



Development of MBA with specialisation in sustainable development

The experience of Universiti Sains Malaysia

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Azlan Amran, Siti Nabiha Abdul Khalid,
Dzulkifli Abdul Razak and Hasnah Haron

Graduate School of Business, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to share the experience of the Graduate School of Business at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in developing the new MBA programme, specialising in sustainable development.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper describes the urgency for a source of education for sustainable development, particularly in the Malaysian business context. The justifications and rationale for incorporating sustainability issues in postgraduate business education is also described in this paper. Additionally, the process involved in developing the programme is also explained.

Findings – This is the first programme of its kind in Malaysia. USM, which aims to be a sustainability led university, has introduced many significant changes. One of the significant initiatives is to develop an MBA programme that specialises in sustainable development. This programme aims to be the catalyst for changes to sustainability from the business context. The whole process appeared to gain support from the University community with less bureaucratic challenges than were anticipated.

Practical implications – This paper provides various examples and ideas for others on how to promote sustainable development for the business community, with a focus on the contribution that can be made by a University.

Originality/value – This is the first effort contribution to the education for sustainable development for business in a less developed country.

Keywords Master of business administration, Sustainable development, Malaysia

Paper type Case study

Introduction

Sustainability is a key issue for the business community in the twenty-first century. The current crisis resulting from rapid industrialisation has caused significant social and environmental side effects. Companies around the world have a major role in shaping the world economy that is evident from the amount of wealth they control world wide:

[...] the largest 500 companies control 42 percent of the world's wealth. Of the biggest 100 economies, half are now corporations and half are countries. The 10 biggest companies together turnover more money than do the 100 smallest countries. Indeed, only 27 countries now have a turnover greater than sales of Shell and Exxon combined. Shell – the world's second – owns or leases some 400 million acres of land, which makes it larger than 146 countries [...] (Gray and Bebbington, 1998, pp. 4-5 cited from Amran, 2006).



Recent studies have shown that this level of control is increasing (Gray and Bebbington, 2001, 2002). However, with extra power comes extra responsibility. The companies are expected to take care of the social and environmental impact caused by their enterprises within their respective territories. However, scepticism abounds as to whether the sustainability of the environment can be left in their care (Gray, 1992). In fact, these multinational companies are no longer controllable by states, making them fully accountable for the impact on the environment and society caused by their businesses (Gray, 1992).

Nevertheless, there is some hope as businesses have realised the need and value of sustainable practices. Research undertaken by the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF, 2009) found that there is a view among business professionals that “green practices” will add value to their business operations and, thus, they recognise the need for environmental education for their employees. From a survey of 1,300 professionals, they found that 65 percent of the respondents considered that environmental and sustainable knowledge adds value and prospects for potential job candidates. Another interesting finding is that a large majority of those surveyed felt that environmental and sustainable knowledge would become an important factor in hiring criteria in the near future. As noted in the report:

Responding to environmental challenges is now so fundamental to a company’s success that environmental knowledge cannot be isolated within an organisation, but must be pervasive. In other words, all jobs are green jobs (NEEF, 2009, p. 41, emphasis added).

Traditional business education, which produces the current business managers, has caused many problems as it is mainly derived from the perspective of greed – to get more and make more profit – usually through growth. However, with the current trend and aggressive movement towards sustainability, we notice that the trend of companies implementing elements of sustainability into their business practices is increasing (Stubbs and Cocklin, 2008). Companies around the world are making significant changes in conducting business. It is expected that with the introduction ISO 26000, ISO for social responsibility, companies’ awareness and interest in sustainability will also increase. Realising the current trend, business schools should realise that business managers now need exposure and skills in implementing sustainability or corporate social responsibility (CSR). The demand for managers with such skills is also increasing. More and more companies now have their own CSR, sustainable development or green department to monitor the sustainability issues within the company.

Current education needs to be reorientated to provide knowledge and skills (Cusick, 2008). Previous studies (Amran and Devi, 2007) show that awareness plays an important role in businesses starting their own sustainable development initiatives. During the Earth Summit, it was recommended that sustainable development is safe with business and business will deliver sustainability to the people (Mayhew, 1997). Such strong trust placed on the business sector will not be realised without a proper mechanism. Company do not exit by itself. They are run and controlled by managers who are the root of the solution. Business managers that run the company should be changed themselves to become the change agent for sustainability.

Sibbel (2009) highlighted that higher education should be a resource for sustainability. This is true as this is the place where business professionals are trained. Business schools should realise that their role has also changed. They are not

just producing products or people that can help companies make profit but producing managers that can make profit within the concept of sustainability. By introducing a new curriculum, we aim to equip students with the necessary skills to understand the problems and provide the capacity to change and transform the scenario, at least in their respective organisation. We hope to produce business managers that can become change agents for sustainability – locally and globally.

It is the responsibility of universities, especially business schools, to have a curriculum that addresses this emerging trend. As such, there is a need to have proper curricula to address the issues of sustainability, particularly for business education in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region. These new curricula should encompass new methodologies and provide a framework for delivering knowledge to facilitate the understanding of sustainability concepts in the business environment (Stubbs and Cocklin, 2008). It is important for the students to understand the philosophy and world view underlying the interpretation of the concepts for them to internalise these concepts into their business activities as well as for charting business strategies that support sustainability.

The Graduate School of Business at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM; www.usm.my) recognises the importance of providing tertiary education to produce managers that have a strong knowledge of sustainability concepts and related skills. More importantly, we expect to produce managers who are capable of initiating change in their respective organisation. In doing so the USM Graduate School of Business has taken the initial step of offering an MBA with specialisation in sustainable development. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to explain the process of incorporating sustainable development into postgraduate business education at USM. The next section of this paper discusses the symbiotic relationship between business and the environment, the relevance of social justice to business and the importance of education for sustainable development. Then, the details of USM are discussed providing the context of the programme. This is followed by a discussion on the process of developing the programme and steps taken from inception to being ready to embrace the first intake of students.

The business case for sustainability

Business and environment

In 1992, Brazil captured the world's attention when it hosted the historic United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. Almost all world leaders attended this conference, which assembled more than 100 heads of state and 178 government representatives. It is more commonly known as the Earth Summit, and, at this conference, Agenda 21 was published. Agenda 21 is the principal global plan to confront and overcome the economic and ecological problems of the late twentieth century (California Global Corporate Accountability Project – CAP, 2002). It is meant to propose actions that should be taken into account by every individual, institution and state. Participants hope to see an improvement in the strengthening of environmental standards in the long term.

Observations after the Rio which was held in 1992, however, show that little has been done in terms of environmental improvement. In fact, all indicators on environmental pollution have shown negative progress (Bebbington, 2001). Also, this is notwithstanding the fact that it is clearly stated in Agenda 21 that businesses must recognize environmental management as among the highest corporate priorities

and as a key determinant for the success of sustainable development. Table I lists some of the negative environmental impacts that are generated from business activities.

Business and social justice

The value of human rights is the fundamental ethical principle that provides power to citizens and communities to experience freedom and dignity in their lives. This includes civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights and the right to a clean environment. These are basic rights that companies should enforce in their operations either within or beyond their host country. Furthermore, the concept of “social contract” is becoming a norm; companies need to broaden their scope of accountability to encompass this new idea. However, the social contract concept applies only if the company is aware of the need for sustainability (Gray, 1992). It would be great if companies are aware of their significant role in achieving sustainability. However, there are still unjust practices reported among companies. Table II highlights some socially unjust practices by corporations.

The negative impact of company activities as seen above, calls for actions by companies to regain the trust of their relevant stakeholders. This could only be possible if proper education is provided to them.

Current sustainability practices carried out by companies, especially in the less developed and developing countries are seen as mimicking the action of large multinational companies (Amran and Devi, 2007). Lacking in awareness and understanding of the need to address the environmental and social issues was identified as one of the major factors for the occurrence of such phenomenon. In the context of Malaysia, many in the business community are familiar with the concept of sustainability; however, their understanding may not appreciate the values to be internalised into the business process. Nevertheless, the trend is showing improvement over time with the aggressive involvement by government and strong support from the media.

Impact	Explanation
Unsustainable development	Scientific data from all over the world shows that humans have destroyed more than one-third of the natural world in the past 30 years (CAP, 2002). If this continues, experts say that humans would need to colonize another two planets within the next 50 years to satisfy their wants
Global biodiversity	The Earth is currently facing the largest mass extinction of species in 65 million years. Most of the world's biodiversity inhabits forested areas, particularly tropical rainforests, and yet it is believed that an area equal to 50 soccer fields disappears every minute (CAP, 2002)
Climate change	Most scientists agree that the greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide from automobiles and industry are changing weather patterns (CAP, 2002). The impact to the sky is the thinning of its protective layer against the sun's radiation (ultra violet)
Soil, air and water pollution	Almost every industrial sector contributes to the pollution of land, air and water. Waste from agriculture is one of the major contributors to river pollution, which directly affects water resources. This can cause sickness to living beings

Source: CAP (2002)

Table I.
Environmental impacts
and their explanation

Table II.
Social impact and their
explanation

The impact	Explanation
Labour/employee	Exploitation of cheap and child labour in less developed countries due to the lack of capacity or political will to enforce basic labour standards and human rights. These workers usually work longer hours with less than standard wages
Health and safety	Labour is exposed to possible toxic chemicals without being given any protection devices or proper training in handling the jobs. Factories are normally in a very bad shape, inadequately ventilated with no air conditioning
Community and customer	Pollution discharge by the business creates cost to the community. Business takes the profit and leaves the social cost to the community to handle. Consumers are cheated on product quality and price

Source: CAP (2002)

USM: the quest to transform higher education for a sustainable tomorrow

USM, the second oldest university in Malaysia, was established in 1969. From the first batch of 57 students in 1969, USM has grown tremendously over the years reaching nearly 1,300 academic staff and 30,000 full-time graduate and undergraduate students (USM, 2008). USM has gained the recognition of the Ministry of Higher Education as one of the four research universities in Malaysia. In 2008, USM gained the APEX status given by the Ministry of Higher Education, an institution to be accelerated for excellence and nurtured for world class standing. It is the only university in Malaysia that has received this status to date.

USM has reinvented itself to focus on sustainable development. Thus, the missions of the university were reframed in line with this focus. With the tagline of “Transforming Higher Education for Sustainable Tomorrow,” the stated mission of USM is:

[. . .] to lead and innovate in achieving excellence at the international level through advancing and disseminating knowledge and truth, instilling qualities that stress academic excellence and professionalism, developing holistic individuals and providing a strong commitment towards the society’s aspiration, the country’s vision and universal aspirations (USM, 2008).

The focus on sustainability does not represent a revolutionary change for USM. It is actually a culmination of the major aspirations of the university even though they had not been formally incorporated and made explicit. Prior to formalising the sustainability into the university mission, USM already has a history of instilling and operationalising sustainability issues into its organisational life. One of the earlier initiatives is the “Healthy campus programme,” which builds the foundation for the university in a garden concept. USM has also established various centres such as Centre for Education in Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (CETREE), among others.

The sustainability focus and activities permeate various aspects of the university including teaching, research, administration, student accommodation, waste management and the community outreach programmes. For example, the focus of the healthy campus programme is to create a physical and social space conducive for working, learning and leisure, especially for the campus community. This is done through the preservation of green areas in the campus, instilling and encouraging

a healthy and sustainable lifestyle as well as a love of nature and commitment to society. As such, all the campuses[1] are managed to ensure that they are environmentally, pedestrian and work- and people-friendly (web site: healthy campus).

Various activities have and continue to be undertaken through the Healthy Campus Programme *per se* or through its collaboration with other units or centres of the university. Several of these programmes are also conducted with the community outside USM. These programmes cover a range of issues such as those relating to health issues, i.e. the dental awareness and anti-tobacco campaigns, obesity and diabetes clinics and health screening.

Programmes on instilling a love of nature and the environment are major components of USM activities. The university's garden concept has led to a more conscious effort in preserving nature, particularly the environs of USM including the greening of the university through tree planting, which is part of the orientation programme for new students. Tree cutting is now monitored on the university grounds. Since 2009, any cutting down of trees must be approved by the Vice Chancellor. In line with the green initiatives programme, USM has also introduced a technique for tree identification for more than 1,000 trees on its campus. The university also plans to have an ecotrail where visitors can learn about these trees.

Conservation of the environment is also encouraged through the usage of solar energy, conducting energy audits, slope and landscape improvements and also the rehabilitation of lakes, particularly at USM. Instilling a green mindset is not focussed solely on USM, but extends to the wider community. One of these programmes is educating schoolchildren about renewable energy. This is one of the CETREE activities, which is implemented in partnership with a multinational company. Through this project, the awareness and concept of renewable energy and energy efficiency has been instilled in 2.5 million school children nationwide.

One of the successful projects at USM, which has been subsequently followed by several institutions of higher learning in Malaysia, is the "white coffin campaign". This campaign, which was initiated by USM students, led to the banning of polystyrene food containers on the university campus. To reduce waste, the campus community is discouraged from buying take away food on campus, and encouraged to eat at the cafeteria or to bring their own container for take-away items. In addition, biodegradable packaging is now used throughout the university. This activity has received an international award for Creative Developments in Healthy Cities by the Alliance for Healthy Cities during the Third Global Conference held in Japan on 25 October 2008 (Woo and Lee, 2008). With its commitment to society, USM is also the Main Steering Committee Member to develop a framework for sustainability in Penang. In 2005, USM gained recognition from the United Nations as one of the seven Regional Centres of Expertise on education for sustainable development. It is the only regional centre of its kind in the ASEAN region.

Given this background and activities, it is not surprising that the university realised the importance of incorporating sustainable development into its postgraduate business programme and to formally incorporate it into its MBA programme. One of the ways in which USM incorporates sustainability issues into postgraduate business education is through the introduction of a new course, i.e. business issues and sustainable development. This was subsequently made compulsory for all MBA students. This course was first offered in semester 2 of the 2008/2009 academic year[2]. In addition,

an MBA with a specialization in sustainable development is being offered in semester 1, 2009. The process for developing the MBA specialisation discussed next.

MBA (SD): the broad visions behind the programme offered

This programme was designed with one vision, which is to see business organisations in Malaysia embrace and embed sustainability in their business. The programme aims to make MBA students realise the current social and environmental crisis the world is currently facing. It is meant to illustrate what business has so far contributed to the planet and people. They are expected to admit that their responsibility covers not only making profit but also to satisfy society and preserve the environment. Evidence shows that top managers have great influence in shaping the company vision and mission (Amran and Devi, 2007). These are the people behind the company that make decisions for the company's daily activities. With that in mind, the objective set for this programme is to promote awareness to the business managers about the concept and philosophy of sustainability. In addition, the curriculum also comprises subjects that address the necessary skills that are pertinent for business managers to incorporate sustainability in their business operations.

Moving forward for specialisation rather than mainstream

The whole process of developing this programme started with a small committee that was responsible for the initial groundwork before being joined in the later stage of the process by a few others. The committee comprised the Dean and two other lecturers. The first tough decision faced in progressing this new programme was to decide on its format and whether it should be mainstream with all the courses offered having sustainability embedded. The second alternative, "specialisation," is where most of the core MBA courses maintain their original content with the addition of a few specialised subjects focusing on sustainable development.

Decisions were made based on the cost benefit analysis and on the resources available at that moment in time. Resources in terms of academic staff and funds were limited. Before a final decision was made, a scenario analysis was conducted with the purpose of understanding USM's current standing in terms of its expertise in relation to sustainability. We searched for lecturers from other schools and departments that were currently teaching sustainable development, green or environmental-related subjects and also social-related subjects. We also compiled an inventory of the research related to sustainability that had been carried out or was still in progress.

In addition to the scenario analysis, we also reviewed sustainability programmes offered at master's level in other universities world wide. This was to help us understand what other Universities are doing in terms of the structure of programmes and subjects offered. We managed to review sustainability programmes offered from universities in Australia, the UK, and USA; however, we found none currently offered by local universities or within the ASEAN region generally.

We were funded by the network for the Promotion of Sustainability in Postgraduate Education and Research (Prosper.NET), a universities network with the main agenda being to promote sustainability at the post graduate level. Monies received were enough to hire one research assistant and cover the funding for a few workshops. The workshops were held to gather opinions and views from experts from various backgrounds. After several rounds of discussion, and because of the limited resources

available and to accommodate the existing system, we decided to opt for specialisation with four courses. While recognising that such a decision may not be the best, we do plan for future improvement.

The process begins

The whole process began with a discussion on the objectives that we wanted in the programme. The decision was reached after we learned and identified our target and the prospect for this new programme. Our target includes, but is not restricted to, executives and managers in private and public sector organisations. Based on our preliminary observation, awareness about sustainability in Malaysia is still lacking. Nonetheless, there are also many who have been exposed to such practices, especially the multinational companies' employees like Intel and Motorola. We also examined the current sustainability issues facing Malaysia as well as the government's aspirations, particularly on the Vision 2020.

In Malaysia, CSR and sustainability became a hot issue after the Prime Minister of Malaysia announced (during his budget speech in September 2007) that it is obligatory for all public listed companies in Malaysia to report their social and environmental impact in their annual report. Furthermore, to be consistent with the national agenda, particularly in relation to achieving the Vision 2020, the Securities Commission is also pushing towards a better CSR implementation in order to meet the objectives of the National Integrity Plan, thus, generating greater economic and capital market growth in Malaysia (Najib, 2004). The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) has taken the lead in Malaysia to educate Malaysian companies in engaging in credible reporting on the environmental and social impact of their business operations. ACCA, together with the Department of Environment, published the first Environmental Reporting Guidelines for Malaysian companies in 2003 and also published the Guidelines for Sustainability Reporting. At present, the government relies on other existing laws such as: Employment Act 1955; Environmental Quality Act; Occupational Safety and Health Act; Consumer Protection Act; and others in enforcing sustainability in Malaysia. Many organizations are still unsure or, in some extreme cases, unaware of the benefits that CSR holds for their organizations. Most of the existing organizations, which have in one way or another incorporated CSR, are most likely doing it because it is a trend or only as a means of promoting their company in view of the obligatory status (Amran and Devi, 2007).

After in-depth consideration on the demand side and what we were able to offer we then produced the following statement of objectives:

This programme aims to prepare and equip the existing and future managers, whether in private or public sector, with the important concept, theory and model of social responsibility and sustainable development. It is timely to have such a programme to cater to the needs of industry that demand managers or future managers who are able to balance the three important elements – people, planet and profit – in their business operation sphere. Besides, continuing the excellence of the existing MBA programme, the students will be taught with an understanding and practical experience of the wide ranging contextual, conceptual and thematic issues involved in the planning, management and practice of sustainable development. As the various global social and environmental crises deepen, a new generation is rising up into leadership positions in the public, private and non-profit sectors that are required to possess a broad multi-disciplinary understanding of the various dimensions of these crises and related solutions.

The whole statement can be broken up into several objectives that are outlined as follows.

The objectives of USM MBA (SD) programme are to:

- expose students to the theories, concepts and sustainable development model;
- train students so that they are able to measure and trace the level of development or company's impact from the social and environment aspects;
- produce well-trained and skilled students in managing organizations to be more sensitive while taking into consideration sustainable development and social responsibility in performing their tasks;
- train and expose students to the theories and best practices related to various issues in the contexts, concepts and themes in planning and managing, sustainable development practices;
- provide a multi-disciplinary understanding towards crisis dimension, primarily towards those involved in the environment and society, and skills to manage the problems;
- form an understanding and current thinking attitude among graduates of sustainable development towards issues that are related to management and sustainable development;
- produce managers who are capable of organizing and applying sustainable development agenda in the planning and operations implementation so that the three objectives (excellent financial performance, responsibility towards society and the environment) can be met; and
- develop basic skills in the scientific research process, either qualitative or quantitative or both, including method and research methodology, analysis and data interpretation in handling sustainable development issues selected by the students.

The objectives then drove and directed the next process where the curriculum of the specialisation courses was formulated. In essence the curriculum covers all the objectives stated above. Also underpinning the programme are the three pillars of sustainable development itself, namely, economic, social, and the environment.

Programme structure and subjects offered

It is important to highlight that this programme was developed with business community the main target, albeit not exclusively for them. As such, the approach undertaken in developing the courses is from the business perspective. We use the three pillars of sustainable development as the dimensions in justifying the selection of the subjects. Unlike many other previous practices where sustainability issues are only embedded within single-discipline subjects (Buchan *et al.*, 2007), this programme created four new courses that contribute to the sustainability dimensions, i.e. economic, social and the environment.

As this new programme is developed on the traditional MBA platform there is limited space for manipulation. We retained nine traditional MBA courses and added four new specialisation courses. The following diagram outlines the subjects offered and classifies them under the three sustainable development dimensions.

In terms of the economic dimension, we believe that it has been addressed adequately by the MBA functional courses. These subjects are the core courses for all MBA programmes under the Graduate School of Business at USM. We have also decided to include a discussion on sustainability within the functional courses. We expect that the course facilitators, where appropriate, will relate some of the issues with the concepts of sustainability in their lectures and discussions.

A workshop was specially conducted for the lecturers in order to ensure each of the facilitators understands their responsibility to have sustainability discussed in the course. The workshop constitutes part of the initiative to expose the facilitators to a proper understanding of the concept of sustainability. The general approach of how sustainable development can be integrated in traditional business courses was presented and debated. The facilitators were exposed to the reformist and transformational approaches (Daly, 1999). Several examples were also discussed and elaborated during the session.

Figure 1 shows the whole structure of MBA (SD) programme. Basically, the programme is composed of the existing MBA functional courses amounting to eight courses, five specialisation courses related to sustainable development and one management project that is also related to sustainable development. The total numbers of units that the candidate has to take are 44 units.

To begin with, we also offer two subjects that specifically discuss sustainability itself, first the business issue and sustainable development course and, second, the sustainability concepts and issues course. The first course relates current business issues and sustainable development. The course combines theories on CSR and sustainable development and will also expose students to the practical “real life” of industry. People from the industry will be invited to share their experiences with the class. The second is a prerequisite course for all specialisation courses where students

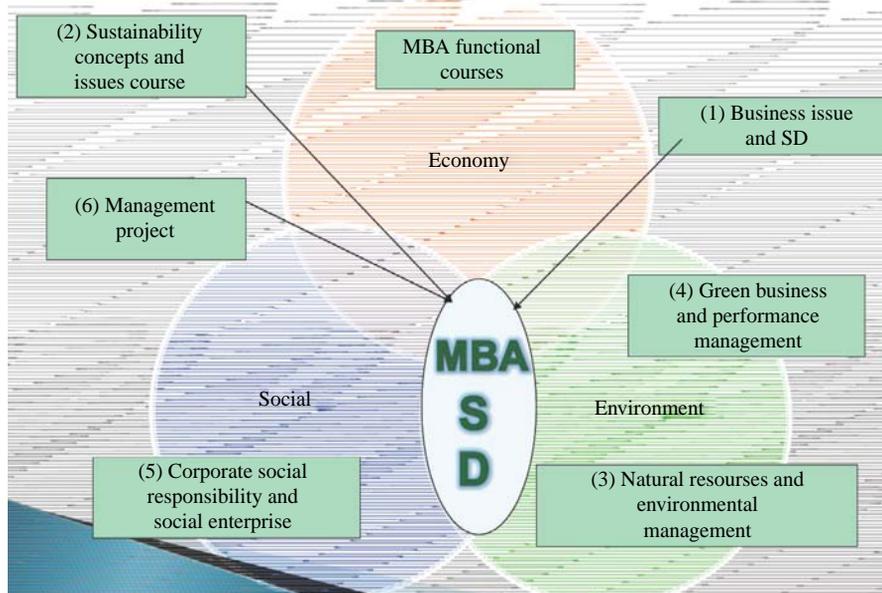


Figure 1.
Structure of the course
in the programme

will be exposed to the philosophy of sustainability, the history and evolution of this concept as well as governance mechanism in sustainability.

The facilitators for each course are identified based on their background and expertise. Most of the facilitators identified are familiar with the course. They are responsible to develop the synopsis and the content for each course. At this stage, the facilitators have the flexibility to create the course content as long as the objectives are met. The detail of the preliminary course outline was documented and sent to outside experts for their comments.

In terms of the social dimensions, we believe that the CSR and social enterprise course will address this issue. In the environmental dimension, we have introduced two specialisation courses to discuss this issue. These are all new courses which are introduced specifically for this programme.

Students are also required to complete a management project, which focuses on sustainability issues. This project is expected to give hands on experience in dealing with the sustainability-related project.

Feedback from stakeholders and working through the bureaucracy

Two rounds of presentations were conducted to ensure the relevance of the new programme. In the first round, the programme structure and courses were presented in front of the working committee, which consists of experts from the academia and industry. However, none of the invited panel from industry came. As such the presentation was made in front of the academics alone. The feedback received was mostly positive and all the comments were incorporated into the programme for improvement.

It is important to highlight that the invited working panel were given details of the whole structure in the presentation. They were advised to particularly focus on the proposed specialisation courses in addition to the nine subjects from the ordinary MBA that were retained.

As mentioned earlier there were no major comments. Discussion and comments received were mainly on the selection of the courses as well as on the content. Each of the course facilitators is responsible to address all the comments. As the facilitators are also part of the working committee, all the necessary adjustments were discussed and accepted and a consensus of all members was obtained.

After the first round of meetings with the working committee, the next few rounds were working through the bureaucracy. At USM, before a new programme can be offered, several rounds of presentation need to be made at various levels of the university's management. First, the proposed programme should be presented to the executive committee at this level of one school. Second, once the programme has received the green light, the next level is to obtain comments from the School Board where the members consist of all the faculties.

The third level is to obtain approval from the executive committee of senate before it is presented to the senate. We were blessed to have obtained all the approvals at all levels without much challenge. Such efforts demonstrate that the entire university community strongly supports any initiative intended to promote sustainability.

Given that the MBA (SD) is new in Malaysia, the graduate school of business has implemented several initiatives to explain and create awareness of the programme. Visits to business organisations and governmental institutions were made to explain

this new programme. Currently, the programme is ready to take up as applications have been received for enrolment in the programme. The Graduate School of Business will continue to evaluate and assess subsequent improvements to the academic programme to ensure that the MBA with specialisation in sustainable development continues to be relevant in the fast changing environment.

Conclusion

This paper discusses the urgent need for a holistic education embracing sustainable development for the business community. The current situation, for example, deforestation for oil palms, urbanisation and poverty are becoming major issues, particularly in the ASEAN region. Businesses, if properly educated, will have a significant role in addressing these key issues. This new programme was developed with the intention of producing business managers who have a keen appreciation of sustainable development and can act as change agents.

The whole process has been described and the new courses that have been introduced have been briefly explained. It is obvious that the whole process went quite smoothly through the help and support of all relevant parties. This implies that the whole community is aware of the need to have such a programme for the betterment of future generations. The university management has also given strong support for the programme to be introduced. It was a daunting task requiring team spirit and the full support from the management. We believe the whole process of engaging with relevant stakeholders, namely, the industry, outside academicians as well as acknowledged experts helped tremendously in the development of the curriculum, particularly in setting the objectives for the programme.

The whole process above would not have materialised without the proper objectives or direction set at the outset. We felt that the objectives were the essential foundation for this programme and needed to be clear before the rest of the execution process could be implemented. We used our objectives as the main guide in selecting from suitable pre-existent sustainability courses. It is these objectives that have guided the content of each of the courses designed in this programme.

We also learned that without a proper background and appropriate experts the whole process may face difficulty. Also an understanding of the existing strengths and weaknesses is also essential. Consequently, a survey was conducted of our existing university academic staff in their area of expertise to source suitable internal experts as well as to identify potential course facilitators. Understanding the external environment is also important. We learned a lot through a survey of foreign universities that had previously introduced similar sustainability programmes.

We also believe that the whole process is replicable for others to follow but of course needs to be contextualised to the particular environment. This paper contributes by sharing the whole process of innovative programme development. It also provides a justification for the need to provide sustainability relevant education that enables business people to apply the appropriate knowledge and skills in their daily business activities.

Notes

1. USM has three campuses. The main campus is built on a 500 acre site located on Penang island, the northwestern part of peninsular Malaysia. The second campus, i.e. the health

campus is located in Kelantan, the northeastern part of Malaysia. The third campus, i.e. the engineering campus is located on the Penang mainland.

2. In USM, there are two semesters in an academic year. Semester 1 is from July to November and Semester 2 is from November to May.

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About the authors

Azlan Amran holds a PhD and is currently a Senior Lecturer at the Graduate School of Business, USM. His research interest is in Corporate Social Reporting, CSR and Sustainability issues. He has published significant number of publications in CSR and Corporate Governance in local and international journal. Currently, he holds a position as the Programme Manager of MBA specialisation in Sustainable Development at Graduate School of Business. Azlan Amran is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: azlan_amran@usm.my

Siti Nabiha Abdul Khalid is a Senior Lecturer at Graduate School of Business, USM. She is also the Program Manager for MBA and MBA (International Business). She earned her doctorate in accounting from University of Manchester, UK. She has done research in the area of environmental management and performance measurement system.

Dzulkifli Abdul Razak is currently the Vice Chancellor of USM since 2000. He is also the Chair of the Malaysian Vice Chancellors'/Rector's Committee. He is the Immediate Past President of Association of Southeast Asia Institutions of Higher Learning, and is presently serving in various committees internationally, including, Asia-Europe Meeting Education Hub Advisory Committee, Association of Commonwealth Universities, and more recently the Vice President of the International Association of Universities – a UNESCO-affiliated organisation. He is also a member of the Advisory Committee of World Universities Forum, Davos, 2008. He serves on the World Health Organisation (WHO) Expert Advisory Panel on Drug Policies and Management since 1995, and the WHO Scientific Advisory Committee on Tobacco Product Regulation (2000-2002). He is a Fellow of the Malaysia Academy of Sciences, and also the World Academy of Art and Science. Under his leadership, the University is designated as one of the seven pioneering Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development by the United Nations University in Tokyo, in 2005.

Hasnah Haron is the Dean of Graduate Business School at the School of Management, USM. Her research interest is in the area of auditing, financial reporting, CSR and corporate governance. She has published widely in both local and international journals. She currently sits on the Editorial Advisory Board of *Malaysian Accounting Review*, *Journal of Financial Reporting & Accounting* and *Journal of Organisational and Behavioural Research*. She is also active in professional activities. She sits on the Council of the Malaysian Institute of Accountants as a representative of the academia, she is a member of the Ethics Assurance Board of Malaysia and a fellow member of the Institute of Internal Auditors, Malaysia.