

Guest editorial: Best sustainability teaching practices

Background

The drastic changes we are experiencing with COVID-19, war in Ukraine, climate change and biodiversity crisis in our economy and society call for reflection and urgent changes. Taking a closer look, many of the root causes behind pollution, climate collapse and the biodiversity crisis can be traced back to the prevailing economic and management paradigms (Stoudt, 2012) and related business education models, vested with negative assumptions of self-interested human agency (Ghoshal, 2005) and rooted in an extraction-oriented approach to nature and its resources. Solving problems using frameworks and assumptions that caused them only serves to exacerbate these problems, as is visible with respect to the continuously degrading ecological state of the world (Rockström, 2009; IPCC, 2021/2022; IPBES, 2019; hinesDasgupta, 2021). Therefore, beyond education, there is a need for paradigm-breaking research (Kuhn, 1962; Hoffman and Georg, 2018).

The role and business of business schools is to educate future leaders for businesses across sectors. The question is – are business schools, inadvertently, furthering ecological collapse by at best engaging in incremental theorising towards the natural environment, coupled with similarly attuned education? This leads to asking, whether business schools have the courage to take the leadership required in the systemic transformation of societies in addressing grand challenges? As noted above, this shift is not only about teaching, it starts with research, the questions we ask, the assumptions guiding our theories, the ontological and epistemological positioning of our research. It starts with the surrounding research culture as well as individual researchers' selection of research topics in the course of their careers. In searching for solutions, these are needed both with respect to business school and university management, global and local institutions, as well as with respect to individual researchers, at different stages of their careers, the likes of you and I. This concerns all of us.

In light of ABIS' ongoing work and projects such as Mapping of Innovative Pedagogies to Integrate Corporate Responsibility into the Business School Curriculum (Coughlan, 2008) and the ABIS (2016) Education Initiative, which aimed to strengthen the exchange of institutional innovation and drive change in business schools, ABIS convened its 19th Annual Colloquium 2020 "Coming full circle? Sustainability and future-proof global recovery", where sustainability change agents from business, academia and NGOs harnessed the change possibilities and committed to urgent action and innovation.

During the event, business schools scholars and educators presented innovative sustainability teaching practices in three categories: sustainability programmes, creative teaching practices and business cases and industry engagement. Some of these are included in this Special Issue (SI) "Best Sustainability Teaching Practices" at the *Journal of International Education in Business*, which is designed to help the ABIS business-academic network and beyond to gain and access relevant insights to accelerate sustainability uptake, learning capacity and improve the development of sustainable business education. Papers in this SI share the perspective that faced with ecological and potential societal collapse, business schools need to do more. The SI showcases concrete and innovative practices that ABIS members are adopting in their continuous efforts in integrating sustainability in business education.



From pedagogical innovation to transformation

The focus on theoretical rigour has led business schools to become preoccupied with developing their “scientific” credentials. The result is that management education shirked its vocational calling, its commitment to character development and the *art* of practice. Since the 1980s, Mintzberg (2010) has been arguing that business schools’ focus on disciplinary excellence and development of “leadership” skills does not prepare students with the perspectives they need to navigate the world of management practice. As a result, the second Carnegie 2011 Report called for a reintegration of humanities and liberal arts education into business school curricula (Auster and Freeman, 2013), and to re-establish business schools’ connection with practice. There have been a series of proposals around how practice-driven learning may take place. Starkey and Tempest (2009, pp. 578–583) argue for the development of narrative imagination via dramatic rehearsals that engage with past, present and future and are actively engaged with others in seeking new interpretations. The argument is that certain practices such as art and theatre lend themselves to imaginative rehearsals that are necessary to develop “metis”. Metis is an internalised coping capability involving memory without language, which involves a form of unreflective practical knowledge combining intuition, foresight, feint and a sense of opportunism (Chia and Holt, 2009, p. 192). It is towards developing this embodied capacity that pedagogical innovation must be directed, and this also calls for new theorisation.

This raises the question of the extent to which business schools are ready for such pedagogical innovation. While it can occur within a course, ideally such a perspective would cut across the business schools curricula, from under- and postgraduate to include executive education. The implication of the pedagogical solutions and learning interventions offered by the SI papers is a call for a pedagogical paradigm shift in business schools. Examples of such a shift are offered in some of the papers, via the application of systems and integrative thinking, liberal arts and interdisciplinary learning in business school settings. Also, the significance of co-creating curricula with external stakeholders is emphasised. Solving grand challenges requires diversity; hence, broad-scale involvement of stakeholders is needed.

Papers in this SI call for system transformation including top-down led transformation and bottom-up engagement. All the while, the published papers are more focused on the former. This leads to questioning the seemingly prevailing managerial, decision-maker perspective to leadership in contrast to the civic engagement of individuals. In parallel, it is acknowledged that leadership education requires delving into the personal transformation that lies at the heart of leadership development. Therefore, in addition to teaching skills and competences, questioning and reflecting on one’s values and attitudes is necessary in sustainability education. To this end, some of the papers featured in this SI offer an appreciation of leadership development towards sustainability by introducing the notion of sustainability integration intelligence or by making the case for the cultivation of virtues.

Taking a critical stance, business and management research, together with the broader social sciences, have assumed a seemingly one-directional relationship between human beings: business and economic activity on the one hand and nature, biodiversity and the natural environment on the other (Steffen *et al.*, 2015). In the age of the Anthropocene, it has become a normalised business paradigm to exploit nature and natural resources for the benefit of company shareholders, in the search of increasing returns and profit margins and satisfying customer needs. Such exploitation is allowed to continue, as long as natural resources bear a minor, if any price tag. While nature might have a voice, this voice is likely to be heard by humans decades or centuries later, in the form of the collapse of local and

global natural ecosystems. Acts of exploiting nature bear systemic effects, the consequences of which are noticeable on a long-time horizon (Foster, 2009).

In parallel, a paradigm shift is needed with respect to technology and human resource management. Fuelled by technological development and global competition for talent and efficiency, the speed of business activity and work is experienced as having increased in recent decades. Ironically, economic and technological paradigms appear to have trapped contemporary professionals into a cycle of activity, the performance requirements and speed of which are spiralling. IT systems have streamlined operations across businesses, yet they have also led to mundane daily tasks being delegated to professionals across hierarchy, leading to the need to multitask between minor tasks and major demands requiring attention. Professionals, across sectors, lament increasing workloads. In parallel, the rise and addictive characteristic of social media appears to have trapped many into a state of non-attention, i.e. inability to pay attention (Hari, 2022), as one needs to be on many platforms simultaneously, reacting to comments and likes, while highlighting one's successes. Such is the speedy and hectic environment, wherein contemporary professionals are expected to thrive. This has led to the search for methods for super-efficiency as visible in the spread of time and mind management handbooks (Burchard, 2017). Such a lifestyle has been coined by critical scholarship as neurotic citizenship (Isin, 2004; Whitehead *et al.*, 2017).

One needs to recognise the human resource and performance management implications for business schools and the broader global institutional and competitive environment they operate in. Choices made with respect to job openings, recruitment, performance expectations, the industrialised publication culture, well-being management and departmental atmospheres are conducive to trail-blazing research while enabling well-being. In contrast to the armchair sociologists of the mid-20th century, are junior researchers and faculty provided the incentive, opportunity, time to think, to ask the right questions? Is senior faculty ready to shift research foci to address societal challenges? Is university management ready to support such transitions, if not transformations? Who is taking leadership?

Summary of the papers appearing in the special issue

This SI offers examples of innovative teaching practice at course-, program- and curriculum levels. In terms of geographical reach, the papers offer nearly global coverage, as the countries represented by the papers' authors cover European countries including Belgium and Germany, the USA as well as African countries via the example of South Africa. While examples from Asian and Middle Eastern countries are missing, the SI's papers do provide signs that, across the globe's business schools, pedagogical innovation is taking place.

In terms of addressing global sustainability challenges, papers advocate for innovative teaching approaches and methods such as experiential learning, enquiry- and problem-based learning, project-based learning (PjBL), service-based learning and combining case study methods with debating. The authors consider that traditional, one-directional teaching methods do not provide the leverage and understanding needed to address sustainability challenges. Cognitive skills and subject-matter knowledge are extremely valuable, yet there are other skills to be nurtured as well. There is a need for participative, collaborative and more entrepreneurial learning, reflecting what is needed in future business practice and what is demanded from younger generations. For example, very early on, Hines *et al.* (1987) called for the development of action skills to further sustainability in business organisations. Shephard and Furnari (2012) stressed the importance of education for sustainability, challenging students to develop skills that draw on their own fields of

speciality to make sustainability a real possibility in everyday business practice. In advocating for the development of “reflective executives”, De Dea Roglio and Light (2009) called for: connective, critical and personal thinking.

The paper by Kundu and Perwez, titled “ISM-MICMAC approach for analysis of Project-based Learning barriers”, identifies and models the barriers towards implementing PjBL in higher educational institutions. PjBL is a systematic teaching approach to educate students to work on complex tasks. Taking a closer look, it is based on activity-, inquiry-, place- and problem-based learning as well as self-directed learning. Prior research offers little knowledge as regards how its application in universities can be hindered. Based on quantitative modelling, the paper presents an integrated model and a hierarchy of the institutional barriers towards PjBL. Given that the main identified barrier is top management support, the authors call for universities to consider their priorities.

Magro *et al.*'s paper titled “Integrating Liberal Education, Business, and High-Impact Practices – the Case of George Mason University’s School of Business” offers a novel education approach to address sustainability challenges in leadership education. The approach is based on liberal arts education combined with high-impact practices, thereby offering an integrative, interdisciplinary approach to sustainability education. High-impact practices such as first-year seminars, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, collaborative assignments, undergraduate research, community-based learning, internships, capstone courses and projects and diversity and global learning were adopted. Going forward, the authors advocate for mixing liberal arts and business education models as well as integrative, interdisciplinary learning as a means of developing sustainable leaders for the present and future.

The paper written by Randles *et al.* titled “Applying Enquiry and Problem Based Learning to Mission-oriented Innovation Policy: From Policy to Pedagogy to Teaching and Learning Practice” focuses on means of educating professionals to participate in mission-oriented innovation policy (MIP). In spite of the topical use of MIP to address sustainability challenges, as for example in the European Union, there is little research or practice-based knowledge as regards educating professionals to work with and towards MIPs. In this paper, this gap in understanding is addressed via the lens of enquiry and problem-based learning (EPBL). The findings highlight the suitability of EPBL in addressing MIP, while pointing to the need to adjust the method to local context, as there is no “one size fits all”. Going forward, the authors emphasise active co-engagement between external stakeholders and business schools in co-creating locally adapted programmes that offer connecting local and international sustainability agendas.

Beyne *et al.*'s paper titled “The three enablers of sustainability intelligence” adopts an individual-level perspective toward sustainability education. The authors introduce the concept of sustainability integration intelligence, derived from prior research on global leadership mindsets, sustainability mindsets and sustainability intelligence. More specifically, sustainability integration refers to knowledge of the what and how of sustainable development, while intelligence refers to the ability to learn to think systemically about the why of sustainable development, our worldview, values and beliefs. The concept encapsulates a tripartite perspective encompassing being, doing and thinking dimensions, which serves to develop *metis*. Sustainability integration intelligence can be developed via education on self-awareness, global perspective and societal consciousness. In the paper’s second part, the authors move onto describing a Global Leadership Skills (GLS) program that was developed and implemented for Master’s students at Antwerp Management School in Belgium as a practical means of enhancing participants’ sustainability integration intelligence through an experiential learning approach. The

authors measure the impact of educating program participants reporting on its results. In closing, the authors call for leadership education to embrace applications of sustainability integration intelligence, such as the GLS program, which can provide the starting point in participants' sustainable transformation processes individually and professionally.

The paper by Pedersen *et al.* titled "Diffusing Corporate Sustainability Knowledge with Online Education: Experiences from a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on Sustainable Fashion" delves into the opportunities and challenges offered via the design and implementation of a mass online teaching in sustainability education. Sector-wise, the paper is focused on sustainable fashion. While the course was developed in Northern Europe, over half of its participants were from the USA and India. The qualitative and quantitative course data shows how an online course platform offers a tool to diffuse sustainability knowledge to learners beyond those from traditional university and business school settings. Such online approaches are particularly useful during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors suggest the development and use of innovative tools as a means of educating broader audiences beyond universities and business schools. Beyond teaching skills and knowledge, the authors further call for curricula to teach values and attitudes.

Arnold's paper titled "Sustainability service learning in economics" adopts a service learning approach towards education on sustainable development. Service learning builds on PjBL by focusing on socially relevant problems for the common good. In a participative ethos, learning occurs in the field and via reflection. The authors argue that a service learning approach bears potential in educating on sustainability issues. Empirically, the paper is set in a cross-university teaching-based project in the field of industrial engineering and economics, in collaboration with two German universities. The empirical focus of the projects was on sustainable cities. Based on qualitative and quantitative feedback from the course, the authors identify success factors and challenges in the use of a service-learning approach. In terms of benefits, participants acquired competences such as autonomy, interaction skills and technology-based know-how.

The paper written by Davids *et al.* titled "Enlarging sustainability learning through integrative thinking with a focus on cultivating virtues" focuses on the personal transformation needed to equip managers to deal with sustainability challenges. At its core, the authors argue that there is a need for new ways for managers to tap into themselves and the ongoing present moment, here offered via the lens of virtues. The paper identifies such virtues as self-realisation, social imaginary, everydayness, relationality, reflexivity and criticality. In so doing, the authors call for an approach that enables questioning and appreciating sustainability as it is being transformed, rather than something that is implemented as such. Empirically, the paper is set at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business's Executive Masters of Business Administration (EMBA) degree. The paper reports the experience and feedback from a Business Model Innovation course adopting an integrative thinking approach combined with the cultivation of virtues. Going forward, the authors call for innovative, context-dependent leadership education on sustainability and transformative education.

Given the role of economic actors *vis-à-vis* sustainability challenges such as pollution and resource extraction, Georgallis and Bruijn's paper titled "Sustainability teaching using case-based debates" calls for business schools to more proactively develop sustainability-related curricula. Little is still known on how to effectively teach sustainability. It deserves recognition that sustainability challenges, by definition, escape traditional business school structures and teaching methods. This article presents one approach to incorporating the complexity of sustainability issues into the classroom: case-based debates. This hybrid

approach combines the case-based teaching method with an in-class debating approach. Beyond exposing students to the complexity of sustainability issues, such an approach enables students to reflect and argue amid such challenges. While describing the approach, the article also discusses its benefits and limitations. The article offers a practical tool for other educators to use and further develop in teaching sustainability in business school settings.

We believe that the papers collected in this volume offer a meaningful response to the variety of calls for pedagogical approaches that integrate systems thinking, practice-based

Author	Paper title	Country setting	Level and unit of analysis	Educational approach
Goutam Kundu, Syed Perwez	ISM-MICMAC approach for analysis of project-based learning barriers	India	Business school organisational focus	Project-based learning
Anne Magro, Lisa Gring-Pemle, Charish Bishop	Integrating Liberal Education, Business, and High-Impact Practices	USA	Business school curriculum development	Combining liberal arts and business education via interdisciplinary approach
Sally Randles, Paul Dewick, Eleanor Hannan, Dawn Theresa Nicholson, Martijn Rietbergen, Christopher Taylor, Valeria Vargas, Helen Wadham, Lauren Withycombe Keeler	Applying Enquiry and Problem Based Learning (EPBL) to Sustainability Challenges: From Policy to Pedagogy to Teaching and Learning Practice	UK	Undergraduate and post-graduate curriculum development in co-creation with stakeholders	Combining enquiry and problem-based learning to address mission-oriented innovation policy
Jan Beyne, Lars Moratis, Ans De Vos	The three enablers of sustainability intelligence	Belgium	Leadership education in context of global leadership skills program	Experiential learning
Esben Rahbek Pedersen, Kirsti Reitan Andersen, Diaz Schiavon, Ana Lucia	Diffusing Corporate Sustainability Research with Online Education: Experiences from a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on Sustainable Fashion	Denmark	Online global massive MOOC-course	Online teaching via MOOC
Marlen Gabriele Arnold	Sustainability service learning in economics	Germany	Course development in a two-university joint course setting	Service-based learning
Lester Davids, Kosheek Sewchurran, Camille Meyer, Jennifer McDonogh	Enlarging sustainability learning through integrative thinking with a focus on cultivating virtues	South Africa	Leadership education in the context of an EMBA degree course	Integrative thinking coupled with virtues-based education
Panikos Georgallias, Kayleigh Bruijn	Sustainability teaching using case-based debates	Netherlands	Class focus	Case studies combined with debating method

Table 1

learning and the development of embodied wisdom. We hope that it will serve to inspire further pedagogical innovation and experimentation that would make meeting the Sustainable Development Goals ever more realistic (Table 1).

Guest editorial

Ivo Matser

Academy of Business in Society, Bruxelles, Belgium

Satu Teerikangas

Turku School of Economics, University of Turku, Turku, Finland, and

Mollie Painter

*Department of Management, Nottingham Trent University – City Campus,
Nottingham, UK*

7

References

- ABIS (2016), "Education initiative report: Sustainable, responsible and ethical business education: an analysis of full programmes in the ABIS network", available at: www.abis-global.org/content/documents/2016
- Auster, E. and Freeman, E. (2013), "Values and poetic organizations: beyond value fit toward values through conversation", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 113 No. 1, pp. 39-49.
- Burchard, B. (2017), *High Performance Habits – How Extraordinary People Become That Way*, Hay House, London.
- Chia, R. and Holt, R. (2009), *Strategy without Design. The Silent Efficacy of Indirect Action*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Coughlan, S. *et al.* (2008), "Mapping of innovative pedagogies to integrate corporate responsibility into the business school curriculum. EABIS curriculum development project", *European Academy of Business in Society*, pp. 2-79.
- De Dea Roglio, K. and Light, G. (2009), "Executive MBA programs, p. The development of the reflective executive", *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, Vol. 8 No. 2, pp. 156-173.
- Foster, J.B. (2009), *Ecological Revolution – Making Peace with the Planet*, Monthly Review Press, New York, NY.
- Ghoshal, S. (2005), "Bad management theories are destroying good management practices", *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 75-91.
- Hari, J. (2022), *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention*, Penguin Random House, New York, NY.
- Hines, J.M., Hungerford, H.R. and Tomera, A.N. (1987), "Analysis and synthesis of research on responsible pro-environmental behaviour: a meta-analysis", *The Journal of Environmental Education*, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp. 1-8.
- hinesDasgupta (2021), *The Economics of Biodiversity. The Dasgupta Review*, HM Treasury, London.
- Hoffman, A.J. and Georg, S. (2018), "Business and the natural environment", *A Research Overview*, Routledge, Oxford.
- Intergovernmental Panel's on Climate Change (IPCC) (2021/2022), "Sixth assessment report".
- IPBES (2019), Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.
- Isin, E. (2004), "Neurotic citizen", *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 217-235.
- Kuhn, T.S. (1962), *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Mintzberg, H. (2010), *Managers Not MBAs. A Hard Look at the Soft Practice of Managing and Management Development*, Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco, CA.

Rockström, J., Steffen, W., Noone, K., Persson, Å., Chapin, F.S., Lambin, E.F., Lenton, T.M., Scheffer, M., Folke, C., Schellnhuber, H.J. and Nykvist, B. (2009), "A safe operating space for humanity", *Nature*, Vol. 461 No. 7263, pp. 472-475.

Shephard, K. and Furnari, M. (2012), "Exploring what university teachers think about education for sustainability", *Studies in Higher Education – Education*, Vol. 38 No. 10, pp. 1-14, doi: [10.1080/03075079.2011.644784](https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.644784).

Starkey, K. and Tempest, S. (2009), "The winter of our discontent: the design challenge for business schools", *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, Vol. 8 No. 4, pp. 576-586.

Steffen, W., Broadgate, W., Deutsch, L., Gaffney, O. and Ludwig, C. (2015), "The trajectory of the Anthropocene: the great acceleration", *The Anthropocene Review*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 81-98.

Stoudt, L. (2012), *The Problem of Corporate Purpose*, Brookings Institution, Washington, DC.

Whitehead, M., Jones, R., Lilley, R., Pykett, J. and Howell, R. (2017), *Neoliberalism: Behavioural Government in the Twenty-First Century*, Routledge, London.