



Fraser, J. H., Rand, P., & Scoffham, S. (2018). *Leadership for sustainability in higher education*. London, UK: Bloomsbury.

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My daughter recently came home with a T-shirt that she planned to wear to vote in the Australian general election; the T-shirt said: "Sustainability – treating the planet as if we were planning to stay". It jolted me into action because I have been sitting on a book that I had agreed to review: *Leadership for Sustainability in Higher Education*, by Janet Haddock-Fraser, Peter Rand and Stephen Scoffham. It is the second book that I have reviewed in a series, *Perspectives on Leadership in Higher Education*, published by Bloomsbury.

Before reviewing the book, it might be worthwhile reflecting upon an Australian election that was supposed to be fought on issues of climate change and Australia's response. The result was overwhelming support in at least one state of Australia for coal mining, when what was expected was overwhelming support for action on climate change.

Personally, I have always seen debates on climate change through the lens of a researcher and in particular, the Type I and Type II errors that confront researchers. Recall that a Type I error is the rejection of a true null hypothesis. A Type II error is acceptance of a false null hypothesis. If I relate this to the climate change debate, to me, the consequences of rejecting a true null hypothesis that the climate is indeed changing and it is caused by human activities, leads to catastrophic climate change. Alternatively, if a Type II error is made and a false hypothesis of human cause of climate change is accepted, the consequence would be killing off the coal industry, etc. prematurely and a cleaner more sustainable future. Accordingly, one could argue that the consequences of the Type II error are far less, than the consequences of a Type I error, but then again, I do not work in the coal industry.

Within this context, let me review the book *Leadership for Sustainability in Higher Education*, by Haddock-Fraser, Rand and Scoffham. The book is divided into four sections. The first section covers the core concepts underpinning the book in discussion of leadership perspectives on sustainability and the higher education sector. The second section develops processes and frameworks for decision-making within a sustainability context, while the third section focuses on leadership and sustainability at an individual level reflecting upon the actions and the qualities required of a leader

within a sustainability context. The final section provides case studies of sustainability leadership across four different countries: the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and India.

The first chapter aims to develop an overview of leadership and leadership qualities for sustainability. This is the most ambitious chapter considering the sheer volume of literature available. However, the chapter provides a good framework for understanding the traits required of sustainability leaders. The chapter incorporates the situational leadership model of Hershey and Blanchard (1988) and the transformational leadership model of Burns (1978). The author notes that the role of power is an important element missing from these models and includes a section with a view to understanding the power dynamics in organisations. The authors note it was unsurprising that there was no one best way to be a leader identified from the models reviewed. They then seek to develop and explore where the general leadership models and theories can help identify the best way to lead for sustainability. This is a rather ambitious objective. However, they do provide a good discussion of the factors that can lead to development of a better understanding of how to successfully lead for sustainability.

Chapter 2 provides some perspectives on sustainability noting that the term itself is relatively recent and only appeared in dictionaries in the 1970s. There is an interesting observation that *sustainability* is hard to characterise - as opposed to its opposite, *unsustainability*. The latter is much easier to recognise since it is evidenced by pollution, extinction of species, and shortages of basic needs such as drinking water in some parts of the world. I quite like their definition, however, fundamentally it is about finding the best possible way to live our lives and to flourish within the limits of the planet which support us – 'treating the planet as if we were planning to stay'.

This chapter takes the reader back to the very origins of sustainability thinking in the 1960s up to the present day with the United Nations attempts to lead discussion and development of sustainable development goals. The authors also note the Paris climate agreement of 2015 and the aspiration to limit global warming to 1 ½° centigrade,

and the consequences of a Type I error in terms of its impact on food security, energy and water, and health.

The authors then raise the issues of sustainability within a higher education context. They note that there is a major challenge in building sustainability issues into university agendas because there are often competing and conflicting agendas. Notwithstanding those constraints, the authors note the actions of higher education institutions in terms of greening of the estates, building awareness of sustainability into curriculum, and the development of strategies for promoting sustainability in higher education. The role of higher education is seen as needing to be broader than simply developing sustainable projects on campus. Institutions should provide thought leadership, teaching students and developing knowledge and promoting the critical evaluation of sustainability issues and research. The authors argue that these should be essential elements of the graduate attributes in higher education. The authors make it clear, however, that students would not be expected to keep abreast of all issues related to sustainability. Rather, they should have "sufficient knowledge and understanding to make a good enough choice or decision", quoting Parkin (2010).

Chapter 3 provides an overview of higher education as a sector. It begins by noting that higher education has become a big business and while this notion is potentially not popular amongst academics, the data shows its rapid growth. The number of students in higher education in most of the developed world has increased, indeed exploded, in recent years. It has also become a major export industry for a number of countries. The same experience is true in China with rapid growth in higher education paralleling that occurring in the west, as they import education and develop their own import-competing capability.

This chapter also provides some discussion of whether higher education is a public or private good. More importantly, it raises the issue of whether universities are for the public good. They note that in the UK, universities are increasingly balancing the need to operate as a business with the need to operate for the public good. They note the mission statements from a number of universities that include notions of contribution to the public good.

The chapter also outlines the different stakeholders in higher education, staff, students, employers, the business community and government. They also note the somewhat unique environment within a higher education institution and the fact that universities can have different structures and cultures partly dictated by their history and partly dictated by trends. The trends that sometimes could be put under the heading of the rise of managerialism and increasing bureaucratic decision-making. The influential and distinctive role and power of academic freedom in Western society is also noted and potential tension created through growing managerialism.

The second section of the book aims to develop decision-making models for sustainability within a higher education context. In chapter 4, the authors rightly note that there is a massive literature on decision-making just like there was a

massive literature on leadership. Notwithstanding that, the authors present and discuss four models and concepts for decision-making for sustainability.

The first model is the *Core Business Integration for Sustainability Model*. They note that this model is an essential component of the executive programs run by Harvard University in its executive education for sustainability courses. A case study of its application at Canterbury Christchurch University is provided. The second decision-making model discussed is *Living Labs*. The application of this concept is discussed at the University of Newcastle in the United Kingdom. Other approaches discussed include communities of practice, and mutual confidence building.

In their overview of these models and concepts, the authors note that there are synergies with the theories developed in chapter 1 for leadership for sustainability. Of particular note: "the need for strong interpersonal skills; to manage follower (and stakeholder) thought and action; to operate empathetically; to cooperate, collaborate and share information and to hunt for and develop mutuality of incentives and goals, with an understanding of the complex human societal environmental in the 21st-century university" (87).

Chapter 5 puts together the decision-making frameworks discussed, with the models for sustainability. The authors recognise that for sustainability leaders to maintain the voice within the modern higher education organisations, sustainability needs to be valued. They outlined a number of ways that this can be achieved and the different terminology employed to achieve this, including triple bottom line reporting, green business, ethical business, to name a few. They outline an approach to modelling sustainability, the *Global Reporting Initiative*, and discuss its application through the case of Campus Brussels at Odisee-KU Leuven University, Belgium.

They also discuss the Five Capitals model of sustainable development as developed by Porritt (2005) which provides a means to view sustainability from the perspective of both capital and value. The definition of capital is broadened to include financial, manufactured, human, social and natural capital. A case study of Canterbury Christchurch University is provided to show how integrated reporting can be undertaken using this expanded notion of capital.

The authors then move to discuss whether these various forms of capital can be valued. They recognise that in many cases, a market value will not exist and a proxy value would need to be used with consequent limitations. Such limitations lead to trade-offs and a pragmatic way for handling the trade-offs is suggested. The so-called 'Five R' approach is outlined – Reducing cost, meeting Regulatory requirements, reducing Risk, Reputation enhancement, or if it is simply the Right thing to do. These five elements enable the development of a framework for evaluating the costs and benefits of sustainability decisions from both an organisational perspective and society as a whole.

Part C of the text focuses on sustainability and the leader as an individual. The authors firstly seek to establish the

link between the literature on what makes a good leader in sustainability, to leaders in universities. They then research trends or commonalities between a sample of universities in the United Kingdom to identify good practice or areas of similar challenges, applying the Cambridge Sustainability Leadership Model within this context. Data was collected through a questionnaire developed based upon that Cambridge model covering leadership context, leadership attributes and examples of success and challenges, and influences on the leader's role. They interviewed 34 respondents representing 25% of the universities in the United Kingdom. The choice of respondents was based on identifying those known for being active and successful in sustainability leadership, which may be a limitation of the research. As the authors note, it does not capture the breadth and depth of sustainability awareness across the sector. The results of this research are outlined in three chapters, firstly leadership context and sustainability, secondly leadership and the individual, and finally, leadership actions and

sustainability.

Part D of the book provides case studies in sustainable leadership from individual institutions in individual countries. These include Canterbury Christchurch University based in the UK, Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the US, Macquarie University from Australia and Kerala University in India.

Overall the book provides a valuable contribution to understanding of leadership, sustainability and the higher education sectors, as well as their interconnectedness. My only criticisms are that issues of building awareness of sustainability into curricula could have been more explicitly covered, and some discussion of the role of university research strategies would have added to the discussion. Overall, however, the models developed, research undertaken and applied case studies presented make it compelling reading for leaders and aspiring leaders in higher education.

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