Sustainable Development and Business Strategies: An International Higher Education Experience

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This paper reports on development and facilitation of a unit (course) on 'Sustainable development and Business Strategies' (SDBS). SDBS was developed in Australia for delivery to international students originated from different countries gathered in Europe. SDBS allowed students to cultivate a new perspective towards change, outlining a new strategy through innovation in an ever changing, uncertain and contemporary 'risk society' (Beck, 2002). The topic of sustainable development and business strategies has gained momentum at governments, international organizations, business and higher education levels. To understand the multidisciplinary nature of this vast topic, which, in part, touched on ethical issues, sustainability and strategic development in contemporary business; SDBS was designed to allow students the engagement in class discussions, arguments and debates, sharing their unique international experiences, throughout which transformation and modification in their mindsets was witnessed. This was measured through class discussions and assessments that were designed in consultation with the European partners. This paper starts with literature review on the concepts under study, an insight into SDBS's development and concludes with analysis of some of the quantitative and qualitative data collected from 51 students over two periods. This is coupled with facilitator's personal reflection. Though this paper has its limitations, yet it is a small step forward towards developing an international perspective for teaching these rather importance issues to business and management students.

Introduction

Daly (1990) established a comparison between two terms 'sustainable development' and 'sustainable growth' which were considered vague. He adopted the dictionary distinction between 'growth' and 'development'. To grow means 'to increase naturally in size by the addition of material through assimilation or accretion'. To develop means 'to expand or realize the potentialities of; bring gradually to a fuller, greater, or better state' (Daly, 1990 p. 1). In short, growth is quantitative increase in physical scale, while development is qualitative improvement or unfolding of potentialities. Thus, an economy can grow without developing, or develop without growing, or do both or neither. Since the human economy is a subsystem of a finite global ecosystem which does not grow, even though it does develop, it is clear that growth of the economy cannot be sustainable over long periods of time. Concluding, Daly contended that the term 'sustainable development' is much more apt, with Ekins (1993) advocating a strategy for sustainability that principally involves differentiating between North and South of the globe and forging new economic relations between them.

Cannon and Sheth (1994) argued that criticism of relevance and process of business school education and research continues to mount, simultaneously, academics and practitioners have become increasingly dissatisfied with traditional theories and practice. Thus, an understanding of the importance of more holistic models and theories that would expand to include relationships between businesses and their stakeholders would be more appropriate, especially in this time that is considered uncertain ambiguous and risky as in 'risk society' as famously identified by (Beck, 1992). An understanding of how to transform contemporary businesses to be more sustainable, not only by scholars, academics and theoreticians but by practitioners, is deemed essential. Indeed, such understanding might assist in the transformation of individuals to develop and ultimately modify their mindsets, transforming these mindsets into ethical. This understanding would generate higher impact if it is planted within higher education curriculum, rather than postponing such understanding to the time those students have become corporate leaders and employees. In this respect, Nijhof and Rietdijk (1999) contended that increasingly and progressively companies are now taking an active interest in the encouragement of ethical behaviour and discouragement of unethical behaviour among their employees including the enhancement of their understanding of the need to being more ethical and more sustainable to face the uncertainties of this world.

Undeniably, having an ethical behaviour in an organization or a company would simply mean being able to look on how to sustain this business for the long run through the development and implementation of sustainable development strategy. Sneddon, Howarth and Norgaard (2006) argue that the concept and practice of sustainable development as guiding institutional principle, as concrete policy goal, and as focus of political struggle–remains salient in confronting the multiple challenges of this new global order. Werhane (2008) concludes that in today's expanding global economy, there is a need to revisit individuals' mindsets to incorporate what will be new kinds of free enterprise that are at the centre of change in the corporate world. With regards to change, Werhane (2008)

argues that in a global world where companies are exploring as well as exploiting new markets, such globalization requires new ways of thinking, which she describes as systems thinking. Werhane contends that the use of moral imagination helps individuals. Imagination has also been regarded by Bruch and Ghoshal (2004) as one of the two keys that will assist in transforming businesses into becoming more immersed in values, system thinking and moral imagination bringing change that might assist in the sustainability of the limited sources of the planet earth. Neu (2008) concludes that certain types of business and management education are demanded; however, it is education that is practical, concrete, delivered at the worksite, and scheduled around the constraints of production. While changes have been witnessed in higher education towards the increased emphasis on internships, critical thinking and business ethics that might lead to transformation into becoming more sustainable (e.g. Brady, 1999; Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2004; Cowton & Cummins, 2003); the role of educational institutions in fostering sustainable development, through a framework based on the integration of the economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Vargas, 2000), moral imagination and beyond materialism (e.g. Hood, 2006) sustainability (e.g. Stubbs & Cocklin, 2007), values and capitalism (Cavanagh, 2010), yet there continues to be a need for further enhancement of these efforts and on global basis to really witness a change and transformation in the minds of students that would have its effect extended to reach the corporate world locally and globally.

Literature Review
Sustainability, ethics and global business
Bradbury (2003) argues that sustainability issues are not just 'out there' in the external environment. Discussing the issue of the incorporation of sustainability in curriculum Bradbury states students benefit from questioning what is it that sustains their own lives, the lives of those they care about, and the organizations in which they work. If encouraged to do this, students become better systems thinkers as they link their external and internal worlds, thus increasing their knowledge and appreciation of their surroundings, reflecting and applying their critical thinking, ethical lens, and moral imagination. Such an exercise would allow them to develop strategies that will assist in enhancing the sustainability of their businesses.

Teaching sustainable business development and strategies would be incomplete if such curriculum did not include a reference to ethics and ethical theories, and their application to business. White and Taft (2004) argue that whether teaching organizational behavior, business and society, business ethics, human resources management, or general management, educating management and for that matter business students involves providing frameworks to approach ethical issues and dilemmas. White and Taft provide a summary of ethical theories which they divide in two main categories teleological (Consequentialist) which includes utilitarianism, egoism, and care, and deontological (categorical imperative or non-consequentialist); whereas rights, justice (distributive, retributive, compensatory), truth-telling, virtue and ethics of care, all are deontological forms of ethical reasoning. These would be considered the western approaches, yet there are the eastern approaches such as Confucianism and Buddhism, with the strong return of the Native American ethical perspectives (Newton, 2003; White & Taft, 2004). These seem to be very comprehensive, yet worth to be re-introduced to our global and contemporary society. This Native American perspective, for example, covers issues such as moral virtues: generosity, kindness, caring, compassion, understanding, restraint, honesty, mindfulness, non-harming, equanimity, forgiveness, concern for continuity of relationships and strength of community, preference for harmony over truth, peace over justice, and justice through cooperation, connection and interdependence with all living things; consequences to self, others, and community. (White & Taft, 2004 p., 471).

Nonetheless, with the global nature of the contemporary business world, and as highlighted by White and Taft (2004) and Fisher and Lovell (2009) there is a need for more guidelines. These guidelines were always in the form of voluntary codes, such as the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, The Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES) principles, The Caux Round Table, known as the CAUX principles, the global Sullivan Principles, amongst others including the corporate codes of ethics. Yet, and despite all these theories, guidelines and principles, we still witness transgressions by businesses that in many instance ill-treat and exploit the resources that are at hand, yet borrowed from the future generations.

In this regard, Jones, Caton, DeWitt, Stubbs, and Conner (2007) posit that sustainability has become a key issue for organizations in the twenty-first century as they increasingly acknowledge that their policies and practices have social and/or environmental consequences. Accordingly, many companies are implementing elements of sustainability into their business practices. In step with this trend is the increasing recognition that sustainability-related subjects need to be included in the curricula of business courses, particularly at the postgraduate level.

Reflection and critical reflective thinking

Mahin (1998) argues that business communication uses causal analysis, classification, process analysis, evaluation - as other forms of composition and that the very act of communicating in the social context of a business culture implies an ethical basis, a respect for persons. More recently, business students were urged to think in a critical and reflective manner. Rogers (2001) argues that despite the widespread adoption of reflective practices across many fields of study, a critical analysis of the concept of reflection and its application within higher education has been lacking. While Tranter and Warn (2003) is of the opinion that generic competencies, including critical reflective thinking are currently widely recognised as being essential for an individual's integration into a rapidly changing workplace. In order to respond proactively to change, one needs to be able to critically consider one's own worldview and its relationship to the world views of others. Higher education endeavours to develop such competencies required for successful adaptation of graduates to the workforce. In management and business education, it seems that these competencies are in demand, and the development of such competencies is given higher priority.

Reflective activities, including critical reflective thinking play a major role in adult learning, yet it is considered one of the most challenging exercises (Thorpe, 2000). While the development of generic skills might prepare students to their next phase in life (i.e. career), yet these students continue to face more challenges as they go into the workforce. Watson (2006) states there would be three things that are deemed necessary for effective management and effective business as a whole: (1) the general intellectual skills produced by a good liberal higher education, (2) technical knowledge about organizations and the environment in which they have to function, and, (3) the specific skills of managing. These can be enhanced through the enhancement of the critical reflective thinking amongst students. This was part of the assessments designed for this unit that was developed in Australia for delivery and facilitation to students from different parts of the world who gathered in Europe.

Methodology and discussions

Denscombe (2008) argues that the mixed-method approach has emerged as a 'third paradigm' for social research. It has developed a platform of ideas and practices that are credible and distinctive and that mark the approach out as a viable alternative to quantitative and qualitative paradigms. This paper adopts this approach by using a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques.

Teaching methods, recommended reading sample and discussions

SDBS was designed with emphasis on extensive participation from students. As the assessments were all on individual basis, the design took into account the inclusion of group work. Discussions became alive, as students became aware of the latest issues in the market. Therefore, the more informed of the current issues and challenges that face businesses that are exerting every effort the more students become active in their discussions, arguments and debates in the class. Students were exposed to different peer-reviewed journal articles, books chapters and extracts, videos, DVDs, and case studies.

SDBS had no text book, but instead, and in the syllabus that became available to students one month prior to start, students were urged to search the online databases for some articles that would discuss the latest in relation to sustainable business development, talent management, leaving a legacy and strategy in the corporate world. The students were warned that the topic is so broad, and the readings will be of diverse types and from different disciplines. Nonetheless, the students were provided with key areas to search for and topics that would be addressed in this SDBS. From these topics and issues, stewardship, living, environmental ethics as virtues, the responsible person, building competitive advantage through integrated talent management, responsibility for the self, community and nature, strategic thinking, formation, change, and content, sustainable business development, innovation and management thinking, enterprise thinking and the strategic logic of strategic business development, and being responsible for all (community, nature – thinking about the triple bottom line).

This data was collected from fifty one international master students over a period of two years 2010-2011. This data was collected through records provided by the European School and the administration of ice-breaker questionnaire, daily reflections, final reflections and evaluations of the teaching and the course itself. The ice-breaker contained fifteen questions, of which eight questions related to sustainability and the sustainable business development course. While the remaining questions were merely simple questions to generate discussions in the groups. For example, 'name three ways to learn things'.

While the daily and final reflection requested those students to reflect on what they learned. Students were specifically warned not to outline what they have learned but rather to reflect on what they have learned. Table 1 provides some pointers as to where students were originated.

Table 1: Students numbers and the countries originated from

Country	# and percentage of students			
	Year 1		Year 2	
France	11	52.38	4	13.33
Taiwan	1	4.76	0	
Italy	1	4.76	1	3.33
Morocco	3	14.29	1	3.33
India	2	9.52	14	46.67
Korea	1	4.76	1	3.33
Canada	1	4.76	2	6.67
Australia	1	4.76	0	
Argentina	0		2	6.67
Poland	0		2	6.67
Brazil	0		1	3.33
Thailand	0		2	6.67
	21	100	30	100

SDBS development and discussions

Predan, Azapagic and Clift (2000), involved in teaching sustainable development to engineering students in the UK, consider that sustainable development is a complex concept which concerns a wide range of social, techno-economic and environmental issues. Without addressing all these dimensions, teaching of sustainable development would not be complete. This is one of the challenges. Another challenge was location of unit developer/facilitator and the school (Australia and Europe), which added to the complexity. However, technology, which once was described as one of the major risks of our society (Beck, 1992; Beck, 1999, 2002), yet in the development of SDBS played a positive role. It was through e-mails that communications were established with the European school and their personnel; also it was possible to liaise with the students prior to meeting them face to face, which assisted in breaking the ice. In addition, Predan, Azapagic and Clift (2000) highlighted the importance of tackling the teaching of such unit (course) through the application of multidisciplinary approach, and this what was considered when developing this unit (course).

Syllabus for the unit was prepared in consultation with the European school identifying the outcomes. Upon completion of this unit would have achieved the following outcomes: (1) demonstrate awareness and sensitivity to the importance of sustainable development, talent management and business strategies in such a crucial time for us as humans worrying about the next generations and our environment. To try to understand how we in 'business people and leaders' can assist, (2) apply conceptual tools and frameworks for the critical analysis of business decision-making practices and policies, (3) apply the frameworks, perspectives and skills of critical analysis to contemporary business issues tackling holistic issues rather than concentrating on economics and finance, And, (4) translate the theories, concepts and analytical techniques learned into practice. These outcomes have been achieved. This is supported by comments from the students on their anonymous evaluation:

'I felt this unit really enhanced my knowledge with respect to the non-economic issues at hand for any business. ' (Anonymous Evluation_Student 1).

'I feel that [lecturer] has helped me to understand the more grave issues for a business in today's world and really opened my eyes to the sensitivity of the situation.' (Anonymous Evaluation_Student 2)

In addition to the outcomes, it is evident that it is not only the resources provided, or the discussions facilitated, but rather the knowledge and passion of the lecturer that counts in delivering such a complex and holistic topic as sustainable business development and business strategies.

'The [lecturer] was very passionate about teaching… communication [developed] and fruitful discussions followed.' (Anonymous Evaluation_Student 3).

> '[lecturer] well organized and involves the class in the subject through games and debates as well as extensive case discussions. Learning this subject under [lecturer] effective teaching was a great experience.' (Anonymous Evaluation_Student 4).

Thus, it is not only the material, the design, the assessments design, but rather the lecturer's passion towards the concepts that were under study.

SDBS Delivery mode and discussions

SDBS was delivered over a period of five days. Six hours of seminars per day, with the exception of Thursday, when it was only three hours, providing students time to work on their 'vision and mission assessment'. The delivery was in the form of seminars. In these seminars the lecturer played the role of facilitator. SDBS started with the introduction of issues and challenges that currently face the business world and the global world as a whole, then moved to introducing issues and case studies, which were derived from the latest literature from books and peer-reviewed journal articles.

The first run of SDBS in 2010 covered issues derived from specific articles and books (e.g. Demuijnck, 2009; Lopez-Gamero, Claver-Cortes, & Molina-Azorin, 2008; Teece, 2009; Tyler Miller & Spoolman, 2009; Woodbine, 2008). Through facilitation and group discussions, looked at 'setting up the scene: growth, strategy, values and value systems, environmental ethics: business sustainable development, world risk society, terrorist threat, reflexive modernization, ethics and sustainability, dynamic strategies and strategic management, strategy tools, sustainable development business success, and corporate governance and ethics – impact on strategy. These topics were mainly discussed through brief presentations followed by readings by groups, and case studies analysis, which sometimes were debriefed through debates or further arguments.

The second run in 2011 expanded on these sources and included some more of the latest sources including some of the latest publications of the European Foundation of Management Development. In addition to the sources mentioned above others were introduced (e.g. De Wit & Meyer, 2004; Duane Ireland, Hoskisson, & Hitt, 2008; Galavan, Murray, & Markides, 2008; Jacobides, 2010; Newton, 2003; Rainey, 2006; Silzer & Dowell, 2010).
Based on these sources and others, especially with the first day of the course in 2011 coinciding 'Valentine Day' it was felt prudent to relate 'love to business', thus the first session following the ice-breakers and introductions including the examination of the European Foundation of Management Development 'EFMD' publication on issues facing the responsible manager in the twenty first century, moved into 'Love, does it apply to business and global business'. Students appreciated this gesture:

> The way people interpreted love and tried to connect it to organizations was quite interesting too. It was a really light, yet important topic which kept us involved even at the fag-end of the day.' (Reflection_Student 1)

Thereafter, and through the facilitation of group discussions, group work, debates and arguments covered the other topics which were conveyed under the titles: (a) making the case for sustainable business, (2) is our society risky - What a Question?, (3) reflexive Modernization - influence on sustainable business development, (4) strategic thinking and ethics - What a match?, (5) business processes and global market collapse, (6) strategy Tools for Shifting Landscape, Values? (7) would they make a difference when it comes to Strategy?, (8) strategy and Society - Why the change of heart?, (9) sustainable development and business success, (10) strategic Thinking - Corporate Governance - a relationship?, (11) current Status - where are we heading? What is needed?, (12) thinking sustainably - does it need ethics?, (13) so… What is the solution? (14) an example from the IT Industry, Strategy? (15) but how - introducing tools and frameworks. In addition, the lecturer shared with students a presentation on 'Australia - Figures and Numbers' highlighting to them what sort of data would be important to make a decision to expand globally. This was very well received by the students:

> 'Finally, the closing presentation on Australia and the way you tried to sell the country was not only informative but also very interesting.' (Reflection_Student 2).

Though extensive material was provided to allow the overall coverage of the different topics, students appreciated this fact:

> 'The learning experience of this unit was good, the resources were extensive and induced further thinking and overall I enjoyed this course.' (Anonymous Evaluation_Student 5).

> '… it was good to move on from just theory to the application…' (Anonymous Evaluation_Student 6)

Assessments and discussions

Assessments of students teaching and learning were in three fold: (1) class participation – face-to-face – including a daily reflection (with very strict guidelines) to be submitted electronically to the lecturer, (2) students' vision and mission to a non-governmental organization (NGO), which forms the base for their final report, and (3) final report and presentation on the strategy as how they wish to implement this vision (if they wish to be innovative and creative they might record a video selling their idea to the board of directors of the organization of their choice). As for the first assignment, and to initiate students' participation, they were required to complete an 'ice-breaker' sheet that contained fifteen questions; eight of these questions were to identify the level of students' knowledge in sustainable developments and business strategies. Looking at the students responses it became apparent that the unit (course) was an elective course for the majority (i.e. 95%), and they had minimal understanding of strategy. This exercise took longer than anticipated, yet students were full of praise of the way this opening activity was administered, as they reflected on saying:

> 'Today the class started with an ice breaker session wherein we had to answer a questionnaire. After answering these questions when we discussed them in groups, we found that we had common answers for many general questions. Thus despite our cultural differences we had many things in common. I found this exercise very interesting.' (Reflection_Student 3)

Further, in a way to expand students' participation in discussions and problem solving deriving from the literature (e.g. Jaworski, 2008; Weber, Radu;, Mueller, Powell, & Maher, 2010) students were asked, and at the beginning of each class to select either a green, orange or red sheet of paper indicating their preparedness for discussions. The first day no sheets were selected, yet this has improved, when students selected the 'orange' sheets indicating that they were somehow prepared to engage in discussions, arguments and debate, however, it was noticed that students did not select the 'green' sheets throughout the unit (course). This might be attributed to the fact that they were over-whelmed with the vastness of topics covered in this unit (course). Despite this, and as students were given the chance to read in their group meetings, they were able to participate in class discussions, arguments and debates. As for the daily reflection students were urged to indicate to the lecturer what they learned each day – what did they see good, bad and fascinating or interesting. Some of the comments:

> '… as the class progressed we discussed the Alphabem of a responsible manager.' (Reflection_Student 4)

> 'This is the first time I'm studying sustainable development although I have acquired some knowledge about this topic through interaction with people in the industry. The major gains as far as I was concerned were a few concepts in the ABC manual to sustainable development [alphabem]. I did not really know that concepts such as Article 13 and Agenda 21 existed. I gained a better knowledge about few other terms such as labels and negative growth too.' (Reflection_Student 5)

> 'As I said in the class that I have studied mostly ethics here thus far. So, today's session provided [me] with an idea of how to implement your ethical philosophy towards building a sustainable business. It also opened my eyes to the notion that we all know but care little about ,i.e., while making profits in the short-run, one also has to keep a tab at the sustainability of the business logic and ideals that you are following.' (Reflection_Student 6)

Whilst the following extract from students' reflection is rather descriptive, yet it provides an overall coverage of what was covered in the first two seminars of this unit (course), especially the final part where the student would argue shareholder and customer value maximization:

> Some words were quite interesting and new like global security, paradigm, agenda 21 while some concepts although previously known had new definitions which provided a new learning experience from the sustainable development point of view. …Then we did two case studies. An argument mentioned in that article is that the two goals of shareholder value maximization and customer value maximization cannot be achieved together, though I disagree with it since shareholder value maximization can very well be a by-product of customer value maximization. (Reflection_Student 7)

SDBS Facilitator found the class setting inappropriate and might discourage group interactions, thus requested students to join in changing the set up. This had attracted positive comments from students:

> Another interesting [thing] was the sitting arrangement. It's always to have a freedom of choice to sit the way you want to and feel relaxed in the classroom. (Reflection_Student 8)

Having six hours of seminars, and active workshops had its toll on students. One of the comments in the daily reflection highlighted this:

> I guess the students were looking exhausted and tired because the previous subject was comparatively lighter. But I have no complaints towards that personally. To sum it up, I quite enjoyed the experience today and look forward to tomorrow's session. (Reflection_Student 9)

While other students took the chance of the first reflection to provide the lecturer with their expectations which was a great idea:

> Since today was the very first lecture I really can't comment or say much .But I would just like to share what my expectations are there from the course. Firstly as an exchange student I would really like to see the approach that is there in formulating strategies in India and globally (as I am here for an international exposure). Understand the very meaning of sustainability apart from the textual meaning. Secondly, I expect to see a lot of real time examples of strategies with the frameworks that are taught. (Reflection_Student 10)

While for the final reflection shared the same first question another question was added: You might recall at the beginning of the week you were asked (in the ice-breaker document) whether you were required to provide data or get involved in coming up with a strategy for your workplace (or might be with family)? And which frameworks you used for your strategy before (if you have done one) Now, following this unit (course) how would you improve on the choices that you have taken and reported on earlier, and what sorts of frameworks you would be using. From their comments:

> 'The week of sustainable development class was very enlightening.' (Reflection_Student 11)

> 'Teaching process was really interesting as it was always two ways in the form of presentations or debates or group work. It was a place where I learnt a lot in a short period of time.' (Reflection_Student 12)

> 'Something that is quite remarkable is that I actually now realize the importance of being sustainable in one's approach and not only that but it can actually increase the profits of a company in the long term. I thank our [lecturer] for 5 enlightening days and the class will truly miss you' (Reflection_Student 13)

> 'In an overall view, I feel that I have improved myself during this week. As on Monday, I just had some vague ideas on sustainable development and CSR, relating those concepts mostly to green business, I am finishing this class with a quite bigger picture of the topic.' (Reflection_Student 14)

The above comments reveal the students' transformation, indeed, using the expression 'enlightenment' reveals how vast the change was.

As for the second assessment, this was an assignment for them to form a vision and mission to an organization, their assignment would be based on (1) to identify an industry of your interest, (2) identify a major challenge that you feel is affecting this industry, (3) to identify a company (preferably global 'NGO') within that industry that might be faced with this major challenge, and (4) come up with a mission statement and a vision that they wish to see implemented for this organization. While their final report would allow them to develop and provide a 'sustainable business development strategy including talent management' that would allow this NGO to survive and serve the 'Seventh Generation' a phrase invented by Newton (2003). At the start students were over-whelmed with the nature of the assignments, yet as the time went by, students and in their reflections were able to see the bigger picture and were able to imagine their assignments including the final report:

> Today, I have got some idea about sustainability development in real company. This help me to doing the assignment more easier. (Reflection_Student 15)

Facilitator's personal reflection

The development and facilitation of SDBS had its challenges. The course was prepared in Australia, yet delivered to students from different parts of the world and in Europe, which added to the complexity of the material to be covered. The diverse landscape (European School, Australia and students from different parts of the world) has provided a complex road map for SDBS development and facilitation. Nonetheless, through technology it became much easier to liaise and communicate.

In this respect, international networks are important, especially with the international fabric of the students who were originated from different parts of the world, seeking education in some other parts of the world. In case of Australia, Curtin University is considered a melting pot of different nationalities from different parts of the world

that are keen to expand their knowledge, even well away from their homeland. This also what was witnessed when visiting and teaching in the European School of Management. Indeed, both share the same aim of developing students from different parts of the world displaying their global citizenship.

Reflecting on this exercise, it has definitely enhanced the SDBS developer's knowledge, simultaneously having the honour to share knowledge including the latest ideas and research in relation to sustainable business development and strategies with students from different parts of the world, who had and through their reflections displayed appreciation of being exposed to such knowledge.

'… So far, I mean, before listening [to] this class, I thought that sustainability related to business is just "green". But, now l know what sustainable business is and what corporate social responsibility is. That is not only just about green and environment problem but also business in the community. I learned that the responsible manager consider all stakeholders- employees, customers, government, suppliers, local communities, shareholders, international organizations, non government organizations, etc.' (Reflection_Student 16)

'… this sustainable business development course has awakened me to protect the environment in my personal life as well as business. I am impressed with current status of our society. The presentation about current risk and 2011 Harvard business agenda is meaningful for me. Those alerted me that sustainability is needed.' (Reflection_Student 14)

Limitations and Implications

Despite its limitations, the small sample size, this paper has provided evidence that teaching sustainable business development to students would transform and shift their mindsets towards becoming more aware of the dangers of being fixated only on profit rather than looking at the big picture first, then profit can be a by-product, especially when businesses aim at the long-term rather than the short term. This paper provides an example of co-operation through an international network in higher education between Australia and Europe, which might have its shortcomings, yet with patience and eagerness to help and assist students in their endeavours have become easier.

It is worthwhile to note here deriving from the students comments in their daily, and final reflections and evaluations that students were looking at analyzing the lecturer's level of knowledge, way of teaching and dealing with students, strongly agreeing to the items in the evaluation of SDBS that the facilitator appeared knowledgeable in the subject area and enthusiastic in teaching such a unit being an effective lecturer. This is a key area, whereas those who are keen to teach across boarders and across disciplines need to be aware of the developments in their disciplines and the countries they are involved in. Though, this is not an easy topic yet, when developed properly and through co-operation between all parties involved it will be for the benefit of students, academics and practitioners in the long run. Simply, such an investment, though huge, is worth the work exerted.

Further, through the daily reflections, it became evident that in the future students need to be asked of their expectations from the unit; this might be done in co-operation with the European School. In addition, the lecture room set-up is changed to accommodate group work in a better fashion.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper, though has its limitations, had provided an Australian-European perspective on international networking and co-operation in higher education. Through examination of students' reflections throughout the time SDBS was run, it became evident that theoretical reflection, when employed, and executed properly by students, is an important instrument that allows students through their reflection to make a better sense of the vast and multidisciplinary material given in a short period of time (i.e. five days). The data collected provided evidence that teaching such comprehensive, multidiscipline units would transform the students mindsets, indeed, it enlightens these mindsets. This can only be possible provided the lecturer/facilitator has the necessary knowledge and enthusiasm to develop and facilitate such a complex multidimensional unit (course).

This paper highlighted the importance of such international and academic network of like-minded academics. It is the strength of such networks that allowed the author to liaise with a European School of Management, develop a unit and facilitate this unit for the second year to students who are originated from different parts of the world. This paper provided a step forward in the road-map to having such a unit (course) become a core rather than elective unit for the business and management students. Further research is anticipated when SDBS is run again, whereas further developments would deem necessary bearing in mind the ongoing changes in strategy, policy, and any other issues relating to sustainability and business development.

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