Top Corporate Responsibility Cases and Articles

With an increased demand for graduating students to understand how sustainability, resiliency, and responsibility intersect into all functions of business operations, the Berkeley Haas Center for Responsible Business (CRB) has curated a list of top responsible business cases and articles for integration into traditional and elective MBA curriculum to ensure that students graduate with these concepts embedded into their core learnings. These sustainable cases encompass the broadest sense of the word to include social, environmental, and economic considerations.

This list features cases and articles hosted on the Harvard Business Publishing site, published within the last 10 years that tackle pressing sustainability and responsibility challenges within the corporate space. Cases have also been tagged if they feature a diverse protagonist, as we strongly believe that diversity and inclusion is core to business success and achieving sustainability goals. For an exhaustive compendium of cases with diverse protagonists (across industries and topics) or cases related to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), please see the DEI Case Compendium of the Berkeley Haas Center for Equity, Gender, and Leadership. Additionally, a number of the cases focus on sustainable and impact finance. If you're particularly eager to include more content in that space within your courses, please utilize the Sustainable and Impact Finance Initiative as a resource.

We encourage professors to examine how they can refresh and embed the below into their curriculum and/or provide as supplemental readings on their syllabi. The CRB is eager to partner with Haas faculty to co-author cases that would be directly included into courses. You can see a list of full cases we've published in the past here. Please do see us as a resource.

Top Corporate Responsibility Cases and Articles Suitable for Inclusion Into MBA Core Curriculum

Autonomous Vehicles: Technological Changes and Ethical Challenges*

USC Marshall | 2018

In 2014, General Motors (GM) announced that semi-autonomous technology, named Super Cruise, would be released in the upcoming 2016 Cadillac CT6 model. But prior to release, the world saw its first death involving semi-autonomous technology, with Tesla's Autopilot. This highlighted the ethical, regulatory, and business considerations related to semi-autonomous technology. The case frames an opportunity to assess whether and when GM should release Super Cruise, and what might justify that decision. Students can draw from case information about Tesla and Google, which exemplify radically different strategies to releasing autonomous vehicles.

Core Courses: Ethics, Strategic Leadership

Potential Elective Courses*:* Opportunity Recognition: Technology and Entrepreneurship in Silicon Valley; Managing the Legal Environment of Business

BlackRock: Linking Purpose to Profit*

Harvard Business School | 2020

The case revolves around the actions that Barbara Novick, co-founder and Vice-Chair of Blackrock, and Michelle Edkins, Global Head of Investment Stewardship, would need to take on the back of the controversial CEO letters from Laurence (Larry) Fink, Chairman and CEO of BlackRock. Fink's letters highlighted the importance of corporate purpose and investing that considers environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues. The case also discusses Blackrock's plans for a new model of shareholder engagement to help drive the changes proposed in the letters. It presents the opportunity to discuss the governance role played by major institutional investors, and how the responsibilities and actions of one large investor, BlackRock, should evolve in such a role going forward. It is not clear whether BlackRock should play such a role, and if so, whether they have the ability to enforce corporate compliance and to carry out this role given they are primarily an index investor. The case is likely to generate spirited debate about the merits of BlackRock's pronouncements, the importance of corporate investments in ESG themes, and allows for discussions on measurement and disclosure strategies that can judge progress on these dimensions.

Core Courses: Finance, Leading People

Potential Elective Courses: HSIF, Investment Management: Hands-on Value and Values Investing

Blurring the Lines Between Business and Government: Salesforce and CEO Activism

WDI Publishing at the University of Michigan | 2019

This case features CRM technology firm Salesforce, and its CEO, Marc Benioff. In 2015, the state of Indiana's new Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) was signed into law by then governor Mike Pence. The RFRA was criticized as legalizing blatant discrimination of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ) community. Because Salesforce had recently expanded to Indianapolis and anticipated future growth there, Benioff decided to ban company travel to the state and threatened to reduce the company's presence in Indiana if RFRA was not repealed. Salesforce was joined by many other large corporations in vocalizing disagreement with RFRA and threatening to reduce or eliminate investment in Indiana. The case explores Benioff's decision to take a public and aggressive stand against the new Indiana law. Some disagreed with Benioff's extreme action that put the company at risk. Others applauded him for taking a stand.

Core Courses: Leading People, Ethics

Carbon Footprints: Methods and Calculations

Harvard Business School | 2011

Describes methods to calculate the carbon footprint (greenhouse gas emissions) of an organization's operations and supply chain, and a product or service. Illustrates concepts with examples of calculating the carbon footprint of an organization (Harvard Business School) and a product (a newspaper). Provides data necessary for carbon footprint calculations.

Core Courses: Operations; Data and Decision Making

Potential Elective Courses: Business and Natural Resources

Cargill: The Risky Business of Integrating Climate Change and Corporate Strategy

WDI Publishing at the University of Michigan | 2017

The complex and fragmented agribusiness sector has been resistant to legislation surrounding greenhouse gas emissions and other climate change regulations. Cargill, one of the largest agribusiness companies and the largest privately held company in the U.S., has the ability to become a significant driver of the climate change conversation and set new industry standards. But, in 2013 Cargill was a traditionally silent group with a negative environmental record. Cargill CEO Gregory Page must decide whether to push Cargill into the climate change

*Features diverse protagonists - please connect with the Center for Gender, Equity, and Inclusion for a fully exhaustive compendium of DEI case studies spotlight by joining the Risky Business Project, a new and innovative initiative that sought to evaluate the economic impact of climate change on the U.S. economy. Page must weigh the environmental and business implications of his decision, as well as how it may affect company stakeholders.

Core Courses: Strategic Leadership

Cathay Pacific Airways: Implementing a Sustainable Development Strategy

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology | 2018

This case traces the sustainable development (SD) journey undertaken by Hong Kong's flagship carrier, Cathay Pacific Airways, to bring environmental issues from the periphery to the core of the organization. In 2012, the airline set 20 SD targets to be achieved by 2020. It soon realized that integrating sustainable practices into the overall strategy was vital for the long-term viability of the business. The key challenge for the airline's Environmental Affairs Department was twofold-to embed sustainability into the mainstream thinking of the organization, and to align environmental and social initiatives that cut across all departments with the overall business goals of the airline.

Core Courses: Ethics, Macroeconomics

Potential Sustainability Courses: Global Leadership; Business and Sustainable Supply Chains

CleanSpritz*

Harvard Business School | 2014

Sales of CleanSpritz all-purpose cleaning spray have been steadily declining for the past five years, and management believes the decline correlates to a growing environmental concern among U.S. consumers. CleanSpritz's management is considering several options to address the environmental concerns in hopes of reversing the decline in revenue: re-launching the current product; adding a new product that includes stronger concentrate in a recyclable pouch; adding a new stronger concentrate in a dissolvable packet; or keeping the business status-quo. Students must present their recommendations for the most effective strategy, keeping in mind the potential risks of each alternative. Students learn to demonstrate the importance of packaging in the marketing mix, analyze the costs and benefits of being a first mover, and learn about the decision-making process for a product extension that represents a creative attempt to rejuvenate a mature brand. This case can be used in courses on marketing management, product management or new product development, or marketing and social responsibility.

Core Courses: Strategic Leadership

Potential elective courses: Social Impact Marketing; Brand Marketing

Eco7: Launching a New Motor Oil

Harvard Business School | 2014

Aaron Jonnerson, vice president of marketing at the automotive division of Avellin, must make marketing mix decisions for the launch of Eco7, a new environmentally-friendly motor oil. The company's performance has been mediocre, shareholder pressure is increasing, and expectations are high for Eco7. However, Jonnerson faces significant challenges in ensuring a successful launch. The market for passenger car motor oil (PCMO) is mature and consumers are price-sensitive. Furthermore, the independent oil change outlets that are Avellin's core customers have declined relative to other channels. Jonnerson must design the best pricing strategy to ensure a successful launch. The Eco7 case asks students to examine consumer behavior and channel conflict and factor them into a product launch. The launch comes at a time when the company may need to adapt to changes in a market that is increasingly commoditized and in which the relative importance of different distribution channels is changing. Students are asked to make recommendations on pricing and distribution and to consider which trade-offs the company should make.

Core Courses: Marketing, Operations

Potential elective courses: Pricing, Innovation

ESG Metrics: Reshaping Capitalism?

Harvard Business School | 2016

In the past twenty-five years, the world had seen an exponential growth in the number of companies reporting environmental, social and governance (ESG) data. Investor interest in ESG data also grew rapidly. A growing belief that increasing levels of social inequality and natural environment degradation were pressing problems that the capitalist system was failing to resolve had led many stakeholders to advocate for changes in measurement and corporate reporting as a potentially powerful "lever" that could move the discussion from "Reimagining" to "Reshaping" Capitalism. Some suggested that increased transparency could change corporate behavior, increase corporate accountability and lead to better outcomes for employees, customers, the environment and local communities. Others suggested that ESG data were value relevant from an investor standpoint and that firms "doing good would do well." According to this view, investors that used ESG data would be able to make better investment decisions and widespread disclosure of such data would improve market efficiency. However, some commentators doubted the sincerity of company ESG disclosures and suggested that firms that did good were less competitive, and therefore earned lower returns for their shareholders. As the business community entered the second half of the second decade of the twenty first century, whether the widespread adoption of ESG metrics would happen -- and whether, if it did, it would lead to systematic change -- was very much an open question.

Core Courses: Financial Accounting

Potential elective courses: Accounting electives, Portfolio Management

ExxonMobil: Business as Usual? (A)

Harvard Business School | 2017

In September 2016, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) launched an investigation into ExxonMobil's accounting treatment of its oil and gas reserves. The SEC questioned the company's decision to record no impairments of its reserves, although oil prices had declined by almost 60% since mid-2014 due to a mix of factors, including excess supply from the US, Russia and Middle East and slowing demand from China. Moreover, critics of ExxonMobil's accounting noted that competitors, such as Chevron and Royal Dutch Shell, had impaired their reserves. This followed probes, by New York and Massachusetts Attorney Generals among other state Attorney Generals, which questioned whether ExxonMobil had, for decades, failed to inform investors about potential climate-change risks. As CEO Rex Tillerson stepped down to become the Secretary of State in the new Administration under President Donald Trump, the new CEO of ExxonMobil faced many strategic questions. How should ExxonMobil invest going forward? What were the capabilities that ExxonMobil needed to develop in order to be successful in the future? Did the accounting book value of the reserves reflect economic reality or was an impairment needed?

Core Courses: Financial Accounting, Macroeconomics

Potential Elective Courses: Energy and Environmental Markets

GEO Tech

Darden School of Business | 2011

The founder of a U.S. provider of geographic information system services focused on sustainability must decide whether to open a Canadian facility. The facility would be in operation for five years and enough information is provided for a detailed cross-border capital budgeting analysis. In addition to introducing foreign currency issues, the case provides exposure to subscription-based revenue streams and discussion of relevant costs.

Core Courses: Finance

Potential Elective Courses: Financial Modeling, Corporate Finance

Google: To TVC or Not to TVC?*

Harvard Business School | 2019

In late 2018, evidence emerged that many of Google's temporary help agency workers, vendors, and independent contractors ("TVCs") were unhappy with the company. TVCs, who reportedly made up 49.95% of Google's 170,000 person global workforce, had raised concerns of mistreatment, citing instances of pay inequity, social exclusion, and physical endangerment. "Flexible" workers, such as TVCs, were often seen as a key cog for Silicon Valley's IT companies: they made workforces scalable, they helped firms get access to specialized knowledge for temporary projects, and they boosted innovation by creating "knowledge spillovers" between firms. But, at the same time, many onlookers worried that flexible work arrangements were aggravating social inequality and making more jobs precarious. Google employees, major media outlets, and politicians demanded that the company change its policies on TVCs. One suggestion was that Google convert all of its TVCs to full-time status by early 2020. As tensions reportedly escalated between Google's workforce and its management team, some began to wonder if Google was still an employer of choice.

Core Courses: Leading People; Ethics

Potential Elective Courses: Negotiations, Power and Politics, Future of work, HR

Governance and Sustainability at Nike (A)*

Harvard Business School | 2013 (Revised 2016)

Two members of Nike's executive team must decide what sustainability targets to propose to Nike's CEO and to the corporate responsibility committee of Nike's board of directors. Set in 2012, the case traces the evolution of Nike's approach to environmental and social concerns from its origins in student protests against labor conditions in the supply chain in the 1990s through the development of a board-level corporate responsibility (CR) committee in 2001 to the creation of the Sustainable Business & Innovation (SB&I) strategy in 2009. In this context, Hannah Jones, Nike's VP of SB&I, and Eric Sprunk, VP of Merchandising & Product, are working to finalize the company's next round of sustainability targets for presentation to the CR committee. When Nike signs on to the Roadmap to Zero, a Greenpeace-inspired initiative to eliminate the discharge of toxic chemicals into the water supply by 2020, the company's target-setting process becomes more complex. Jones and Sprunk must decide whether to recommend that Nike dial back other sustainability goals to meet the zero toxics challenge, modify its commitment to zero toxics, or find another solution.

Core Courses: Data and Decisions

Potential Elective Courses: Large Scale Social Change, Strategic Brand Management, Corporate Governance, Sustainable Innovation

Hapag-Lloyd AG: Complying with IMO 2020

Harvard Business School | 2019

A new environmental regulation known as IMO 2020 was creating what one industry analyst called "the biggest shakeup for the oil and shipping industries in decades." According to the new regulation, all ocean-going ships would have to limit their sulfur emissions by January 1, 2020. Senior leaders at Hapag-Lloyd, one of the world's largest shipping companies, were evaluating three ways their ships could comply with the new regulation: use low sulfur fuel, use high-sulfur fuel but install scrubbers to clean the exhaust, or convert ships to use liquid natural gas (LNG) as fuel. Each of the options had its advantages and disadvantages, and the most attractive option depended on not only the values of key parameters (e.g., future fuel prices and equipment costs), but also the strategies adopted by the owners of the other 60,000 ocean-going ships subject to the regulation.

For the industry as a whole, annual compliance could cost as much as $60 billion; for Hapag-Lloyd, annual compliance might cost as much as $1 billion or more. For a company with net income of $34 million (€28 million) in the prior year, and losses in two of the past four years, getting this decision right was of the utmost importance. Senior executives at Hapag-Lloyd had created a proposed compliance plan and were scheduled to present it to the firm's supervisory board for approval in June 2018. Whether the team had the right plan and whether the board would approve it are the key questions in the case.

Core Courses: Finance

Potential Elective Courses: Corporate Finance

Just: Positioned to Target Mainstream Tastes? (A)

Darden School of Business | 2018

Well suited for MBA and undergraduate marketing programs, this case uses product positioning and placement during the early growth stages of a start-up's brand in the food industry to unfold circumstances that allow for an analysis of the firm's positioning and food marketing decisions. All products are plant-based foods distributed nationally in the United States. Seeking to target mainstream tastes and low price, tensions among the three pillars of the brand's marketing strategy, which are quality, accessibility, and sustainability, leave the case open to explore uncertainty, positioning, marketing mix, and consumer behavior. The A case opens with Josh Tetrick, Just's founder and CEO, facing an obstacle to the brand around accessibility. Target delisted all Just products in its stores after receiving an unverified, anonymous letter claiming that some of the products were unsafe and mislabeled. Although it only accounted for a small percentage of sales, losing Target affected Just's ability to meet its distribution goal to reach price-conscious consumers where they shopped and its greater goal to build a food system where everyone could eat well.

Core Courses: Marketing

Potential Elective Courses: Food Innovation Studio

Legrand: Lightning Their (Electricity) Load

UC Berkeley - Haas School of Business | 2015

This case illustrates the key factors that Tim Travis, the maintenance lead for Legrand North American, must consider in a capital investment decision that involves the implementation of a new lighting system. Legrand, a France-based multi-national company that sells electrical wiring accessories worldwide, is considering whether it should implement its own internal energy efficiency program at its Fort Mills, South Carolina, warehouse location to achieve cost and environmental savings on electrical usage and to meet the new standards established under U.S. Department of Energy's Better Buildings Challenge . The case examines the key components of the capital investment decision, how tax policies promoting energy efficiency can influence the decision, and how to measure the return on capital investment through three different methodologies: the payback method, internal rate of return, and net present value. A breakdown of a cost/savings analysis on energy usage is also examined.

Core Courses: Finance

Potential Elective Courses: Business and Natural Resources, Corporate Finance, Energy and Environmental Markets

Levi Strauss & Co.: Driving Adoption of Green Chemistry

UC Berkeley - Haas School of Business | 2016

This case examines the challenges and opportunities faced by Levi Strauss & Co. (LS&Co.) as it attempts to help establish a cross-industry sustainability initiative to eliminate hazardous chemicals in the apparel supply chain. LS&Co.'s Screened Chemistry Program screened chemical formulations against human and environmental health hazard endpoints before they chemicals entered the supply chain. This shift represents a radical departure from the status quo that requires widespread collaboration across the industry to implement. This case explores the associated challenges and opportunities to achieve cross-industry collaboration to achieve a sustainability objective.

Core Courses: Operations; Strategic Leadership; Leading People

Potential Elective Courses: Business and Sustainable Supply Chains

Patagonia: Driving Sustainable Innovation by Embracing Tensions

UC Berkeley - Haas School of Business | 2016

This case study examines the tensions that arise when Patagonia simultaneously pursues sustainability and quality objectives embedded within its mission statement to "Build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis." Specifically, this case study focuses on Patagonia's Durable Water Repellent (DWR) problem-DWR is a highly effective chemical treatment used to waterproof jackets supporting the quality objective, but it has by-products that are toxic and persist in the environment (undermining the sustainability objective). This case presents Patagonia's (and the industry's) challenges, its history trying to resolve the problem, including research, its temporary solution to use a less harmful but less effective option in C6, and its investment in Beyond Surface Technologies through $20 Million & Change, amongst others. The case also discusses external issues such as competitors and their efforts, pressure from Greenpeace, governmental involvement, and chemical industry actions. At the higher level, the case focuses on the question of how companies like Patagonia drive innovation down the supply chain to chemical and material suppliers, as well as how they think about innovation/disruption across the entire system, all the while grappling with internal tensions between performance, durability, and their commitment to cause no unnecessary environmental harm.

Core Courses: Strategic Leadership

Potential Elective Courses: Product Management; Strategy and Leadership for Social Impact

REI's Solar Energy Program

Stanford Business School | 2011

In 2010, Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI) considered adding photovoltaic solar panels to the roofs of some of its facilities. This was driven by both financial and environmental considerations. In 2008, the company had added solar panels to 11 buildings in a project ("Phase 1") that was justified largely as a learning exercise. The new project ("Phase 2") would have to meet both financial and environmental objectives. The case describes the company's experience with solar power generation as well as providing representative assumptions for parameters in the financial analysis. An Excel spreadsheet is available for students, incorporating the basic analytical methodology used by REI.

Core Courses: Finance, Financial Accounting

Potential Elective Courses: Capital budgeting

Sustainability as a Marketing Tool: To Be or to Appear To Be?

Business Horizons | 2016

While sustainability is an ethical issue, it is also becoming relevant from a marketing standpoint and can be particularly decisive in stakeholder relationships. Companies can approach this issue in different ways, choosing whether to publicize their good conduct or to project a responsible attitude that does not reflect what they effectively achieve. In this context, the authors propose a self-assessment matrix that identifies a better way to make sustainability a source of competitive advantage through a transparency-based approach. By way of a geological metaphor, four types of companies are presented that are distinctive based on two variables: sustainable commitment and communication. Costs and benefits are analyzed for each quadrant, as well as problems resulting from a lack of transparency. In the final section of the article, the authors discuss whether the choice to communicate sustainability can be considered ethical or whether it is only a question of business. Reflections are reported.

Core Courses: Marketing

Potential Elective Courses: Social Impact Marketing

The Clorox Company: Leveraging Green for Growth*

Harvard Business School | 2011

The Clorox Company needs to decide on the marketing strategy going forward for its three sustainable brands, Brita, Burt's Bees and Green Works. These brands had fared differently over the past 3 years and each presents multiple courses of action heading into 2011. Management also needs to assess the role the sustainable brands play in Clorox's overall Corporate Responsibility strategy and the implications they have for the other brands (such as Clorox Bleach, 409, and Hidden Valley). The company has set aggressive financial targets in light of its upcoming centennial in 2013. Students need to evaluate whether sustainability is an enduring trend that Clorox should embrace for future growth or whether focusing on its core brands, which currently represent 90% of sales, is a better approach.

Core Courses: Marketing; Strategic Leadership

Potential Elective Courses: Strategic Brand Management; Social Impact Marketing; Marketing Research; Marketing Strategy

The Sustainability Accounting Standards Board

Harvard Business School | 2014 (Revised 2015)

In 2014, as the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) has just brought former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg on as chairman of the board, Jean Rogers, founder and CEO struggles with how best to ensure the nonprofit's financial sustainability while pushing for broad acceptance of its nonfinancial accounting metrics.

Core Courses: Financial Accounting

Potential Elective Courses: HSIF; Financial Information Analysis

Tough Decisions at Marks and Spencer

Harvard Business School | 2012 (Revised 2015)

In 2007, under the leadership of CEO Stuart Rose, the iconic British retailer Marks and Spencer, with great fanfare, announced its "Plan A" initiative. Based on the five essential pillars of climate change, waste, sustainable materials, fair partnership, and health, the plan sought to transform the company's practices. By 2012, the program's aim was to ensure that M&S was carbon neutral and sent no waste to landfill. It also aimed to help its customers and employees achieve a healthier lifestyle, and to improve the lives of all involved in the company's supply chain with fair wages, as well as improved working hours and conditions. Called Plan A "because there is no Plan B," the company identified 180 projects to improve the sustainability of its operations and business practices in anticipation of the need for a very different business model in the future. Key aspects of Plan A included more sustainable sourcing and influencing the business practices of the company's supply chain; communication to employees, customers and investors; and employee engagement. The case concludes with the tradeoffs involved in the decision of whether or not to install refrigerator doors in the grocery section of its stores. While the energy savings and reduced carbon emissions are relatively clear and easy to measure, the impact on customers and revenues is harder to assess.

Core Courses: Data and Decision; Leading People

Potential Elective Courses: Strategic Brand Management

*Features diverse protagonists - please connect with the Center for Gender, Equity, and Inclusion for a fully exhaustive compendium of DEI case studies

Triodos Bank: Measuring Sustainability Performance

IMD | 2015

An increasing number of organizations are subscribing to sustainability, but how can sustainability performance be measured? Unlike financial performance, which can be assessed through accounting techniques that aggregate various numeric indicators, sustainability performance is more complicated. For financial institutions the situation is even less straightforward - while traditional sustainability frameworks, such as the triple bottom line (TBL), are concerned with the direct inputs and outputs of an organization, financial institutions have indirect impacts based on the loans and financial instruments they offer. Triodos Bank, a pioneer in the sustainability banking sector since it was founded in the Netherlands in 1972, has been grappling with this issue. Peter Blom, Triodos Bank's CEO, defined sustainable banks as "value-driven banks" that "prioritize people over profits" by "lend[ing] to and invest[ing] in organizations that benefit people and the environment." Transforming this definition of sustainable banking into a tangible performance measurement framework was a significant challenge facing managers at Triodos Bank. From aiding loan officers in their decision-making process to determining how successful Triodos Bank was at fulfilling its mission, measuring sustainability performance was a daunting yet critical challenge.The case assesses Triodos Bank's various initiatives, along with the current best practices for measuring sustainability performance. While some frameworks have been developed to cater to the financial sector, particularly the investment sector (which has many similarities to the sustainable banking sector), no existing frameworks effectively convey the sustainability performance of Triodos Bank.The case therefore provides an excellent vehicle for students to develop a sustainability performance measurement framework for Triodos Bank.

Core Courses: Finance

Potential Elective Courses: Social Impact Metrics; Socially Responsible Investing; Impact Investing

Walmart Sustainability Through Lightbulbs: Flickering Out?

Darden School of Business | 2012

CFLs were a signature piece in Walmart's sustainability effort, and although by October 2007, Walmart's goal of selling 100 million compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) had been achieved, the achievement actually highlighted how little CFLs had penetrated. With over 100 million households in the United States, this impressive-sounding result actually meant less than one CFL per residence on average. Walmart had much more work ahead in positioning and pricing CFLs to make them a viable presence in the lighting category. A public failure here could cause Walmart to lose momentum in the greening of its brand. Was the issue a matter of product, price, promotion, or positioning?

Core Courses: Marketing

Potential Elective Courses: Strategic Brand Management, Marketing Strategy

Yes, Sustainability Can Be a Strategy

2019

The accelerating rate of adoption of these practices has also provoked a debate about the nature of sustainability and its long-term implications for organizations. Is the adoption of sustainability practices a form of strategic differentiation that can lead to superior financial performance? Or, is it a strategic necessity that can ensure corporate survival but not necessarily outperformance? Recent research suggests that sustainability can be both a necessity and a differentiator. Some sustainability activities are simply becoming "best practice" and so are a necessity. But the data suggests that some companies are creating real strategic advantage by adopting sustainability measures their competitors can't easily match.

Core Courses: Strategic Leadership

Potential Elective Courses: Strategic and Sustainable Business Solutions

Additional Corporate Responsibility Cases and Articles
Recommended by the Center for Responsible Business

B Lab and the Impact Assessment Evolution

Stanford Graduate School of Business | 2014

This 2014 case discusses the U.S. nonprofit organization B Lab and its mission to support and help drive investment capital toward private enterprises that 1) aim to provide social and environmental benefits, and 2) are accountable to stakeholders (such as employees and their community) in addition to their equity investors. B Lab created robust tools for assessing the impact of these enterprises so that the social and environmental Return on Investment could be measured and evaluated in a consistent, comparable and transparent fashion. The tools were based on a 200-point assessment scheme called the B Impact Assessment. In addition, B Lab created a certification called "B Corp," which identified companies that considered diverse stakeholder interest in its definition of corporate and fiduciary responsibility. B Lab also created and championed a new legal form, the Benefit organization, which supported those organizations. Through these activities, B Lab played an important role in the relatively new practice of impact investing, which seeks to generate positive social or environmental value alongside financial returns. In 2014 the eight-year-old company was at a strategic crossroads. Many organizations found the B Lab assessment process to be burdensome, and the investment markets were showing a lack of interest, if not resistance to, using B Lab's measurement systems. Many market participants wanted to focus only on specific parts of B Lab's assessment, or wanted more customized tools to suit data collection for their own existing metrics. However, enabling investors to do that would make it harder for B Lab to create common standards - a key part of the organization's mission. B Lab's leaders were grappling with the issue of how far to go to meet the market with highly customized products and services that investors were demanding, versus how much B Lab should lead the market to a higher bar for measuring impact.

Potential Elective Courses: Introduction to social impact courses; Strategy and Leadership for Social Impact, Berkeley Impact Venture Partners: Investing

Facebook's Privacy Breach: Challenges of Managing an Information-Based Supply Chain Risk In

North American Case Research Association (NACRA) | 2019

June 2018, subsequent to the widespread reporting around a privacy breach, Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook's 33-year-old founder, Chairman and CEO, was under pressure from the lawmakers to act on protecting the privacy rights of individuals. Facebook's lax policies allegedly allowed an app developer to sell Facebook users' data to Cambridge Analytica, a data analysis firm. Cambridge Analytica was accused of using Facebook users' data to profile and influence the voting intentions of British and American people. The disclosure of this news left Facebook tremendously vulnerable to criticism from the general public, media, and lawmakers. This resulted in an 18% drop in the company's stock prices. After two rounds of intense testimonies before the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives, lawmakers were still baffled by how Facebook was planning to address privacy issue given their business model that sacrificed user data for making the profit. Zuckerberg faced the difficult task of deciding how best to protect the privacy of users to prevent similar adverse events in the future, while maintaining profit. His options included (1) making some fundamental, and perhaps philosophical, changes in firm's value proposition (2) imposing stronger privacy protection measures, and (3) improving ethical decision-making in privacy protection through the governance adjustments.

Potential Elective Courses: Big data, Strategy for Networked Economy

Generation Investment Management

Harvard Business School | 2012

Examines the investment process of Generation Investment Management, a "sustainable" or socially responsible investing firm established in 2004 by David Blood and U.S. Vice President Al Gore. Places students in the position of David Lowish, director of global industrials, who must decide whether to recommend an investment in ABB

India. The decision pits economic development-supplying energy to impoverished rural areas in India, against environmental damage-caused by the use of coal-fired power plants.

Potential Elective Courses: Portfolio Management, Impact Investing, Mergers and Acquisitions: A Focus on Creating Value

JetBlue: Relevant Sustainability Leadership (A)

Harvard Business School | 2017

In 2017, JetBlue, the airline founded on the mission to "bring humanity back to air travel", became one of the first companies to report performance according to the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) standards and was first among airlines to adopt the recommendations of the Task Force for Climate-related Financial Disclosures. Despite operating as a smaller player in an industry dominated by few legacy competitors, JetBlue saw themselves as a driver of industry progress. However, was JetBlue's leadership "relevant sustainability leadership"? Moreover, how could developing metrics and improved performance on material sustainability issues be used as an instrument for change management? JetBlue wanted to achieve best-in-class performance on SASB metrics, as they believed sustainability was more than simply a risk mitigation tool. Was it? If so, how could JetBlue receive credit from investors, and competitors, for their sustainability leadership?

Potential elective courses: Metrics, Leadership, Innovation

Patagonia's Path to Carbon Neutrality by 2025

UC Berkeley - Haas School of Business | 2018

This case study describes Patagonia's goal to become carbon neutral by 2025 in an absolute sense -- that is to reduce emissions to zero while still growing the company. Patagonia also wants to achieve absolute carbon neutrality in such a way that other interested companies can replicate. The case explores aspects of this goal through the eyes of a number of Patagonia employees who work on different teams within the apparel and gear business. Patagonia is attempting to both address its own emissions and act as a leader on a complex, global problem.

Potential Elective Courses: Supply chain management, Business and public policy, Energy and environmental markets.

Rewarding Consumers for Recycling Packaging: Kimberly-Clark Seeks Shared Value

UC Berkeley - Haas School of Business | 2017

This case describes how Kimberly-Clark is working to encourage consumer recycling of flexible plastic film packaging, which is wrapped around many of its products, including paper towels, toilet paper, and more. An infrastructure already exists for consumers to return this film to retail stores for recycling, but estimated return rates remain low. Furthermore, Kimberly-Clark is not directly involved in the recycling transaction; retail stores collect the packaging and sell it to recycling companies. Kimberly-Clark is considering developing a consumer rewards program to incentivize store return of the packaging. Funding such a program will likely require Kimberly-Clark to identify new sources of value throughout the film-packaging lifecycle.

Potential Elective Courses: Supply Chain Management, Consumer Behavior

Sustainability Through Open Innovation: Carlsberg and the Green Fiber Bottle

UC Berkeley - Haas School of Business | 2018

The case follows Danish brewer Carlsberg as it develops the Green Fiber Bottle, a beer bottle made of wood pulp, in collaboration with a startup, a small-to-medium sized enterprise (SME), and a Danish University. The case has a dual focus. First, it demonstrates how a company can successfully innovate by leveraging the concept of open innovation. Second, it shows how sustainability - and relatedly, the idea of purpose - can be a powerful motivator to drive open innovation efforts. In this respect, this case serves as one of the first formal documentations of how open innovation can effectively drive innovation activities to address a stated sustainability objective. This co-mingling of sustainability and open innovation has the potential to become a domain in its own right (perhaps under a moniker such as “Sustainable Open Innovation”).

Potential Elective Courses: Innovation

Woolf Farming and the California Water Crisis

Harvard Business School | 2015

This case highlights the tough choices, competing interests, and decision-making mechanisms involved in California’s management of its severe drought, entering its fifth year in 2015. Stuart Woolf, CEO of Woolf Farming, a grower and processor of almonds, tomatoes, and other crops in California’s Central Valley, must decide how to respond to the changing operating environment. Scarce water resources-and institutional constraints on the use of water-have forced many producers, including Woolf, to fallow farmland. Meanwhile, competing demands for water from municipalities and environmental interests have raised the public’s scrutiny of agricultural water use. This case describes farming in California’s Central Valley and reviews the state’s complicated system for managing water rights and resources. It invites students to analyze the relative merits of competing perspectives on how to allocate water, the institutional mechanisms for doing so, and the potential responses of agricultural producers to the changing marketplace. Is now the time to double down on farming in the Central Valley, shift to a higher-value-added crop portfolio (e.g., organics), or retreat from this challenging business?

Potential Elective Courses: Business and government, Business and Natural Resources

This review was conducted through advising and supervision from the Berkeley Haas Center for Responsible Business.

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