Introduction

This case story from Business School Lausanne in Switzerland provides an example of how sustainability and responsibility can be built-in a bachelor programme rather than bolt-on as an additional programme feature. In order to integrate these topics integrally into the programme, an in-depth and full programme revision was required, provoking changes not only in the selection and focus of course domains, but indeed changing the content of every single course offered.

Challenges

- How to influence and convince the faculty involved with the 40 mandatory bachelor courses to include responsibility and sustainability into every single subject course?
- How to provide the faculty with relevant support so that they can approach these topics in their subject domain, in view of the fact that many professors do not have training in responsibility or sustainability?
- How to ensure that our approach does not come across as dogmatic and mental force-feeding to students but is rather approached as ensuring that we open up the existing agency-model and economic thinking to embrace a broader societal perspective in order for students to form their own reflected perspectives?

Actions taken

We held individual sessions with each of the professors in the bachelor programme in order to develop a mutual understanding of the challenges involved in applying this strategic change. These meetings helped us create a basis of collaborative exploration rather than top-down imposition. As a follow-up to these sessions, we established contracts for those professors in need to better understand what to do and how with those consultants and professors in our network that have an in-depth understanding of sustainability and responsibility in each of the subject areas.

We face the biggest challenges in the domains of accounting, finance and economics, where the professors were not really interested and also either refused to collaborate or ignored how to approach these subjects. In these cases, we established facilitation between the professors and the supporting consultants to ensure that everybody involved understood the importance to the school. A personal commitment and engagement in finding solutions (providing relevant books and articles and industry connections in key areas) helped professors to embrace this big challenge and little by little, open up to at least include an alternative view on the current dominant thinking.

At our quarterly faculty meetings, we would work in world-café break-out sessions with our faculty to promote dialogue among themselves. This led to an interesting exchange of best practices, not only in the area of subject knowledge, but more importantly in expanding the pedagogic approaches on how to effectively create open-space learning environments.
Results

All of the 40 bachelor courses have, in the meantime, been taught at least once, and each of the professors has integrated the topic of responsibility and sustainability in each of the courses.

We have established a process of continuous improvements, where at each quarterly faculty meetings professors report among themselves challenges and issues, as well as new learnings and best practices. This ensures that we all treat this as a continuous joint learning experience rather than a once-done and ticked-the-box issue.

The role of PRME/sustainability principles

- Responsibility and sustainability are topics that have clear relevance across all subject courses
- Sustainability with its three dimensions (social, environment, and economic), has created a positive personal inquiry for our bachelor students, which includes career choices and purpose of life questions.
- This is our way of doing what we can to work towards achieving Principle 1 – Purpose.
- We were keen to provide a built-in rather than a bolt-on approach to ensure Principle – 2 Values.