

# **The subject of Sustainability in Organizations of the Professional Master's in Governance and Sustainability: A new learning model**

## **ABSTRACT**

This study presents the learning methodology applied in the subject of Sustainability in Organizations of the Professional Master's in Governance and Sustainability offered by the Higher Institute of Administration and Economics (ISAE), in the city of Curitiba, southern Brazil. Inspired on the Principles for Responsible Business Education (PRME) of the United Nations, the Master course of ISAE was built reflecting the educational model of IES called Perspectivaction. One of its disciplines was developed to think about sustainability in organizations focuses on sustainable development as a guiding model for strategies and policies in business management based on Edgar Morin's conceptions of transdisciplinarity in education applied with the corporate social responsibility approach defended by Thiery-Cherques (2003). It seeks to implement sustainability in supranational, national and regional governance and encourages its adoption by the most varied kinds of organizations. The applicability of these concepts, associated with a classroom methodology that promotes the analysis and construction of values, has got more students involved – besides reaching a challenging degree of comprehension through the development of projects that integrate governance with sustainability.

**KEYWORDS:** Educational Model; Sustainability In Organizations; Globally Responsible Leaders.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Many educational methodologies are studied during the preparation for the teaching profession. Paulo Freire, Vygotsky and Piaget are key authors in the search to understand the teaching process as a construction based on each person's reality. With respect to adult education, Malcolm Knowles (1984) highlights significant differences in the learning process – such as self-concept; experiences; readiness, guidance and motivation to learn –, emphasizing that the result doesn't depend on the teacher's performance.

The image of the teacher as the holder of knowledge became outdated when we started to see the classroom as a learning environment to exchange experiences and knowledge, where everyone in the group can contribute with their perception. Based on the idea that each student's learning requirements and preferences are different – as defended by Rosemberg (2008) –, it is possible to conclude that organizations such as business schools should use a mixture of approaches in their educational strategies.

One of the challenges in the conception of the education model for ISAE's Professional Master's was to find a method that could promote the synergy between class participants - students and professors equally. It should be beyond traditional education, based on the instructor as the holder of knowledge and the division of subjects into disciplines that do not communicate to each other, what prevents their interconnected understanding.

In opposition to the traditional model, the preparation of the subject of Sustainability in Organizations was based on Edgar Morin's studies in transdisciplinarity, which are summarized in the Charter of Transdisciplinarity – adopted in the First World Congress of Transdisciplinarity, Convento da Arrábida, Portugal, November 1994. The charter defends that authentic education must teach contextual, concrete and global approaches, recognizing the existence of different levels of reality governed by different types of logic (Freitas et al., 1994: 2-3). At the time, the authors Lima de Freitas, Edgar Morin and Basarab Nicolescu

composed the committee for drafting the Charter for Transdisciplinarity for UNESCO and established in eight articles of this document, some concepts and limits for transdisciplinary term (Freitas et al, 1994, p. 2 -3). As known:

Article 1: Any attempt to reduce the human being by formally defining what a human being is and subjecting the human being to reductive analyses within a framework of formal structures, no matter what they are, is incompatible with the transdisciplinary vision.

Article 2: The recognition of the existence of different levels of reality governed by different types of logic is inherent in the transdisciplinary attitude. Any attempt to reduce reality to a single level governed by a single form of logic does not lie within the scope of transdisciplinarity.

Article 3: Transdisciplinarity complements disciplinary approaches. It occasions the emergence of new data and new interactions from out of the encounter between disciplines. It offers us a new vision of nature and reality. Transdisciplinarity does not strive for mastery of several disciplines but aims to open all disciplines to that which they share and to that which lies beyond them.

Article 4: The keystone of transdisciplinarity is the semantic and practical unification of the meanings that traverse and lay beyond different disciplines. It presupposes an open-minded rationality by re-examining the concepts of "definition" and "objectivity." An excess of formalism, rigidity of definitions and a claim to total objectivity, entailing the exclusion of the subject, can only have a life-negating effect.

Article 5: The transdisciplinary vision is resolutely open insofar as it goes beyond the field of the exact sciences and demands their dialogue and their reconciliation with the humanities and the social sciences, as well as with art, literature, poetry and spiritual experience.

Article 6: In comparison with interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary, transdisciplinarity is multireferential and multidimensional. While taking account of the various approaches to time and history, transdisciplinarity does not exclude a trans-historical horizon.

Article 7: Transdisciplinarity constitutes neither a new religion, nor a new philosophy, nor a new metaphysics, nor a science of sciences.

Article 8: The dignity of the human being is of both planetary and cosmic dimensions. The appearance of human beings on Earth is one of the stages in the history of the Universe. The recognition of the Earth as our home is one of the imperatives of transdisciplinarity. Every human being is entitled to a nationality, but as an inhabitant of the Earth is also a transnational being. The acknowledgement by international law of this twofold belonging, to a nation and to the Earth, is one of the goals of transdisciplinary research.

In the development of the discipline of Sustainability in Organizations for the Professional Master of ISAE, it sought to show how the application of transdisciplinarity in education has

a positive impact on the student's learning process, when they are encouraged to have classroom experiences to associate theory with the organizational environment and their daily reality and build knowledge – what results in a higher degree of engagement and assimilation.

Knowles (1998) states that as a person matures the motivation to learn is internal and focused on tasks related to their social roles. Therefore, classes of the subject of Sustainability in Organizations seek to associate the student's experience and their personal motivations with theories and cases discussed along the course. The objective is to develop knowledge transversally, allowing the student to better understand the themes and their applicability, adding value to concepts studied in the classroom.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The inspiration for designing both the Professional Master's in Governance and Sustainability and the subject Sustainability in Organizations came from Edgar Morin's transdisciplinary vision of education – comprehended as a transgression of borders between disciplines, focused on a new scientific, cultural, spiritual and social model –, along with Thiery-Cherques' corporate social responsibility approach, which defines it as a duty of society, including institutions.

### **2.1 Conceiving the method**

When we refer to methodologies, many scholars have highlighted the importance of considering the student's universe in the construction of knowledge. Paulo Freire (1983) criticizes the predominantly "decorative" character of the traditional method of education – basically focused on memorizing and repeating information. Vygotsky (1997) argues that the construction of knowledge is the result of mediation made by others. In a contemporary vision of adult education, Rosemberg (2008) defends learning through multiple sources, combined

with a model to support the student's performance (coaching) in order to improve educational practices. The French philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin has also built his legacy through questioning the traditional teaching method. He states that subjects taught at school are not related because they are divided into different disciplines, giving the student a fragmented vision of knowledge, thus hindering global comprehension. For Morin (2003), teaching an isolated discipline blocks the mind's natural aptitude to contextualize knowledge.

In opposition to the traditional model of education, Morin says we need a new educational system based on transdisciplinarity – a model for learning and constructing knowledge that sees diversity as an advantage and proposes a radical change in the way of thinking, teaching and learning.

“Pertinent knowledge is the one which can place any information in its context and, if possible, in its group. We can even say that knowledge doesn't progress much through sophistication, formalization and abstraction, but mainly through the ability to contextualize and encompass.” Morin (2003, p11)

In the transdisciplinary vision, pertinent knowledge is what allows us to situate the information we receive in its geographical, cultural, social and historical context. For Morin, transdisciplinarity represents the valorization of non-fragmented knowledge and the development of a complete vision, which allows the student to feel as part of a system and comprehend that it's from the interaction of different elements and perceptions that something new appears.

Another concept often used in this type of interaction proposed in the addressed discipline is the experiential education - educational model that consists of an educational concept based on transactional process between teacher and student, understanding direct experience with the learning environment. For the Association for Experiential Education (AEE), experiential education it is a philosophy and methodology in which educators engage purposefully with

learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to raise awareness, develop skills and clarify values. (AEE, 2009).

In this educational concept, the learner's experience plays a central role in all the considerations of teaching and learning. A key element of experiential approach is that learners should perform the analysis of the experience, reflecting, evaluating and reconstructing the same, in order to abstract their meanings, in light of their previous experiences (Andresen et al., 2000).

Authors such as Italian physician Maria Montessori, the French pedagogue Célestin Freinet, the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget and Paulo Freire fall into this educational concept that values the experience lived by the learner as a way to develop knowledge (Medeiros, 2006).

## **2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility**

One of the first records of the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility is from Ethos Institute. In 1998, the term was established by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development as a permanent commitment for entrepreneurs to adopt an ethical behavior and contribute to economic development – while improving the quality of life of employees and their families, the local community and the whole society.

In 2003, Thiery-Cherques registered his perception of social responsibility as a duty of people, groups and institutions in respect of the whole society. In his opinion, responsibility is what makes us subjects and objects of ethics, law, ideologies and faith, thus being liable to sanction, punishment, disapproval and guilt.

“Companies are being called to account because, having systematically been mistaken about the future of economy and society, they face the need to reassess the weight of their activities' effects and correct their conduct.” Thiery-Cherques (2003, p32)

More and more companies have understood that social responsibility is directly linked to their identities. Anderson (2015) – a pioneer in the construction of the corporate sustainability concept – emphasizes that profit cannot be the main objective of a company. Its main goal should be its mission. And he adds that profit is just an essential factor for the company to fulfill its mission. For Benthan (1983) responsibility concerns the obligation to answer for our conduct.

It is essential to study these concepts and promote discussions among Master's students when we talk about governance and sustainability for companies and future leaders. Considering that it's easy to disseminate information in the globalized world, companies need to be alert to the impacts of their activities on society, developing interdependent relations established with stakeholders. This way, they can adopt a globalized posture, integrating social responsibility into all organizational processes through their leaders' actions.

### **3. OBJECTIVES**

The subject's general goal is to show that sustainability is the result of the collaboration of various sectors of society. Therefore, it explores collaborative work, group construction, experience sharing and the applicability of ideas. Works proposed are different from traditional situated simulations, for they deal with real companies, using both the students' experiences and the national companies' good practices. This way, learners can see that their ideas will have real impact and should be implemented – what requires dedication and focus on concrete results. This conception provides tangible aggregate value of sustainability in their actions.

During the activities of the the course, students are required to understand sustainability as part of a business management process and therefore should be worked transversely fostering the involvement of the entire organization and thus becoming one intrinsic value in its various

layers. This awareness is the result expected from the combination of three main elements worked in the room: the spread of the theory, the contact with real cases that allow an extension of the student's vision, and the incentive to search for applicable solutions and tangible results.

## **4. METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Context of the subject delivery**

The Higher Institute of Administration and Economics (ISAE) is a business school that offers postgraduate, master's and in-company courses (short and medium-term), with headquarters in Curitiba, southern Brazil. It was created in 1996 by Getulio Vargas Foundation (FGV) – one of the most renowned educational institutions at global level, established in 1944. Since its foundation, ISAE has built its trajectory based on the concept of educating to transform, defending that a globalized vision of leadership is the key for sustainable development. As a business school, it has adopted an innovative and transversal posture, encouraging students to develop responsible management practices and aggregate value for businesses and society.

The Professional Master's was inspired by the United Nations' Principles for Responsible Management Education (UN-PRME) and ISAE's educational model – Perspectivaction. The PRME initiative seeks to establish a process of continuous improvement among management education institutions, aiming to develop a new generation of business leaders, prepared to manage complex challenges faced by companies and society in the 21st century. Perspectivaction is focused on the integral formation of the human being, leader, agent that changes reality into multiple perspectives, responsible for self-education.

The Master's curriculum focuses on the concepts of transversality, a practice that associates transversal themes – guiding concepts, which can influence the process of



transformation of society – into traditional curriculum content (Busquets et al., 1999). The guiding concepts are leadership, governance, sustainability, innovation, ethics and entrepreneurship, which are guidelines to implement responsible education transversally into all school activities and among stakeholders.

## **4.2 Methodology development**

The theme Sustainability in Organizations is consolidated as one of the five mandatory subjects of the Master's. Besides exploring the guidelines used for constructing the program, it also puts the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into practice – which were designed by the UN to be achieved by 2030.

The subject is based on understanding sustainable development as a guiding model for strategies and policies. It focuses on sustainability within the ambit of supranational, national and regional governance, and also on the application of the concept in organizations (companies, public entities, etc.). It promotes the comprehension of the sustainability concept, considering the company's internal environment (administrative functions) also the external environment (meso and macro-contexts).

With the purpose of training learners to use sustainability precepts as a tool for managing projects, the course offers a critical and attentive vision towards the demand for action in sustainable development issues. The methodology used in the classroom is far from academic traditionalism – it advances learning with focus on solutions for the market.

### **4.2.1 Knowledge construction**

In order to contextualize the subject, the classes begin disseminating the most current concepts of Sustainability and Sustainable Development, besides the previously mentioned Corporate Sustainability. After that, students are divided into groups and invited to redefine

sustainable development, what results in a discussion to explore each individual's perception. Then, the new conceptions are aggregated into a unique definition designed by the whole group through collaborative construction.

The final concept is distributed to everyone, with focus on the comprehension that sustainable development is still something new and is under construction with society – here represented by them. In addition, this construction is also sent to the United Nations, for it supports the understanding of the society's perception in respect of UN actions towards sustainable development.

#### **4.2.2 Disseminating the SDGs**

The sustainable development goals (SDGs) are the foundations of the subject of Sustainability in Organizations. Drawn from the eight MDGs - Millennium Development Goals - the Sustainable Development Goals are goals that must be assumed by all UN member states after 2015. There are 17 goals and 169 targets that are part of a set global priority actions for sustainable development is achieved in instances such as People, Planet, Peace, Prosperity and Partnership. The guidelines of the ODS are focused primarily on the three pillars of sustainability: social axis, environmental and economic. What differentiates the MDG from the ODS is that the actions of the Millennium Development Goals focused on social issues, especially in relation to the difficulties of developing countries, involving some economic axis. The Sustainable Development Goals are more global and with great focus also on the environment. Such actions serve as sustainable agenda that should guide the actions of society by 2030. (Plataforma ODS, 2016). The 17 Sustainable Development Goals proposed are:

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere;

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture;

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 6: Ensure access to water and sanitation for all

Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Goal 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all

Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources

Goal 15: Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss

Goal 16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies

Goal 17: Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

In order to work with the SDGs in a dynamic way, each objective is set to a different group of students to be studied, redefined, discussed in an article and presented in a seminar, in order to disseminate knowledge among other students. This way, learners are called to seek knowledge, comprehend it through their own perceptions, and replicate it by using their own

leadership skills and convictions. This activity also explores the comprehension that when students construct, they create a relation with the topic studied, perceiving it as true. From this involvement there will be a greater connection and integration of students with its Sustainable Development Goal, therefore initiating the process of sensitization to the issue.

### **4.2.3 Creating aggregate-value**

The connection of students with the corporate market in the classes of Sustainability in Organizations happens in three distinct ways. First, students analyze some case studies from companies that work with sustainability in order to propose improvement actions to be sent for analysis and viability. The second action brings professionals from large companies to the classroom for a discussion on how sustainability is applied in their companies, emphasizing the main difficulties. The aim is to encourage students to act as consultants, proposing strategies and evaluating new approaches with focus on concrete results. Finally, the subject's conclusion work consists in choosing a company in the market which they can visit to meet the leadership, comprehend its governance and sustainability system. Then they do a critical analysis by promoting positive points that can be replicated in other organizations, pointing gaps and suggesting improvements from their point of view.

Such activities complements each other acting on a concatenated manner allowing students to be entered in a process of experiential education from the development of knowledge and skills that obey not merely cumulative and additive logic, but a new knowledge composition built together with the knowledge already acquired by the person during their educational and professional journey.

Supported by these pillars, classes are innovative, escaping the traditional focus on the professor as holder of knowledge, who delivers concepts to be memorized – the image criticized by Paulo Freire. The course proposes to valorize the individual and their abilities,

which should converge in a management method focused on positive results for sustainable development.

## **5. RESULTS**

Educating to transform means to contribute to the development of society, spreading a philosophy which considers sustainable development an emerging need in a world calling for changes in behavior. Helping students to identify value and applicability in themes presented in the classroom is one of the main elements that govern transforming education. Strategies include the importance of encouraging the student to see their actions being applied, besides acting to associate their routine as a leader to their experiences as a student.

As a result of implementing Corporate Social Responsibility transversally to valorize the construction of knowledge, participants have been able to achieve a challenging degree of comprehension, which is experienced in the development of projects integrating governance with sustainability – with a focus on their individual skills.

During classes, students can participate in challenges and test their skills by checking case studies, preparing critical analyzes, being exposed to real problems and concrete results. Thus, they have sought solutions to a growing market with a focus on sustainable development. ISAE aims at their formation as globally responsible leaders, who could be a model for their companies and the PRME initiative.

The differential of this methodology is its willingness to promote collaborative knowledge construction. Considering some points of the class as the encouraging for an active participation of students through research and discussion groups; or the assumed mediator's position of the teacher by being students' partner on the discovery process; and yet the contribution of different professionals that leads sustainability initiatives in their companies; it is possible to list moments of exchange and experiential learning by different perceptions,

varied thoughts and points of views mainly resulted from learned lessons that may even reduce students' errors during the implementation of sustainability principles in their own projects.

It is very important to emphasize that this logic aims to contribute to the particular process of expanding the level of consciousness of each participant, which is possible only through self-knowledge and assessment required for a real change in the perception of value and consequent evolution of thought positioning in favor of the sustainable development. This evolution can be named as 'maturitometer' – a maturity measure that can be evaluated by proposing activities where the student is encouraged to think over and be aware of its own maturing during the course of the discipline.

## **6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

When working with the theme of sustainability in organizations, ISAE's Master's in Governance and Sustainability seeks to stimulate leaders to change their perspective, by letting them understand that their choices and actions are forming the future we want – what the world needs.

With the development and expansion of technologies in recent decades it was possible to observe changes in the behavior of society and the student. In addition to the increasing flow of information available, the learning environment has expanded its horizons beyond the classroom, what allows students to better comprehend the reality in the world and the impact of their actions.

Therefore, companies and leaders are more attentive to issues that go beyond the financial performance of the business. According to the Global Report Initiative (GRI), the 1st Global Conference in 2006 registered 650 sustainability reports. Less than 10 years later, in 2013, there were nearly 5,000 reports – and Brazil was in the 3rd position with respect to the

number of companies that publish sustainability reports (only behind Spain and USA). These figures show the market's tendency to adopt sustainability principles as intrinsic values in companies. (Global Report Initiative, 2016)

By promoting this knowledge in the classroom, with the participation of people and companies that have already adhered to sustainability practices, ISAE intends to reinforce the strategic position this theme has in organizations, besides moving from theory to practice. The activities proposed seek to engage students, helping them to be the protagonists of attitudes that shall bring results both for companies and stakeholders. The aim is to make students understand that having a leader who can handle the demands of a company with a sustainable attitude is a strategic advantage in the market.

Developing the student's vision of globalized leadership reflects the ideals of Responsible Management Education – which aims to encourage the student to embed values and practices consistent with the sustainable development goals in their management approach. Consequently, it will change their legacy into intangible value for stakeholders and the whole society.

## **7. REFERENCES**

AEE, Association for Experiential Education (2009), *A community of progressive educators and practitioner*. Available at: <http://www.aee.org/about/whatIsEE>

Anderson, R. (2015). *Relatórios de Sustentabilidade: a prática da transparência*. Redação da Envolverde. Available at: <http://www.parceirosvoluntarios.org.br/relatorios-de-sustentabilidade-a-pratica-da-transparencia/>.

Andresen, L., D. Boud e R. Cohen (2000), "Experience-Based Learning", em G. Foley (ed.), *Understanding Adult Education and Training*, 2a. ed., Sydney, Allen & Unwin.

Benthan, J. (1983). *Collected works*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Busquets, M. D. *et al.* (1999), *Temas transversais em educação: bases para uma formação integral*. São Paulo, Ática.
- Freire, P. (1983), *Pedagogia do oprimido*, 13a. ed. Rio de Janeiro, Paz e Terra (Coleção O Mundo Hoje).
- Freitas, L. de, E. Morin e B. Nicolescu (2000), "Carta da Transdisciplinaridade", em *Educação e transdisciplinaridade*. Guarujá, SP, Brasil, UNESCO, v.1.
- Global Reporting Initiative (2016). *Relatórios no Brasil*. Available at: <https://www.globalreporting.org/Pages/default.aspx>.
- Instituto Ethos. *Relatório de sustentabilidade*. São Paulo, 2005, p.24.
- Knowles, M. (1984), *The adult learner: a neglected species*, Houston, Gulf Publishing Company.
- Knowles, M. S., E. F. Holton, R. A. Swanson (1998), *The adult learner: the definitive classic in adult education and human resource development*, 5th edition, Gulf Professional Publishing.
- Medeiros, I. L. (2006). *A comunicação social como agente para a conscientização de problemáticas urbanas*. Monografia de pós-graduação, Faculdade Frassinetti, Recife.
- Morin, E. (2000). *Os sete saberes necessários à educação do futuro*, 3a. ed., São Paulo, Cortez; Brasília, DF, UNESCO.
- Plataforma ODS (2016). *O que são os ODS*. Available at: <http://plataformaods.org.br/>
- Rosenberg, M. J. (2008), *Além do e-learning: abordagens e tecnologias para a melhoria do conhecimento, do aprendizado e do desempenho organizacional*, Rio de Janeiro, Qualitymark.
- Thiery-Cherques, H. R. (2003), "Responsabilidade moral e identidade empresarial", *Revista de Administração Contemporânea* 7 (esp.), p31-50.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1997), *A formação social da mente*, São Paulo, Martins Fontes.