

## Corporate Sustainability Leadership in Global Companies

Sustainability means many different things to different people yet in spite of differing definitions it is enjoying a continuous growth in popularity. In the past 10+ years many Multi National Corporation's (MNC's) have embraced the concept to various levels of complexity. Unilever, BASF, Siemens, to name but a few have all been acknowledged as leaders in the field. Their CEO's are visionaries in the pursuit of sustainable outcomes and in the process have set targets and ambitions not traditionally associated with a profit seeking enterprise. Others such as Volkswagen, BP, BHS and some pharmaceutical companies have not fared so well in light of scandals destroying their reputation..

In this course we will examine the environmental and social origins of what we now call Corporate Sustainability. We will begin by gaining insight into the (social) scientific foundation for the world's most pressing problems. Utilising examples from the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, and other sources, we will critically evaluate how sustainability can create growth opportunities whilst generating value for society at large.

Throughout the course we will explore what makes a leader a sustainability leader and reflect upon these ideas in each session. Students can expect to engage in role-play, gaming and simulations throughout the course as well as self-reflection.

The course will cover the following themes

- **The origins of sustainable development and the role of business.**  
In this theme we will look at the history of the modern corporation, the roles of businesses and duties of directors and corporate governance in different jurisdictions. Moving forward we will then explore the relationship with classical economics of the firm and social responsibility. The trends in natural and social science that have given rise to the Sustainable Development agenda (MDG's SDG's) etc. and the business case for engagement is undertaken. The WBCSD's Vision 2050 ambition and Action 2020 strategy will serve as a case.
- **Business Response to the SD agenda.**  
Through the use of case studies, report reviews and other sources students will critically examine the range of activities MNC's have and are currently engaged in, in the pursuit of creating sustainable outcomes to address climate change, social and environmental impacts.
- **Supporting Business Engagement**  
Many tools, frameworks and standards have been developed to support businesses. In this theme we will critically examine a selection of tools that support decision making and strategy such as the Natural Capital Protocol, the Social Capital Protocol, Life Cycle Analysis, Reporting – The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), Integrated Reporting (IR), The Sustainable Accounting Standards Board (SASB) and The Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP).

- **Sustainability Leadership**

What makes a leader a sustainability leader? This theme will use activities to help students examine their leadership style and through simulations, gaming and group activities allow students to challenge assumptions, try new ideas and techniques and develop new skills.

Intended learning outcomes – [subject specific]

- Gain an understanding of the scientific underpinnings of sustainability
- The capacity to reflect on and develop insights into the opportunities and challenges businesses face when pursuing sustainable outcomes
- The ability to recognise the characteristics and traits of a sustainability leader and how to nurture them
- Develop the ability to critically evaluate sustainable performance in multinational corporations
- A reflective, critical and practical approach to the courses themes

Intended learning outcomes [general – skills]

- Ability to be reflective and think critically.
- Understanding of the complexities of the role of business when navigating the Sustainable Development Agenda
- Ability to use data and literature to form opinions on company strategy, sustainability performance.
- The ability to critically evaluate sustainability reports and business communication on their commitments to the SD agenda.

**Course Convenor:**

Name: Rodney Irwin  
Contact details: [irwin@wbcsd.org](mailto:irwin@wbcsd.org)

*I will be available in the evenings of all days of the course to provide assistance, address questions, concerns and support assignments*

**Assessment:**

Students will work on a group presentation during the week they are in Geneva and present them on the Friday morning of the program

**Module outline:**

Day 1 will present the underlying scientific evidence that supports the role of business in sustainable development, the Climate Agreement from COP 21 in Paris, The 2015 Sustainable Development Goals etc;

Days 2 - 4 will have different part so the WBCSD discuss the work cross sector collaboration can bring to the Sustainable Development agenda and will also include company visits and a visit to the World Economic Forum

Day 5 will bring all the learning together and will conclude with a large online business simulation allowing participants to test understand and practice learning outcomes.

Sustainability Leadership will be a recurring theme through out all days of the course.

### **Selected Bibliography**

The Literature on Sustainability is vast. No one text book will be used for this course however the following a useful general books that cover sustainability and business

Hargadon, Andrew – Sustainable Innovation  
Stanford Business Books ISBN: 978-0-8047-9250-9

Husted, Bryan W. & Allen, David Bruce – Corporate Social Strategy  
Cambridge University Press ISBN: 978-0-521-14963-1

Werbach, Adam. Strategy for Sustainability  
Harvard Business Press ISBN: 978-1-4221-7770-9

**All course participants should at a minimum review the following.**

Vision 2050 (WBCSD) - <http://www.wbcsd.org/contentwbc/download/1746/21728>

Action 2020 (WBCSD) - <http://action2020.org>