Sustainability Mindset Toolkit both and thinking (QAA 1) #ImpactFund

Group Size
Small group (teams of 4-6), Large Group
Learning Environment
Lecture Theatre, Carousel Tables (small working group)
QAA Enterprise Theme(s)
1Creativity and Innovation

Objectives:

- To critically analyse circular business models through a 'both-and thinking' perspective (of the sustainability mindset principles)
- To develop creative and innovative thinking through the application of polarity mapping

Overview:

This session introduces students to the Sustainability Mindset Principle of ‘both-and thinking’ that enables more inclusive decision making that moves beyond ‘either-or’. This aids in dealing with paradoxical situations – and how to find solutions in which all stakeholders (including the planet) can most benefit/are not compromised. Activities to embed this learning focus on the practical tool of ‘polarity mapping’ applied to a context of circular economy business models in order to generate entrepreneurial thinking. It is assumed that students will have prior understanding of circular business models.

Sustainability Mindset Principal Themes addressed:

SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

Both-And Thinking

Cyclical Flow

Enterprise Educator Framework addressed:

Developing Skills and Competencies associated with being Enterprising.

Activity:

Slides 2 – 3 Introduction (5 mins)

S2 – Aim and objectives/activities

S3 – A definition of the Sustainability Mindset Principle ‘both and’ thinking

1. *Paradox case study (15 mins)*

S4 - A 'paradox' case study - ‘centralization versus localization’. Ask students to read this short case and to consider the positives and negatives of both centralization and localization. Draw a grid on a whiteboard as in the format of S5 to capture whole group feedback responses (10 mins)

S5 – Consider how discussion responses to compare to the ideas presented in the slide, and discuss the notion of paradox in referring to polarities of views that can cause tensions in decision making (3 mins)

2. *Introduction to polarity mapping (15 mins)*

S6 – This is an introduction to polarity maps that students will shortly be completing – demonstrating how tension in paradoxical decision-making can be eased by identifying a point of balance between extreme views (essentially enabling the best of ‘both’ extremes).

S7 – The image can helpfully illustrate that polarity is not about ‘pros’ and ‘cons’ – but rather about complementary parts in which both aspects are needed in balance, rather than over focusing on just one aspect to the detriment of the other.

S8 - This slide further exemplifies the four quadrants of polarity mapping. Talk through the quadrants and play the short video to aid understanding

S9 – Talk through this final example to enable clear understanding of how polarity maps are designed.

3. *Paradoxical tensions in circular business models (15 mins)*

S10 - Discuss the concept of circular versus business models and draw out some organisational examples. Then, draw on these organisational examples to apply to the potential tensions in circular business models, as identified in the table. As the following exercise looks in particular at financial tensions, examine the challenges in transitioning to business models in terms of differing stakeholders perspectives, short term profit motives, and so on

4. *An example – polarity mapping for Natura (5 mins)*

S11 - Discuss the content taken from the Ellen Mac Arthur Foundation on the cosmetics company, Natura, and presented through a polarity map to further prepare students for completing a similar exercise next

5. Exercise - Polarity mapping for a business of choice (financial focus AND circularity focus) (40 mins)

S12 - The instructor should download a copy of the PPT resource for the activity to share with students as an online shared document. Working in small groups each can complete a different slide for a chosen business. When completed, they can be presented to the class and ideas compared

Skill Development:

UNESCO Sustainability competencies covered using this tool.

Cognitive/ Thinking competency

- **Systems thinking competency**: the ability to recognize and understand relationships, to analyse complex systems, to perceive the ways in which systems are embedded within different domains and different scales, and to deal with uncertainty.

- **Anticipatory competency**: the ability to understand and evaluate multiple futures – possible, probable, and desirable – and to create one's own visions for the future, to apply the precautionary principle, to assess the consequences of actions, and to deal with risks and changes.

- **Critical thinking competency**: the ability to question norms, practices, and opinions; reflect on own one's values, perceptions and actions; and take a position in the sustainability discourse.

Behavioural/ Ways of Doing competency

- **Integrated problem-solving competency:** the overarching ability to apply different problem-solving frameworks to complex sustainability problems and develop viable, inclusive, and equitable solution that promote sustainable development – integrating the above-mentioned competencies.

Resources:

Powerpoint slides with all required resource links included on the slide: Both And - EEUK

References:

Dagilienė, L., & Varaniūtė, V. (2023) Transitioning to a Circular Economy: Paradoxical Tensions of the Circular Business Model. Organization & Environment, 36(4), 559-589 https://doi.org/10.1177/10860266231213108

Johnson, B. (2014) Reflections: perspectives on paradox and its applications to modern management. The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science 2014, Vol. 50(2) 206–212 https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886314524909

Rimanoczy, I. (2021), The Sustainability Mindset: A Guide to Developing a Mindset for a Better World, Routledge, New York, NY.

About the Author

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Last Revision Date: 23/01/2025