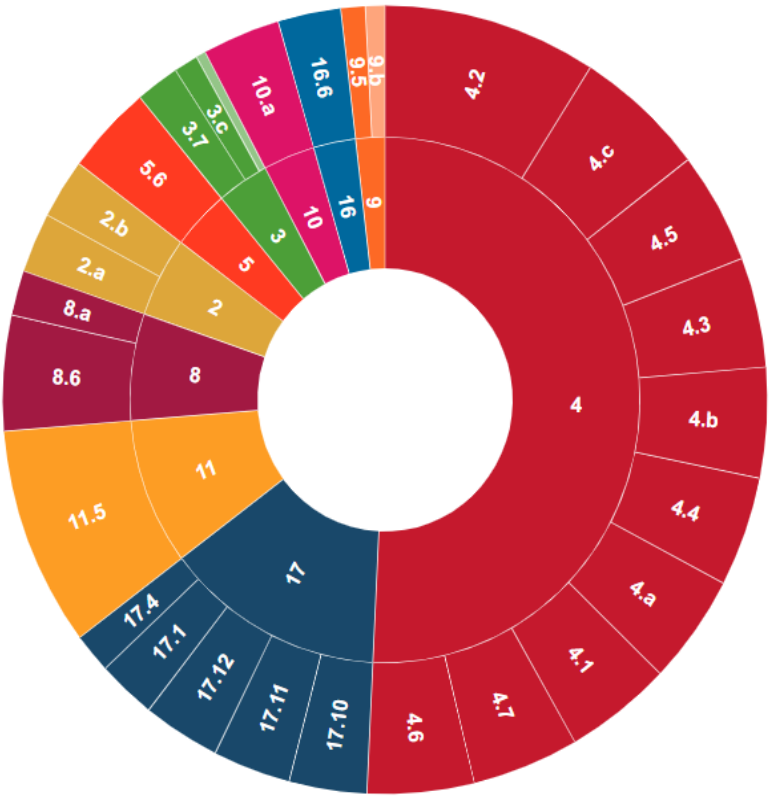
Strongest emerging SDG: Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

NWU Business School



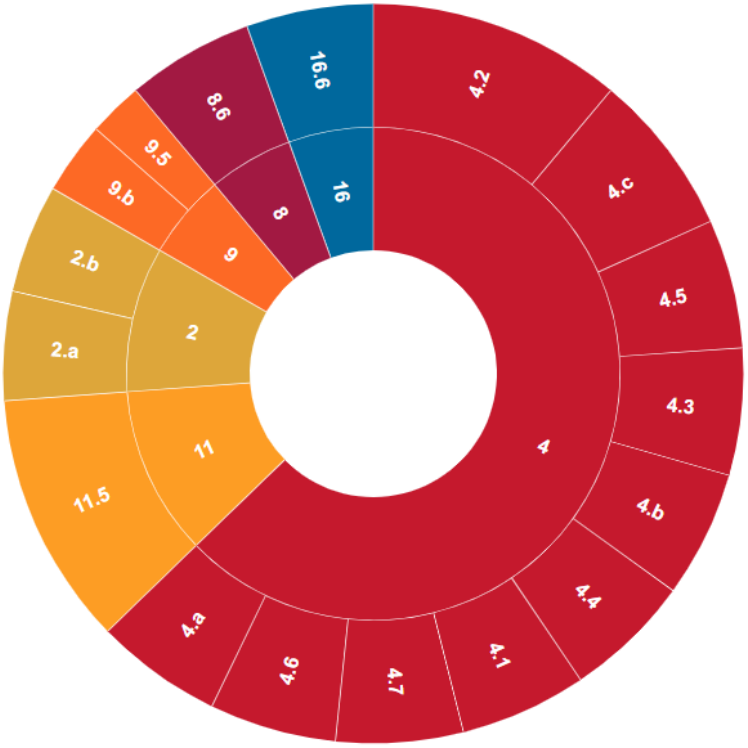
Strongest emerging SDG: Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Regent Business School



Strongest emerging SDG: Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Rhodes Business School

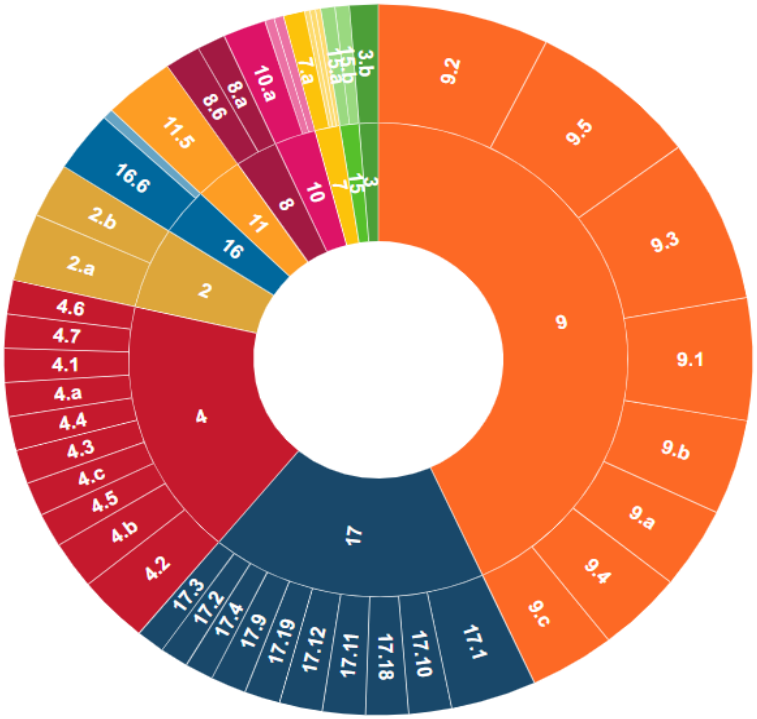


Strongest emerging SDG: Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Tshwane School for Business and Society

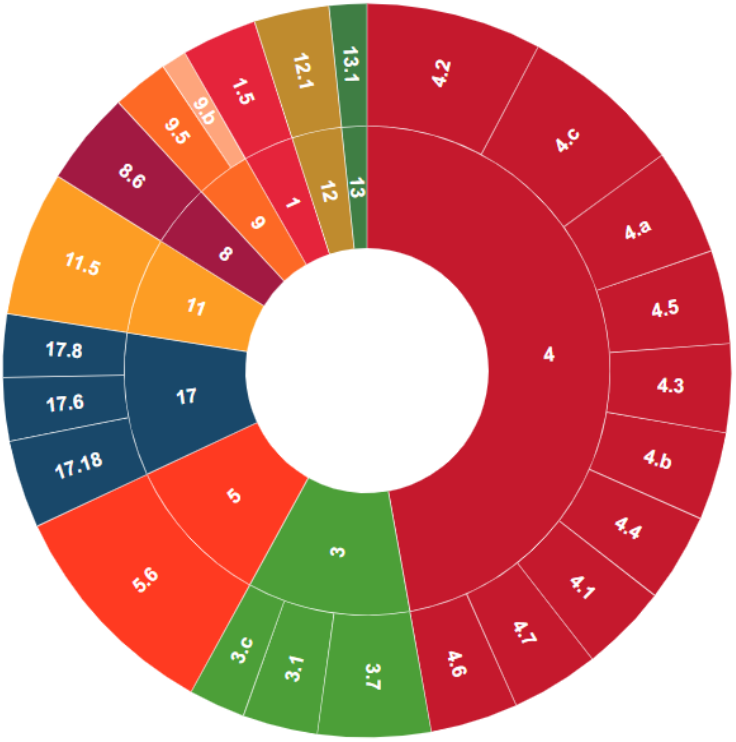
Strongest emerging SDG: Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business



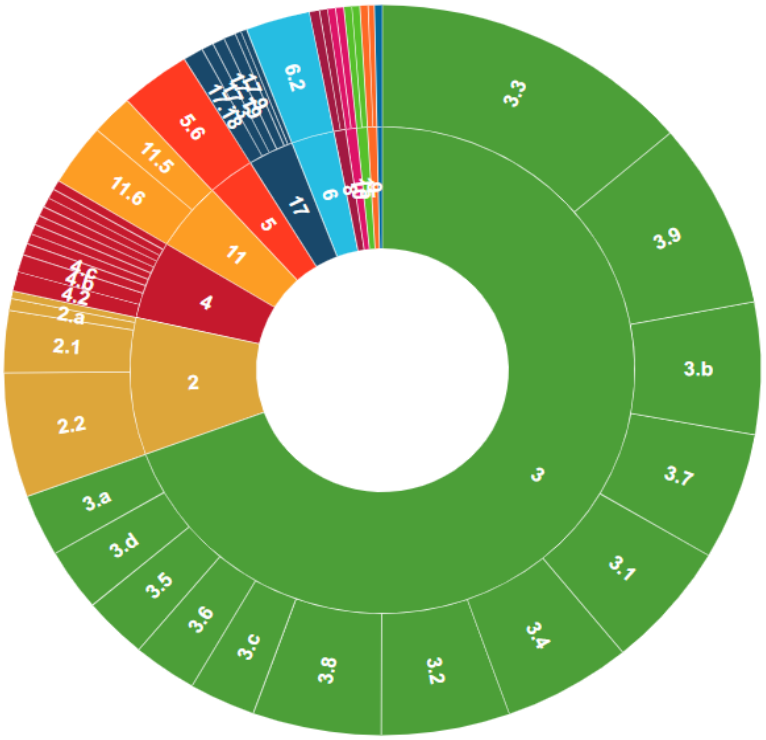
Strongest emerging SDG: Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

University of South Africa Graduate School of Business Leadership



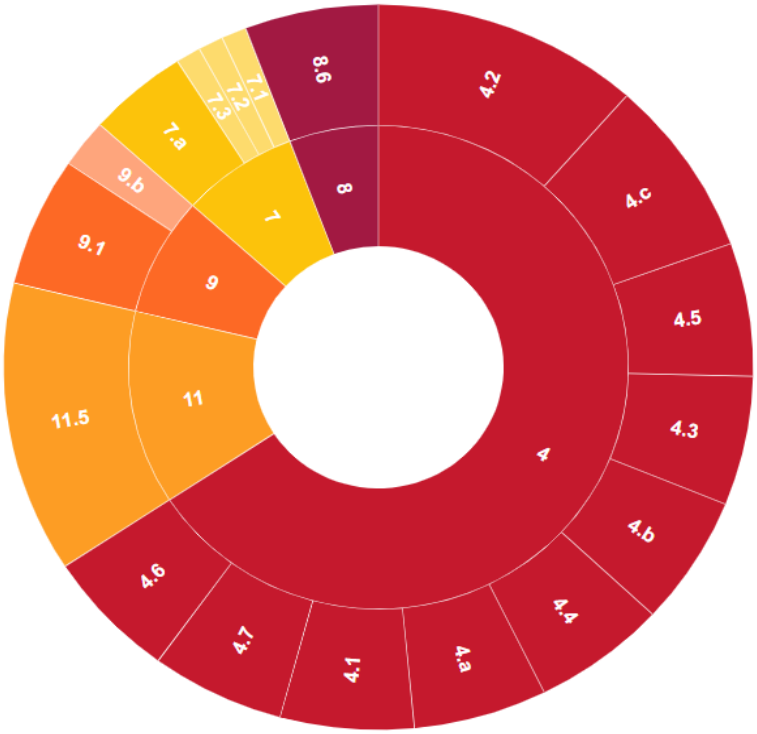
Strongest emerging SDG: Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

University of Stellenbosch Business School



Strongest emerging SDG: Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Wits Business School



Strongest emerging SDG: Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

From initial observations it is evident that Goal 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all) is the dominant emerging SDG across South African business schools, with 8 of the 15 schools rating the strongest here. This is followed by Goal 17 (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development) and Goal 9 (Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation) with 2 schools respectively rating strongest in them. Goal 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages), Goal 15 (Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss), and Goal 16 (Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels) are respectively the strongest with the 3 remaining schools.

To derive at an overall view of the South African business school community, the data extracted was then aggregated. Table 2 indicates the ranking of the goals per business school, along with the number of schools that feature a particular SDG ("count" column). Next, the ranking average across schools was calculated, after which the averages were ranked to indicate the highest to lowest SDG emerging from the data.

Table 2: Individual ranking of SDG prominence aggregated for business school sector

	BS 1	**BS 2**	**BS 3**	**BS 4**	**BS 5**	**BS 6**	**BS 7**	**BS 8**	**BS 9**	**BS 10**
Goal 1										
Goal 2	2	4			3	10			5	3
Goal 3						5		5	7	
Goal 4		2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1
Goal 5					4	8		4	6	
Goal 6										
Goal 7			5							
Goal 8	4	6	2	4	7	7	4	3	4	5

	BS 11	**BS 12**	**BS 13**	**BS 14**	**BS 15**	**Count**	**Rank Ave**	**Goal Ranking**
Goal 1			8			1	8	16
Goal 2		5		2		8	4,25	4
Goal 3		12	2	1		6	5,33	9
Goal 4		3	1	3	1	13	1,54	1
Goal 5			3	5		6	5	6
Goal 6	4			7		2	5,5	10
Goal 7		10			4	3	6,33	12
Goal 8		8	6	8	5	14	5,21	7

	BS 1	**BS 2**	**BS 3**	**BS 4**	**BS 5**	**BS 6**	**BS 7**	**BS 8**	**BS 9**	**BS 10**
Goal 9		3	6	1	6	6			10	4
Goal 10	3	5				9			8	
Goal 11		8	4	3	5	3	3	2	3	2
Goal 12			3			11				
Goal 13										
Goal 14		7								
Goal 15		9								
Goal 16	5				1	4	5		9	6
Goal 17	1	1		5		2	2		2	

	BS 11	**BS 12**	**BS 13**	**BS 14**	**BS 15**	**Co unt**	**Rank Ave**	**Goal Ranking**
Goal 9	5	1	7	11	3	12	5,25	8
Goal 10		9		9		6	7,17	14
Goal 11		7	5	4	2	13	3,92	3
Goal 12	3		9			4	6,5	13
Goal 13			10			1	10	17
Goal 14	2					2	4,5	5
Goal 15	1	11		10		4	7,75	15
Goal 16		6		12		8	6	11
Goal 17		2	4	6		9	2,78	2

The South African business school community MBA SDGs and associated targets, ranked from strongest to weakest, are subsequently as follows:

1. Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
2. Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development
3. Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
4. Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
5. Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
6. Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
7. Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
8. Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
9. Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
10. Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
11. Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
12. Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
13. Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

14. Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
15. Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
16. Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
17. Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

It is expected that Goal 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all) emerged as the most relevant SDG to the processed MBA information, because of the nature of the organisations, i.e., management education and training institutions.

Of significance is that, as a collective, all 17 SDG are covered, albeit that some reflect strong integration into the MBA programmes, whilst others reflect quite weak. Associated with the goals that are highly ranked, is also the significant coverage of the targets imbedded in each of the goals. Considering the top integrated SDG across the sample of business schools, namely Goal 4 of Quality Education, with the goal specifically referring to "ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all", the targets imbedded within Goal 4 can be viewed at http://metadata.un.org/sdg/4?lang=en

For further detail on the indicators imbedded within the targets, please refer to the Sustainable Development Goals Taxonomy[365].

The most significantly represented SGDs that emerged from the extracted concepts, are:

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[365] Sustainable Development Goals Taxonomy, http://metadata.un.org/sdg/?lang=en

- Goal 8 (Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all) [14 schools].
- Goal 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all) [13 schools]
- Goal 11 (Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable) [13 schools]
- Goal 9 (Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation) [12 schools].
- Goal 17 (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development) [9 schools].

The above therefore has 60% to 93% representation amongst the sample of 15 business schools. From the analysis the following is also noteworthy in getting a sense of the weakest SDGs that emerged from the extracted concepts:

- Only 1 business school reflected Goal 1 (End poverty in all its forms everywhere) from its extracted concepts.
- Only 1 business school reflected Goal 13 (Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts) from its extracted concepts.
- Only 2 schools reflected Goal 6 (Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all) from its extracted concepts.
- Only 2 schools reflected Goal 14 (Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development) from its extracted concepts.

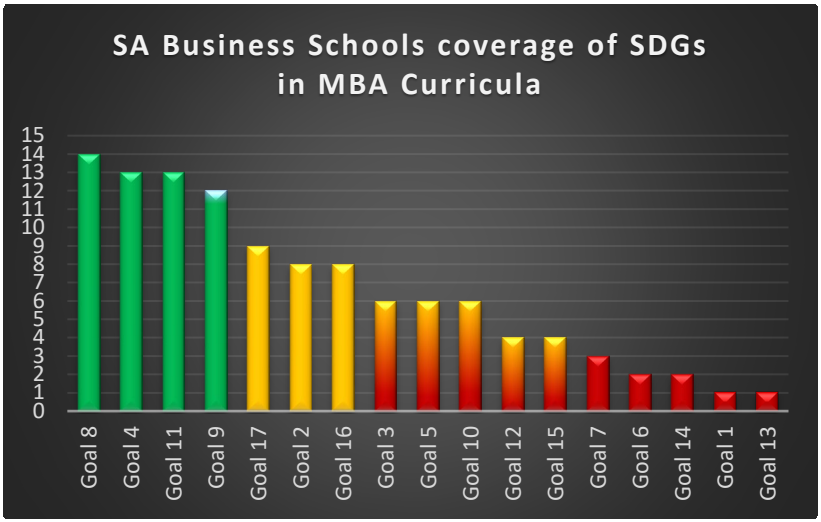
- Only 3 schools reflected Goal 7 (Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all) from its extracted concepts.

The economy, education, human settlements, infrastructure, industrialisation, innovation, and global partnerships as it relates to the SDGs evidently dominates the focus of South African business schools when considered as an aggregate.

On the flipside, poverty, climate change, the environment, and alternative energy sources as it relates to the SDGs have very weak coverage by South African business schools when considered as an aggregate. Too few South African business schools therefore integrate these latter concepts into their MBA curriculum.

Figure 3 provides the whole view in terms of the number of business schools from which coverage of the various SDGs emerged.

Figure 3: The number of business schools coverage per SDG



If, on an arbitrary scale of…

80% and above = satisfactory

50% to 80% = reasonable

40% to 50% = undesirable

0% to 40% = poor

…SDG 8, 4, 11, and 9 are satisfactorily covered; SDG 17, 2, and 16 are reasonably covered; SDG 3, 5, 10, and 12 are undesirably covered; and, SDG 7, 6, 14, 1, and 13 are poorly covered. Next follows the detailed expose of the extent of integration of the SDGs into MBA curricula, research, and partnerships aggregated across the 15 South African business schools.

Satisfactory integration

- **Goal 4.** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- **Goal 8.** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- **Goal 9.** Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
- **Goal 11.** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Reasonable integration

- **Goal 2.** End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

- **Goal 16.** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- **Goal 17.** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

Undesirable integration

- **Goal 3.** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- **Goal 5.** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- **Goal 10.** Reduce inequality within and among countries
- **Goal 12.** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- **Goal 15.** Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Poor integration

- **Goal 1.** End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- **Goal 6.** Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- **Goal 7.** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- **Goal 13.** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- **Goal 14.** Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

The above "performance dashboard" serves as point of departure for the South African business school community for setting an agenda in pursuit of cross-sectoral commitment to, and integration of the SDGs into MBA curricula, research, and partnerships.

Management Implications for South African Business Schools

Notwithstanding the moral obligation of business schools to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, institutional commitment to ethics, responsible management education and sustainability have become requirements by programme accreditation bodies. A move towards sustainability and social impact in the criteria used in the major rankings of business schools is also evident. Moreover, employers increasingly require employees to be familiar with sustainability and the SDGs and how to integrate them into core business models as is evident from industry collaborations. In terms of research and often associated funding, the SDGs are also increasingly being incorporated into international research projects. As an internationally recognised framework, the SDGs furthermore offer business schools with a guide to frame their core competencies in a way that allows them to engage globally and collaborate in teaching and research activities with other schools, as well as a to build partnerships and collaborate across sectors (PRME, 2020:5-6).

García-Feijoo et al (2020:160) posit that business schools are facilitators of change that could definitively contribute to achieving the SDGs, but they are not doing so at the rate one would expect. Often business schools are uncertain as to where to start, and in setting the agenda, they should consider interventions in teaching, research, and management by promoting a paradigm shift, pursuing interdisciplinary collaboration, reaching out to other business schools locally and

globally, adding new activities, and adopting the use of active methodologies.

It is therefore important for South African business schools to reflect on its values, commitment, and accountability. They should take responsibility and ownership for shaping future business leaders who are empowered and equipped to curb the negative environmental and social impacts of business, because failure to do so will put the legitimacy of business schools at risk (Maloni et al., 2021:13).

Conclusion nnd Recommendations

The analysis of South African business schools' MBA information proved valuable in getting a sense of the extent of SDG integration into MBA curricula, research, and partnerships, albeit at a high level. It assists significantly in setting an agenda for an in-depth review at the individual school level. While the extent of integration of the SDGs in South African business schools' MBA curricula appears moderate, it is important to take note of the targets imbedded within each goal. At the goal-level the impression might be that integration into the curricula is sufficient whilst at the target-level integration might be insufficient.

Whilst the integration of the SDGs into MBA curricula is by no means a failing effort in the South African business school community as is evident from the findings, much are still to be done, especially in relation to the SDGs where coverage appear weak, such as the SDGs addressing poverty, climate change, the environment, and alternative energy sources.

As an aggregate, the country's business schools (sufficiently represented by the 15 business schools listed on MBA.co.za) cover all 17 SDGs, albeit it, as mentioned, faring well in some, but faring poorly in others as expressed in Figure 3. Emphasis should initially be on the SDGs with undesirable integration and poor integration, i.e.:

Undesirable integration	***Poor integration***
• Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages • Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls • Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries • Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns • Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss	• Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere • Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all • Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all • Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts • Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

The way forward in improving the status quo for South African business schools would imply interventions at the individual school level, as well as on the collective sector level.

Recommendations at the individual businesses school level

It is recommended that business schools initiate an SDG self-audit in relation to its curricula, research, and partnerships. The LinkedSDG[366] platform is a valuable tool that can assist business schools in evaluating

[366] LinkedSDG: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/LinkedSDGs/about

their commitment to the SDGs and the subsequent integration thereof into curricula, research, and collaborations.

In addition, the "Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[367]" should be used as reference point for detailed analysis. The indicator framework can be downloaded in MS-Excel for ease of use in the analysis. Following the self-audit, the business school should craft a plan of action, prioritising the interventions in order of weakest to strongest performance in relation to SDG integration into the MBA curriculum, research, and partnerships.

The PRME "Blueprint for SDG Integration into Curriculum, Research and Partnerships[368]" is also an invaluable resource for business schools in their endeavours to transition from the conceptual to the practical in terms of integrating the SDGs in their curricula, research, and partnerships.

Business schools should consider the use of the "Sulitest[369]" to measure and improve sustainability literacy in its MBA curriculum. The Sulitest could assist faculty in identifying the gaps to in turn develop interventions to empower and equip their students to address the social, economic, and environmental challenges the world is facing, and in order to reach the SDGs.

Business schools should also pursue affiliations with organisations that are custodians of the promotion of responsible management

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[367] Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/

[368] Blueprint for SDG Integration into Curriculum, Research and Partnerships: https://d30mzt1bxg5llt.cloudfront.net/public/uploads/PDFs/BlueprintForSDGIntegration.pdf

[369] Sulitest: https://www.sulitest.org/en/

education informed by the SDGs, such as PRME[370] and Responsible Research in Business & Management (RRBM)[371]. Associations or partnerships with organisations that promote ethics should also be considered, for example Globethics.net[372] and the Business Ethics Network of Africa (BEN-Africa)[373]. Finally, the value of accreditation with accreditation bodies such as AMBA[374], AACSB[375], and EQUIS[376] cannot be overemphasised. Not only does the accreditation process subject a business school to rigorous evaluation in relation to strict criteria to meet international standards but provides the valuable opportunity of self-reflection and continuous improvement. Via the accreditation bodies, support and developmental initiatives regarding the SDGs are also a prominent benefit for accredited schools, not to mention the value of collaboration with fellow-accredited schools for purpose of benchmarking, best-practice pursuance, and research.

Recommendations at the collective, sector level

Within the context of the South Africa business school sector, SABSA could fulfil a strong influencing role in creating greater awareness of the SDGs and promoting the importance thereof in terms of integration with MBA curricula amongst its 22 member schools.

At the Deans and Directors meetings, the SDGs should become a standing point on the agenda so that dialogue and debate could be

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370 Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME): https://www.unprme.org/

371 Responsible Research in Business & Management (RRBM): https://www.rrbm.network/

372 Globethics.net: https://www.globethics.net/home

373 BEN-Africa: https://www.benafrica.org/

374 AMBA: https://www.associationofmbas.com/

375 AACSB: https://www.aacsb.edu/

376 EQUIS: https://www.efmdglobal.org/accreditations/business-schools/equis/

facilitated, with best practice and lessons learned shared among members.

Regular webinars with experts and thought leaders on the SDGs could be hosted with all member schools and their faculty to attend. In addition, workshops could be scheduled to assist members schools to review, craft strategies and develop action plans for integrating the SDG into MBA curricula.

Via the mechanisms of SABSA, collaboration between member schools in relation to the integration of the SDGs into MBA curricula should be promoted, and best-practice guidelines should be developed and drafted.

Closing Comments and Limitations

Understandably the integration of the SDGs into MBA curricula will not be without challenges. There might be the lack of acceptance on the part of some students, complex translation of SDGs into curricula, difficulty in dealing with all the goals, and most importantly the limited timeframe of 2030 achievement of the goals. Nonetheless, South African business schools must strive to integrate the SDGs into curricula, research, and partnerships to change the way employees, managers, CEOs, and leaders think and act, which in turn will lead to broader changes across industries globally. The SDGs' framework emphasises the need to act in a collaborative and urgent manner. In management education, the SDGs should be embraced as an opportunity to accelerate the long-needed changes in management curricula to give sustainable development the prominence it deserves (Setó-Pamies et al., 2020:7).

The SDGs can provide an overarching framework that not only addresses environmental and economic sustainability but is also inclusive of social sustainability and adopt a collaborative approach across multiple levels (organisations, cities, and government) thus

enabling students to see the importance of legislative regulation in enabling achievement of the SDGs. The emphasis on the SDG integration into curricula, research, and collaboration allows for a global focus that is applicable to all countries and cultures. This model of integrating sustainability into the curriculum through the SDGs can be used in any discipline to support a holistic and inclusive approach that promotes a viable and equitable future for all (Landrum, 2021:1346).

This study was limited to 15 of the 22 South African business schools accredited by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) to offer MBAs or MBLs in South Africa. It nonetheless provides a good representative 'snapshot' of South African business schools SDG integration into MBA curricula, research, and partnerships. Another limitation is the depth of analysis, seeing that only data available in the public domain were used in the study, hence the recommendation that business schools individually undertake a deep analysis with the assistance of the LinkedSDG tool, and the indicator framework.

The study has nonetheless set an important foundation from where further research into the subject can be undertaken in the South African context. Possibilities for future research are, comparative studies between countries, and studies on ways to measure the impact of business school SDG activities emanating from curricula, research, and collaboration.

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