Sustainable Development and Responsible Business: The Role of Business Schools

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Introduction

• Presentation addresses the following themes:

• Sustainable Development and Responsible Business
• Role of the Business School
• Evidence of CSR in European business schools
• Niches and mainstream
• Can responsibility be taught
Sustainable Development and Responsible Business

• Assumption that Responsible Business (RB) is a contribution of business to Sustainable Development (SD)
• Caution in claiming more
• Assume Business School responsibility is to contribute to RB and to encourage thinking about its links with SD
• SD presumes wider range of systems and actors
• Raises various questions about the role of the Business School (BS)
Role of the Business School

• **Blame** Enron/ Worldcom leaders & financial institutions leaders graduated from prominent BS
• **But** also from Physics and Engineering departments and wider education systems
• Is Business School experience a formative period relevant to managerial decision-making or is it a ‘ticket to a job or promotion’ or ‘finishing school’?
• Effects of wider education and socialisation on business roles; particularly in-work socialisation?
• Discrete BS role important, but also connection with wider education and socialisation?
Role of the Business School

• Stakeholder analysis
• BS main external stakeholders are students (potential, enrolled, alumni)
• Their core expectation is career development / salary enhancement (or is this an FT ranking driven myth?) nb general UK student expectation of education for sustainability not necessarily reflected in BS enrolment (especially MBA)?
• Other main external stakeholder is presumably employers and world of business more generally attractive?
Role of the Business School

• Very amorphous... but reasonable to assume their key expectation is of graduates and knowledge BSs generate is conducive for business success
• Very broad... profitability/ potentially long-run profitability
• Arguably also *key external stakeholder is society* on whom fruits of business education fall?
• As per role of professionals who have client + wider responsibility?
Role of the Business School

• What can we infer?
• Millennium Poll expectations re RB, nb in hard economic times, growth for jobs / economic nationalism may seem attractive
• Key imperative to align responsibility & sustainability with business success
• But not a call for crass business case for CSR rather case for identifying value in / of responsible business and its contribution to sustainability
Role of the Business School

• Core *internal* stakeholders are staff / colleagues
• Main expectations around educational standards excellence in teaching and research
• How can RB and SD contribute here?
• Teaching and research imperatives and opportunities

• So where are we?
Role of the Business School

• Historically RB not prominent in business education; assumption that main responsibility to shareholders

• 30 years + of business ethics in leading US schools but often rather an add-on?

• **Research growth**

  • Journal status of CSR as per Entrepreneurship
  • Iterative; issue-led; little theory building; re-formulation of concepts (Lockett, Moon & Visser 2006)
Role of the Business School

• Dedicated journals; mainstream journal interest
• Social Issues in Management Division of AoM
• Aspen Institute Beyond Grey Pinstripes rankings
• European Academy of Business in Society
• Conferences
• UNPRME
• Text book / readers / handbook growth represents bridge between research and educational demand
Evidence of CSR in European business schools

- Surveys defined CSR very broadly (incl SD)
- Growth 2003 – 2007
- Relatively similar across Europe
- Relatively lower than USA on MBA higher on MA
- Less market driven than USA; more academically-oriented
- Leading schools appear strongest
Evidence on CSR in European business schools

- Interest in reputation: new rankings (Beyond Grey-Pinstripes; FT MBA); accreditation criteria
- Where CSR education is strongest it is often faculty-led; associated with dedicated research centres; accompanied by student mobilisation
- Maturation of CSR research within BS:
  - Converging focus and replicable studies
  - Distinctive theoretical orientations (e.g. STK, CSR strategies, political CSR)
- Increase in PhDs on CSR
Can responsibility be taught?

- Can responsibility / CSR be taught? Can that which is taught be deployed / adapted by granduates in ten years time? If so, how?
- Do compulsory modules represent evidence of mainstreamed / integrated CSR teaching?
- Challenge<
- Limits of talk & chalk / power point / texts for task of embedding core responsibility awareness / capacity?
- Assume four main components:
Can responsibility be taught?

1. **Concepts and frameworks** for framing and conceptual language e.g. ethics, legitimacy, responsibility, stakeholders, sustainability, strategy

2. **Evidence based teaching** for strategy-building / measures / evaluation e.g. aggregate data, case-studies, practitioner speakers

3. **Techniques** for doing e.g. around accounting, reporting, assuring, stakeholder strategies
What is it that needs to be taught?

4 Alternative pedagogies for developing awareness; feedback loop on concepts, evidence, techniques (e.g. film; drama; facilitated role play; internships) for self-awareness; awareness of dynamics of responsibility in organisational & business contexts

- These are quite apart from content inter- / trans- disciplinary questions
Conclusions

• Evidence of greater awareness of need to address responsibility in business schools
• As per companies, questions of depth of commitment; need for assurance arise
• Goes to questions of the role of the School
• How to achieve lasting impact?
Our work

• Nice range of papers addressing these issues and more:
  • Empirical overview
  • Case studies
  • Integrative analyses
  • Conceptual models and approaches
  • Many address the challenges of SD around inter-/trans-disciplinary education and the embedding of SD in business schools
References


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