

Chapter 13

Enhancing Sustainability through Experiential Learning in Management Education

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability related areas like CSR, business ethics and corporate governance as subjects is seen in most business school curriculum, whether its inclusion leads to inculcating interest and values for responsible business practices is still a big question. Sustainability incorporates holistic view of issues; the curriculum therefore, has to make linkages to social issues and has to be contextual. The focus of business school curriculum has to be on sensitizing students towards responsible citizenship along with competency building in the area of sustainability. Here, experiential' or action learning would be helpful. The chapter posits the importance of experiential learning in the context of management education and highlights the fact that unless sensitized to the sustainability issues, business schools or at corporate level will see it only from compliance perspective. The chapter also discusses success story of existing modules on experiential learning crafted by 2 NGO's intended to sensitize the participants.

INTRODUCTION

The realization of preparing the students to face the sustainability challenges has been taken up by a handful of autonomous business schools in India. Though the mention of sustainability related areas like CSR, business ethics and corporate governance as subjects full or partial is seen largely in every business school curriculum, whether its inclusion leads to inculcating interest and values of responsible business practices in future managers is a big question mark. Sustainability incorporates holistic view of issues; the curriculum therefore, has to make linkages to social issues and has to be contextual. It has to lead to critical thinking on problem solving and alternatives leading to innovation. It has to convert into interests and value for the future managers to impact enough to formulate, adopt and implement socially responsible practices in an organization. In short the focus of business school curriculum has to

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-1013-0.ch013

be on sensitizing students towards responsible citizenship along with competency building in the area of sustainability. The education has to go beyond classrooms and to the fields for students to practically relate to the impact of the companies on the society. A focus on the experiential' or action learning in the social and environmental context should be an important element of the management education. Experiential learning in form of simulations, case study, industry visits, live projects and summer internships to understand business concepts has been a common pedagogy undertaken by educational institutes. It takes the participants through real life experiments and situations taking them to a learning experience that challenges them to move from established work routines to a real time learning zone. Can experiential learning lead to sensitization? Can it lead to transformational change? Many corporate houses have realized the importance of learning experience beyond the work routines and have come up with rural immersion programs as part of either their entry-level leadership training boot camp or as part of middle and senior level leadership programs. A core function of product development for example depends very much on innovation. Product Innovation for the bottom of the pyramid is completely based on understanding problems at the core. Rural immersion programs have therefore become very popular since the last decade contributing to several product innovations. Unless one lives the problem situation; solutions for the same may not be sustainable at all. This is not only to get an intimate understanding of the consumer so that innovative products can be developed but also to provide a platform to the employee to evolve as a humane leader through transformative experiences gained during these programs. The paper posits the importance of experiential learning in the context of business management education. It also puts forth trends in the corporate related to employee engagement further reinforcing the concept of experiential learning for sustainable development. The paper makes an attempt to establish the fact that unless sensitized to the sustainability issues, learning and execution whether in business schools or at corporate level will only be taken with the objective of compliance. It puts forth examples of top business Schools and a few business houses who are engaged in experiential learning reinforcing the idea of experiential learning in Business education. The paper also puts forth success story of existing modules on experiential learning crafted by 2 NGO's intended to sensitize the participants.

BACKGROUND

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility has been around since 1950's and different terms have been used referring it as corporate responsibility, Corporate Accountability, Corporate ethics and corporate citizenship. The concept has evolved since then and is more popularly used as Corporate Sustainability shifting away from the traditional mindset based on charity to a focus on new and responsible way of doing business. Sustainability encompasses a more comprehensive uptake to responsible business practices globally. The major difference between CSR and Sustainability is that Sustainability includes a commitment to protecting the environment in addition to community and economic issues where as CSR traditionally did not include the commitment to environment. The World Bank Council for Sustainable development, defines CSR as "the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as local community and society at large" Sustainability as defined by the Australian Government is "Encompassing strategies and practices that aim to meet the needs of the stakeholders today, while seeking to protect, support and enhance the human and natural resources that will be needed

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