

# Critical Tourism Studies Proceedings

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Volume 2017

Article 146

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2017

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### Recommended Citation

Lourenço, Fernando and Morais, Felisita (2017) "Role-Playing to Explore Values," *Critical Tourism Studies Proceedings*: Vol. 2017 , Article 146.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.tru.ca/cts-proceedings/vol2017/iss1/146>

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## ROLE-PLAYING TO EXPLORE VALUES

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore the role-play activity as a tool in helping educators understand the attitudes and value of students as well as to understand the gap of knowledge they have in ethics, social responsibility and sustainability arena. In this paper, the role-play activities aim to guide students to develop and discuss tourism and hospitality business concepts based on different ethical and sustainability perspective to meet the needs of different stakeholders. Instead of teaching the idea of what is bad or good or what is right or wrong, this pedagogical approach guides students to experience different forms of value systems, allow them to understand how each perspective leads to different outcomes and to strike balance between opposing interests where trade-offs between profitability and social responsibility exists (Bos, Shami, & Naab, 2006). The contribution of this study is on our understanding of role-play as an educational tool (1) to develop and explore students' value, (2) to expose different scenarios to students in order to help them understand the consequences of their actions and (3) to support the teaching of ethics, responsibility and sustainability. Qualitative methodology is adopted to allow students to reflect and generate insights related to their value system based on their experience derived from the role-play activities. The finding suggests that our approach helped students to learn and gain insights related to the importance of corporate social responsibility and sustainable practice without actually covering these topics in the activity.

**Keywords:** *education for sustainable development; entrepreneurship education for sustainable development; tourism and hospitality education; entrepreneurship education; pedagogy*

## INTRODUCTION

### *Using role-play activity to explore values*

Sustainable development is a model that seeks to balance the economic, social and environmental bottom lines in order to create positive impacts for multiple stakeholders (Elkington, 1999; UN, 2005: 11-12). The widely adopted definition offered by the Brundtland Commission - led by the former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, emphasizes that sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987). During recent decades, the concept of corporate social responsibility has been used interchangeably with sustainability. The aim for corporate social responsibility is the achievement of social cohesion, the rational use of natural resources and the development of economic competitiveness (European Commission, 2011). However, it has been suggested that it is problematic to pinpoint these concepts (Macbeth, 2005; Torres-Delgado & Palomeque, 2014) because these can be positioned in different perspectives serving different stakeholders (Macbeth, 2005).

The concept of stakeholders has been applied interchangeably with the concept of sustainability and corporate social responsibility. When dealing with business and economic activities, it has been suggested that business should benefit wider range of stakeholders (Freeman, 1984) instead of prioritising all efforts to generating shareholder values and profit-maximisation (Friedman, 1962, 1970). Some scholars have suggested that business should be accountable for their negative externalities that affect social well-being (Bowen, 1953; Carroll, 1979; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Frederick, 1960). Essentially, business enterprises have moral obligation to consider their societal and environmental impacts. Other scholars emphasise the need to create mutual benefits to wider stakeholders and view this as core business strategy to ensure competitive advantages and to enhance financial bottom-line (Fisher et al., 2009; Freeman & Evan, 1990; Jenkins, 2009; Jones, 1995; Porter & Kramer, 2006). It has been suggested that corporate philanthropy such as charity, sponsorships, employee voluntarism may not be the best investment in corporate responsibility because these are not as effective as strategic corporate responsibility with an aim to improve business performance (Husted & Salazar, 2006). For this reason; apart from philanthropy there is corporate responsibility integration that aims to create a more responsible operation for existing business, and, corporate responsibility innovation which aims to develop new business models to solve social and environmental issues (Halme & Laurila, 2009). Researchers argued that, sustainability as an example; can be positioned on a spectrum where priorities and outcomes will vary based on the philosophical positioning. For example, on weaker form of sustainability, it is egocentric and it focuses on growth and resource exploitation. In this perspective, the prime concern is shareholder value and profit-maximisation (Friedman, 1962, 1970). A strong form of sustainability is homocentric and it focuses on the interest of the collective over the individual. In this perspective, there is a concern to consider the societal and environmental impacts of a business and its role to create positive social-wellbeing. Moreover, the extreme form of sustainability is ecocentric, which does not prioritise human over non-human nature. This perspective proposes to change harmful human activities to improve the quality of the natural environment as a priority. Different forms of sustainable practice will benefit different groups of stakeholders. It is suggested that ethical values are the main driving force that influence whatever sustainability positions and practices (Macbeth, 2005).

There are situations where trade-offs between profitability, social responsibility and sustainability (Bos et al., 2006; Elkington, 1999). Viewing this situation from an education perspective, striking a balance between these often-opposing interests is important for students to learn. Role play activities allows students to experience these situations and learn how to deal with them (Sondergaard & Lemmergaard, 2002; van Ments, 1983) in a process of ethical inquiry (Brown, 1994). Often in these situations, a definite right answer does not exist, Bos et al. (2006) argues that educators need to develop students' ability to deal with dilemmas instead of impose a certain viewpoint for them to follow. This process forces individuals to a state of confrontation in an underlying issue that is faced by the organisation or individual asking them, as explained in Castro (1989). This process of confrontation will lead to enhanced self-understanding (Bos et al., 2006). Therefore, role play is a fruitful teaching method to support ethical inquiry which can be hard to teach via textbooks (Hawley, 1991). Application of active learning pedagogy such as role play and simulation has been used across many disciplines. For example, it is used in business schools to teach business ethics (Brown, 1994; Raisner, 1997; Sanyal, 2000) and corporate social responsibility (Bos et al., 2006; Shami, Box, Fort, & Gordon, 2004; Sondergaard & Lemmergaard, 2002). Tourism and hospitality management use role play to enhance the learning experience of students in general (Armstrong, 2003; Edelheim & Ueda, 2007; Penfold, 2009; Ruhanen, 2006) as well as to teach sustainable tourism (Herremans, 2006), ethical tourism (Lei, Lam, Lourenço, & Sappleton, 2015) and corporate social responsibility (Tribe, 2002).

The purpose of this paper is to explore the role-play activity as a tool helping educators understand the attitudes and value of students; as well as to understand the gap of knowledge they have in ethics, social responsibility and sustainability arena. In essence, the role-play activities aim to guide students to develop and discuss tourism and hospitality business concepts based on different ethical and sustainability perspective to meet the needs of different stakeholders. Instead of teaching the idea of what is bad or good or what is right or wrong, this pedagogical approach guides students to experience different embodiment of value systems, allow them to understand how each perspective leads to different outcomes and to strike balance between opposing interests where trade-offs between profitability and social responsibility exists (Bos et al., 2006). The contribution of this study is on our understanding of role-play as an educational tool (1) to develop and explore students' value, (2) to expose different scenarios to students in order to help them understand the consequences of their actions and (3) to support the teaching of ethics, responsibility and sustainability.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In 2017, at the Institute for tourism Studies (Macau, China), a group of thirty-two final year students from the Tourism Management degree programme participated in the role-play activity via their entrepreneurship course. In this activity, students were divided into five small-groups as it is the recommended format (Springer, Stanne, & Donovan, 1999). The instructor then provided explicit and clear instruction to ensure each student and group know exactly what they need to do in the activity and know their roles and the mind-set to follow (Springer et al., 1999).

In brief, the instructor first introduced the overall situation, (see table 1) (Brummel, Gunsalus, Anderson, & Loui, 2010). Students were led to develop a concept for coffee shop one by one based on different positioning of sustainable practice within the sustainable development spectrum (Macbeth, 2005). For example, Coffee Shop A is on the weaker form of

sustainability, it is egocentric and it focuses on growth and resource exploitation. The focus is on creating shareholders value and profit-maximisation. Coffee Shop B is on the strong form of sustainability, it is homocentric and it focuses on the interest of the collective over the individual. Generating social wellbeing for wider stakeholders was a priority. Coffee Shop C is on the extreme form of sustainability, it is ecocentric. It prioritises on creating benefits for the whole ecosystem and biological life instead of having a human-centred focus (see table 2). During the activity, the instructor had little interference in order to allow students to develop their own ideas, values and opinion (Chesler & Fox, 1966). The idea is to create a situation where participants expand their perceptions, values, opinion from within themselves (Brown, 1994).

<b>General guide</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– No Law or Regulations</li> <li>– No resource restriction (investment available)</li> </ul>
<b>Task: Develop a coffee shop</b>
<p>Outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Coffee shop concept (25m<sup>2</sup>)</li> <li>– How will you run it?</li> </ul> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Costs, revenue and profit</li> <li>– Utilities bill (electricity, water, gas, phone, internet, etc)</li> <li>– Rent</li> <li>– Salary for four staff</li> <li>– Insurance</li> <li>– Stocks (coffee, sugar, milk, containers, etc)</li> <li>– Furnishing (furniture, machines, equipment, heater, air-con, TV, sound system, mugs, cutleries, etc)</li> <li>– General products (paper, tissues, straws, washing liquids, cleaning products, etc)</li> <li>– Many more...</li> </ul>

*Table 1: General guide*

<b>Coffee Shop A</b>
<p>Your mindset:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Your only concern is money and profit maximisation</li> <li>– You only need to care about yourself</li> <li>– It is acceptable to be selfish</li> <li>– Remember, there is no law restriction and no restriction on resource (investment available)</li> </ul>
<b>Coffee Shop B</b>
<p>Your mindset:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Human are the most important entities in the universe</li> <li>– You value human beings</li> <li>– We don't need to care for anything unless they provide life necessities and important to our businesses</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– You only need to value nature for what it supplies to humanity and business (find ways to sustain it)</li> <li>– Remember, there is no law restriction and no restriction on resource (investment available)</li> </ul>
<b>Coffee Shop C</b>
<p>Your mindset:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– You value all living things on earth, regardless of their usefulness to human</li> <li>– Respect and care for animals and plants for their own sake</li> <li>– You can only exploit other living things and the natural environment unless it is vital to human needs, for survival not for luxury</li> <li>– Remember, there is no law restriction and no restriction on resource (investment available)</li> </ul>

*Table 2: General guide*

Towards the end, it is important to include evaluation, this is best done by the participants themselves (Brummel et al., 2010; Doorn & Kroesen, 2013). This creates an opportunity for students to reflect and generate insights, which relates to their value system based on their experience derived from the role-play activities. For this reason, students were given an evaluation form to stimulate reflection to allow them to understand their attitudes and learning. The evaluation form has three open-ended questions. The first question asked students to explain which of the three coffee shops they like the most. The second question asked students to explain which of the three coffee shops they would realistically run in real life. The third question asked students to discuss about their overall learning gained from experiencing three different business models. In short, question one and two aims to explore the discrepancy between what students ‘like’ and what they will ‘do in reality’. This helps to explore their values as well as attitudes towards business ethics, social responsibility and sustainability. The third question aims to explore key learning aspects as gained by students subsequent to their journey across different mind-sets. The qualitative data, which is transcribed into Microsoft Words and Microsoft Excel will be subsequently analysed using content analysis and thematic analysis to identify patterns, themes and clusters (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Robson, 2002; Shaw, 2004). This process aims to facilitate the formation of key concepts and findings representing the attitudes and views of students (Glaser & Strauss, 2004; Strauss & Corbin, 2004).

## **DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULT**

The data generated from the evaluation form of thirty-two students was categorized into Microsoft Excel according to the three questions. Table 3 shows the overall finding in terms of the business concept they like the most (question one) and the business model they will realistically run in real life (question 2). The finding suggests that students’ preference is equally spread in question one. However, their preferences towards launching a realistic business have change to having a majority of students preferring to adopt socially responsible and sustainable business model.

Option they like the most			Option to run realistically	
A	10		A	4
B	11		B	14
C	11		C	13
			None	1

Table 3: Results from question 1 and 2

When examine closely on the changes in preferences from their mostly liked business idea to one that they have to realistically start-up, all of those who liked business model A have gradually changed to business model B and C. Those who liked business B have either maintained their position or moved to a stronger for of sustainability position. Interestingly, although most of those who preferred business model C have either maintained their position or moved to an anthropocentric position, four students thought that it is more realistic to run business model A in the real-world.

Option they like the most	Option to run realistically		Option they like the most	Option to run realistically		Option they like the most	Option to run realistically
1 A	B		1 B	B		1 C	C
2 A	B		2 B	B		2 C	C
3 A	B		3 B	B		3 C	C
4 A	B		4 B	B		4 C	C
5 A	B		5 B	B		5 C	C
			6 B	B			
1 A	C		7 B	B		1 C	A
2 A	C					2 C	A
3 A	C		1 B	C		3 C	A
4 A	C		2 B	C		4 C	A
			3 B	C			
1 A	NONE		4 B	C		1 C	B
						2 C	B

Table 4: The discrepancy between question 1 and 2

In regards to the views expressed by students in terms of their 'most liked' concept, their comments were grouped according to their preferred business models. For those who liked Coffee Shop A (ten comments in total), most of the comments were related to profit-maximisation and how easy it is to develop better ideas and outcomes without law and regulations (nine comments). In addition, it is also easier to operate the business as it provides freedom whilst being able to maximise profit. Those who 'liked' Coffee Shop B the most (thirteen comments in total) have generally expressed the fact of serving people (five comments) and because it is humane, creates good relationship and cares for stakeholders (six comments). Moreover, students who 'liked' Coffee Shop C the most (ten comments in total) have expressed that the respect and consideration for all living things is what they like about the concept.

With regard to the views related in choosing a business model if they had to launch and run a coffee shop realistically, only four students expressed that they wish to run Coffee Shop A because it will ensure profit maximisation and it does not require them physical or personal

supervision. Having said that, these students have initially expressed that Coffee Shop C were the business model they like the most. For those students who preferred to launch Coffee Shop B (fifteen comments in total) claimed that it is a better model and manageable. In reality, we need to think of the people and law. Attending to human needs create a better image for the company by being responsible, which is, obviously essential in the market (service-wise). Finally, for those who chose to launch Coffee Shop C (twelve comments in total) expressed the necessity to care for human and the environment. To them, it is a realistic, better model and it follows law.

Forty-nine comments were generated from student when they were asked to express their views in terms of their learning gained by experiencing the development of concepts for coffee shop with different mind-set. In general, students learned how to enhance their creativity through communication and discussion activity (six comments), skills. Moreover, the activity also helped some students to develop their values (three comments), understand the discrepancy between imagination and reality (two comments) as well as helped them to acknowledge the importance of research to support business development (six comments).

Most importantly (table 5), the activity helped students (five comments) to see the dilemma associated to balancing the triple-bottom-line. Bos et al. (2006) argues that there are situations where trade-offs between profitability and social responsibility. Striking a balance between these often-opposing interests is important for students to learn. This process of confrontation will lead to enhanced self-understanding (Bos et al., 2006). One crucial aspect that students have revealed is that they acknowledge that business concepts can change by adopting different perspective and therefore there are more than one way to develop a business (twelve comments). Via the activity, students acknowledge that unethical business concepts certainly make money (two comments) they also see the importance of having laws and regulations in order to protect people and the environment to create a sustainable future (six comments). Emphasizing sustainability values as one of their learnings via the activity due to the understanding of the negative impact a lawless society creates (five comments).

Learning	Code
I think after experiencing three styles, I learn that apart from making money, I also need to care about the earth and have social responsibility. If it is just to make money, I will hurt people, hurt the environment. Many one day, there will be no more customer and we cannot enjoy the environment	Sustainability value: Dillema
Type A is less restriction and more crazy it is special idea but hard to achieve, Type B is also special and can be achieved. Type C has too many things to consider and is hard to breakthrough	Sustainability value: Dillema
If there is really no law and resource restriction, people may try to do anything to maximise the profit without consider anything. However, if they care more on human beings value, respect and care animals and plants (which also consider the environment) it may create a better image to the company. Moreover, cost might be increase due to the element mentioned above.	Sustainability value: Dillema
If people are selfish, they can earn as much as possible. However, it is not sustainable. However the humanity and caring the earth more, the cost will be higher but can keep money and earn.	Sustainability value: Dillema
if business focus on something, it also need to give you something such as coffee shop C concerns all species in the earth but it can't imagine the profit like coffee shop A.	Sustainability value: Dillema
consider what model can be the most profitable when operating a coffee shop and without any illegal concern	Sustainability value: profit maximisation
You can use some illegal things in order to maximise profit. And you can decrease the cost via inhumane ways in order to make profit.	Sustainability value: profit maximisation
Understand the difference between no law and give some reason. Follow the guideline to develop a business.	Law
Comparing the differences between under law and without law	Law
Law is very important	Law
Freedom is the most important factor for business model. When there are no limitation, you can use your reasonable idea to earn money.	
After limitation was appeared, you must take care each different situation, that will limit your space of your mind to imagine.	Law
Laws and rules limit business development, people can make more money without law and rules limitations	Law
I learn that law is very important although some law would force people to do something but law also can protect the human safety. Most important to build friendly environment	Law
Successful business owners have to find the right equilibrium in order to succeed	Sustainability value
Learned that in the real world, it is hard to balance many factors (profit, care for nature, worry for human).	Sustainability value
If I want to start a business, I should think about human being, ethic and answer things that is good to society and the world	Sustainability value
There are many ways to run a coffee shop and making money is not the only thing, we need to care the surrounding area in the city.	Sustainability value
consider what human needs and protect the planet	Sustainability value
Learn about how to narrow and focus the idea in one point. From coffee shop A is about the mass idea, and we need to screening the idea and finally the coffee shop C was launched.	Ideas adapting to different situations
Under law each of requirement, it will have different things to concern	Ideas adapting to different situations
We need to have different ideas in different situation and demand	Ideas adapting to different situations
in order to exist in different environments we need to have different adjustment	Ideas adapting to different situations
The target customer are different the main concept are different	Ideas adapting to different situations
I learn that as the priority changes the concept very a lot	Ideas adapting to different situations
coffee shops can have different values and have different themes and concern	Ideas adapting to different situations
Learn that run a business has different ways.	Ideas adapting to different situations
Business model can be changed due to different styles although it is the same business, it can gain money through different style.	Ideas adapting to different situations
I learn we can use different angle to think one thing. it depends on your focus on what point to think about it. Maybe some of you didn't want to earn a lot of money, they just want to break even and want everyone to be happy.	Ideas adapting to different situations
if we focus on different points to think of one thing, we will get different results.	Ideas adapting to different situations
More limitation or creative if the different kind of customer	Ideas adapting to different situations

Table 5: Question 3 (sustainability and ethics related learning)

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study applied active learning strategy such as role-play to support the teaching of sustainability. This teaching method is selected because it allows participants to experience multiple perspective surrounding difficult issues and this pedagogical method goes beyond traditional classroom setting (Maier & McLaughlan, 2007). If done properly, extremes views can be explored and express in low risk and safe environment (Raisner, 1997). Teaching ethics, social responsibility and sustainability requires educators to develop students' ability to deal with dilemmas instead of impose a certain viewpoint for them to follow Bos et al. (2006). This process forces individuals to a state of confrontation in an underlying issue that is faced by the organisation or individual asking them, as explained in Castro (1989). This process of confrontation will lead to enhanced self-understanding (Bos et al., 2006). Therefore, role play is a fruitful teaching method to support ethical inquiry which can be hard to teach via textbooks (Hawley, 1991).

The result derived from the study suggest that students learned the value of sustainability and social responsibility subsequent to observing how dangerous our world can become in a lawless society and learned that there are many perspectives they can adopt during the process of business development. They have also learned that there will be trade-offs because they have to balance and consider many aspects and stakeholders. Nevertheless, students also perceive that it is a burden to business and profit-maximisation when they need to consider the social and environment. Although, there were many students having preferences

on their unethical ideas, they do not have inclination to launch those ideas in reality. Interestingly, there were a number of students who 'liked' sustainable concepts but in reality they would adopt unethical business because they perceive them to be the only feasible business where they can make a profit.

To conclude, the role-play activity is a good tool to help educators to understand the attitudes and values of students as well as to understand the gap of knowledge they have in the ethics, social responsibility and sustainability arena. Firstly, based on our findings, it clearly shows that students need to be aware that in order to make a business socially responsible and sustainable their financial bottom-line does not have to be affected negatively. In many cases, it leads to the progress of financial bottom-line (Ambec & Lanoie, 2008; Peloza, 2009). If used strategically, Husted and Salazar (2006) point out that it is more profitable and can generate more impact for their investments compared to altruistic form of social responsibility. Moreover, sustainability and responsible strategy have the potential to create intangible benefits to business. The development of innovation (product, process, position), improvement of bottom-lines, build competitive advantage, brand image, improve staff morale, meet investor demand and attract new investors, sustain employees, decrease liability, strengthening relations with stakeholders, improve social welfare and preserve the ecosystem for future generations (Ambec & Lanoie, 2008; Fussler & James, 1996; Gladwin, Kennelly, & Krause, 1995; Hart & Milstein, 2003; P. Hawken, 1993; P Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins, 1999; Weizäcker, Lovins, & Lovins, 1998).

Overall, this study contributes to our understanding of the effectiveness of role-play activity to stimulate students to explore and develop their own values (contribution one). Although the students took pleasure and were amazed in developing unethical means of maximizing profit and developed many unethical practices right from the start. They themselves were able to perceive how ugly human nature can become in a lawless society (contribution two) and therefore it helped to realise the importance of laws and regulations as well as to lead a future where respect is vital to the society and environment when running a business venture (contribution three). All of these are the lessons they taught themselves instead of imposing on them (contribution three)

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