Chapter 8

Anecdotes of Action Learning: Realizations of an Indian B-School’s Sustainability Lessons

Saravan Krishnamurthy
Symbiosis International University, India

Vishal Pradhan
Symbiosis International University, India

ABSTRACT

The objective of this chapter is to narrate the realizations while developing sustainability lessons by Action Learning (AL) for inclusion within an MBA-IT Business Management curriculum. This process is elucidated in a narrative style. The premise was set by ALs of earlier cohorts’ trials, errors, improvisations, and reflections. In the year 2015, the Institutional Social Responsibility (ISR) team attempted scaling up ‘Learning by Doing.’ In 2016, a ‘Consolidate and Optimize’ approach was adopted. Each activity used a reflexive approach during AL evaluations. Together, AL practitioner and learners developed incrementally maturing sustainability lessons for the subsequent cohort. The chapter aims to share experiential learning with all stakeholders in higher education. An overall shift from apathy to empathy by virtue of AL to implement sustainability lessons is the highlight of this chapter.

INTRODUCTION

Indian Business school curricula need to include sustainability lessons to reshape into new patterns of learning. A disturbing trend was observed i.e. business students focusing on solely on profiteering rather than inclusive growth. Personal benefits had gained more importance than citizen’s participation, in the growth of business and country together. Such a mentality may have promoted apathy, to the exclusion of empathy. Taking cue from the three pillars of sustainability of economic feasibility, social equality and environmental soundness (United Nations [UN], 1992), sustainability lessons were deliberated upon by faculty. As a solution, incremental inclusions sustainability lessons were implemented, in the year 2013. These experimented ‘Trial and Error’ methods received high student participation and ap-
precisations. After reflections and evaluations, the inclusions of sustainability lessons continued in the year 2014 by developing new actions for AL sustainability Lessons. Upgrading AL with industry visits and collaborations with civil society organizations were attempted. Shortcomings and corrections were noted throughout, followed by reflections and evaluations. These follow-through exercises helped to develop an internal capacity building environment for the AL team. Based on these initiations of AL for sustainability lessons in earlier cohorts, the current chapter narrates further AL developments in the years 2015 and 2016. Beginning with a re-organization in 2015 of the Institutional Social Responsibility (ISR) team to adopt sustainability lessons, maturing in delivering sustainability lessons within traditional business courses and culmination in interdisciplinary research in 2016 are described in this chapter. For easy comprehension of the whole process, it is recommended first to understand Figure 1 that illustrates the flow of AL spirals in a detailed ‘Plan-Act-Observe-Reflect’ diagram. The iterations of an Indian B-School’s attempts at AL are listed below.

- **(Year 2015) SCALING UP ‘LEARNING by DOING’**: The objective was to address nationally critical issues, and to simultaneously align with University vision. The Institutional Social Responsibility (ISR) team was revamped, and a scaled up bustling environment ensued with multiple AL actions, gathering more students’ participation. ALs on a selected cluster of sustainability issues, relevant evaluations of each activity with reflexive approaches yielded useful augmentation for next cohort. Shortcomings, reflections, and corrections were recorded.

- **(Year 2016) ‘CONSOLIDATE and OPTIMIZE’**: The objective was to consolidate into lesser number of activities than before and optimize with better quality of AL reflections ensued. The cohort that began AL in 2015 received carefully designed interventions during their courses in each subsequent semester. Student teams were empowered to try self-governing vision setting and self-organizing themselves towards one social cause per team. After receiving the full cycle of sustainability lessons, this cohort has concluded well with student research publications on sustainability.

**BACKGROUND**

India’s education on sustainability had transition through changes since her independence in 1947. Progressing from poverty ridden history to a formation of political ideologies in the 1970s, and then to rapid development in the 1990s, education systems had undergone adaptive changes. Among the neo youth of the 2010s, a generation that had grown up without much exposure to difficulties of the previous generations, a marked variation in the civic sense of citizens was observed by the AL practitioners. In the observation of authors who are also AL practitioners, the modern youth are demanding more attention and fast results, and educators in India are surprised to find apathy among its youth. Taking caution from a Harvard business study, the millennials’ selfish and opportunistic behavior had been rated higher than previous generations (Alsop, 2008). Taking clues from experts in sustainability education, to develop adequate competencies in foresighted thinking (De Haan, 2006), and avoid unintentional blunders, educators are advised to include sustainability lessons within their curricula. According to an empirical study based on evidence from India, quality education components with Universal values of sustainability is advocated (Bhattacharya & Bhattacharya, 2014).

According to the Brundtland et al., (1987), sustainability development “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” A landmark reference
Related Content

Theoretical and Empirical Comparative Analysis on Quantitative and Qualitative Marketing Researches
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/theoretical-and-empirical-comparative-analysis-on-quantitative-and-qualitative-marketing-researches/117413?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/theoretical-and-empirical-comparative-analysis-on-quantitative-and-qualitative-marketing-researches/117413?camid=4v1a)

How Economic Decisions Are Made in Public vs. Private Sectors: A Comparison of Methods
[www.igi-global.com/article/how-economic-decisions-are-made-in-public-vs-private-sectors/196603?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/how-economic-decisions-are-made-in-public-vs-private-sectors/196603?camid=4v1a)

How Marketers Conduct Mixed Methods Research: Incorporating the Exploratory Sequential Design with the Hierarchy of Effects Model
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/how-marketers-conduct-mixed-methods-research/147775?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/how-marketers-conduct-mixed-methods-research/147775?camid=4v1a)

Discount Focus Subgroup Method: An Innovative Focus Group Method Used for Researching an Emerging Technology
Mohanad Halaweh (2015). *Enhancing Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research with Technology* (pp. 494-512).
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/discount-focus-subgroup-method/117534?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/discount-focus-subgroup-method/117534?camid=4v1a)