

Report

Titel: The Future Academic Organisation at SDU Business School - Draft

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Introduction

The report has been prepared by the working group tasked with exploring possible structures for the academic organisation at SBS, including a consolidation of the current research groups. The purpose of the working group has been to seek inspiration from other business schools and monodisciplinary faculties in order to present a number of models on which the future academic organisation at SBS can be based.

The tasks of the working group have included:

- Mapping the research areas in the two departments
- A survey among faculty across the two departments
- Gathering inspiration from other business schools and mono-disciplinary faculties
- Discussing design criteria of importance to the future organisation
- Outlining models to be considered by the new business school leader.

The working group consisted of:

- Dean Hanne Søndergaard Birkmose (chair)
- Professor Domen Bajde, DBM
- Professor Nicole Richter, DBM
- Associate Professor Victor Martin-Sanchez, DBM
- Professor Per Freytag, DBS
- Professor Majbritt Evald, DBS
- Associate Professor Stephanie Sohn, DBS
- Vice-Dean Kristin B. Munksgaard

Current organisation

Department of Business and Management (DBM)

The current research organisation at DBM consists of 6 research groups, a centre, and a department administration. Each faculty member belongs to one of the following research groups or research centre:

- Accounting
- Centre for Integrative Innovation
- Consumption, Culture & Commerce
- Finance
- International Leadership & Management
- Strategic Organization Design
- SDU SCC Elite Center PACA

It totals to approximately 90 FTE (8.1 TAP FTE).

Department of Business and Sustainability (DBS)

The current research organisation at DBS consists of 8 research groups, two of which are centres, as well as a department administration. Faculty members can belong to one or two research groups. The research groups / centres are:

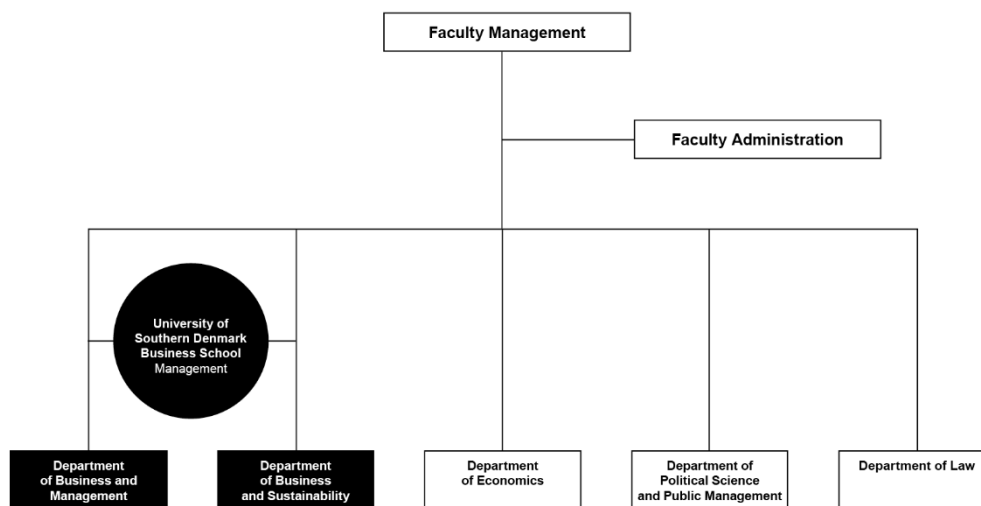
- Center for Sustainable Business Development and Policy
- European Center for Risk & Resilience Studies
- Entrepreneurship
- B2B Marketing
- Interactive Innovation
- Social Aspects of Organising
- Management and Economics of Resources and the Environment
- Supply Chain and Technology Management

It totals to approximately 31 FTE (7.5 TAP FTE).

Current management

Business School

The management of the business school is made up of a Business School Director and two Vice-Business School Directors. These are the Heads of Department at DBM and DBS.



Department of Business and Management (DBM)

At DBM the management team is made up by the Head of Department, one Vice Head of Department, the Head of the Administration and the six Heads of the Research Group.

The management is supported by a PhD-coordinator and an Academic Director responsible for Life-Long Learning (MBA, Børsen, bespoke education etc.).

Department of Business and Sustainability (DBS)

At DBS the management team is made up by the Head of Department, three Vice Heads of Department and the Head of the Administration.

The management is supported by a PhD-coordinator and the Heads of the Research Group.

Framework and design criteria

The work of the working group has been shaped by two main factors. First, ambitions for the SDU Business School, as formulated by the board in its decision to separate the Business School from the Faculty. Second, the working group's terms of reference, stating that the future organisational structure must take account of geographical presence and ensure that research environments across all campuses are integrated into a unified structure.

Ambitions for SBS

- **Increase external visibility and profiling** - nationally and internationally - with a clear identity and branding of SBS as a single entity
- **Intensifying collaboration with external partners**, including companies, public organisations and international institutions and building a reputation as the business school of the Region of Southern Denmark
- **Achieving further international accreditations**, building on the recent AACSB accreditation and ambitions for EQUIS and AMBA accreditations
- **Strengthening the quality** of research and education through excellent research environments, strategic recruitment and a sharper educational profile - both full-time and part-time

The aim has therefore been to operate with a set of design criteria that allow the future organisation to:

- Support strategic ambitions for SBS
- Support the development of strong, academically focused research environments with critical mass
- Consolidate current research groups to reduce complexity and strengthen collaboration
- Account a multicampus structure and ensure local presence

Design criteria

The development of the design criteria is based on input gathered in different fora. A questionnaire was sent to all academic faculty at the two business departments asking about their preferences for a future organisational structure. The results of the questionnaire are found in Annex 1. The members of the working group initiated meetings at both DBM and DBS to gather views and perspectives on the criteria, and finally the criteria were established through discussions at working group meetings.

1. **Coherence**
Emphasises broad, recognisable academic areas as the organising principle.
2. **Continuity**
Captures stability, long-term structures, and avoiding unnecessary future re-organisations.

3. **Collaboration**

Supports cross-field collaboration, cross campus work, project-based groupings, and external engagement.

4. **Autonomy**

Supports academic freedom, bottom-up development, keeping bureaucracy and hierarchy light.

5. **Governance**

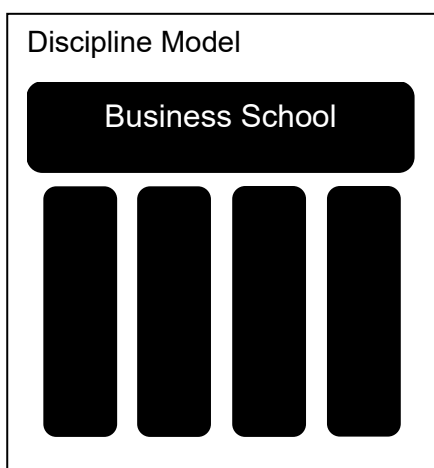
Frames the need for clear leadership roles, separated responsibilities, and transparent decision-making.

While the ambitions for SBS are oriented toward external positioning, identity-building, and strategic profiling, the design criteria for organising academic staff reflect internal academic logics such as research coherence, continuity, collaboration, autonomy, and governance. The working group are aware that these two perspectives do not naturally align in all respects, and the organisational design must therefore accommodate both sets of considerations.

Model description – ideal models

The working group sought inspiration from other business schools and monodisciplinary faculties. The group divided into two sub-groups, each with responsibility for one of the two categories. Due to time constraints the search was limited to schools and faculties in Europe. The aim was to identify models that could be relevant for the future academic organisation of SBS. The initial findings were presented within each sub-group, and from a broader set of options, three to four examples were chosen to be discussed within the working group. Ultimately, four ideal models were identified and described. The four models are elaborated in the following sections and subsequently assessed against the design criteria.

The Discipline Model



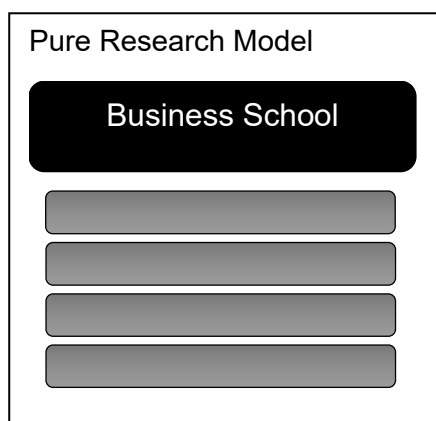
The business school is organised as a set of sections corresponding to established research disciplines and/or business functions (e.g., management, marketing, finance). As the scope of research disciplines is relatively broad, this model allows for a smaller range of organisational units (e.g., 3-5) which can be relatively large in size. The model allows for relatively less complex and more centralised governance with only two organisational layers (Business School/sections). The governance structure also makes it possible to streamline administrative processes such as budgeting, hiring and performance evaluation across sections.

Disciplinary categories are fairly stable and often familiar across diverse academic circles as well as among potential external partners. While the sections are meant to reflect and support the full range of activities spanning teaching, research and collaboration with external partners, some activities might be more conducive to

sectional organisation than others e.g., teaching programmes are often organised along disciplinary fields or business functions, while research activities tend to be more specialised. This governance structure tends to be more stable than 'thematic' research units which often depend more on individual leaders and/or research and funding trends. Within the disciplinary model researchers can still self-organise into informal thematic units or around (ongoing) research projects without requiring formal structural changes.

An approximate example of disciplinary organisation is the Faculty of Theology at the University of Copenhagen, where the sections are however also supplemented with research centres that cut across the sections (i.e., closer to a matrix model). Examples of purely disciplinary organisation (without any elements of cascade or matrix models) are hard to find.

The Pure Research Model



The business school is organised around a set of cross-disciplinary research themes, and centres or sections rather than traditional disciplinary departments. These thematic units bring together scholars from different fields (e.g., management, marketing, accounting and finance, strategy, innovation, entrepreneurship, organisation studies, HRM, sustainability, or international business) who share similar research interests. This model allows for a larger range of organisational units, some of which can be relatively small in size. The model consists of two layers: Business School leadership and the leaders of

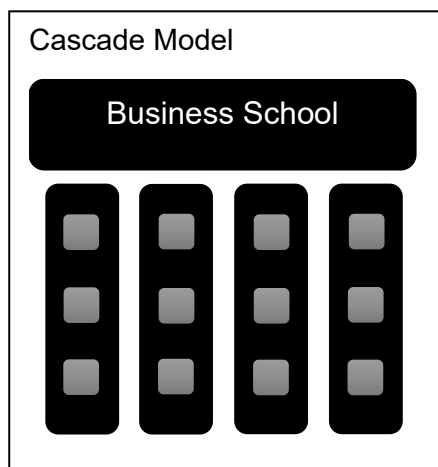
the research themes.

Because thematic areas are typically more focused and dynamic than broad disciplinary units, this model implies a larger number of smaller and more fluid research entities, which may vary in maturity, visibility, and critical mass. Research identity and external positioning are built primarily through centres (e.g. a centre for sustainable business), platforms, or collaborative networks, rather than through stable departmental structures.

The thematic organisation is designed to support research excellence, interdisciplinary collaboration, and external engagement, while teaching responsibilities tend to be coordinated across themes to ensure programme coherence. Importantly, the structure allows themes to emerge, grow, merge, or close in response to strategic priorities, funding opportunities, and societal needs.

Overall, this model emphasises flexibility, permeability across disciplines, and strong outward orientation, positioning the Business School as a networked research organisation, which can be embedded in regional, European, and global knowledge ecosystems. An example of this model is the Law School at the University of Exeter (UK).

The Cascade Model



The Business School is organised into a set of formal disciplinary sections corresponding to core areas of business scholarship (e.g., accounting, finance, marketing, and management). These sections provide stable institutional anchoring for academic interests and resource allocation. Within each disciplinary section, research and scholarly collaboration are structured around a limited number of thematic pillars (e.g., within management: strategy, entrepreneurship, international business, and innovation).

This model allows for a smaller range of organisational units (e.g., 3-5) which can be relatively large in their size, but with smaller research

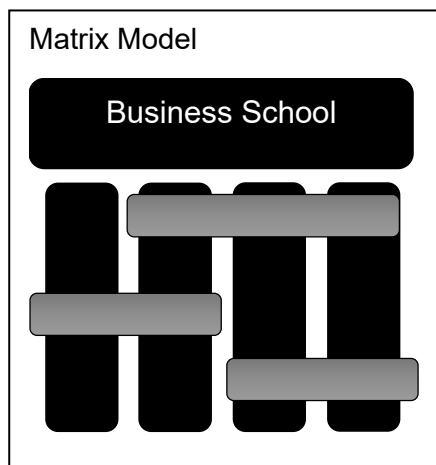
units embedded in internal pillars. The model consists of three governance layers: Business School leadership, the leaders of the disciplinary sections, and the leaders of the thematic pillars.

The internal pillars concentrate intellectual expertise, support the development of critical mass in priority research areas, and allow strategic direction to be translated from School-level priorities into discipline-specific research agendas.

Governance and strategic coordination follow a cascading logic, whereby overall priorities defined at the School leadership level are progressively interpreted and operationalised within sections and their respective pillars. This structure is intended to balance organisational stability and accountability with research differentiation and specialisation, while maintaining alignment between teaching, research, and external engagement activities.

Overall, the cascade model emphasises clear lines of responsibility, and structured research development within disciplines, positioning the Business School as a coordinated yet internally differentiated academic organisation. An approximate example of this is CBS which has 11 departments with varying numbers of centres per department.

The Matrix Model



The business school is organised across two (or more) intersecting dimensions. For example, as a set of disciplinary sections (1st dimension) and as research units – such as research centres or research groups (2nd dimension) – that cut across the disciplinary sections. This model allows for a smaller range of first-dimension organisational units (e.g., 3-5) which can be relatively large in size, but with second-dimension research units varying in size.

In the business school context, the first dimension tends to be primarily focused on supporting more broadly structured activities, such as

teaching activities (e.g., finance, marketing) or broader areas of expertise (e.g., digital business, sustainability), while the second dimension typically focuses on more specialised research activities organised around specific themes, approaches or socio-economic challenges.

The model thus allows for a relatively flexible arrangement that allows for simplicity on one level (e.g., a limited number of disciplinary sections), while retaining the ability for more specialised organisational units (e.g., centres or cross-disciplinary research groups) that are not constricted by disciplinary boundaries. Nevertheless, due to multiple intersecting dimensions and levels of organisation and leadership, the resulting structure can become quite complex.

An example of a matrix organisation is BI Norwegian Business School, which hosts a number of units (primarily organised across disciplinary lines) as well as multiple cross-disciplinary research centres aiming for research excellence “through the study of a clearly defined theory, phenomenon or context”. As is often the case, BI’s matrix model is combined with a cascade model as some research groups and centres are bound to individual units (e.g., hosted by a single unit).

Assessment of the four models

In the following section, the working group has assessed the described ideal models against the five design criteria to establish how they support the ambitions of SDU Business School. The design criteria are:

1. Coherence
2. Continuity
3. Collaboration
4. Autonomy
5. Governance

The Discipline Model

The discipline model builds on broad, well-established academic fields (e.g., marketing, finance, management) as the primary organising principle for the Business School and supports **coherence** in the research organisation. One of its core

strengths lies in its clarity: disciplinary boundaries are easily recognisable internally and externally, and the model is broadly comparable to structures found in other business schools and can facilitate external understanding among partners, accreditation bodies and students. Reliance on well-established academic fields may transform into strong contributions to the international academic community. However, reliance on broad disciplinary categories may reduce the distinctiveness of SBS at a time when business schools increasingly differentiate themselves through thematic, cross-disciplinary profiles. The emphasis on disciplines may constrain creativity and innovation, particularly if it encourages a traditional view of academic fields or fosters path-dependent thinking. Also, when disciplines become very large and broad, researchers may struggle to identify where they belong, and it may be a challenge to create a meaningful academic identity. This may weaken community cohesion, peer support, and intellectual belonging.

In terms of **continuity**, the model offers stability and a predictable organisational setup. Because disciplines change slowly over time, the structure avoids frequent reorganisations. Yet this same stability may come at the cost of flexibility. As research themes emerge, grow or decline, the model does not easily accommodate new or cross-cutting areas without establishing additional structures, such as informal networks or centres, which remain peripheral to the formal organisation.

With regard to **collaboration**, the disciplinary units can strengthen collaboration within each field by bringing together scholars on related topics. The disciplinary model may also be advantageous from the perspective of junior scholars, as internationally reputable journals, academic communities, and performance indicators are largely organised around established disciplines. This can provide clearer reference points for publication strategies, evaluation and career development than more fluid thematic structures. At the same time, the model tends to be less conducive to cross-disciplinary research, as its structure does not inherently encourage collaboration across disciplinary boundaries. Therefore, unless deliberate mechanisms are put in place to support cross-field collaboration, it may also risk limiting researchers whose work spans multiple areas. Potentially it may reduce the school's capacity to engage with grand societal challenges that require multidisciplinary perspectives.

Autonomy within the disciplines model is typically strong. Large disciplinary units can allocate internal tasks and coordinate research agendas with a fair degree of independence. However, this autonomy exists primarily *within* the disciplinary units; the model allows less structural flexibility for bottom-up development of new thematic areas. As autonomy also entails light governance understood as the absence of bureaucracy and hierarchy, certain tasks need to be elevated to the business school (i.e. faculty) level, as the model builds on only two levels.

Governance in the discipline model benefits from a clear structure with a distinct hierarchy and, subsequently, the possibility of establishing clear leadership roles and ensuring transparent decision-making. The size of the formal groups may entail that members of the sections experience distance to the formally appointed section leader and that the span of control becomes large.

Overall assessment

The discipline model offers clarity, recognisability, and stable organisational anchoring grounded in established academic fields. This may increase external visibility and profiling. However, the model risks limiting interdisciplinarity, innovation, and the ability to respond to emerging societal challenges. While it supports coherence and strong academic identity within disciplines, it may constrain thematic development and reduce the Business School's distinctiveness. The organisational structure can ensure critical mass and consolidate existing environments while allowing for a multicampus structure that integrates research environments across campuses. Autonomy and governance may be seen as conflicting design criteria in the disciplines model.

The Pure Research Model

The pure research model is centred on thematic research units rather than disciplinary areas. These themes act as dynamic hubs that bring together scholars from different backgrounds based on shared research interests, societal challenges, or methodological approaches supporting **coherence** among those with shared interests. The model's defining strength is its strong support for problem-driven, cross-field collaboration. By removing disciplinary boundaries, the structure fosters interdisciplinary research communities with high potential for innovative output and strong engagement with external stakeholders. However, the model simultaneously weakens the visibility of traditional academic disciplines such as marketing, strategy or finance. Thematic research areas often emerge in response to external drivers such as foundations' strategic priorities, e.g., climate, health, and digitalisation. For this reason, thematic areas often signal that the university is actively engaging with relevant societal challenges, making them easily recognisable to external partners. For those not familiar with the specific themes, the organisation may appear less intuitive and harder to navigate.

Continuity represents one of the model's major challenges. The thematic units are inherently fluid: new themes emerge, others disappear, and some evolve in ways that may not correspond with formal structures. This dynamism can ensure responsiveness to societal needs and funding opportunities but also risks structural instability or strategic misalignment. Themes may be formalised in ways that no longer reflect the actual academic activities, and reorganisations may be required more frequently than in discipline-based structures. At the same time, organising around research themes may strengthen academic identity, as it follows the organic development of the themes. However, over time themes may stabilise as sub-fields or enduring areas of research and business practice, ensuring a better degree of continuity.

Collaboration is a clear strength of this model. The thematic focus promotes cross-field collaboration both internally and externally, provided that strong, capable theme leaders are in place. The structure naturally supports interdisciplinary projects, broader research networks, and engagement with businesses and public organisations.

Related to **autonomy**, the model allows considerable freedom to pursue academic interests and can encourage entrepreneurial academic behaviour. Researchers have room to initiate new themes or shape their research agendas in response to external opportunities and academic curiosity. Similarly to the disciplines model,

certain tasks need to be elevated to business school level to ensure autonomy, as the model builds on only two levels.

Governance in the pure research model can be complex. Staffing, promotion processes, workload distribution and teaching coordination become harder to manage when academic teams are fluid and cut across traditional boundaries. At the same time, decision-making can be more decentralised and closer to the active research community, which may enhance ownership and bottom-up influence.

Overall assessment

The pure research model promotes interdisciplinary innovation, external engagement, and responsiveness to societal needs, which may increase external visibility and collaboration with external partners. Its flexibility and problem-driven orientation are strong assets, yet the model may suffer from structural instability, potential ambiguity in governance, and weaker disciplinary identity. Success depends heavily on size, leadership capacity, and the ability to maintain coherence amid fluid thematic structures.

To fully capture the strengths of the pure research model, the research units need to be small and agile. This may conflict with the aim of ensuring critical mass in research units and the fact that SDU Business School aims to have only 3-5 units. The organisational structure can ensure critical mass and consolidate existing environments while allowing for a multicampus structure that integrates research environments across campuses. Larger formal units may entail that members of a section experience distance to the formally appointed section leader and that the span of control becomes large. Autonomy and governance may be seen as conflicting design criteria in the pure research model as in the disciplines model.

The Cascade Model

The cascade model combines disciplinary anchoring with structured thematic development within each discipline. Disciplinary areas form the primary building blocks of the organisation, ensuring visibility and clarity for external stakeholders and ensuring **coherence** internally. At the same time, thematic pillars within each discipline allow for scholarly specialisation and the development of research priorities aligned with the School's strategy.

One of the model's strengths is its ability to provide stable institutional anchoring while still enabling thematic initiatives to emerge. Disciplinary areas remain recognisable as academic homes, and research themes can develop within these areas without requiring frequent structural change. This provides **continuity**, while allowing the school to pursue specialisation and differentiation through targeted thematic priorities within the respective disciplines.

Collaboration is partly supported by the structure, as thematic pillars foster scholarly connections within each discipline. However, support for cross-disciplinary collaboration is limited: themes are typically confined to the disciplinary area in which they are housed. Thus, the cascade structure may insufficiently leverage strengths that build on cross-disciplinary research environments.

In terms of **autonomy**, the disciplinary units can help provide an academic identity, but cascading strategic priorities from School leadership to disciplines and then to

thematic pillars may limit bottom-up entrepreneurial activity. The structure inherently embeds a top-down logic, which may reduce the freedom for researchers to initiate new areas that do not align clearly with disciplinary boundaries or strategic priorities.

Governance is core in the cascade model. Clear responsibilities at each of the three structural layers help ensure transparent decision-making, and disciplinary sections can manage staffing, workloads and coordination in a coherent manner. However, the additional governance layer introduced by thematic pillars increases complexity. Effective functioning requires clarity in the distribution of authority between School leadership, discipline leaders, and theme leaders without creating bureaucratic overhead.

Overall assessment

The cascade model balances disciplinary stability with space for thematic specialisation. It provides coherence and continuity while enabling strategic development within disciplines. However, it may insufficiently support cross-disciplinary strengths and risks underleveraging research areas that naturally span multiple disciplines, limiting strategic alignment with SBS's ambitions. The model thus provides coherence but may not fully capture cross-cutting potential.

The organisational structure can ensure critical mass in the disciplinary sections and strengthen collaboration around themes within the disciplines. The formalisation of bottom-up thematic pillars may come at the expense of multicampus collaboration. Strategic priorities around thematic pillars may reduce autonomy.

Thematic pillars reduce the span of control and the distance between leaders and group members are reduced as well.

The Matrix Model

The matrix model combines two intersecting organisational dimensions – typically disciplinary units and thematic research units. As such, it offers the highest degree of flexibility among the four models. It supports the development of thematic excellence, aligns well with external funding mechanisms that increasingly favour interdisciplinary approaches, and allows for the coexistence of distinct identity markers, including thematic specialisation tracks and unique academic strengths. The model's flexibility enables the Business School to maintain standard disciplinary structures as a core while expanding cross-disciplinary research initiatives. It supports cross-disciplinary initiatives and offers opportunities for developing unique thematic profiles. However, this flexibility also comes with the risk of dispersed positioning. If the matrix is poorly coordinated, the external profile may become unclear or overly complex and internally it may lack **coherence**.

In terms of **continuity**, the matrix model will provide an organisation around the disciplines that remain stable. The structure will at the same time provide possibilities for strategic adaptability, as thematic units can be developed, reoriented, or discontinued in response to emerging priorities, societal challenges, and funding opportunities without requiring repeated reorganisation of the School's disciplinary foundations. The more formalised organisation at the second dimension may limit the agility of the matrix model though.

Collaboration is a central strength. The model invites a diversity of perspectives, relying on trust and sustained interaction between disciplinary and thematic structures. It fosters both intradisciplinary cohesion and cross-disciplinary collaboration, which can create strong research communities and international networks. Moreover, it makes potential “shadow structures” – informal collaborations operating across units – explicit, while offering a more formalised framework for them to grow.

Autonomy is also supported in several ways. In an autonomy-aligned matrix, bottom-up development is not treated as an informal workaround but as a recognised organising principle of the second dimension. In this sense, the matrix can decouple intellectual leadership from administrative hierarchy, which is central to maintaining academic freedom, if research groups or centres emerge from scholarly initiative rather than top-down planning and leadership in the second dimension is facilitative (coordination, representation, resource brokerage) rather than directive. Matrix models can become heavy and bureaucratic when both dimensions exercise strong line authority. Therefore, the autonomy-friendly version avoids this by being asymmetric: the first dimension holds formal line responsibility for staff and core processes, while the second dimension operates largely through influence, coordination and scholarly leadership, not command.

Governance in the matrix model is inherently complex. While staff often have close access to immediate leadership, the model introduces multiple lines of leadership and can increase coordination costs. For the matrix to function well, clear decision-making processes and strong coordination mechanisms are essential. Other issues include the challenge of ensuring that the model enhances rather than fragments organisational identity and sense of belonging. Without careful governance, the matrix can become difficult to operationalise and may confuse both internal and external stakeholders. The complex governance structure might also make it more challenging to develop shared norms and sense of identity across the intersecting organisational levels and units.

Overall assessment

The matrix model offers a high degree of flexibility and supports both disciplinary and thematic excellence. It strengthens collaboration, adaptability and alignment with external funding and societal challenges. Thus, the model may help position SBS, increase visibility and collaboration with external partners. The model's complexity requires robust governance, clear decision-making, and strong coordination. Without careful design, the model risks fragmentation, unclear identity, and reduced coherence.

The organisational structure can ensure critical mass in the disciplinary sections and strengthen collaboration around themes across disciplines. The formalisation of thematic research units may come at the expense of multicampus collaboration. Formalised thematic research units reduce the span of control and the distance between leaders and group member are reduced as well.

Management structure and leadership principles

The SBS management will be made up of the Head of Business School, a Director of Education and a Head of Secretariat. It is to be decided to which extent the management of the research organisation become a formalised part of the faculty management.

Besides governance being a key design criterion in the presentation of possible organising models, the working group has had a more general discussion in relation to the management of SBS.

Across all organisational models, the group finds that it is essential to distinguish clearly between responsibilities related to research and those that are best handled by the overarching leadership structure. Research groups should focus on academic development, research collaboration and scholarly progression. Administrative responsibilities such as allocation of teaching, distribution of resources or other decisions with faculty-wide implications should remain at the appropriate managerial level. This separation ensures transparency, avoids ambiguity about who receives what and on which grounds, and provides a clear basis for decisions concerning research, education and other key faculty-wide matters. In particular, budgetary authority should be placed at the business school (i.e., faculty) level, thereby avoiding STÅ-oriented considerations across research groups.

The working group finds that it is important that responsibility for employee development dialogues (MUS) is placed within a formal leadership position and that this leader has the competences for making binding agreements etc. with faculty. This could indicate that it should be the research groups leaders. These leaders could then also be responsible for the organisation of research seminars within the group, and the strategic development of the group's research profile. Accordingly, they should have access to a modest budget dedicated to research group activities. They could approve participation in annual conferences for researchers in the group, be informed about and involved in ongoing funding initiatives, and recommend grant applications to the dean for final approval. The research group leader also has a particular responsibility for supporting junior academics, including active involvement in their career planning.

Next steps

In concluding its work, the working group emphasises that several important aspects lie outside the group's formal mandate and therefore have not been analysed in depth. These matters have not been forgotten, but they require careful consideration in the next phase of the organisational design process. The points below outline key areas of attention that should be addressed to ensure a coherent and sustainable implementation of the future academic organisation.

Designing the future organisation

A central next step is to determine how the chosen organisational model is to be translated into a concrete structure. While this report outlines four ideal models, decisions still need to be made regarding the specific configuration, the number and scope of units, and the internal distribution of responsibilities. This includes assessing how different models support the ambitions of SBS and how they can be

adapted to the multicampus context. The design phase must balance strategic direction with opportunities for bottom-up contributions, taking into account that different models imply different degrees of autonomy, leadership layers and administrative complexity.

Placement of academic staff

Another key issue concerns how employees are to be placed in the new organisational structure. This includes establishing transparent principles for mapping current research groups to new entities, ensuring academic belonging, and supporting research coherence. Considerations should also be given to how to enhance existing strong research environments. Special attention should be given to how to handle researchers whose profiles are cross-disciplinary, and how to secure a fair and trust-building process – particularly if placement affects career development or research identity.

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Leadership of future research groups

The identification and appointment of leaders for the new research groups is a pivotal decision for the success of the organisation. The working group notes that leadership roles will differ depending on model choice (e.g., two-layer vs. three-layer structures), and that expectations regarding span of control, decision-making authority, and academic leadership must be clarified early. A transparent, open process for appointing research group leaders could support legitimacy and ensure strong leadership profiles. It will also be necessary to address potential tensions related to academic rank, promotion pathways and the balance between managerial and scholarly roles.

Interaction with educational programmes

Although educational programmes fall outside the research organisation, the final decision on the academic structure must consider implications for education across disciplines and campuses. All four models influence how teaching responsibilities, programme alignment, and cross-disciplinary coordination can be organised. The working group notes that some models may risk reinforcing disciplinary silos, which could affect the agility of programme development and the ability to respond to evolving industry needs or student demand for interdisciplinary competencies. Furthermore, independent of the chosen structure, there is a need for clear governance regarding where teaching coordination is placed, how programme leadership interacts with the research organisation, and how to ensure transparency in resource allocation and staffing.

Finally, the working group refers to Annex 2, which contains a draft process plan outlining the proposed timeline and key decision points for the next phase of work.

Annex

Results of the questionnaire

Results Survey “Research Organization new SDU Business School” – Jan 2026

SDU 

Sample

→ 154 invitations sent out; 63 data sets registered as complete = 40.9%* *note that there are several where we do not have complete answers to all the questions

→ **Locations (n = 63):**

Esbjerg (n = 5, 7.9%), Kolding (n = 13, 20.6%), Odense (n = 30, 47.6%), Sonderborg (n = 1, 1.6%),
missing (n = 14, 22.2%)

→ **Career stage (n = 63):**

early-career (n = 2, 3.2%), faculty (n = 45, 71.4%), prefer not to say (n = 3, 4.8%), missing (n = 13, 20.6%)

SDU 

Q1: To start, we would like to hear your big-picture perspective. From your point of view, what should be the top priorities when organizing research at SBS going forward?

41 responses ; key takeaway: respondents want the organization to be stable and academically driven, protecting academic freedom and existing strengths, while building a shared school identity that supports internationally excellent, societally relevant research

Theme	Description	Exemplary Quotes
Stability and Continuity	Many respondents emphasized the importance of stability in the new organization. After years of frequent changes and reorganizations, they want a structure that endures and builds on existing strengths rather than introducing more disruptive changes. Preserving what already works (such as effective research groups) and avoiding constant restructuring is seen as crucial for maintaining momentum and trust. Continuity in strategy and structure is preferred to ensure long-term success without further upheaval.	"Ensure stability for an organization that has suffered from a very large number of reorganizations and restructurings in the last years..." (ID_77) "Stability: An organizational structure that lasts and does not lead to further restructuring in the future..." (ID_138)
Academic Freedom and Autonomy	Another dominant theme was the preservation of academic freedom and a flexible, bottom-up organizational approach. Faculty members want the freedom to pursue research without heavy bureaucratic constraints or rigid top-down directives. Many suggested a lean structure with minimal hierarchy that enables curiosity-driven inquiry and organic collaboration. By reducing administrative burdens and encouraging autonomy, the organization can better foster innovation and responsiveness in research.	"Safeguard the principle of academic freedom at all times." (ID_44) "Enabling a free and open research process not constrained by organizational structure, resource allocation and administrative burden." (ID_76) "SBS should avoid overly rigid top-down prioritization and create a structure that allows for curiosity-driven research, methodological diversity, and bottom-up initiatives." (ID_96)
Balancing Unity and Local Autonomy	Respondents called for a balance between forging a unified SBS identity and respecting existing local and cultural differences. Many acknowledge caution against imposed cross-campus collaborations that might do more harm than good. The new structure should encourage voluntary collaboration and a sense of belonging to one school. Having leadership presence at each campus and reducing the need for constant inter-campus travel were suggested ways to strengthen local engagement while still working toward common goals.	"I think overcoming the cultural divide between Jutland and Fyn and shaping a collective identity of 'we are all members of SBS' should be the top priority." (ID_102) "Establish an organizational structure that creates unity while respecting local cultural and structural differences... The past has shown us that enforcing collaboration between campuses... has more often than not led to conflict rather than collaboration." (ID_77)
Research Excellence and Societal Impact	A strong emphasis on research quality and impact emerged across the responses. Faculty want the business school to enhance its academic reputation by building on current strengths and aiming for internationally excellent research. Many stressed that quality should trump quantity, focusing on high-impact research in top-tier journals and on addressing pressing societal challenges, rather than chasing simple output metrics. By concentrating on core business disciplines and 'hot topic' areas (such as sustainability, digitalization, or data analytics), SBS can distinguish itself while maintaining credibility and accreditation. In short, respondents envision a research profile that is both academically outstanding and highly relevant to society.	"Raising the overall research output (quality and level) and research reputation of the entire school." (ID_118) "SBS should prioritize the quality and impact of research over short-term output metrics. This means supporting research aimed at top-tier journals and addressing issues of significant societal relevance..." (ID_99)
Supportive Environment and Well-Being	Participants highlighted the importance of a supportive work environment and researcher well-being. They desire an engaging, collegial atmosphere where faculty feel valued and part of a community. Priorities include strong, present leadership and efficient support systems so that researchers have clear guidance and less administrative hassle in their daily work. Mentoring and career development opportunities for staff, along with a psychologically safe space for sharing ideas and taking risks, are seen as crucial.	"One of the top priorities should be to make researchers' lives as easy as possible." (ID_171) "supporting career development, cultivating research ideas, building a psychologically secure space to explore ideas." (ID_140)



Q2: As a first step, please select the five considerations (out of the twenty presented below) that you consider most important for the design of SBS's research organization. Please note that you are free to select multiple considerations from a single design principle.

49 responses, key takeaway: Responses signal that SBS should be built on disciplinary areas + strong local research environments

Structural design (Plurality, coherence and academic practice: thematic and disciplinary coherence, scale, and diversity in research units). 60 selections for this principle (19.4 % of all selections)	
Item	n (% out of 49 responses)
The structure should organize research around flexible thematic areas (e.g., sustainability, artificial intelligence).	14 (28.6%)
The structure should ensure that research units have an appropriate size.	11 (22.4%)
The structure should be anchored in clearly defined disciplinary units (e.g., entrepreneurship, supply chain management).	22 (44.9%)
The structure should account for diversity in e.g., research methods, or career stages.	13 (26.5%)
Openness and collaboration (accessibility and collaboration inside and outside the Business School) 63 selections for this principle (20.4 % of all selections)	
The structure should be understandable and recognizable to external stakeholders (e.g., companies).	14 (28.6%)
The structure should support interdisciplinary and cross-faculty collaboration.	14 (28.6%)
The structure should enable effective collaboration across campuses.	12 (24.5%)
The structure should enable strong, locally anchored research environments at individual campuses.	23 (46.9%)



Q2: As a first step, please select the five considerations (out of the twenty presented below) that you consider most important for the design of SBS's research organization. Please note that you are free to select multiple considerations from a single design principle.

continued, key takeaway: respondents prioritize a research organization that builds on existing strong research environments and creates a shared academic identity, while also being internationally comparable and supported by clear governance and leadership roles

Strategic positioning and distinctiveness (how the research organization positions the Business School) 51 selections for this principle (16.5 % of all selections)	
Item	n (% out of 49 responses)
The structure should be comparable to leading international business schools or relevant peer institutions.	21 (42.9%)
The structure should enable a distinctive Business School research profile.	16 (32.7%)
The structure should clearly differentiate the Business School from other entities within the university.	7 (14.3%)
The structure should enable strategic prioritization of selected research areas.	7 (14.3%)
Academic community and careers (people, careers, and academic environment) 68 selections for this principle (22.0 % of all selections)	
The structure should support recruitment across different academic career stages.	12 (24.5%)
The structure should support career development, mentoring, and progression over time.	19 (38.6%)
The structure should contribute to a shared academic identity and sense of belonging.	26 (53.1%)
The structure should support clear roles and expectations for the individual.	11 (22.4%)
Continuity, feasibility, and integration (institutional alignment, resources, and governance) 67 selections for this principle (21.7 % of all selections)	
The structure should take into consideration existing strong research environments.	26 (53.1%)
The structure should be organized based on educational activities or best support educational programs.	11 (22.4%)
The structure should take into account available financial and administrative resources.	9 (18.4%)
The structure should enable clear leadership roles, governance, and decision responsibilities.	21 (42.0%)

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Q3: Please now rank these considerations in order of importance. To do so, click on the statements in the order you consider most important: the first statement you click will be ranked 1 (most important), the second 2, and so on. You may change the order by clicking again until you are satisfied.

Item	Considered for ranking 1-5 (n)	Rank 1 selected (n)	Ranks 4 or 5 selected (n)	Average value of assigned ranks (the lower, the 'better')
The structure should organize research around flexible thematic areas (e.g., sustainability, artificial intelligence).	10	1	5	3.20
The structure should ensure that research units have an appropriate size.	5	0	4	4.40
The structure should be anchored in clearly defined disciplinary units (e.g., entrepreneurship, supply chain management).	17	7	3	2.18
The structure should account for diversity in e.g., research methods, or career stages.	10	0	7	3.90
The structure should be understandable and recognizable to external stakeholders (e.g., companies).	10	0	3	3.00
The structure should support interdisciplinary and cross-faculty collaboration.	10	3	2	2.50
The structure should enable effective collaboration across campuses.	5	1	1	2.80
The structure should enable strong, locally anchored research environments at individual campuses.	16	7	5	2.50
The structure should be comparable to leading international business schools or relevant peer institutions.	14	4	7	3.00
The structure should enable a distinctive Business School research profile.	9	1	4	3.33
The structure should clearly differentiate the Business School from other entities within the university.	3	1	1	2.67
The structure should enable strategic prioritization of selected research areas.	4	1	2	2.75
The structure should support recruitment across different academic career stages.	6	0	3	3.50
The structure should support career development, mentoring, and progression over time.	13	1	6	3.38
The structure should contribute to a shared academic identity and sense of belonging.	22	8	11	2.86
The structure should support clear roles and expectations for the individual.	7	1	3	3.14
The structure should take into consideration existing strong research environments.	19	4	3	2.53
The structure should be organized based on educational activities or best support educational programs.	6	0	2	3.33
The structure should take into account available financial and administrative resources.	5	0	2	3.40
The structure should enable clear leadership roles, governance, and decision responsibilities.	12	1	6	3.33



Q4: Are there any important principles or considerations that you feel are missing or insufficiently represented above?

26 responses; key takeaway: respondents want the new school to be built around core academic values, supported by a flexible strategy-aligned structure, inclusive and transparent leadership, and stronger resources/support systems, while also strengthening the school's external orientation and real-world impact/international positioning

Theme	Description	Exemplary Quotes
Academic Culture and Values	This theme captures calls to uphold core academic principles and a supportive scholarly culture. Respondents emphasized protecting academic freedom and prioritizing academic considerations over managerial interests. They also urged the school to foster an environment of authenticity, inclusivity, and intellectual breadth, for example, by valuing diverse disciplines and approaches and avoiding corporate jargon that could undermine academic integrity.	"There should be a focus on diversity (of disciplines, people, research questions, methodologies...) and a suitably broad conception of 'business' to include the wide variety of work done at the faculty." "One important consideration that could be made more explicit is the role of epistemological and methodological alignment within research units. While diversity and collaboration are rightly emphasized, sustained research quality and international visibility often depend on shared scholarly traditions, publication cultures, and evaluation standards within research environments."
Organizational Structure and Flexibility	Many responses focused on how to design an effective organization structure that aligns with the school's strategy while remaining practical and adaptable. There were calls to tie the new structure closely to strategic goals (encompassing both research and teaching) and to avoid imposing any overly rigid, one-size-fits-all "grid" on the organization.	"Structure follows Strategy should be [a] guiding principle. Research AND teaching should equally be considered within the structure." "A framework that has both structure and inherent agility-collaborative flexibility is needed to avoid rigid forms while providing clarity." "I think it is important to both enable strong discipline-specific focus (e.g., to support career development) and actively encourage cross-disciplinary work (e.g., through thematic groups that cut across individual disciplines)."
Leadership and Governance	A number of respondents highlighted principles related to leadership style and governance. They advocated for a more inclusive and transparent leadership approach, where faculty are actively involved in discussions about leadership roles and decisions are made based on clear, consistent rules. It was also suggested that academic leadership needs to be accessible and present across all campuses, so that leaders stay connected to the daily realities of research and teaching in each location.	"Engage researchers in ongoing dialogue about the roles and responsibilities of the Business School's leadership." "Rule-based decision-making." "Proximity in leadership, ensuring that academic leadership is locally present and closely connected to the everyday realities of research and teaching across campuses."
Resources and Support	This category encompasses calls for better support systems and resources to enable academic work. Respondents underscored the need for stable funding and reduced bureaucracy so that researchers can focus on high-quality research. Ensuring equitable and sufficient support – from baseline funding for projects to freeing up time for research by streamlining administrative tasks – was seen as crucial for the new structure to truly empower faculty.	"Establish stable baseline funding to support project development and the preparation of external grant applications." "Collaborate with public and private funding bodies to streamline application procedures, ensuring that researchers do not spend excessive time on administrative processes that may ultimately be unsuccessful."
External Orientation and Impact	Several respondents felt the new principles should better reflect an outward-looking perspective. They want the school to emphasize real-world impact and to position itself as a top-tier international institution. This includes learning from other leading schools' best practices and considering the needs and perceptions of external stakeholders (like funding agencies or industry partners) when shaping the school's direction and identity.	"Encourage idea generation to guide research toward areas where it can create meaningful impact for society and business." "The naming, branding, and structure should make it clear that our upcoming business school is a highest-level international research organization, not only a locally-anchored school." "I think that, to some extent, we should look into the best practices that international business schools represent. However, these must also fit into our reality." "As external funding becomes extremely important, the structure has to consider the perceptions and expectations of external research funding bodies and companies."

Q5: If you had to name one design principle or consideration that should clearly guide decisions about the research organization, what would it be?

33 responses; key takeaway: Respondents want a reorganization that protects academic freedom and long-term research quality, strengthens cross-campus collaboration and a shared identity, and creates a clear, internationally comparable structure, ensuring the model is practical, workload-aware, and sustainable to implement.

Theme	Description	Exemplary Quotes
Academic Freedom and Research Quality	Many respondents emphasized core academic values that should guide the reorganization. They highlighted protecting academic freedom and researcher autonomy, ensuring integrity and high-quality research, fostering curiosity-driven inquiry, and focusing on long-term scholarly sustainability over short-term metrics.	"Upholding the principle of academic freedom while also emphasising the responsibility and integrity required of researchers." "Academic freedom." "Individual research autonomy" "Supporting high quality research would be the most important design principle, in my view." "Prioritize long-term research quality and academic sustainability over short-term performance metrics. All structural decisions should support impactful research, protect academic freedom, and create a sustainable environment for all."
Collaboration, Unity, and Shared Identity	Another strong theme is the desire for greater collaboration and a unified identity across the business school. Respondents urged breaking down silos between campuses or faculties, fostering cross-boundary teamwork, and creating an inclusive culture where everyone feels part of one cohesive academic community with a shared sense of belonging.	"The structure should contribute to a shared academic identity and sense of belonging" "Enabling cross-faculty collaboration" "Embrace local strength, but break up local silos - we should truly become one department" "Diversity & collaboration across boundaries" "Delegated responsibility to form an including and progressive and supporting culture" "To create rather than hinder or weaken conditions that enable groups of researchers to grow the relations that enable productive interactions, intense, in-depth, and enduring research conversations and research projects."
Clear and Comparable Organizational Structure	Several comments focused on how to structure the new organization in a coherent and internationally comparable way. Suggestions include organizing around academic disciplines or thematic hubs (to leverage each campus as a thematic center), ensuring the structure aligns with internationally recognized standards in business disciplines, and even considering innovative models like a decentralized "holacracy." A common point was that the organizational design should be academically logical and adaptable, not just something that only makes sense to top management.	"research organization should be guided by academic coherence and international comparability of core business disciplines" "Research organization should primarily be guided by disciplinary coherence and long-term academic sustainability." "We should organize the Business School in thematic areas where campuses will become a thematic hub. That way, also campuses create a point-of-difference inside and outside SDU." "Consider decoupling research contexts from teaching-finance powerbloss ... they can be too hemmed in by 'groupness'" "A holacracy with a decentralized organizational system would probably serve best our situation." "The organization should be internationally comparable in its structure."
Continuity and Leveraging Existing Strengths	Many respondents cautioned against sweeping changes that disregard the university's existing strengths and history. They stressed the importance of continuity – anchoring the new structure in the successful aspects of the current research organization and respecting the diverse needs, approaches, and campus cultures that have developed over time. The transition to a new business school model should not compromise current academic strengths or thriving inter- and cross-disciplinary activities. In short, changes should build on what already works and avoid triggering further disruptive restructurings down the line.	"Continuity. Anchoring in existing research organization." "Respect for diversity in needs, approaches, cultures and histories (the latter as a basis for continued success, not out of nostalgia)" "The transition to a business school should not come at the cost of our academic strengths and the diversity of our inter- and cross-disciplinary activities." "That it makes sense, and does not lead to further restructuring."
Workload, Time, and Practical Considerations	Respondents raised practical concerns about implementation and resources. Several noted that any new structure must account for faculty workloads – including teaching obligations – and ensure researchers still have adequate time for research. There were warnings about the "hidden" time costs of reorganization, such as hours spent in meetings, planning, and surveys, which might be underestimated. Efficiency in daily operations (for example, within each campus) was also mentioned as important to make the new setup viable without overburdening staff.	"Research organization should take into account teaching duties." "What is the least costly approach in terms of the hours spent by employees." "Time for research" "Make the daily operation on each campus be effective with collaboration between people on each separate campus"

Q6: Is there any principle or consideration that should NOT be considered for structuring the new Business School?

25 responses, key takeaway: respondents are cautious about a reorganization that forces cross-campus/interdisciplinary integration, and instead want a structure that is flexible, justified, and preserves individual choice in research group membership. They also stress that the change must be driven by a clear internal strategic rationale and academic priorities, not by external pressure, trends, or administrative convenience.

Theme	Description	Exemplary Quotes
Interdisciplinary & Cross-Campus Integration	Many respondents worry about being forced into cross-campus or interdisciplinary collaborations that may not arise naturally or make thematic sense. Geographic separation between campuses is seen as a challenge, and some caution against assuming synergies across different locations or disciplines without clear justification.	"I think that forcing inter-disciplinary collaboration wouldn't be a good idea. It would be great to have a support for those who are interested and to provide opportunities to share knowledge across different thematic and field silos." "Assumed unrealised synergies across campuses (e.g. creating cross-campus research groups with personal responsibility)" "No need for cross campus groups if it doesn't make thematic sense. Size of groups should also not play a too big role." "All groups need to be across campuses and geography"
Organizational Structure & Research Group Formation	Concerns were raised about how the new research units and groups will be structured. Respondents question decisions like creating a new unit just because existing ones are small, and worry about retaining personal choice in joining groups. There are cautions against strictly discipline-based divisions or centralizing everything at one campus, and suggestions to use more flexible, collaborative structures (e.g. no hierarchical "discipline heads").	"Themes. Radical change." (concern that organizing by broad themes represents a radical structural change) "Not the possibility to make individual choices of belonging to a research group or not" "Be careful not to align research organization too closely with educational programs, since it will risk creating resource discussions between groups related to education and recreate the old battles between departments at a group level." "Move away from traditional names of the discipline, which somehow also hinder collaboration... If it is clearly divided, it creates intangible walls for collaborations." "That the business school gets too centralized and Odense focused." "No disciplin[e] head of research groups and [the] head of research groups shall only be coordinators and eventually form a council to be responsible for research"
Strategic Focus & Motivation	Many concerns revolve around why the reorganization is being pursued and what it is prioritizing. Respondents caution against letting external pressures, trends, or cost-cutting drive the process at the expense of internal needs and academic values. Some worry about copying other institutions or chasing buzzwords instead of focusing on substantive strategy. There are also notes about balancing the new research-focused priorities with the university's existing strengths (like teaching excellence).	"The focus should NOT be on what external stakeholders want. The most important stakeholders are those who spend their lives at SDU: employees and students." "The organization should not be based on current trends and/or fancy buzzwords." "Short-term administrative simplicity should not outweigh academic considerations in research organization." "Organizing it like other business schools" "Teaching is important – but the strategic priorities for the reorganization are focused on research. So support the strategic priorities over what we already do well." "Creating a new unit solely because two existing units, which are internationally regarded as core areas, are currently small"

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Conclusion

→ Key suggestions from the survey for structuring research

- 1) Build for stability and continuity:** Design an enduring structure that builds on existing strengths, preserves what already works, and avoids repeated disruptive reorganizations (→ structure that enables adaptations in the future)
- 2) Safeguard academic freedom through a lean, enabling model:** Protect autonomy and bottom-up research development by keeping bureaucracy and hierarchy light, reducing administrative burden, and maximizing time for research.
- 3) Create one SBS identity while strengthening local research environments:** Foster a shared school identity and collaboration across campuses, while respecting local cultures and ensuring collaboration remains meaningful, voluntary, and supported by visible leadership presence.
- 4) Organize around clear academic units (while staying flexible):** Anchor the structure in internationally recognizable business disciplines, while allowing flexible groupings (e.g., thematic clusters or project-based collaborations) that reflect real research practices and enable connecting to the outside
- 5) Enable excellence and impact with strong governance and resources:** Prioritize internationally excellent, societally relevant research (quality over quantity), supported by transparent governance, a supportive culture, adequate funding, efficient support systems, and realistic workload/time conditions



Conclusion

- Responses suggest that designing the research structure is a complex, multi-criterion task (structure as a carefully designed compromise)
- Input discloses potential tensions, such as:
 - Stability and continuity vs. the need for strategic renewal and unity
 - Academic freedom and local autonomy vs. coordination, comparability, and governance
 - International excellence and impact ambitions vs. practical constraints (time, workload, support capacity, geography)
- Outlook: complement the overall design work with a more fine-grained understanding of our research landscape (outcome could benefit from a mapping of research themes, method traditions, publication outlets, previous collaborations, etc., at the individual level)

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Annex 2: Draft process plan

Date	Responsible	Activity
25.03	Dean SAMF	Dissemination of the draft report to the steering committee
27.03	Steering committee meeting	Discussion of the draft, incl. any requests for further elaboration or additions to the report
27.03-24.04	Dean SAMF	Dissemination of the draft report to Liaison Committee / Academic Council / departments as part of the consultation process (Consultation from 27.03-24.04 in Liaison Committee / Academic Council)
07.04	Academic Council	Consultation on the draft report in the Academic Council
10.04	Dean SAMF and Director of SDU Business School	Online information meeting regarding the draft report with employees at DBM and DBS (and the Faculty Administration)
10.04	Optional working group meeting	Finalisation of the report (if changes requested by the steering committee)
13.04	Cooperation Committee	Consultation on the draft report in Liaison Committee (extraordinary meeting)
16.04	<i>Steering committee meeting</i>	<i>(primarily for approval of the Administrative Structure)</i>
24.04	Cooperation Committee	Consultation on the draft report in Liaison Committee (extraordinary meeting)
27.04	Working group meeting	Handover from the Dean SAMF and the working group to the Director of SDU Business School.
27.04	Steering committee meeting	Approval of the report
April-June (ca)	Director of SDU Business School	Dialogue with faculty and staff at DBM and DBS and hearing in the Academic Council, Liaison Committee, departments etc.
13.05	Steering committee meeting	
01.06	Director of SDU Business School	SBS Seminar
Mid / late June	Director of SDU Business School	Communication of the new structure