

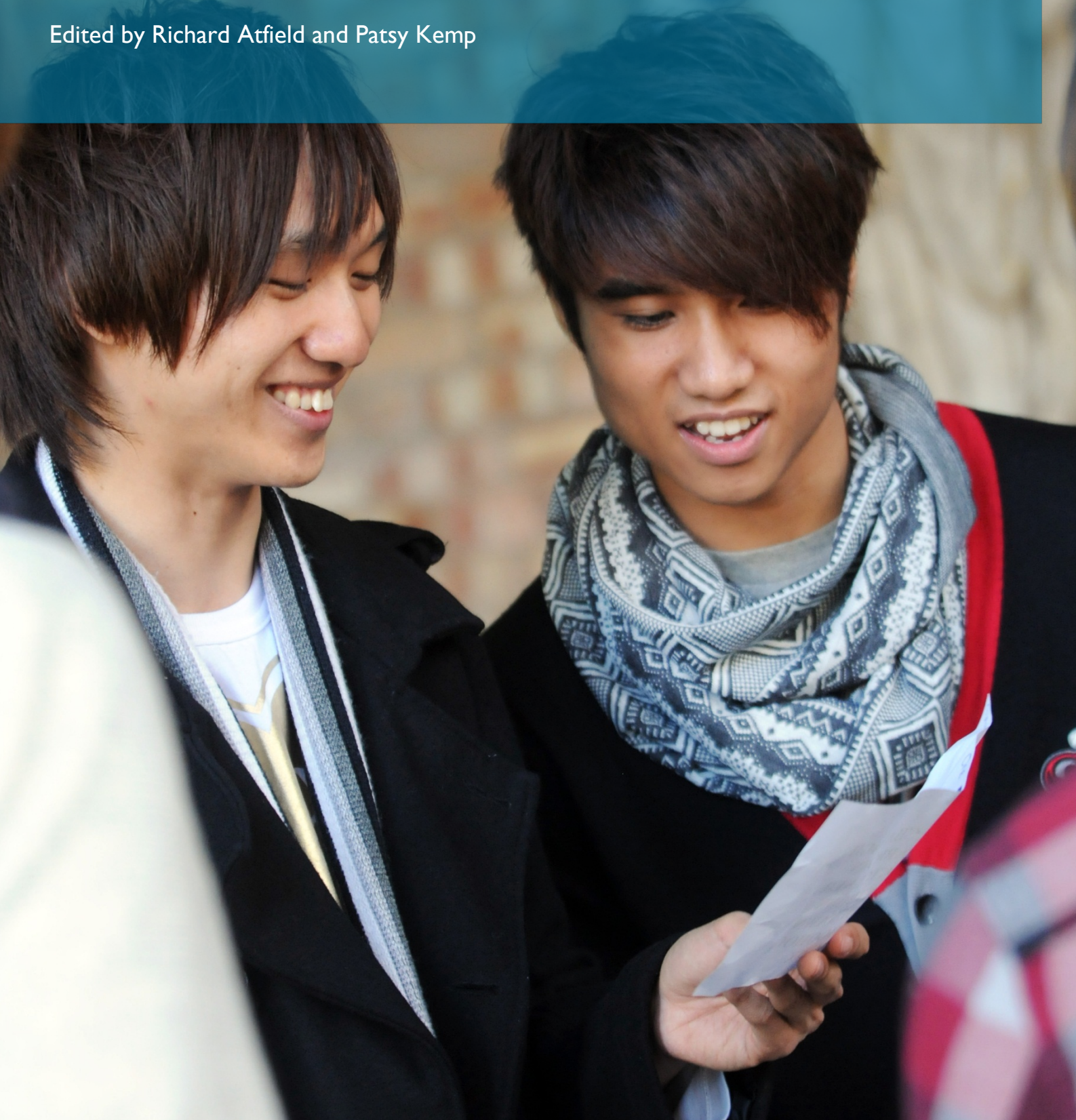
# Enhancing education for sustainable development in Business and Management, Hospitality, Leisure, Marketing, Tourism



Chapter 5 Integrating sustainability into Business schools: evidence from United Nations Principles for Responsible Management Education (UNPRME) Sharing of Information in Progress (SIP) reports

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# Summary

This chapter explores business schools' efforts and achievements around the integration of sustainability. The authors have analysed the Sharing Information on Progress (SIP) reports of the first 100 United Nations Principles for Responsible Management Education (UNPRME) signatories who developed and uploaded their report onto the UNPRME website<sup>1</sup>. The findings show to what extent and in what ways business schools embed sustainability in their teaching, research and operational practice, and how they manage and facilitate the integration process.

## Introduction

Business schools are frequently singled out by their stakeholders as having a particular responsibility in the broad agenda of social, economic and ecological sustainability. This is largely because of their critical role in management education but also in response to business leaders' failings: corporate corruption seen in the cases of Enron and Worldcom, economic system failings, such as the financial sector meltdown or ecological failings (for example, regarding global warming). Fundamental changes to the ways we all do business are required to respond to the threats of climate change and identify opportunities arising from the sustainable development of businesses, economies and markets. According to some recent studies (Aspen Institute, 2009) business schools worldwide are beginning to move towards accepting the broader responsibilities of management in society, and preparing tomorrow's leaders for future market realities, by equipping them with the sustainability perspectives required for socially responsible business.

The UNPRME elements of the UN Global Compact are viewed as one of the most important initiatives to inspire and champion responsible management education, research and thought leadership globally (Alcaraz and Thiruvattal, 2010; Waddock et al, 2011). Business school signatories commit themselves to implement six sustainability-related principles (see: [www.unprme.org](http://www.unprme.org)). The six principles are: developing capabilities of future managers, academic activities and curricula, educational frameworks and environments, research, partnership with business corporations, and stakeholder dialogue. The initiative also stresses the need to transform organisational practices to reflect each business school's overall commitment to responsibility and sustainability. Following this requirement, it has become current practice in business schools' SIP reporting to disclose information about the integration of sustainability into their operations.

These principles represent a guiding framework for the development of research, curricula and teaching methodologies. At the time of writing (August 2012), more than 460 business schools worldwide have signed these principles.

Signatories commit to develop SIP reports which are uploaded onto the UNPRME website at least every 24 months. Their purpose is two-fold: to support sharing experience and good practice among the UNPRME network and to provide a regular account of achievements made by the signatories to all stakeholders (UNPRME, 2010). All participants who had adopted the UNPRME before 31 December 2008 were requested to submit their first SIP report by June 2010 and to make it publicly accessible by uploading it onto the UNPRME website. The key findings from analysis of the first 100 reports from UNPRME signatories worldwide enabled preliminary stocktaking of current, up-to-date experience among the UNPRME network. These findings build the basis of this chapter and aim to provide insights into business schools' current approaches to, and achievements in, integrating sustainability into business education, research and operations. The majority of these reports are from North America (40%) and Europe (37%), with others coming from Africa (2%), Asia (7%), Middle East (6%) and South America and the Caribbean (8%).

The key findings from our study are summarised and presented in the next sections headlined under three dimensions: 'Frameworks and strategies', 'Facilitating integration and organisational change', and 'Achievements' (see Godemann et al, 2011, for a detailed description of the findings).

## Frameworks and strategies

### How do business schools frame and strategise the integration of sustainability?

In their reports, many business schools remain vague when specifying educational frameworks and their relationship with sustainability. The reports which do address the integration of sustainability into educational frameworks, underpinning learning objectives and learning outcomes, stress different goals of sustainable business education: some focus on critical thinking, whereas others stress the necessity of innovation to deal with societal problems, acting as a global citizen, dealing with complexity or the value of traditional management knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> The financial support of the project 'Integrating Sustainability into Business Schools' (ISIBS) by the Higher Education Funding Council England' (HEFCE) is gratefully acknowledged (<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/iccsr/isibs>). We would also like to thank Bath University School of Management.

Defining sustainability-related learning goals and learning outcomes provides the opportunity to distinguish between learning *about* sustainability (knowledge) and learning *for* sustainability (competences). In practice, there seems to be a highly diverse understanding of the learning outcomes of sustainable management education. Terms like competences, capabilities, skills and knowledge are used more or less randomly and only a minority of business schools explain how they move from educational frameworks to goals, learning outcomes and methods. Overall, it seems that responsible management education in business schools could benefit from the alignment of a clear set of sustainability-related learning goals with teaching methods and learning outcomes.

Almost every business school shows some engagement with sustainability-related research. One third of business schools address sustainability-related research aspects in their sustainability strategy or overall strategy. However, this often takes the shape of short statements such as reference to the business school's commitment to UNPRME as a key element of the organisational strategy, in both teaching and research. Fewer than 10% of business schools provide details about their sustainability research strategy or, for example, elaborate on their areas of expertise and the process of engaging with the emerging area of sustainability research.

## Managing and communicating sustainability

Our analysis of frameworks and strategies for 'managing and communicating sustainability' shows that there is commitment in the business schools to engage with their community and 'green' the campus. In particular, environmental management systems and ranking and awarding schemes appear to provide frameworks for sustainable organisational practices. Within the last decade higher education institutions have put efforts into environmental management systems (Viebahn, 2002); the focus now appears to move to carbon management, the reduction of CO2 emissions and carbon neutrality. Although business schools do communicate about environmental and sustainability issues, we could not find much evidence for comprehensive sustainability communication strategies in the SIP reports. Figure 1 provides an overview of the main findings regarding the frameworks and strategies for integrating sustainability.

Figure 1: Frameworks and strategies	
Educational frameworks for sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• specific learning goals around critical thinking; innovation; global citizenship; dealing with complexity; traditional management knowledge;</li> <li>• low alignment of learning goals with learning outcomes, methods and assessment criteria</li> </ul>
Strategies for sustainability research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• almost no account of a sustainability research strategy;</li> <li>• no explication of understanding of sustainability research.</li> </ul>
Frameworks and strategies for managing and communicating sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• using frameworks such as environmental management standards and awarding and ranking schemes;</li> <li>• social engagement focuses on community involvement;</li> <li>• almost no account of a communication strategy</li> </ul>

## Facilitating integration and organisational change

### How do business schools facilitate sustainability integration and organisational change?

Closer examination of the context in which all attempts at integration take place shows that there is a reported will on the part of business schools to learn. However, only a few business schools explain their strategy for organisational learning. The findings attested to the importance of the right balance of top-down and bottom-up approaches in creating a climate for organisational change. Key approaches to structural change involve the establishment and/or mobilisation of business school centres dedicated to or integrating sustainability as well as the establishment of working groups, committees or task forces within the business school or the overall institution.

### Managing the organisational change process

The study shows firstly that a quarter of the business schools have undertaken a review of their own teaching, research and/or organisational practices to learn more about themselves in order to allow change to occur, and that the emphasis here lies on the review of teaching. Secondly, only in exceptional cases is there debate about a communication culture that brings organisational members together in order to discuss, relate and understand the current status of sustainability in the business school. There also seems to be room for improvement which involves students, staff and external stakeholders. Thirdly, one out of ten of the reviewed business schools made support available to organisational members in the form of teaching materials, provision of sustainability-related publications, multimedia resources and opportunities for research topics. The

creation of funds to finance investments in institutional development linked to sustainability and the provision of financial incentives are less common.

## Reflective learning for organisational change towards sustainability

The findings regarding ‘reflective learning for organisational change towards sustainability’ reveal there is an interest in sharing experience with others and learning from others. There is also a need for support, sometimes directly expressed as a request for good practice examples, the facilitating of information-sharing about signatories, and the desire to improve the learning network through co-ordination or initialisation of partnerships with other business schools and organisations. In their reports, the business schools identified a set of challenges and barriers to the integration of sustainability as well as insights into enablers for organisational change towards sustainability. Tools which can support the reflection process are monitoring of and learning from other organisations, sharing best teaching practice and surveying the faculty. However, as the purpose of SIP reports is not only to provide stakeholders with a regular account of achievements made by the signatories, but also to support sharing experience with integrating sustainability into business schools among the UNPRME network, we were surprised not to find more comprehensive accounts of how, and with which results, schools reflect on their experience with the integration of sustainability. Figure 2 summarises how business schools facilitate the integration process and organisational change.

Figure 2: Facilitating integration and organisational change	
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there is a will on the part of business schools to learn;</li> <li>• only a few business schools explain their strategy for organisational learning;</li> <li>• creating a climate for organisational change seems to require the right balance of top-down and bottom-up approaches;</li> <li>• key approach to structural change involves the establishment of business school centres dedicated to or integrating sustainability.</li> </ul>
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• only a few business schools provide insights into how they integrate sustainability (process);</li> <li>• reviewing their own teaching, research and/or organisational practices to allow change to occur; the emphasis lies on the review of teaching;</li> <li>• almost no account given for the establishment of a communication culture that brings organisational members together to learn from each other;</li> <li>• providing financial incentives or input for staff is relatively rare.</li> </ul>
Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• great interest in sharing experience with others and learning from others as well as a need for support;</li> <li>• only a few business schools yet provide a comprehensive account of their experience with integrating sustainability in their organisations;</li> <li>• some business schools monitor other organisations, share best teaching practice and survey the faculty.</li> </ul>

## Achievements

### What achievements have been made in integrating sustainability?

Generally, business schools who have signed the UNPRME appear to aim to embed sustainability within all areas (research, teaching, operations); however, when they present their achievements most emphasis is placed on teaching.

Figure 3: Achievements	
Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sustainability-related offerings in the majority of business schools;</li> <li>• interdisciplinary teaching seems to play an important role;</li> <li>• focus on teaching methods such as guest speakers, case studies and competitions;</li> <li>• tendency to put more effort in integrating sustainability at postgraduate level;</li> <li>• collaborative research is employed to enhance sustainability-related research but this is still not widespread;</li> <li>• organisational practices are centred on environmental activities and community involvement.</li> </ul>
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participating in the UNPRME initiative enhances the formalisation and development of strategic sustainability integration and transformation;</li> </ul>

- business schools appear to choose the 'traditional' academic way of publishing about sustainability rather than creating impacts through contributions in other media;
- committing to continuous improvement and goal setting reveal the future impact of business school's activities.

## Outcomes and impacts

Integrating sustainability has several outcomes and impacts (see Figure 3 above). Many business schools have various sustainability-related learning offerings. Most report that they have either created new courses or programmes which focus specifically on sustainability issues or integrated sustainability within existing structures. In relation to this, interdisciplinary teaching seems to play an important role, as 30% of the reviewed business schools employed this approach when teaching about sustainability. The level at which sustainability is integrated in the educational programme indicates a gap between postgraduate and undergraduate levels. Business schools have a tendency to put more effort into integrating sustainability at postgraduate level, with a particular focus on the MBA programme. The most popular methods of delivering sustainability are guest speakers, field-based learning experiences, the use of case studies, and local and global competitions. The content of sustainability-related teaching is mostly centred on corporate social responsibility (CSR), ethics and sustainability.

Although sustainability seems to be an important focus for research, there are opportunities for an increase in collaboration in sustainability-related research. Interdisciplinary research is mentioned by nearly a fifth (17%) of signatories as a way to enhance sustainability research by involving faculty members from different departments or research streams, and scholars with different disciplinary backgrounds. The current involvement of external practitioners can be viewed as positive but disciplinary boundaries and barriers separating scholars from practitioners seem still to exist (transdisciplinary research). Practitioner involvement is mainly represented by guest speakers, advisory board members or supporting partners rather than in embedded collaborative sustainability research. Moreover, accounts of research impact are mainly presented in the form of a publication; less frequent is evidence for knowledge transfer to other audiences through, for example, contributions in the media or other print media.

The majority of organisational achievements presented by the business schools are centred on environmental aspects and initiatives. They are often linked to, or embedded in, university-wide activities with an observable focus on carbon emissions reduction. A quarter of the business schools reviewed mention sustainability-related campus initiatives, and about a third of them promote sustainability in the university and also in the wider community, through social projects and initiatives.

The participation of business schools in the UNPRME initiative appears to enhance the formalisation and development of strategic sustainability integration and transformation. In their key targets, nearly all business schools commit themselves to enhancing their activities and impacts in the fields of research, education and operations.

## Conclusion

We think our analysis of self-reported endeavours around integrating sustainability into teaching, research and organisational practice might allow an optimistic answer to questions about the role of sustainability in business schools. It shows that business schools seem to be aware of the imperative towards mainstreaming sustainability and have made notable achievements in embedding it into research and teaching. Operationally, they are committed to greening-the-campus activities and some have received certification for their environmental management system or awards for their environmental performance. There is substance and some degree of change and development towards the integration of sustainability into business schools.

The observation that the UNPRME are seen as an opportunity to get or keep the ball rolling in the internal integration of sustainability seems to paint an encouraging picture. It provides an opportunity for business schools to think about the usability of the principles and how they want to contribute to a sustainable society in the future. However, the results also indicate that reflection on the implementation process and the management of the organisational change process is underdeveloped, and that there is a need for more future drivers from institutions. Developing tools and methods for creating a culture of organisational learning and building change strategies around sustainability knowledge (mindsets) seem to remain challenges for business schools. In the light of pervasive estimations that business schools are not interested in sustainability education, probably the most surprising finding is what some business schools say they have achieved regarding the integration of sustainability. However, given our analysis covers only business schools already committed to sustainability, it would be interesting to ask non-signatories about their progress.

It should also be noted that it is often difficult to assess the integration process and learning opportunities as these are not documented in sufficient detail. Much information is available about specific general objectives, initiatives and outcomes of projects but there is a noticeable lack of data to show *how* these objectives and outcomes are achieved. Tools which support business schools in reflecting on their own practices, overcoming barriers and facilitating change are viewed as a critical part of strategies for sustainability integration; however, these strategies are made explicit by a minority of business schools only. To

enhance the purpose of the SIP reports to foster mutual learning the business schools should be encouraged to balance what they have achieved and how they achieved the integration of sustainability.

Finally, the analysis reveals there is no one 'recipe' for the integration of sustainability into business schools. Every business school has chosen its own way of integrating the UNPRME and of reporting achievements. This in part reflects the SIP design, which encourages an emphasis upon individual accounts of progress rather than bench-marking – for better or for worse. Nevertheless, through the medium of this report, the SIPs have enabled progress both by providing an overview of the implementation of the UNPRME principles worldwide and by raising key opportunities for further reflection, development and discussion.

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