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The Responsible Management Education Paradox: Applying the Conceptual Lens of Organizational Ambidexterity

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Abstract

This chapter explores and discusses responsible management education as a paradox. Indeed, there is a contemplation of whether it is *irresponsible* to deliver responsible management education. The theory of Organizational Ambidexterity, a theory pertaining to paradox, is applied as a lens to critically reflect on progress within PRME (the Principles for Responsible Management Education) and the achievement of SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). There is a discussion of tensions that are hindering the impact of PRME and SDGs. Ambidextrous approaches are presented as a potential consideration/solution for responsible management educators and business school practices moving forward, as well as deeper embedding of competencies for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

Introduction

In this chapter, the core focus considers one overriding critical reflective question for responsible management educators:

> "Are we *irresponsible* in delivering responsible management education?"

Crucially, we are discussing this question to draw out significant realities within responsible management education. For example, we will discuss shortcomings in the delivery of the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Yet, it is of course crucial that responsible management education works, has meaningful and lasting impact and contributes to achieving SDGs. The aims and objectives of this chapter are three-fold. First, we want to take a step back and honestly and critically reflect on where we are up to within the responsible management education journey (with a primary focus on PRME and SDGs). Second, we want to conceptualise and frame within a theory pertaining to paradox why there are key tensions and barriers affecting the delivery of PRME and achievement of SDGs. Finally, we want to instil hope and possibilities for moving forward and overcoming such tensions and barriers.

In terms of this book overall, the critical perspectives offered and discussed here add deeper contrast to the perspectives already presented in other chapters. This then presents further contemplations within the leadership of SDGs and also draws out much needed critical reflection within responsible management education.

For some, the overarching question will make the 'blood boil' and question 'what on earth' we are trying to achieve in this writing. For others, it may fall in line with reflective questions already being asked. Regardless of where you are in the spectrum on this, we will certainly first explain the premise for such a controversial question. The chapter then outlines PRME and paints a picture of where we are in the journey of responsible management education and the achievement of SDGs. Following this, the theory of Organization Ambidexterity, a theory pertaining to paradox, is introduced. With this theory, greater meaning is provided within critical reflections and the difficulties of implementing and delivering on PRME and the SDGs. A discussion of other relevant areas is explored, namely the 'Alpha' Framework and a competencies approach. Finally, suggestions for ways forward are offered in an attempt to leave a more inspirational message for action to reinvigorate and reenergise responsible management educators for the challenge ahead – this primarily focuses on approaches within educational competencies.

<u>A note of caution to the reader:</u> We, as authors, present a critical debate around PRME and the achievement of SDGs. However, this is not to say we are anti-PRME or anti-SDGs. In fact, we are strong advocates of the need for models like PRME and SDGs to succeed. We want them to succeed. Importantly, we recognise and discuss the difficulties around the journey to potential success, but with a view to generating action and solutions – this is a crucial element within our message portrayed. The theory of Organizational Ambidexterity presented provides an alternative lens to contemplate action and solutions that could be crucial in moving forward to greater success in achieving SDGs.

The paradoxical premise

When providing an oxymoron like "Are we *irresponsible* in delivering responsible management education?", it is perhaps essential to set out our intentions and meaning early on. In short, we believe the delivery of responsible management education is *paradoxical* by nature. This paradox can be portrayed by a classic position versus a more modern-day position. For example, the traditional argument by Friedman (1962, 1970) outlines 'There is one and only one social responsibility of business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits'. The other end of this dichotomy, and arguably a more modern perspective, is a responsible management position that balances sustainability (e.g. resources, the environment, climate change, etc.), responsibility (for all stakeholders) and moral dilemmas (ethics) (Laasch & Conway, 2015). In short, we argue the two are mutually exclusive. We will later evolve this debate through the conceptual lens of Organizational Ambidexterity and other related research. For now, we want you to keep in mind that we are attributing this paradoxical positioning as one reason for potential shortcomings in the delivery of PRME and the achievement of SDGs. Crucially, such a critical position is seldom discussed within the literature. We feel it is essential to bringing necessary criticality with a view of increasing SDGs impact moving into the coming years.

The Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME)

This discussion begins with PRME and an outline of what we aspire to in responsible management education. PRME is a United Nations-supported initiative designed to enhance the profile of sustainability in business and management schools around the world, and inspire future leaders to balance economic and sustainability goals (and this includes links to the Sustainable Development Goals) (PRME, 2021). On the surface of the definition here, we can already see conflict emerge through this 'balancing' of economic and sustainability goals. For example, how far would organizations (intentionally referring to an organization as an entity here) really go to sacrifice economic goals in favour of sustainability goals?

Despite the initial conflict, it is pertinent to start with the positives. PRME is certainly engendering change within Higher Education. Within a UK context, the authors of this chapter have both worked/are working within a PRME Champion business school (note: since August 2021, the first author now works in a university that is a PRME Signatory, but had worked in a PRME Champion business school where the other authors currently reside). In our careers, this means we have seen curriculum and module content change significantly to provide much greater focus on sustainability. We see more academics than ever (including ourselves) producing research and publications around sustainability. We would argue that students are gaining values-based skills and toolkits to take into the workplace after graduation. Thus, we can evidence educational impact quite well; albeit, one might argue this is anecdotal evidence.

Critically reflecting on PRME

The above shows a good start. But is this enough? Is responsible management education transcending into SDGs achievement? Is all as it seems within the delivery of responsible management education? Can change be measured through PRME providers?

Séraphin *et al.*'s (2021b) research highlights that PRME uptake in European higher education providers is not at a level where it can make extensive inroads and necessary changes into the curriculums of a large demographic of institutions. Their research also highlights that there does not appear to be a correlation between PRME institutions who deliver tourism education and then the performance of where the destinations these institutions are based (particularly in terms of environmental sustainability). Thus, the argument can be made that PRME does not yet appear to be transcending from education into business practice (not at least in local/regional form anyway). Of course, this study is limited to the field of tourism, although the nature of this industry has allowed for some metric comparisons to be made in this way and contemplate the measurement of PRME post-education.

Related to the study above, Séraphin *et al.* (2022) conducted a global study analysing PRME adoption and making comparisons with the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index from the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019. Again, limitations were highlighted between PRME uptake and sustainability transitioning into the tourism industry within the same destinations. As a more focused example, Séraphin *et al.*'s (2021a) research conducted with students at Kedge Business School (Marseille, France) also reveals limitations between responsible management education within a PRME institution and related/ transitioning impact on practice outside of the educational context. What we can take from these studies is that more needs to be done and the journey is far from complete.

Beyond the positive messages being derived via PRME, the evidence to support educational transition into practice is still required and still building. Thus, the connections to furthering the achievement of SDGs is perhaps lacking at this point. But, as a symbol of hope and a beacon of theoretical light, PRME currently gives us one of our best models of practice. The challenge is moving that rhetoric into reality and impact. The following sections around Organizational Ambidexterity will consider this dichotomy and contemplate how we can attempt to move further into reality and impact. Crucially, it is positioning the conversation through an alternative lens that hopefully gives rise and scope to considering different approaches that will ultimately help to further achieve SDGs (as well as other necessary agendas in organizations).

What is Organizational Ambidexterity?

Organizational Ambidexterity is a theory pertaining to paradox. In other words, because of its opposing and conflicting positions, it allows a discussion around potential paradox from two extreme points of consideration. Then, when you contemplate maximising organizational performance or practice from these two positions, it should provide alternative approaches, in theory (see **Table 1** for theoretical examples). It is worth noting that this theory was not primarily designed for responsible management education. Indeed, we are mapping the theory/lens to this subject domain. The theory, importantly, is robust enough to allow for that mapping.

Organizational Ambidexterity is built around two conceptual opposing positions: *exploitation* and *exploration* (Birkinshaw & Gupta, 2013; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013; Raisch *et al.*, 2009; Stokes *et al.*, 2015; Stokes *et al.*, 2019). One end of this spectrum relates to e*xploitative approaches* that are generally focused on what is known (underpinned by convergent thinking) and centred on existing customers and markets. The other end of this spectrum relates to *explorative approaches* that are generally focused on moving beyond that existing knowledge into new knowledge through embracing aspects like innovation, experimentation, flexibility and divergent thinking. With these polar opposites, Organizational Ambidexterity can assist in presenting a complicated and potentially paradoxical juxtaposition through this dichotomous framing.

To help visualise the framing above, **Table 1** presents those basic conventions relating to Organizational Ambidexterity. In addition, the table helps to make other connections. For example, *exploitation* can be related in some part to theoretical aspects within McDonaldization (Ritzer, 2008), cost leadership within Porter's Generic Strategies (1980, 1985, 2004), and Transactional Leadership (Hater & Bass, 1988). The emphasis here is the mastery through which such efficiency, cost leadership and so on is achieved. For *exploration*, the obvious counter-theory is again related to Porter's Generic Strategies, whereby the emphasis is on mastery through differentiation, as well as Transformational Leadership (Hater & Bass, 1988). Organizational examples are then connected that are perhaps best known within those theories. Then, to go one step further, we identify what could arguably be presented as successful ambidextrous organizations.

To expand here though, we present Netflix as an ambidextrous organization (e.g. Kohli & Mier, 2021). As a subscription-based streaming service for films and TV, they are a global organization that maintains relatively low subscription rates for customers which keeps competition at bay (*exploitation*). The main difficulty for new competition comes at the hands of innovation and investment in new products, i.e. new films and TV (e*xploration*). This is a somewhat simplified example, but it could be argued that Netflix could quite easily raise their prices for goods and services with all those premium products attached. Yet, they appear to hold back. One reason could be that they make so much through global subscription and having over 200 million customers. Another reason could centre around ambidextrous practice. In other words, through maintaining lower subscription rates but maximising investment in new products and services, it truly makes Netflix very difficult to compete with. This is an organization that started out in the early guise of being a DVD rental service via mail.

Innovative, but ultimately the business approach did not cut it. Yet, they have gone on to utilise technology and globalization (e.g. economies of scale) in particular to achieve ambidexterity (whether done consciously or not). Thus, it proves that an ambidextrous organization can be achieved and there are examples to compare and aspire to.

Organizational Ambidexterity: the extremes	**Exploitation**	**Exploration**
Common associations	Existing customers and/or markets Efficiency Refinement Expanding what is generally *known* to the organization	Focus on new knowledge and movements away from existing knowledge Experimentation Flexibility Innovation Divergent thinking
Theoretical links	McDonaldization (Ritzer, 2008; Smith, 2016) through: Efficiency, Calculability, Predictability, and Control Cost leadership or cost focus through Porter's Generic Strategies (Porter, 1980, 1985, 2004; Smith, 2016) Transactional Leadership (Hater & Bass, 1988; Smith, 2016)	A focus on differentiation or differentiation focus through Porter's Generic Strategies (Porter, 1980, 1985, 2004; Smith 2016) Transformational Leadership (Hater & Bass, 1988; Smith, 2016)
Organizational examples	McDonalds IKEA Ryanair Primark	Apple BMW Google Toyota
Examples of ambidextrous organizations, i.e. both exploitative and explorative	Netflix Amazon Xiaomi Phantom Geak Tencent	

Table 1: Overview of Organizational Ambidexterity

Plenty of literature (e.g. Raisch *et al.*, 2009) will discuss how to 'balance' *exploitative* and *explorative* business practices. However, we will work from the argument that the polar opposites identified through *exploitation* and *exploration* can be reconsidered and positioned to work 'paradoxically in tandem' (Smith, 2016:12), i.e. to maximise each end of the spectrum contained within the paradox. Although this may sound counterintuitive and arguably impossible, we argue that organizations must consider responsible management and sustainability in this way for any chance to succeed through PRME or SDGs. This is akin to accepting a paradox and using it constructively (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989). In essence, we cannot merely balance profit versus planet; they need to be (and arguably are) mutually exclusive and we need to maximise both ends of this particular spectrum. In essence, instead of being stunted by the nature of the paradox, the understanding and positioning around it creates a line of strategic thinking to move forward by tackling those polar opposites simultaneously, but without compromise at either end – it may be the only way to generate the purposeful change required. That general context here surrounds the difficulty of implementation and delivery of responsible management principles (including SDGs and PRME) (i.e. values orientated; new knowledge and practice) versus more traditional business approaches (i.e. profit orientated; existing knowledge).

Although we presented the example of Netflix earlier as an ambidextrous organization, that example sits within, arguably, more normative business practice, e.g. 'people versus profit' and surrounding organizational conversations. For this chapter moving forwards, the focus will look more like 'people versus profit versus planet'. The dichotomy almost becomes a trichotomy when layering in responsible management education in addition to those normative business practices. This adds weight to the complexity of delivery and potential for success for SDGs. We delve further into this in the following section.

Applying the conceptual lens of Organizational Ambidexterity to responsible management education

In this section, we are going to focus on a number of tensions within responsible management education. These tensions will highlight through an Organizational Ambidexterity lens why it is so challenging to achieve SDGs through PRME. The paradoxical elements outlined will serve to highlight why an ambidextrous approach could be required for greater impact in the delivery of PRME and greater success for SDGs. As Hahn *et al.* (2018:235) highlight, a paradoxical perspective within sustainable development will embrace the tensions to be discussed "to simultaneously accommodate competing yet interrelated economic, environmental, and social concerns". Indeed, Moratis & Melissen (2022) argue that when we address the SDGs, this automatically comes with trade-offs, tensions and paradoxes. Following this section, we move into discussing the hidden curriculum and the part it plays for executing (or not) responsible management education. Subsequently, we discuss a competencies focus for responsible management education and how this could act as a catalyst for greater impact moving forward.

Tension 1: Shareholders versus stakeholders versus sustainable development

There is a traditional positioning whereby shareholders sit in potential opposition to other stakeholders. Stakeholder Theory effectively highlights how many potential relationships could be intertwined into business, including governmental bodies, political groups, trade associations, trade unions, communities, financiers, suppliers, employees, customers, and even competitors (Freeman, 2015). We could consider profit orientation and maximisation (*exploitation*) versus the considering of all other stakeholders where it is potentially costly to address them all (*explorative*). This is challenging enough and comes with many complications due to the vast and diverse nature of those stakeholder relationships. Yet, to go further and deal with something like climate change, becoming carbon neutral, and other sustainable development aspects, we arguably need to go beyond just visualising stakeholders and reacting to their presence, because there are aspects like the natural environment to consider and generally going much deeper into issues raised (i.e. like the SDGs outline).

To truly achieve these SDGs then, organizations may need to radically alter their business practices, and this is likely to be costly in the first instance. Thus, perhaps organizations will just maintain this paradoxical situation and status quo, which we can perhaps label as profit and shareholder driven (*exploitative*) versus sustainable development action and stakeholder driven (*explorative*). Quite rightly, this former could be seen as the simpler and more secure option for a business, so could go a long way in explaining why organizations are slow to react and reluctant to make necessary changes. To effectively achieve SDGs, however, the need for *explorative* approaches is theoretically clear, i.e. organizations need to be doing considerably more and embracing this need for change. If such change is resisted, contributions to SDGs could be minimalist, tokenistic and fall considerably short of what is required.

So how can the above be done simultaneously, 'paradoxically in tandem' (Smith, 2016:12)? One approach commonly suggested is finding cost efficiency through sustainable practices. This is arguably applying *exploitation*, because of the efficiency element, but also requires *exploration* to generate the new practices needed. This is perhaps where we are currently falling short in achieving the SDGs. If we can build this ambidextrous approach in more organizations, then arguably profit orientation and SDGs can be simultaneously achieved? One aspect of this tension is clear. If the majority of organizations persist in resisting the application of necessary *explorative* practices, and therefore persist in being slow to change, this will only lead to limited achievement of the SDGs. But how can such change be achieved, at the rate that is required to meet the 2030 SDGs, within a fundamentally capitalist paradigm?

Tension 2: Transactional leadership versus transformational leadership versus responsible leadership

Leadership is another great area to highlight tension and potential paradox. To build that discussion here, we will highlight some very basic connections to leadership theory. The discussion could go a lot deeper, but we only want to introduce the debate to reflect on the subject matter within this chapter.

Transactional Leadership is commonly characterised through rewards in accordance to contracts and efforts exerted, and an avoidance of new direction when old practice fulfils performance goals (*exploitative*) (Hater & Bass, 1988; Smith, 2016). In contrast, Transformational Leadership is commonly characterised through: an ability to instil pride, faith, respect and a sense of mission; an ability to delegate, teach and coach; and an encouragement to think and act in new and creative ways (*explorative*) (Hater & Bass, 1988; Smith, 2016). This is perhaps the common tension often discussed in leadership literature. However, these are somewhat internalised and focused upon the organization being worked for.

There is certainly greater emphasis on elements external to the organization when considering responsible leadership, which can bring in areas of ethics, values, an emphasis on all stakeholders, serving and caring for others, trust and emotional intelligence (Maak & Pless, 2006; Pless, 2007; Tronto, 1993; Voegtlin *et al.*, 2012). Thus, although *explorative* practices may clearly be needed here to focus on sustainable development, it is important to realise it is potentially an extra dimension of leadership capability. This intensifies the tension and the potential for paradox and even highlights further the need for practice that embraces various aspects of leadership approaches. The link between responsible leadership and achieving SDGs becomes clear here, i.e. if PRME and SDGs are externalised, it could become difficult for managers/leaders to even consider, never mind operationalise, relevant action to respond to these challenges.

Tension 3: Traditional education versus responsible management education

A capitalism tension needs to be highlighted here as it has such a profound impact upon responsible management education. If society accepts that we live in and prosper around a capitalist economy, then profit sits at this heart of this (Hirsch, 2021). Arguably then, to be effective at business in society, we need to be effectively trained in universities on profiteering and profit maximising. Society almost dictates this. As a result, the tension comes why trying to radically alter the minds of future business leaders (*explorative*) and bring in something potentially counterintuitive to that profit focused training (*exploitative*), i.e. responsible management education. General dimensions might include sustainability (triple bottom line), responsibility (stakeholder value) and ethics (moral excellence) (Laasch & Conway, 2015). Despite criticisms that business schools need to become more socially responsible and grow beyond criticisms that they are “brainwashing institutions educating their graduates only in relatively narrow shareholder value ideology” (Matten & Moon, 2004:323), the tension and potential paradox will remain if society is generally built in such a capitalistic manner. This tension is further discussed through the hidden curriculum section that follows.

As academic educators, as the opening question highlights, we could be irresponsible in delivering responsible management education if we are not successfully preparing graduates for a profit focused capitalistic society. This is a real source of potential paradox/tension and one that is not discussed and explored enough amongst academics. Worse still, could it potentially mean that responsible management education teachings become potentially *tokenistic* if graduates revert to business practices more akin to those traditional capitalistic teachings? In other words, it is all very well hearing about the importance of SDGs and responsible management, but it would be devastating for impact if little action were to follow.

The difficulty of implementing and delivering on responsible management principles

The tensions identified and discussed in the previous section perhaps highlights the absence of an ‘Alpha’ (leader) in the responsible management education system. Indeed, an inadequate structure for an organization and an absence of positive synergy amongst members of a system are barriers to the sustainability of this system (Sun *et al.*, 2013; Todd *et al.*, 2017).

The ‘Alpha’ framework is used to discuss interactions amongst members of a system (Ek & Larson, 2017). This framework stipulates that a system must be spearheaded by an ‘Alpha’, whom the role is to take decisions for the entire group (Mech, 1999), as this person or organization has been identified as the most capable to lead, but with the support of others (Mirjalili *et al.*, 2014). Amongst these are the ‘Beta’, who have a secondary role as part of its remits is to reinforce instructions from the ‘Alpha’, as well as advising and providing feedback. The ‘Beta’ is/are the second in line if the ‘Alpha’ is not capable of performing relevant duties (Mirjalili *et al.*, 2014). The ‘Omega’ is at the bottom of the hierarchy as they are only required to obey orders, and serve as a scapegoat to vent frustrations and tensions (Mirjalili *et al.,* 2014). All the others below the ‘Omega’ are referred as ‘Delta’. They are subordinates and do not have any specific role (Mirjalili *et al.*, 2014).

With the above said, it is also worth mentioning the fact that the ‘Alpha’, known to be strong, authoritative, and well-accomplished individuals or lead organizations etc., are also being perceived as weak, as their strengths are also their weaknesses (Ludeman & Erlandson, 2006). The concept of the ‘Alpha’ is ambidextrous by nature, because, and linking a Janusian thinking approach, there is a need to contemplate and consider simultaneously opposing operational strategies and implementations (Rothenberg, 1996; Sanchez & Adams, 2008; Vo-Thanh *et al.*, 2020). This is almost a *sine qua non* condition for success. The ambidextrous ‘Alpha’ can be seen as both a hero who can save a group, but also as a villain who can harm this group (Mirjalili *et al.*, 2014; Mkono *et al.*, 2020). This is all the more important for complex systems, as these types of systems can lead to innovation (Rouard & Schegg, 2019) and, more importantly, improvement (Fragniere & Simon, 2019).

The context of responsible management education is, based on previous discussions, a complex system that could benefit from ambidextrous approaches. Thus, for responsible management education delivery it is important to determine the role ('Alpha', 'Beta', 'Omega' and 'Delta') of each party involved in the system. Based on the tensions previously discussed, an 'Alpha' is certainly needed, but there is also an important role for an 'Omega'. At the moment, the related 'Alpha' role within responsible management education institutions is not really performing effectively enough due to the fact that there is a disconnection between academia and industry when it comes to research related to sustainability and outcomes expected (Belmonte-Urena *et al.*, 2021); this create tensions (like those previously mentioned). Graduates could arguably play the role of the 'Omega', providing they manage to demonstrate their ability to simultaneously help an organization to grow and offer sustainable and responsible strategies. For this to become effective as a transition from education to industry, it is also important to adopt a suitable type of structure for responsible management education to work.

Organizations involved in collaboration schemes are organizations which have either a centralised structure based on hierarchy, an autonomous structure or a hybrid structure (Fragniere & Simon, 2019). Organizations based on a centralised structure are very efficient in terms of decision-making; however, when the hub of this centralised structure is negatively impacted by an issue, the entire network collapses and none of dependent satellites of the network can takeover. As for organizations based on an autonomous structure, the hub does not have a leading role and this makes these organizations difficult to manage; however, if the hub of the network collapses, a dependent satellite of the network can takeover. Finally, organizations based on hybrid structure are a mixture of the two previous one. This structure is quite dynamic, but also requires all satellites of the network to work very closely (Fragniere & Simon, 2019).

As ambidexterity has been underpinning much of the discussion in this chapter, a hybrid structure seems to be the most suitable when implementing and delivering responsible management education. The centralised ('Alpha') role could be played by a leading PRME Higher Education Institution (HEI) (based on sustainability performance) in each country, which will play an advisory role to all other HEIs ('Delta') in the country. The HEIs will have some degree of autonomy in terms of how they implement PRME. However, because of the competitive nature of and between HEIs in terms of attracting students, positioning in leagues table, etc. (Harker *et al.*, 2016), this might be difficult to implement, even if a change in leadership approach is important for sustainability (Visser, 2015). Yet, when it comes to sustainability, and therefore responsible management education, it appears that despite all stakeholders and shareholders being aware that a change needs to happen, there is a reluctance to create radical changes in the way they operate (Mkono *et al.*, 2020). This once again reveals ambidextrous/paradoxical tensions.

Competencies – an enabling tool for ambidextrous responsible management learning

By adopting a position that "The purpose of business is to produce profitable solutions to the problems of people and planet, and not to profit from producing problems for people and planet" (Mayer & Roche, 2021:11), then, by extension, ambidextrous leaders are needed to address the goals of people *and* planet *and* profit. Paradoxically, transformational educational approaches also require transformational business approaches, since, in seeking innovative pedagogies, educators also need to focus on the employability competencies required by business. It would be irresponsible for business schools not to prepare graduates for workforce employability, while, at the same time, it can also be considered irresponsible for business schools not to prepare graduates to address the so-called 'wicked' problems of sustainability that businesses are, at the very least, answerable to. Thus, the following section considers how competencies can be embedded into education to equip graduates to seek profitable solutions (through exploitative efficiencies) to the problems of people and planet (through explorative innovative behaviours).

To analyse the potential impact of competencies as a tool for responsible management education, it is helpful to first consider the application of competencies within an organizational context. While recognising there is extensive literature on varying definitions of competence versus competency/competencies, this chapter draws on early academic commentators such as Sparrow (1995) and leading practitioner bodies such as 'The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development' (CIPD, 2020) in defining competencies as attitudes, skills and behaviours required for effective job performance. The subsequent section on the educational context will similarly define competencies as dimensions of Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes/behaviours (KSA). Implications for responsible management analysis and action from an ambidexterity perspective will be considered across both organizational and educational competencies.

Organizational context

Competencies fall under the umbrella of contingency theories relating to performance management, whereby maximum performance is achieved when competencies are aligned with role requirements and organizational context (Boyatzis & Boyatzis, 2008). They are essentially talent management tools in recruiting, training and evaluating performance. The CIPD (2020 [online]) advises that "competency frameworks, when done well, can increase clarity around performance expectations and establish a clear link between individual and organizational performance". The inherent paradoxes of competency frameworks are apparent here in that while they are descriptive tools in specifying desirable performance behaviours, at the same time, they are normative tools in terms of what people should do (Bolden *et al.*, 2006). The suggestion that individual and organizational performance is benefitted 'when done well' can be juxtaposed with individual and organizational outcomes when they are not done well. Paradoxically, therefore, it might be said that while they are designed to benefit individual and organizational performance, they can potentially also constrain and inhibit effective behaviours. The same of course applies to their effective application in educational settings.

The multi-functional use of competency frameworks means they are applicable to organizational ambidexterity. This can serve as tools for both *exploitation* (for example, in selective recruitment processes or in defining the daily job roles in a realistic way) and *exploration* (for example, in performance development when they need to be applicable to as many people as possible or in defining the daily job roles as an aspirational guide for behaviour). There is a significant body of literature which details the limitations of competency frameworks effectively synthesised by Bolden and Gosling (2006) as being; reductionist in a fragmented approach to what are often complex roles; generic without considering context; backward rather than forward looking; too focused on measurable behaviours rather than more subtle qualities; and, mechanistic which results in a 'criteria compliance' (*exploitative*) rather than encouraging innovative and risk-taking behaviours that might not ‘tick’ within the competency ‘box’ (*explorative*).

Hollenbeck *et al.* (2006:412) contend that although competency frameworks may appear to be reductionist and generic, they “can be used and applied in complex ways” and that they “are a useful attempt to help leaders learn a broader range of competencies and, in the process, learn how to use them differentially and effectively across different situations”. This view is helpful to inform an analysis of pedagogical approaches to embedding competencies for responsible management, in which they are flexibly and creatively applied, rather than restrictive and constraining to effective behaviours and learning. While it is straightforward to accept that they should not be used as a ‘one size fits all’ measuring instrument, whether in an organizational or educational context (in which they would be used exploitatively), it is perhaps less straightforward to ensure they are applied flexibly according to situational differences (i.e. *explorative*). The key of course, is that they are both explorative and exploitative.

Embedding Responsible Management Education

University education represents a significant opportunity to influence society and business, and it is the purpose of PRME to shape the skills and behaviours of current and future business leaders. This section details some of the major areas of study into competencies for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). This is an evolving field, which capture approaches, such as Rieckmann (2018), in informing educational pedagogy linking the SDGs to twelve ESD competencies (A Rounder Sense of Purpose, undated) through to the business discipline. For instance, building on Wiek *et al.* (2011), Laasch & Moosmayer (2016) provide a systematic literature review which underpins the competencies needed for the ‘professionalisation’ of responsible business management. This analyses competency literature according to KSA (Knowledge, Skills, Attitude) dimensions, which are also adopted in five competencies of the ‘Competency Assessment for Responsible Leadership’ (CARL, 2021; Muff *et al.*, 2020).

At a broader level, UNESCO (2017, 2020) identified eight ‘cross-cutting competencies for achieving the SDGs’. These link the competencies to the cognitive domain (knowledge), behavioural domain (Skills) and socio-emotional domain (Attitudes). UNESCO’s competencies have been adopted by The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA, 2021) which manages standards of Higher Education in the UK, competencies for ESD. The KSA dimensions provide a helpful framework for informing educators understanding of learning outcomes and activities. **Table 2** compares the UNESCO (2017) competencies to those of the CARL framework. This is not intended as a definitive comparison, and it is relevant to note that the CARL framework literature does not refer directly to UNESCO competencies. The purpose here is to demonstrate the alignment between mainstream sustainability and responsible management competencies.

As a result, we are calling for ambidextrous university education, which simultaneously develops graduates’ commercial acumen as part of the more predictable (*exploitative*) expectations of a programme alongside mainstreaming responsible management which can be seen as riskier (*explorative*). This represents a paradigm shift away from ‘shoe-horning’ sustainable development goal focuses into modules, towards strategically embedding the principles from the top down, such as in programme revalidation design. The broader university context is fundamental in shaping students lived experiences and operationalising any definitions of sustainability/responsible management focused competencies, in the same way as organizational contexts influence employee attitudes and behaviours. Therefore, competencies for sustainable education are useful in scrutiny of both formal learning and the 'hidden curriculum' (Blasco, 2011), which refers to the wider university experiences of campus life that can act to positively reinforce or undermine formal curriculum learning.

UNESCO/QAA Competencies for achieving the SDGs	Competency Assessment for Responsible Leadership (CARL)
Systems thinking	Systems thinking
Normative	Ethics and values
Strategic	Change and Innovation
Collaboration	Stakeholder relations
Self-awareness	Self-awareness
Integrated problem-solving	
Anticipatory	
Critical thinking	

Table 2: Based on UNESCO (2017), CARL (2021) and Muff *et al.* (2020)

There is huge potential for graduates to enter the workforce with a mind-set for transformative business action, and fills the void identified by (Gosling & Grodecki, 2020:251) that "there is little to say that leaders should be willing to initiate transformative responses to injustice, ecocide and inequality. The world of management competences has yet to catch on to calls for radical changes to (or of) capitalism". University is arguably the ideal base for developing students' competencies to develop the organizational competency frameworks needed for a new, ambidextrous responsible business paradigm. As set out by Redman *et al.* (2020), it is now necessary to consider how competencies can most effectively be assessed in educational contexts, linking to the same limitations of organizational contexts where Stokes & Oiry (2012) observe that competencies can be assessed in 'variable and unreliable' ways. The challenge for both business and education is to move from rhetoric to action.

Final reflections

It has been shown that while there is an understanding of the competencies required to address the so-called 'wicked' problems of sustainability, it requires an urgent imperative for organizations to integrate responsible management competencies (capturing ethical, environmental and social behaviours) into existing management competency frameworks. It is positive that competencies are being integrated into advice for 'Education for Sustainable Development 2030' as part of the SDGs, but if universities are to avoid the criticisms of businesses whereby frameworks are backwards rather than forward looking, it is vital for a common language of responsible management competencies to be developed between business and education. Within education, programmes need to consider paradoxical tensions in how responsible management competencies are featured across modules and programmes and use this to develop ambidextrous thinking, alongside how competencies are reinforced or possibly decoupled by the informal curriculum.

Returning to the initial question, "Are we *irresponsible* in delivering responsible management education?", we hope you can see the paradox and tensions explored make it a complicated answer. Yet, we strive for the answer to be a 'no' if we can tackle the paradox and tensions using organizational ambidexterity. By understanding the challenges under a different lens, we perhaps give ourselves a better chance of working towards effective change for the future that will support PRME and work towards greater achievement of SDGs whilst maintaining some of the status quo related to society ideals, e.g. a desire to make a significant profit in business.

This offers greater depth of thought when considering the leadership of SDGs, the role of business schools and this whole book overall. This chapter has explored responsible management education under a different microscope/lens and this should build on the wealth of perspectives throughout the different chapters. We hope the journey through this chapter has been emotive, engaging and forward thinking. It might have provoked some discomfort, but also a chance to self-reflect and be inspired. Responsible management educators are essential and important actors, and it is crucial we are constantly pushing ourselves and our approaches to help businesses and students with their future working practices. Contemplating and embracing paradoxical practices could be one way to assist in this development.

Where next?

Case studies demonstrating how responsible management competencies can most effectively be embedded into the formal and informal curriculum are needed, since to focus on the dimensions of Knowledge, Skills and Attitude requires additional planning by educators, and additional focus by students. Such case examples should build on debates around the most effective ways of embedding competencies into *explorative* curriculums, within potentially *exploitative* contexts based on restrictive resourcing.

Research is needed into how embedding competencies into responsible management education links to changes in business behaviours and attitudes. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, it would be devastating if educational inputs were not linked to positive industry impacts in effectively managing the paradox of people versus profit versus planet.

In terms of the paradoxical situations, we could argue there is a need to accept that such realities exist. Instead of trying to fix or resolve this, we could instead find practices that embrace the nature of paradox. Applying organizational ambidexterity, and even ambidextrous leadership approaches, could assist in finding workable solutions rather than being lost in the frustrations of complex paradoxical realities. For business schools and responsible management educators, applying critical reflection and then making effective change could be assisted by the lens of thinking offered here. In essence, we should not accept the norms and limitations of responsible management education, but should seek to advance its delivery and impact.

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