

# EMBEDDING SUSTAINABILITY IN MANAGEMENT EDUCATION: PEDAGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ojiagu, Nkechi Cordelia

Department of Cooperative Economics & Management,  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.

## Abstract

*Embedding sustainability in management education involves a functional integration of unifying the gap between what was being taught in institutions and what was actually needed by businesses. Management education and training research for today's business environment have become an important subject to debate because it allows the design of scenarios that contribute to economic and social development. Thus, value is placed on diversity and flexibility in implementation and developing of programmes and teaching methods to avoid the "saddlebag" tendencies so that the needs of current and future generation are met. This paper is a descriptive study which majors on pedagogical considerations. It is recommended that management education providers need to translate sustainability into different disciplines and engage faculty, students and practitioners of these different disciplines to send key messages about the importance of sustainability.*

**Keywords:** Embedding sustainability; management education; pedagogy considerations; PRME

## Introduction

The concept of sustainability has its root from the principles of sustainable development. The Bruntland report (1987) defines institutional sustainability as development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. Management

education sustainability represents resilience overtime which evaluates whether all stakeholders have taken positions for long-term growth rather than only short-term performance. Management education sustainability involves active academic participation to create economic, social and environmental programmes; improving life standards, generating empowerment and respecting interdependence (Davis, 2018). Sustainability encourages people, institutions, politics and businesses to make decisions based on the long term. In this way, acting sustainably encompasses a temporal framework of decades and considers more the outcome than the profit or loss involved (Straik, et al, 2010).

The motivations behind sustainability are often complex, personal and diverse. It is unrealistic to create a list of reasons why so many individuals, groups and communities are working toward this goal. Yet for most people, sustainability comes down to the kind of future we are leaving for the next generation (University of Alberta, 2014). The United Nations Global Compacts Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) working through six principles engages business and management education school to ensure they provide future leaders and equip today's business to balance economic and deliver change tomorrow (Antonic Guterres, UN Secretary-general). It is expected by PRME's vision and mission that management related higher education institutions play a key role in shaping the mindsets and skills of future leaders to be powerful drivers of corporate sustainability. Sustainability, therefore, is not just

environmentalism but concerns for social equity and economic development are embedded.

The world of organizations is changing radically, the world of management education much less so. New technologies are radically reshaping how work is done in the worlds of business and the growth of government bureaucracies also created demands for management education. Twenty-first-century enterprises look very different from their predecessors. More agile, more ephemeral, less hierarchical, less stable, traditional corporations are vanishing and pop-ups are pervasive, management education requires a substantial overhaul. (Davis, 2018). More so, today's management education is facing tremendous challenges created by the fast-paced changes in the operational environment; the world and the working life are changing at a very-accelerating pace; globalization makes the world smaller and expedites the movement of people, ideas and expertise; technological development transforms the ways of working, networking and communicating and new global megatrends are increasingly shaping the future and the way we understand the world; (Tienhaara, et al, 2017). Others include global interconnectedness such as digitalization, robotization, virtualization artificial intelligence and úberisation. The increased demand for more and sustainable management education has probably never been greater, and especially universities are expected to address the needs of the students they educate and the societies they serve. Sustainable management practices require the ability and skills to adapt to changes in a rapidly transforming operational environment thereby bringing together theory and practice on sustainability and responsible management. (Weybrecht, 2015).

Management education and training research for today's business environment have become an important subject to debate because it allows the design of scenarios that contribute to economic and social development. The quest for high quality and

insightful management is an important prerequisite for the economic and social well-being of societies. At the same time, it is just as critical a success factor for all types of enterprises as it is for a range of public and non-profit organizations. Responsible management education practices require the ability and skills to adapt to changes in a rapidly transforming operational environment. (Tienhaara et al, 2017; Onete et al, 2014). Confirming, Shephard (2008) indicates that education for sustainability seeks majorly three primary outcomes: graduates should know about sustainability issues, they should have the skills to act sustainably if they wish to and they should have the personal and emotional attributes that require them to behave sustainably for higher education's most valuable contribution to sustainability lies in providing large numbers of graduates with the knowledge, skills and values that enable business, government and society as a whole to progress towards more sustainable environment development. Also, Khan (2015) expresses that management education institutions need develop and transfer knowledge and prepare graduates for the real world (the workplace); make significant adaptations in the education programs designed for cosmopolitan leaders and take timely actions in response to various environmental developments they face and foresee.

Embedding sustainability in management education involves a functional integration of unifying the gaps between what was being taught in management education institutions and what was actually needed by businesses. Many find fault with perceived lack of integration of functional area; hands-on-learning by-doing; lack of attention on developing competencies, especially the need to develop leaders behaviours (Miesing et al, 2017). Embeddedness in management education entails that actors preferences can only be understood and interpreted within relational, institutional and cultural contexts. Embedding sustainability, therefore, places

values on flexibility in implementation and developing of programmes for every society has different drivers and pressures, different cultures and different people (Weybrecht, 2015).

## **Conceptual Review**

### **Concept of Management Education**

The concept of management education recurs frequently in international educational discourse (PRME) because it is uniquely positioned to empower individuals and practitioners with the necessary tools and mindset to better understand the role business can play in society today. Management education assures smart and strategic business directions for development at all levels of an organization. At organizational level management education develops leaders to elaborate strategies for the future, to build an organizational culture in which teamwork closely interact, direct the company to profitable growth and to maintain standards of excellence. At human resource level, management education is adapted to corporate strategy to meet the needs of the business environment, developing strategies on a medium and long term to quantify organizational performance and transformation for the role accomplishment within the organization. At management level management education is focused on objectives and competitive strategies, result delivery that defines the company's mission (Zoran, 2013 in Onetel et al, 2014).

Thus, due to diversity and flexibility of management education and its delivery, the concept is very difficult to define precisely and exhaustively, which is occasioned by related ambiguity to the difficulties with the concept of “management itself. Tienhara et al (2017) add that the term management is used interchangeably with leadership; administration and governance unless otherwise stated. Moreover, it covers multi and interdisciplinary programmes combining also elements from a broader range of disciplines. Management education is viewed

in this paper as a major disciplinary field offering education in topics related to management namely business management, cooperative economics and management, public administration management, marketing management, entrepreneurial management, finance management and other management courses. In addition, Ibrahim and Mazin (2017) define management education as the application of theory and practice of management to the field of education or educational institutions. This definition connotes that management education is one discipline of higher education by which students are taught to be business leaders, directors, managers, executives and administrators. It focuses on the process of imparting or acquiring knowledge to develop the members of the executives or administration of an organization or business, managers or employers collectively, or train in the techniques, practice, or science of managing, controlling or dealing in the skilful or resourceful use of materials and time (Leclaire, 2009).

The foregoing indicates that there is a widespread agreement that education plays a crucial role in the development of sustainable societies and economic systems. Management education for sustainable development empowers people to think and act for the future in a positive way (Müller et al., 2020). The implication is evident in that sustainability enables each individual to understand the effects of their actions on the world and encourage them to make responsible decisions. Thus management education serves valuable-social functions. Among these functions is the development of skills among students that can be used later in the labour market, thus becoming knowledgeable participants in the larger social system (Verdugu & Mueller, 2009). Since management education assures smart and strategic business directions for development at all levels of an organization, through training of stakeholders, it is submitted that the concept will continue evolving to serve a broader range of learners.

No doubt, embedding sustainability in management education can be framed as incorporating the management of economic, social, environmental and cultural imperatives in all decision making (Arevalo & Mitchell, 2017).

### **Embedding Sustainability in Management Science: Dealing with Curriculum – Related and Pedagogical Challenges**

Management education is increasingly operating in the global environment. This forces education providers to find ways to utilize new areas of educational demand, to strengthen their position as credible actors and to prepare their students for the changing international environment and cultural differences (Tienhaera et al, 2017). However embedding sustainability in management education is a daunting task on curriculum and pedagogical levels (Khan, 2015; Raufflet, 2013) as sustainability is a life long education and leadership, which embraces the requirements of today's world. Miesing et al (2018) reflecting on three dilemmas of management education interlia; first, changing demographics of students' body which demanded more applied learning and relevancy in its curriculum. Second, the business community identified a problem – management graduates lacking the ability to apply business concept outside of business – class silos. Third, the academic community identified a problem that of the management education curriculum lacking integration and being largely focused on theory at the expense of application and skill development. Thus, dealing with these challenges affects the curriculum and pedagogy for these on-going concerns of stakeholders need an address. This indicates that for management education institutions to be sustainability leaders, sustainability needs to be integrated through the curricula, delivery methods and modes, institutional activities students and operations (Nordman & Pasquier-Doumer, 2017).

To address the structural and stakeholders driven barriers, incorporation of

transdisciplinary participatory processes to address current social, economic and ecological paradigms needed to be integrated. More recently, embedding sustainability in management education is seen as a holistic body of knowledge and understanding for management practice that meets the needs of current and future generation (Arevalo et al, 2017). The definition displays a polymorphous meaning of sustainability which may make it difficult to anchor a program. Besides, Raufflet (2013) adds that the challenge of implicit and explicit; short-term and narrow curriculum assumptions on business ethics in management education programs to bring sustainability into classroom conversations and concerns would not hit its target. The complexity of the word sustainability adds Weybrecht (2015) is a key reason, why some management education providers push it aside.

Dealing with challenges of curriculum and pedagogy enthrone understanding the concepts. The concept of curriculum in this literature connotes the learning which is planned and guided by the school, whether it is carried out in groups or individually, inside or outside the school; a combination of instructional practices, learning experiences and students performance assessment that are designed to bring out and evaluate the target learning outcomes of a particular course; a program, which is made up of three components: programme of studies; programme of activities and programme of guidance (Bediako, 2019; Khan, 2015; Shao-wen, 2012). While pedagogy in its simplest form encompasses both teaching and learning methods, the science of upbringing and education and knowledge of the representations useful for teaching a subject (Melanie, 2019; Mynbayeva et al, 2017).

Pedagogy of the past centuries differs from the pedagogy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there have been many changes in the development of world education, management education inclusive. The most observable phenomenon is now the

internetization of society and penetration of digital technologies into learning thus change ways of life, way of communication, thinking, feelings, influence, social skills and social behaviour, indeed, high-tech environment reshape the human brain (Melanie, 2019). Thus, technological development will continue to challenge the teaching methods and modes of delivery management education. (Miesing, et al, 2017, Tienhaara et al, 2017). This requires that providers of management education are willing and capable to respond to this challenge, now and in the future by enabling online learning an integral part of their educational offerings for sustainability, indirectly affecting the curricular. Borrowing from Khan, (2015), embedding sustainability in management education calls for a more integrated and applied approaches to curriculum design and pedagogy.

In management education, globalisation and digitalization go hand in hand thereby enthroning a drastic change for a dynamic, diverse, challenging and interesting pedagogy. Management education providers need to avoid the "saddle-bag" addition of new courses into their existing curricula for the challenge of sustainability (Sharma & Hart, 2014). The lack of utilizing digital technology in teaching has been partly related to attitudes, not all teachers may be enthusiastically supportive of online course deliveries. Blending digital technology with traditional classroom practices are most times still unclear to many. Management education institutions administration differ in sustainability approach, creating a daunting interrelated dimension. Most management education administrators value flexibility in implementation based on their strengths and interest. (Weybrecht, 2015; Raufflet, 2013).

Tienhaara et al, (2017) and Weybrecht, (2015), opine that the vast differences and changes in today's learning environment, no single model to implementing sustainability in management education is going to work or even desirable. However, it is deemed that appropriate diversity must be maintained in

teaching methods and curriculum change. Moreso, have not internal elements (Faculty buy-in; upper management and operations) and external elements (rankings, accreditations and recruiters) influenced management education providers ability to move forward in embedding sustainability.

### **Sustainability in Management Education: Proposed Pedagogical Considerations.**

The growth of management education has been identified as an essential future trend. Both supply and demand are globally growing. (Tienhaara et al, 2017, Khan, 2015), due to the participation of different target groups. Simultaneously there is a growing pressure for diversifying the models of delivery and utilizing management education necessitating. "Diversity and flexibility". Further, Raufflet (2013) proposes that sustainability embedment in the management education need be based on the premise that what is most important are the interactions between human societies and the biosphere in which business and non-business organizations operate, thereby building connections and to train, prepare students and managers to think, operate and feel differently, as a citizen of the world. Embedding approach of management education ( Melanie, 2019, Khan, 2015) is also considered as **transformational management education** which goes beyond simply teaching and training of the graduates but a connection between classroom knowledge to the real-world situations thus bringing together two forms of knowledge (disciplinary and professional).

Management education providers may wish to consider the proposed pedagogical considerations in embedding sustainability, though not exhaustive.

- *Put in place, measure and report on goals and target by rewriting their value statements.*

- *Embed sustainability across a well-structured curriculum and teaching methods.*
- *Conduct research and teaching relevant to the industrial environment.*
- *Find new combinations for thematically innovative programs which creates boundary-crossing “skills”.*
- *Develop collaboration with non-university actors*
- *Identify sustainability as a focus for research activity and partnership.*
- *Study program process and results through a feedback-rich review.*
- *Develop a mix of top-down and bottom-up considerations in operations.*

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Management education sector recognizes the importance of sustainability which has translated into very diverse forms and contents. The importance of management education as a purveyor of sustainable development is also well established since management education remains the language of business and entrepreneurship. But, embedding sustainability into the sector is still largely unrealized as curriculum and pedagogical challenges dodge its path. Therefore, the practices of embedding sustainability in management education for current and future needs require providers to brace up to the enormous tasks identified to reposition the sector to drive sustainability in a dynamic and flexible globalized environment where change is constant.

This study has the following limitations. First, the paper focuses less on the curriculum and more on the pedagogical challenges and does not connect with other dimensions such as graduate competencies, environmental changes, education institutional leadership and strategic alliances.

Second, this paper is a descriptive study which most times researchers question the validity and reliability of its recommendations since the contained

information needs scrutiny and critical evaluation.

Notwithstanding, management education providers need to translate sustainability into different disciplines and engage faculty, students and practitioners of these different disciplines to send key messages about the importance of sustainability.

### **REFERENCES**

- Arevalo, J.A.; & Mitchell, S. (2017), eds. *Handbook of Sustainability in Management Education: In search of a multidisciplinary Innovation and Integrated Approach*. First Edition: Edward Elgar Publishing, ISBN: 9781 78536 1234.
- Bediako, S. (2019), *Models and concepts of curriculum implementation, some definitions and influence of implementation*. Conference Curriculum change and evaluation.
- Brundtland, G.H. (1987), *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future*, New York: United Nations.
- Davis, J. (2018), *Management Education for Sustainable Development* Stanford Social Innovation Review. <http://ssr.org>.
- Ghasemy, M. & Hussin, S. (2014), *Theories of Educational Management and Leadership: A Review* Culty of Education, University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- Ibrahim, A. A. & Mazin, S. A. (2017), *Education Management, Educational Administration and Educational Leadership: Definitions and General concepts*. *Journal of Medicine*, 326-329.
- Khan, M.A. (2015), *Diverse Issues facing the Business Management Education: A Conceptual Journey*. *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, Vol. 5, No. 4.

- Leclair, D. (2019), Where is management education going?. Global focus, The EFMO Business Magazine [www.globalfocusmagazine.com](http://www.globalfocusmagazine.com).
- Melanie, N. (2020), A new application for the concept of pedagogical content knowledge: teaching advanced social science research methods, *Oxford Review of Education*, 46:2, 185-201. DOI:10.1080/03054985.2019.1644996.
- Miesing, P., Krzykowski, L. & Rich, E. (2017), Enabling Sustainability in Management Education”, Chapter 22 in Arevalo, J.A. and Mitchell, S.F. (eds.), *Handbook of Sustainability in Management Education. In Search of a Multidisciplinary. Innovative and Integrated Approach* Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Müller, U.; Lude, A. & Hancock D. R. (2019), Leading Schools towards Sustainability. Fields of Action and Management strategies for principles. *Journal of Sustainability* MDPI, 12, 3031.
- Mynbayeva, A., Sadvakassova, Z. F. Akshalova, B. (2017), Pedagogy of the Twenty-First Century: Innovative Teaching, Education. *New Pedagogical Challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – Contributions of Research in Education*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/interchopen.7234/>.
- Nordman, C. J. & Pasquier-Doumer (2017), Vocational Education, On-the-Job Training and Labour Market Integration of Young Workers in Urban West Africa. Hal-01620253.
- Onete, B.; Pleise, D.; Teodorescu, I. & Cirstea, A. (2014), Evolutions and opportunities of Business Education in the context of Educational Reform from the Digital Age. *Contemporary Priorities in Business Education*. Vol. Xvi. Nr. 37, 747.
- Raufflect, B. (2013), Integrating Sustainability in Management Education. *Humanities*, 2, 439-448, ISSN 2076-0787.
- Shao-wen, S. (2012), The various concepts of curriculum and the factors involved in curriculum-making. *Journal of Language, Teaching and Research* 3(1).
- Starik, M., Rands, G., Arnold, M., & Clar, T. (2010), In search of Sustainability in Management Education. “Academy of Management Learning and Education 9(2010): 377-83.
- Sharma, S. & Hart, S.L. (2014), Beyond “Saddle bag” Sustainability for Business Education. *Organization & Environment*, 27(1), 10-15. DOI:10.1177/1086026614520713.
- Shepherd, K. (2008), “Higher education for sustainability: seeking affective learning outcomes”. *International Journal of sustainability in Higher Education*, Vol. 9 ISS. 1, pp. 87-88.
- Tiehaara, P., Lyytinen, A. F. Kivisto, J. (2017), Management Education in Transformation: Current challenges & future perspectives. University of Tampere, Faculty of Management, Finland.
- University of Alberta (2014), What is sustainability? Office of Sustainability.
- Verdugo, R. R. & Mueller, C. (2009), Education, Social embeddedness, and the integration of the Turkish community in Germany. *An Analysis of Homeland Identity. European Education*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Winter 2008-9), pp 3-22.
- Weybrecht, G. (2015), State of Sustainability in Management Education. *Shaping the Future Business Leader. State of Sustainability Education Overview. Global Compact LEAD*.