Introduction

Founded in 1900, Audencia Nantes School of Management has developed a broader meaning of sustainability, known as Global Responsibility (GR now onwards). Audencia Nantes has been the first mover in France in promoting responsible management; it is the first French business school to have signed on to the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) in 2004, and also the only one to partner with WWF in 2010. By staying a step ahead of others, it intends to become a leader in the field of GR. The integration of GR is steeped in the school’s culture, which aims not only to differentiate it from other B-schools in France but also to showcase exemplary practices for other schools to follow its example. Audencia’s raison d’etre to emphasise GR is based on three fundamental reasons; firstly, the term global implies scope of the partnership and engagement and extends itself to all sorts of organisations; secondly, the term also highlights tensions between global and local level; thirdly, the term responsibility implies that all stakeholders are accountable and Audencia itself is responsible for consistently learning and improvising from each experience (Antal & Sobczak, 2004). Signing on to the UNGC led to creation of the Institute of Global Responsibility (IGR), which has been at the core of the school’s activities related to sustainable development. The IGR leads the schools strategy to be premier in GR through a unique approach towards teaching, research, partnership, and institutional strategy through the activities at the regional, national, and international level. Thus, for the PRME framework has been very relevant in shaping its first mover strategy for GR; these principles have therefore helped Audencia’s to develop its organisational capabilities to work with multiple stakeholders.

Challenges

The case reveals that, like any other organisation undergoing strategic change, Audencia also faced the challenges in undergoing the transformation process to become a responsible business school, imparting responsible management education. Since Audencia has a history of undertaking novel initiatives, it is familiar with many hurdles, including those to justify the legitimacy of respective initiatives and actions. Respective challenges faced by Audencia are summarised below:

1) Convincing Stakeholders

When IGR was founded, its head faced hurdles in convincing his colleagues, because he had no hierarchical authority. It was also observed that not everyone was convinced of GR, and therefore convincing all the internal stakeholders was challenging.

2) Difference in Opinions

Because GR is a broad subject, perceptions often varied amongst faculty in different departments of the school, and therefore the transversal nature of GR often leads towards ambiguity of opinions and decisions. The difference in opinions often resulted in criticism of GR and adds barriers in its implementation.
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3) Organisational Barriers

Factors such as organisational politics often acted as hindrance for the integration process. Factors like bureaucracy and hierarchy also tend to be obstacles in GR initiatives, resulting in a decision making process that often takes a long time.

4) Communication

Not all internal stakeholders are aware of GR, while others are less interested. Often, respective departments were too occupied to take into consideration any GR activity, while some departments complained about lack of internal communication and strategy of organisation.

Actions taken

As shown in the above the school focused on three respective areas – research and teaching, administration, and external relations. Thus, integration of GR in Audencia can be summarised below as:

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\text{GR at Audencia} = \text{Role of IGR} + [\text{Influence of actors at multilevel (example: dean, professors, internal staff)}] + [\text{Influence of factors at multilevel (example culture, bureaucracy, leadership, etc.)}]
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IGR collaborated with respective stakeholders in laying out guidelines for initiatives. Every department was asked to undertake respective initiatives depending upon their perception of GR and their capacity to implement it. For example, the International Relations department practised GR by:

- Planning air trips according to the carbon foot print
- Offering GR scholarships
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Similarly the general administration undertook steps by:

- Introducing fair trade products to the school’s cafeteria
- Having sustainable suppliers
- Reducing carbon footprint through recycling and conservation

The strategy of integrating GR that Audencia seems to have followed could be termed as a “Self Improvisation Strategy.”

Whereas self-improvisation obliged Audencia to report on activities, it also spurs innovative thinking. The objective of this strategy is to maintain the exclusiveness of the school by being the first mover in GR initiatives, nationally and internationally. In order for the school to implement GR, new types of partnership that stretch beyond corporations and business schools was needed. Thus the idea developed first and only exclusive partnerships were borne. The commitment to the principles of the UNGC and PRME meant that the school should motivate itself by defining its own benchmarks and spearheading activities at an organisational level. Similarly, the scope of the WWF partnership is to develop GR practices within organisational and strategic levels. This means that the faculty dedicates 10% of the curriculum to GR in 80% of the subjects taught at the school. On the other hand, the partnership ensures that the school engages in reducing its environmental footprint. Finally, Audencia has also undertaken an auditing process by an independent social rating agency. Per auditing standards, Audencia was again the first business school in France to receive quality label “Label Lucie,” which certifies Audencia’s quality efforts in the domain of GR. Thus, as Audencia has learnt from its experiences as first mover, it has also consequently created new benchmarks for achieving them.

Results

In year 2009, the institute created the “Foundation Audencia” with part of the funds allocated for GR research. Most importantly, the institute focuses on the transversal nature of GR, which means that it encourages respective researchers to pursue research in their own discipline and link it with GR. Audencia has also been part of the CR3+ (see case story in first edition of the Inspirational Guide) research cooperation since 2011 and has actively participated in PRME Working Groups, such as those on anti-corruption and gender equality. Audencia also hosted major conferences, including RIODD 2012, IPSERA 2013, and CIG 2013, with themes dedicated to GR issues and has also launched research chairs dedicated to GR issues in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Finally, as a result such activities noted above, Audencia’s efforts have been recognised in rankings at the national level and international level, placing amongst the two French schools that secured place in Aspen Grey Pinstripes ranking and le etudiant.fr rating in CSR.

Recently, the school also launched an MBA in Responsible Management. Audencia also facilitates students to work on GR projects through internships and extracurricular activities. Case studies focused on GR form the integral part of teaching; for example, each year MBA students participate in the International Aspen Case Competition, which is dedicated to resolving sustainability issues. The school also hosts conferences and workshops with WWF, Nantes Metropole, Net Impact, and regional actors for spreading awareness.
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The role of PRME/sustainability principles

- The PRME framework has helped Audencia to identify its GR strategy. By analysing its strengths and resources, Audencia intends to find innovative ways to integrate GR in the school.

- PRME also offers a unique opportunity to collaborate and share knowledge with like-minded institutions. Audencia has benefited from the PRME network and has also partnered with other respective signatories. The CR3+ group is one such example of collaboration. The PRME initiatives and working groups offer a learning space, to which Audencia researchers have actively contributed.

- The commitment of Audencia to the principles of PRME further ensures that Audencia aspires to be a leader in developing GR initiatives by engaging stakeholders at the regional, national, and international level.

References