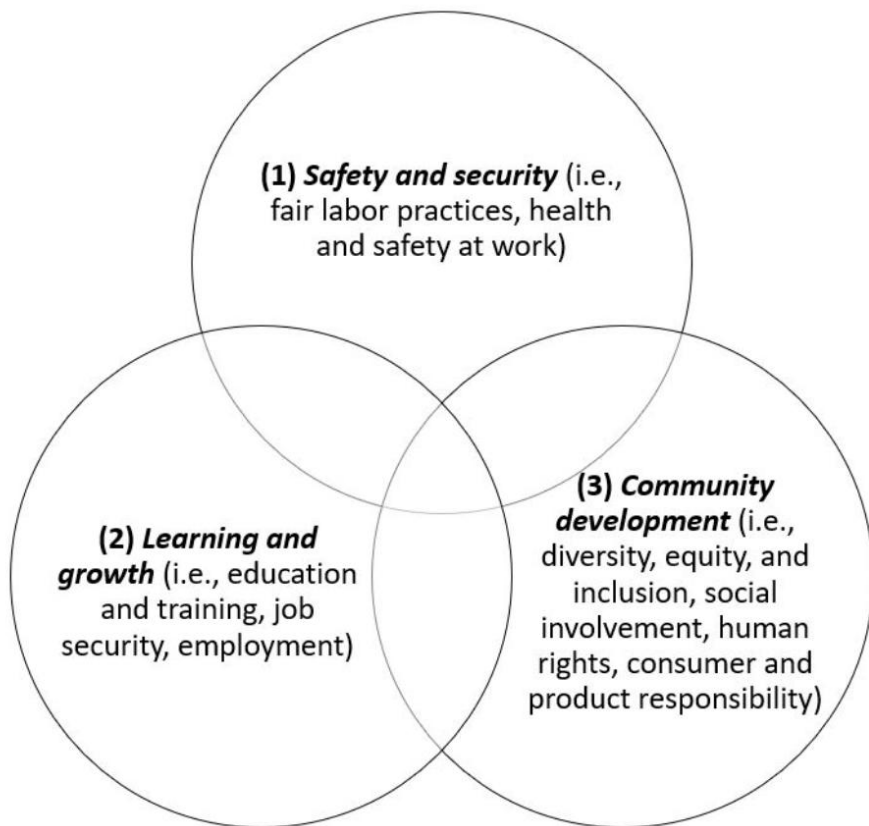


Empower Business Through Social Sustainability

Open Access Business Simulation: Managing Social Sustainability in an SME

What is **social sustainability** in business?



Based on work by Ajmal et al. (2018)

Why Social Sustainability Matters

Strong social sustainability practices help business thrive. They can enhance:



Learning and development



Workplace Well-being



Diversity and inclusion



Employee Engagement

When people flourish, performance and long-term business success strengthen.

Moreover, by integrating sustainability into their operations, businesses strengthen long-term growth while contributing to global initiatives such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the European Union's efforts to advance successful and sustainable economic development. You can work to create both successful business and future for all.

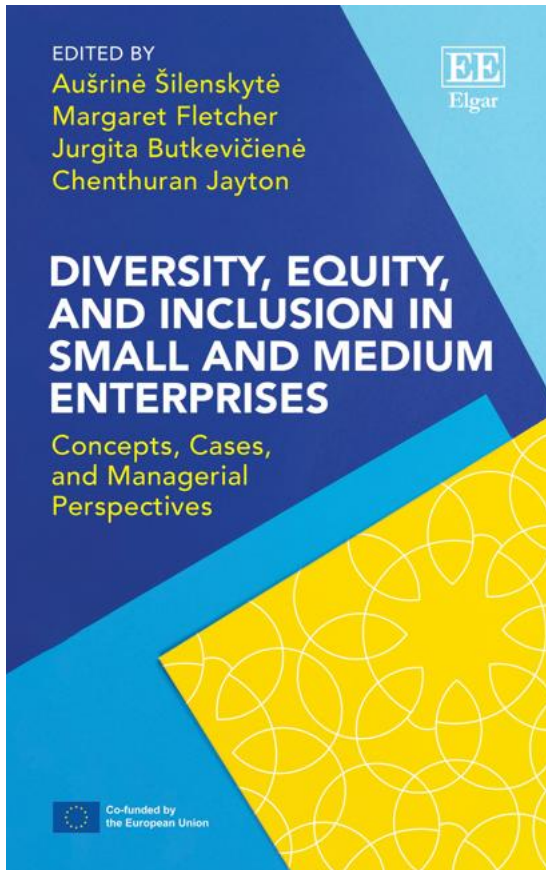


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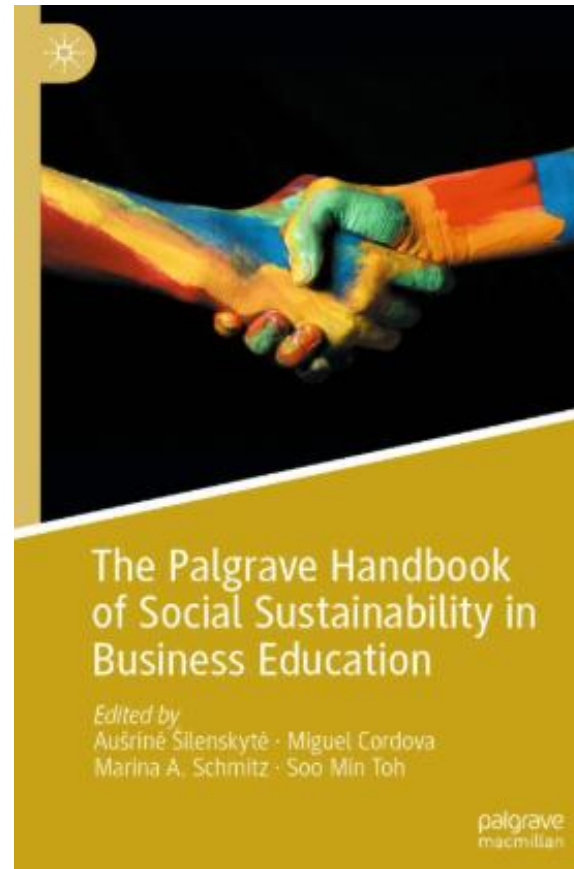
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Teaching cases & insights on social sustainability in business & business education



Open access:

<https://www.elgar.com/shop/gbp/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-in-small-and-medium-enterprises-9781035361236.html>



<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-50168-5>

First chapter open access – [available here](#)

Overview of the book in ppt: [here](#)

Employees discriminated against, unhealthy, or working in poor conditions are unlikely to think about the firm's strategy, which requires them to focus on a more efficient use of the firm's resources, or to create innovations that will make the firm's products more environmentally friendly. (Šilenskytė et al. 2024, p. 3)

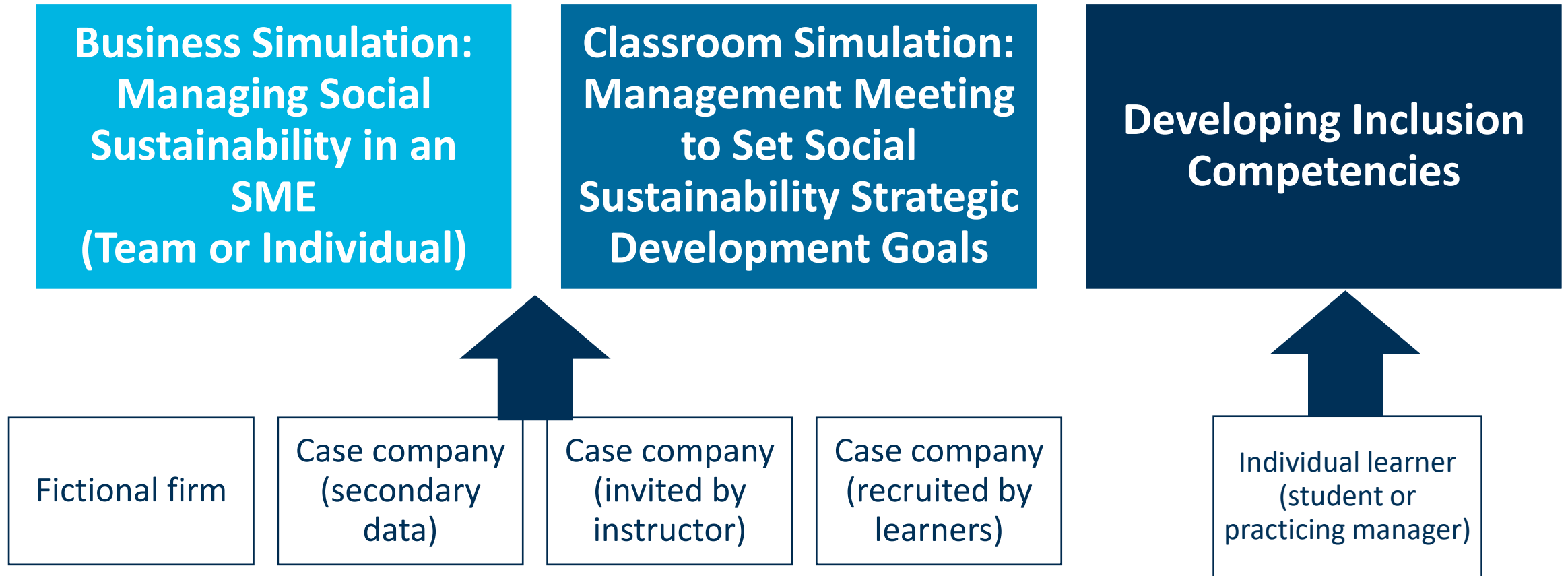


Digital Tool for Social Sustainability Management and Reporting

How to use it to develop industry-ready skills?



What simulations can you implement with the DEI4SME digital tool?



What can learners learn when doing these simulations?

Business Simulation: Managing Social Sustainability in an SME (Team or Individual)

Learners use a digital tool to **learn how firms integrate social sustainability** into business strategy, people management, product or service development, and reporting. **They will simulate real managerial decisions on how companies can promote fairness, inclusion, and accessibility while still growing their business**

Classroom Simulation: Management Meeting to Set Social Sustainability Strategic Development Goals

This exercise allows one to realize that there **are multiple paths towards strengthening business with social sustainability**. It also allows exchanging ideas on how this could be achieved. Simple **planning templates help students understand connections between strategic goals, specific measures of success, and accountability management in firms.**

Developing Inclusion Competencies

This is an individual assignment intended to support learner in developing their inclusion competencies. This exercise supports learners' growth as a responsible and inclusive business leader

Best practices, insights, assessment tools that can be applied for case SME strategy development, assessment, reporting, and individual growth

Learn & Plan

Report

Inclusion Competencies

For Educators

Glossary

FAQ

EN

Four Engagement Areas



Social sustainability in daily work and routines

WHAT THIS MEANS

Make social sustainability part of the business model — how you design services, enter markets and define success.

HOW TO ENGAGE

- Check your engagement level with social sustainability in strategic management
- See examples of social sustainability in strategic management
- Plan my actions to strengthen strategic management with social sustainability

WHY IT PAYS

Connecting social goals to your core offer strengthens brand, customer trust and innovation, and improves access to EU buyers and finance that increasingly prioritise social performance.



Compliance and governance of social sustainability

WHAT THIS MEANS

Apply fairness and inclusion to all people you write job ads, shortlist, interview, hire and manage.

HOW TO ENGAGE

- Check your engagement level in strategic management
- See examples of managing people sustainably
- Plan my actions to strengthen social sustainability management

WHY IT PAYS

Fair, visible processes help you attract talent, avoid disputes—key for European SME employers and serving diverse markets.



Social sustainability in strategic management

WHAT THIS MEANS

Make social sustainability part of the business model — how you design services, enter markets and define success.

HOW TO ENGAGE

- Check your engagement level with social sustainability in strategic management
- See examples of social sustainability in strategic management
- Plan my actions to strengthen strategic management with social sustainability

WHY IT PAYS

Connecting social goals to your core offer strengthens brand, customer trust and innovation, and improves access to EU buyers and finance that increasingly prioritise social performance.



Managing people sustainably

WHAT THIS MEANS

Apply fairness and inclusion to all people you write job ads, shortlist, interview, hire and manage.

HOW TO ENGAGE

- Check your engagement level in strategic management
- See examples of managing people sustainably
- Plan my actions to strengthen social sustainability management

WHY IT PAYS

Fair, visible processes help you attract talent, avoid disputes—key for European SME employers and serving diverse markets.

Report

This tool offers two ways to report on your firm's social sustainability. Both are free of charge, guide you through questions step by step, and deliver a finished PDF report to your email.

FREE-FORM REPORT

Social Sustainability Report

A report in your own words about how your firm supports its people, covering areas such as training, safety, inclusion and well-being. You choose what to report on.

EU STANDARD FORMAT

VSME Standard Report

A report that follows the EU's Voluntary Sustainability Reporting Standard for SMEs (VSME). This report format helps you respond to sustainability information requests from larger customers, banks and investors with a single document. Takes about 60-90 minutes.

Start the VSME report

Develop Your Personal Inclusion Competencies

Knowing Yourself, Self-Awareness

I consider that I am deeply aware of my interpersonal style, behavioral tendencies and how they impact others *

0

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

COMPLETELY DISAGREE COMPLETELY AGREE

I think, I am deeply aware of my strengths and weaknesses as well as how they impact others *

0

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COMPLETELY DISAGREE COMPLETELY AGREE

DEVELOPING (6.8 / 10)

What this means

You sometimes reflect but not consistently. You recognise some strengths and weaknesses. You may act on feedback, but not regularly.

Practices to strengthen:

- Make reflection part of your routine**
After a meeting or customer interaction, ask yourself: What did I do well? What should I adjust next time?
Routine reflection links emotions, thoughts, and behaviours, building durable self-awareness.
- Do a monthly "Start-Stop-Continue" check with one colleague**
Schedule a 15-minute monthly conversation with one colleague to discuss what to start, stop, and continue in your working styles.
This helps you develop both internal and external self-awareness in a structured way.



Diversity Equity Inclusion



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Detailed manuals that can be downloaded and used at once for setting the simulation in class or course

Learn & Plan

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- ▶ <https://tool.dei4sme.eu/en/educator-instructions/>
- ▶ Download the simulation task
- ▶ Indicate the practical arrangements relevant for your course and institution
- ▶ Have learners enjoy the interactive learning with digital tools where they make decisions for firms



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EN

Instructions for Educators on Using the Digital Tool for Social Sustainability in Business

This Digital tool for social sustainability in business provides learners with a practical way to learn how social sustainability is integrated into business strategy, people management, product design, and reporting. With this tool, learners can simulate real managerial decisions, practise reporting, and understand how firms can pursue fairness, inclusion, and accessibility while growing their business.

- These exercises can be used in courses on strategy, sustainability, entrepreneurship, human resource management (HRM), or any business and management related courses.
- The digital tool can be used for classroom discussions, as an individual assignment, and an individual or group business simulation.

Below are potential exercises and facilitation guidance for educators.

Business Simulation: Managing Social Sustainability in an SME

In this simulation, learners will use a digital tool for social sustainability in business to learn how firms integrate social sustainability into business strategy, people management, product or service development, and reporting. The educators may download these documents and use them for setting individual or team business simulation in their courses. These are extended assignments and will require **approx. 10-20 hours** to complete it diligently. Thus, this simulation is recommended to be used as an extended course assignment.

- Simulation to work in teams ([download here](#))
- Simulation to work individually ([download here](#))

Tips for conducting this simulation:

- When setting this simulation, educators can suggest their own deadlines, information on the submission process, assessment or other requirements relevant for their institutional context.
- In the assessment, it is recommended to focus on analytical skills and ability to make real business decisions suitable for specific business case. For example, the assessment criteria may focus on the quality of outcomes; depth and accuracy of the case analysis; suitability of the suggestions for the specific case company; and appropriateness, feasibility, and innovativeness of the strategic developments proposed.

N.B. When using these materials, DEI4SME team kindly requests to maintain logos and other attributions necessary to indicate the authorship of this simulation, funding, and project within which these educational resources were provided.

Exercise: Developing Inclusion Competencies

This is an individual assignment intended to support learner in developing their inclusion competencies. This activity may take 1-5 hours to complete. Strengthening personal inclusion skills can directly benefit business managers and entrepreneurs, especially in a small-team environment where every relationship, decision, and communication counts. More reasons on why inclusion competencies matter for business managers are provided in this page: [Inclusion Competencies](#). The educators may download this document and use it for setting an individual assignment, encouraging learners to work towards becoming inclusive and responsible business leaders:

- [Exercise for developing inclusion competencies \(download here\)](#)

Tips for conducting this activity:

- When setting this simulation, educators can suggest their own deadlines, information on the submission process, assessment or other requirements relevant for their institutional context.
- In the assessment, it is recommended to focus on individual's willingness and efforts to develop personal skills and attitudes. For example, the assessment criteria may focus on the quality and thoughtfulness of the development plan, the suitability of the personal development strategy for the person, and the ability to critically reflect on own strengths and weaknesses, suggesting ways to address them both.
- Educators can facilitate this activity by asking learners to imagine themselves as managers who want to understand their strengths and weaknesses and talk about how manager features connect with the firm's strategic actions (e.g., when using microfoundations or Upper Echelons Theory). This is an individual assignment, so learners can personally engage with their development without feeling unnecessary external pressures.

Tips for educators

- ▶ <https://tool.dei4sme.eu/en/educator-instructions/>
- ▶ Time for the activity
- ▶ Tips on implementing simulation
- ▶ Tips on assessment
- ▶ Digital tool was tested by:
 - ▶ 29 SME (incl. entrepreneurs)
 - ▶ 30 educators
 - ▶ 23 researchers / scholars
 - ▶ 63 students
 - ▶ 10 sustainability experts / consultants

and we improved it accordingly to ensure that educators can develop business relevant skills in social sustainability and learners can immediately apply these skills in their organizations.



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