

# (Re) thinking Education for Sustainable Development: A Capability Approach

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**Key words** : Education for sustainable development, Capability approach, Responsible management education

## [Abstract]

The paper examines the significance of Education for Sustainability Development (ESD) within the context of business studies in Higher Education. Adopting Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, the paper argues for 'sustainability' as the underlying capability *of* ESD, not simply its goal. This gives rise to what Sen refers to as 'evaluative space', whereby we understand how actions within one domain impacts upon other domains. Current practices in implementing ESD can lead to a decoupling of practice and rhetoric. Yet, by extending the evaluative space (or the array of factors and outcomes) we can seek greater consensus with business and wider society. In understanding ESD as a form of capability, the evaluative space of education itself provides the means for significant change in how we approach the subject of business and in turn how businesses might view themselves. Crucially, the need is for more relational understanding of the broad and at times competing factors at stake in matters of sustainability. The point is not for ESD to be a necessary outcome of contemporary business, but as a forum for its radical critical thinking. This requires certain evaluative spaces and capabilities, but also in turn presents the opportunity to extend them.

## 1. Education for Sustainable Development: A Capability Approach

*This paper offers critical reflection following the Japan Forum of Business and Society's 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference (2019) on the theme of Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability in Management Education. By way of introduction to four papers from the conference (outlined at the end of this paper) it serves to offer what is defined here as a critical, evaluative*

*'space' specific to Education for Sustainable Development.*

This paper turns particular attention to 'Education for Sustainable Development' (ESD) in relation to business studies, which arguably expands the units of analysis to the point at which – beyond the typical purview of business – we need to question the relationship between the educational and business setting, and indeed, to question what it means to de-

liver business ethics education more fundamentally. The emergence of ESD is taken in this paper to be a 'new disruptor' within education. This can be understood as twofold: it represents a specific ethical agenda to assert over existing business education, but equally it requires a level of re-thinking about the nature of business, as to question anew how we define business education in the first place. It is worth noting, reference to the term 'development' in ESD is not taken here to refer to development issues or studies per se in relation to emerging economies, but rather as a business and educational development that is pertinent to all economies. As outlined below with respect to UNESCO's definition of ESD, the critical issues are wide-ranging and interconnected globally, so pertaining to all business education contexts. As will become apparent, the framing of this paper bears relation to debates between ethics and economics, with specific reference to Amartya Sen, who has done much to reinvigorate mainstream economics through the contributions of moral philosophy and welfare economics (Sen, 1987).

The significant prevalence of ESD teaching at business schools dates to the early 2000s, particularly following the introduction of UNESCO's definition, which urges business schools to accept a more comprehensive approach. While, there is no formally agreed model, the UNESCO definition, drafted as early as 2005, usefully establishes ESD as follows:

Education for Sustainable Development means including key sustainable development issues into teaching and learning;

for example, climate change, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity, poverty reduction, and sustainable consumption. It also requires participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change their behaviour and take action for sustainable development. Education for Sustainable Development consequently promotes competencies like critical thinking, imagining future scenarios and making decisions in a collaborative way<sup>(1)</sup>.

The definition presents an agenda for educators and students to look at how they can make positive changes to support sustainability through their own actions and behaviour (Ghoshal, 2005; Rands and Starik, 2009; Starik et al., 2010). Of particular interest for this paper is the emphasis on an evaluative approach and competencies for independent, critical thinking, which raise questions about the 'means' rather than simply the 'ends' of education; and which, in turn, pose quandaries as to how we define the parameters and intentions of business and how best to implement and maintain an appropriate means for the development of future leaders. Many business schools can certainly be seen not only to adopt the rhetoric of ESD, but also to seek to implement its key tenets. Yet, an underlying problem regards the status of education, as to whether it represents a challenge to or merely the reproduction of conventional practices (Burchell et al., 2015; Rasche and Gilbert, 2015; Painter-Morland et al., 2016).

The account offered here chimes with the

account offered by Baden and Higgs (2015), in which they challenge the ‘wisdom’ of management theories and practices. They offer a critique of ‘business and management school education and the values it propounds and its contribution to the development of future leaders’ (p.539). Marking a distinction between means and ends, referring to ‘terminal goals, such as human welfare and instrumental goals, such as money’, they are explicitly critical of dominant management models that measure success purely in financial terms. ‘If business is to retain its legitimacy and benefit society,’ they write, ‘profit needs to be seen as a means to the end of sustainable business not an end in itself’ (p.539). Baden and Higgs make a laudable argument, drawing attention, for example, to the need for curriculum changes. A point echoed in this current paper is for the need to go beyond cosmetic, superficial change (as has been prevalent, for example, in presenting ethics, responsibility and sustainability through elective modules etc.), with the need ‘to *integrate* relevant discussions into business schools to move beyond a situation where the topic is only treated as an add-on’ (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015, p.240). However, arguing the need for change does not necessarily help in *actually* finding ways to effect change. One of the problems of Baden and Higgs’ account, for example, as will be examined here, is that they are not fully reflective of the *means* through which an ‘alternative’ business model can be asserted.

This paper draws on the philosophical pragmatism of Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach (1999). As will be argued, Sen’s work

enables us to ask more operative questions about how education can offer an appropriate alignment or articulation of means and ends and so providing the capability for the ‘imagining of future scenarios’ as hoped for in UNESCO’s definition of ESD. The paper adopts Sen’s (1999) underlying argument for ‘development as freedom’, where freedom is the principle and purpose of development. In this case, we need to consider how ‘sustainability’ (outlined in more detail in the next section) is to be taken as the underlying capability *of* ESD, not simply its outcome or goal. Also, it relates to debates around ‘welfare economics’ (propounded by Sen and others since the 1970s). We need to work towards more comprehensive accounts and perspectives, which gives rise for the need of what Sen refers to as ‘evaluative space’; i.e. to understand how actions within one domain, or pertaining to specific needs, has impact on other domains and factors. If we can extend the evaluative ‘space’ (or the array of factors and outcomes we take into account) we can seek to reach greater consensus with businesses and wider society.

## 2. SITUATING EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Kurucz et al. (2014, p.454) position sustainability as a ‘provocation’ to traditional management education, which they argue is limited in its ‘capacity to address complex global issues’, despite such issues being increasingly important and visible in the business world. Thus, sustainability offers a mode of critique and renewal, ‘to build a new vision for management education that moves business

schools beyond functioning as management training and diploma-granting facilities', and instead to 'serve as public spheres of conscientization'. It is not so much that within a curriculum that sustainability represents a defined set of learning elements within a syllabus, but that it is a *way of approaching* the subject area as a whole. Analogy can be made to learning a foreign language. The syllabus sets out a finite set of vocabulary to learn, but it also requires certain principles of grammar to be understood, which in turn enable the words to be used in a variety of ways and contexts. Ethics and sustainability can be understood more as a 'grammar' of learning. It is a way of formulating the subject and a way of maintaining and underpinning learning. As will be outlined, ESD is to be taken as a 'capability' for facilitating and enhancing further learning rather than simply as a topic of learning. Beyond the classroom, this raises searching questions about the practical and epistemological relationship between business practices, education and research, as well as more broadly the status and positioning of business practices within wider social and economic discourse.

Cullen's (2017) bibliometric review shows that since the mid-1990s the fields of business and management studies have shown a substantial growth in interest in sustainability as a general topic, and from around the mid-2000s 'the emphasis of books published in this area began to change from one which advocated "sustainable development" to one which viewed sustainability as a management practice which could help businesses and society

simultaneously' (p.429). The specific literature within business education has been more limited, but has shown similar growth rates. Cullen notes how the rapid increase in interest, over a relatively short period of time, has led to confusions (and arguably dilutions), with a wide range of different understandings and definitions of sustainability (Marshall and Toffel, 2005; Ferdig, 2007; Parr, 2009). Equally, it can be argued interest in sustainability in mainstream business and management studies has come late, and as a result significant attention 'has yet to be integrated at any level into most business school courses and programs' (Starik et al., 2010, p.377). By the mid-2000s, for example, while the topic was seen to have had significant take up, sustainability was nonetheless seen 'as a relative "newcomer" to the MBA curriculum' (Christensen et al., 2007, p.352). For the purposes of this paper, sustainability is to be understood within the broad terms set out by UNESCO (outlined above), which allows for an understanding across economic, social and environmental issues. As Cullen notes, 'sustainability has been a central concern in fields such as geography, sociology and development studies for decades, [while] the relatively recent interest from management studies can be seen to stem from the various social, environmental and economic crises facing the world (2017, p.430). As part of which, sustainability concerns both intergenerational and collaborative thinking. When UNESCO refer to 'imagining future scenarios' there is a need to understand different generational temporalities, which, in terms of short-term political cycles are not always easy to

'sustain' and make workable. Similarly, establishing and then sustaining collaboration across different domains and disciplines can prove difficult. These, then, are as much sustainability issues as are the headline concerns of finance, resources and the environment.

As will be discussed in the next section, the work of Amartya Sen is concerned with an underlying interest in the expansion of real freedoms that people can enjoy – to advance, for example, the kind of 'well-being' that Baden and Higgs suggest is the goal of education. Importantly, Sen argues for freedom as an end in itself; a 'constitutive role' of freedom, which 'relates to the importance of substantive freedom to enriching human life. The substantive freedoms include elementary capabilities like being able to avoid such deprivations as starvation, undernourishment, escapable morbidity and premature mortality', as well as freedoms of education, literacy, political participation and freedom of speech etc. (1999, p.36). However, he also accounts for 'instrumental' freedoms and rights<sup>(2)</sup> that 'may also be very effective in contributing to economic progress'. These are operative in development, though still substantive freedoms remain fundamental. As Sen notes, 'the significance of the instrumental freedom of political freedom as *means* to development does not in any way reduce the evaluative importance of freedom as an *end* of development' (p.37). An underlying tension of this paper is the degree to which issues of sustainability can be read in terms of substantive freedoms (on a par with the aforementioned elementary capabilities), or whether as more instrumental means to-

wards change. The line taken here is that in order for ESD to be instrumental to a changing landscape within business studies, so arguably impacting positively on society at large, there is equally a need to consider it more substantively – as something constitutive of how we live, or intend to live.

In discussing ESD, it is pertinent to draw attention to the 'Principles for Responsible Management Education' (PRME), since both are linked initiatives of the UN Global Compact. At its core, PRME is directed at the next generation of business professionals. As Parkes et al., (2017) outline:

...the underlying goal [in establishing PRME] was to develop the capabilities of our students to be generators of sustainable value for a more inclusive global economy through our teaching, research, and campus practices. Then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, pointing to the potential of the PRME initiative, noted that, "The Principles for Responsible Management Education have the capacity to take the case for universal values and business into classrooms on every continent" (p.61)

The Secretary-General's words undoubtedly suggest of a more inclusive, interconnected set of relationships. It is interesting how we might read the phrase 'universal values and business', whether we take the 'and' as an operator between two entities, or as a means to intrinsically link the two. Parkes et al.'s (2017) reference to students as 'generators' and in

having ‘capabilities’ in the first instance would seem to suggest of a working *out from* business, so to impact upon the wider world. Yet, over time, this may lead to a different conception of where the boundaries lie, if indeed they need to exist at all between business and society<sup>(3)</sup>.

Currently, if we look at the ‘Eligibility Procedures and Accreditation Standards for Business Accreditation’ of the well-known AACSB International (The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business), it is evident that, while the overall vision is for business and business schools to be ‘a force for good, contributing to the world’s economy and to society’, the thrust of the language emphasizes business as somehow separate to (even if ‘serving’) society or communities. It uses phrases such as: ‘society is increasingly demanding that companies become more accountable’, ‘the same factors impacting business also are changing higher education’, and ‘business schools must respond to the business world’s changing needs by providing relevant knowledge and skills to the communities they serve’. Of course the purpose of such a body is to set accreditation standards, which inevitably leads it to narrow its focus, in this case business education (and so the site of business practices more generally). Yet, the accreditation bodies are arguably themselves looking to innovate and to be more responsive to the colleges they interact with. As AACSB International’s documentation puts it: ‘Accreditation standards and associated processes should foster quality and consistency, but not at the expense of the creativity and experimentation

necessary for innovation. Also, accreditation standards and processes should not impede experimentation or entrepreneurial pursuits; the standards must recognize that innovation involves both the potential for success and the risk of failure’ (AACSB, 2017, p.3)<sup>(4)</sup>. There is a need to look beyond prescriptions and instead consider underlying capabilities and how these can align with aspirations.

Various stakeholders are all looking in the same direction, towards a more progressive business landscape. What is missing, however, is a cohesive means of proceeding. It is in this respect that Sen’s perspective of a ‘Capability Approach’ can be useful to redefine problems as questions around the appropriate capabilities required to achieve certain functions. As a long-time advocate of welfare economics, involving the co-consideration of ethics and economics (Sen, 1987; Putnam, 2004, pp.46–64), for Sen there is a need to re-evaluate the way we relate to debates of the market; i.e. how we position ourselves vis-à-vis business *and* society. The most prominent argument in favour of the market mechanism is that left unrestricted it typically allows income and wealth to flow (and ‘trickle down’), which broadly Sen agrees to, with some caveats. However, his argument for the market is different, and more fundamental, regarding an inalienable right to undertake exchange and transactions. ‘Even if such rights are not accepted as being inviolable,’ he writes, ‘...it can still be argued that there is some social loss involved in denying people the right to interact economically with each other’ (1999, p.26). Added to which, he notes, ‘[t] he discipline of economics has tend-

ed to move away from focusing on the value of freedom to that of utilities, incomes and wealth. The narrowing of focus leads to an underappreciation of the full role of the market mechanism' (p.27). In Sen's view, then, there is a need to rebalance the 'engineered' or highly mathematical approach to twentieth century economics, through the reintroduction of ethics (Putnam, 2004, pp.47-48). It is worth noting, in Sen's case, 'the reintroduction of ethical concerns and concepts into economic discourse must not be thought of as an *abandonment* of "classical economics"; rather it is the *reintroduction* of something that was everywhere present in the writings of Adam Smith' (Putnam, 2004, p.48). Sen aligns strongly with the work of Adam Smith. He notes wryly how commentators often rarely get beyond the famous quote of 'the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker', but suggests, even if they do not read further, 'this passage would indicate that what Smith is doing here is to specify why and how normal transactions in the market are carried out', and that crucially, 'the fact that Smith noted that mutually advantageous trades are very common does not indicate at all that he thought that self-love ... could be adequate for a good society. Indeed, he maintained precisely the opposite. He did not rest economic salvation on some unique motivation' (Sen, 1987, pp.23-24). Thus, Sen reminds of the underlying *social* principle of economics. We always trade with others. It is a freedom we seek to secure, which can only be secured *through* the relations with others, rather than despite them. In effect, exchange comes *before*

business, it is one of the fundamentals of being social. In this view, we can begin to view any rigid distinction between business *and* society as problematic.

As will be considered further below, Sen's focus on capabilities and 'freedoms' *as* development (not the result of development), sets out a more pragmatic and interconnected understanding of the market, wealth and sociality, which we can adopt to make better sense of how ESD needs to be conceptualised and articulated within the context of the business school. While Sen certainly does not dismiss classical economics, his reading, as suggested above, is nuanced and reintroduces philosophical and ethical considerations relevant to contemporary debates. By making a link, then, ESD represents one opportunity to rethink how we define the curriculum for a new generation. What needs to take effect is not only a framework (and set of accreditation standards) for articulating new values<sup>(5)</sup>, but also a *means* allowing for 'the next generation of managers, leaders, and business professionals, committed to developing their capabilities to be generators of sustainable value for a more inclusive global economy' (Parkes et al., 2017, p.62). It is in this direction that Sen's 'Capability Approach' offers valuable insights.

### 3. COMPREHENSIVE OUTCOMES

The agenda of ESD in itself puts forward a need for change – to change the curriculum, to change behaviours, to change business practices. Institutionally, this gives educators and administrators a 'case for change', but as

already intimated, implementation of new approaches can end up being superficial, or at least bolted on rather than built in. In other words ESD is readily *incorporated* into the educational programme, but it is not necessarily constitutive of it. At stake is a wider range of capabilities for a transformative understanding of business. Underlying Sen's work is the need for an integrated picture. He notes, for example, how various economic indicators in isolation can be used to show disparities in wealth between countries, but when combined with other factors such as health statistics produce quite striking and unexpected disparities. For example, male survival rates in the USA are higher than that of the state of Kerala, India, by over a decade. The obvious explanation is that the USA is vastly more affluent and so people live longer. Yet, the same statistics show that black males living in USA have a *lower* survival rate than in Kerala. What Sen argues with these statistics is the importance of *combined* factors, or 'substantive freedoms' as he calls them. These include aspects of social and health care, community relations, education, law and order, security, and political factors (notably the level of democracy). In order to attend to issues such as poverty and health it is not enough to simply spend more money. Businesses, for example, can often be criticised for the ineffectiveness of philanthropic activity; for only donating to, not actually *contributing* to society. Development is not merely a return on investment and it is not a luxury: '...enhancement of human freedom is both the main object and the primary means of development. The ob-

jective of development relates to the valuation of the actual freedoms enjoyed by the people involved. Individual capabilities crucially depend on, among other things, economic, social, and political arrangements' (Sen, 1999, p.53).

Sen's account of 'development as freedom' might be described best as the *freedom to* do things (to live according to your own capabilities), rather than suggest of the more negative *freedom from* something. In other words, development is not applied to free us from a problem, instead it is the articulation of our freedom. According to Sen's data, males living in Kerala will on average earn substantially less than black males living in the USA, but potentially possess more *substantive* freedoms (in terms of education, social networks, literary etc.). And it is these substantive freedoms that he argues *combine* to lead to longer life expectancy. Crucially, a combined ethics and economic perspective looks to the bigger picture, so asking different questions of and across datasets. Similarly, ESD requires a broader canvas to be taken into account, which itself is challenging of the field of business studies.

The factors involved in ESD are of course different to those pertaining specifically to poverty, well-being and life expectancy, but similar principles are at stake (and there are interrelated debates). Firstly, ESD should not be viewed as development on from traditional business, or indeed as an imposition upon, or even policing of, existing business practices. This would be to suggest ESD is somehow seeking *freedom from* business (forever characterised as bad). Alternatively, the view might be taken that business and commerce has ma-



tured to a point at which it is now possible to apply ESD. Again, this would be the wrong way to frame things, as if ESD is a luxury we can now afford. The point is to consider ESD as the *freedom to* pursue business in a particular way, one which offers a more integrated picture and so is both led by and leads to greater capability. As Sen writes: 'Capability is thus a kind of freedom: the substantive freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations (or, less formally put, the freedom to achieve various lifestyles)' (1999, p.75). The use of the term 'functioning' varies across Sen's work, but as Hart (2013, pp.37-38) notes, the term generally gravitates to 'achieved functionings', made possible through an individual's 'capability set'. As Sen writes: 'The capability set would consist of the alternative functioning vectors ... While the combination of a person's functionings reflects her actual *achievements*, the capability set reflects the *freedom to* achieve: the alternative functioning combinations from which this person can choose' (1999, p.75). Sen gives the example of how an affluent person choosing to fast has a very different 'capability set' (or set of choices) than the destitute person unable to feed themselves<sup>(6)</sup>.

Given the various (and even competing) demands and perspectives encapsulated by ESD, we can think of it as an attempt to bring together a variety of 'lifestyles' or choices, which represents a complex 'capability set', all of which needs attention and evaluation. Following this logic, it is necessary to consider what substantive freedoms are required of business within the frame of ESD.

Education itself is one key freedom or capability. We need the ability to think critically and creatively in order to re-evaluate and transform business. Thus, the capabilities of a teacher to deliver the kind of education they value is important in itself, but equally this is part of the greater freedom to understand sustainable development, and for education to provide support to business thinking, to allow for a wider set of viewpoints. In this sense, education is not simply about feeding business with appropriately skilled labour to enable the status quo. Education is to be taken as a substantive freedom of business itself. It is part of an infrastructure that gives individuals and individual businesses the means to pursue the values they deem to be important. From Sen's perspective, intervention is not what makes changes, but only what supports it. What we require are the grounds for change, which form the freedom to assert change. It can be argued that economic development can better support and resource education, yet Sen (1999, p.41) sees this the other way round, arguing education is a freedom supportive of economic development. Education is for example capability towards the function of greater productivity. He cites, for example, the East Asian economic 'miracle' as being strongly predicated on 'human resource development' and higher levels of literacy, underlying which – in this particular context and circumstance – is a common cultural and social investment in the primacy of education. With respect to ESD, education is not simply a driver towards greater productivity, but towards *better* (and sustainable) business practic-

es.

Capability Approach pays attention not only to opportunities but also processes or procedures 'that allow freedom of actions and decisions' (Sen, 1999, p.17). The idea of understanding 'development as freedom' leads us to pose different kinds of questions about what we think development means, and how it correlates to ideas of freedom. In effect, Sen turns our frames of reference around, to understand freedom not as the 'goal' (whether development, or education), so not as an *end*, but equally as *means*. This is given further definition through his distinction between 'culmination outcomes' and 'comprehensive outcomes'. Taking a hypothetical idea that a competitive market mechanism could be matched by a centralized, even dictatorial system, Sen asks – if both yield the same economic result – is there any real difference if we concern ourselves only with end results? Intuitively, he writes, 'something would be missing in such a scenario ... the freedom of people to act as they like in deciding on where to work, what to produce, what to consume and so on' (Sen, 1999, p.27). Despite being able to produce the same end results, the argument is that we would still prefer the scenario offering free choice. The difference is between whether or not we focus on just the ends, or equally upon the means; and that such means are constitutive of the ends, i.e. it is how we define ourselves through the process as much as the end<sup>(7)</sup>.

Sen's explicit interest in capabilities is of more specific import, providing a pragmatic way of analysing a situation and of defining

development or change *through capabilities*. It can be viewed a form of idealism, Sen refers to 'outcomes' (and is context specific). His approach, in looking at the processes and procedures that allow for opportunities, as a *combined reading*, and which vary enormously between different situations, is concerned with development as a *form* of action and doing, not simply a value or belief (which arguably can remain merely an ideological pronouncement).

Thus, for Sen, there is a distinction 'between "culmination outcomes" (that is, only final outcomes without taking any note of the process of getting there, including the exercise of freedom) and "comprehensive outcomes" (taking note of the processes through which the culmination outcomes come about)'. The relative merits of a market system, he argues, is not based solely on the 'capacity to generate more efficient culmination outcomes' (1999, p.27). In the context of ESD, there are numerous different ways for its implementation within the education setting, which in turn can be reflected in simple measures and accreditations. However, if we look to how implementation *culminates*, i.e. how ESD is 'actually existing' and how it progresses beyond the educational context, we might come to quite different views about how best to pursue it. In an ever increasingly regulated society, with numerous systems of accreditation and auditing, universities and companies have become skilful in appropriately positioning their activities (and without necessarily making fundamental changes to their practices). In this sense the implementing and integrating of ESD (as a culmination

outcome) is not necessarily the same as its embedding (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015). For that, we need to understand – as active forces – the integrated context of education, business and society. ESD provides a prompt to redraft how we define these terms, and indeed how these sites of practice interrelate, so allowing for the imaging of future scenarios, as UNESCO would hope for, and for a broader ‘evaluative space’ (to adopt Sen’s term, explored further below), whereby a wider range of options and interactions can be taken into critical consideration.

#### 4. EVALUATIVE SPACE: ESD AS CAPABILITY

If we review the various issues that UNESCO list in their definition of ESD, such as climate change, biodiversity, poverty, and sustainable consumption, and others such beside, each in turn are laudable concerns. However, difficulties may arise if we start to consider them in relation to one another. For example, is there a hierarchy of low to high priority, and in attending to one issue can we remain true to others? Overcoming issues of poverty could in some circumstances lead to increased production, or a decrease in biodiversity (where perhaps greenbelt land is used to overcome housing shortages etc.). Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) argue that improvements to quality of life and equality can be met without further economic growth. Indeed, their thesis is that equality and sustainability are intrinsically linked. Sen’s Capability Approach is attuned to these kinds of interrelated concerns. In discussing equality, for example, he is critical of a utili-

tarian perspective, which puts ‘equal weights on everyone’s utility gains’ (1992, p.13), when in fact, he argues, we cannot assume all individuals can achieve the same utility gain from the same resources or circumstances. Thus, despite general agreement that equality is a good thing, it is not something we can necessarily uniformly agree upon in practice. As much as we may need to debate the importance of equality, for Sen, the question is also always ‘equality of what?’ (Sen, 1992). Being egalitarian, he argues ‘is not a “uniting” feature’. Indeed, he writes, ‘it is precisely because there are such substantive differences between the endorsement of different spaces in which equality is recommended ... that the basic similarity between them (in the form of wanting equality is *some* space that is seen as important) can be far from transparent’ (1992, p.14). Similarly, the question of ‘why sustainability?’ can appear to dominate, whereas, *pace* Sen, we should really ask ‘sustainability of what?’. The answer to which will vary depending on numerous factors. And like equality, there are some ‘spaces’ of sustainability (as Sen terms it) that are more readily associated than others. So, for example, the environment can quickly be evoked, yet, as noted in this essay, the issues range more broadly. The protest movement, #BlackLivesMatter, for example, has sought to show how environmental concerns such as air pollution are also deeply entwined with matters of class and race (Kelbert, 2016)<sup>(8)</sup>. What Sen has to say of equality can be transposed to matters of sustainability: ‘it is important to recognize equality in one space – no matter how hallowed by tradition – can lead

one to be anti-egalitarian in some other space, the comparative importance of which in the overall assessment has to be critically assessed' (1992, p.16).

The frequent reference to 'space' needs some clarification. The Capability Approach is concerned with what Sen refers to as 'evaluative space', which is never definitively defined, certainly not as a specific site or domain. Nonetheless, looking across his writings, we can relate 'space' to a form of operation that varies according to different domains, discourses and disciplines. Different professional, conceptual and discursive domains or spaces will emphasise different 'objects of value':

The identification of the objects of value specifies what may be called an *evaluative space*. In standard utilitarian analysis, for example, the evaluative space consists of the individual utilities (defined in the usual terms of pleasures, happiness, or desire fulfilment). [...] The capability approach is concerned primarily with your identification of value-objects, and sees the evaluative space in terms of functioning and capabilities to function (Sen, 1993, p.32).

As already discussed, capability sets provide possibility of different choices or functions. All of which, however, sit within 'spaces' (meaning domains or discourses), which are inevitably important in driving the terms of debate. Different evaluative spaces or agendas will have a strong impact on how we come to view capabilities and functionings in the first place. To quote Sen at length:

The selection of the evaluative space has a good deal of cutting power on its own, both because of what it *includes* as potentially valuable and because of what it *excludes*. For example, because of the nature of the evaluative space, the capability approach differs from utilitarian evaluation ... in making room for a variety of human acts and states as important in themselves (not just *because* they may produce utility, nor just to the *extent* that they yield utility). It also makes room for valuing various freedoms – in the form of capabilities. On the other side, the approach does not attach direct – as opposed to derivative – importance to the *means* of living or *means* of freedom (e.g. real income, wealth, opulence, primary goods, or resources), as some other approaches do. These variables are not part of the evaluative space, though they can indirectly influence the evaluation through their effects on variables included in that space (Sen, 1993, p.33).

Education provides an obvious context in which not only can we engage with an evaluative space, but also potentially to construct one. ESD in particular presents specific means to pursue the relational complexity that is suggestive of Sen's account. However, as discussed above, the implementation of ESD and the pressures of various drivers can inhibit how we frame or engage in the issues. Baden and Higgs (2015), as shown, are critical of the dominant approaches, suggesting that

'ethical issues tend to be presented as instrumental rather than the infusion of wisdom into the curriculum' (p.545). Nonetheless, they outline a number of areas where a wider frame of reference and perspective can be adopted to broaden the purview of business studies. So, for example, they suggest Accounting modules can work upon the concept of the triple bottom line (Elkington, 1997), to broaden out from economic to social and environmental performance. Finance, while potentially more difficult, can look at financing that contributes positively to social needs. Human resource management can turn to 'quality of life' indices to offer justifications for improved working conditions not on the basis of improved productivity, but on the human value. Marketing is another difficult area, as arguably it is predicated on consumption, which then is in tension with sustainability issues. Nonetheless, it is possible to promote decreases in production and focus on shifts to services. Entrepreneurialism can be centred around inspirational prosocial role models, and corporate governance modules can look to alternative legal models and structures, and strategy modules can emphasize stakeholders over shareholders (Baden and Higgs, 2015, pp.546-548).

Each of these examples suggest changes to what might be *included* or *excluded* in the 'space' of the curriculum and teaching environment. Of course, a key concern is the *extent* to which such changes are made. They can be presented as mere alternative functionings, so becoming just one choice out of a range of choices. As such, a compartmental-

ised approach is still followed. We might even relate this to a more utilitarian mode, as a means to *maximise* sustainability in a given area, without necessarily broaching its deeper significance. Certainly, it is the case, through modularisation, that the different subject areas may not necessarily interact. Samuelson notes, for example, 'a course with "sustainability" in the title might consider the risks for both the business and its fence-line neighbors, ... But in finance and other classes, these same students are taught to externalize costs and discount the future' (p.67). However, if we are to see ESD as genuinely broadening a capability set, and evoking a different kind of evaluative space, it is important to maintain a critical dialogue between differing perspectives and needs. As Cebrián, Grace & Humphris (2013, p.286) put it, 'ESD can foster a sustainable social transformation, through the clarification and reassessment of values;' indeed 'sustainability can be defined as a learning process that encourages transformative learning, the capacity to challenge existing patterns and worldviews, to construct new knowledge collectively, to rethink current practice, and to critique and examine sustainability issues' (p.287); an argument that echoes Kurucz et al. (2014).

The evaluative space determines key considerations or the terms of debate, even the degree to which sustainability might be viewed as significant in the first place. Education can clearly play a role in influencing and even re-calibrating such spaces. However, within such a context is it also how we relate to capabilities that is important. 'The freedom

to lead different types of life,' writes Sen, 'is reflected in the person's capability set' (1993, p.33). This is by no means an unproblematic notion. We might not always be aware of our capabilities, or we may not always have impetus to make choices despite being available to us. Furthermore compound issues, such as mentioned above in relation to environment and race, are either not easily visible, or can become so entrenched that limited capability is normalised. To give an example specific to sustainability and the business context, we might consider the differing capability sets of a large, nationwide car dealership and a small, local mechanics firm. With the former, narratives pertinent to sustainability can often be made quite explicit. Perhaps the company promotes a new line in hybrid or electric cars, and/or a scrappage scheme framed explicitly as a 'green' service. A problem, of course, is that the business is also predicated on increasing sales, so adding to the number of cars on the road. It is focused on providing new cars, rather than new components. Down the road, the local mechanic does not necessarily see him- or herself as being particularly diligent towards issues of sustainability, yet as a business the focus is on repairing cars, keeping them on the road. It is about re-using resources. These businesses engage differently with the evaluative space concerning sustainability. One is overt about such evaluations. Indeed, the car dealership is likely to have a dedicated CSR report and provide lots of related signage on its premises to impress its customers. Such displays of 'consciousness' on the part of the business could be said to

further influence future capabilities. However, what is significant about Sen's work is the need to *relate between* different circumstances and indicators – to understand relational differences and that change occurs *through* circumstances. In this case, while the mechanic is perhaps not so consciously engaged in the evaluative space of sustainability issues, it does not mean the business is not already in possession of requisite capabilities and indeed already functioning in a sustainable way. The question over 'sustainability of what?' is again pertinent. As Sen argues, capability is not a resource of fixed value, but something that must be examined in terms of its scaling according to specific circumstances. The difficulty, of course, is bringing legitimacy and/or consciousness to such capabilities. At this level, as Putnam (2004, p.60) reminds, census around matters of capability requires public debate and democratic engagement and acceptance. In this case, the car dealership perhaps speaks more publicly, yet in looking to a new generation of business practitioners a wider, relational field of vision allows us to look more across different capabilities, to make finer judgements about what is valuable. Again, it is arguably the educational 'space' that has a vital role to play.

Inevitably, there are various critiques and challenges made of Sen's work (Hart, 2013, pp.34-46; Qizilbash, M., 1996; 2008; Gasper, 2002; Clark, 2005; Cohen, 1993). It is not in the scope of this paper to work through these in detail, but in closing a few points can be made. Sen is criticised for a lack of clarity in the use of his terms (which have evolved over his career),

This paper has sought to clarify the key concepts as far as possible within the narrative provided here. As Hart (2013, p.35) notes, there are many terms, such as class, power and poverty, that are equally difficult to define, but their contested nature is equally constitutive of our need to debate the issues that surround them. This is the case too of 'sustainability', which, as argued in terms of ESD, should *not* be fixed, but always the subject of debate. 'Freedom' is another term of significant complexity and is central to Sen's work. Qizilbash (1996) has been critical of a lack of attention to 'negative freedom', i.e. the forces to take us away from freedom. Sen could be seen as overly optimistic. However, rather like the debates around the concept of the 'public sphere', which is really only something of an ideal, even a myth, most critics hold the view that it is a 'necessary possibility', as something we must work towards even if not always reached. Likewise, 'capability' may not necessarily be something we can distinctively identify or agree upon, but it becomes an important concept through which we can make empirical judgements about how best to approach topics such as 'sustainability' (within the specific space, for example, of business and business education). As part of which, the argument made here to keep debate open, to continually test circumstances etc., echoes Sen's reluctance to offer specific 'lists' of capabilities and functions. By contrast, Nussbaum, an associate of Sen and an important scholar of capability theory in her own right, has been more forthright about the need to develop schema. An implication for future research,

when looking at ESD through the lens of capability approach, would be whether or not Nussbaum's (2003) consideration of 'fundamental entitlements' and 'minimum thresholds' might in fact be pertinent to establishing aspects of curriculum and its tie-up with business practices. Finally, a key criticism of Sen's work is in 'under-emphasizing the role of social interaction in the generation of capabilities' (Hart, 2013, p.44). This, again, is an area that requires further research. The approach taken in this paper is that the conceptual approach – to understand specific principles of means and ends, to privilege comprehensive outcomes, and to give credence to *sets* of capability etc. – is something that translates when we consider 'individual' sites of practice, such as a firm or the interaction of businesses. Also, in terms of ESD, specifically (i.e. in the context of education), the ideas of capability do generally apply, even if more theorisation is welcomed (Hart, 2013, pp.45-46). Overall, ESD is a critical prompt for the expansion of the evaluative space of business, which needs to be addressed through a broadening of capabilities both within and outside of the educational setting itself.

## 5. TOWARDS A NEW DIALOGUE

This paper has examined the emergence of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) within the field of business and management studies. The body of current literatures tend to focus on the development of teaching ethics and sustainability in a compartmentalised way, with less attention on how business can

engage dynamically with such a new agenda (i.e. the wider ramifications its inscribes). To support a *change* in agenda, consideration has been made of Sen's Capability Approach, which leads to the view that ESD itself can be understood a form of capability. In the context of education it is an evaluative space that provides the means for significant change in how we approach the subject of business and in turn how businesses might view themselves. Crucially, the need is for more relational understanding of the broad and at times competing factors and agents at stake in matters of sustainability. Current practices in implementing and accrediting ESD can lead to a de-coupling from the actual educational practices of a business school. Such decoupling may be caused where ESD is seen as an end point of strategic renewal, not as a means of educating, expanding on and practicing in relation to ethics and sustainability issues. Sen's formulation of 'development as freedom', by which he means we need freedom or capability to be able to pursue development (i.e., freedom is not a product of development, but its means), is significant in turning the tables in how we relate to the issues of ESD. We might argue, not for *sustainability as ESD* (i.e. that ESD can lead to sustainability), but rather *ESD as sustainability*, that sustainable thinking and actions, or capability are *required* for ESD to take root. The point is not for ESD to be some form of 'necessary' outcome, but as a genuine practice based on an expanded 'evaluative space', allowing for *comprehensive* outcomes. Of course, one of the real difficulties of ESD is the radical critical thinking it implies,

which leads to a challenging of received knowledge and norms. Nonetheless, not only does this critical work require certain evaluative spaces and capabilities, it also in turn presents the opportunity to extend them.

Overall, then, the account offered here has sought to provide the critical, conceptual tool of 'evaluative space' in relation to ESD. It is offered as a contribution to the Japan Forum of Business and Society's 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference 2019, which was held around the themes of Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability in Management Education. Specifically, the paper seeks to aid an understanding of forward-going, progressive engagements with ESD, and in particular serves to offer critical dialogue with four papers from the conference: Elisabeth Fröhlich and Berivan Kul's 'The Necessity of Sustainability in Management Education'; Masao Seki's 'サステナブルビジネス教育における課題: トランスフォーメーションの時代に求められるもの' [Challenges in Sustainable Business Education – What is Required in the Age of Transformation]; Yasushi Sonobe and Makiko Kawakita's 'The Prestige Effects of Sponsorship on Attitudes toward Corporate Brands and Art Events'; and Hidemitsu Sasaya's 'SDGsを活用した新たな共通価値の創造 (CSV)' [Evolution of Creating Shared Value (CSV) by Utilizing SDGs]. The first of these two papers illustrate how educators and professionals in their own evaluative space consider approaches to, and engage in, the practice of ESD. The other two papers present investigations that offer contexts exemplifying 'objects of value' and lead towards a question of 'what' is to be located



among consumers, organisations and society.

The paper by Fröhlich and Kultake on the task by discussing a case from the CBS International Business School, to explain its sustainability vision in terms of serving as a role model for other business schools. They argue that 'Rethinking Capitalism' is one of the essential requirements to respond to ecological and social challenges we face today. It is a particular interest of this paper to consider how a business school approaches its curriculum design comprehensively in order to contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They propose 'SDG teaching mapping' as the means of engaging in this process. As an example of this mapping exercise, SDG12's targets are utilized to evaluate current practices and so to identify opportunities and directions in terms of curriculum design in the future. The paper by Seki argues that achieving SDGs requires not only progressive improvement but transformation that would make major social and economic changes at the system level (e.g., one of the keys is digital transformation). He points out that companies are the driving force behind such transformation and places importance on 'future aspiration', 'strategic thinking' and 'backcasting' while nurturing people who can create innovation. Backcasting refers to identifying what needs to be done now as a plan, after defining what would be a desirable state in the future. The paper certainly triggers key questions regarding what we value: *what and where* do 'we' want to be in the future? Indeed, ultimately, to ask: *what is a good life?*

The paper by Sonobe and Kawakita presents an investigation on the relationship between corporate prestige and corporate image by supporting artistic activities. In particular, it examines the effects of prestige in sponsorships on consumers' attitudes toward corporate brands and art events. While reading, one may ask whether *doing* 'good' actually equates to *being* 'good'. The paper provides context to deepen our understanding of how we evaluate corporations every day: Does it matter, for example, who the 'good doers' are (e.g. corporations) and who (e.g. consumers) evaluates them? The paper by Sasaya, which similarly notes that addressing social issues has become an important business proposition for many corporations, develops a reading of the notion of Creating Shared Value (Porter and Kramer, 2011). However, he finds it problematic that there has been insufficient insight into the social issues to be addressed. He argues SDGs help articulate social issues and proposes they complement a process of creating new, shared values.

- (1) <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco-world-conference-on-esd-2014/resources/what-is-esd/>, Accessed June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020.
- (2) Sen (1999, pp.36-40) identifies five types of instrumental reason: (1) political freedoms, (2) economic facilities, (3) social opportunities, (4) transparency guarantees and (5) protective securities. These freedoms 'contribute to the general capability of a person to live more freely, but they also serve to complement one another', thus analysis 'must also take note of the empirical linkages that tie the distinct types of freedom *together*, strengthening their joint importance' (38). As an example, he notes that a rich person prevented from speaking openly is *deprived* of their freedom. 'Development seen as enhancement of freedom can-

not but address such deprivations' (37).

- (3) It is worth noting conceptions of and relations between business and society can be seen to differ culturally. Tange (2001), for example, presents a contrast between Anglo-American and Japanese models of community, whereby the former places individuals and companies as separate entities within society (as the overarching community), whereas in the latter, individuals are placed within companies, which in turn provides community. The fact that the relationship between business and society is not fixed, but changeable, is pertinent to the agenda of ESD that look towards making more radical change.
- (4) AACSB Business Accreditation Standards <http://www.aacsb.edu/-/media/aacsb/docs/accreditation/standards/business-2017-update.ashx?la=en>, Accessed October 21<sup>st</sup> 2017.
- (5) It is important to note, the Global Compact itself can be criticised for favouring business (Thérien and Pouliot, 2006) and enabling firms to promote themselves ethically regardless of actual practices and commitments (Sethi and Schepers, 2014).
- (6) Sen's use of the terms 'capability set' and 'functioning vectors', stems from *Commodities and Capabilities* (1985). Based on a series of lectures, this is an overtly econometric text, full of equations etc., unlike his more well-known and accessible text, *Development as Freedom* (1999). It is the earlier text that helps make more sense of these terms as mathematical concepts. Capability refers to an array or set of data, which define possibilities or choices (not so distant from the concept of opportunity cost as calculable values). While functioning refers to treatments that can be drawn out from these sets (hence functioning vectors). Choices can be made based on certain principles or needs. For example, choices from a set that allow for education can be made a function. However, it is only the availability of a set that can allow for functionings in the first place.
- (7) It would be possible to explore further a view on 'means' and 'end' in Baden and Higgs' work (2015) whose view is similar to Sen. However, it is not done so due to the limited space of this paper.
- (8) Sen (1992, p. 55) similarly identifies, '[t]he problem of entrenched deprivation is particularly serious in many cases of inequality. It applies particu-

larly to the differentiation of class, community, caste, and gender'. And the extent of such deprivations can often not show up as a metric simply because individuals come to accept hardships; 'the victims do not go on grieving and lamenting all the time, and very often make great efforts to take pleasure in small mercies...'

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