



Sample MSt Group Project Topics

1. Financing the future

The finance sector plays a critical role in the reallocation and management of capital within the economy and as such has huge potential as a lever for change. Yet how do we cause the finance sector to embed sustainability thinking into its general lending, insurance and investment activities? How can they finance and facilitate the transition to a low carbon sustainable future? What would it take to shift financial capital at scale into climate solutions and natural asset classes? How do we change finance and finance change?

2. Who are the “intrapreneurs”?

Why have so few organisations been able to move beyond compliance to leadership in social and environmental innovation? A few global companies are regularly mentioned in terms of sustainability leadership. These include Interface, Timberland, Marks & Spencer, GE’s Ecomagination, and more recently Nestlé and Unilever. What makes them examples of leadership is that their sustainability commitments are much closer to the scope of the challenge and that it involves innovation (value creation) in their core operations. Sustainability leadership is therefore dependent on new ways of value creation and on a commitment to the type of ‘transformation’ that science says is required. But who are the “intrapreneurs” who take the initiative for innovations that address social and environmental challenges whilst creating ‘commercial’ value for their organisations?

3. Role of business in shaping a sustainable economy

What role can business play in shaping a more sustainable economy? The last thirty years have shown us that our current economic paradigm is not working as well as it could. Even though we have succeeded in lifting many people out of poverty and have seen technological progress unimaginable to previous generations, we are also facing an environmental, social and economic crisis of significant proportions. Since the Second World War, the objective of any society has been to further economic growth, but this has come at the expense of people, the planet and even economic stability. There is a growing consensus within government, business and civil society that a new approach is needed, but still uncertainty as to what that new approach should be. The Group will explore the failures of the current economic paradigm, explore the potential of a new, more sustainable paradigm and define how business can thrive by enabling the transition between the two.

4. Sustainability performance evaluation

Sustainability strategies, processes and practices are vital for organisations to support positive change for sustainability. But how can the desired sustainability performance be achieved and evaluated? Sustainability performance has both procedural dimensions (e.g. how it is carried out) and substantive dimensions (e.g. what outcomes are realised). To achieve the desired sustainability performance robust management systems or frameworks are needed. They require, amongst others, clear objectives and appropriate indicators and data collection for monitoring to demonstrate actual performance. The group may choose to research and apply any aspect of sustainability performance attainment or evaluation within a selected organisation or sector.

5. Aligning planning and decision-making with sustainability

The concept of sustainability is increasingly accepted as a guiding framework or aspiration for public policy, for business and for our own individual lives. Various sectors (for example mining) have undertaken industry-wide processes to articulate more clearly what sustainability means for their business. But how do these understandings of sustainability inform planning and decision-making in practice? When we develop a project proposal or an investment strategy how can we ensure that more sustainable options are selected over less sustainable ones and that programmes, plans and projects make a positive contribution to sustainability? How sustainable is ‘sustainable enough’? The group is invited to explore how sustainability is ‘operationalised’ within real world planning and decision-making.