

Barclays invest in a sustainable future

In our world of accelerating change, banking can be a risky business. Decision-makers in the banking sector need to be well-informed with regard to environmental and social as well as economic future trends. A bank also needs to maintain good relations with the local and global communities that it serves, hence the reason why Barclays takes corporate social responsibility (CSR) so seriously. Phil Case, Barclays Environmental Director, views CSR as “...***the contribution corporations can make to the wider sustainability agenda,***” and he recognises the importance of integrating CSR into Barclays’ culture. What better way of introducing this change in culture than inspiring the graduates on the fast-track Barclays Business Leadership Programme (BLP) through a training session on sustainable development and CSR.

It was just such a training day that was delivered to Barclays BLP, for the second year running, by the Professional Practice for Sustainable Development (PP4SD) Project on 12 December 2003. The day used a systems approach to enhance the graduates’ understanding of developments in the world around them and explored with them the role banking can play in these developments. Lucy Shackleton, Barclays Head of Entry Talent, explained how this training session contributed to the graduate programme, “...***CSR is a key part of the BLP and the PP4SD programme fits in with our aim of turning out well-rounded professionals***”

The debates about the business cases for CSR and for sustainable development have reached the majority of boardrooms in the UK. Many companies, including Barclays, have board members with direct responsibility for CSR. Barclays is one of eight financial services companies that have formed the FORGE Group. The FORGE Group has worked with the support of three Government departments, professional bodies and non-governmental organisations to produce guidance on environmental and CSR management and reporting in the financial services sector. As the FORGE Group guidance points out “***Many organisations already have processes in place to manage several of the components of CSR, but few, if any, have achieved a systematic, structured response that reflects the priority issues from a business perspective. This is essential if CSR is going to be managed successfully as an integral element of business risk and performance and be able to deliver sustained business value.***” (FORGE Group 2002, Guidance on CSR Management and Reporting for the Financial Services Sector, Available at <http://www.bba.org.uk/pdf/forgepart1.pdf>.)

One of the first challenges to achieving this level of integration in an organisation is to raise staff awareness of the concepts. Without this awareness-raising, implementation can often fail to do more than provide lip service to CSR and sustainable development. The PP4SD training course is a tried and tested programme for introducing the concepts, raising awareness and providing the confidence and motivation to put the concepts into everyday practice.

The training session delivered to the BLP was based on a programme developed by the PP4SD Project over the last four years. PP4SD is a partnership project, managed by representatives from the Environment Agency, the Institution of Environmental Sciences, the Natural Step and the RSPB. The Project has involved collaborative work with 14 professional institutions in the creation of this training programme on sustainable development for use in a wide range of professions.

The PP4SD course was designed to be interactive and challenging. The graduates were introduced to the concept of sustainable development through a simulation

exercise in which they were asked to identify everything they would need in order to survive for a long period in space, cut off completely from the Earth. In effect they had to design the biological, social and economic support systems that we tend to take for granted. This activity was reinforced by a presentation of the theory behind the interconnected nature of systems thinking.

Armed with this awareness of the systems approach to sustainable development, the trainees were then invited to review case studies of companies that have already engaged with sustainable development and CSR to varying degrees. This included the opportunity to reflect on a Barclays' case study, which many of the graduates found particularly useful. Further input from the facilitators covered the "Five Capitals" model addressing natural, human, social, manufactured and financial capital, with the graduates again having the opportunity to reflect on how this model might be applied in practice. Emma Jones, a member of the BLP and currently working in Barclays' retail division, made the following comment. ***"This training day has put sustainable development into context with Barclays and shown the big picture by using the Five Capitals model. I can envisage applying the Five Capitals model in the Retail Network."*** Later in the day the trainees were given the opportunity to put what they had learnt into practice. Initially by role-playing a scenario involving a branch of Barclays Bank and secondly by action planning how they might implement what they had gained from the day both in their current work placements and in their future careers.

In the delivery of the training session the PP4SD team placed significant emphasis on two processes: initiating dialogue and appreciative inquiry. As Jimmy Brannigan, one of the PP4SD facilitators, explains, ***"...initiating dialogue is a way of thinking and reflecting together about sustainability. It is not something that is done to another person, but is something done with people. Appreciative inquiry is a process which focuses not on what is wrong with an organisation, but rather on how using the principles of sustainability, we can develop new and positive ways of organising its activities sustainably."***

An evaluation of the training session revealed a positive response from those taking part. All the trainees felt they had improved their understanding of sustainability issues and 97 percent of them felt that they had improved their ability to make decisions within the context of sustainable development, which suggests that the impact of this training will be felt across the organisation. The enthusiastic response to the session from all those on the BLP is summed up by this comment from Jennifer Chiu. ***"The facilitators were great and very passionate about the topic and about linking CSR to business decisions. If they could present to more people at Barclays, such as Team Leaders, it could instil a change of culture."***

The PP4SD training programme is one part of Barclays' strategy for getting staff at all levels and across all divisions engaged with CSR. Phil Case sees ***"...integration as the absolute key to CSR,"*** he also feels strongly that ***"...people want to work for a company that shares their values"***. Training in CSR helps individuals explore their own values as well as those of the organisation; sharing a common set of values can increase commitment from staff and satisfaction for staff.

PP4SD's programme of working with professionals to produce continuing professional development materials on sustainable development is expanding. The Project is currently focusing on the financial sector and the land-based sector as well as continuing to work within sectors such as engineering, construction, waste and energy. Further information about PP4SD and contact details for the Project can be found at www.pp4sd.co.uk