Introduction

A module on Sustainability Management was introduced into the Senior Management Programme at Lagos Business School. The category of the students – senior managers in top organisations required a teaching approach that would really make them engage the topic and be moved to act. In order to achieve this, traditional and new media (PowerPoint presentations, radio jingles, TV ads, and Twitter) were incorporated into the usual case teaching method, and the students were challenged to be the protagonists of the message of sustainability. The module consisted of four sessions of 75 minutes each.

Challenges

Here and now, in the 21st century, it is time to bring multimedia and social media into the classroom. The first challenge was to get the classroom internet ready, but there was an administrative communication breakdown, and resolution took some time.

Beyond the use of technology, there was an interesting debate about which aspects of sustainability were more important and should therefore be given priority for class discussion. A main concern was that people issues in Nigeria override environmental issues and need to be addressed first. Other issues included the integration of personal responsibility and corporate responsibility as well as the role of government.

Actions taken

The students were asked to work in groups. Each group had to do research on sustainability and present it in PowerPoint, followed by a panel discussion to the class. The topics for the groups were:

1. Making a case for sustainable management in Nigeria and wider Africa
2. Deep insights into the economic rewards of managing sustainably
3. Fighting for social sustainability: Where do people stand in the profit-people-planet spectrum?
4. Management and the Earth: There is no Planet B

In addition, each group was expected to prepare:

a) A radio jingle educating the public on sustainability (2 minute maximum duration) and
b) A TV advert of a product/service (selected from one of their companies in the group) that emphasises its green aspects (5 minute maximum duration). The aspects could be actual or potential.

Finally, a “twitclass” (via Twitter) was held to discuss one of the cases given to the students: Green Forests Inc.
Results

Each group did brilliant work. They engaged within their groups and made deep and insightful presentations to the whole class. The sessions were very participatory, and others who were not in the presenting group benefited and contributed to enriching discussions. The radio jingles and TV ads also came out very well and could be used to spread the message of sustainability. The class decided to pursue this possibility and also to initiate a tree-planting project. The “twitclass” was successful – two of the students later offered free consulting services to the case subject. A number of the students continued the discussion on Twitter even after the class. Other expected results include:

- The airing of at least one of the radio jingles or TV ad
- Continuous advocacy for management for sustainability by the participant students
- Further assistance (advisory services and network reach) provided to the case subjects

Learning points

- The sessions were enjoyable and, at the same time, full of content. The students were happy to create and share knowledge themselves and put in the needed effort to do a good job. In the process, they assimilated principles of sustainability to a greater extent than might have been if they had passively attended lectures.
- The rich experience of the individual participants (senior managers from different industries) came out easily and was shared with everyone else.
- The students learnt to articulate their stance on issues regarding sustainability and to reach out to others and talk about sustainability.

The role of PRME/sustainability principles

This project draws on five of the Six Principles of PRME:

1. The students’ capacities regarding responsible management have been enhanced. Through testing and employing their creativity, the students’ happiness at the end with was palpable.
2. Introducing the sustainability module supported sustainability values teaching at Lagos Business School.
3. The interactive teaching method was engaging and effective.
4. Since the participants are senior managers in Nigeria’s top organisations, their discussions gave insights into the shared challenges that organisations face in the quest to achieve sustainable management.
5. Discussions on Twitter were a good beginning to dialogue between educators and students.