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Integrating sustainability in business schools: The possibility of harmonic response across heterogenic landscapes?

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Authors	Wall, Tony;Hindley, Ann;Mburayi, Langton;Cregan, Karen;Evans, Vicky
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Integrating sustainability in business schools: the possibility of harmonic response across heterogenic landscapes?

One of the ongoing critiques of management learning and education, and higher education more broadly, relates to how it promotes ethics and responsible managers of the future (Ghoshal, 2005; Snelson-Powell et al 2016). Indeed, the United Nations' established the Principles of Responsible Management Education initiative in 2007 to help promote and deliver the 17 Sustainable Development Goals as part of its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, over a decade on, the integration of sustainability into management learning and education remains limited (Akrivou & Bradbury-Huang, 2015; Mburayi & Wall, 2018), and is beset with obstacles ranging from accreditation drivers to leadership challenges (Painter-Morland et al 2016). Adopted strategies have included the addition of sustainability content to existing modules; the creation of standalone sustainability modules; cross-curricula integration and cross-disciplinary course provision for business students, and a recommendation for a whole institution approach that develops capacities, builds connectedness and supports systematic leadership (Rusinko, 2010; Painter-Morland et al 2016).

One conceptualisation of the issue posits that the organisation of the business school needs to direct and reflect sustainability values such that it inculcates sustainable behaviours across organisational units (Akrivou & Bradbury-Huang, 2015) – and as such, providing a harmony to direct and guide behaviour at the business school level. In contrast to the need for this harmonic response, there is evidence of emerging heterogenic responses across sub disciplines, for example: there seems to be comparatively little integration in the context of accounting and finance curricula or seemingly 'bolt on' approaches (Mburayi & Wall, 2018); tourism and events seemingly embed responsibility in the nature of place and space (Hall et al, 2015); and marketing, which is sometimes portrayed as a contributor to over-consumption, often questions its ability to market sustainability which creates its own tensions (Carrington et al 2016). Beyond this, others may purposively not engage in the education for sustainability agenda for a range of reasons including indifference, confusion, or the belief that it is not the concern of a business school (Rasche et al 2013). Therefore, this QIC aspires to examine the possibility of harmonic response across the heterogenic landscapes of business schools, with a view to exploring alternative pathways in practice and research.

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