Integrating Sustainability in Business And Management Education - A Holistic Approach

Dr Vasanth Kiran,
Assistant Professor – School of Business, Alliance University

&

Prof. Sahana Madan
Assistant Professor – School of Business, Alliance University

ABSTRACT

Management education plays a key role in any transition in the society. Education will itself be transformed into the process. It is necessary and possible to build on the limited progress already made in which the role of sustainability plays a vital role. This paper presents a matrix of options for integrating sustainability in management and business education, and illustrates how the matrix can be used with the example of a business school in Bangalore, including lessons learned. The matrix contributes to the literature by including the co-curriculum and continuous mentoring—in addition to the curriculum—as an opportunity for integrating sustainability in management and business education. In addition, it draws from and extends previous empirical and conceptual research, and addresses the needs and weaknesses stated in earlier literature. The matrix provides a framework for discussion, as well as a framework for action—since it provides faculty, staff, and administrators with options for integrating sustainability and includes advantages, disadvantages, and recommendations for using each option. This holistic approach promises to answer some of the key problems of traditional management education giving way to a new perspective.

Keywords: B-schools, Curriculum, Co-curriculum, Mentoring. Management Education, Sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Management education in a pluralistic world needs to consider new approaches and curriculum changes, if its graduates are to provide effective leadership in a multicultural and multinational global economy. In the twenty-first century however, we have begun to see a shift in focus away from measures of organizational and managerial performance that are often limited and subject to short term manipulation at the expense of long term sustainability. Why are we advocating a “transformative” sustainability approach to management education? Our answer is obvious: Neither the “business-as-usual” nor the incrementalist reform approaches that most individuals, organizations, and societies have employed to address critical global sustainability issues are apparently enough to move us far enough fast enough to prevent near-term crises. Learning lies at the core of the management process when learning it is defined holistically as the basic process of human adaptation. It is not just the result of cognition but involves the integrated functioning of the total person—thinking, feeling, perceiving and behaving which makes him/her closer to being a complete manager. It encompasses other specialized models of adaptation from the scientific method to problems solving, decision making and creativity which form as key characteristics to be a successful manager which needs to be carefully implemented holistically in management education system by B-schools. Over the past several years, a number of studies have been published on how to integrate sustainability in higher education, including studies focused on business and management education. Some of the more recent ones include Benn and Dunphy, 2009; Porter and Cordoba, 2009; Rands, 2009; Walker et.al, 2009. In June 2009, the Journal of Management Education published a special issue on the topic, “Greening and sustainability across the management curriculum.” One of the summary messages from contributors—both academics and practitioners—was the need to integrate sustainability both in management
education and across the business school (Rusinko & Sama, 2009); therefore, that is the focus of this paper. This paper presents a matrix of options with respect to how to integrate sustainability in management and business education.

This paper presents a matrix of options with respect to how to integrate sustainability in management and business education. It extends a matrix (Rusinko, 2010), and offers an application that illustrates how a Business school in Bangalore, India is integrating sustainability in management and business education, including lessons learned. The matrix presented here contributes to the literature by addressing the co-curricular, academic and corporate mentoring—as well as curricular—opportunities for integrating sustainability in management and business education. It is flexible in that users can move between and among options, and can implement multiple options simultaneously. Users—including faculty, staff, and administrators—can start at whichever option (or quadrant) is most appropriate for them. The primary focus of this matrix is structural options for delivery of sustainability in management and business education; however, the paper does provide a brief list of current resources to facilitate integrating sustainability into management and business education.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND

While there are multiple definitions of sustainability, here, sustainability will be defined in a manner consistent with one of the most-cited definitions, that of the Brundtland Commission. That is, sustainability refers to that which “meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987: 8). There is overlap between and among these dimensions of sustainability (e.g., Scott & Gough, 2006). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO; 2004), sustainability education must address all three dimensions—social, environmental, and economic—because this allows all people to develop the necessary skills, knowledge, and perspectives to make decisions to improve quality of life at all levels. The inclusion of curricular and co-curricular learning with mentoring helps business schools to approach sustainability as a more holistic issue, which is the way that sustainability is approached by effective decision makers in effective organizations.

There is a growing literature on the importance of both curricular and co-curricular engagement in higher education (e.g. Ahren, 2009). Co-curricular options for sustainability can allow students the opportunity for additional experiential and applied learning outside the classroom, as discussed further below. While there may be some variation, the term, co-curricular is generally defined to mean complementary to, but outside of the curriculum; therefore, it will be defined that way here. Ahren (2009) defines co-curricular engagement to include a variety of student activities outside of the classroom, such as community service groups, student government, honour societies, athletics, and fraternities. Since service learning can refer to both academic service learning based in coursework (e.g., Rands, 2009) and co-curricular service learning outside of the curriculum (e.g., Keen & Hall, 2009). While these stay with curriculum and outside curriculum aspects one which imbibes both is mentoring which can be defined as

**Mentoring**

Mentoring relationships range from loosely defined, informal collegial associations in which a mentee learns by observation and example to structured, formal agreements between expert and novice co-mentors where each develops professionally through the two-way transfer of experience and perspective. Whether the relationship is deemed formal or informal, the goal of mentoring is to provide career advice as well as both professional and personal enrichment. For this chapter, we define a mentoring relationship as helping and supporting people to “manage their own learning in order to maximize their professional potential, develop their skills, improve their performance, and become the person they want to be” (Parsloe, 1992).
While most of the popular books on leadership expound on mentoring, you cannot learn to be a mentor or mentee by reading a book or following cookie-cutter leadership advice. One size does not fit all, particularly in Management education for the field is so dynamic and volatile in nature. For mentoring to effect institutional change in higher education, it must be more than informal or spontaneous. Despite the benefits of mentoring throughout a career, the skills and type of advice needed inevitably change over time. Spencer and Golden (2003) says that at the beginning of a college life (management course), a more generalist mentor may be appropriate and then at later stage a role specific or job specific mentor can be assigned based on the student’s career interest. For example, a suitable mentor might be someone who is highly skilled and proficient in Marketing aspects and so can provide advice on ways to become more proficient in the same. As organizational roles evolve into more supervisory capacities, mentors who can provide more career-related, organizational, political, and managerial skills development can be beneficial. The leadership within an institution must first recognize and identify the need for mentoring, and then plan, develop, support, and promote a program that directly addresses specific workforce gaps—both current and future which is what Alliance University Business School, Bangalore in India practices. The institution has identified industry mentors from various premier B school graduates who are currently working in various senior level positions across various industries and organisations. The student would be assigned two mentors at the beginning viz: Academic mentor and Industry mentor. The simultaneous moulding from both ends would give a near to perfect shape to student’s focussed career and is guided till he is up on the success ladder. The interesting part is note that the mentoring does not end once the student is graduated and also access to college’s LMS (Learning Management System) which would have all the information on the current and past academic information available to him at any given time. This would enable the Alumni to still be academically updated while be mentored at any stage of career.

An essential first step in a successful mentoring relationship is the mentor to help mentee identify, define, and honestly articulate common and individual goals and motives. Mentoring helps over the cultural gaps between professors, industry experts (mentors) and students. To be a mentor is to someone committed to the well-being and success of the protégé. Such a caring attitude not only provides a good role model, but also provides a safe environment and an excellent ambience for students to learn and excel. The mentoring approach is the preferred approach of education specially management education. Apart from this mentoring emphasizes certain skills that are important in a multicultural environment; these include active listening, becoming aware of one's own assumptions and world views; understanding the beliefs and values systems of other cultures; developing relationships with people other cultures, and adopting the appropriate communication strategy in negotiation and conflict resolution. Hence, mentoring moves management beyond the realm of technology and number crunching into the realm of personal development and spirituality, because a mentor is concerned with the wholesome growth of the mentee.
Fig. 1: Model for Management Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Delivery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrow (Discipline-Specific) Curricular</td>
<td>I. Integrate into existing course(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>III. Integrate into common core requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad (Cross-Disciplinary) Curricular</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Model developed by authors.

**Co-curricular options:**

a. **Service Learning:**

Service-learning has been defined as a “course-based, credit-bearing educational experience that allows students to:

- Participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and
- Reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.” - Bringle & Hatcher (1995). The following elements emphasize in formulating a definition of service-learning applicable to the management education.
Service-learning involves students in community service activities and applies the experience to personal and academic development.

Service-learning occurs when there is "a balance between learning goals and service outcomes". Service-learning engages students in a three-part process:
1. Classroom preparation through explanation and analysis of theories and ideas
2. Service activity that emerges from and informs classroom context and
3. Structured reflection tying service experience back to specific learning goals.

b. Competition:
The definition of human competition is a contest in which two or more people are engaged where typically only one or a few participants will win and others will not (Webster and Mitra, 2008). Competition exists when there is scarcity of a desired outcome. Individuals and/or groups are then positioned to vie for the attainment of that outcome.

It is partly true that the world is competitive. It is difficult to entirely avoid competition in life; however, for the most part, competition is a self-imposed or at least self-selected condition. We can just as easily live an existence defined more by collaborative and self-referential goals than by competition with others. To say the “real world” is inherently competitive is a myth. Moreover, to say that we are preparing students for the real world by putting them in artificially constructed competitive situations is to impose on them a specifically biased world-view (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). In a broad sense, educators collectively create a more or less competitive future by the way we encourage our students to think and treat one another. If we create a more cooperative environment in our schools we create the likelihood of a more cooperative future; if we create more competitive environments, we create a more competitive future.

Introduce competition to the context of a group effort and a shift in attitude will occur. When competitive goals are present, groups tend to place increased value on the outcome of the effort and tend to decrease their focus on the process. They will increase attention on what it takes to win and decrease attention on learning for its own sake. In addition, the competitive element has an effect on group dynamics (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). Suppose that we ask groups to work in teams to assemble model airplanes and set up a reward for the group who finishes first or creates the best product. If we substitute a competitive condition in place of a collaborative condition, group members will change the way they regard one another.

The competitive condition encourages them to view their fellows less as peers or members of a learning community and more as instruments to be used to reach the goal (Emmer & Gerwels, 2006). Behaviors such as dialogue and reflection are useful in the collaborative condition. In the competitive condition they often slow the process and diffuse group focus. In a collaborative condition divergent ideas can usually be explored without penalty; when we introduce the element of competition, a disincentive to dialogue is created. No reflection is incorporated than is necessary to accomplish the task.

In a collaborative setting there is no disincentive to involve the efforts of the less dominant or less skilled members of the group. In the competitive condition, however, some combination of personality dominance and individual level of competence will define the values of the process, inevitably marginalizing weaker and less skilled team members. Even with good will and/or good intentions present at the beginning of the process, these trends will take over as the structural incentive in a competitive condition inherently promotes a shift in the focus of the task and the nature of the team dynamics (Emmer & Gerwels, 2006; Johnson & Johnson, 2006).

Use of competition in classrooms:

There is some subscription to the position that there is no such thing as healthy or unhealthy classroom competition. While it can be debated whether competition should be incorporated in business schools at all, it is a prevalent practice and will likely continue. With that in mind, let’s distinguish “healthier”
forms of competition from those that are less healthy. There are a few principles to consider when judging whether a competitive classroom situation is more beneficial or less.

First: competition for valuable outcomes will have more detrimental effects on a class than competition for trivial and/or symbolic outcomes.

Second: The shorter the life of the competition the more likely it is to have a beneficial effect. The length of the contest increases its sense of prominence and decreases its sense of intensity and fun -- both undesirable effects. For example, if we keep track of the number of books each student has read over the course of the semester and post the tally on the classroom wall, the initial effect may be an increased motivation to read. We initially may assume the strategy is effective. However, as the contest goes on we notice that students are reading books just for the sake of winning the contest and will have an incentive to falsify the number of books they have read. Over time we will notice the competition is becoming less fun and increasingly burdensome. At the end of the year the competition will have produced one somewhat happy and very relieved student, many students who feel unhappy about losing, a good number who will feel a little unhappy but highly relieved that the chart is no longer being held over their heads to shame them.

Third: the leader of the competition must place a conspicuous emphasis on process over product. If winning is the point, students will take on a “just do what it takes” attitude. If students are encouraged to value the process, they will feel justified in staying focused on the learning outcome and feel assured that it is okay to put their attention into quality as the primary goal. However, facilitating this mindset is only possible when the context itself does not place so much value on winning that the leader’s emphasis falls on deaf ears. The two first principles are prerequisite.

C. Common Experiences: Management schools face many challenges in knowledge sharing as subjects are dispersed and peers collaborate with each other. Also, Groups and teams are temporary and a lot of learning may be lost when they disband. Experience sharing concentrates on communities, which are informal and semi-formal groups of people bound together by shared interests. In Business schools they require certain degree of formality. Communities are viewed as connecting and enhancing knowledge sharing mechanisms in and within projects. Student Communities can help to connect peers working in various projects and assignments with each other. Hence experience sharing is one of the indispensable guides to an understanding of the structure of social and intellectual movements of students.

d. Clubs, Activities and Communities: Here we take a critical look at to reinforce ‘traditional’ and stereotypical views about who can and should participate in what physical activities. Health clubs and other recreational clubs and the critical role that not only teachers but also pupils, parents and ‘wider society’ play in either reinforcing or challenging these views. We thereby draw attention to the many and complex ways in which inequity operates and argue that there is a need for changes in the philosophy underpinning extra-curricular provision, in its content and delivery, and for a critical review of student-teacher training, if traditional and stereotypes views are to be challenged and the needs and desires of all students to be met. However, we also identify the present climate of higher education in Indian context and in particular in the ideological context in which provisions are set, as far from conducive to the development of practices and attitudes aimed at empowering student communities.

Conclusion:

Although many ongoing, interactive, contextually relevant continuing educations can improve the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of management graduates, there is a growing literature to help guide the selection of course objectives, educational methods, and forms of evaluation. However, there remain few methodologically sophisticated outcome studies and a surprising number of negative findings. Certainly, much more high-quality research is needed on from an employer perspective, the imperative to enhance management capability arising from the changing nature of work, especially the need to cope with increased competition and “more or less continuous upheavals in present day
organisations”, demanding increased intellectual flexibility and alertness as well as relevant knowledge, skills, abilities, and self-awareness.

Despite the plethora of management education aiming at student development now and with the increasing level of demand, however, there remains a significant question as to the extent to which current curriculum and provisions meets the needs of organisations. Some of the key trends are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Trends</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The MBA Programme | • Prescribed course  
• Standard  
• Theoretical | • Study programme & real contemporary issues.  
• Customised.  
• Theory in context. |
| The Time-frame | • One-off event  | • A journey with ongoing support |
| The Mode | • Lecturing / Listening  
• Conceptual | • Participatory, Interactive & Applied.  
• Experiential & Conceptual |
| The Focus | • Individuals | • Individuals within a group, for a purpose |
| The Mentor | • Developmental Alliance | • Partner, Co-Designer, Facilitator, & Coach |

Underlying these changes are a number of transforming concepts about the purpose of management and business education. There are of course, the practical concerns of creating more effective managers and leaders, enhancing the competitiveness of organizations and providing programmes that people will pay for, but associated with these are changing philosophical perspectives on the role of Management and Leadership within organizations and how best to develop them.

To conclude that “the global business school’s challenges now occurring demand approaches to management and business education that are profoundly different from those that have served well in the past”.

REFERENCES:


