

**RMIT University
Graduate School of Business**

ARIES STAGE 3 Final Report

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1.0 Context:

The Graduate School of Business at RMIT was a participant in the ARIES Stage 2 Project whose aim was to increase the Profile and content of Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility in MC162 MBA (Executive) Program.

The opportunity to be involved in ARIES Stage 3 with its theme of directly engaging with the business community in an action learning based research project was seen as consistent with the educational strategy of the Graduate School. Furthermore the GSB has stated themes for both the School and its MBA Executive of "Responsibility" and "Corporate Responsibility and Ethical Practice". Involvement in Stage 3 was seen as an opportunity to directly address these issues within the context of the MBA (Executive)

The purpose of the project was to also further connections between business and the Graduate School of Business with a particular objective of engaging in an action based research project that would lead to meaningful change in an area of CSR-Sustainability for the organization and the Graduate School of Business.

1.1 Original Proposal:

The original Stage 3 proposal submitted by RMIT-GSB to ARIES identified two major objectives for the RMIT- engaging with a potential business partner- Carrier Air Conditioning- which had identified more than 40 potential projects and secondly to review the entire core courses of the MBA Executive program with a view to improving the CSR- Sustainability content in appropriate courses.

In addition the vehicle for engagement between students and Carrier was identified as BUSM 2170 Managing Personal And Corporate Responsibility. This is the same course that featured in ARIES Stage 2 project that saw its' Sustainability content increased dramatically.

1.1.1 MBAs and CSR/Sustainability

Despite the increasing media attention given to CSR and Sustainability, generally speaking this has not translated in to sustainable demand for postgraduate courses in the RMIT MBA. In 2004 a questionnaire was sent to RMIT MBA students seeking information as to why they did not enrol in such courses when they were made available. Whilst the feedback covered a range of issues, up to 30% of respondents indicated that they believed that their own organisations did not take the subject matter seriously and therefore it was an ill-advised choice in terms of career advancement. Others highlighted the lack of employment opportunity as a key factor whilst others indicated that the subject matter was not as important as traditional functional disciplines such as marketing, finance and strategy.

The results of this survey along with anecdotal information collected in recent times suggests that students often misunderstand the nature of CSR and Sustainability and some associate it with either radical environmentalism, others with stifling business activity and a minority questioning the evidence around sustainability. The increase in scientific evidence around

global warming has done much to dispel the latter views, many students still seem to not value such courses based on the inability to attract numbers to BUSM 2170 in 2007 & and in trimester 1,2008.

This raises an issue around the purpose and function of business schools. If they are run as businesses, then they will only tend to offer subject matter that businesses and business students demand. In economic terms this is responding to a want rather than a need. Universities need to consider whether they have a responsibility to also address the needs of business and not just their wants. If education is about sharing and enhancing knowledge it must also include teaching people what they need to know and not just what they want to know.

The Graduate School of Business has "Responsibility" as one of its key themes. Many of the core courses in the MBA program refer to social responsibility yet specific content is often not reflected in the core program. The ARIES Stage 3 project provided a means by which the GSB could review some of the course offerings, both core and electives, and work towards a more definitive and demonstrable presence of CSR and Sustainability in the MBA. In this way the GSB would be addressing a need of business. By doing so students would be exposed to these concepts throughout the core courses of the MBA. This may address some of the misunderstandings of CSR and Sustainability highlighted by the 2004 survey and as a result students may come to recognise the strategic importance of CSR and Sustainability to their organisations thus increase demand for elective courses.

1.1.2 Participants and Roles:

Project Leader: Dr Michael Segon, Senior Lecturer, Associate Director Academic RMIT GSB

Principle Researcher: Ms Peliwe Mnguni: GSB Adjunct Lecturer- Sustainability Researcher*

Ms Fiona Healy: GSB Adjunct Lecturer and Sustainability Researcher

Project Support: Caroline Bayliss, Director Global Sustainability Institute RMIT University

Carrier Air-conditioning: Primary Business Partner

MBA Executive Students: Primary researchers

** Ms Peliwe Mnguni was involved in both ARIES stages 1 and 2 as a principle researcher and course facilitator. It was intended that she continue with this role for Stage 3. Whilst she did contribute to initial discussions regarding Stage 3, she decided to return to South Africa to pursue academic opportunities. Ms Fiona Healy was asked to join the project as a researcher and co-facilitator. Ms Healy was able to attend ARIES meetings representing the GSB, however, her coordination of the FebFast program restricted her involvement. With BUSM 2170 not successfully running in Trimester 1, 2008, her involvement reduced to that of potential second supervisor to any research students and member of the revised Community of Practice.*

As identified above, the MBA Executive elective BUSM 2170 Managing Personal and Corporate Social Responsibility was to be used as the vehicle for MBA students to engage directly with Carrier. The course was offered as an elective throughout the GSB and Business Portfolio (Faculty) for the summer semester 2007/8 (November- February)

1.1.3 The Original Research Objective and Expected Outcomes

The primary outcomes as identified in the original Stage 3 Proposal were as follows:

- Development of sustainability models with respect to specific business activities. This means presenting the concept of sustainability from the perspective of building organisations that can continue to exist in the future due to the establishing of lasting relationships with customers and suppliers. It also encompasses examining the means of production, i.e. natural resources, human and financial capital and the need for these to be on-going- i.e. "sustainable". This would mean revisiting the economic model of the market system and highlighting the inadequacy of the concept of the equilibrium price based on the interaction of demand and supply. Current economic theory tends to make assumptions concerning the extent of available supply (of goods and services) as that which is brought to the market and not what is actually available. Thus the market often makes no allowance for the diminishing of natural resources levels, provided the supply in the market is maintained as a similar level. A short case study on the near extinction of the North Atlantic cod due to over fishing - yet the price remaining unchanged- will be used as an illustrator of this point.

The critical issue for the presentation of these CSR/Sustainability models is that they must have business credibility. They must be seen to add value to the organization in terms of managing the organisation's resource utilisation.

The review of the MBA is taking place at two distinct levels. As part of the ARIES project the eight (8) compulsory courses of the MBA have been and are continuing to be reviewed. The objective of the ARIES component of this review is to identify the level of CSR and Sustainability content which needs to be embedded across the curriculum so as to ensure graduates have understanding and application skills.

- The Review will be conducted through the GSB teaching Faculty. Course Coordinators (those responsible for the delivery of courses) are required to undertake reconciliation of course content against approved course learning outcomes. Coordinators must demonstrate how these objectives are translated into learning activities in the classroom and how this contributes to knowledge and application capabilities.
- As identified in the Project title section above, at least four MBA compulsory courses have CSR and Sustainability as defined learning outcomes. The review will determine whether these outcomes are being translated into meaningful learning experiences and as identifiable topic areas in each course.
- If the review identifies that this is not the case, the structure of each course will be altered to reflect these key learning outcomes. This will in effect be a structural change

to the MBA programme. This information will appear in each course's syllabus and be available to the public, in limited form, on the RMIT Website.

- A second stage of the MBA review will be to examine the MBA (Exec) suite of electives. The MBA program is currently structured with eight compulsory course and four electives. Students may choose any four courses from those available in GSB and cross the university. A GSB strategy is to group courses together with similar theme of content that builds on each course and to advertise these as cohesive majors. A minimum of three courses from any one defined groups must be undertaken by students to be seen to have undertaken a "major" study in particular field.

The GSB currently has a series of courses that form a CSR major (four elective courses). These include:

- BUSM 2170 Managing Personal and Corporate Responsibility
- BUSM 1229 Corporate Governance Principles and Processes
- BUSM 1561 Corporate Citizenship & Sustainability
- And an approved related course from another School, i.e. law, finance, economics, etc

The three GSB courses; BUSM 2170, BUSM 1229 and BUSM 1561 will undergo a review process to determine whether the course content is appropriate and reflects up to date research and best practice. BUSM 2170 is being run in trimester 2, 2008 and will be reviewed as a matter of course at the end of the trimester. BUSM 1229 and BUSM 1561 will be reviewed in trimester 1, 2009 with a view to being offered in trimester 2, 2009 and trimester 3 2009

A primary objective of this major field of study is to develop managers with expertise in Business Ethics and CSR/Sustainability. It is anticipated that as the CSR/Sustainability agenda becomes more accepted as mainstream business activity, organisations will develop positions with responsibility for CSR/Sustainability strategy. MBA graduates with this knowledge from the RMIT GSB should be well placed to take advantage of this developing employment field.

1.1.4 Initial Developments: Action Research Components

As previously identified, the vehicle for the MBA engagement with the business community in an action research project was the GSB elective BUSM 2170 Managing Personal and Corporate Responsibility. As identified in the original Stage 3 proposal, the intention was that students enrolled in this course would form groups of 4-5 then liaise directly with representatives from Carrier Air Conditioning to identify a CSR and/or Sustainability project that they could research and provide valuable perspectives to the organisation. The objective was to have been the development of practical strategies that would lead to meaningful change at Carrier either with the 13-week trimester or the development of strategies that could be implemented over an agreed period that would enhance the organisation's position. Carrier

had identified over 40 potential projects that would have been available to the student groups.

Unfortunately only 10 students enrolled in BUSM 2170 Managing Personal and Corporate Responsibility course. The RMIT Business Portfolio specifies that a minimum of 15 students must be enrolled in any class for it to be considered economical. Unfortunately the course was not permitted to run.

Despite requests for the course to be re-offered as first semester 2008 course, and publicised to students in December 2007 (re-enrolment period) this was not done. It is unclear as to why the Administrative Manager responsible for timetabling did not accede to the request. Instead the course was scheduled for semester 2. The Administrative manager was made aware of the need to reschedule and readvertise this course as a semester 1, 2008 offering and the fact that ARIES funding was linked in part to this course. This issue raises matters of internal organisational politics consistent with Robbins (1990) and his observations of the political activities of dominant coalitions and their abilities to affect or determine organisational decisions.

Thus in late January 2008, given that the enrolment period for semester 1, 2008 had effectively closed, it became apparent that the GSB did not have a viable course running that could be used as the basis for the action research engagement with Carrier.

These events delayed the GSB's involvement in the business engagement aspect of the project.

1.2 Review of MBA Executive Core Courses

The GSB holds regular monthly MBA team meetings attended by teaching faculty and key administrative staff. The review of the eight (8) MBA core courses was one of the agenda items in mid-late 2007. The first task was to map the MBA core content. At the August 2007, meeting, Dr Michael Segon requested course coordinators to email an outline of each course to him, specifically the 12 weekly topics and an overview of assessment. The objective was to establish what was actually taught and examined on a unit by unit basis across the eight courses, and to determine if and where the key themes of Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable Practice were evident.

Once the information had been collected it was mapped in an excel document and presented at the September 2007 MBA meeting.

This review identified the following:

- BUSM 3902 Global Business Context had 1 unit called "Ethics" that included a limited overview of CSR and the Global Reporting Initiative, but no specific content in Sustainability.
- BUSM 3907 Leadership and Management had no identifiable topic addressing responsible practice or leading organizations in a sustainable way.
- BAFI 3166 Finance and Accounting for Business Decisions had no identifiable topic addressing the measurement of CSR or Sustainability

- MKTG Marketing Management had no identifiable topic addressing responsible marketing practice.
- BUSM 3912 Managing people, Relationships and Performance had 1 unit called “Ethics and Law” that included aspects of ethical decision-making. (Identified as replicating the some of the content of the BUSM 3902 Global Business Context unit “Ethics”).
- BUSM 3922 Creating Strategy had no identifiable topic addressing CSR or Sustainability from a strategic perspective.
- BUSM 3927 Implementing Strategy had no identifiable topic issues pertaining to the challenges of introducing CSR or Sustainability into an organization.

The meetings allowed for an open discussion of the course content of the MBA and the issue of whether CSR-Sustainability should be featured more predominantly. Several outcomes occurred as a result of this mapping activity.

It was one of the first occasions that the teaching faculty could actually see what was being taught in other core courses on a week-by-week basis. This led to a better understanding of the core of the MBA and how each course relates to others. Prior to this activity such understanding was actually based on assumption of content.

Secondly it identified that duplication existed across the core course due to the fact that some courses had deviated from the content approved at University level. This suggests course coordinators had been amending course content in isolation, without recourse to the MBA program map. (The RMIT University permits minor changes to be made to course content with the need to seek re-approval from programs committees)

Thirdly, despite CSR, Responsible Decision Making and Sustainability appearing as program objectives and in some cases as Course objectives, little direct content could be identified.

Discussion at the September and October MBA meetings focused on matters of content and eliminating duplication. Importantly course coordinators were vocal in their views as to what content was necessary in other courses so as to make their own course more meaningful. For example, the Coordinator of Creating Strategy identified that students needed to have well developed financial and marketing knowledge and skills so as to complete business strategy plans in the strategy course. Similarly, I as the coordinator of BUSM 3912 Managing People, Relationships and Performance stated that as this course and BUSM 3907 used the same management competency models as analytical frames for the diagnosis of developmental needs, students needed to tackle BUSM 3907 first as this was where the models were introduced and explained. Furthermore the faculty discussed the importance of CSR and Sustainability across the MBA. Course coordinators of BUSM 3922 Creating Strategy and BUSM 3927 Implementing Strategy suggested that their courses did address content relevant to CSR and Sustainability through discussion and case materials, however it was not formally identified as one of the 12 units in these courses course. The course coordinator of BUSM 3907 Leadership and Management suggested that “responsible leadership practice” included addressing the issue of leading organisations in sustainable ways, and that this was a key element of the course and discussed regularly. He further suggested that some of these

concepts were embedded in the course unit called “Professionalism and Leadership” and that this could be retitled and redesigned to make this content more explicit.

The faculty also considered that the introductory course of the MBA Program, BUSM 3902 Global Business Context, was not delivering the appropriate contextual content necessary for the MBA. Most of the faculty identified that this course also needed to be revised and it was also noted that the 2005 University approved course guide had a more prominent component of CSR and Sustainability than present in the course. However, the coordinator of BUSM 3902 was not present at these meetings, due in part to other commitments, and he had also expressed a view that the course worked well and did not require revision.

1.2.1 Redesign of MBA Executive Core:

As a result of the MBA review, it was agreed that some of the core content needed to be addressed. The first priority was to review and redesign BUSM 3912 Managing People, Relationships and Performance as this course was regarded as the most inconsistent with the University approved course content. The ARIES Stage 3 Project Leader, Dr Michael Segon, was also the course coordinator of this course and undertook to redesign this Unit and remove duplication with BUSM 3902 Global Business Context and to feature topics related increased personal responsibility, empathy and trust within relationship management ready for a semester 1, 2008. This was a project that needed to be completed by January 2008, as that was the GSB deadline for major changes to printed courseware. The task was undertaken by the course teaching team that included adjunct faculty Ms Elizabeth Corbett, Ms Judith Watson and Ms Julie Shaw. All were experienced educators and had been involved with this course for at least 2 semesters and were aware of the need for change.

As the course was built on adult learning methodologies and reflective practice, no change was considered to the educational pedagogy. However, several meetings took place in October, November and December of 2007 to discuss the course’s structure and content. In all six new units were written to reflect the management competency frameworks of Boyatzis (1982) Peddler et al (2001) and Goleman et al. (2002). This also re-established the relationship to BUSM 3907 Leadership and Management that also uses these frameworks. A specific unit was included that is of direct relevance to the issues of responsibility and sustainability.

“Unit 7 -Developing Capability: Building Sustainable Relationships through Empathy and Trust”

This unit was included in the courseware for BUSM 3912 Managing People. It builds on other aspects of the course with an emphasis on trust through the development of the competency of empathy and its role in establishing and maintaining relationships in an ethical manner, between colleagues, managers, superiors, direct reports and other stakeholders. “Empathy” is also a competency identified by both Boyatzis and Goleman as a critical ability necessary to establish and maintain effective interpersonal relationships. It is clear that effective corporate social responsibility requires people to respect the rights of individuals, communities and those of the future. It requires people to treat each other with respect and dignity. It is argued that empathy and trust are fundamental, as without trust, relationships cannot be formed and maintained. “Responsible practice’ is therefore built in this ethical premise of treating people

as ends and not as means to an end, a concept that is discussed in virtue ethics and a key feature of this unit.

1.2.2 Student Feedback:

Students are completing the course in the First week of June 2008. An evaluation form has been prepared with a specific question addressing the inclusion of the content empathy as the basis for sustaining relationships. As identified above an objective of this course is to develop management capabilities that enable the building and maintaining of relationships. In this way the concept of building sustainable relationships is seen as consistent with the ARIES Stage 3 objectives.

1.3 Revised Action Learning Strategy for 2008.

In order for the GSB to continue with the Stage 3 Project and meet the project deadline of May 2008, an alternative engagement strategy was devised. Given that the original course BUSM 2170 was not running in Semester 1, MBA executive students were offered an opportunity to engage in a full research course BUSM 1539 Research Project as the basis for investigating a CSR- Sustainability aspect of their own businesses, using an action- research framework. (This was arguably more in keeping with the original action- research focus of the project).

It was made clear to the students that their organizations would need to be partner organizations to the GSB and thus involved in the project.

Five students responded to the email and were invited to a meeting with Dr Michael Segon, who would act as the primary supervisor. Following these discussions in early March, three students were deemed as not meeting the criteria- as they were fulltime international students who did not have access to an Australian organization.

Two students decided to proceed with the research project.

Student 1: MBA Executive student who works for a large Australian bank. She proposed to examine the bank's current CSR strategy with a view to assessing the change strategy and its effectiveness.

Unfortunately this student subsequently withdrew from the project citing excessive work load with other courses and transferred enrolment to BUSM 2170 in second semester and will undertake a modified project consistent with the ARIES Stage 3 process and objectives, but clearly after the ARIES program has ended.

Student 2: MBA Executive student who has established a project examining the retrofitting of existing buildings with less energy intensive lighting. The student has partnered with a lighting manufacturer and is proposing to trial a refit of an apartment building in Melbourne's CBD. The measurement of energy savings would then be used as the basis for carbon emission savings. This project would be a case study intended for ongoing application by both the manufacturer and the industry as evidence of the feasibility of retrofitting existing buildings.

1.3.1 Current Status

The student concerned is completing secondary research leading to a literature review that will form approximately 50% of the final research project submission for assessment in BUSM 1539 MBA Research Project.

Despite emails in May requesting updates and meetings to discuss progress, the student failed to make contact until later July. At that point the student advised that he had suspended his research due to workload commitment with other MBA courses. He has now resumed the research and is expected to complete the project by the end of Trimester 2, 2008 which is early November (beyond the timeframe of the ARIES project). As RMIT regulations allow students to withdraw from courses without the permission of, and no requirement to notify course coordinators, I was unaware of the student's decision. In a meeting held late July with the student, the matter of ARIES was raised and that the research project undertaken by the students was linked to this project. Whilst the students acknowledged this and regretted the need to suspend his research, he indicated that his workload and study management took priority.

2.0 Refocused ARIES Stage 3

The original intent of the ARIES Project for the GSB was to engage in Action Research activities with a business partner. Secondary objectives included reviewing the content of some MBA courses that the project leader had control over. With the inability to get BUSM 2170 running in both trimester 3, 2007 and trimester 1, 2008 and the inconsistent responses from students regarding undertaking individual research projects, a new focus needed to be found to enable meaningful outcomes to occur in the area of CSR/Sustainability for the GSB. Following consultation with ARIES, the provision of advice that the original project objectives would not be met, a revised strategy was proposed that moved the primary focus of the project from an Action Research and engagement in a change project within business to a development of an increased focus of CSR/Sustainability curriculum in the core courses of the MBA Executive.

The rationale for this objective lay in the fact that the Graduate School of Business has stated themes of CSR and Sustainability both as part of its mission statement and as capability objectives for students completing the MBA. However as identified through the MBA mapping exercise in the early stage of this project, little specific content was actually included in the MBA. This presented an opportunity for the ARIES Project to focus directly on all of core courses of the MBA and attempt to include specific CSR/Sustainability content in as many of the courses as possible.

There were two approaches developed to facilitate these objectives. Firstly the MBA review commenced in 2007 had identified BUSM 3902 Global Business Context as requiring revision and a more prominent feature for CSR/Sustainability. Normally the responsibility for rewriting or redesign of a course lies with the course coordinator. Given the reluctance of the coordinator to revise the course material, the ARIES Project Coordinator, Dr Michael Segon approached the Academic Director of the GSB, with a proposal to rewrite the Unit titled "Ethics" in BUSM 3902 as a means of continuing the ARIES project. In addition it was pointed out that the ARIES Project Coordinator was an active researcher and a consultant in the field

and that he would be the appropriate writer for the unit. He further proposed that in line with the faculty view that more substantive perspective on CSR/Sustainability, that the rewrite be expanded to 2 units for this course. The Academic Director and the GSB accepted this.

2.1 Global Business Content: The introductory course of the MBA Executive

As identified in section 1.3.1 the review of the MBA core courses undertaken in 2007 as part of the ARIES Project identified that BUSM 3902 Global Business Context had 1 unit called “Ethics” that included an overview of CSR and the Global Reporting Initiative, but no specific content in Sustainability.

The Graduate School of Business agreed, as part of the ARIES Stage 3 to an amended objective of expanding the presence of CSR-Sustainability in this course via the development of two units:

- Unit 5 Individual Responsibility and
- Unit 6 CSR-Sustainability

The existing unit called “Ethics” included brief information on the ethical concepts of utilitarianism (consequentialism) and deontology or duty based ethics. A brief section on Corporate Social Responsibility described it as emerging in the 1950s in the US, which was technically not correct. The unit then outlined the Global Reporting Initiative. Little research or substantive readings were included.

The first Unit Individual Responsibility focused on the concepts of understanding ethical dimensions to decision-making and how this leads to more responsible practice on the part of leaders and managers. As the writer has taught business ethics and CSR for almost 20 years, substantive new research was not necessary, rather the approach taken was one of designing a unit that introduced ethical concepts in a practical way underpinned by literature that focused on ethical decision-making.

As previously identified, the educational design used by the Graduate School for the MBA is adult learning based facilitation. There is no need to alter this pedagogy as it is already identified as an appropriate method for MBAs. However, case material such as the Ford Pinto, in which an unsafe car was allowed to go to market, justified in economic and legal terms, is presented as part of the course material to highlight that responsible decision making involves consideration of a variety of stakeholders not just shareholders. This case also highlights how short sighted decision making damages trust between customers and the organisation- i.e. irresponsibility jeopardises reputation and a sustainable future.

The Second Unit “CSR-Sustainability” was written in a similar fashion. Key concepts included history of CSR, CSR as Corporate Strategy and an outline of Sustainability. As identified above, this unit included a review of economic models and its flaw regarding pricing of resources. Case studies included the North Atlantic Cod, referred to earlier, Shell’s Brent Spar Oil Rig and their failure to engage with stakeholders.

This means that students commencing the MBA Executive will address specific topics in CSR and Sustainability within their first semester.

Both Units are in the final stages of writing and will be included in the Semester 2, 2008 course offering.

2.2 Proposed Further Expansion of CSR-Sustainability

Following the agreement to expand the CSR Sustainability offerings in BUSM 3902 Global Business Context, discussions with GSB faculty continued as part of the MBA core course review. Course coordinators in several courses identified that CSR-Sustainability themes were present but could be made more prominent.

ARIES Project Leader Dr Michael Segon undertook to draft a discussion paper identifying the remaining core courses and the type of subject matter that could be included in the course courses. This was completed and summarised below:

1. Leadership and Management Redevelopment of 1 unit "Responsible Leadership" agreed and scheduled for trimester 1, 2009
2. Business and Economic Analysis - proposed development of 1 unit examining carbon trading and economics of climate change
3. Finance and Accounting for Business decision - proposed development of 1 unit examining financial recording of CSR-Sustainability- e.g. TBL & balanced Scorecard etc
4. Marketing Management- proposed development of 1 unit addressing issues of responsible (ethical) marketing
5. Creating Strategy - proposed development of 1 unit addressing CSR and Sustainability and Business Strategy-
6. Implementing Strategy - proposed development of 1 unit addressing implementation of CSR-Sustainability initiative and challenges of such change programs.

The proposal was forwarded to the Head of School who agreed in principle that such changes were possible and would enhance the program. A letter of support came from the Graduate School's (Acting) Head of School.

He requested that discussions with faculty continue, however, the Graduate School has recently appointed a new MBA Director, with a background in Strategy and Philosophy. The Head of School requested that the new Director be a leader in these discussions. At this stage the new Director of MBA has provided in-principal support for the suggested changes but has not committed to a specific timeframe. Suggested topics for Marketing Management, Business Economic Analysis, Creating Strategy and Finance and Accounting courses need faculty approval. Whilst course coordinators are supportive of including concept, they have agreed to the specific topics suggested. This continues to be discussed at MBA faculty meetings. It is anticipated that changes will occur to these units in 2009. It should be noted that coordinators

of Leadership and Management and Implementing Strategy have indicated increased focus will be built in to their courses as of trimester 1, 2009.

2.2.1 Update January 2009

The Head of School, John Toohey, has approved the proposal to include an Ethics/CSR/Sustainability component in each of the core units of the MBA Executive! The RMIT University through the Graduate School of Business has commenced a formal review of the MBA programs, facilitated by Professor Ed Davis AM, Dean of the Division of Economic and Financial Studies at Macquarie University, and former Deputy Director at Macquarie Graduate School of Management. The review will address all the compulsory courses of the MBA and MBA Executive with an introduction in mid 2010. The objectives of increasing the CSR-Sustainability component is likely to be given even further impetus by this Review in the light of calls for increased attention to ethics and responsible practice as a result of the Global Financial Crisis. As of January 2009 the commitment to increase the CSR/Sustainability component was as follows: Global Business now has 2 units thanks to ARIES, and Finance and Accounting will focus on reporting systems, Marketing will get an Ethical Marketing or Responsible Marketing Unit, whilst Business and Economic Analysis will get a unit examining the changing nature of economics given the financial meltdown and a session on carbon trading. Leadership and Management also has a stronger focus on Ethical Leadership thanks to ARIES and this will be expanded further. The remaining courses will be adjusted progressively as we can't get them all done prior to semester starting.

Just finished an MBA team meeting where the proposal was tabled ... everyone was in agreement with the principle ... now comes the design of content and implementation. Yes it will be promoted to future MBA Execs probably as of semester 2 but I expect a press release shortly...

I think that without the ARIES focus this would not have happened. We will be making a press release announcing the "Responsible MBA" or some appropriate brand...

MS reflections, January 2009.

2.3 CSR-Sustainability Community of Practice

Another important outcome of the refocused ARIES Stage 3 was the opportunity to re-engage with the concept of the Community of Practice. With the failure of any CSR-Sustainability courses to run over the past 2 years, and the limited focus in any of the core courses, the Community had little real function and had not met for 18 months. Several members had also indicated their inability to continue. Following discussions with the Head of the GSB, it was agreed that a reinvigoration of the CoP concept was in order and that there was significant role to play given the direction of the ARIES Stage 3.

A meeting was organised with the Director of the Global Sustainability Institute at RMIT, Caroline Bayliss and her support was enlisted to approach key CSR-Sustainability personnel in major industries on the Institute's databases. Several leading academics at RMIT and at other Universities are also being approached to join this committee.

Currently the Committee Membership includes:

- Dr Michael Segon- RMIT GSB
- MS Caroline Bayliss- Director Global Sustainability Unit RMIT University
- Professor Ronald Francis- Professor of Business Ethics Victoria University
- Ms Fiona Healy- Director Feb Fast (Former CSR Manager at Origin Energy)
- Mr Dean Newlan- Partner McGrath Nicol- Specialist in CSR and Integrity
- Mr Murali Neelamegan- Director Dynamic Wisdom Consulting

Invitations have been extended to:

- ANZ Banking Corporation
- The Village Well Organisation

Its two primary functions are:

1. To provide practical advice concerning the issues facing Australian Organizations regarding CSR-Sustainability and how these are addressed in the courses in the MBA Executive, and
2. Provide ongoing opportunities for joint research activities between the GSB and organizations in the area of CSR-Sustainability

2.4 Summary of Outcomes

1. Inclusion of two (new) Responsibility- CSR /Sustainability Units in Global Business Context, the introductory course of the MBA.
2. Inclusion of "Empathy and Trust"- a key interpersonal capability required for building and sustaining relationships in Managing People, relationships and Performance.
3. Redevelopment of the Professionalism unit in Leadership and Management, to focus on "Responsible Leadership" that extends these notions of Professionalism to include "ethical leadership" and the approaches of leadership writers such as Kouzes and Posner and Mant that advocate the importance of leaders to act in an ethical manner and to role models behaviours.
4. Greater attention to CSR-Sustainability Issues in the content of the capstone course in the MBA- Implementing Strategy.
5. A commitment from the Graduate School to continue the review the content of the remaining units in the core of the MBA.
6. Research students pursuing a CSR- Sustainability project across Trimester 1 & 2, 2008.
7. Re-establishment of the Community of Practice in CSR-Sustainability.

8. January 2009: Agreement from the Head of GSB and GSB academic staff to include an Ethics/CSR/Sustainability component in each of the core units of the MBA Executive.

2.5 Next Steps

Timelines for inclusion of new units and revised units in MBA courseware.

Whilst content has been included informally in semester 2, 2008, the Graduate School makes formal changes to printed material only once per year.

The new two units in Global Business Context and the revised unit in Leadership and Management will be formally included in printed courseware to be available as of February 2009. At this point copies of the full units will be made available to ARIES.

Community of Practice: The GSB has announced the formation of an Advisory Board that will also function as a Programs Committee for MBA Programs in 2009. The relationship between this Board and the Community of Practice will need to be clarified as both have content advisory roles. The Community of Practice will have a significant advisory role in the review of BUSM 2170 Managing Personal and Social Responsibility and the 2 other CSR courses (see next item).

Review of BUSM 2170 Managing Personal and Corporate Responsibility will commence as per normal practice at the end of semester 2, 2008 taking into account student feedback. A review of the content of BUSM 1229 Corporate Governance Principles and Processes and BUSM 1561 Corporate Citizenship & Sustainability will commence in semester 1, 2009. BUSM 2170 is scheduled to be offered in semester 2, 2009 so any course changes will need to be completed by mid May, 2009.

As previously identified, Dr Michael Segon is conducting a survey of MBA students to gauge their perceptions of CSR, Sustainability, Ethics and their choice of elective courses within the context of career development. This survey is currently being administered (October, 2008) the results of which will be used for a major paper to be delivered at the 2nd World Business Ethics Forum in Hong Kong, December 2008. This data will also be used as the basis for reviewing BUSM 1229 Corporate Governance Principles and Processes and BUSM 1561 Corporate Citizenship & Sustainability, in particular determining which elective will be offered in Trimester 3, 2009. This decision will drive the review process in semester 1 & 2 2009. This will need to be completed by July - August 2009 to allow sufficient publicity of the elective and address any RMIT regulations.

CSR- Sustainability will be continued to be promoted to the MBA Student body as a potential research undertaking through BUSM 3519 Research Project.

3.0 Reflection

The GSB's involvement can best be described as a stop start affair. Following the successful conclusion of the Stage 2 Project and the very positive response of students who undertook BUSM 2170 Managing Personal and CSR, I felt confident that the course would be well supported and be the basis for the Stage 3 engagement. RMIT's teaching philosophy has always included action research, particularly at the post graduate level and I saw the opportunity to

engage with Carrier as a significant vehicle to showcase the GSB's progress and commitment to CSR & Sustainability.

Promoting the course to MBA Students

Previous experience with offering BUSM 2170 Managing Personal and CSR had shown that whilst there was always a core group of about 10 students who wanted to undertake this type of course, this was insufficient to guarantee course viability and that additional promotion would be required. During semester 2, 2007, as part of my own teaching schedule, I would regularly mention BUSM 2170 Managing Personal and CSR to students as an elective offering during the spring-summer school period. During the lead up to enrolment period in October 2007, I liaised with the MBA Administrator and discussed the course and the involvement and funding provided by ARIES and the importance of having a viable number of students enrolled in the course.

As part of the promotion I prepared an email outlining ARIES and its involvement with the Graduate School (and that the course would be given special assistance in terms of meeting action research expenses) and forwarded this to the MBA Administrator with a request that it be part of the message to all MBA Exec students advising them of elective options during trimester 3 and details of the classes, workshops etc. At the time I felt that this additional information would attract the additional 5 or 6 students needed to ensure the course viability. It became apparent in early November 2007 that there was an insufficient enrolment with only 8 confirmed students. This was extremely disappointing and frustrating and to some extent somewhat perplexing as issues dealing with CSR, Sustainability, Global warming etc had become far more prevalent in mainstream and business media and I had believed that this would have influence students choice. I decided to contact several students who had previously indicated their interest in the course, not only to advise them of the non-viability of the course, but also to seek their feedback as to possible strategies for increasing the profile and attractiveness of BUSM 2170 Managing Personal and CSR for future offerings. During the first discussion with one of the students I asked how they reacted to the information about ARIES and the additional support and whether this may have been a factor in students elective choice. I received what became a collective "what ARIES information?"

No Special Treatment

It was clear that despite preparation of this additional information it did not appear to have been forwarded to MBA Executive students, so none of the student group had any knowledge of the project and the opportunity to be involved with an action research project with Carrier. In part the rationale appears to have been that this course should be seen as the same as any other elective and thus not be given any additional assistance.

Who runs the University?

The second frustration occurred soon after the cancellation of the course as a summer/spring (trimester 3) option. I contacted the MBA Administrative manager and requested that the course to be offered again as a semester 1, 2008 elective. (This required the course to be

offered out of sequence- i.e. the GSB has a rotating policy for electives ensuring that they are offered once every 3 semesters so as to avoid too many or too few electives being offered in any one semester. I discussed the situation with the MBA Administrative Manager and identified that a significant amount of funding supplied by ARIES was linked to the course and as such it needed to be offered, this time with the additional information or we risk losing the funding. I can recall that at the time the Administrator opined that there already were too many electives offered in semester 1 and that BUSM 2170 had greater likelihood of attracting sufficient numbers if offered in semester 2, 2008. I again clarified that these were unusual circumstances and that the timelines for completion of the program required the course to be run in semester 1 as the project needed to be completed by end of May 2008, consistent with the contractual agreement between ARIES and the GSB.

Them and Us

Whilst I can understand the logic used to explain this decision, I felt that there were other issues, namely the tensions that often surface between academics responsible for course delivery and the managers and support staff who administer the courses and programs that accounted for this decision. Noted organisational theorist Henry Mintzberg discusses organisations that experience tensions between professionals and administrators- he suggests that such organisations, those he terms "professional bureaucracies" experience difficulties because, by nature, the professionals are those that do the actual work of the organisation utilising non standard and flexible delivery methods. On the other hand the administrators perform their work using structured and bureaucratic approaches. This inconsistency creates the tension and each group competes for dominance. He states that the administrators- which he calls technocrats and support staff- seek to control and limit the activities of the professionals- through standardisation and adherence to bureaucratic processes- not realising this in fact limits their ability to perform their duties. I believe that this is a more likely explanation for the decision concerning course scheduling.

At this point I felt extremely disheartened and frustrated- both with the RMIT, its systems and politics and with the student body for failing to recognise the importance of this subject matter. I was uncertain how to proceed and felt that the ARIES project was in substantial jeopardy. In addition I was responsible for an MBA study intensive in France which was only a matter of weeks away, plus responsible for rewriting the course materials for BUSM 3912 Managing People Relationships and Performance- a unit of which included a "responsibility" perspective which revolved around equipping students with the skills and abilities to build lasting relationships based on trust. This has been discussed elsewhere in this report. Needless to say the ARIES project was put on the backburner whilst these other priorities took greater prominence.

In January of 2008 I was accompanying a group of MBA Executive students in France for a weeklong residential program studying European business practices. As the course was facilitated by academics from the host institution, whilst I was often in class with the students, I also had time to reflect on the ARIES project and how it might be furthered. Clearly the preferred strategy of using BUSM 2170 as a vehicle in semester 1 2008 was no longer an option, however, it occurred to me that the MBA used to have a compulsory course called BUSM 1539 Research Project. Ironically, I was instrumental in removing this as a

compulsory course as benchmarking had shown that the majority of quality MBA programs were coursework and not research based. Yet it suddenly dawned on me that the solution rested with this course- a full research course that would allow students to undertake organisational research and as there was no course content there would not be issues with regards minimum class sizes, etc. However, issues did subsequently emerge which further delayed the project (as explained below).

I immediately contacted the Academic Director and the Research Director with a proposal to email all the MBA Executive students- approximately 250 students and invite any with an interest in CSR/Sustainability/Ethics with a free elective, or who might wish to transfer from an existing enrolled semester 1, 2008, to BUSM 1539 and pursue an 8000-10000 word research project with myself and Fiona Healy as principal supervisors. I also decided to advertise that some of the research costs would be covered under the ARIES arrangements. It was also clear that limiting the number of participating students to 6-8 students would be more manageable from a supervisory and timeline perspective. Due to the restricted time frame of a mid-late May completion date, I considered that the Carrier option would be difficult to further as the primary research vehicle. Students would need time to establish key relationships with Carrier personnel and then to actually undertake research. It was clear with my schedule, absence and return date in late February 2008, it would be highly unlikely that such relationships could be established. I therefore decided to vary the proposed ARIES agreement and allow students to research their own organisations and relationships and data were established and available.

More Delays

Both the Academic Director and the Professor responsible for the course were supportive of the concept, however, the time differences between Australia and France meant communications were rather slow and each communication took place over several days, rather than several hours. Several other issues emerged that delayed the promotion of the research course option even further. There was some debate about the wording of the invitation to students to undertake this course. In particular whether it was appropriate to mention the issue of financial research support. It was suggested that this might cause a precedent and that current and future research students undertaking this course may expect a similar opportunity. I naturally assumed that I would be the principle supervisor, however this matter was not clarified and whilst I initially held meetings with the students and the sole student who undertook the research, the coordinator of the research unit also felt that they were to be the principle supervisor and also had discussions with the student.

The coordinator of the research course also suggested that the word limit of 10,000 was excessive for MBA students undertaking one course and that a lower figure should be offered for the research project. Yet again I felt that semantics and positions were delaying what I considered a workable solution. I was frustrated with being in France and unable to directly sit down and discuss the issue with those concerned. The sense of urgency with the project did not seem to be shared by others within the School, which was another bone of contention. I agreed to compromise and changed the wording of the invitation to remove any reference to research support and to reduce the word limit to a maximum of 8,000 words. Unfortunately these delays meant that this notification did not flow through to students until mid February 2008, a matter of only 8-10 days prior to semester 1 starting. I was somewhat

pessimistic about the likelihood students agreeing to transfer to the course as past experience tells me that once students have enrolled they are not likely to move unless it is absolutely necessary.

Upon my return to Melbourne I was very pleased to see that five students had responded to the invitation and I immediately contacted them through emails and I organised meetings with all of them. I was disappointed to realise that 3 were full fee international students and had no links to Australian organizations. (This requirement was made clear in the email). I was somewhat annoyed with their suggestions that they could undertake research with their own organisation back in India/US etc. I tried to make it clear to them that the nature of the action research and the focus on Australian B-Schools engaging with Australian Organisations. I put forward the Carrier possibility but they were less than enthusiastic. My impression was that they thought the option of no classes and a 5,000-8,000 word report was perhaps an easier than a normal class based elective. I settled on two students, details described above, but again was disappointed that one student with a very challenging proposal dropped the course due to workload.

At this point I felt that the funding and the whole project was yet again in jeopardy. One student undertaking arguably a worthwhile project was not what I considered a robust research outcome and certainly not in keeping with the research proposal. However, from misfortune opportunities can and did present themselves. Clearly the funding was an attractive end for the GSB and it became apparent that an amended focus with a direct link to one or more of the MBA Executive courses became a real possibility, something that I had been pushing for several years.

I also began to give much greater consideration to the topic of Ethics, CSR and Sustainability and its place in the MBA. Having failed again at being able to run the CSR elective due to insufficient demand, I reflected on a survey of MBA Exec students conducted in 2004 asking why they didn't undertake such electives when offered. I reviewed the results and found that more than 30% of respondents considered the subject matter not as important as functional courses such as marketing, finance, etc, thus would not pursue such courses. Almost the same number thought that it was an important topic but until business leaders demonstrated a commitment to CSR and to people with qualifications in the field, they felt they could not afford to undertake such study when other courses such as finance, marketing, etc would have a better impact on their careers.

Student Choices based on Assumptions and Misinformation about CSR-Sustainability

A major outcome emerged as a result of this survey and its application to the ARIES project. I have come to the conclusion that student choices regarding CSR, Sustainability and Ethics are based on misinformation about the nature of the subject matter and that continuing to offer such courses as electives without students having greater insight into its strategic value, would most likely have the same result. Non-viable class size two out of every three offerings, and given that the GSB had taken a decision to have a rotating elective system, it meant that the CSR course would most likely only run once every 2-3 years. Thus, CSR-Sustainability subject matter must be built into the core of the MBA Exec and that this limited information may create awareness and thus greater demand for full courses as electives.

The ideal approach would be to have a full course in the compulsory core of the MBA Exec. This would demonstrate to students that the subject matter is just as important as any other. Unfortunately this is unlikely to happen as it requires a major restructure of the program and a willingness to fly in the face of convention concerning what is seen as critical MBA courses. In addition it would mean that one of my colleagues would have to agree to their "key" course being changed to an elective. I simply could not, and cannot see the leadership, marketing, finance or strategy course coordinators agreeing to such a proposal.

The more realistic option is to pursue the strategy of ensuring content is included in as many of the core courses of the MBA Exec as possible- not as "embedded themes" but rather as actual units with objectives, reading activities and linked to assessment tasks.

In order for this to occur it was necessary to link the ARIES project and in particular the funding to a specific outcome. The most logical was to address CSR/Sustainability and Personal Responsibility in the commencement course of the MBA, Global Business Context. As identified above, it was supposed to contain topics on CSR and sustainability- as approved by the RMIT academic board, yet, arguably the content was light and in some cases non-existent. This provided the opportunity to convince the Head of School and the Academic Director that the opportunity would allow retention of the funding and provide a better more robust course.

A further opportunity arose in March 2008 with the MBA Director's Forum, an annual event organised by MBA Connect, whose theme this year was to be "Sustainability and MBAs". Furthermore the RMIT-GSB's Head of School was to be a keynote speaker on this very topic. I thought it would be advantageous for ARIES personnel to be at the Forum, ideally as speakers, but if not then as visible participants. In addition I thought that the opportunity for ARIES to discuss issues of Sustainability and CSR directly with the GSB Head of School might prove a significant advantage in confirming the preferred outcomes of writing the two units in the Global Business course and perhaps extending the task to other courses in the MBA. This proved to be the case with a commitment from the Head of School and Academic Director to allow the rewrite of the units and to consider the positioning of CSR-Sustainability throughout the MBA, however, the Head of School expressed the desire to involve the new Director of the MBA, who was due to be appointed in June 2008 to be directly involved in these "additional" content decisions.

A second major decision that I have taken as a result of this project is to re-administer the survey of why MBA Executive students do not pursue CSR-Sustainability electives when offered. Clearly the failure to get BUSM 2170 off the ground on three occasions is cause for concern. If CSR-Sustainability is such a hot topic, why won't MBA Exec students pursue it? This is an important piece of information in the light of the changing CSR- Sustainability landscape. We also see organizations such as Westpac and ANZ and others using the CSR-Sustainability agenda as part of their corporate identity. It will be interesting to see whether this has filtered through to student awareness. Ethics approval within RMIT has now been granted and the survey is in the process of being uploaded to the web for delivery in October. The results will be written up as a major paper examining MBA students and their perceptions of CSR- Sustainability and delivered to the 2nd World Business Ethics Forum in Hong Kong in December 2008 (subject to paper approval). I would also be happy to share advance results with ARIES if this was seen as advantageous. These results will also provide valuable insights

into what students want from such electives which will guide the review of the two other CSR-Sustainability courses to occur next year.

Another important outcome from this project has been the increased attention given to CSR-Sustainability by the faculty. Several years ago the response to these initiatives would have been “nice to have, but not in my course”. Several colleagues have been not only encouraging of the ARIES project, but have identified that they discuss these matters in their courses and recognise an opportunity to formalise them as specific content topics. Since the first draft of this report, the coordinator of Leadership and Management has agreed to formalise one of the current topics as “Responsible Leadership” with an emphasis on understanding the roles and responsibilities of organisational leaders in terms of internal and external engagement with stakeholders- this is a key theme in CSR.

Another pleasing development since the first draft of this report has been the appointment of a new Professor as the MBA Director. Whilst I approached this appointment with a degree of trepidation, it turns out that the person in question has a commitment to CSR and Ethics, has co-authored articles with my former PhD supervisor and is fully supportive of my initiative to have at least 1 unit in each of the 8 core courses in the MBA directly address the issues of CSR-Sustainability or Ethics.

4.0 Summary of Insights/ Learnings, Recommendations

Perhaps the learnings from this experience can best be summed up as take nothing for granted and that despite best intentions and clear evidence as to why something should be done, people will often frustrate such initiatives in order to protect or advance their own interests.

Another learning, and one that I should have recognised given that I previously lectured in change management is that people resist change for a variety of reasons. Often bureaucratic processes are put forward as necessary, yet do little more than delay real action. The preference for consultation and discussion can also be a delaying tactic and whilst it is important to have a participatory approach there is also *carpe diem*.

It is clear that a one must accept the political nature of organisations and individuals. If I were to undertake this project again I would negotiate clear responsibility and decision parameters regarding the Graduate School’s commitment to ARIES so that strategies such as the promotion occurred according to timeframes. In addition I would have engaged in greater negotiation to ensure a clear commitment from the GSB to introduce course content across the MBA with specific Units and timeframes.

5.0 Ongoing Initiatives and Next Steps

- BUSM 2170 Managing Personal and CSR is currently running in trimester 2. Guest speakers from industry have been organised along with case studies. A feature of the Sustainability component in the OK Tedi case from BHP Billiton, which clearly demonstrates the tensions between economic development and ecology.
- Case studies referred to in this report such as the Pinto, North Atlantic Salmon, Ok Tedi etc are available in the public domain and will continue to be used as educational

materials. As part of normal teaching practice research is continuously conducted to identify new case materials.

- The Research Project undertaken by the MBA Executive Student in retrofitting buildings with energy efficient lighting is expected to be completed by the end of November. At that time an assessment will be made as to whether this information can be used as case material for future courses. (My experience with research students is that they rarely complete reports of time, as was evidenced by the student deferring his enrolment to semester 2.
- Discussions with the Director of the Sustainability Unit at RMIT continue as to how to foster greater links between the GSB and organisations around CSR-Sustainability. It should be noted that guest speakers for BUSM 2170 are in part organised by this Unit
- The review of the MBA continues through the monthly MBA faculty meetings and this will continue through 2009. (See section 2.5 for discussion of time-lines)
- Fostering greater discussion about CSR and Sustainability issues is one way of building interest in the field. Bringing relevant articles and readings to the attention of coordinators is also a way of enhancing knowledge. However, I do believe that if expertise exists then it should be used. In the same way that whilst I might understand some of the principles of accounting, I would not teach it. Discussions have taken place with the coordinator of Global Business to redesign the delivery of the contextual course so that subject experts would deliver different components of the course rather than have 1 facilitator try to cover everything. I believe that this will be the accepted delivery mode as of 2009.
- CSR- Sustainability has also been built into the assessment tasks of the MBA. In the case of BUSM 3902 Global Business Context, I am negotiating with the Course Coordinator to include a CSR analysis as part of the major paper undertaken by students. This involves students analysing their own organisations and assessment its level of commitment to CSR- Sustainability using the models and frameworks presented in class. (Whilst this is a preliminary analysis- it is hoped that the expose will increase interest in the field and that students pursue BUSM 2170 Managing Personal and CSR as a result.)
- Students in BUSM 3912 Managing People, Relationships and performance are required to diagnose their own capabilities in terms of empathy and trust, using diagnostic tools such as the Myers Briggs Personality test and review two critical incidents from their workplace that involve this capability. They then must design an action plan to improve their capability.
- This is considered the final report on the details of the project; however, an update will be provided to ARIES at the end of the Trimester on the outcome of the MBA Research Project undertaken by the MBA Executive student.

6.0 Conclusion

In conclusion I actually think we have achieved far more than I had anticipated. Originally I thought that we would have 4 or 5 groups of MBA Executive students that would have produced a 2000-3000-word report about their engagement with Carrier. This is what the original project was supposed to achieve. With insufficient numbers making the course unviable it appeared that the ARIES project would flounder. However by refocusing the project to course content we now have a clear and substantive presence of CSR-Sustainability in two of the core courses of the MBA Exec, a commitment to redevelop another unit in the Leadership course and a well-supported proposal to include at least one CSR-Sustainability concept or Business Ethics concept in all other courses! In addition we have a revived Community of Practice, which will play an active role in this process and a robust action research project with some very positive ecological outcomes.

That is far more than I would have hoped for!