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Social Responsibility: Preparing Students for the Real World

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ABSTRACT

Ethics and corporate social responsibility are widely discussed in business and in the classroom. In fact, many mission statements for Colleges of Business include ethics as a major component. As corporations become increasingly aware of their impact on the environment, sustainability and social responsibility have become significant issues for many executives. How to “teach” ethics and social responsibility is a dilemma that has been addressed with no definitive solution. Research shows that the traditional model of teaching and/or learning is outdated. In many disciplines, instructor/lecture and student notetaking are outdated methods of teaching. To increase student engagement and to reach a new generation of students, college courses must incorporate new models that lead to active engagement. Service learning has been defined as “a form of experimental education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development” (Johnson 2013). Based on the idea of service learning and the need for students to be socially responsible on campus, students in an MBA course were assigned a field project to support a university organization, the LU Green Squad. The Green Squad focuses on interacting with the campus and surrounding community concerning environmental and sustainability efforts. The student/instructor team guided the organization through the goal setting and execution process. Students acted as managers and executed plans to help the organization develop a plan for achieving its goals. The experiential component of the project enabled students to determine ideas that seem perfect in theory often do not work in the real world. Applying what they learned in the classroom in a real setting anchored students’ learning and produced a high level of engagement. This paper reviews the learning experience of MBA students, studies the impact of the project on the client organization, and discusses the results of the project.

INTRODUCTION

Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) are increasingly being included in the business curriculum, but there is no definitive method to teach these concepts. Research findings indicate that effective learning models for teaching CSR and sustainability require the inclusion of cases and experiential learning. Further, involving students in projects with their communities is an integral part of teaching sustainability. Based on recommendations from the literature, a project

pairing MBA students with the LU Green Squad was utilized in an MBA class to allow students the opportunity to use what they learned in the classroom in a real-world setting.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability

To achieve the goal of bringing business and society back together, organizations are increasingly integrating the concepts of Corporate Social Responsibility and sustainability. CSR may be defined as a discretionary allocation of corporate resources to improving social welfare that serves as means of enhancing relationships with key stakeholders (Barnett 2007). The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) defined sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The business world and the natural world are inextricably linked. “Our economy and society depend on natural resources. The environment provides critical support to our economic system – not financial capital, but natural capital” (Esty and Winston 2009).

Many companies originally engaged in CSR and sustainability efforts to increase the bottom line. Pava and Krausz (1996) and Waddock and Graves (1997) in separate studies found enterprises that met criteria for CSR and sustainability generally had financial performance on par or better than other enterprises. A positive relationship between sustainability performance and financial performance was found by Koh, Quinz and Wang (2014). Maletic et al. (2015) concluded that greater engagement in sustainability leads to greater financial and market performance. As a result of increased interest in CSR and sustainability, companies are now evaluated beyond economic performance. The new measurement is the Triple Bottom Line (TBL). Business is not only responsible for generating economic profit (profit), but also for caring about society as a whole (people) and the environment (planet). Profit, people and planet comprise the TBL (Fauzi et al., 2010).

A notable increase has occurred in discussions surrounding the integration of global sustainability and responsible management practices in business school curriculum. In 2014, Kelley and Nahser reported although The United Nation’s Principles of Responsible Management Education Initiative highlighted the important role of business educators in developing globally-minded responsible managers, significant challenges remain for the introduction of sustainability into mainstream business education. Research indicates that instructors are still looking for appropriate teaching resources in the fields of ethics, corporate social responsibility and sustainability (Aragon-Correa, et. al, 2017). There is no doubt that we need informative, engaging and effective teaching material that both inspires students and provides them with concrete tools and techniques to tackle these challenges in making the world a better place (Dyllick, 2015).

Osagie (2018) surveyed CSR managers and found learning through interaction is the best activity for development of CSR competencies. Results indicate that CSR leaders most often engage in learning activities that involve “learning through social interactions” like discussions and collaborations. Aragon (2017) found that instructors’ satisfaction and perceived quality of teaching resources in the field of CSR are moderate; he proposed effective models for teaching sustainability require the inclusion of representative cases, vivid illustrations and experiential learning. Involving students in projects with their communities should be an element in the design

of teaching sustainability. Professors offer experiential learning by pairing students with businesses and non-profits to provide practical experiences to students.

Sustainability is important on college campuses. Thomashow (2013) stated, “Higher education is under enormous pressure to reduce costs, provide the public with value for its investment and develop measures of accessibility and accountability that balance learning and value. Whether we are describing energy innovations and efficiency measures, campus food-growing systems, green construction and materials, or the curricular changes that ensure a vital and prepared twenty-first century workforce, colleges and universities can save money, invest in the future, work with the community, become crucibles of innovation, and lead the way to a sustainable future. These initiatives matter for the campus itself, the surrounding community, the regional and national economy, and global ecosystem services.”

By working with the Lamar University Green Squad, our study utilizes service learning to teach students management skills and the importance of sustainability. Service learning has been defined as “a form of experimental education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development: service-learning combines service objectives with learning objectives with the intent that with activity change both the recipient and provider of the service” (Johnson 2013).

IMPLEMENTATION

Background

The MBA program at Lamar University offers courses in leadership and organizational development. The College of Business partnered with Franklin Covey, one of the leading executive training companies in the world, to deliver world-class corporate training content to Lamar’s MBA students. Franklin Covey certified Lamar professors to teach its content. The faculty developed the structure for the content to be delivered for academic credit. MGMT 5315 is a course in the MBA curriculum titled “Strategic Leadership.” The course is based on the best-selling management book, The 4 Disciplines of Execution by Chris McChesney and Sean Covey. The book presents 4 essential disciplines for achieving strategic priorities. The Franklin Covey organization spent more than a decade studying execution. The 4 Disciplines of Execution represent actionable and impactful insights from what the authors learned.

MGMT 5315 classroom sessions are workshop-based. The instructor found presenting the course content using lecture and discussion alone had limitations; these methods did not adequately prepare the student to apply the content in a real-world setting. “Lectures aren’t truly meaningful until the learner can apply the content to issues” (Ellett, 2007).

Based on the idea of service learning, students in MGMT 5315 applied the 4dx process to advance social responsibility at Lamar University. The Lamar University Department of Sustainability is an organization on Lamar University’s campus formed to make sustainability in Southeast Texas a priority. The department was formed to address regional environmental challenges. The Lamar University Green Squad is a volunteer group that focuses on recycling, energy conservation, and sustainability awareness. The organization’s mission includes reducing

waste and recycling materials, making efficient use of transportation resources, creating a net zero carbon footprint, increasing visibility and participation, purchasing eco-friendly products, enhancing the study of sustainability, and expanding community outreach.

Making sustainability a priority is more than just a lofty goal. It requires focus and execution. Execution is behavioral, requiring commitment and conscious effort. The Green Squad's success depends on the behavior of members of the organization. The Green Squad is a volunteer group. Its leaders do not have formal authority over members, nor can they force compliance. They can only influence commitment. Competing for time and attention of members who are juggling a number of priorities is the number one enemy of successful execution. This enemy is called "the whirlwind." The whirlwind represents the massive energy it takes for someone to maintain his or her job, school or life on a day-to-day basis. In addition, the whirlwind makes it very difficult for a person or organization to tackle anything new. For the Green Squad, executing sustainability initiatives meant overcoming the whirlwind's powerful distraction.

In his book Good to Great, Jim Collins speaks of the proverbial flywheel that starts slowly, but with constant nudges in the right direction, gains speed and inertia. The Green Squad determined that making sustainability a regional priority was a flywheel project that started at the University level.

Using 4dx to Teach Sustainability at Lamar University

The Green Squad had been in existence for less than a year and was having trouble defining its objectives. The group had a loosely-defined strategy, based on dozens of good ideas, but students did not know, specifically, what they wanted to do or how they wanted to do it.

Using The 4 Disciplines of Execution, MGMT 5315 students acted as consultants. While applying the 4dx process, the students held meetings with Green Squad leaders and created actual work plans. The students and Green Squad leaders identified the organization's most important goals and by creating lead measures, they identified the key activities necessary for goal achievement.

Using Franklin Covey's "Meeting Advantage," students learned how to plan and manage the Green Squad meetings. Using Inside Out Development's "GROW" and "Feedback" models, students learned how to conduct coaching conversations with Green Squad members.

After taking this course, students were able to:

- ❖ Apply the Discipline of "Focusing On The Wildly Important". MGMT 5315 students helped Green Squad leaders apply the concepts of Discipline 1. A root cause of poor execution is lack of clarity around the objective. During the Discipline 1 meetings, Green Squad leaders quickly realized they had more good ideas than they had the capacity to execute. They needed to narrow their focus and specifically determine what success would look like. MGMT 5315 students helped them define two important goals. These goals are called "Wildly Important" because failure to achieve them will render every other attempt to advance sustainability inconsequential.

- ❖ Develop and Act On Lead Measures. Lack of commitment is another reason execution breaks down. Individuals may know a goal, but not be committed to achieving it. Since all actions are not created equal, it was necessary to identify and track high-leverage activities that would accomplish the goals. Green Squad leaders needed to define the new behaviors to which they must commit and perform consistently to achieve their sustainability WIGS. These behaviors must be predictive of goal achievement and influenceable by the team. Discipline 2 is the discipline of leverage. Lead measures are key leverage points for sustainability goal accomplishment. MGMT 5315 students used 4dx lead-and-lag measure tools and a WIG flow chart to flush out the Wildly Important Goals and Lead Measures.

Wildly Important Goal

Increase Membership

Candidate Activities	Candidate Measures	Predictive?	Influenceable?	Can we get the data?	Rank
Awareness event	One per month	Y	Y	Y	1
Fundraising event	One per month	Y	Y	Y	2
Publicity event	One per week	Y	Y	Y	3

If you could choose one, two, or three of these measures, which ones would be most predictive and influenceable? Craft the lead measures in the form of "From X to Y by When" as appropriate.

Lead Measure 1: Having one awareness event per month

Lead Measure 2: Having one fundraising event per month

Lead Measure 3: Having one publicity event per week

Illustration 1: Lead Measure Builder: Wildly Important Goal: Increase Membership

Wildly Important Goal**Recycling**

Candidate Activities	Candidate Measures	Predictive?	Influenceable?	Can we get the data?	Rank
Downloading Recyclemania application on mobile phones	1000 Green Squad members till Spring Break	Y	Y	Y	1
Publicity event	One per week	Y	Y	Y	2
Giveaways and Contests	Bi-weekly	Y	Y	Y	3

If you could choose one, two, or three of these measures, which ones would be most predictive and influenceable? Craft the lead measures in the form of "From X to Y by When" as appropriate.

Lead Measure 1: Ensuring that 1000 Green Squad members download Recyclemania application on their mobile phones

Lead Measure 2: One publicity event per week

Lead Measure 3: Giveaways and contests to be held bi-weekly

Illustration 2: Lead Measure Builder: Wildly Important Goal: Recycling

- ❖ Create and maintain a compelling scoreboard to visibly track results. Discipline 3 states: "People play differently when they are keeping score." Higher levels of commitment come from people who are emotionally engaged. Higher levels of engagement are achieved when people keep score. It is important for people to know whether they are getting closer to or farther away from the goal. MGMT 5315 students created a model which would serve as a guide for LU Green Squad leaders to create their scoreboard. Students emphasized the importance of using the scoreboard to track the organization's lead measure activities

and progress toward success. The scoreboard allowed LU Green squad members to see whether they are winning or losing.

- ❖ Produce a “Cadence of Accountability.” Accountability is where execution happens. There is a correlation between the level of accountability and the level of commitment. Volunteer organizations are notorious for not holding members accountable for progress toward their goals on a regular basis. MGMT 5315 students applied Discipline 4 to help Green Squad leaders create a cadence of accountability for commitments. In Discipline 4 the concept of “no accountability, no commitment” was introduced.

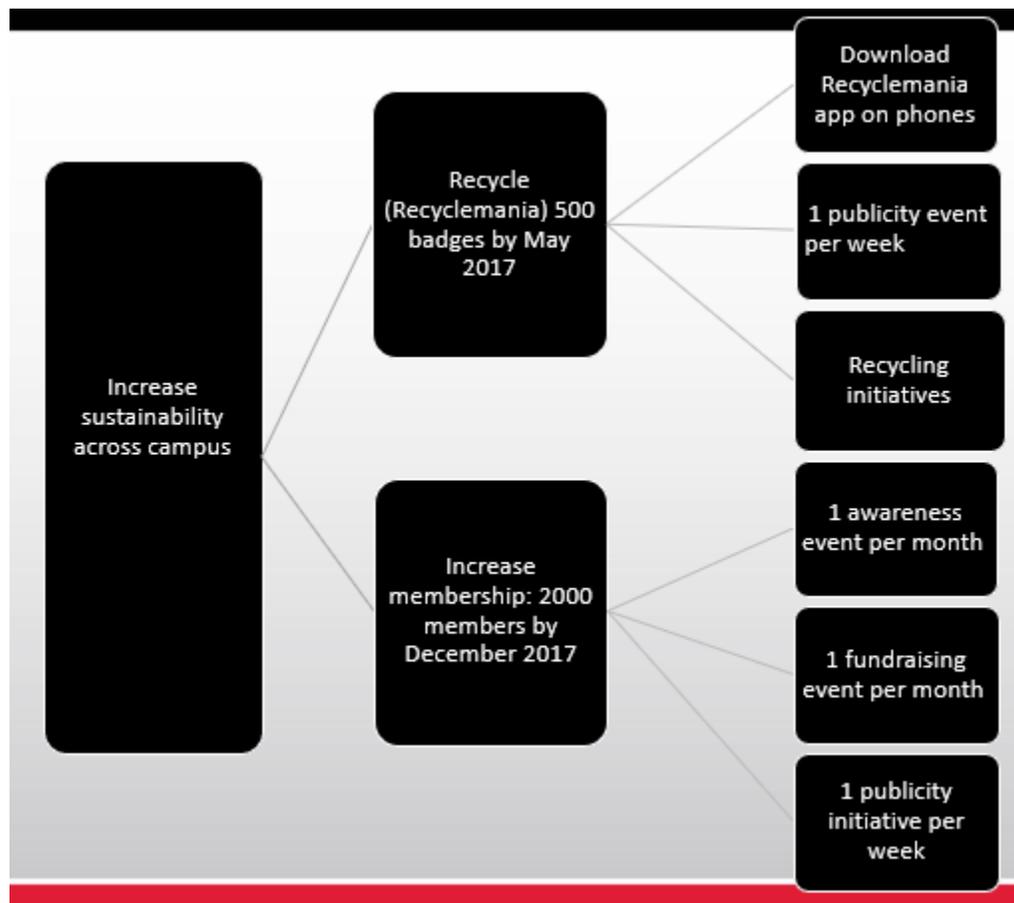


Illustration 3: Lead Measure Builder

- ❖ Create a plan for a productive meeting.
- ❖ Apply skills for effectively managing a productive meeting.
- ❖ Implement effective post-meeting follow-through and produce results.

- ❖ Apply knowledge in understanding performance and skills for using the GROW and Inside Out feedback models to help others achieve performance breakthroughs.

“The 4 Disciplines of Execution” is an operating system designed to achieve objectives in spite of the whirlwind. Once it’s installed, it can be used to execute Social Responsibility initiatives in any school, organization, or company.

SUCCESS OF THE PROJECT AND CONCLUSIONS

The success of this project is based on the learning outcomes of the students in MGMT 5315 and on the improvements to the LU Green Squad. As discussed above, the students in MGMT 5315 were able to lead the Green Squad through the 4dx process. Students learned valuable management skills and aided an organization devoted to sustainability efforts for the campus and community. One student commented; “I loved having a live client with whom to apply our learning on the 4 Disciplines of Execution. This reinforced our application and retention of the material.” The instructor used various methods and concluded that the experience for the students was much richer than with traditional lecture.

The client organization benefited by being led to focus on two Wildly Important Goals rather than the 10 with which they originally began. The consultants further helped Green Squad leaders develop actions to achieve these goals and a scoreboard to measure the goals. The first WIG concerned increasing membership in the organization. The organization has had at least 50 volunteers each semester and has approximately 1000 followers on three social media accounts. Increased recycling was the second goal and there are now recycling bins in every classroom, office and dorm room, as well as 170 outdoor recycling bins. Beginning this year, the organization will be able to monitor the amount of waste diverted from the landfill with the addition of thirteen recycle dumpsters.

Teaching CSR and sustainability is now part of the curriculum on college campuses. This study provides an example of incorporating campus sustainability efforts with a MBA project to enhance the learning outcomes of students and to foster the development of an organization committed to improving sustainability on campus and in the community.

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