

Research Project: Sustainable Business Models and Practices: Management Learning and Thinking.

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Background: Many of the key areas of BRASS research interest including the automotive industry, food production, mining, electronics and waste are areas where the technical or ‘hardware’ elements of the production and consumption systems tend to dominate discussions of CSR and business sustainability. However, a recurring theme across the CSR and business sustainability literature is that the barriers to progress towards sustainability are as much based on existing patterns of thought and management practice as they are on technical or economic realities. A number of aspects of BRASS research have therefore addressed issues of general management, management education and leadership for CSR and sustainability.

Aims & objectives: To contribute to the development of a new sustainability orientated paradigm of management by challenging existing ways of conceptualising, teaching and practicing management and leadership and to develop new approaches to understanding management principles and practices from a sustainability orientated perspective.

About the research: This research project had several distinct but interrelated strands including:

- **Sustainability and leadership:** One of the most consistent findings in the research literature about the pursuit of sustainable development and corporate social responsibility is that active support from top leadership is crucial in determining whether sustainability and CSR initiatives succeed. Leadership is a recurring theme within much of the BRASS research agenda, and it has also been the subject of a number of specific projects and outputs on issues including sustainable entrepreneurship, organisational change and models of leadership. This also links to a PhD project on organisational change processes and sustainability in multi-national companies.
- **Sustainability metaphors:** The metaphors used to communicate and understand business sustainability shape the development of theory, discourse and practice in the field. This element of work examined the implications of particular metaphors in business sustainability. This has included an exploration of military metaphors in sustainability leadership discourse, and their incompatibility with many key sustainability principles. It also examined how a selective and partial use of particular biological, evolutionary or ecological metaphors for business has generated theoretical and empirical bias. This work contributed to industrial ecology discourse by giving consideration to the extension of the underlying metaphor, using the specific example of (bio) diversity to suggest a new and broader set of economic structures and relationships and a more critical perspective that could be brought into the realm of the discipline. Sustainability metaphor research was also a component of the sustainability accounting and reporting project (see A40).
- **Education for sustainability:** BRASS has made a variety of contributions to education for sustainable development at various levels, particularly management education in disciplines such as accounting and marketing. BRASS co-organised a workshop after the 2nd World Summit on Sustainable Development at a British Academy of Management Conference in London and organised an Academy of Management Conference “Showcase Symposium” on Corporate Citizenship in Denver.
- **System for Auditing University Curricula in Higher-Education (STAUNCH):** This project emerged from BRASS’s work promoting the adoption of SD principles and CSR in the work of Business Schools. A system was developed to allow the systematic auditing of curricula within universities to analyze the extent to which sustainability concepts and principles were integrated within them. Although originally designed for Business School curricula, it could be applied to any element of Higher Education

Results and outputs: The work on leadership, metaphors and sustainability revealed how a different choice of metaphors may have the potential to realign the discourse about business sustainability. For example leadership metaphors derived from tribal leadership as opposed to military strategy may provide opportunities for more cooperative and sustainable modes of strategy making and stakeholder management to emerge. A different selection of ecological metaphors utilising concepts such as diversity, local adaptation, and alien species invasion as they might be applied to business and economic analysis could result in a different understanding of what a more sustainable business paradigm would involve. The STAUNCH work demonstrated the potential to systematically audit management (and other) learning to understand its contribution to the promotion of education for sustainable development.

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Impacts achieved/potential for impact: BRASS work on sustainability and leadership has been closely linked into policy and practice particularly in Wales where BRASS contributed to the planning and delivery of a major Sustainable Leadership Programme for Wales (led by Cynnal Cymru and Cambridge Programme for Industry), including developing the briefing documents for delegates on sustainable development for leadership and a compendium of key sustainable development concepts, policy and resources. BRASS also worked with Leadership Management Wales and Peter Head (Arup and Ecological Sequestration Trust) for a pair of seminars for managers on leadership and sustainability. The STAUNCH system was piloted at Cardiff University before being adopted across all HE institutions in Wales in a Welsh Government funded audit initiative (the first such systematic and comparable audit conducted anywhere in the World). The system was shortlisted for a Times Higher Education Award for *Outstanding Contribution to Sustainability* and has since been launched commercially. The system has been presented at a number of fora including the 2008 Association of Business Schools Conference.