Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

Exploring CSR Teaching Practices through Collaboration: The Case of CSR Teaching in XJTLU

Introduction

Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) is a young joint university established in 2006 in China. In 2011, XJTLU first opened the module of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to undergraduate students. Aiming to develop students’ abilities in critical thinking and ethical dilemma decision-making around practical ambiguous issues, the instructor made “exchange” as the motto of teaching this module, promoted cross-cultural communications through collaboration with partner universities in the UK and the US, and introduced open dialogue through inviting local business managers and NGOs as guest speakers. Although CSR teaching in XJTLU has only two years of implementation experience, good teaching practices have already been recognised in our Business School. Students, the local community, partner universities, and staff have all benefited from the exchange-oriented practices in teaching CSR.

Challenges

When the module was first opened for delivery to undergraduate students in 2011, no previous internal experiences or routines were available for reference, aside from the module specification from our partner, the University of Liverpool. After conferring with the module leader about the teaching content, methods, and assessment at Liverpool, we realised that we must design the learning objectives of this module by considering both the level of students at XJTLU and the special character of this module. The learning performance of students could not be assessed with only one final exam essay, as in Liverpool. Rather, learning on this module must be guided by diverse supportive measures, such as field visits to business, guest speeches from varied practitioners in different fields, direct dialogue and communications with people from different cultural backgrounds, etc.

Actions taken

Considering the infeasibility of following the assessment method used at the University of Liverpool, we decided to change the module specification. With the inclusion of individual papers that aimed to promote students’ reflective thinking on realistic business issues, group work and presentation that aimed to encourage students to go beyond textbook and campus, students could be motivated to engage more positively in the whole learning process. To facilitate students’ learning and improve their understanding on the diversity and ambiguity of ethical issues, we tried our best efforts to create field visiting opportunities for students, establish networks with universities and other organisations both domestically and abroad, introduce diversified pedagogic teaching methods. In general, in order to promote better learning performance on CSR, we took actions on the following aspects, including course
design, content, process, student support, and assessment.

First, regarding course design, we focused on the primary learning objective to develop student capabilities in critical thinking and ethical dilemma decision-making. We designed the course with four principles:

- **Case-based** i.e., using various cases and scenarios to facilitate learning.
- **Reality-based** i.e., offering discussion and presentation from leaders in various fields to stimulate thinking and application of ideas.
- **Action-based** i.e., requiring students to explore their decision making processes, to describe their observation toward real business phenomena and research in papers and presentations.
- **Team-based** i.e., utilising student-led teams to accomplish learning objectives.

Second, regarding course content, we added supplemental reading materials, selected from famous business magazines and media, such as BusinessWeek, The Economist, Forbes, New York Times, BBC, etc. to stress the importance of keeping close observation of up-to-date business ethical events. Apart from these, we also provided students introductory academic articles from related journals, such as *Business and Society*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Harvard Business Review*, to improve third year students’ academic training.

Third, regarding course process, we introduced and utilised electronic media. Sometimes, a good movie can help deepen students’ understanding of real business issues. For example, we viewed *The Corporation* to offer students a valuable supplement to help them understand more accessibly the debate between shareholder value and stakeholder value. Thus, through bridging theory with business practice, students’ interest in studying this course increased.

Fourth, regarding student support, we tried to expand networking. We established collaboration with an American professor to support bilateral communications between students on both two sides. Together, we initiated an online joint-case study programme aimed to promote students’ cross-cultural communication and collaboration in problem-solving an ambiguous issue based on a case from a third country to offer a neutral context. In this way, students were expected to have the opportunity to improve their cross-cultural communication and understanding of different values and perspectives on business ethics. Through this joint-case study, American and Chinese students with different cultural backgrounds and values understood the impact of different values on ethical decision-making. This practice has proved very successful. To broaden students’ perspective and experiences, we seek to integrate the addition of a Scandinavian example into the joint-case study programme in CSR teaching. Thus, a triangle partnership network with students exchange from Northern Europe, the US, and China could greatly improve the teaching performance of CSR when considering the context-dependent
character of CSR practices.

Results

Although our School has not yet become a signatory of PRME, we aim toward this objective. Our exploration of developing good teaching practices on CSR has significantly contributed to staff awareness on the importance of business ethics education and promoted more positive discussions and communications on teaching and research related to ethics and sustainability. Our efforts on teaching CSR has been recognized and awarded the Most Innovative Teaching Practice Teaching Prize in XJTLU in 2013. We believe that our efforts benefit our students, bringing them a more diverse exchange network, enabling them to have more communications with people from different cultural contexts and value systems, nurturing their cultural intelligence, and enhancing their capabilities of ethical decision making.

The role of PRME/sustainability principles

We believe that the principles under the framework of PRME are good guideline for responsible management education. Through our exploration on teaching CSR, we especially perceive the value of the principles on Method, Partnership, and Dialogue. In future, we will strengthen our consistent efforts on these principles to achieve more benefits for our students and staff.

- Method/Curriculum Change
- Partnership
- Dialogue