National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy

*Greening Business Curricula:
Integrating Sustainability
into the Core*

March 12-13, 1998

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Background

Throughout 1996 and 1997, members of the NRTEE Education Committee met with deans and faculty of selected Canadian business schools to discuss the notion of bridging sustainable development and business education. One resulting conclusion was that most Canadian business schools are not systematically main-streaming sustainability principles into their core curricula.

As a follow-up, the NRTEE hosted a workshop of frontline business educators, students and professionals to help advance the NRTEE Education Committee objective of encouraging business schools to incorporate sustainability principles into their core program. The workshop, titled "Greening Business Curricula: Integrating Sustainability into the Core," explored the barriers which need to be overcome to ensure that future Canadian managers and business leaders are made aware of the need to integrate environmental and economic decision-making. The workshop built on ideas already generated by business schools and identified the important next steps, while concurrently forging links between the NRTEE and the workshop participants. The workshop was held in Ottawa, March 13, 1998.

Objectives

The Meeting of Business School Educators and the background paper prepared for this workshop was focussed on the following objectives:

1.   **Defining the opportunity.** In defining the opportunity, it was important to: address the theoretical and practical reasons for greening business curricula, including addressing the demand issues; articulate what "integrating sustainability into the core" means in practical terms; and, review the existing level of integration within business schools.

2.   **Establishing what barriers prevent the achievement of this opportunity.** This discussion focussed on the impediments to greening business curricula, whether these impediments are philosophical, institutional, practical or otherwise.

3.   **Discussing the best way to overcome the barriers.** Achieving this objective involved a focus on both tools and methods. Tools represent the items which will help integrate sustainability into the core, while methods represent the best ways to target, distribute and encourage the use of the proposed tools. This discussion included an evaluation of the current tools proposed and pursued by the NRTEE as a result of its earlier meetings with business deans; and

4.   **Focussing on the next steps.** Based on a definition of the problem and the best solutions to address the barriers, the workshop concluded with a determination of where the NRTEE is

likely to add the most value to this process in the future and the appropriate steps to be taken beyond the capacity of the NRTEE.

Workshop Organization and Approach

A briefing paper was prepared to create a context for the discussion and to stimulate reflection and debate. This paper and a consultation workbook which defined the questions for discussion were sent to participants prior to the event.

The workshop began with an evening panel presentation which included Mr. Duncan Noble, Nortel, and Mr. Ron Bergin, Office of the Commissioner on Environment and Sustainable Development. The speakers both presented overviews of how sustainable development is being integrated into the business/government paradigm of planning, problem solving and decision making, risks and rewards, and concepts of bottom-line. Copies of these presentation slides are attached to this report as an appendix.

On day 2, the featured speaker was Mr. Brian Neubert, BELL/MEB, World Resources Institute. Mr. Neubert's presentation was aimed at stimulating the group's discussion of tools and methods to overcome barriers. A copy of his presentation is also attached to this report. The balance of day 2 was spent in a workshop format - small table discussions of specified questions with plenary reports.

The remainder of this report is to re-cap the questions and discussion highlights from these workshop sessions.

Expectations of Participants

❏ Linkages between this discussion and professional work of curriculum development
❏ Build a Canadian Network
  • lever ideas/exchange to speed up work at university
❏ Develop multi-disciplinary approach to courses and students - think beyond business schools to "all students"
❏ See what problems we share - and exchange on how to overcome - to learn
❏ Plant seeds to grow/build capacity
❏ Encourage Round Table to take the lead to develop educational materials
❏ Look for realistic ways to integrate sustainable development into Society and into decision-making
❏ Identify new and innovative approaches to integrate into Business Schools
❏ How can Round Table play a catalyst role
❏ Develop a shock treatment for colleagues
❏ How to integrate personal and professional orientation
❏ How to link to work in curricula, education and design
  • commitment to further steps

❑ To see what's happening in Business and the environment

❑ How to build on this group to create and build alliances which will focus on supply and demand side issues

❑ An Agenda for change

❑ Know the Barriers - what skills do graduates need to meet the needs of the market place

❑ What will help facilitate the transition to sustainable development

❑ Renewed resolve

❑ Education to Business and Academics

❑ Define method of getting business and leaders to think sustainably

A.   Defining the Objective

Question 1:

The purpose of this part of the discussion was to articulate what integrating sustainability into the core might mean in practical terms. This first question was to create an operative definition of "integrating sustainability into the core. The table report presentations tended to focus on 3 points: definitions of sustainability, means of integration into the core, and other specific ideas to compliment the process as content of integration.

- **Definitions of sustainability**

   Participants distinguished between "greening" business curriculum versus integrating "sustainability" into the core. The latter was seen as more robust as a concept, more relevant to the studies, and more in tune with the challenges of change in academic values. Participants defined sustainability as meaning triple bottom-line which includes economic and ecological results as well as social acceptance.

   Finally, sustainability was defined as resulting in "increased resources for future generations due to balanced decision making and values systems".

- **What does "integrating sustainability into the core" really mean.**

   Two models of thought emerged from this discussion. The first was a vertical model presented below. In brief, it argues that sustainability must be treated through practical cases, and that the continuum of vision, experiential practice and tools must be in place.

Figure 1
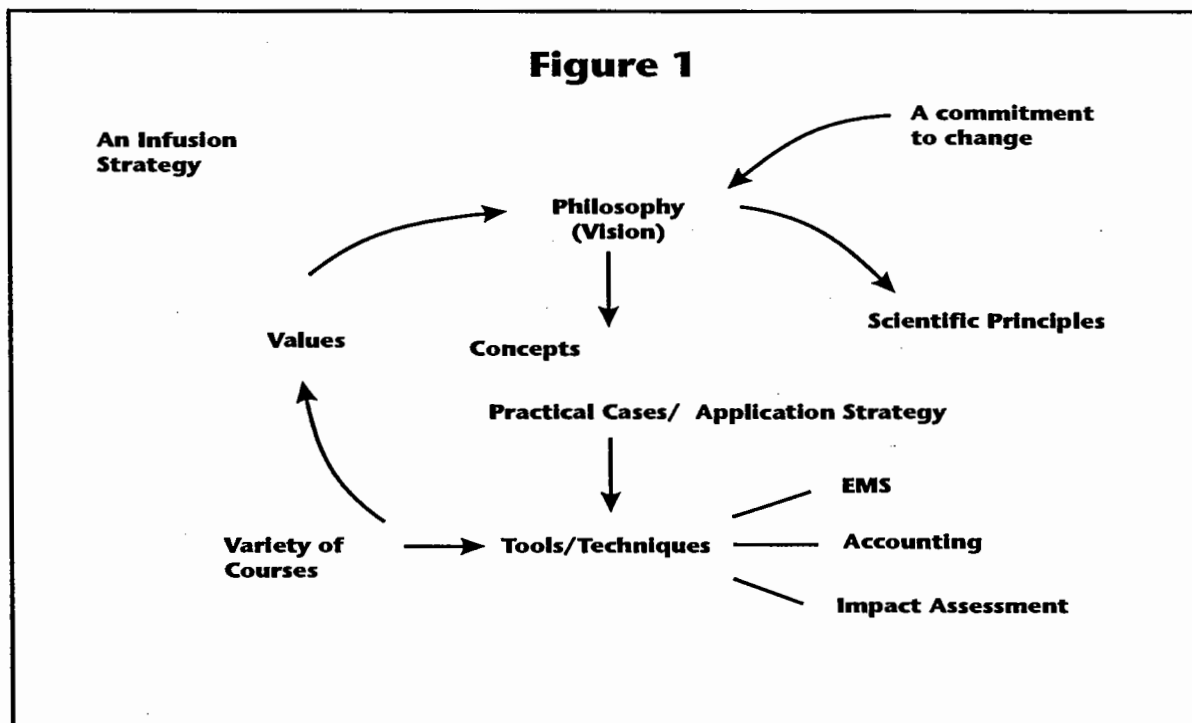
The second model included various ideas on course structure. These include:

- A mandatory foundation course at the beginning of studies which would provide the overall framework concepts, as well as training in tools, data analysis, methods of interpretation and so on.

- Modules to be incorporated or "infiltrated" into the spectrum of courses - accounting, marketing, strategic management and supply chain management were most frequently mentioned. These modules would be mandatory. An oversight committee would ensure compliance.

- Other elective courses and/or competitive strategies; competitions etc.

- "Core" means a required set of courses and modules which could lead to an individual concentration.

- Alternatively, include modules in various courses with an "integrative" course at the back end of the degree program to "pull it all together" and to reinforce the values and concepts.

- Other considerations concerning what "integrating sustainability into the core "means".

    - Sustainability needs to be integrated into the vision/mission statements of Universities, faculties and professional (e.g. C.A.) societies and journals.

    - Look at the experience of integrating ethics and internationalization into business curricula - what are the lessons learned.

    - The approach taken must be flexible in terms of 1st, 2nd and 3rd cycle studies.

    - Requires top down pressures - as in remove "sexism" from curriculum as well as bottom-up in terms of energy, ideas, innovation of individual professors.

    - It needs symbols - e.g. ring ceremonies for sustainable development concentration, vision statements etc.

Question 2:

In your experience, to what extent have we achieved the integration of sustainability into the core in business schools?

- Overall, discussion reports were brief and consistent:
    - The Canadian experience has been largely shaped by individual efforts in different schools; concentrations, advanced degrees, compulsory courses.
    - Experience runs toward inclusion of courses as opposed to integration of core concepts across courses.
    - Looking ahead, the prescription is to build on the individualized successes; build further awareness, and integrate current activities into more complete models of what business schools could do.
    - Also note the European experience - seen as more advanced than Canada.
    - Also noted, Florida Gulf State University which integrated sustainability into its raison d'être.

Question 3:

As relevant as it is to define the concept of integrating sustainability into the core, it is equally important to delineate why this objective should be pursued in the first place. In this connection, participants discussed "why business schools should care about sustainability principles".

- The key reasons cited in discussions were as follows:
  - Values - the only long term hope for business and humanity is an ideological outlook which values sustainability.
  - Demand from business - markets looking for more environmental responsibility: automotive, construction.
  - Demand from students - personal future, forward looking
  - Evidence that successful firms are also sources of best practices: "friendly managers should be teaching students best practices, which includes sustainability issues"
  - Socially responsible to discuss (like business ethics).
  - Not a trade-off: Business and Environment are complimentary.
  - Stakeholder priority - ethical funds.
  - The debate of "should we do this" is over for business - business leaders see this as a requirement for doing business.
  - Business leaders are concerned about the sustainability of their businesses. They need to be better versed re: environmental issues, imports and management re: sustainability
  - Globalization of economics requires a global environmental paradigm.

Question 4:

Conversely, participants were asked why business schools might not care about sustainability principles. The principal reasons they cited were:

1. Denial - stonewall a perceived threat.

2. Business Reward systems - Professoriate promoted in functional silos

3. Hard times - hard decisions - Sustainable development courses may be first to be cut.

4. Lose Agenda to law schools - mediation as an avenue to address reconciliation between environment and business concerns.

5. Systematic - shorter programs of MBA - eg. 1 year puts pressure on curriculum.

6. Curriculum momentum - little incentive for change. Lack of champions across disciplines - Lack of student demand.

7. Need for systems perspective.

8. Need for collaboration - both for human resources, and for systems view.

9. Not supported by business advisory boards - Lack of perceived business demand.

10. Short term focus of Business schools. Professorial is resistance to change.

11. Lack of ecological education - systems knowledge and thinking.

12. Lack of tools for integrating sustainability into course work, e.g. finance.

B.   Establishing the Barriers

Question 1:

Following on the first part of the discussion, participants were asked what are the key impediments to integrating sustainability into the core. Their discussion typically addressed factors related to faculty capacity and attitudes, student perceptions and expectations, business attitudes and expectations, and opportunities for research and publication. More specific views include the following:

1.   Typically of interest to junior faculty.
2.   Lacks rewards as well as career risks for young professors.
3.   Don't know how to - capacity issue.
4.   Lack of business interest.
5.   Lack of leaders.
6.   Academic structure - vertical or silo nature.
7.   Curricula - short term focus.
8.   Competition for "shelf space".
9.   Lack of tools and materials as well as an ideology which does not perceive the need for a professional school to integrate sustainability.
10.   Lack of champions.
11.   Lack of leadership or energy.
12.   Limited resources: faculty capability and interest; time in the curriculum; fiscal resources.
13.   Need for protection of untenured faculty.
14.   Limited opportunity for research - need journals to be interested.
15.   Students - low importance or relevance.
16.   Business signals
17.   To long a definition of what Business/Management is, and too narrow a definition of who we serve - hence difficult to coordinate.
18.   Basic ignorance - lack of understanding.
19.   Represents a radical approach.
20.   Business is conflicted - as there are forces for and against.
21.   No guidelines as to how business operates.
22.   Shakeholder values - at macro level, the right wing agenda - agenda applies to schools - and forces universities to acquiesce at the Board or Advisor level.

Question 2 (a):   What are the most important barriers to focus on?

1. The model of barriers to be overcome for success includes:
    −   Understanding/awareness
    −   Structural barriers - capability, resources, reward structure, functional organization versus stove pipes
    −   Market barriers - students, stakeholders
    −   Leadership
    −   Resources - faculty time, curriculum, funding

2. Further ideas:
    −   Limited mind set - lack of knowledge of consequences, focus on academic independence.
    −   Adequate resources.
    −   Industry funding a chair in "sustainable development".
    −   Business Values.
    −   Primary and Secondary schools have policy of curriculum change but not at universities.
    −   Need both incremental and strategic approach.
    −   Change the reward system - tenure should be based on education not research (Note: no agreement on this point).
    −   Time for research and curriculum development.

Question 2 (b):   Who needs to be on-side?

1. Deans and senior faculty.
2. Accreditation bodies.
3. Business Community.
4. Peer pressure - student and faculty.
5. Stakeholder involvement.
6. Convince independent minded faculty to be aware - concerned.
7. CEO's have short term focus - are appointed for short terms - focus is on responsiveness to customer demands - goal is to mobilize interest of concerned.
8. Publishers to include in text books (but don't have time to write a chapter).
9. Focus on few early adopters.

Question 3:   What are the determinants of student interest in sustainability?

1. Knowledge, received early on.

2. Relative importance placed on the issue in course work - also that courses are elective.

3. Align personal values and course work.

4. See relevance but not too much - lack of media profile; lack of reference in hiring ads.

5. Lack of knowledge re jobs, eg. consulting industry - firms should come to business schools.

6. Job pay prospects.

7. Student recruitment criteria: conservative students are being recruited - Do admissions criteria select out students with environmental interests?

8. Only a minority sees the relevance.

9. Low media profile.

10. Not on the political agenda.

11. Old thinking of environment as a "cost"; creates paradigm of "jobs versus environment" and hence, students shy away.

C.   Tackling the barriers

Question 1:

Having discussed barriers, participants next considered the question of tools, methods, strategies to overcome them. The first question under this rubric asked what tools and methods have been tried, what has worked, what has not?

Discussion highlights:

What worked:

1. Optional courses - worked with foreign students - linked to good business practice. Case studies, scenario building, simulations, case competitions.

2. Contrast between what is driving business versus business schools.

3. A core group that is committed.

4. Periodic studies on where management education should be heading - cycle is 10-12 years - then link this to accreditation.

5. Create informal groups - untenured staff.

6. Research opportunities.

7. Business Speakers who reinforce actual cases and experience.

8. Buy in from other faculty.

9. Team teaching and experimental projects.

10. Short modules integrated into other courses.

11.   Informal groups.

What did not:

1.   Tried case competition - no interest.
2.   No french texts.
3.   Too many teachers, speakers can be problematic - guest speakers need to be carefully selected.
4.   Single integrating lectures at the end of term are not effective.
5.   Soft philosophical approaches which sound like preaching.

Question 2:   What other tools and methods should be used?

1.   Communication across and between institutions - using web sites and list servers.
2.   "Strategis" of Industry Canada.
3.   Disseminate course outlines, reading lists, key papers, sources of information.
4.   Champions - disseminate information to colleagues.
5.   Capacity Building - use Internet to build on strengths and as part of an informal educational process.
6.   Environment Canada - state of Environment Report.
7.   WBCSD - Canadian companies.
8.   Keep integrating business leaders, NGO's - to address faculty and students.
9.   Role of NRTEE - continued involvement.
10. WBCSD - Sustainability challenge - on line course.
11. Create an Environmental Awareness sub-committee on Advisory Boards.
12. Create student achievement awards with a business sponsor.
     –   More support for competitions - cases, use of simulations, study missions, experiential group projects etc.
14. CA and other professional streams to incorporate into accreditation.
15. Encourage Professional bodies to create sub-committees.
16. Create/identify Centres of Excellence - e.g. York University.
17. Develop a speakers Bureau.
18. Develop and stress importance and value of simulations.
19. Develop a stakeholder negotiation exercise book.
20. Web sites with links to other sites (universities).

Question 3:   What type of strategy should be developed to address these barriers?

1. Educate the educators - especially deans - organize one/two-day workshops.
2. Get 3rd party speakers - eg. Maurice Strong.
3. Employers to build into recruitment profile.
4. Universities integrate the need for literacy on sustainability into hiring policy.
5. Need a well-funded, multi-prong strategy.
   - Integrate into accreditation criteria.
   - Importance of maintaining a national network.
   - Develop support for business - environmental literacy - along the lines of the Arthur Anderson model.
   - Continue to exploit opportunities for short courses and introduce continuing education.
   - Awards and scholarships.
   - Resource centre for professors to find out who is doing what, who is available, what is available.
   - Finally, create a planning mechanism to devise a strategy.
6. Recognize stewardship of retiring CEO's by Business Schools. Honorary degrees.
7. Develop the support and accessibility of business.

Question 4:   What is the appropriate role of organizations to play integrating sustainability into the core?

1. NRTEE - act as convenor; prepare and distribute videos to augment the speakers Bureau.
2. Get well known person to cross sell videos in supermarkets.
3. Create a video conferencing capability
4. NRTEE - play catalyst role; organize a 1 day multi-stakeholder workshops.
5. Funding - accountability for resources and impacts; NOG's can participate.
6. Companies - internships to show students there are jobs - provide free consulting to companies.
7. Create links to the MEB Bell Program and expand these links across institutions.
8. Create and build on electronic networks - ISD.
9. Private Sector:
   - support guest speakers
   - support to literacy institutions
   - co-op assignments
   - internships
   - executives in residence in Business Schools
   - honorary degrees in Sustainable Development
   - clarify demands in skills in sustainability

10. Academic Associations - get issues on the agenda.

11. Need for neutral university research - example of post Kyoto - both sides said that this will kill the Canadian economy. The Best way to reach students is to present this controversy to them.

D. Next Steps

The final part of the day considered various aspects of next steps, from "what" to "how" to "who". The aim was to create a shared sense of specific expectation for follow-up. This was a plenary discussion. The notes below reflect the contributions of the group as a whole.

Question 1:   What are the first three things that must be done to address this issue?

1. Information on what is currently happening needs to be broadly distributed.

2. NRTEE needs to be proactive - gathering and disseminating information and lobbying.

3. Send a letter to Deans

   • inform them of the process

   • get Deans together to shape and share a vision of how to integrate sustainability. Include industry, government and NGO's. Focus on Business Education for the 21st century. Explore video conference - 1 central hub and several regional centres. Use this meeting to identify champions amongst the Deans and to set targets and objectives.

4. Create / identify a national centre of excellence on sustainable management - need a university-based secretariat to take the lead on this.

5. NRTEE - put report together; clarify plan and activities; clarify overall game plan; consider follow-up meeting - 6 months.

6. Certification of Business Graduates - code of ethics - gold ring.

7. Senior Business leaders to talk to senior academics.

8. Develop good ways of illustrating relationships of sustainability to both business and academics.

9. Create a sustainable development seed fund.

10. Teaching development - material, cases.

Question 2:   Who must be involved?

1. The power of "1" supported by critical mass.

2. Business leaders.

3. Deans/Presidents.

4. NRTEE

5. Faculty

6. 3rd parties, eg. Maurice Strong.

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7. Government Agencies

8. Students - for their input and expectations.

9. Alumni

10. NGO's - Pembina Institute; Pollution Probe.

11. Professional Associations: CA's; CSA's

Question 3:   Who should be responsible for initiating this work?

1. We all leave with some responsibility for Bottom-up activity.

2. NRTEE provides report from Top-down perspective.

3. This group is a network - consider the group as an advisory Task Force for the NRTEE.

4. This group can have a virtual continuous meeting on E-mail to circulate successes.

5. Need to interest a mainstream journal.

6. Leadership will shift overtime as progress is made - eg. from NRTEE to Deans.

Question 4:   How might you be willing to contribute to integrating sustainability into the core?

1. Each participant communicate to Deans and Presidents re this meeting - advise them of forthcoming letter re a meeting of Deans - encourage this.

2. Send letter to Deans now to let them know about this meeting.

3. Re: FPCMP (182 companies) - Tim to bring back message about the value and potential for industry of this kind of association - better candidate for industry involvement.

4. Conference of Deans will require money - industry could help with cost of this. (Note: industry will be encouraged to pay if they receive service)

5. Get more industry participation at future meetings.

Question 5:   Is there a logical sequence of events which should take place?

1. Letter to Deans re Next Steps.
    *   need copy of report
    *   simultaneous support of business community for a joint venture

2. Develop a marketing plan around these initiatives.

3. If CEO's could agree to the potential for money - then this is a key message for Deans.