



Original citation: Emblen-Perry, Kay (2020) *Using Sustainability Audits to Enhance Responsible Management Education and Develop Personally and Professionally Responsible Work-Ready Graduates*. The International Journal of Professional Management, 15 (2). ISSN 2042-2341

Permanent WRaP URL: <https://eprints.worc.ac.uk/id/eprint/9372>

Copyright and reuse:

The Worcester Research and Publications (WRaP) makes this work available open access under the following conditions. Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRaP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Publisher's statement:

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by International Professional Managers Association in The International Journal of Professional Management available online: http://www.ipmajournal.com/articles/Vol15_Iss2_Article6.php

A note on versions:

The version presented here may differ from the published version or, version of record, if you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the 'permanent WRaP URL' above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information, please contact wrapteam@worc.ac.uk



The International Professional and Applied Management Review
incorporating

The International Journal of Professional Management
ISSN 20422341

The Journal of the International Professional Managers Association
And
IPE Management School, Paris



Using Sustainability Audits to Enhance Responsible Management Education and Develop Personally and Professionally Responsible Work-Ready Graduates

Kay Emblen-Perry

Abstract

It is widely held that responsible management education within UK business schools is lagging behind the needs of graduates in the changing world of work, leaving a UK-wide skills shortage. New approaches to learning and teaching are therefore required to address this skills shortage and develop personally and professionally responsible work-ready graduates who possess the knowledge, skills and values required to deliver environmentally, socially, and economically responsible business futures that balance short term economic management with long-term responsible business practices.

In response, the University of Worcester Business School has adopted real-world ISO14001 and Global Reporting Initiative sustainability audits as teaching tools to enhance responsible management education for second and third-year business management students. Engaging students in the critical and reflexive thinking and questioning required to undertake a sustainability audit of business procedures and practices can develop graduates who are personally and professionally responsible, work-ready, and have the necessary responsible management knowledge, skills, and values to identify and address any irresponsible business practices.

This innovative approach to responsible management education will be of interest to educators seeking opportunities to enhance student engagement in responsible business practices and to graduate employers seeking work-ready graduates who can close gaps in sustainability skills and help to develop responsible business futures. Both of these are urgent needs in the changing world of work.

Key words: Responsible management education; sustainability audits; personally and professionally responsible work-ready graduates; responsible business management

Introduction

Many corporate managers and decision makers are educated by business schools (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2011). There is a long-held expectation that higher education institutions should play a leading role in developing the knowledge, skills and values required by businesses to achieve a responsible, just, and sustainable future (Cortese, 2003; United Nations, 2015; Financial Times, 2019).

It is widely recognised that business schools have the potential to support businesses in addressing issues of irresponsible behaviours and practices through learning, teaching, and research (Rieckmann, 2012; Sterling et al, 2013; Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2013; Higher Education Academy, 2014; United Nations, 2017). There are specialist courses, and responsible management education is being incorporated into business curricula; 85% of graduate jobs in the UK now require a knowledge of responsible management practices (Drayson, 2015). But despite this, it is still generally accepted that business schools are failing to adequately prepare their students to deal with the issues of

irresponsible management they will face in their future workplaces (Drayson, 2015; Govender, 2016; Sadler, 2016; Financial Times, 2019).

To overcome this skills shortage and ensure students are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and values needed in the changing world of work, business schools need to increase their focus on sustainability, ethics, and social purpose in business management education (Financial Times, 2019) and promote critical and reflexive thinking (Howlett, Ferriera & Blomfield, 2016) and questioning (Ryan & Tilbury, 2013). Together these can equip future business managers with the ability to identify and challenge irresponsible behaviours and business practices that exploit both people and the environment (Mula et al, 2017).

This paper explores the challenges faced by business schools in equipping graduates with these skills. It proposes the adoption of real-world sustainability audits such as ISO14001 and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) as teaching tools that are able to engage students in the active and participative learning styles they prefer. These tools ultimately provide the graduate employment market with personally and professionally responsible work-ready graduates.

Challenges Facing Business Schools, Graduates and their Future Employers

Business schools are playing a significant role in closing sustainability and employment skills gaps by increasingly incorporating employment skills into teaching and investing in resources to enhance graduates' employment skills (Cashian, Clarke and Richardson, 2015). But Figuero & Raufflett (2015) cite two challenges that remain:

- How can business schools effectively educate the leaders of the future to become responsible managers and change agents?
- How should business schools integrate responsible business practices into management education?

The ability of business schools to address the challenges of environmental accountability and social and economic responsibility is widely recognised (Higher Education Academy, 2014; Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2013; Financial Times, 2019), but no consensus has been established as to the most effective ways to do this. Rather, generic teaching approaches have been advocated. These include

- Engaging students in realistic, relevant, and authentic experiences in contexts and learning environments they find meaningful (Matthew & Butler, 2017)
- Developing immersive learning environments that enable students to construct knowledge (Howlett, Ferreira & Blomfield, 2016; Staniskis and Katiliute, 2016)
- Incorporating potential scenarios for a responsible and sustainable future (Rieckmann, 2012)
- Engaging students in authentic enquiry (Hensley, 2017)

In addition, Wiek et al (2014) advocate incorporating real-world business tools to further enhance authentic learning experiences. This practical application of learning can promote responsible business futures and develop the personal and professional knowledge, skills, and values that are increasingly in demand by businesses.

Individually these approaches may go some way towards enhancing responsible management education. Combining them will integrate practical and theoretical knowledge, skills, and values into responsible management education and encourage thinking in the new ways needed for them to become the responsible managers of the future. This can be achieved by using a real-world sustainability audit as a tool to enhance responsible management education.

Sustainability Audits

A sustainability audit is a methodological examination of a business's procedures and practices that determine or influence its environmental, social, and economic impacts. This is widely used to allow a business to develop a systematic approach to:

- Improve responsible business activities (Viegas et al, 2013)
- Identify problems before they affect operations (Hillary, 2004)
- Provide a benchmark from which to measure subsequent changes (Clark & Whitelegg, 1998).

Sustainability audits give a valuable opportunity for students to develop personal and professional responsible management skills, giving them additional employment skills to offer potential future employers. The practice of auditing can also provide students with knowledge and values to feed forward into their future workplaces to develop responsible business practices from within.

Why use sustainability audits as tools for learning and teaching?

As a sustainability audit is a systematic process, it can introduce students to the complex issues faced by responsible and irresponsible businesses on a daily basis. Undertaking an audit gives the advantages of:

- Exposing wider issues and empowering students to identify, critically evaluate, and question issues with greater insight than would be encountered through receiving pre-digested information in lectures (Centre for Teaching, 2017).
- Engaging students in the active, real-world learning processes in environments they prefer; learning-by-doing and problem-based learning in real-world settings.

Learning-by-doing can promote engagement with the subject (Dewey, 1916; Drayson, 2015) whilst problem-based learning can equip students with transferable skills of enquiry, problem solving, and critical analysis (Shepherd, 1998), which encourages individuals to challenge accepted practice. Together these can help students to become independent learners rather than consumers of knowledge (Juarez-Nayera et al 2006).

The Practical Application of Sustainability Audits as Teaching Tools

At the University of Worcester Business School two different real-world audits are used to enhance responsible management education – ISO14001 and Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) audits. Second year business management students studying responsible management undertake an assessed ISO14001 audit of the University of Worcester, whilst third year students undertake an assessed GRI audit of a fictional case study company. The author designed and created both audits. The modules they are taught in and the fictional case study facilitates a teaching approach based around sustainability audits taken from real-world business tools. In both sustainability audits the students independently collect, synthesise, and evaluate evidence of business practices to develop evidence-based judgements of responsible business performance.

For second year students this involves exploring and evaluating the university as a business. Students develop their audit findings from their critical analysis of information provided on current practice by the university's sustainability practitioners in expert witness sessions, their investigation of on-campus activities during site visits, and evaluation of sustainability strategies, targets, and achievements published on the university's sustainability website.

Third year students undertake their GRI audit of a fictional company created as an online case study by the author to replicate a real-world manufacturing company. Students review and evaluate the emails, letters, photographs, and company reports provided, which mirror as closely as possible the documents and site visit undertaken by an auditor in a real-world sustainability audit.

The students are advised to act as sustainability consultants when conducting their audit to give them experience of work-based learning and freedom to explore the complexity of real-world responsible business practices. They are guided to act in two specific ways: firstly, to conduct an assessment of the process rather than the person undertaking it and secondly, to focus on the processes that are working well. Experience from professional auditors suggests auditing the process generally generates a more detailed response, whilst assessing the person can lead to a limited response for fear of reprisal. In addition, it is generally accepted that by seeking good practice, irresponsible actions will become visible.

Both second and third-year students are given an audit template to complete which replicates those used in real-world sustainability audits. They then collect evidence and analyse and filter it to identify what is important and what can be left out. These are both important academic skills for successful learning outcomes and valuable employment skills for their future. Performing this situational analysis leads to an evidence-based judgement of responsible business practice against each area of activity on the template, i.e. audit findings.

The ISO14001 template includes audit questions, whereas third year students are required to construct audit questions which they then answer. This additional task is incorporated to increase the level of academic challenge whilst further engaging them in real-world business tools. Following this situational analysis, students are required to frame potential actions accompanied by SMART targets to address the irresponsible actions identified.

The Potential of Sustainability Audits to Develop Personally and Professionally Responsible Work-Ready Graduates

This teaching approach has been specifically designed to develop students' personal and professional responsible management practices. It can expose them to the process-based approaches to responsible business management that organisations are currently adopting and promote a gradual development of responsible business knowledge, skills, and values that are vital for responsible business futures.

The independent learning processes built into the practice of auditing are valuable in students' academic careers, for their future employment prospects, and for their future employers. These processes can develop the higher order cognitive skills considered lacking in students (Sadler, 2016), promote long-term thinking, assist students to recognise their own learning and, perhaps most importantly, help them to recognise what they do not know.

The long-term thinking promoted by auditing typifies the reality of responsible business behaviours, particularly the challenges organisations face in balancing short-term economic management with the longer-term responsible business practices that society is increasingly expecting. This, along with the process of learning what needs to be learned to complete the audit, can challenge students' preference for just-in-time learning. It can also engage them in self-directed learning whilst facilitating the continuous academic support and guidance that is expected by current students (Ertmer & Simons, 2006) in the massified and marketised environment of business schools (Lynch, 2006) which is demanding increased student numbers, better learning outcomes, and more student retention.

Conclusion

This paper has presented sustainability audits as a tool for teaching which can enhance responsible management education through authentic and real-world learning in the learning environment that students prefer. Utilising the real-world ISO14001 and GRI audits is designed to immerse students in real-world systematic processes that encourage them to critically analyse and question environmental, social and economic (ir)responsible management practices. The evidence-based situational analysis of the business audited and construction of potential improvement actions seeks to develop students' responsible management skills

in the safe environment of a classroom, to close responsible management skills gaps and empower students to develop both academic and employment skills to enable them to graduate from the University of Worcester Business School as personally and professionally responsible work-ready graduates.

Bibliography

- Cashian P, Clarke J, Richardson, M, (2015) Perspectives on: Employability. Is it Time to Move the Employability Debate on?
Accessed November 25th 2019 from:
<https://charteredabs.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Employability-Debate1.pdf>
- Centre for Teaching (2017) Teaching Sustainability
Accessed November 27th 2019 from:
<https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/teaching-sustainability/>
- Clark G. and Whitelegg, J, (1998) Maximising the Benefits from Work-Based Learning: the Effectiveness of Environmental Audits, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 22, pp. 325-334
- Cortese, A, (2003) The Critical Role of Higher Education in Creating a Sustainable Future'. *Planning for Higher Education*, 31, pp. 15-22
- Dewey, J, (1916) *Democracy and Education; An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, New York NY: Macmillan
- Drayson, R. (2015) Student Attitudes towards and Skills for Sustainable Development, Executive Summary: Employers
Accessed November 25th 2019 from:
www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/les/executive-summary-&.pdf
- Ertmer, P. and Simons, K, (2006) Jumping the PBL implementation hurdle: Supporting the Efforts of K-12 Teacher, *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-based Learning*, 1, pp. 40-54
- Figuro, F. & Raufflett, P, (2015) Sustainability in Higher Education: A Systematic Review with Focus on Higher Education, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 106, pp. 22-33.
- Financial Times (2019) Social Purpose: How Business Schools Around the World Measure Up.
Accessed December 1st 2010 from:
<https://www.ft.com/content/b6bcfa02-ef37-11e9-ad1e-4367d8281195>
- Govender, I, (2016) Evaluating Student Perceptions on the Development Management Curricula to Promote Green Economy. *Environmental Economics*, 7, pp. 1-10
- Hensley N. (2017) The Future of Sustainability in Higher Education, *Journal of Sustainability Education*, 03.
Accessed November 24th 2019 from:
http://www.jsedimensions.org/wordpress/content/the-future-of-sustainability-in-higher-education_2017_03/
- Higher Education Funding Council for England, (2013) *Sustainable Development in Higher Education: Consultation on a Framework for HEFCE*.
Accessed November 25th 2019 from:
<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/workprovide/Framework/> (Accessed: 25 November 2019)
- Higher Education Academy (2014) *Education for Sustainable Development: Guidance for UK higher education providers*
Accessed November 25th 2019 from: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Education-sustainable-development-Guidance-June-14.pdf>

- Hillary R. (2004) Environmental management systems and the smaller enterprise. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 12, pp. 561-56
- Howlett, C., Ferreira, J. & Blomfield, J. (2016) Teaching Sustainable Development in Higher Education: Building Critical, Reflective Thinkers through Interdisciplinary Approach, *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 17, pp. 305-321
- Juarez-Najera M, Dieleman H. & Turpin-Marion, S, (2006) Sustainability in Mexican Higher Education: Towards a new Academic and Professional Culture, *Journal of Cleaner Production*. 14, pp. 1028-1038
- Lynch, K, (2006) Neo-liberalism and Marketisation: the Implications for Higher Education. *European Educational Research Journal*, 5, pp.1-17
- Matthew, A. & Butler, D. (2017) Narrative, Machina and Cognitive Realism. Constructing an Authentic, Real-World Learning Experience for Law Students, *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 33, pp. 148-162
- Mulà, I, Tilbury, D, Ryan, A, Mader, M, Dlouhá, J, Mader, C, Benayas, J, Dlouhý, J. & Alba, D. (2017) Catalysing Change in Higher Education for Sustainable Development: A Review of Professional Development Initiatives for University Educators, *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 18, pp. 798-820
- Rieckmann, M, (2012) Future-Oriented Higher Education: Which Key Competencies Should Be Fostered through University Teaching and Learning? *Future*, 44, pp. 127–135
- Ryan, A, & Tilbury, D, (2013) Uncharted Waters: Voyages for Education for Sustainable Development in The Higher Education Curriculum, *Curriculum Journal*, 24, pp. 272-294
- Sadler D, (2016) Three In-Course Assessment Reforms To Improve Higher Education Learning Outcome. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 41, pp. 1081-1099
- Shepherd, H, (1998) The Probe Method: A Problem-Based Learning Model's Effect on Critical Thinking Skills Of Fourth And Fifth-Grade Social Studies Students. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina State University
- Sterling, S, Maxey, L, & Luna, H, (2013) *The Sustainable University: Progress and Prospects*. London, UK: Earthscan
- Staniskis, J, & Katiliute, E, (2016) Complex Evaluation of Sustainability in Engineering Education: & Analysis, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 120, pp. 12-20
- United Nations (2015) Sustainable Development Goals, 17 Goals to Change our World. accessed November 25th 2019 from: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>
- United Nations (2017) Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform: Sustainable Development Goals. Accessed November 25th from: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (2011) Definition of Education for Sustainable Development Accessed November 25th from: <http://www.unescobkk.org/fr/education/esd-unit/definition-of-esd/>
- Viegas, C, Bond, A, Duarte Ribeiro, J, & Selig, P, (2013) A Review of Environmental Monitoring and Auditing in the Context of Risk: Unveiling the Extent of a Confused Relationship, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 47, pp. 165-173
- Wiek A, Xiong A, Brundiers K, & van de Leeuw S, (2014) Integrating Problem-and Project-Based Learning into Sustainability Programmes. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 15, pp. 431-449