

Chapter 56

Sustainable Development and Consciousness Development: Realizing a Sustainable World Through Management Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses how management education can propel the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by including tools for consciousness development within degree programs. Consciousness is the capacity to comprehend and care about the wholeness of life in ourselves, our society, and the natural world. Recent studies indicate that how individuals perceive challenges, formulate solutions, and collaborate with others is determined by their development of consciousness – that individuals functioning at higher levels of development are more likely to demonstrate sustainable leadership than those at lower states. To realize a sustainable world, universities must provide the necessary tools for students to transcend conventional thinking and experience higher states of consciousness. When the technologies of consciousness are included in management education, the world will realize a global shift towards a new sustainable paradigm.

INTRODUCTION

Today's sustainability challenges are a mix of ecological, political, economic and social dynamics which demand new strategies in management education that can enable students to shift from the linear and fragmented nature of traditional thinking towards a holistic, systems perspective (Senge et al., 2008). Several scholars have highlighted the importance of management education in facilitating this shift towards sustainability, yet much is left to be desired in terms of how existing institutions prepare students

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to resolve such challenges (Arac et al., 2013; Kassel & Rimanoczy, 2018). Transforming the existing paradigm into a new sustainability mindset requires management education to focus on the development of consciousness. Higher levels of consciousness will enable students to construct a wider and more unified lens from which to view the challenges of humanity, society and the environment, and create innovations that can lead us into a sustainable future (Heaton & Heaton, 2018; Tsao & Laszlo, 2019).

This chapter reflects on the challenges and opportunities for management education in the context of sustainable development. Its central thesis is that to move humanity into a sustainable future, management education must provide tools for students to reach higher states of consciousness. The chapter begins with a reflection on the crisis of climate change and the role that higher education can play in facilitating a shift towards sustainable development. Next it discusses the vision of the United Nations Principles of Responsible Management Education (UNPRME) towards shaping sustainable programs in institutions of higher learning. It examines how mental models or mindsets limit progress towards sustainability and explores how consciousness development can enable individuals to transcend the existing mental models that limit education for sustainable development. The chapter then provides an explanation of higher states of consciousness and discusses the relationship between higher states of consciousness and sustainable innovation. It concludes by discussing tools that management education can incorporate from the Consciousness Based Education¹ model to facilitate sustainability.

THE ON-GOING GLOBAL CHALLENGE

In an effort to eliminate existential challenges and create a sustainable world for future generations, 195 countries worldwide signed the 2015 Paris Agreement, the most inclusive global agreement to date. Also referred to as the 2030 agenda, the Paris Agreement calls for a world void of poverty, inequality, violence and global warming where all human beings are able to fulfill their full potential in dignity, realize human rights and equality, and live in peaceful, just and inclusive societies. However according to the Human Development Report (United Nations, 2016), the world still faces many complex challenges. Some are global (gender inequality), some are local (natural disasters), some are deepening (inequalities), and some emerging (violent extremism). Most are urgent and mutually reinforcing. Thus the Director General of UNESCO advocated for education that prepares students for the challenge of sustainable development: “Education for Sustainable Development is a life-wide and lifelong endeavor which challenges individuals, institutions and societies to view tomorrow as a day that belongs to all of us, or it will not belong to anyone” (Koichiro Matsuura, 2005, quoted in Huisingsh, 2007, p. 3). The United Nations Principles of Responsible Management Education (UNPRME), contends that for sustainable development to become the prevailing paradigm, management education should play an active role (PRME, 2019a). Similarly, Rayment and Smith (2013), argue that it is important for universities to recognize the important role they play in shaping the future managers of the global society. Over the last decade Bachelor of Business degrees have consistently accounted for the largest number of degrees awarded in the United States (see Figure 1 in the Appendix). This positions management education as one of the most prominent mediums for influencing the ideas and strategies of those who will lead tomorrow’s businesses, industries and by extension the global economy. Consequently, it is necessary for Management Education to utilize the best methods for developing sustainable leaders.

The UNPRME was launched in 2007 as a guiding framework for universities to develop the future leaders of a new sustainable world. The backdrop of these principles is the UN Global Compact initiative

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