MOBTC 2020 proposal

Session Title:

Innovating and Collaborating in Business Education for a Sustainable/Flourishing/-Regenerating World

Abstract:

Please join speakers from a bunch of business schools actively innovating and collaborating as they each transform their *entire* business curricula and some of the school’s research to become *fully aligned* with the need for a sustainable world – and are doing so in just three years. They will share what they are doing, bumps in the road they are experiencing, results, and plans for next steps. They humbly (Schein, 2013, etc.) seek your ideas, reports on what your school is doing, and your support. They also hope to inspire you to join this current initiative and a future, larger, one to transform all business education and all business practice around the world.

Session Description

Introduction:

The session is about contributing to a global movement to transform all of business education into a vehicle for creating a sustainable world. It will share goals and experiences that we hope will inspire audience members to suggest things the speakers can do to help them move their own schools toward the major innovative curricula and research changes and transformations that will be required to create a sustainable world. The session also seeks to inspire audience members to lead innovative initiatives in their own schools and to collaborate with the speakers and with each other in doing so.

Time line (60 minutes):

Introduction/session overview: 5 minutes

All folks introduce themselves briefly: 10 minutes

Speakers each give a one-minute summary of what they would like to talk with other folks about: 5 minutes

Conversations in breakout groups: 30 minutes

Short summary from each group: 10 minutes

The session will start with a very short description of a 2016 and then a 2019 application to the MacArthur Foundation 100&change 100 million dollar competition that inspired the initiative the presenting schools are involved in. The 2016 and 2019 applications were designed to contribute to a movement to transform global business education into a vehicle for transforming ourselves and our productive entities into ones that can flourish on this planet “forever” in John Ehrenfeld’s words (Ehrenfeld, 2010). The schools participating in the applications knew they could not win the $100 million, but used the application as a means to frame and inspire an initiative that was designed to have a continuing “life of its own” for the next three years and not be dependent on winning the 100 million dollar “prize.” That continuing initiative provides the substance of this session. (The initiative we will be sharing about is also laying the groundwork for a “scaled up” application for a possible third 2022 MacArthur Foundation100 million dollar competition in 2022. In the 2022 application/initiative, 400 business schools will be committing to transform their teaching and research … and will have started to do so before 2022.)

After that short introduction, the speakers will introduce themselves and invite audience members to say who they are, why they are there, and what they would like to get and/or give during the session (very briefly)

Then the speakers will each state a particular theme they would like to talk about with anyone in the group who is interested in that theme and we will break into small groups to do so. Each theme has at least four angles: (1) what does it look like when we get there? (2) How can we bring it into being (-- How can we get there)? (3) How are we starting to teach about it? and (4) how are we starting to research it?

For example in the case of transforming ourselves: (1) what kinds of folks will we actually be when we are living sustainably?, (2) how can we (and others) become such folks?, (3) how are we starting to teach about those questions?, and (4) how are we starting to research those topics (including how are we researching how to teach about them).

The same set of questions can be asked about transforming the systems that provide goods and services to meet our needs and some of our wants.

(We do not think the speakers and groups would try to cover all of those angles for a particular topic in their conversations, but there should be much room for rich conversations.)

One more possible topic: There is also the rich ob/management/strategy/-organizational development/policy-type topic of what is actually happening in each school as it starts moving forward on this adventure.

With only a 60 minute session and given the richness of the possible topics, it is not likely that we will want to break in the middle of the session and do a second round of conversations with newly composed groups --- but during the session, we will check to see if that assumption is correct.

A volunteer in each group will capture any action items that emerge…if any do …and the names of any folks who commit to do something following the conversations. We do not feel a need to “pressure” folks to define and commit to specific actions, but we will collect the names and email addresses of all folks in the room and circulate that info and any actions and the names of any “action-inclined-folks” that emerge during the session. Of course, the volunteers in each group will capture any such items on a flip short sheet for the group. We will take a photo of the flip chart sheets and email the photos to everyone in the session along with documents from each speaker – please see below).

If the session is accepted, we would like permission to add the names of maybe 5 or so more faculty members to the announcement of the session before the program is finalized – if doing so is administratively feasible without undue burden. (We could provide those names in mid to late February.)

All of the speakers will come to MOBTC with brief written reports on where their schools are on this adventure. We will send these reports to everyone in the session after it is over (as is noted above).

ADDENDUM

The following is some additional information provided in response to specific questions asked as part of the submission process. One question asked about the theoretical foundation of the proposed session and one asked about teaching implications.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications:

Theoretical Foundation: This session is based on an initiative in which 40 business schools are starting to make major curricula and research changes of an order of magnitude great enough to be labeled “transformative” and to do so in an “impossibly” short period of time. In doing so, the schools will need to figure out (1) what a sustainable world looks like (people and productive entities flourishing in a regenerating world), and (2) how to get there. We believe that no one “TRULY KNOWS” how to do so, even though many folks may have promising ideas.

The theoretical foundation has three pieces and one assumption:

The first piece is based on Hal (Harold J.) Leavitt’s observation that “when you do not know how to do something, give it to a group.”

The second is based on the view that if you cannot come up with one sure-fire way to do something, you might want to create a bunch of independent projects seeking the same goal (independent “parallel research projects” from the 1960’s moonshot days …in our case the projects are independent but are encouraged to embody collaboration rather then fostering competition.) In the “parallel research project” mode of this initiative, 40 different business schools will each develop its own approach to bringing about the teaching/curriculum/research transformations and will share the adventure and results with all business schools as they do so. The 40 business schools will represent many countries, sizes of school, orientation (teaching, research, service, whatever), etc.

The third piece is based on a well-known quotation about the power of commitment:

# *Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way. I have learned a deep respect for one of Goethe's couplets: Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it!* (Read it first, undated)

The quotation is by William Hutchinson Murray but is frequently attributed, not very accurately, to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

The assumption is that once the deans in the business schools joining this initiative make a *conditional commitment*, they will act on that commitment independent of the condition on which the commitment was made. The deans in the business schools in this initiative agree “to encourage and support their schools in fully aligning their curriculum and some to much of their research with the need for a sustainable world” IF they receive $2.4 million dollars to do so from a 2019 MacArthur Foundation 100 million dollar competition or from some other source. The assumption is that they will start making those changes right away, without waiting for the money to arrive. Some may find the money on their own, others may receive more than $2.4 million from a variety of other sources related to this initiative, and some may bring about the transformation with no additional funds dedicated to that purpose.

Teaching Implications: The teaching implications are particularly exciting and substantive for changes/transformations in all aspects of the curriculum at all levels: undergrad, grad, doctoral, and executive. The teaching implications will be especially interesting for the core, required courses in each discipline. Very likely the schools will find that they need to “go down to bare metal” and ground each core course in the context of the realities of the 21st Century and the need to move from a world of “Business As Usual” to a world of “Managing for Global Sustainability.” (By the way, for a variety of pretty easily guessable reasons, it is likely that many schools will find the ob/management faculty members are ones who are particularly amendable to being pioneers in embarking on the adventure of transforming their courses and research. However, session speakers from finance, marketing, economics, and perhaps other disciplines will also be available for sharing experiences in transforming core required courses in those disciplines.)

REFERENCES

These references are for only the description of the proposed session. Additional references – maybe too many – are included in a lengthy – maybe too lengthy – statement addressing the submission question about the possible “unique contribution” of this proposed session to MOBTC.

Ehrenfeld, J., 2010. *Sustainability by design: A subversive strategy for transforming our consumer culture.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Read it first (undated). <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/128689-until-one-is-committed-there-is-hesitancy-the-chance-to> Last accessed, January 4, 2020.

Schein, E.H., 2013. *Humble inquiry: The gentle art of asking instead of telling*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Schein, E.H., 2016. *Humble consulting: How to provide real help faste*r. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Schein, E.H. & Schein, P., 2018. *Humble leadership: The power of relationships, openness, and trust*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.