



Education for sustainability in business education programs: a question of value



Elizabeth Sidiropoulos

School of Business and Law, Central Queensland University Melbourne, 108 Lonsdale St., Melbourne, VIC 3000, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 31 January 2013
Received in revised form
22 October 2013
Accepted 22 October 2013
Available online 5 November 2013

Keywords:

Education for sustainability
Tertiary business education
Individual and Social values
Curriculum
Critical pedagogy
Constructivism

ABSTRACT

This paper posits that sustainability is essentially a question of value, a notion that is situated within the context of an individual, organisational and community perspective. Each person or group interprets sustainability through their own value lens, so messages promoting sustainability need to be positioned according to the receptivity (value driver) of the audience. Individual and social values around the world are reviewed both theoretically and empirically and the case is made to integrate sustainability concepts into all tertiary education business programs. The focus of this paper is on Education for Sustainability (EFS) in tertiary business programs for mixed student cohorts. The author outlines a particular pedagogical philosophy and praxis using values to incorporate sustainability concepts into business courses taught to international and domestic students. Practical examples are provided for courses in Economics and Marketing at diploma, undergraduate, and postgraduate levels, during the period 2005–2013. These demonstrate a variety of possibilities to integrate discussion of values for sustainability such as cleaner production and consumption as well as social equity into the curriculum, depending on the teacher's influence on curriculum content and assessment. Educational practices range from incremental integration (such as class discussion of curriculum topics) to course-specific introductory sustainability seminars to deeper integration of sustainability into course curriculum and assessment. Student feedback indicating the impact of these escalating interventions on their views, attitudes and behaviour towards sustainability is also discussed. Finally, the paper concludes with suggested pedagogies for educators to navigate their students learning journey.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Human values are an important driver of their behaviour. Meglino and Ravlin (1998) suggest that “values have been considered as needs, personality types, motivations, goals, utilities, attitudes, interests, and nonexistent mental entities.” Values can be regarded as the principles that dictate what's important to us as individuals (Caprara et al., 2006; Dietz et al., 2005; Hemingway, 2005), families (Moore and Asay, 2008), companies (Alas et al., 2006; Argandona, 2003), society (Gowdy, 1997; Kilbourne et al., 2002), and how we choose to use our resources (Brown, 1984; Wals and Jickling, 2002). We attach value and dedicate resources to whatever creates benefits for ourselves or for other valued persons or things (Stern, 2000) and generally do not value those things that create benefits for non-valued others or the natural environment, least of all if they come at some irrecoverable cost to us. Value

also represents the use of our resources: we define it, create it, measure it, brand it, trade it, accrete it and store it. That is the role of business and the purpose of tertiary business education programs is to provide individuals with knowledge and skills to achieve this efficiently and legally. In doing so, educators can also build graduates capabilities to conduct business ethically and to select options that contribute towards long-term sustainability.

A variety of definitions and measures of sustainability exist (Glavic and Lukman, 2007; Lozano, 2008) and these appear to vary depending on the values of the individual, organisation and community. The terms sustainability and Sustainable Development (SD) are technically different with SD viewed as the journey or process to achieving sustainability (Lozano, 2008). Sustainability interpretations include Triple Bottom Line (TBL) reporting (Elkington, 1997), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the Brundtland Definition of SD (WCED, 1987), The Natural Step (Robért, 2002), Natural Capitalism (Lovins et al., 1999), etc., each with varying degrees of adoption and acceptance. The most popular is the Brundtland Commission definition of SD, namely: “development that meets the

E-mail addresses: l.sidiropoulos1@cqu.edu.au, l.sidiropoulos@mel.cqu.edu.au.

needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p. 43). The ongoing debate on the definition of SD and what constitutes human “needs” in all countries now and in the future, remains a vexed and challenging question that goes to the essence of values and reflects the importance of context in the journey to sustainability. In any particular country, a series of cascading influences creates the context for its unique sustainability journey, depending on its history, culture, traditions, local institutions, infrastructure, resource challenges, national wealth and level of economic development (Wals, 2009).

All graduates require skills in ethical competence and sustainability and education is a crucial component in developing students’ critical capabilities to participate in SD (Barth et al., 2007). Accordingly, in 2002, the UN established the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) for the period 2005–2014 and appointed UNESCO (UNESCO, 2005) to integrate SD into all academic subjects (Reid and Petrocz, 2005), via a holistic inter- and trans-disciplinary approach with a clear focus on values and ethics (UNESCO, 2009 cited in Lambrechts et al., 2013). The approach adopted in this paper draws on Sterling (2010), whereby the term Education for Sustainability (EfS) is used interchangeably with Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and where sustainability is interpreted as “both a process and a broad direction” (Sterling, 2010, p. 512). In the author’s view, sustainability is a value, a space, a skillset and a mindset and EfS is focussed on providing individuals with “knowledge, skills and understanding necessary to make decisions based upon their full environmental, social and economic implications” (DEWHA, 2009, p. 4) and to create sustainable alternatives as individuals, households and organisations. This paper describes the author’s experience in integrating EfS into tertiary business courses during the period 2005–2013.

The remainder of the paper is organised into four sections. Section 2 provides a theoretical foundation of social values and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (individual) to establish the case for integrating EfS into all Higher Education (HE) business programs. In Section 3, there is an overview of both theoretical and practical approaches to conceptions of sustainability and sustainability education. Section 4 provides an outline of the author’s teaching context and methodology of EfS with practical examples of using a values approach to incorporate EfS in the context of tertiary business programs, particularly to international students in Australia. Section 5 presents results from student surveys and discussion of the impact of these EfS pedagogies on students’ knowledge, views and behaviour regarding sustainability as well as some reflections on the author’s EfS praxis. Section 6 provides concluding comments and recommendations for tertiary educators.

2. Theoretical framework – the values context

In Schwartz’s Values Theory, ten motivationally-distinct basic values are derived relating to “three universal requirements of the human condition: needs of individuals as biological organisms, requisites of coordinated social interaction, and survival and welfare needs of groups” (Schwartz, 2007, p. 1). The ten values of self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity, tradition, benevolence, and *universalism* are divided into four opposing dimensions: *self-transcendence (universalism, benevolence) vs. self-enhancement (achievement, power)*, and *openness to change (hedonism, stimulation, self-direction) vs. conservation (tradition, conformity, security)*. Universalism is the value most closely related to sustainability in more urbanised countries. The structure of these basic values was validated in 67 countries around the world, although there is little evidence whether the same value theory applies to more isolated tribal groups with minimal

exposure to urbanisation, mass media, and the market economy (Schwartz, 2007).

Another value framework is Maslow’s (1970) theory of motivation and personality, which yields a hierarchical list of needs for an individual with physiological needs at the bottom and psychological needs at the top of the hierarchy: sustainability is thought to manifest at higher levels of motivation. In Maslow’s theory, these needs are defined as goal states that motivate and drive behaviour and are sequenced in order of priority from lowest to highest, namely: physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness needs, self-esteem, and self-actualisation. Maslow (1954) contends the hierarchy of basic human needs is a cultural universal but notes behaviour is also determined by biological, cultural and situational factors (Maslow, 1943). Udo and Jansson (2009) confirm a global hierarchy of needs among 132 nations similar to Maslow’s hierarchy at the individual level and demonstrate that “nations that are struggling to survive are less concerned with environmental sustainability than advanced and stable nations” (2009, p. 3700).

However, Hofstede (1984) argues that Maslow’s theory was primarily derived from Western thought characterised by individualist cultures, so may not apply to collectivist cultures where “interdependence is valued over the individual” and “esteem and self may never be realised, as the individual is viewed as non-conforming” (Wachter, 2003, p. 68). Culture influences an individual’s behaviour within the family, with peers, friends and the community. Societies with capitalist and competitive systems such as North America, Northern and Western Europe promote the personal self, I, and individual success whilst societies with a collective social orientation in Asia, Africa and South America promote *belonging* (Seeley, 1992 cited in Wachter, 2003; Triandis and Suh, 2002).

Both Schwartz and Maslow value theories are integrated into a common framework and used in the World Values Survey (WVS), an ongoing study conducted every 5 years investigating changing values and their impact on social and political life. Beginning in 1983, the WVS is now combined with the European Values Study and collectively covers 97 societies, representing 90% of the world’s population in industrial and industrialising countries. It provides a comprehensive measurement of all major areas of human concern and is constructed across two dimensions: (1) Traditional vs. Secular-Rational values and (2) Survival vs. Self-expression values, which collectively account for over 70 percent of the cross-national variance in a factor analysis of the ten indicators. The Traditional vs. Secular-Rational dimension reflects the influence of religion and a range of closely related orientations, while the Survival vs. Self-expression dimension is linked to the transition from industrial to post-industrial societies where an increasing share of the population has grown up taking survival for granted and seeks greater expression. In almost all industrial societies, orientations have shifted from Traditional toward Secular-Rational values and from Survival toward Self-expression values, which in turn, give high priority to environmental protection. In such societies, there is a high value on individual freedom and self-expression, as well as activist political orientations, which are all attributes “the political culture literature defines as crucial to democracy” and similar to attributes necessary for a new paradigm in SD (Inglehart, 2009). A convergence of sustainability “values” around the world is also evident in other surveys (Pew Global Attitudes Project and World Bank surveys, 2007, cited in Burke, 2008; Johnson Controls, 2010; Shen and Tatsuyoshi, 2008; Supply and Demand Chain Executive, 2010). However, differences in societal values still remain between countries, shaped by their cultural heritage (Inglehart and Baker, 2000 cited in Kates and Parris, 2003).

Reporting on WVS findings, authors such as Barrett (1996), Redclift (1992) and Inglehart (2009) comment on the challenge of

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1744839>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1744839>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)