Session 9

Embedding Climate Change Knowledge in the Curriculum (II)

The Future Leaders Certificate -
Taking responsible business beyond the curriculum

Sandy Purewal and Rosalind Hay,
Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham

Abstract

In this session, we propose to showcase the Future Leaders Certificate (FLC), an extra-curricular programme delivered by the Careers in Business team which helps prepare Business School MSc students for the Future of Work. The programme is based around a Competency Framework (Figure 1) which outlines the skills/knowledge/behaviours we believe are important for students to possess to be a successful future leader.

Alongside building their knowledge of digital/technology change and trends, increasing students’ awareness and engagement with responsible business, and therefore helping to encourage them to consider leadership through this lens, is a fundamental part of the programme.

In the 2020-21 academic year, this started as early as the Autumn term promotional/application stage webinars, in which Professor Ian Thomson participated and highlighted the importance of responsible business and the students’ vital roles in addressing these issues.

Once we had selected our 100 participants in December 2020, they embarked on four Canvas modules focused on leadership, an entrepreneurial mind-set, learning agility and emotional intelligence, with an initial Welcome section providing further information on responsible business, the UN’s SDGs and the WEF’s ‘Great Reset’. We believe this set the tone for the FLC and encouraged the students to consider these issues as they made their way through the programme. We were delighted that one of the student teams incorporated this concept into their consultancy name, ‘S.A.F.E. (Sustainable, Accurate, Futuristics, Expert) Solutions’, and a number of groups highlighted sustainability in their core values as part of their team charter infographics (Figure 2). In addition, one of the first tasks we set the teams was to create a video summarising what a successful future leader looks like and the challenges they will face in the context of COVID-19, digital change and responsible business, and some fantastic videos were produced.
To bring each of the Canvas modules to life, we also held a series of webinars. Every guest speaker linked back to responsible business in some way, covering subjects such as values-based leadership/values-led organisations, creating businesses with a positive societal impact and the importance of supporting entrepreneurial talent to help tackle the crises and challenges our world faces.

In March 2021, we designed an innovative ‘Digital Asset Day’ to assist students in developing their engagement with responsible business alongside their learning agility, entrepreneurial mind-set, digital and Agile project management skills. Using a combination of Zoom, MURAL and proto.io, the teams collaborated virtually and built a fully functioning prototype app in just a few hours to present a business idea addressing a social or environmental issue. They produced a wide range of ideas with a number focusing directly on climate change e.g. raising awareness of coral bleaching, promoting recycling and providing information on local levels of air pollution (Figure 3).

In June 2021, the students participated in a 2-week virtual, consultancy project for either Beiersdorf or the BBC. This brought together everything they had learnt throughout the programme to help them produce some fantastic recommendations for their client companies, and we were delighted that a number of the groups incorporated sustainability/responsible business into their solutions (Figure 4).
Fig. 1 – FLC Framework

Fig. 2 – example of team values

Fig. 3 – prototype apps addressing environmental issues

Fig. 4 – screenshot taken from student video pitch to Beiersdorf
Engaging academics for embedding sustainability in management and business curriculum: A practitioner perspective

Muhammad Mazhar,
Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University

Abstract

Higher Education Institutions are engaged in embedding sustainability in curriculum (Gupta and Singhal, 2017) and studies have offered practical examples by outlining the process (Fuertes-Camacho et al., 2019; Molthan-Hill, 2017). Embedding sustainability in business school curriculum is more relevant. Business schools are producing future managers and leaders and it is their responsibility to equip them with the knowledge of sustainability to solve real world challenges (Muff et al., 2013). There is an ongoing debate whether business schools are fit for purpose and they have a pivotal role in addressing sustainable development issues. The role of business is changing, and business schools need to adapt to rapidly changing landscape (Graham, 2019). There is a need to mainstream sustainability into management and business curriculum for graduates’ sustainability literacy.

From students’ perspective, there is growing demand for sustainability. 79% of business students feel ‘moderately’ to ‘not at all’ knowledgeable regarding environmental sustainability and 64% want environmental sustainability to be embedded into the curriculum (Yale, 2016). However, there is a barrier of skills shortage among academics and training is required. Sustainability literacy and competency become necessary when it comes to management and business curriculum. Staff development is considered as a catalyst for integrating sustainability into curriculum (Barth and Rieckmann, 2012). Engaging academics for embedding sustainability in management and business curriculum is paramount. However, there are barriers to integrating sustainability into the curriculum. Key barriers include staff knowledge, understanding & competency, lack of time, competing priorities, lack of personal interest, top level commitment and lack of resources & available support.

This research was aimed at providing an analysis of the ways business schools can engage academics for embedding sustainability in management and business curriculum and provides some recommendations. This was a small-scale action research at Nottingham Business School (NBS), Nottingham Trent University, UK, involving an online and co-created short course as an action research intervention. NBS is a leading PRME (Principles for Responsible Management Education) Champions business school evidencing good practice. The School has adopted a three-tier approach to embed sustainability into curriculum. It has been challenging to engage academics more widely in departments. The proposed research question was: “How can an online
sustainability short course help engage academic staff for embedding sustainability in management and business curriculum?”. Participants in this research were academic staff (5) in NBS departments who were interviewed, and they belonged to different disciplines such as management, human resource management, accounting & finance and economics.

Primary research focus was to engage staff under time and resource constraint environment. There are various mechanisms for staff engagement. One of the ways is through the online courses and learning resources. Action orientated approaches can challenge mental models of academics (Cebrián et al., 2015). This research explored if the online sustainability education tool can raise academics’ awareness and understanding and get them thinking about their practice. Engagement with online tool in a meaningful way can help address this issue, as online learning tools have now become sophisticated and they can be effective to engage learners.

References


Yale, 2016, Rising Leaders on Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change: A Global Survey of Business Students, Available online at: https://cbey.yale.edu/sites/default/files/2019-