Introduction

Each year about 2,700 new students start their first semester in one of eighteen bachelor programmes at Copenhagen Business School (CBS). The students’ first day on campus, Responsibility Day, is dedicated to the topic of responsible management. The aim of the day is to provide students with an opportunity to reflect upon social responsibility and ethical dilemmas, both in their new role as CBS students and in their future role as business managers. Furthermore, to set expectations for what role responsible management education should and will play in their upcoming years of study.

Faculty from each study programme are teaching on Responsibility Day, and as a result engaged in developing the learning environment of the actual day. However more importantly is the way in which the initiative impacts the general educational framework of responsible management by kick-starting curriculum development and facilitating the signalling of CBS’ values. Hence, by developing learning environment for responsible management education on each study programme from the very first day, Responsibility Day creates extensive impact across CBS.

Challenges

When students attend business school they usually expect core courses, such as marketing and economics, to form the main part of their education. At CBS we want to signal our dedication to responsible management on the students’ very first day of lectures, as well as set students’ expectations for how their future study programmes will deliver responsible management education. In order to prove the relevance and strategic substance of responsible management education to individual bachelor programmes, we needed a way to perceptibly demonstrate the implementation of PRME and engage faculty and study programmes across the board at CBS. One approach for attaining these objectives was set in motion by the Dean of Education at CBS with the launch of Responsibility Day – on the first day of lectures for all incoming bachelor students CBS makes its commitment to responsible management education explicitly across all study programmes.

Actions taken

Responsibility Day starts with morning sessions where the students of each study programme, varying in size from 60 to 650 students, discuss a relevant case of responsible management together with a senior faculty member. In 2013 the case will focus on the philanthropic projects and supply chain of the iconic Danish apparel company, Hummel. In the afternoon sessions, the students are assembled and welcomed to CBS by senior management, which is followed by real life examples of responsible management presented by keynote speaker, Christian Stadil, creative director and owner of the case company, Hummel.

On Responsibility Day, the students have the opportunity to start working with the case supported by a designated instructor, after which they have three weeks to finish a case solution for submission. A jury
will select the three best case solutions to be pitched during Green Week, where the winning group will be announced. During Green Week, CBS promotes sustainability to both students and faculty through company presentations, events, and student activities. By extending Responsibility Day into Green Week, CBS signals that commitment to responsible management is an integral element to our values and education.

Responsibility Day was launched in 2009, and is continuously being developed. In order to evaluate and improve Responsibility Day, a survey is given to students and instructors directly after the event. Study programmes differ significantly in size and nature, therefore requiring a high degree of coordination, logistical overview and engagement from our intro teams and programme coordinators. Such challenges are addressed and facilitated by formulation of the Responsibility Day Road Map in which experiences from the preparation and execution of the event are retained and updated each year.

Results

Responsibility Day aims to illustrate the concept of responsible management and how it relates to each study programme. Students learn to reflect upon social responsibility, ethical dilemmas and the like, both in their new role as students as well as in their future careers. In 2012 we conducted six focus group interviews with students who had participated in one of the previous Responsibility Days. Along with feedback from faculty who participated in the event these interviews indicated that both students and instructors viewed Responsibility Day as an initiative that gives an important foundation and frame of reference for the coming years of studying. Furthermore, it was evident that students clearly remembered Responsibility Day as their first day of lectures.

Moreover, Responsibility Day works as a catalyst for curriculum development. By engaging faculty in Responsibility Day, the initiative creates ownership and encourages study programme directors, instructors, and study board members to focus on responsible management throughout the bachelor programme. Hence, when approaching study programmes concerning PRME initiatives, such as curriculum development or faculty training, faculty are predisposed towards responsible management education and know how it is linked to their individual study programmes.

The role of PRME/sustainability principles

- Responsibility Day is CBS’ most important mechanism to signal the commitment to PRME towards students and faculty. As it is the first day of lectures, every study programme and student alike are exposed to responsible management education.

- In terms of resources needed, Responsibility Day has proven to be an impactful way of reaching every new bachelor student at CBS.

- Responsibility Day serves as a catalyst for development and implementation of other PRME activities, e.g. curriculum development.

- Responsibility Day enables the establishment of synergies and coherence by engaging CBS’ organisations and initiatives, such as Oikos Copenhagen and CBS Goes Green, as well as the teams responsible for the bachelor students’ general introduction to CBS.