



Postgraduate Certificate in Sustainable Value Chains

Group Project Topics

Exploring Past, Present and Future Ethical Trade Models and Tools

Sean Ansett

Value chain human rights issues continue to make the headlines. Even in industries like apparel, it seems we are far from solutions despite significant investments to address systemic value chain human rights issues since the 1990s. Technological trends suggest that in the next several years we will enter an age of “hyper-transparency” in upstream and downstream value chains with lower cost technologies like smart phones creating new communication platforms for workers and communities in the global south.

This brave new world is empowering to some stakeholders and creates much needed transparency and thus accountability. However, it may be of concern to others. New engagement processes will be required as information loops exponentially picks up pace and brands lose control of their message and engagement strategies. In response to this evolution, every corporate executive should be asking themselves the following questions:

- What is the story behind our product or service?
- Are we proud of that story?
- Would my customer be proud of that story?
- Do we own the story or do others own it for us?

Addressing value chain human rights issues is not easy and in fairness there is still a large number of “free riders” in the industry that invest little or nothing in ethical trade. However, there is much to be learned from the mistakes of the past and opportunities to leverage that learning. Unfortunately, the Rana Plaza tragedy in Bangladesh was a stark reminder that social auditing has produced limited results so why do some many companies across sectors rely on it and continue to spend resources? This project group will do a post-mortem on the ethical trade model and tools. The group will analyse what has worked, what has not and explore new ways forward to improve supplier social performance in global value chains.

Prospecting Across the Value Chain for Commercial and Impact Opportunities

Justin DeKoszmovszky

To permanently align the profit and growth motives of the private sector with social and environmental sustainability, we need to integrate them into the criteria we use in looking for, prioritising and executing new opportunities. Without the ability to commercialise sustainability by linking it to the innovation and business development functions, sustainability risks only making slow incremental change while increasing the inter-related risks of resource shocks, reputational deterioration, insecurity, inequality.... There are a myriad of supporting trends in technology, transparency, consumer activism and the undeniable fact that the repercussions of our unsustainable economic activity like climate change are having tangible impacts on our lives and our companies.

The starting question for this group project is: How and where can sustainability add the most value? Some of the questions that the group may consider and discuss in order to focus their thinking will be:

- What are the major impact areas?
- Where in the value chain is there the most risk in terms of volatility, reputation, scarcity, inequality...?
- What drives the impact and risks?
- What are the major areas of growth and profitability?
- Where do these overlap and what opportunities lie in that confluence?
- How can we develop solutions, measures and coalitions to address them?
- Who might we need to work with to explore, test and commercialise (internally and externally)?
- Will the value added and profitability delivered be enough to propel the solution to scale?

The Effective Use of Data and Systems to Manage Sustainable Value/Supply Chains

David Lawrence

Whatever model is used to manage a sustainable value chain, data will be key and managing, storing, analysing and reporting on that are all essential elements in any good programme; what risk tools to understand where to focus, to standardised public reporting formats, tools and systems can make this job easier. The project group will look at - what exists, what adds value and what is really needed for what in today's complex market, including researching what are the up-coming trends and technologies that might create step-changes in the way sustainability data is managed and to what ends?

Science-Based Targets?

Ian Ellison

Most businesses now include some sort of sustainability targets and reporting. Some include them in their core business activities and reports, many see them as a stand-alone endeavour. The key drivers of these targets tend to be: profit, competitiveness, compliance and management of reputation.

International action to acknowledge and act on key sustainability issues such as climate change, air quality and water often result in commitments and regulations that are thought to fall short of what the science tells us we really need:

http://www.globalcarbonproject.org/carbonbudget/16/files/GCP_CarbonBudget_2016.pdf

This has led to the emergence of science-based targets (e.g. <http://sciencebasedtargets.org>). A few organisations have begun to develop and pilot such targets, but these are far from mainstream and are rarely baked into the core business value proposition.

Themes for investigation by the group may include:

- What can science tell business about future needs and priorities?
- How can business digest the science and turn it into a value proposition quickly enough?
- What methods are available and how to choose / develop a suitable one?
- Which methods / targets are robust for application in the real world of business?
- Where should business start and how can science best engage business?

Managing Sustainable Value/Supply Chains

Dr Benn Lawson

Operating a sustainable value/supply chain requires firms to balance economic, environmental and social dimensions. A project in this area might focus on factors which affect a firm's ability to accomplish its goals in one or more of these areas. Potential topics might include (but are not limited to):

- New technologies (like blockchain) and opportunities for sustainability
- Improving worker voice within global value/supply chains
- The effects of new regulation (e.g. the UK Modern Slavery Act (2015)) on firm sustainability strategy and activities
- What is the right strategy for value/supply chain transparency and disclosure?

Transformation Towards Sustainable Business Models – Challenges and Opportunities

Dr Doroteya Vladimirova

To address global sustainability challenges radically new ways of doing business are required. The business model describes how a firm does business Magretta (2002). Across industries radically different business model paradigms are required that move away from pure profit maximisation through satisfying customer needs, to multi-stakeholder value creation and creating positive value for society and the environment. The capability to frequently and successfully move from one business model to another is an important source of sustainable competitive advantage and a key leverage to improve sustainability performance of organisations. The transformation from one business model to another can affect the entire business model or a combination of its value proposition, value creation, delivery, and capture elements, and the value chain.

- What are the challenges that the business need to overcome in the transformation towards a more sustainable business model?
- What are the challenges in the value chain in such shifts?
- What are the triggers for business model transformation?
- What are the internal and external conditions that enable or prevent successful business model transformation?

The group is encouraged to assess and develop a new sustainable business model and sustainable value chain directions for an organisation or industry of choice considering some of these key questions.