# Business sustainability

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***COURSE AIMS AND INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES***

There is growing recognition of the role business and market-based solutions can play in tackling complex ‘wicked’ global sustainable development challenges, including reducing poverty, protecting vulnerable ecosystems, and responding to global climate change. Concurrently, issues of sustainability and the broad role of business in society remain high on public agendas, while sustainability and stakeholder management are increasingly important considerations for business managers. Responding to these developments, this course focuses on the understanding of contemporary debates and practices of business sustainability and stakeholder management, as well as encouraging reflection on the wider role of business in sustainable development. The course answers key questions on the relationship between business and society, including: what is the impact of business on society? How should companies manage their relationships with stakeholders? How can companies be more transparent and responsive towards the contexts in which they operate? How can firms create value, broadly defined, in ways that are sustainable? How might they strategically engage with issues and practice of related to business sustainability? What is the future of relationships between business and society?

At the end of the course students will be able to:

* Discuss concepts, debates and theories of business sustainability and stakeholder management, and explain their relevance to sustainable development and wider management (Knowledge);
* Discuss current developments and new phenomena in the field of business and society such as social innovation, social entrepreneurship, and alternative business models (Knowledge);
* Discuss systems and practices of business sustainability and stakeholder management, and their relationship with long-term performance, including their application across different industries, geographies, and social and environmental domains (Knowledge);
* Research and use public data to analyze a company’s approach towards business sustainability and stakeholder management (Intellectual Skills);
* Perform a stakeholder analysis to inform strategic planning in real scenarios and in relation to business sustainability (Practical Skills);
* Evaluate business sustainability practices in real life scenarios and critically reflect on their role in long-term firm performance (Practical Skills);
* Make recommendations for new strategies and practices related to business sustainability and stakeholder management (Practical Skills).

To reach this aim, the course is structured around two modules, each with a specific focus area.

***COURSE CONTENT***

Module I

The module aims to introduce key theories and debates on business sustainability and stakeholder management. This will include the definition of business sustainability, stakeholder analysis, relationships between corporate governance and business sustainability, reporting and accountability, wider actors in the field of business sustainability, and new developments in business and society research and practice. The module will equip students with essential knowledge and tools to understand and manage issues of business sustainability and stakeholder relations in their future professional activities.

Module II

The module aims at presents the contribution of business sustainability to firms’ competitive strategy and main responsible practices toward stakeholders. The module will provide students with essential tools to design an effective strategy for business sustainability and contribute to the firm competitive advantage and performances.

The main topics of the course are: Module I are:

* Introduction to business sustainability  
  Definition of business sustainability and main related theories, the case for and against business sustainability
* Introduction to stakeholder analysis  
  Stakeholder and shareholder theories, stakeholder identification, prioritization, and engagement.
* Corporate governance and business sustainability  
  Integration of business sustainability in corporate governance and the role of board of directors.
* Auditing and reporting business sustainability  
  Social and environmental reporting, social auditing, accounting and assurance and materiality analysis.
* Business sustainability, partnerships, and politics  
  Business sustainability, governments and regulation, social and environmental public policies.
* New approaches to relation between business and society  
  Social innovation, ‘Shared Value’ and the Base of the Pyramid.

The main topics of the course are: Module II are:

* Design a strategy for business sustainability  
  Business sustainability and value creation, the integration of social and environmental issues in strategic plan.
* Activities toward suppliers  
  Definition, strategies, and tools for integration of social and environmental issues in supply chain.
* Activities toward natural environment  
  Types of environmental strategies and new business models for circular economy.
* Activities toward community and customers  
  Identify social needs and the implementation of strategic philanthropy.
* Activities toward employees  
  Globalization and human rights, assessing internal expectations and work-life balance initiatives.
* Measuring impact of sustainable strategy  
  The principles and process for social impact measurement.

***READING LIST[[1]](#footnote-1)***

Required readings for students who selected a multiple assessment route.

List of readings for students who selected a multiple assessment route will be available on blackboard.

Required readings for students who selected a single assessment route.

List of readings for students who selected a single assessment route will be available on blackboard.

***TEACHING METHOD***

Teaching methods will encourage students’ ***active*** participation and interaction between students, lecturers, and guest speakers. Case histories, business cases and global examples from the field will be introduced. To achieve active participation, it is expected that students will prepare in advance all materials required for the weekly sessions. Additional information is available on blackboard.

***ASSESSMENT METHOD AND CRITERIA***

Students can choose between a multiple assessment route and a single assessment route.

*Multiple assessment route*

As a mandatory part of the multiple assessment route students must complete two group projects applying knowledge and tools of stakeholder management and business sustainability to real scenarios. The first group assignment is a “stakeholder analysis”. Students will analyze public information on a firm with the aim of mapping and prioritizing its stakeholders, as well as performing a critical analysis of its approach to stakeholder management. The results of this stakeholder analysis will be presented to professors in a dedicated session. In a second group assignment students will work to develop a “strategy for business sustainability” for one firm. Each group will work as a strategic department in charge of assessing the existing strategy of one real firm and developing a new social initiative to be implemented by the firm. Results of the business sustainability strategy group work will be presented to professors and managers.

The multiple assessment final grade will be computed on three combined assessment elements: (i) the presentation to professors of stakeholder analyses (weighted: 25% of final grade); (ii) the proposal of a “strategy for business sustainability” to professors and managers of the firm (weighted 25% of final grade); (iii) an individual written exam to be held during first official exam session (three open theoretical questions) (weight: 50% of final grade). Each assessment will receive a mark on a 30-points scale. Finally, students receive a mark that will be the weighted average of the grades they got in the three assessments.

For a PASS in the multiple assessment route, the following conditions must be met: (i) the assessment elements are mandatory; (ii) the grade received in each assessment element must be greater than or equal to 18. Students who do not pass the multiple assessment route are evaluated according to the single assessment route. Even though attendance is not mandatory for a PASS in the multiple assessment route, it is strongly recommended.

*Single assessment route*

The single assessment will be based on a comprehensive individual written exam (six open questions) to be held in an official exam session. Three questions will aim to assess the student’s knowledge and intellectual and practical skills, with another three questions focusing on discussion of specific cases or strategic situations. Each answer will receive a mark on a 30-points scale and the average of the grades of the answers will provide the final grade of the individual.

*Assessment criteria*

The student's preparation is evaluated according to grading scales which are published in Blackboard.

***NOTES AND PREREQUISITES***

*N. ECTS* - 8

*Enrollment requirements* - Basic knowledge of business strategy or corporate strategy is required. Students who do not have such knowledge are responsible for acquiring it to the extent necessary during the course.

*Language of instruction* - English

*Attendance –*It is not mandatory, but it is strongly recommended.

*Associated courses* – Corporate Strategy

*International dimension* – International teaching materials are used throughout the course and the analyzed firm is a multinational company.

*Business connection* - The course makes extensive use of contemporary business cases and examples. This written material is also supported by guest speakers from business companies that provide a more practical demonstration of strategic management themes and issues. The direct involvement of top management from real business setting allows to have a strong connection with corporate business.

*Professional context* - In professional life, business sustainability is naturally associated with a couple of perspectives. First, business sustainability managers are responsible for the proper design and implementation of social and environmental strategies of companies, thus collecting data to effectively manage decision making. Second, corporate and business unit managers are supposed to know and apply concept of social responsibilities to select sustainable solutions to complex problems, and effectively participate to strategic planning and execution.

*Further information* – Additional information regarding the course schedule and delivery, learning assessment, expectation and policies, general announcements, and additional course materials will be posted on Blackboard.

1. I testi indicati nella bibliografia sono acquistabili presso le librerie di Ateneo; è possibile acquistarli anche presso altri rivenditori. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)