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ENVIRONMENTAL AND  
SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY FOR  
BUSINESS ADVANTAGE COLLECTION

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Robert Sroufe, *Editor*

# Human Resource Management for Organizational Sustainability

**Radha R. Sharma**



**BUSINESS EXPERT PRESS**

# Human Resource Management for Organizational Sustainability



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Editor  
Radha R. Sharma



BUSINESS EXPERT PRESS

*Human Resource Management for Organizational Sustainability*

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## Dedication

*The Supreme*

&

*My Family!*

*Dedicate yourself to what gives your life true meaning and purpose;  
make a positive difference in someone's life.*

—Roy T. Bennett



## **Abstract**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit on 25 September, 2015, contains holistic, far-reaching, and people-centered set of universal and transformative goals and targets. These call for strengthening capacities and providing an enabling environment for access to opportunities that are sustainable from economic, social, and environmental standpoints. Sustainability focus of the organization needs to go hand in hand with sustainable HRM systems, processes, and practices. But the reality is that sustainability is seldom a part of HR plans or strategic HR practices of most of the organizations. Hence, the book *Human Resource Management for Organizational Sustainability* offers a new paradigm by focusing on human resource systems and processes from the lens of sustainability. The book puts together the concepts, researches, and practices that advance the understanding of organizational sustainability through human resource management contributed by specialists from Austria, Germany, India, Netherlands, Spain, United Kingdom, and United States, with examples, cases, and review questions.

Whereas environment-related aspects have been receiving increasing attention over the years, the “people” element of social responsibility has received limited attention in management education and also in the business world (CAMB competency model for management education for sustainability, Sharma, 2017, doi:10.1177/0972262917700970). The book is expected to bridge the knowledge gap and be a text/source book to develop insights into how sustainable HRM practices can contribute not only to organizational sustainability but also to sustainability at large.

## **Keywords**

Sustainability; sustainable HRM; human resource management; organizations



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## CHAPTER 11

# Promoting Responsible Leadership and Sustainability

## A Case Study in Management Education

Grace Hurford

### Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of a residential weeklong program run in the heart of the British Lake District with a unique emphasis on leadership and sustainability. It covers the type of program and how it is run and summarizes some of the evaluation work that has already been carried out. It also includes some of the benefits to the local community that have ensued from such a program.

The initial partnership between the University of Cumbria (UoC) and Robert Kennedy College (RKC) in Zurich led to a pilot of our first joint MBA program in Leadership and Sustainability (2010–2011), leading to three full master's programs commencing in 2013. Entirely online (except this particular 5-day Ambleside residential course), the 18-month to 5-year program is flexible and accessible yet challenging, designed for students who would not otherwise be able to study. Up to

10 residential weeks are delivered annually. Teamwork is crucial to ensure the student residency experience is of a phenomenal quality. The programs have over 2,000 students; over the last 18 months, 400-plus students in groups of 30 from more than 120 countries worldwide have come to Ambleside to participate in a weeklong program of lectures, outdoor activities, and group work. These residencies embody the university's mission: to provide and promote excellent and accessible higher education that enhances the lives of individuals and fosters the development of the communities to which we belong. In so doing, the university will embrace four guiding themes: sustainability, creativity, employability, and enterprise.

The residencies also put into practice the university's core values of intellectual curiosity, rational enquiry and personal creativity; emotional, creative and spiritual development; social responsibility, equality, diversity, and inclusivity; excellence and achievement; and environmental sustainability. The residential course includes an element of outdoor learning. Recent studies have highlighted the need for more holistic, experiential, interdisciplinary approaches in business and sustainability, and as a pedagogical approach, outdoor learning has much to offer since it lends itself to holistic and experiential learning and enables integration of knowledge and skills from a range of disciplines (Lugg 2007).

## What Makes the Residencies Innovating and Inspiring?

**Students**—Representing global companies, third-sector aid agencies, armed forces, and family businesses, students work in deserts, on glaciers, in submarines, refugee camps on battlefields and oil rigs, as well as in towns and cities worldwide. They inspire and challenge the staff every step of the way.

**Core values and team**—The unique feature of the program is the strong commitment to ethical practice and corporate sustainability underpinning the residency. The team comprises teachers, researchers, and activists, united in their determination to put these values into practice.

**Residential design/delivery**—Students employ experiential learning and use critical thinking: indoors and outside, with the Lake District as a forum for business inquiry.



Using material from iconic local philosophers and writers (such as Wordsworth and Ruskin) and bridging natural sciences with business, students probe deeper questions of ethics and social responsibility and challenge management orthodoxies. The outdoor walking sessions include discussions about sustainability: sustaining ourselves, the planet, and the organizations we work in. Staff and students work through a range of mental/physical/ metaphorical activities (examples include a comparison of water flow and money flow, decomposing logs are compared to organizational life cycles, and the earth's time line is explored as a method for reassessing sustainability models and concepts). Throughout these activities, students reflect on how such experiences challenge personal and organizational lives. There are key locations during the exploratory walks, but the reflective process unfolds in between these places, so that the journey is as important as the stages and the final destination.

**Community benefits**—The open lecture series embedded into the residencies are free to the public, featuring extraordinary speakers from around the globe such as Funmi Iyanda (New Dawn, Nigeria) and Cornis van der Lugt (BSD Consulting, Switzerland).

Locally, the team has started to support business tutors in schools, running spin-off workshops to inspire learning and raise aspirations in local young people.

### **Brief Overview of the Program and the Importance of Partnerships**

The development of the MBA programs over the last 18 months has built on early planning work carried out with the RKC, creating structures and systems for linking the two institutions together. After the initial planning period (2010–2011) when a single MBA was trialed, adapted, and evaluated, the full suite of MBA and MA programs began in spring 2013. The team works hard to make this partnership seamless:

Robert Kennedy College has been very pleased with our partnership with the University of Cumbria, by which we have been able to deliver some of its Master's programmes seamlessly

through distance learning to students from over 120 countries worldwide. The programmes follow the same assessment and quality processes as those of the university itself, and to date there have been almost 2,000 students, all of whom also attend a one week residential at the university's Ambleside Campus. When I meet the students they have all been impressed by the university, and the capability of both faculty and administrative staff, and have greatly appreciated the chance to study for a British university degree which they know will be recognized everywhere. (David Duffill, Associate Dean, Robert Kennedy College, November 2014)

The residencies at Ambleside are phenomenal team-building experiences, among both the student participants and the Cumbrian/RKC teaching team. This is achieved in the classroom, in group project work and in outside studies. The mix of nationalities and professional backgrounds of the participants is itself a major source of inspiration and insight. Cumbria also has a 'back-room' team, rarely seen, but who make the entire residency run smoothly: perfect teamwork in action! (Dr Roy Damary, Robert Kennedy College, November 2014)

In practice, this seamless service means that students are often unaware of where RKC ends and the university begins—learning platforms, search engines, electronic libraries, and learning support are all shared access—the UoC validates and quality checks the whole master's set of joint programs, so assessment criteria and progression are consistent and transparent to students and tutors.

## Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Residential Programs

**The students/graduates:** For many of the students, the experience is truly transformative. The diversity of the student groups in terms of nationality, culture, work experience, sectors represented, personal

experience, and character always leads to rich and varied debate. The need to educate global leaders on sustainability issues is of paramount importance, and the team recognizes that many of its students return to positions of political, corporate, public and not-for-profit sector influence, taking with them an enhanced level of understanding and resolution to implement meaningful change within their environment.

Example feedback from students in 2013 to 2016 was as follows:

<i>High standard teaching. The opportunity for debate and simulated “life” situations were well managed. Excellent facilitators and very good admin</i>
<i>Doing this course has been an exciting journey. Congratulate RKC and UoC for such a wonderful course</i>
<i>Grateful for this learning experience where I learned theory but most importantly allowed me to learn more about myself</i>
<i>I am quite honored to be part of this residency and memories would remain forever. The instructors were wonderful, loving, caring and so on. The knowledge acquired would definitely move me to the next level in life. I can’t wait to implement all that I have learned</i>
<i>Environment and teaching quality are exceptional</i>
<i>The dynamic exploratory activities were an excellent way to learn. I enjoyed the experiential learning on our Lakeland walk by Dr G. The case study group assignment was a fantastic way to synthesize the theories and practice.</i>
<i>This course rocks! Dr G and Dr D are exceptionally good</i>
<i>You guys are so well organized, the world is richer with you</i>
<i>This experience really enriched my MBA journey, studying online can be quite a solitary affair, so being able to spend 5 days with experienced cohorts and expert professors renewed my enthusiasm and broadened my perspectives. I can honestly say I have learned something valuable from everyone here</i>
<i>Dr D is an excellent guide, mentor and tutor. Ambleside’s a beautiful place, take care of it. It’s a lovely module, I will never forget it</i>

Their businesses: Students who enroll on the programs are often senior decision makers in globally significant organizations around the world (recent delegates include leaders of political parties from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, and representatives from Price Waterhouse Cooper, Hewlett Packard, the United Nations, the security services, and the World Health

Organization). The power of these individuals to shape their futures when they return cannot be overestimated. Later feedback is shown in Table 11.1:

**Table 11.1** *Later forum feedback*

<p>“With respect to our residency module, honestly, it has affected the way I do things and make choices. Although the marketing class introduced the concepts of ethics and CSR with the Patagonia reading, the concepts weren’t central to the course. Having done the residency, I now have a greater understanding of business ethics and the potential impact of CSR strategies that are part of an organization’s DNA. It is interesting to note that, as stated in one of the lectures, MBA students have a clearer understanding of ethics BEFORE they start their programs than they do at the end. This is likely due to the fact that business tends to take an ‘ends justify the means’ approach to ethics, putting the satisfaction of shareholders above other considerations based on the “businesses exist to increase the wealth of their shareholders/owners’ paradigm. Making this module mandatory would go a long way towards clarifying these issues for MBA students who will soon be decision makers and key stakeholders for organizations that will impact their local, if not global, communities.” (I USA)</p>
<p>“The course has changed the way I live to some extent. I have always been conscious of the environment, water etc, but now, like I, I take better care with water and recycling. Turning the tap off when I shave and brush my teeth etc. I also pushing more recycling efforts at work and have had discussions with my boss on how we can highlight sustainability on a broader basis. As we are the United Nations, we are not profit driven, and we often work in conditions that are not optimal for sustainability—but I want to do a paper for my company on sustainability in disaster/war zones. With regards to the ethics and corporate social responsibility—I believe that the class brings the necessity of corporate responsibility to the forefront and shows us that a corporation is-in the end-people. These people who drive business are board members etc. who need to think about their decisions and the impact that they have. Recently, I have been having some of these discussions with friends and colleagues on corporate responsibility—and how money drives our society.” (B Spain)</p>
<p>This has impacted my way of thinking and hope to now impact my staff with the “team” theory even though each has a job description. I am not ignorant of the fact that the concept of “team” has it challenges however when they are worked out sustainable results are achieved. Presently, I am training my staff and hope to get a “buy in” to the team work. Micro-management in the bureaucratic organization is becoming obsolete. (Barbados)</p>
<p>“This is a very interesting programme and very relevant to my country (Nigeria). I am going to go back and try to convince my boss to make an (CSR) effort to see what we can do.”</p>
<p>“To be very honest, the residency I consider as extremely motivating for me for the MBA course itself.</p>
<p>I would actually recommend to every student to participate in it as early as possible as it creates a feeling of ‘belonging’ to the university and other students. Before that the feeling was more ‘lonely, anonymous fighter on the way to my MBA’ I would actually make it a part of the MBA to have two residencies....one per year.</p>
<p>It made me more conscious about various things I use in daily life. I became aware that we do not appreciate enough such a simple resource like water which is available to us in highest quality in Europe. At least we in Europe take too many things for granted. Some more modesty within the society would be not bad.” (A Kazakhstan)</p>

### *Open Lectures Inspire Businesses Locally to Think about their Own Practices*

Thank you so much for such a fantastic lecture last night! I thoroughly enjoyed it and it was definitely thought provoking. (local retailer)

The emerging links with local schools foster new ideas for learning and introduce the concept of sustainability early on. School tutors appreciate the way science is bridged with business when exploring sustainability and management:

The links with science are not something we normally see and I liked this. I think the log and the water metaphors are really good starting points—to enable us to lead on to introducing cash flow forecasts and finance in business etc. Yep this has affected my teaching strategies: I would definitely use these activities as a way of introducing topic areas in the future. I would be interested in developing these metaphors further. (B, local school)

There is also **added value for the wider UoC and RKC through an** enhanced profile of the staff teams, enabling the Institute for Leadership and Sustainability (IFLAS) to build new partnerships (including short courses) with organizations such as Impact International, and opportunities for staff across UoC/RKC and outside to engage in the innovative ways of working that are being pioneered by this partnership. Visiting tutors from across the world tell us:

This is such an exceptional and unique learning/teaching environment. The combination of nature and MBA residential module is really special. The notion of experiential learning in such a context is indeed very powerful. (Prof Wang Chun Zhi, October 2014)

The lectures and trading activity are really innovative and interesting. The campus is so beautiful and this is such an extraordinary learning environment. The energy from the participants and tutors are amazing. It is so important to embed leadership and sustainability

within contemporary management studies and I've really enjoyed being part of the residential week. (Dr Suzy Zhang, October 2014)

## Summary

Sustainable leadership is promoting change that is mutually beneficial for the person, organization, and world at large. We think that businesses can and will play a significant part in this transformation provided they have the partnership tools and the knowledge to do so and are supported by academics who understand the importance of this global challenge. This chapter outlines the beginning of one university's joint journey on this adventure.

## Acknowledgments

Grateful thanks to Dr David Murphy, co-module leader, and Philippa Chapman, IFLAS Manager 2014 to 2017, for support and statistical data.

## Review Questions

1. What aspects of partnership do you think have emerged in this case study?
2. What role does place have in the success of a sustainability course?
3. How can the design of assessments enable course members to embed sustainability values and actions in the longer term?

## References

Lugg, A. 2007. "Developing Sustainability-literate Citizens through Outdoor Learning: Possibilities for Outdoor Education in Higher Education," *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning* 7, no. 2, pp. 97–112. doi: 10.1080/14729670701609456