

Doing sustainability right: developing responsible business leadership for social and economic progress

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Abstract:

The mission of the European School of Management and Technology (www.esmt.org) is to develop entrepreneurial leaders who think globally, act responsibly and respect the individual, and to contribute and impart new knowledge to foster sustainable economic growth. When done right, sustainability means social development and environmental protection as well as operationally successful and financially stable organizations, whether commercial or non-profit. This concept drives the research, teaching and learning at the school, and the Information Center supports the progress of every area with literature, trainings and tutorials and personalized services and support.

Keywords: business school, leadership, business, social responsibility, sustainability.

What do you think of when you hear the word ‘business’? Money and management, profits and work, corporations and power?

These too are part of business and are very likely some of the first terms that came to mind. Do you also think of people, leadership and progress? Organization, responsibility and society? Eventually you probably would, however these concepts have in recent decades taken at best second place even though both employees and consumers are people, good management requires strong leadership, and every non-profit and NGO is also an organization striving to prosper. The European School of Management and Technology, educates leaders to create and operate sustainable businesses, where the only true sustainability stems from contributing to the social progress and environmental well-being from which all business in turn benefits.

Like the library or information center of any institution, ours at ESMT provides information resources and services to its faculty, students and staff. What is different about our Information Center is that we serve such a small community that I know each of our

colleagues and students personally and we enjoy the luxury of having many opportunities to become involved in their work. So the stories of how our Information Center supports social change are in the end the stories of the individuals we work with and how their research, teaching, careers and personal goals contribute to a virtuous circle of social and economic well-being.

The school: ESMT European School of Management and Technology, Berlin, Germany

ESMT's mission is to develop entrepreneurial leaders who think globally, act responsibly and respect the individual, and to contribute and impart new knowledge to foster sustainable economic growth. (ESMT European School of Management and Technology, 2014) This concept drives the research, teaching and learning at the school, and the Information Center supports the progress of every area with literature, trainings and tutorials and personalized services and support.

Faculty research

ESMT has an international and academically diverse faculty researching a wide spectrum of fields related to creating, maintaining and sustaining corporations and other organizations. Some work in areas more traditionally associated with business, such as production and operations, corporate finance and business strategy, while others are active in the fields of organizational behavior, development economics and corporate responsibility. Regardless of the field, sustainability and responsibility are key concepts for all areas of scholarship.

Research from these fields contributes to a further understanding of the roles of business in society, highlighting the various points of connection between the successful businesses and prosperous societies. Our professor for corporate responsibility bases his research on the tenet that when done right, sustainability affects positive social and environmental change while contributing to a company's competitive advantage and long-term success. He initiated the school's annual Sustainable Business Roundtable, at which business leaders meet to discuss best practices and challenges in achieving a symbiotic relationship between business, society and the environment. (ESMT European School of Management and Technology, 2014)

Teaching

Our faculty's research enters the professional discourse as well as the content of the courses they teach. A professor who focuses on development and labor economics teaches the course *Fighting Poverty with Business*, while the professor who runs the Roundtable also teaches *Sustainable Business*. Our professor for organizational behavior examines teamwork and diversity in organizations in her research, and then brings the topic to life in her courses with classes so diverse that students live daily the challenges as well as the enormous advantages of having so many different viewpoints in one team. Even in the traditionally profit-focused classes on finance and product development students discuss why human behavior needs to be a factor when thinking about investments, and how product innovation can contribute to the development of both companies and society.

Learning

ESMT offers graduate degree programs leading to a Master's in Business Administration and a Master's in Management, and was accredited to grant PhDs in 2013. Students represent

countries worldwide and are drawn by a faculty dedicated to research and teaching, the connections to internationally successful companies, the location in Germany and the school's reputation for personal support throughout the program. Beyond traditional classroom instruction and support, we also want to teach by example, treating each student with respect and building upon individuals' strengths just as we hope they will go on to do as leaders of their own teams, organizations and communities.

The school awards the Kofi Annan Scholarship to students from developing countries, covering their tuition in full so that they can take the skills they learn back to build sustainable businesses in their home countries. ESMT also sponsors the extracurricular Social Impact Club, which for the past two years had the most members of any school club. Students in the SIC organize fundraisers for donations to charitable groups and regularly support microfinance projects. Club members also work with non-profit organizations to define one or more pro bono consulting projects that some students then take on as their final MBA projects. The school covers all or most of the costs of these projects, which have in the past taken students to India, Afghanistan, Kenya and post-earthquake Haiti. Corporations too hire our students for these final projects, in the recent past consulting on smart homes, telehealthcare, and workplace diversity initiatives. Students on these teams usually develop a master's thesis topic analyzing some aspect of the projects, thus deepening their knowledge of best practice and the goals of socially relevant work within non-profit as well as commercial organizations.

The Information Center

The concept of the Information Center rests on three objectives: provide access to information supporting research, teaching and learning, offer research training, support and services, and make everyone who comes in the door or otherwise contacts us feel welcome. My experience at this school and other institutions has shown that the best way to achieve the first two goals is to begin with the third.

Faculty research

The Information Center ensures that our faculty can access all the information they need for their research from wherever they happen to be working. Our digital subscriptions cover more than 17,000 current and archival journal subscriptions as well as a number of databases for corporate financial information, industry reports and market research. I manage this content on our school intranet and also coordinate a cooperation with the Humboldt University that gives our faculty access to further databases. Remote access to almost all our digital resources is currently possible via EZProxy, and this allows faculty members to work while at conferences, visiting co-authors or otherwise off campus. If they require articles or books outside of our subscriptions and collections, I use the document delivery and interlibrary loan services of subito as well as a local bookshop to put the literature they need on their desks.

To make our faculty's research freely and publicly accessible, the Information Center team catalogues the working papers of our faculty and faculty professionals so that they are retrievable from our OPAC. We also support and use SSRN as well as the open access repositories of the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek/German National Library and RePEc.

In order to proactively support our faculty's research, I attend faculty discussion groups and regularly inform myself about their current work. What I learn guides my acquisition choices and investigation into cooperation and consortium opportunities with other institutions. Often I run across references to articles and other literature in professional newsletters and other publications, and when they match a professor's research I send them on. Sometimes they have seen the articles or working papers already, sometimes they have not, but the feedback I receive suggests that they appreciate the fact that we actively keep them in mind at least as much as receiving the literature itself.

For the Sustainable Business Roundtable and other school events, we provide access to articles from journals, magazines and newspapers and consult on what German copyright laws and data providers' license agreements allow. The license agreements and German copyright law can be quite restrictive, so I look for possibilities of scholarly sharing and when necessary purchase the appropriate distribution licenses.

Teaching

To support our professors' teaching we offer services common to many educational institutions such as checking and updating textbook references in their course bibliographies and making sure our collection is up to date and contains a variety of complementary literature. We also gather all articles suggested for further reading in the Information Center online, a section of the school's e-learning platform, which lets students access them both on and off campus. Reading through the course syllabi steers and supports my acquisition decisions.

For some courses I have suggested ways of more directly connecting material covered in classes with the information resources in our collection and subscriptions. Students sometimes forget what they learned during the introduction session at the beginning of their studies, or they are unsure of what kind of information is relevant to their assignments and why. For one course I compiled an overview describing the type of information contained in each relevant resource and what exactly it is good for within the scope of that particular class. When professors teach or give assignments requiring a specific database, I highlight it on the Information Center's main search page and sometimes send an extra email around, and the professor mentions in class both the database and how to access it.

Learning

When students arrive at the school, they begin an experience with new colleagues, new challenges and new opportunities. One thing they have in common, though, no matter where they came from, is that most at first think of the Information Center solely as the library and are thus surprised by the modest number of bookshelves. Some have eventually admitted that they initially wondered why we needed one team member per bookshelf unit; the team consists of one full-time manager and two student assistants, who have until now been librarians already or studying for a related degree. Judging by their facial expressions, students are even more surprised when we eventually greet them by name, ask about or already know what they did before they got to our school, and inquire about their aspirations. By the time I start talking with them about possible resources, contacts and their personal strengths that could help them get where they want to go, they are often truly bemused. With time they become accustomed to this, and by the end of the year when they start their final consulting projects, theses and job searches, they realize what I was doing.

At the beginning of their studies, I offer an introductory whirlwind tour of the Information Center online. I mention that they can borrow books from the library, but I hold this session in their usual classroom so as to emphasize the fact that most of the materials we have to offer are available to them online via our school's intranet. I highlight a few databases related to their first courses, show them around the ebook library, and demonstrate how easy and Google-like it is to use our discovery system Summon. The main idea of this introduction is however to tell them that my team and I are there to provide whatever information they require for their studies and very interested in making sure they get all the support they might need. As a guideline I suggest that as soon as they start to ask 'where do I find...' and are unable to find their own answer, they should contact us **before** they get frustrated. This earns me a few smiles, but it also gives students a concrete example of what kind of questions we can help them with so that they more quickly and easily think of us when they arise.

Once students do come in, we use the contact to find out more about them, when appropriate, and ask them about anything that comes up naturally, from career goals and international experience to families and personal strengths. This is how I know that every year we have more students who intend to continue or to go into work at NGOs and other non-profit organizations, or to focus on social responsibility initiatives or departments in corporations. Anticipating this interest, the OECD iLibrary has always been a core resource in our collection and we subscribe to a variety of journals focusing on topics such as hiring and retaining a diverse workforce, social entrepreneurship, microfinance and other market-based opportunities for social and economic development. I also dedicate a good portion of my book and ebook budget to expanding our collection in these areas.

Finding positions in which they can contribute to social and economic development poses a challenge for many of our students, even those who already have experience in related fields. Taking the time right from the beginning to get to know our students means that sometimes I can forge connections between current students and alumni working in the same type of organization a student is aiming for. Especially students aspiring to a move from a different industry toward more socially active work face the usual human fear of change and, often, not being 'good enough' for their admittedly ambitious goals. By the time I hear that some students are facing these doubts, I usually know them well enough to talk with them about the value of the experience, skills and personal traits they do have, the various possible steps they can take between graduation and the work they really want to do, and who might be able to help further.

The final consulting projects often prove to be the opportunities that let students discover for themselves the significance of their own strengths and how they can successfully apply them in ways they find meaningful, and we in the Information Center do all we can to support this. One such project in 2011 led a team of students to Haiti, where a non-profit organization was planning a community center that would offer services specifically for the survivors of the earthquake of 2010. These students consulted the organization on the planning process behind the programs and facilities, while at the same time working under a tight deadline for their master's thesis. One student returned from Haiti to let me know that the only obstacle to her research was that the internet service in Haiti was unreliable, but when the service was up and running she could access the Information Center online to read journal articles and ebooks. These resources supported the project as well as her master's thesis, which focused

on how the skills learned and honed in an MBA program are also necessary for running a sustainable NGO.

Feedback in the form of anonymous surveys as well as personal conversations suggests that students rate our attention to who are students are and where they want to go as our most meaningful contribution to their studies and progress. The efforts of the entire school focus on this goal, and I have created a niche activity in the Information Center that goes beyond information resources and includes guidance for them as people and as professionals in an otherwise neutral environment. All students have a coach who accompanies them throughout the MBA program, however I attribute the success of my 'hidden coaching' to the simple fact that they do not expect it. Their coaches are professionals in the field and students prepare for their meetings with them, whereas when they talk with me they can be candid and spontaneous, which can reveal different strengths and concerns than would come up in a formal meeting with their coaches. These 'sessions' often start off with a more library-typical question, for instance about a book or an article, and when appropriate I take it from there to find out about their past experience and future goals, their strengths and their concerns. For instance one friendly but reserved woman once asked about books on presentation skills, and this turned into a conversation in which I learned that she wanted to move into development finance but was unsure of her chances. Though I encouraged her to imagine how she could apply her talents in that field at least as well as she had already done for her past employers, I could tell she remained concerned. Some months later her consulting project with the GIZ, the German Society for International Cooperation, required her to fly unexpectedly solo to Nairobi to work with people she had never met on a renewable energy project that was new to her in every way. What she also did not expect was that her skills, dedication and authenticity would make the trip both professionally successful and personally satisfying. When she came back to school and told me her stories, she also said she kept returning to this one conversation in the Information Center. I had told her then that she is capable of far more than she thinks, which at the time she did not believe but then in Kenya proved to herself daily. This one story alone would have made my year, and happily enough it is just one of many.

Where we go from here

Faculty research

We are currently working on a process for entering the working papers of our faculty and faculty professionals into the EconStor database of the ZBW, Germany's Central Library for Business Studies. The ZBW is a truly excellent archive of business resources and we are excited about expanding the access opportunities by contributing to this multilingual repository. After establishing our EconStor process I will continue to add further repositories to our list.

Teaching

In 2013 I held my first tutorial for information literacy as a complement to the Research Methods course they take as a required course. It covers all technical aspects of research and writing, and the presentation makes students aware that this too is what the Information Center is for, thus directing their questions to us instead of to the professors mentoring their thesis projects. I told students about academic resources and writing and showed them again and in more detail how to use our discovery system and how to apply efficient research skills

to their work. My assistant presented the literature management freeware Mendeley and my colleague from the Faculty Publications office introduced the thesis template and described the purpose and technique of citations and references. Student feedback was so positive that we have now integrated our tutorial into the course program.

I will also continue to build on contact with the faculty to find out if there are more ways in which we can support their teaching throughout the year. The resource overview and timely presentation of relevant databases work well, however I suspect there are other classes for which I could offer similar guides and services.

Learning

Currently the ESMT community accesses the Information Center online via a 'course' in our Moodle e-learning platform. Because the Information Center online requires more complicated functions than a true course, we are looking for alternatives and this year we hope to migrate to the Drupal intranet used by the rest of the school.

The personal support that we offer will continue as it is, which by definition means that we will constantly be changing and developing, especially in order to meet the needs of our students. Our first Master's in Management class starts this fall, and most students will have either just earned their bachelor's degrees or have worked for only a few years, so they will benefit most from a different kind of guidance than we offer those with years or even decades of work experience. My concept for the Information Center was created to accommodate development and diversity, so we will continue to listen to, learn about and learn from our faculty, from each class and each individual.

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