From Good to Great: Advancing ways of understanding, engaging and enhancing students learning and involvement of CSR

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SUMMARY:

When individuals enjoy and have a desire to learn the uptake of knowledge is enhanced and the acquired knowledge is retained for longer periods. Therefore, to ensure sustainability as a relevant and worthwhile field of management study the engagement of students is an important aspect. This will secure the long-term success of corporate social responsible (CSR) and sustainability studies, preventing it from becoming another management fad. This workshop aims at engaging academics to increase understanding of how the teaching of CSR at the University level can be improved for students to maintain sustainable management approaches into the future.

INTRODUCTION

This workshop is built around the findings of a survey undertaken in the UK and Australia that investigates corporate social responsibility (CSR) within University education. Focusing on the content and methods of delivery to engage stakeholders has relevance in content to both students and employees. Ongoing global disasters such as BP's oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico gives cause to gain insights into the engagement and effectiveness of CSR education in business faculties. The survey was undertaken to gain greater understanding into the perceptions of those involved in the development of CSR as a relevant field of study within university qualifications. By developing such understanding it is possible to achieve further support for the area and of equal importance contribute to CSR's future development.

WHY THE WORKSHOP?

This workshop is to explore a deeper understanding in the teaching and education of CSR with the aim of improving students learning and engagement in this topical field of management studies. For many involved in CSR, this area is as much a passion as it is a field of study. The development of research is important to the extension of understanding. This understanding grows into knowledge through its greater application and disseminations through not just words but also actions. It can be seen in Fromm's (1992) terms of 'being an art'. Art is sometimes the tangible physical form and when given to the conceptual frameworks, brings life to what could remain an intangible theory. For example, if one studies specialist medicine and achieves 100% for all exams, one is not necessarily a skilful doctor but possibly skilled at exams. It is when one can takes the information and through practice creates wellness that one moves from doctor to specialist physician. This was exemplified in a recent radio interview with a leading neurosurgeon who failed the study of surgery twice. On discovering his love of neurosurgery, found the passion to gain the knowledge to undertake what has become his art that of mending the injured nervous system.

Those working in the area of CSR often see the relevance of taking the study and creating the art. As for those involved, often a belief and value system looks for short-term outcomes, in contrast to an outcome that evolves into everyday business practice. For this longer-term focus to be successful, a transformational approach is needed for others to understand and engage. This requires a map, a picture, a connection and an adopted reason, value or belief that these are at one with the 'art or being' concepts as put by Fromm (1992) rather than just having knowledge. Having gained the initial information in the survey, this workshop through its participants will start to paint the pictures that evolve the information into meaning. This meaning can then be used to suggest methods to move CSR forward in a positive way. To this end the material will be looked at in the following broad areas of:

1. What we teach and how we teach it;
2. Engaging students through creative and innovative ways of teaching CSR;
3. Engaging and creating links with business and industry to support the growth and enhancement of CSR education;
4. Do Universities, particularly Business Schools, practice what they preach?
5. CSR and sustainable business practices – a fad or a management practice for the future.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL DRIVERS OF THE WORKSHOP

If you introduce the topic of CSR at a social or business gathering, it is bound to cause passionate responses from a spectrum of believers to non-believers. The overwhelming evidence of CSR as a topical issue develops momentum as people gain knowledge, consider options and deepen their arguments within this rapidly developing subject (Blowfield and Murray, 2008). In the business environment socially responsible actions have been making headway since Carson's (1962) disclosure of the detrimental effects of chemicals such as DDT in the 1960s. Over the ensuing decades the connection of chemical use to corporate activities has generated widespread concern with the subsequent degradation to many life forms caused by events such as Bhopal, Chernobyl and Exxon Valdez (Blowfield and Murray, 2008, Hartel and Pearman, 2010, Lovelock, 2006). More recently, in 2010, BP's oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico headlined world news for months. In the case of BP, they had recognised the need to re-strategise their business to doing things differently and committed $8 to $10 billion dollars in investment into alternative energies (Senge et al., 2008). Yet perhaps this was too little and too late.

The unprecedented disaster of BP's Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico caused widespread damage affecting the environment, the economy, and society along with causing severe reputational damage. Despite their efforts to re-strategise, this was not the first time BP had been involved in 'accidents' and in the situation of the 2010 oil spill it was notwithstanding the organisation's espousing codes based on principles, ethics and strategies. These espoused values and beliefs were seemingly "lost in translation between words and actions" (Jennings, 2010). BP is not alone in the corporate world where codes of ethics are documented, publicised and championed, however never embedded (Brenkert, 2010). For example Enron, also held an extensive written code of ethics and principles yet was responsible for one of the worst accounting frauds in United States corporate history (Wankel, 2010, Norman and MacDonald, 2004). This underlines the need for imbedded learning of CSR to go beyond the espoused "lip service of social responsibility" by implementing actionable outcomes (Norman and MacDonald, 2004).

In the perfect world or a parallel universe, these disasters may have been reduced with alternative approaches. Individuals adopting a holistic culture or the 'art of being', with an understanding of best practices in societal, economical and environmental sustainability could provide these alternatives. As organisations and society identify CSR actions and behaviours as a principle of good business practice the pressure is on secondary education to provide students with these core competencies (Wankel, 2010, Raufflet, 2009).

Supporting this premise, a study of the *Financial Times* top 50 Global Business School programs disclosed most academic streams covered CSR, ethics or sustainability with one third of these schools demanding all three subjects to be included in the curriculum (Christensen et al., 2007). This study further reported evidence of CSR adoption in secondary education with higher enrollments in these subjects along with a five fold increase in ethics courses since 1988 (Christensen et al., 2007). Another study on higher education of CSR in Europe (Matten and Moon, 2004) showed support by practitioners and industry for CSR to be mainstreamed into curricullums, however at that point in time low levels of scholarship were evident.

Sustainability issues will continue to confont businesses whilst becoming more complex and challenging (Russell and McIntosh, 2011). Therefore the need to produce business students who are indoctrined in CSR is important. Studies of CSR in higher education further clarify the need to go beyond just speaking the language of sustainability and move to imbedding CSR through learning and engagement. Argyris (2004, 1982, 1977, 1991) and Nielsen (2009) advocate a participatory and practical approach to engage in the education of CSR actions and behaviours. From this arguement, Argyris (1997, 1977) developed the practical and interactional approach of double loop learning to decrease defensive routines that individuals and organisations often display when their status quo is being challenged. Double loop learning is the reflection, critique and questioning that develops more effective performance in contrast to single loop learning when self defeating acts are displayed (Argyris, 1997, Argyris, 1977, Gapp and Fisher, 2006).

Consider an example of single loop learning when high achieving students receive poor results in mid semester assessments and the University reacts by changing the course convenor. If the course continues on the same path but the convenor was not at fault, the problem remains despite the intervention, which equates to single loop learning (Ambrosini et al., 2009). In contrast, if that same University applied double loop learning and reflected on the poor results, by asking the students and course convenor for their input to discover the fundamental state of the course needed modifications leading to understanding, improvement and change. As a consequence, this reflection achieves improvements in the students overall learning and the course convenor's teaching. Given the original espoused belief that students deserve and should receive a sound education, the course is then transformed from the impact of actually matching beliefs with actions, behaviours and outcomes.

Returning to the perfect world, where management students apply their understanding and engagement of core competenicies in CSR leading to increased sustainability efforts. These students go into the business world prepared to uphold the CSR management approach. Within BP or any other organisation they would be prepared with skills and knowledge to develop alternatives and convince the organisation do things differently. This results in the increased likelihood of sustainability becoming a reality.

Although, the studies discussed earlier reported high levels of participation in CSR courses, the examples of corporate disasters continues. This reinforces the need for commitment, with the argument to create a more sustainable future undeniable (Flannery and Page, 2009, McDonough and Braungart, 2002). As evidenced with the example of BP it is clear that the current teaching modes are not creating the move forward to sustainable business practices. Business students who have a long-term allegiance to CSR underpinned by the philosophies of double loop learning gained in their higher education will fulfill the demand of industry that necessitates individuals with key capabilities in sustainable management approaches. This workshop will explore the insights and knowledge of academics at the forefront of management education to promote undertanding of student engagement in CSR practices.

STRUCTURE OF THE WORKSHOP
1. Introduction and background to the workshop (10 minutes)
2. Group formation (5 minutes)
3. Group activity (40 minutes)
4. Presenting back to the wider group (25 minutes)
5. Summary and moving forward (10 minutes)

(Introduction, feedback, and summary session to be video recorded and made available to participants)

Length:
One hour thirty minutes

Requirements:
Room where participants can breakout into small groups and reconvene to discuss findings.

Introduction:
Opening of the workshop will include an overview of the proceedings, methodology to be applied by the workshop groups and the background to the research to date along with an introduction to the facilitators of the group.

Group formation:
Formation into groups will be of a voluntary nature with facilitator's assistance allowing for a short time for group members to introduce themselves to one another.

Group activity:
Groups will be given several questions based on the points below, to discuss, reflect and share from their own teaching and student experiences.
1. What we teach and how we teach it;
2. Engaging student through creative and innovative ways of teaching CSR;
3. Engaging and creating links with business and industry to support the growth and enhancement of CSR education;
4. Do University particularly Business Schools practice what they preach and the perceived impact on the present and future of the CSR and sustainable practice and education.

Presenting back to the wider group:
This will be done in informally with guidance allowing time for interaction and comments from the workshop participants.

Summary and moving forward:
During this time email addresses will be sought for those who would like a summary of the workshop. The possibilities of taking this workshop further will be discussed with the potential for feedback through an electronic mode such as Wikispace.

Workshop outcomes:
At the end of the session those involved with have been able use the findings to elaborate the survey outcomes and further develop the teaching and educational content with their own teaching environments. Results will be video recorded and breakout summaries provided to all that attended the workshop.

DRIVERS OF THE WORKSHOP

Dr Rod Gapp will lead the workshop. Facilitating with Dr Gapp will be Heather Stewart, Dr Simon Brooks, Dr Ron Fisher and Phillip Woods. This team combines many years of experience covering management disciplines including CSR, organisational studies, performance management, leadership, supply chain management and education.

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