Chapter 10
Globally Responsible Management Education: From Principled Challenges to Practical Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Responsible management education is a crucial step in shaping our common future. This chapter reviews how the Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME) offers a platform for institutional commitment and leadership engagement toward business ethics and poverty alleviation. Specifically, this work critically analyzes the challenges and opportunities in adopting the educational principles for practical outcomes in the context of other trends in socially responsible global engagement. Through a review of the institutional trends in relation to PRME, the authors offer practical opportunities for curricula development, academic engagement, and ethical education for the 21st Century.

INTRODUCTION

Management education is first and foremost about leadership development for social impact. In the ever-changing complex world, management education should challenge those candidates whose priority is simply self-enrichment. It should prepare students to be responsible leaders in the world. Even within traditional fields like finance, accounting, business administration, and public service, management programs emphasize their social and global responsibility for a shared sustainable future. A growing number of studies have been highlighting these trends and the possibilities and responsibilities that management education has for world benefit and global prosperity (Muff et al. 2013; Werther & Chandler, 2014; Williams, 2014). These trends are already visible in numerous managerial and leadership practices of corporations engaged in sustainable...
Globally Responsible Management Education
development, human rights, labor rights, and the
anti-corruption agenda of the United Nations
Global Compact (Lawrence & Beamish, 2013;
Rasche & Kell, 2010). However, many world-
wide management programs still have to make
several changes in their curricula offerings and
strategic priorities to become more relevant to the
global responsibility trends for sustaining profits,
people, planet and partnerships (Fisk, 2010; Sosik
& Jung, 2010; Wankel & Stachowicz-Stanusch,
2011; Wankel & Stoner, 2009).

The United Nations’ Principles for Respon-
sible Management (PRME) emerged from the
United Nations’ Global Compact (UNGC) in
2007 in order to offer a shared platform for aca-
demic institutions to engage in globally respon-
sible management education. Through a set of
shared common principles and a commitment to
regularly shared information with its stakehold-
ers on the progress made in implementing the
principles, PRME is becoming a valuable tool
in shaping the future of responsible management
education. “The PRME is the first organized
relationship between the United Nations and
management-related academic institutions,
business schools, and universities” (PRME
Secretariat, 2014). The PRME’s objective is to
increase social responsibility and sustainability
in management education; both are concepts that
acknowledge managers as moral actors (Lavine
& Roussin, 2012) and socially responsible agents
(Katamba, 2012).

The idea that business schools have a role
in educating socially responsible managers and
leaders engaged in sustainable development is
relatively new. For example, at the 1992 UN Rio
Earth Summit there was a marked absence of busi-
ness school representatives. In contrast, twenty
years later, a conference entitled “PRME Global
Forum” included 300 attendees from some of the
most prominent business schools in the world that
came together at the UN Rio+20 Earth Summit.
Now, there is a rapidly growing acceptance of
business school’s role in sustainable development
starting from the private sector. This acceptance
has helped make PRME into an important base
for business educators and has given management
education a role in positive, progressive social
change (Kelley & Nahser, 2014).

Much of this acceptance can be attributed to
the mid-2000’s financial crisis which led busi-
ness educators to ponder whether the curriculum
was adequately addressing bad management
practices, or if it was even encouraging these
practices. However, most of the ethical imple-
mentations in management curricula have been
simply a ‘patchwork’ without fully integrating
ethics across the curricula (Boylan & Donahue,
2003) or placing ethics as a world benefit at
the core of good management education (Melé,
2012). In addition, much of the teaching resources
devoted to ethics center around individual-level
values with an emphasis on short-term exercises,
rather than focusing on the interconnectedness
of individuals and their organizations with long-
term, in-depth projects that equip students with
an understanding of the complex issues regarding
business and society (Lavine & Roussin, 2012).

Currently, more and more business schools
and management programs have joined or are in
the process of joining the movement to partner
businesses with socially responsible principles.
PRME, along with other similar engagement
initiatives for academia and corporations, is
a realization of the effort to provide a prin-
cipled platform for socially responsible global
engagement. In the following sections we will
examine the ethical implications of adopting
the principles and engaging in a shared process
to foster sustainable and socially responsible
educational practice. Although the institutional
reasons for joining, and ultimately the level of
commitment of PRME academic institutions,
may vary the basic principles offer a common
ground for expressing their specific commitments
in line with the initiative’s purpose. Similar to
the voluntary participation of corporations in
the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC),