

Introduction

Chris Galea

Saint Francis Xavier University, Canada

One of the main challenges facing educators is that of creating an environment where student learning moves beyond theory and becomes instinctive practice. We have all had experiences in our lives where some theoretical concept is instantly grasped because it addressed some immediate concern or solved some pressing practical problem. Although such fortuitous ‘eureka’ moments are welcome, they are also infrequent. As such, the task of the educator is to make such opportunities emerge in the classroom and to create an environment where theory blends in seamlessly with practice.

The challenge outlined above is especially relevant to the area of teaching business sustainability. This is because educators in the field need to combat the unstated but often underlying assumption that much business sustainability is non-value-added effort—it is work that needs to be done to meet regulatory standards or to stay out of trouble with various stakeholders. Although it is not the purview of this volume to combat this widely held belief—much fine work has recently emerged that challenges this assumption—to deny its existence is to make the educator’s task that much harder and the educational outcomes less successful. In light of this, a number of the contributors to this volume bring up this tension and outline various ways of addressing it. The key approach is to acknowledge the dichotomy and to help students explore the various ways in which the theoretical aspects of business sustainability can result in valuable and value-added practical outcomes.

Another consideration about teaching business sustainability is the realisation that the field is, relatively, still in its infancy. As such, there is the added challenge of teaching material that is still evolving and that is constantly in a state of being superseded by more developed concepts and ideas. As a result, the challenge to educators is to teach less of the actual nuts and bolts of business sustainability and more of the various tools and approaches by which students can continue to teach themselves. Although this advice applies to many other disciplines, it is especially relevant to the field of business sustainability, since educators and practitioners continue to make great strides in core areas of the discipline.

This results in another tenet that is especially relevant to our field: the need to use a mix of approaches when teaching business sustainability. This can be seen from the variety of different pedagogies taken by many of the educators who have

contributed to this volume. Although many of the approaches are experimental and at the leading edge of management learning, there are some core elements that tie the approaches together. One is that they all share an experiential approach to teaching—a pedagogy that is well grounded in management learning literature. This approach fits in well with the point made earlier that the teaching of business sustainability needs to bring together the theory in a way that makes it relevant to practitioners in the field. The implication is that, whenever possible, educators need to link the learning to the students' immediate and pressing 'real-world' realities. This applies equally to undergraduates or to high-level executives. However, failing the existence of such real-world realities (as may often be the case in undergraduate settings), educators need to introduce experientially based approaches that re-create such settings in the classroom.

Another common element to the learning styles and approaches outlined in this volume is the desirability of holistic and interdisciplinary learning. It is clear from much of the literature on sustainability that the concept does not easily lend itself to being pigeonholed and that it crosses many of the functional areas of business. Indeed, it goes beyond just business learning to encompass many fields such as ecology and biology. If students are to move beyond the narrow perspective that conventional business study often entails, they need to be introduced to the wider vision that an interdisciplinary approach engenders.

Another common theme that one can discern from the various submissions is the desirability for learning to happen in a team-based setting. This is especially relevant because the field of business sustainability is such that there is rarely one optimum way of proceeding. In this kind of setting the collective thinking and experience of a functional group of students will result in much greater learning than if they work in their own individual silos.

The final point that emerges from this collection is that the experiential learning of business sustainability often can, and should be—dare one say this in an academic work—fun! Be it a heated exchange in a case-study discussion, a role-play exercise or a hands-on student consulting project, much experiential learning seems to excite the imagination of the students and to release their creative juices. In such circumstances, learning is a lot more 'fun' compared with the absorption of dry lectures. We can all attest, from personal learning experiences, how effortless and long-lasting such 'fun-based' learning can be.

The rationale for this book

Most readers of this book probably believe that the issue of sustainability and the role that business plays in it is of paramount importance. We also probably all share a notion that much remains to be done to make sustainability a driving force in today's business world. As such, most would agree that there is a great need to infuse business leaders of today and tomorrow with the key ideas behind business sustainability and to equip them with the tools to help them deal with its challenges. This book—and its forthcoming companion volume, consisting of exer-

cises—has been developed directly with that objective in mind. It is meant to equip educators in the field with the tools by which they, in turn, can impart to business practitioners the knowledge and confidence to tackle the issues of sustainability.

Moreover, this collection of essays on business sustainability aims to unite the somewhat disparate efforts of pioneering educators. While the field of business sustainability is still relatively young, much teaching material has been developed and is being used in various business programmes and executive training. This material has emerged on a rather ad hoc basis as various educators have developed new pedagogies to suit their particular teaching needs. While there have been considerable efforts to collect and distribute such material, there has been little academic work done that puts it into a theoretical context. This book is a timely attempt to initiate such a process and to put together in one volume a number of such contextual perspectives.

In addition, the development of the book draws together a nucleus of leading-edge thinkers in the field and thus provides the various educators who are scattered across the globe with the sense that they are part of a larger group of like-minded colleagues. It is hoped that these efforts will spread the ultimate goal of developing business leaders who are ready to face the challenges and also benefit from the opportunities posed by sustainability.

The contents of this book

The 23 submissions to this first volume of *Teaching Business Sustainability* have been divided into three thematic groups. In Part 1, ‘Theory, critique and ideas’, the authors explore and critique some of the overarching ideas and thinking behind the teaching of sustainability. Part 2, ‘Learning from current practice’, contains the experiences of a number of educators and the successful and leading-edge approaches that they have used. The final part, Part 3, then outlines, as the title suggests, the tools, methods and approaches that can be used to teach business sustainability. This final section also serves as an introduction to the upcoming second volume that will provide educators of sustainability with a series of case studies, role plays and experiential exercises.

Part 1: Theory, critique and ideas

The book opens with a chapter by John Adams in which he outlines how our mental models—that is, our beliefs, assumptions, expectations and attitudes—exert a powerful effect on our behaviour and therefore on the results we get from our efforts. By extension, he contends that if we do not address ‘mental models-in-use’ in the teaching of sustainability it is doubtful that many of the technical and management practice ideas contained in this volume will ever be fully implemented, as they are built from mental models that differ from those presently prevailing throughout society.

John then describes and defines six mental models prevailing in North American organisations. He introduces the concept of ‘versatility’, meaning ‘appropriate flexibility’, as being necessary for effective teaching of the technical and management practices needed for a sustainable future. Additionally, a list of questions for contemplation and dialogue are provided that can increase the versatility of the learning experience.

Chapter 2 is by Bobby Banerjee. In this chapter Bobby critiques the concept of sustainability and the ways in which it is deployed in the organisational studies literature. Sustainability means different things to different people and, in this chapter, Bobby discusses the key concepts of sustainability and underlying assumptions behind the concept. Employing a critical perspective, the author argues that we need to be cautious of the populist rhetoric and win-win situations that characterise much of the literature on sustainability. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how we can develop a course on teaching sustainability by taking a critical approach through exploring three perspectives: the theoretical, multidisciplinary and global-local.

Chapter 3 is a provocative paper by Tom Abeles. Tom starts out by asking the pivotal question ‘Can a publicly traded corporation be environmentally and socially responsible?’ After a wide-ranging discussion that draws on various perspectives he posits that, if the investors are seen only as the stockholders and their measure is only in the increasing value of the stock or the dividend pay-out, then the model has significant cognitive dissonance with respect to environmental and social issues. He concludes that, if the business schools approach these issues by such tactics as screening the social and/or environmental values of applicants or by adding separate curriculum palliatives such as ethics and the environment, the institutions will have failed to address the problems at the core.

Following Tom’s contribution is a related chapter by Pep Bardouille. In Chapter 4 Pep asserts that, in the decade since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the overwhelming focus of sustainable business efforts has been ‘greening’. However, just as the sustainability paradigm goes beyond ecological protection, sustainable business strategies cannot be limited to only environmental management. Pep proposes that the private sector must consider ways in which to address ‘fundamental human challenges’, including poverty eradication and universal access to basic services (water, energy, health-care). Pep outlines motivations for business to play a leading role in promoting global sustainable development and explores commercially viable ways in which it can contribute to improving the socioeconomic condition.

In Chapter 5 Suzanne Benn and David Bubna-Litic argue that, based on survey results from Australia and the USA, the typical MBA programme is incompatible with contemporary conditions of reflexive modernity. These call for graduates who are ethically self-reflexive, who recognise values differences and can negotiate the corporate transformations required for sustainability. Suzanne and David then explore the questions of whether the MBA can be rejuvenated through the incremental integration of sustainability themes into existing curricula and teaching techniques or whether we need to acknowledge that a holistic and integrated curriculum requires breaking with the fundamental modernism reflected in many

assumptions that underpin the MBA. This thought-provoking chapter explores these options.

In Chapter 6 Homer Erikson, along with Steven Elliott and his colleagues at Miami University in Oxford, OH, argue that, historically, industrialists and environmentalists have not been partners in exploring environmental issues because of a lack of common vocabulary and because of silo-based disciplinary approaches. However, in the 1980s, the concept that a robust economy and healthy environment are not mutually exclusive objectives, but are inextricably linked, gained significant support. The authors then describe the integration of business and environmental education that has resulted and discuss the implications for educators.

Next follows a chapter by David Foot and Susan Ross. In Chapter 7 David and Susan outline why social sustainability has emerged as the third ingredient of a successful sustainable business strategy, along with economic and environmental sustainability. They review the current state of social sustainability as an essential component of sustainable business performance. Ultimately, they conclude that social sustainability considerations need to be integrated into virtually all curriculum elements and business units if a truly successful sustainable strategy in business teaching and practice is to be adopted.

In Chapter 8, the concluding chapter of Part 1, Michael Schaper looks at the question of whether there are any substantial, measurable differences in concern for the environment between students from different countries. He outlines a recent evaluation of environmental concern among business school students in four different countries—Australia, France, Hong Kong and Singapore. He concludes that, in general, students displayed a relatively high level of environmental concern. Moreover, there were no substantial differences in mean scores between students of different nationalities.

The results of Michael's research have important implications for management educators. First, it is clear that most business management students are concerned about environmental issues. This concern is relatively universal, and transcends cultural and national boundaries. Second, whereas previous studies have focused on MBA students, this research indicates that undergraduates are also environmentally aware. This in turn suggests that there may be a high level of unmet undergraduate student demand for courses on sustainability and environmental issues in business. Last, proactive university business schools may be able to seize a competitive advantage by incorporating these topics into their curriculum, given the high level of student concern with such issues.

Part 2: Learning from current practice

Part 2 opens with a chapter by Polly Courtice and Jonathon Porritt, who are co-directors of the Prince of Wales's Business and the Environment Programme based in Cambridge University. In Chapter 9 Polly and Jonathon explain how they established their programme as a world-class body in the domain of teaching sustainability. They explain how they give participants a deep, intensive experience in a constructive environment and how this experience shapes their atti-

tudes, values and aspirations about sustainable development. They believe that this has the potential to radically change the way their organisations do business. They conclude that the success of the programme lies in building a core team of people who share a common concern about the sustainability challenges that we face and a belief that a new paradigm for how wealth is generated in our society can be achieved.

Chapter 10 is a second contribution by Elliott, Erekson *et al.*. In this chapter they describe a unique senior-level undergraduate capstone course developed and offered through the Center for Sustainable Systems Studies (CSSS) at Miami University. This course is team-taught by business and the science faculty and the student numbers consist of roughly half business and half science (or other non-business) students. The content of the course draws heavily on the many parallels between ecology and economics, including systems and resilience, ethics and valuation issues, and information and dialogue as central to the process of sustainability. The course pedagogy is intended to get business students to help science students with advanced business concepts and to get science students to help business students with advanced science concepts.

In Chapter 11 by Diane Holt a longitudinal study of a group of 52 business school students is used to examine the effectiveness of environmental education programmes in universities. The focus of the chapter is to examine whether the environmental learning experiences the students undergo have made a difference to their environmental actions, knowledge and attitudes and what factors may have been influential in any changes.

In Chapter 12 Kariann Aarup shares her experience of teaching a course called 'Social Context of Business' at McGill University. This course deals specifically with social and environmental issues and is unique as a core course in undergraduate business school curricula in Canada. Kariann focuses on the pedagogy used to achieve the teaching objectives of the course and the intention behind the assignments given, and outlines the effects that the course has had both on students and on the institution itself.

In Chapter 13 Gillian Rice and Amy Sprague explore the value of experiential learning activities in MBA programmes through an evaluation of the World Resources Institute's Environmental Enterprise Corps (EEC). The EEC matches teams of MBA students with environmental small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Latin America for specific projects, such as market studies or financial analyses. As a result, students gain an understanding of sustainability and conservation issues in the small-business context of emerging markets and have the opportunity to make a real, measured impact on the business.

Tom Eggert and co-authors, in Chapter 14, describe a partnership between a business school class at the University of Wisconsin and Baxter International, a global healthcare company. The projects that arose from this partnership were developed on the premise that leadership toward sustainability will come from the business community as Western society struggles to come to grips with the challenges of living and acting sustainably. Student teams from a class on 'The Greening of Business Strategy' each worked with a Baxter contact to research various aspects of sustainability such as socially responsible investing, energy conservation and extended producer responsibility. As a result of the programme, students

gained a more practical knowledge of sustainability than they would have done had they only studied sustainability in the classroom. The research also benefited Baxter International in its drive toward sustainability by giving it both a more complete picture of the state of sustainability and focused information on specific areas.

The last paper in Part 2, Chapter 15, is by Judi Marshall. Judi suggests that in educating for sustainability we need to generate forms and practices of education that are congruent with the issues addressed. She describes the development of the MSc in ‘Responsibility and Business Practice’, a master’s programme that has an explicit intent to ‘address the challenges currently facing those managers who seek to integrate successful business practice with a concern for social, environmental and ethical issues’.¹ She explains key educational choices made in designing the degree, describes the teaching practices adopted and reviews some key learning, based on staff experiences and participant feedback.

Part 3: Tools, methods and approaches

Part 3 of this volume has eight chapters, starting with Chapter 16, by Sasha Courville. Sasha presents a conceptual framework for integrating tools for social justice and environmental protection, such as environmental management systems, corporate reporting systems, codes of conduct, third-party certification systems and so on into current business practices.

This is followed by Molly Brown and Joanna Macy’s work on whole-systems learning, in Chapter 17. Molly and Joanna present an approach to whole-systems learning that helps people experience their innate connections with the self-correcting, self-organising powers of all living systems. In Molly and Joanna’s experience, this empowers people to seek out, create and apply sustainable business practices within the workplace and the larger world. They outline methods to teach whole-systems learning that are highly interactive, experiential and enjoyable.

The ensuing chapter is by Trudy Heller. Trudy outlines how environmental managers often speak of the need to disseminate sustainable business thinking throughout a company, of communicating beyond the ‘green wall’. Many corporations are conducting educational programmes to enlist employees as partners in addressing the challenge of how to enhance the business while diminishing its environmental footprint. In Chapter 18 Trudy reports on a pilot survey that asked companies, ‘What activities are being offered to educate employees in sustainable business thinking?’ She then describes specific activities, with examples from the surveyed companies. Common challenges are discussed, and an ideal programme, from an educator’s perspective, is also outlined.

Chapter 19, by Beate Littig, puts forward neo-Socratic dialogue (NSD) as a didactic method to teach the ethics of sustainable development in business enterprises and in advanced business training. Beate’s approach aims at visioning and explaining implicit values and at clarifying fundamental concepts. A second aim of NSD is to improve the communicative skills of the participants. Besides describ-

1 Quote from course details, at www.bath.ac.uk/management/carpp/msc.htm.

ing the more theoretical background, Beate also presents a case study, an NSD held with an interdisciplinary group of students studying sustainable development at the University of Vienna.

Kathleen Wood and co-authors, in Chapter 20, explore the difficulties of introducing and embedding triple-bottom-line approaches in a business environment when demands are consistently exceeding resources. They outline a framework, called ‘the five pillars’, which they successfully use in their work with clients. To embed sustainability into a business a ‘systems approach’ must be used, where each piece is critical to the whole—and where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The pillars consists of:

- Business alignment
- Sustainability knowledge
- Personal and organisational leadership
- Systems thinking
- Enabling technology and/or process

The authors conclude that triple-bottom-line sustainability, when viewed as a solution to strategic business issues and a source of competitive advantage, will garner the credibility and resources needed over the long term to evolve the current extractive business model into one that is sustainable.

The next chapter, by Bob Willard, concerns the why, what and how of teaching sustainability in business schools. In Chapter 21 Bob argues that the business case for sustainable development should be the cornerstone of an enlightened curriculum in business schools. He contends that business schools are overlooking how a well-executed sustainable development strategy can form one of the greatest contributions to savings, revenue, productivity, innovation, competitiveness, lower risk and new markets. Even hard-nosed business leaders are interested in worthy causes when the business language of dollars is used to quantify the benefits of sustainability strategies. He then proposes a tool called the business-case simulator to assess potential business benefits to companies from sustainability initiatives. Using this tool he demonstrates how companies can truly ‘do well while doing good’.

The penultimate chapter, Chapter 22, is a second paper by David Foot on population and pedagogy in sustainability analysis. David outlines how population growth is almost always at the core of most sustainability issues, whether they relate to environmental, economic or social sustainability. He contends that sustaining an increasing population in a world with limited resources characterises the sustainability challenge. He then concludes with the practical approaches that educators can take to teach issues pertaining to population studies.

The last chapter, Chapter 23, by Darcy Hitchcock and Marsha Willard, deals with the challenges, methods and tools of teaching sustainability. Darcy and Marsha provide a framework for dealing with the challenge of getting everyone in an organisation to understand sustainability. Sustainability can seem abstract, overwhelming, too starry-eyed or too dismal. Darcy and Marsha examine the most

common challenges in each of three phases of implementation and provide practical advice on how to overcome them.

Conclusions

As can be seen from the varied ideas outlined above, it is clear that there is no one approach to teaching business sustainability. Nevertheless, it is also clear that some approaches are better than others and will result in learning that is more grounded, applicable and fruitful. Educators in business sustainability would do well to follow the intuitive and practical advice offered in the chapters in this book while keeping an open mind to possibilities not yet explored.