EPILOGUE

ETHICAL LEADERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION REVISITED

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The most important quality of a leader is integrity.
Doing the right thing even if it's hard. – Adam Grant

Ethics and values matter in higher education.[*] Whether specialised business schools, state and private universities, or research centres, this collection of chapters offers a detailed and interdisciplinary insight into the manifold initiatives higher education institutions are undertaking in promoting the sustainable development goal agenda from an ethical perspective. Most importantly, they understand their mandate in this regard less as an *external* programmatic mandate, rather are they engaged *internally* in a values-driven education and creation of a corresponding learning and research environment. This is crucial to underline, as this multi-authored volume constitutes not just another contribution on sustainable development goals as a subject matter, but more so as a stimulating framework for pedagogical reflection and the

analysis of meaningful educational management, teaching, and research preparing for real-life contexts.

This joint publication project is in itself the result of a cross-organisational collaboration which has brought the co-editors, all themselves engaged in higher education and in building bridges between theory and praxis in education, together around a challenge: How can higher education institutions equip a new generation of leaders with competences that do not end with disciplinary boundaries, but bear in mind a global, yet locally sensitive, and holistic outlook on improving living conditions for all, now and in future?

We have noticed in our educational praxis the vital importance of establishing and nurturing an institutional culture of learning. This entails not only the provision of a teaching, learning, and research environment for the stakeholder groups benefitting directly from higher education, but – and perhaps more importantly so – also the cultivation of a posture of active learning inside the institution on how to implement ethical principles and values in a long-term perspective and with the intersectionality of societal impact objectives in mind. The sustainable development goals (SDG) framework lends itself to such an exercise. The contributing authors of this volume have demonstrated this for their business schools and other higher education institutions. They have done so in a very constructive manner, critically engaging with the SDG system, as well as with their respective contextual, institutional, and operational challenges.

The value of this volume is that it brings together a wide range of contributions providing insights in precisely this double bind of 'learning outside' and 'learning inside' indispensable for advancing the discourse on ethics, sustainable development goals and higher education.

In a systematic perspective, four salient dimensions can be highlighted emerging from these contributions, which deserve to be explicitly presented and pursued in scholarly debate. This is not to

reduce or level out the individual outcomes each of these contributions offer, rather to facilitate an orientation and to stimulate the engagement with thematic fields coming into view.

Sustainable Development Goals as an Ethical Field of Theory and Praxis in Higher Education

There is probably no other contemporary field of public and scholarly debate which serves more as a kind of unifying symbol than sustainable development. The authors of this volume bring this aspect to the fore by establishing clearly how the sustainable development goals constitute a distinct field of theory and praxis in higher education, through which ethics can be probed as a transversal. All contributions elaborate, from their different vantage points, how the sustainable development goals can only be attained if grounded in an ethical understanding. This ethical framework bears both theoretical and practical implications and higher education is the propitious space to work systematically on these.

Athena Vongalis-Macrow and Mandy Baker, in their chapter, show for example how sustainability is an integral part of the university's research strategy with guiding principles around quality education. The case studies they present show how there can be meaningful bridges between the theoretical analysis of sustainability and the way it practically affects people enabled to make long-term lifestyle changes through learning opportunities the university offers. One of the authors' key findings is that these theory-praxis bridges are most successful if coupled with an institutional value proposition that aims at societal impact: 'doing good' so that the communities can flourish.

In a similar vein, Fiona Robertson emphasises in her contribution on integrated reporting that higher education institutions will have to define, now more than ever before, which value they are creating for a

broad array of stakeholders. She shows how valuable higher education contributions can be in terms of widening the perception of deep-seated economic concepts by underlining value creation in terms of multiple capitals, and not only of monetary worth. Her participatory research, conducted in several European countries, is fascinating as it unveils the impediments of a consequent implementation of integrated reporting at higher education level and thereby offers a valuable evidence basis for sustainability-oriented strategizing. Simultaneously, it provides clear avenues on how institutions can overcome them by drawing on their multi-stakeholder and multiple capital activities.

Julio C. Durand, writing on the Argentinian and South American experience of higher education institutions with education for sustainable development, observes that embracing this educational mandate constitutes a genuine challenge for leadership in educational institutions. Teachers and faculty members need to be prepared to teach and transmit the importance of humans living in harmony with the earth, which entails reflecting upon institutional management, curriculum design and educational competency development. He elaborates, based on two initiatives, how the creation of a new degree programme and a joint award programme can not only impact the higher education community and the consciousness of education for sustainable development as an interdisciplinary responsibility for reforms within the institutions, but also strengthen a wider dissemination of sustainability as a theme with profound practical influence on people leading their lives today and in the future.

Considering Ethics, Sustainable Development Goals and Contextuality

The articles of this volume attest to the evidence that the sustainable development goals constitute a framework of reference for theoretical

discourse and practical implementation, in which business schools, as all higher education institutions, are engaged. However, this engagement is marked by the contextual relevance and underpinnings the sustainable development goals gain. It has been a longstanding research desideratum to deepen the contextualization of sustainable development goal framework and of education for sustainable development, and the chapters of this volume shed a particular light on this contextual dimension of higher education's engagement with sustainability. This may be fostered by the insight transpiring all contributions, that higher education implicitly and explicitly creates spaces for whole-person formation, for moral imagination, i.e., for the ethical contours of what it means to be in this world and to shape interactions. Contextuality is not only essential for defining a sustainability agenda and planning for its successful implementation, rather it is critical for understanding the rationales and worldviews that undergird its reception in the different regions.

While all chapters bring to the fore one or several elements of contextuality, some of them illustrate this dimension in a specific manner. Chidiebere Onyia, for example, invites us to consider the context of the Nigerian higher education system and unfolds how higher education infrastructure delivery processes are highly dependent on the existence and nurturing of a positive ethical culture, especially for the institutional leadership. This is crucial, as per Onyia, especially for emerging scholars and researchers who seek to become resilient against the proliferation of unethical behaviour in the wider society.

Stephan Rothlin pays particular attention to the ethical underpinnings of the sustainable development goals and how their achievement can be promoted in consideration of an Asian-Confucian context with its seniority-leadership understanding and congruity of message and action within a stringently hierarchical setting. Grounded in these contextual observations, he advocates for intrinsic motivation and the departure

from a compliance-based approach to the implementation of the sustainable development goals. He presents a significant illustration with the project of the Deignan Award for Sustainable Entrepreneurship, which, apart from resonating with the local culture, cultivates the attention for revisiting conventional economic paradigms and allows alternative concepts, such as the common good, to take root.

Contextuality not only shapes the philosophical contours of how the sustainable development goals are received as a framework and how leadership is conceptualised against this background. Nthoesane and Ngambi describe in their exposé that it can also unleash higher education's potential to effectively contribute to a national development project, as is the case in Zambia around Sustainable Development Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth. The experience of precarious living conditions and the analysis of underlying economic, social and political factors in a given context – as can be shown for a plethora of countries aspiring for a holistic national development agenda – constitutes the starting point for a university teaching and research strategy that is strictly outcome- and transformation-oriented and can be, as in this case, focused on a specific prioritised domain.

Msafiri, in his chapter, pursues this argumentation further in as much as he emphasises the need for higher education institutions to take on a distinctly critical contextual stance if they would wish to advance the sustainable development agenda. African higher education institutions, such is his plea, need to develop a new educational model independent of external influences and focus on contextually sensitive and innovative solutions for real-life problems, in particular in relation to climate action at the intersection of other spheres which will determine the livelihood of people on the continent and beyond.

Ethical Mentoring and Role Modelling for Sustainable Development

More than any other dimension, the contributions of this volume indicate the crucial importance of ethical mentoring and role modelling to accompany the holistic formation of leaders, who are not only specialized experts, but conversant interpreters, acting with integrity and able to establish the necessary connections. This requires not only an intellectual effort of knowledge creation and transmission, but an intentional accompaniment that assists in nurturing ethical postures of discernment and corresponding practice.

Similarly to the Zambian study carried out by Nthoesane and Ngambi, Arnold Smit focuses on Sustainable Development Goal 8, and how South African small business owners can be supported through a dedicated educational programme. Smit demonstrates that the initiative becomes relevant as it offers tailored capacity development opportunities for the entrepreneurial participants, in which coaching and mentoring plays a key role to ensure learning progression. This may constitute a valuable anchor for further methodological investigations, also in other business school contexts, on how the lessons learned can help to design contextual and praxis-oriented continuing formation programmes with substantial impact on livelihoods. The 'contextual reading' on the programme this contribution provides, both in terms of the direct involvement of the target group and the insights on what economic growth and decent work means, is in itself a value added for the discussion on sustainable development in an educational perspective.

Mentoring – in its conceptual version – is also a dimension Simon Robinson and Adalberto Arrigoni underline in their chapter focusing on SDGs, ethical identity, and the curriculum. They engage critically with the lacunae in the integration of sustainability and responsibility in the education for sustainable development. Their observation is that graduates identify insufficiently with ethical principles and values at an

organisational level, which they endeavour to address with a threefold proposal. First, they argue, a commitment to implementing values in practice needs to emerge from identification with them, and secondly, such an internalised ethical identity will have to be coupled with guidance to develop responsibility through three modes of deliberation, narrative development and dialogue. Thirdly, Robinson and Arrigoni describe the pedagogical context for an integrated approach to teaching ethics, which they use as a basis for unfolding a strategy on how ethical identity can be developed in the curriculum. One of the interesting aspects they present is that higher education and the curricular provisions do not only prepare *for* dialogue and critical engagement with diversity, but that dialogue is used and practised as an educational tool to cultivate a holistic and ethical sense of self in relation to others, which then becomes an appropriate link to the rationale of interrelatedness that the sustainable development goals are embedded in.

Driving Ethical Consciousness in Higher Education from Within

One may argue that this volume brings together a collection of differentiated analyses, mostly case-base oriented, which underline that the sustainable development goals in the context of higher education institutions and business schools are much more than an area for competence building. They constitute elements for facilitating an ethical consciousness in higher education from within. It is about introducing a theory of change, in the very complete sense of the word, preparing a new generation of leaders in academia and beyond for new societal roles. Nario Galace takes the reader into the context of a college-based centre for peace education in the Philippines and describes how the more permeable lines between academic formation, advocacy, and community engagement can become vital and mutually enforcing drivers for the

development of a peaceful culture. At the heart of such a stakeholder-based and action research-oriented engagement are conflict resolution and peacebuilding methods, which serve as a propitious basis for the sustainable development goals.

Cobus Oosthuizen's preoccupation is to address the criticism of a failed ethical skills transmission in South African business schools, indispensable for the role future leaders will have to take on in the world of business and the wider society. He elucidates the underlying reasons through research on MBA curricula and institutional mission, vision, and values statements. The benchmarking lens he uses is the UN-supported initiative of Principles for Responsible Management Education (UNPRME). Building intellectual capital for the country, as per Oosthuizen's argument, will have to be realised through a stronger integration of the SDG-agenda and ethical principles in education around purpose, values, method, research, partnership, and dialogue in the business schools themselves and across their respective stakeholder communities. This offers many entry points for an international debate with higher education institutions worldwide currently facing similar challenges related to aligning the SDG-agenda with an internal, values-driven education of transformative leader personalities.

Delport translates and revisits the sustainable development goals in the architectural education setting. In this chapter, education for sustainability is conceptualised as an integral part of an ecosystem, in which 'learning architecture' is not divorced of the other meaning-making instances in society and remains in relationship with the environment in which it endeavours to create sustainable living spaces. Combined attention is given to the architectural studio (Radically Inclusive Studio) and its role in supporting the development of an ethical consciousness through the pedagogical principles that emerge from an inclusive architectural praxis. An investigation that is conceptually supported by a comprehensive literature review and indications that

could be highly valuable, also for other sustainable development education ventures.

Conclusion

This collection does not aim to give a comprehensive overview on education for sustainable development nor on ethical leadership. However, it provides unique and profound insights from within educational institutions in diverse regions of the world on how 'learning outside' and 'learning inside' can be meaningfully integrated, so that the sustainable development agenda does not remain a static programmatic agenda, but a creative and permeable framework to develop meaningful, interdisciplinary curricula and research projects which serve the human community as a whole and advance knowledge in respect of the earth and the future generations who will inherit it. We invite the readers of this volume to engage together with us in a study and learning process on how our institutions can become conducive spaces for nurturing the awareness for an ethical leadership that emphasises care for the common good as guiding principle.

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