

COFFEE WITH PROFESSOR TIMA BANSAL

“I am someone who believes deeply that doing good and doing well is what most corporations are about.”

Tima Bansal worked as a government economist and management consultant before entering academia. It was while doing a DPhil at the University of Oxford that she first got interested in issues of sustainability. Today she is Director of the Cross-Enterprise Leadership Centre on Building Sustainable Value and the Academic Director of the Research Network for Business Sustainability

What drew you into this field?

At Oxford you get to think about the big questions, and for me the big question was, ‘Why would firms engage in activities for which there is no obvious financial benefit.’

Since you started, the field has grown enormously. Why?

Climate change and corporate scandals have brought the issues into focus. And through technology and globalization, we are more aware than ever of the global issues, such as poverty and AIDS. But it’s more than just issues. I believe that sustainability is at the core of human nature. Health, wealth, and the natural environment are just about being human.

You argue that the dichotomy between profitability and sustainability is false. Why?

I start with the premise that the world is interconnected. If an organization is going to sustain itself in the long term, it has to be profitable. To do that, it has to ensure that natural resources are not compromised, and that the people who help to generate profits are treated fairly.



One aspect of your research deals with the issue of time and sustainability. What's the connection?

Ultimately one hopes to find a lever that will lead us toward this people/profit/planet synergy. I believe the lever may be time. Over long time horizons, the success of organizations becomes intertwined with the social and environmental health. However, time scales have shortened for a variety of reasons. Firms are going through faster and faster product cycles, and CEOs are spending a shorter time in each position. By understanding differences in time scales, I believe society can accommodate the long-term future while addressing immediate needs.

If a CEO asked you what she could do to make her company sustainable, what would you advise?

The easiest way to drive change is through measurement and reporting. And what can't be measured needs to be driven by the leader's values. If you're a good leader and you really care about this stuff, it will happen.

What do you do when you're not working?

I believe in what I do in my work. So almost everything I do – volunteer work, writing, speeches, research, teaching – is centred around sustainability. My work is my life.

 www.ivey.uwo.ca/faculty/Tima_Bansal.html