The marginalisation of responsible management in business schools: a consideration of future trajectories.

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Abstract

***Purpose*:** Business schools are vital in promoting responsible management (RM) – a management grounded in ethics and values beneficial to a wide array of stakeholders and overall society. Nevertheless, due to deeply embedded institutional modernistic dynamics and paradigms, responsible management is, despite its importance, repeatedly marginalised in business school curricula. If students are to engage with responsible management thinking, then its occlusion represents a pressing issue. Drawing on the United Kingdom (UK) business school context, this paper examines this issue through a framework of institutional theory and considers the role played by (modernistic) institutional accreditation and research assessment processes in marginalisation of responsible management.

***Design/methodology/approach*:** This study utilised an exploratory qualitative research method. Data were collected from seventeen responsible management expert participants from fifteen UK business schools that were signatories to the United Nations Principles for Responsible Management Education (UNPRME) through semi-structured in-depth interviews and analysed using the six phases of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis.

***Findings*:** The study identifies a potent institutional isomorphic amalgam resulting in conservative impacts for responsible management. This dynamic is termed *multiple institutional isomorphic marginalisation (MIIM)* - whereby a given domain is occluded and displaced by hegemonic institutional pressures. In responsible management's case, MIIM operates through accreditation-driven modernistic-style curricula. This leads business schools to a predilection towards 'mainstream' representations of subject areas and a focus on mechanistic research exercises. Consequently, this privileges certain activities over responsible management development with a range of potential negative effects, including social impacts.

Originality/value: This study fills an important gap concerning the need for a critical in-depth exploration of the role (and implications) that international accreditation frameworks—such as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the EFMD Quality Improvement System (EQUIS), and the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME), and national institutional academic research assessment processes in this case the Research Excellence Framework in the UK—play in affecting the possible growth and influence of responsible management. Additionally, it utilises heterotopia as a conceptual lens to reveal the institutional 'mask' of responsibility predominantly at play in the UK business school context and offer alternative pathways for responsible management careers.

Keywords: Responsible Management, Modernism, Institutional isomorphism, Heterotopia, Accreditation, REF, MIIM.

Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed the introduction and development of subjects within business and management studies which aim to have a positive impact on pressing societal issues—including, for example: sustainability, corporate social responsibility, and responsible management (RM). Responsible management can be viewed as a blend of ethics, sustainability, and responsibility, among other things (Laasch and Conaway, 2015) and is essentially sociological and qualitative in nature and approach. While considerable debate has taken place on many established subject domains (for example, strategy, finance, economics, marketing etc.), commentary on responsible management remains emergent and evolving. There are several reasons for this stunted development – not least the hegemonic presence of modernistic processes and structurings of business school activity (characterised by notionally objective quantification, metrics, linearity, and reductionism) - and this forms the focal interest of this research. This hegemony privileges, for example, a range of long-established (sic: institutional) 'mainstream' subjects over responsible management.

Responsible management does indeed have representation and is promoted by (modernistically-styled) international accrediting institutions such as, for example: the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the EFMD Quality Improvement System (EQUIS), and the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME). All of these bodies demand that business schools demonstrate engagement with responsible management as an aspect of their requirements. Such accreditations therefore constitute institutional frameworks, or forces, that skew and shape responsible management in business schools and its wider consequent potential impacts (Prasad *et al*., 2019). Moreover, in the UK context, linked with such accreditation frameworks, the *Research Excellence Framework* (REF) and journal quality lists such as the UK Chartered Association of Business Schools Journal Guide List (i.e., 'the ABS list') (Bryce *et al*., 2020) reinforces these

modernistic effects by frequently prioritising particular positivistic methodologies in many highly ranked journals. Therefore, the present study considers the role and implications that such international and national institutional frameworks and processes play in affecting the possible growth and influence of responsible management. This produces the following research question:

> *RQ: What are the dynamics and effects of business school modernistic institutional processes (e.g. accreditation and research exercises) on the lived experience of the main academic proponents of responsible management within the business school?*

Conceptual Framing: Responsible Management (RM) from an Institutional Perspective

The rapid expansion of the number of business schools during the 20th century (Larson, 2020) and the commensurate growth of academic research on business management and organisation have facilitated research that has variously addressed the responsibility of a range of stakeholders. In turn, these efforts were supported in the latter half of the 20th century by what can be termed a critical or 'sociological' turn in business, management, and organisation studies which focused on philosophies and approaches that challenged modernism – such approaches included, for example, critical theory, postmodernism, and poststructuralism (Fournier and Grey, 2000). In particular, this '(r)evolution' witnessed the emergence of RM-type topics addressing a wider range of sociological and societal impacts relating to business activities, including but not limited to sustainability, corporate social responsibility (CSR), corporate citizenship, well-being, business ethics, zero-growth, anti-globalisation, social entrepreneurship, and responsible management (Matten and Moon, 2020). As a result, responsible management has been described as: 'rebalancing society through management'—i.e. by providing appropriate leadership—or 'stakeholder harmonisation' (Carroll *et al.,* 2020). However, Nonet *et al*. (2016) cautioned that there is a dangerous tendency to define responsible

management in generic terms, echoing Wersun's (2017) concern about the need to appreciate 'context'.

The evocation of, and drive for, a need for responsible management implies that some modern management and organisational behaviours have hitherto, on occasion been regrettably less than entirely responsible. Further, it might even be said that periodically managers and organisations may have conducted themselves in categorically *irresponsible* manners (Martins and Lazzarin, 2019). Recent illustrative examples include: the banking practices leading to the 2008 banking and economic crash; the Enron debacle (2001); and the Carlos Ghosn/Nissan crisis (2018). Thus, the adoption of responsible management clearly has an ongoing important role to play in business school curricula and research, influencing students so that they might accomplish beneficial societal and organisational impacts in their subsequent careers (Mousa *et al*., 2020). In this spirit, business schools have a responsibility to convey not just technical skills and knowledge, but also positive values, mindsets, and behaviours (Petriglieri, 2012) and it has been further argued that their key role is to support the next generation of globally-minded and caring citizens (Prandini *et al*., 2012). However, despite these seemingly societally-focussed developments, there have been growing calls to question the actual extent to which much business school activity and research has societal relevance (Van de Ven, 2007). This issue is echoed by Tourish (2020) who underscored the need for management scholars to desist from undertaking bite-sized chunks of research and publishing related papers simply to persuasively and quickly resonate with leading journals with a primary motive to advance their academic careers. Tourish proposed an alternative pathway to rid academics of: "the suggested genuine imposters many of us have become by pretending to be doing more important work, and more competently, than we really are", which necessitates that we adopt a mind-set to undertake research purely to advance knowledge that is comprehensible to not only insiders—

enacted by the ivory tower metaphor, but most importantly the public so as to engender tangible, meaningful positive broader societal contributions/impacts.

Several longstanding issues have been highlighted as potential barriers to the development of responsible management in business schools, including the fact that many treat it as mere 'window dressing' (Cornuel and Hommel, 2015). Sharma and Hart (2014) identified that, while responsible management research centres and courses have been established, there is little evidence of their having any in-depth impact. For many commentators, business schools are overly fixated on, for example, institutional rankings and league tables – predicated on conventional mainstream subjects, leading to a loss of 'self' mission and societal values (Durand and Dameron, 2011; Jack, 2022). More intensely, Ghosal (2005, p. 76) accused business schools of: "propagating ideologically inspired amoral management theories that have actively freed their students from a sense of moral responsibility." Alternatively expressed, business schools in seeking to be seen as connecting with global contexts have potentially become self-focussed, silo-like, and disconnected (Dyllick, 2015). Similarly, Knight and O'Leary (2006) argue that business schools have tended to respond to the macro-economic environment which seemingly reflects managerialism, competition-based, materialistic, growth-focused approaches, even if this does not as such undermine the transformative nature of business education. In this vein, and probing more deeply at the underpinning foundations and drivers of the *status quo* in many business schools, a major factor shaping business school curricula is the continuing dominance of modernistic and positivistic assumptions and paradigms linked to quasi-scientific and capitalistic framing imbued with a preoccupation with competition, efficiency, and performativity (Jones *et al*., 2020; Stokes, 2016). These tend to produce curricula that are overly-focussed on a reductionist and linear financialisation and commodification of ideas (Millar, 2020; Stokes, 2016)—i.e. (following and building on Knight and O'Leary) yielding primarily competition-based, materialistic, growth-focused approaches

that produce negative societal and environmental impacts and poor sustainability that are likely to infringe human rights and dignity (Blowfield and Murray, 2014). This issue of widespread yet unacknowledged underlying paradigms and their influence in higher education curricula is longstanding (Margolis, 2001; Martin, 1976). Thus, whilst business schools have been increasingly pressured to respond to many of the wider social issues impacting the world (Milutinović and Nikolić, 2014); this is often conducted primarily through a modernistic lens and an institutionalised inward-looking manner (Tourish, 2020).

In seeking to respond to these issues, the present argument engages institutional theory (Patriotta, 2020; Voronov and Weber, 2020) to approach and understand the interplay of responsible management with hegemonic modernistic paradigms that shape curricula and influential accreditation and research policy frameworks within the national case context of the UK. Considering institutional theory, Scott (2014) stated that an institution can be understood conceptually as an organisation and/or entity founded by a given community for educational, religious, social, cultural, political, or other purposes. Institutions commonly purport to provide order and stability to aspects of society and social systems. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) indicated that institutions tend to exhibit *regulative*, *normative,* and *cultural-cognitive* dimensions. *Regulative* behaviours prescribe structures and rules to govern behaviours and ensure that individuals conform through obligation and persuasion. In terms of a business school and university context, Hanson (2001) identified regulative dimensions as being evidenced in, for example, compliance with accreditation bodies and institutional submission to research exercises and general university rules and procedures. Alternatively, *normative and cultural-cognitive dimensions* relate to the guidance of actor actions in regard to *what seems appropriate and expected* within the given institutional values and culture, which constitutes the unwritten norms, rules of conduct and moral obligations (Palthe, 2014; Patriotta, 2020). Responsible management is marginalised within the normative research exercise and

accreditation environments which privilege mainstream topics and modernistic academic performance metrics (Burchell *et al*., 2015; Doherty *et al*., 2015; Mousa *et al*., 2020; Warin *et al*., 2016). Furthermore, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) classically identified three means through which institutional isomorphism occurs: *coercive (obliged/forced)*, *normative (following trends/fitting in/being part of the 'group')*, and *mimetic (copying/following to fit in)*. *Coercive, normative, and mimetic isomorphism* operates through the need for institutions to adhere to rules and prescriptions, which aligns with the above-discussed regulative dimension. Examples here might include business school league tables and the pursuit of the accreditations awarded by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), EFMD Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) and Association of MBAs (AMBA)—the so-called 'Triple Crown' sought by business schools. Although not integrally part of the Triple Crown, the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME)—which focus expressly on responsible management—is also emerging as a desirable, or even necessary compliance for business schools. However, it is still not part of the sought-after Triple Crown. All the accreditation schemes require evidence of adherence to ethics, sustainability, and responsible management (Rasche *et al*., 2020). Indeed, for some time, EQUIS and AACSB have made ethics, responsibility, and sustainability mandatory parts of their evaluation criteria (Cho *et al*., 2014). However, business schools often continue to focus on offering courses that examine these three themes separately, thus, modernistically reducing them to isolated competencies while missing opportunities to consider their interconnectedness (Smith and Alexander, 2013). Responsible management related research is also affected by the need for business schools to comply with institutional isomorphic systems and research-related pressures such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the United Kingdom. However, here an interesting and important tension emerges. Responsible management is often viewed in a pejorative manner because it is often cast as *inter-disciplinary* and, thus, not considered by mainstream-

affiliated commentators (in an environment dominated by modernistic specialisms) as conducive to the delivery of high impact research. In turn, this means responsible management research is unlikely to secure outlets in major journals (Cotton *et al*., 2018) and thus be able to contribute to REF and other research assessment processes. This provides perhaps a further reason for the diminished importance and marginalisation attributed by business school directorates to responsible management activities and outputs. A shift in this regard is likely owing to the emergence of journals such as Management Learning (ML), *Academy of Management Learning and Education* (AMLE), and *Journal of Management Education* (JME) leading the way with responsible management like articles (e.g. Hibbert and Wright, 2023; Millar and Price, 2018; Saunders *et al*., 2022; Soh *et al*., 2023).

As noted above, in recent decades, due to a wide range of scandals and crises that have plagued the economic and business environments, business schools have been charged with not doing enough on programmes to ensure these episodes do not subsequently occur. In other words there are gaps in their curricula (Ratle *et al*., 2020). This has led observers to comment that the capitalist and competition and consumption-promoting modernistic paradigms that dominate business school curricula (through regulative institutional accreditations) are a serious issue and that more attention needs to be paid to responsible management informed ideas and societal needs (Parker, 2020). We will now outline the three different institutional frameworks relevant to the UK context with a view to considering and contextualising these issues further.

Institutional context – PRME, REF and accreditation in the UK

It has been demonstrated above that isomorphic institutionalism is an important driver and motivation for business schools to engage in, for example, research assessment and accreditation processes (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Doherty *et al*., 2015). Such engagement

is driven to keep up with competitor business schools and to achieve a sense of greater control over their trajectories (Keerasuntonpong and Cordery, 2018). As indicated, this involves a combination of coercive, normative, and mimetic isomorphic pressures that impel business schools into a series of felt-obligation and mutual behaviours (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Seyfried *et al*., 2019). Alternatively, a business school lacking accreditations potentially operates as a form of sanction on those institutions that do not engage in or comply with such behaviours (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015). Through business school alignment, such systems also work to provide *a form of legitimacy* to business school deans and directors who feel compelled to comply with them (Warin *et al*., 2016). However, they are also often equally seen as a product of the questionable modernistic and positivistic coercive structuring and creation of target systems predominant in business schools and wider society (Millar, 2020; Stokes, 2016).

As alluded to above, many of the accreditation frameworks do require demonstration of, and engagement with, ethical, sustainable, and responsible management practices by business schools (e.g. the ERS criteria considered to be mandatory by the EQUIS and AACSB), but how this is addressed may vary and be flexible (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015; Sharland *et al*., 2013). Business school accreditation systems such as the AACSB, EQUIS, AMBA, and PRME are thus a potentially major mechanism for the institutionalisation of responsible management. In particular, a key facet of the responsible management activities carried out in business schools in recent decades has been the emergence of the PRME accreditation organisation and of the six responsible management principles that it promotes and guide the compliance reports that members submit for approval. Significantly, the PRME is endorsed by the United Nations (UN) and aligns with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) initiative. It has over 800 signatory member institutions globally and has close relationships with wider accreditation bodies (PRME, 2021). The PRME is therefore of growing interest to many UK business schools.

However, commentators such as Storey *et al*. (2017), whilst signalling that accreditation bodies have a genuine and real opportunity to influence responsible management in business schools, remain unconvinced that such bodies drive *real RM change and adoption* in these institutions, and therefore identified them as having a diminished and reactive role (sic defensive following Visser, 2016). Similarly Rasche *et al*. (2020) argue that although business schools increasingly adopt the PRME framework, they operate to legitimate and validate—*rather than develop*—those responsible management processes with which business schools (in the UK) are often *already* engaged (Hauser and Ryan, 2021). Moreover, although many UK business schools have become signatories to the PRME—arguably due to isomorphic mimetic pressures (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983)—and this, in many ways, is an encouraging development, there are concerns that the PRME (akin to observations concerning many accreditation processes) rather than being catalytic in changing organisational and societal practice and mindsets may be engaged in little more than a rhetorical 'tick box' exercise. This creates *decoupling*—i.e. the symbolic adoption of the initiative with little or no meaningful effort to embed and institutionalise responsible management and its related principles seriously (Doherty *et al*., 2015)—or window dressing for organisations to engage in impression management (Giacalone and Rosenfeld, 2013; Hervieux *et al*., 2017). The implication is that, while PRME provides some indication of having a positive impact in relation to responsible management, concerns remain that, because of the isomorphic drivers that affect accreditations, the PRME may be perceived by some as yet another bureaucratic accreditation system rather than a meaningful mechanism for real change (Millar and Price, 2018). Moreover, there is a sense that responsible management and initiatives such as PRME unfortunately remain 'poor relations' even within the more established subjects and accreditation regimes, thus further marginalising any potential for wider benefits.

Beyond accreditations, a further kindred institutional device that influences responsible management in the UK business school context is the Research Excellence Framework (REF). The REF exercise requires explicit research impact to be demonstrated through impact case studies and underpinning research, and responsible management constitutes one of many business and management subject areas within units of assessments (UOAs) considered. Given the septennial periodic nature of the REF, the REF2014 and REF2021 are the most recent exercise for which there is complete data and mature analysis.

In recent decades, UK higher education research has increasingly been institutionally audited for impact (Geuna and Piolatto, 2016; Jones *et al*., 2020). REF2014 and REF2021 defined *impact* as: "*the provable and measurable effect of research on society, economy, culture, public policy or services, health, environment, or quality of life, beyond academia*" (REF2021; REF2014). While this points at concreteness as a feature of an RM-style impact, it is important to recognise that impact through REF may, equally importantly, also be a conceptual evolution or development (ESRC, 2016). In a similar vein, Morton (2015) underlined that transforming ideas and the way people think also represents an important impactful outcome. It is interesting to note that the overall exercise weighting accorded to impact has risen from 20% in the REF2014 to 25% in the REF2021 (in turn, this has left 60% weighting on outputs (e.g., papers/books) and 15% on environment). Rebora and Turri (2013) deemed the importance of the assessment of impact to be two-fold: first, academics should be in discussion with praxis to achieve impact (aligning with Sealy *et al*., 2017) and second, they should avoid becoming self-absorbed and inward-looking as a community (Tourish, 2020). Overall, the presence and operation of the institutional REF are claimed to provide *accountability* (Blackburn *et al*., 2023; Franco-Santos and Otley 2018; Parker and Teijlingen, 2012); inform *funding* to ensure the subsequent appropriate and effective societal impacts (Donovan, 2011), and generate *understanding* to engender and facilitate pathways to greater insight and impact (Hicks, 2012).

The research work submitted to REF2014 and REF2021 included the identification of a wide range of impacts at national and international policy levels; however, how extensive these were in real contexts is debatable (Hoffman, 2021). Within the UK system, university research is publicly subsidised through regional funding councils, and academics submit grant applications to research councils and funding bodies. As indicated, the REF organises research into units of assessments (UOAs), which are broadly aligned to major subject group/study domains. Panels of assessors judge and grade outputs according to a series of starred criteria: 4* is world leading, 3*internationally excellent, 2* internationally recognised, 1* nationally recognised, and then unranked. In addition, UOA submissions from each university must be accompanied by impact statements and associated case studies. The most recent REF2021 result for 2014-2021 judged 79% of the overall quality of business and management research as 3* and 4* (REF, 2022). Blackburn *et al*. (2023) opine that the changes made to the REF2014 rules supported REF2021 in offering a more comprehensive view of UK research activity and quality than previous research assessment exercises.

Nevertheless, despite an increasing focus on 'impact', the UK institutional framework of the REF may, in fact, represent something of a barrier to the implementation of responsible management in UK business schools and, as a result affect the benefits brought by responsible management work to organisations and society at large (Doherty *et al*., 2015). The REF may, for instance, be seen as one of the many institutionalised activities that divert attention away from responsible management projects by privileging mono-disciplinary—rather than responsible management inter-disciplinary—style areas. Sharland *et al*. (2013) identified that academics engaged in interdisciplinary research may experience heterotopic (unforeseen gaps and 'blind spots' in prescribed and understood domains) (Foucault, 1986) difficulties fitting into the REF subject disciplinary silos. This deters academics from getting involved in responsible management, causing them to pursue their careers in more established areas

(Rasche and Gilbert, 2015; Warin *et al*., 2016). However, responsible management—and its development and embedding across the business school—often calls for inter-disciplinary approaches and constructs (Weybrecht, 2017). In other words, it actively calls for a disconnection but at the same time the potential to influence holistically. Also, the demands of the REF mean that UK academics are frequently focussed on producing papers capable of achieving 3* and 4* levels (following the ABS-list) (Walker *et al*., 2019), and these, again, tend to involve being committed to a particular subject rather than to inter-disciplinary, responsible management-type, domains. Overall, these represent important reasons for responsible management often not being foregrounded in many academics' works. Thus, it is readily acknowledged that researching and writing for the REF takes up a considerable amount of academic resources and time. In addition, therefore, it may also be the case that many academics are discouraged from engaging in responsible management as it prejudices their publishing and career prospects. Institutionalised exercises such as the REF can even lead to bullying in some settings (Jones *et al*., 2020; Mathieson, 2015). And the non-inclusion of an academic in the REF can be a career-impairing situation due to institutional pressures and obligations (Smith and Conroy, 2016). In addition, within the REF, as indicated above, responsible management has often become synonymous with pedagogic research, which, as Cotton *et al*. (2018) signalled, is viewed in some quarters as the 'Cinderella of academia', rather than an established (more silo-focussed) boundaried subject discipline. Institutional practices seeking to promote impact, such as the REF, may also lead to what has been termed 'game-playing' (Watermeyer, 2014). McNay (2015) noted:

> *"It seems that a lot of time and effort has gone into 'preparing' for the REF – in the sense of doing trial runs, trying to work out how to play the game. In that sense, it has not been an efficient use of public funds…" (p.20).*

Hubble (2015) highlighted examples of certain universities suddenly changing their staffing configurations for the REF2014 in order to improve their research profiles (n.b. this particular form of 'gameplaying' was prohibited in the REF2021 by new regulations). Whereas Marcella *et al*. (2018) evoked that the arrival of impact as a REF factor had led to a range of dubious practices. Such negative institutional pressures do not bode well for the integration of responsible management in impactful research agendas and also appear to run counter to the above-mentioned PRME principles—namely, principles 3 (*methods*) and 4 (*research*). In addition, while responsible management may be generating dialogue at a (policy) macro-level, there is less evidence of it being implemented or supported with real resources at university levels. Considering the PRME's principle 6—*dialogue*—there would seem to currently be more responsible management rhetoric than action. On the one hand, some authors acknowledge PRME's potential to engender a particular way of thinking about what business schools teach and why. Conversely, they argue its presuppositions are not open to questioning, thus offering no space for comprehensive and open dialogues and critical reflexivity to engage with and challenge the fundamental understandings of the nature of management education and business practice (Cornuel and Hommel, 2015; Louw, 2015; Millar and Price, 2018). Moreover, given the PRME/RM's potential nexus with institutional frameworks such as the REF (which is supposedly a key vehicle for impact), it would seem that responsible management, as a topic, is not always viewed by business school directorates as delivering high-level research outputs and is therefore not always strongly supported for the REF. This is unfortunate, and there is perhaps potential for the PRME and responsible management to play a stronger role in informing, for example, REF policy and processes (within the consequent societal impact). Responsible management seeks to re-shape/improve communities, and active engagement with diverse stakeholders (a pluralistic approach) is an enabler to this cause (Abdelgaffar, 2021; Painter-Morland *et al*., 2016; Storey *et al*., 2017). Therefore, reframing the

"impact" component of the REF 2014 and 2021 exercise to "engagement and impact" for the 2029 exercise is further beneficial for progressing responsible management towards increased institutional visibility, legitimacy and mainstreaming if only responsible management proponents can recognise and leverage this opportunity. Even the REF Directorates acknowledge the importance of complying with the global shift towards more *responsible* research assessment (Curry *et al*., 2022; REF, 2023); this value of responsibility (championed through charters such as PRME, UN SDGs, etc) is akin to what responsible management is about. Linked to this, there are ways in which business school curricula could be revisited in order to facilitate greater responsible management engagement and, more critically, to gauge the post-course responsible management impact of former students in the workplace and society (Barber *et al*., 2014; Cullen, 2020; Ndubuka and Rey-Marmonier, 2019; Stubbs and Schapper, 2011).

Towards a Heterotopic Process Perspective

This review of institutional pressures on responsible management has highlighted that whilst much is espoused in business schools around this agenda, the various managerialist institutional pressures appear to subsume and connect responsible management to these drives for legitimisation through transparent external standards and benchmarks - as a secondary 'window dressing.' Whilst the visible institutional responsible management appears to position responsible management as a core intent, there appears to be a hidden disconnect to actual practices, impact and experience of academics and students. Rather, responsible management is patronised – it is present but still kept distant and its potential resistance to mainstream structurings of curricula is dulled.

It is this interplay between connection and disconnection which leads us to argue that responsible management be treated in a heterotopic fashion (Foucault, 1986). Heterotopias are

alternative spaces of ordering while they paradoxically remain simultaneously disconnected and connected to all other spaces. Traditionally, they are understood as sites of resistance to power (Bosteels, 2003; Genocchio, 1995; Hetherington, 1997). However, Topinka (2010) challenged this interpretation of heterotopias, arguing that it obscured their core function—i.e. to make order *legible* through a process of reordering knowledge. Consequently, he proposed that heterotopias be understood from an order and knowledge production stance since this may better uncover how heterotopias fulfil their primary function: making order legible, compared to applying the resistance perspective solely. Therefore, heterotopias are sites in which scientific knowledge (i.e. a principled system of understanding or epistemes) collide and intersect, resulting in the further strengthening of knowledge. Responsible management compared to much of mainstream modernistically-styled management is a case in point. Moreover, this intensification of knowledge encompasses both resistance and order and knowledge production. So, by juxtaposing and combining various spaces in one site, heterotopias problematise received knowledge by critiquing (i.e., uncovering and destabilising) the ground on which the knowledge is built. Thus, heterotopias are more than sites of resistance; they are also sites of reordering since the telescoping of many spaces in one site results in the intensification of knowledge and the revelation of the principles that govern its order - making order legible (Topinka, 2010). As heterotopias clash with the dominant order, they remain linked to them and simultaneously construct new ways of knowing by mapping existing spaces between objects, making order legible (Foucault, 1986, cited in Topinka, 2010). This disconnection-connection tension typifies Foucault's (1986) conception of a heterotopia along with a focus on the significance of viewing heterotopias over time. Considering that Foucault (1986) argued that heterotopias may change over time, the changing nature of the connection-disconnection tension over time appears to offer a pertinent lens for responsible management i.e. the heterotopic process. From this temporal perspective, heterotopias move

from connection to the dominant order, to disconnection and resistance to then critically connecting back to reorder and offer alternatives to change the dominant order.

Therefore, viewing responsible management as a heterotopic process, we could draw on Visser (2016) who mapped a series of developmental stages that business schools can follow to allow them to progress from modernistically paradigm-bound dispositions (i.e. defensive and promotional) to more explorative, enacted responsible values and mindsets (i.e. strategic and transformative). The inference being that, currently, too many business schools are situated in the initial phases rather than towards the latter end of the spectrum. Warin *et al*. (2016) amplified that the early stages of business school engagement with responsible management tend to regress to very limited actual discussion of responsible management in classes and being prone to essentially reactive plans on setting up dedicated responsible management research activities and centres. All of these proposals often have little overall evidence of commitment to green activities (Abdelgaffar, 2021; Hervieux *et al*., 2017; Jones, 2012; Rasche and Gilbert, 2015). In contrast, more developed responsible management orientated business schools tend to set up pro-active dedicated responsible management modules and courses, have well-established responsible management research centres and active green-promoting policies. At the more progressive transformative stage, business school curricula include clearly integrated responsible management contexts (e.g., sustainability, debates on growth, sustainable production, and operations) into core subjects. These approaches place ethical, social, and environmental factors intrinsically in all decision-making and actions.

Interpreting this research from a heterotopic process perspective, the latter transformative stage points towards a responsible management heterotopia with the potential to connect rather than disconnect to academics and students' practice, by opening up not only a disconnecting resistance to the institutional straightjackets talked about above but a more critically engaged,

reordered practice. In other words, this highlights the need to reverse the dynamic over time between connection and disconnection to the dominant managerialist order. Therefore, whilst the above prior research has indicated that business schools predominantly are institutionally locked within the early stage of responsible management development due to institutional constraints, this research aims to better understand the extent to which this is the case and by exploring the pervasiveness of institutional frameworks from the perspective of the main UK protagonists for responsible management development. In other words, we attempt to ask whether there are heterotopic possibilities for responsible management within the UK which not only resist but reorder as well?

To summarise, prior to outlining the methodological approach, it seems evident that responsible management, as an emergent field, plays an important role in supporting and facilitating potential business school impacts at all levels. However, due to the pervasiveness of the various institutional isomorphic regulative, normative, and coercive drivers discussed above, the lived experience, practice, and impact of responsible management are marginalised and disconnected to the tokenised responsible management gestures. We identified the above noted isomorphic institutional and heterotopical dynamics and effects on responsible management as a phenomenon that can be conceptualised – to generate a novel and useful term - as 'multiple institutional isomorphic marginalisation' (MIIM). We see MIIM as a situation whereby a heterotopic field or domain (such as responsible management) is subjected to, and experiences, the effects of a series of institutional structures and influences—which can even extend to active assaults—stemming from a potent combination of normative, coercive, and mimetic institutional isomorphic pressures. Alternatively expressed, responsible management practice and impact are displaced and 'hidden' - while other modernistic mainstream topics (e.g. economics, accounting, management science) are privileged. International accreditation frameworks—including the PRME in particular—should, in principle, provide strong engines

suited to position responsible management as an impactful topic and project. Nevertheless, the MIIM environment surrounding responsible management means that both it and the PRME, to some extent, offer challenges rather than alignment to responsible management with even the potential benefits stemming from it largely becoming a 'box-ticking' exercise of modernistic accreditation and REF-type frameworks. The next section of this paper maps out the methodology employed to identify the heterotopic stages of responsible management within this institutional context.

Methodology

To examine the above issues, inductive research was conducted, which enabled an insider view—getting to understand the phenomenon through the eyes of the actors experiencing it, with all actors sharing their own respective 'truths' (Pickard, 2013; Ragab and Arisha, 2018). The aim of securing multiple points of view and achieving in-depth insights led to the purposive selection of twenty-five prospective expert participants to request participation in the study. Some of whom were identified at a relevant workshop[1] and conference[2] and by reviewing; PRME UK and Ireland annual conference proceedings, RME-focused peer-reviewed journal articles, and PRME signatory directory via the corporate webpage—SIP[3] reports that contained the contact details of PRME coordinators/champions, specifically for UK HEI signatories. Of the twenty-five academics approached, seventeen academics representing fifteen UK universities agreed to participate. Drawing on Saunders *et al.'s* (2016) recommendation of a 5-25 minimum sample for studies that employ semi-structured or in-depth interviews, the seventeen expert participants were adequate for the study. Purposive sampling maximised the relevance of the contributions of the expert participants (Etikan *et al*., 2016), in that they were very familiar with responsible management education and research, accreditations, the PRME and the REF[4], and were representative of a variety of UK business schools. All were signatories to the PRME (including four basic signatories, nine[5] advanced signatories, and two PRME champions) and committed to institutionalising responsible management to promote the principles among students, so that they would be equipped with the tools and skills needed to

[1] Responsible leadership collaboratory workshop at Henley Business School at the University of Reading - A joint initiative between British Academy of Management (BAM) Leadership and two of its Special Interest Groups (SIGs) - Leadership Development and Sustainable and Responsible Business.

[2] 4th UK and Ireland Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) conference

[3] Sharing Information on Progress

[4] A significant funding stream and a framework that continues to affect all higher education institutions and academics in the UK, so it was assumed that most academics had basic understanding of the REF and its processes compared to RME. Consequently, in-depth knowledge of RME and involvement in PRME was a greater focus in terms of selection criteria applied.

[5] At the time of the interview, four participants were situated in two business schools (i.e. two participants each in one business school) which is why nine advanced signatories is cited within the main text instead of eleven.

tackle complex sustainability issues in organisations and, ultimately, become responsible leaders/professionals capable of positively impacting business and society.

To ensure the success of the main study, a pilot was conducted (Lancaster, 2015) with a UK university. This, in addition, enabled the evaluation of the effectiveness and appropriateness of the study instruments (including the participants' information sheet, informed consent form, interview schedule, and audio recording), the proposed sampling technique for the main study (purposive sampling), and the method of transcription for the audio recording and data analysis (thematic analysis[6]). Ultimately, the pilot study (face-to-face, in-person) helped to minimise any risks and prevent the wastage of the resources available for the study. The main data collection phase entailed conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with sixteen academics from fourteen universities. Medium included a combination of face-to-face interview (1 participant), online video and audio call via Skype (12 participant), telephone call (2 participants), and Google Hangout audio call (1 participant). These are valid interviewing channels drawing on previous studies (e.g. Krouwel *et al*., 2019; Lo Iacono *et al*., 2016) that utilised similar methods. Moreover, as the world increasingly relies on technology, there is no significant difference between our in-person and online interactions. Therefore, it is needless to question the truth in the interactions that researchers have with research subjects/participants irrespective of the medium utilised, we cannot for certain judge the "self" presented during such interactions as 100% the genuine self (Sullivan, 2012).

While an interview duration of an hour was specified on the information sheet that had been emailed to the participants, the time actually taken by each interview varied, with reasonable adjustments being made as necessary. All the participants in the pilot and main data collection phases were well-informed about the overarching aim of the study and its supporting

[6] For the pilot phase, it consisted of the first two of Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommended six stages for the effective completion of a thematic analysis—i.e., familiarisation with the data and generation of initial codes.

objectives, including what participation entailed and how the data generated would be managed and used. In addition, they all met the selection criteria—close involvement in Accreditations/RM/PRME[7] (thus, related accreditations) and a good understanding of the REF, not necessarily submitted to the REF2014 due to the divisive nature of this process in business schools (MacDonald, 2017).

The participants' positions ranged from professor (P) to associate professor (AP), reader (R), senior lecturer (SL), assistant professor (AsPR), and lecturer (L) from both Russell Group (i.e., research-intensive/chartered) universities (R) and non-Russell Group (i.e., research-informed teaching/modern) ones (NR). These variables were reflected in the codes used to conceal the participants' identities. For example, in Table I below, A-PNR stands for a professor (P) situated in a non-Russell (NR) Group university, and F-APR for an Associate Professor in a Russell Group university.

……Table I position here……

The interview questions that were posed to the seventeen expert participants are presented in Table II below.

……Table II position here……

The qualitative data generated through the semi-structured interviews for both the pilot and main data collection phase were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, thus facilitating the in-depth study of the phenomenon (Sullivan, 2012). The data generated during the pilot and main data collection phases were merged due to their relevance in relation to the phenomenon under investigation, in addition to the perceived lack of critical mass in the Responsible Management Education (RME) field (Warin *et al*., 2016) at the time of the study—it would

[7] More than 80% of them were coordinating/leading their institutions' PRME initiatives.

have been wasteful to discount the useful data that emerged from the pilot study. The data were transcribed verbatim using the *Trint*™ software—the audio recordings were fed into the platform, and the transcripts were generated automatically with an accuracy of approximately 40%. This facilitated the next phase of the transcription, which entailed carefully reviewing each transcript while closely listening to the audio recordings in order to ensure their alignment with adjustments being made where necessary to ensure that the integrity of the data was not compromised.

The seventeen interview transcripts were then imported into the NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis Software, which was instrumental in the effective management of the dataset collated (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). The entire six phases of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis (data familiarisation, generation of initial codes, search for themes, revision of themes, definition of theme, and write-up) for qualitative data were followed, and the six principles of the PRME (i.e., purpose, values, method, research, partnership, and dialogue) were employed as an overarching guide to structure the data categorisation owing to PRME's legitimacy as a United Nations-backed initiative. Additionally, PRME is a top player, champion, and advocate for responsible management institutionalisation in higher education institutions worldwide and has affiliations with accreditation bodies such as AACSB, AMBA, EFMD, EQUIS, etc. Institutional theory then facilitated the sensemaking of the study's findings, serving as an interpretative framework. The ethics surrounding the study were comprehensively considered. An informed consent form and a comprehensive information sheet were emailed to the prospective participants, requesting their voluntarily participation in the study. Respect for the participants' anonymity—including that of their universities—and the confidentiality of the interviews was assured and maintained (MacNish, 2020).

Findings and Discussion

This section discusses the respondents' perceptions of the dynamics and tensions surrounding the lived experience of responsible management in relation to accreditation and research institutional frameworks.

1. Institutional straightjackets – the adoption of responsible management as an intent rather than as a practice

Within the UK, the accreditation process and the REF have been far from exempt from criticism, and the latest version of the latter—the REF2021—has been no exception (Jones *et al*., 2020; Manville *et al*., 2021). However, while there is some resistance, as there always is with change, the addition of a greater focus on assessing the impact of research on society (Jack, 2022) has been generally welcomed by our respondents and to varying degrees by others (see Chubb *et al*., 2020; International Advisory Group, 2023; Manville *et al*., 2021):

> *C-SLNR: "I like REF pushing people to think about impact, co-creation of research agenda, co-production of knowledge, and using people outside the universities."*
>
> *A-PNR: "I'm in favour of looking at impact. Historically, far too much research has been people writing for a very small number of others."*
>
> *O-SLNR: "I think [the REF] should work as a positive thing rather than a barrier because I can see the opportunities."*
>
> *N-SLNR: I think that it forces people to think of the stakeholders in their research, which is really what RME is all about, to be honest with you. And how they can impact those stakeholders more effectively. So, I think it's very helpful."*
>
> *J-RNR: "[The impact component of the REF] is probably supporting because I suppose you were able to apply for a lot more resources to actually create a case study."*

A number of respondents recognised that responsible management and accreditations/REF are, to a certain extent, potentially complementary agendas with common aims and intentions for tangible, sustainable benefits for society through teaching, research, and broader engagement within and beyond academia.

> *B-SLNR: "…Our AACSB accreditation is one of the things that drove the faculty executives to decide that they should engage with PRME."*
>
> *C-SLNR: "REF impact is about the mindsets, academics being more externally focused, less conceptual, and focusing on what they can contribute."*
>
> *L-LNR: "I think [responsible management and the REF] could be compatible; there is great potential combining them. I guess they are compatible as well in the sense that we are not just talking about pure research just in journals; we are talking about research in some sense getting into the real world."*

However, looking more critically at responsible management, the extent to which such intentions lead to responsible management impact creation at a societal level through the development of responsible future leaders and professionals was an area we were keen to unmask. Teaching, research, and engagement are vital means for progressing this agenda. However, these could be at risk on account of the institutional accreditation and assessment pressures wielding strong influences that inform business school directorates—which are often not in favour of and aligned to responsible management, particularly when the research interests of senior academics do not fall within the responsible management field. Our findings highlight that the implementation of responsible management does not seem to have progressed as far as it should—it retains an early-stage heterotopic position, which primarily connects rather than disconnects to MIIM pressures and is thereby not well embedded in UK universities.

The practices and impact remain hidden or relatively superficially treated in a range of curricula. Indeed, the homogenisation of practices through coercive and mimetic isomorphism (via accreditations/REF) (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) is pervasive, as institutions are forced to respond to demands that may even affect their very survival. Business schools are particularly prone to be targeted by these exogenous pressures, given the active ecosystem of organisations that evaluate the quality of education and research they deliver. Finding themselves under sheer scrutiny and in a climate of intense competition for reputation, funding, and students, business schools often see themselves responding to these pressures, with consequent MIIM effects of responsible management. Therefore, in spite of a rhetoric of growing commitment towards embedding responsible management and claiming it in PRME reports, senior leaders, including in PRME signatory institutions, appear to be much more strongly focussed on certain accreditations and mainstream topics for the REF.

B-SLNR: "You need to have responsible management educators who can teach across a broader range of topics and subjects. Those kinds of educators are not the sort of research-heavy intensive individuals we would employ…So, we have this disconnect…Then, the burden is on those people who can teach to do that. So, therefore they are sacrificing their careers in some ways because they are not then researching. I think there's this tension which the REF brings to bare on schools."

Q-AsPR: "…If I can be bluntly honest, I'm not entirely sure what the role of PRME is in our business school particularly. If I want to be cynical, I think they view it as something that's good for accreditation purposes."

H-PNR: "Because responsible management research is not seen as sufficiently high-status…The REF might have affected responsible management by diverting some universities from not doing much about the teaching and learning agenda which responsible management is about."

E-PR: "…PRME and accreditation agencies are expecting this now, …Whether that has resulted in any kind of paradigm shift, the fundamental rethinking of business education, I'm not very sure…I think for most schools, responsible management is an add-on."

O-SLNR: "We are still treating responsible management as an alternative to whatever traditional management styles are and they are so deeply rooted to even manage our faculty, university, or other organisations. So, we faculty are not fully informing ourselves to take it to mainstream which is a pathway we need in universities; we are supposed to be a critical bunch—that's what is continuously needed to be challenged."

2. Ways forward: An RM insider view - emergent critical awareness of accreditations/REF/PRME with heterotopic possibilities for responsible management

A considerable number of the interviewees were particularly critical of the accreditation/REF processes in the way they impacted the working lives of UK-based academics, leading to a significant heterotopic MIIM influence on their values and behaviours around being aware of the weaknesses of such normalised ordering around diminished creativity, spontaneity, trust alongside increased gameplaying, fear and concealment. Whilst the following quotes illustrate these various concerns and show how frustrated the key actors within responsible management feel about the impact of accreditations/REF/PRME on their working lives, they also point towards a need for an alternative, heterotopic reordering of higher education around the following values:

2.1. The Heterotopic call for a Value of Responsible Management Institutional Recognition

According to Doherty *et al*. (2015), the mainstreaming of responsible management towards institutional recognition is patchy and ad hoc in many business schools. These authors identified the UK REF, which drives the performance management of academics, as a double-

edged sword. On the one hand, it is a key institutional barrier to integrating RME in higher education institutions' curriculum—on account of the REF, academics preferred to work in small silos predominantly focused on research, not curriculum development. On the other hand, it is believed that responsible management scholars/universities could legitimise and gain responsible management institutional recognition by considering responsible management-related impact case studies in the REF. This will, to a certain degree, help universities reorient academics into being more conscious of (and perhaps more likely to question) their research's social and environmental relevance/impact on wider communities instead of a limited pull of stakeholders.

Another REF-related challenge in mainstreaming responsible management via research, which Doherty *et al.'s* (2015) study revealed, is the ABS journal rankings—a limited number of journals accept responsible management-related research outputs. Our respondents also echoed this issue. However, as mentioned earlier, the emergence of publication outlets such as ML, AMLE and JME is promising in that they offer a real opportunity for responsible management scholars in their critical mass to raise the profile of responsible management. Additional high-quality journals that will further cater to the dissemination of responsible management research will probably emerge due to the increasing recognition of the field's potential in responding to the triple bottom line concerns with direct benefits to the broader society and realising sustainable development goals targeted at elevating/improving local and global communities (Abdelgaffar, 2021; Beddewela *et al*., 2021).

> *J-RNR: "…The quality of our research and how that's judged depends on where it's published. So, I suppose one of the biggest issues is the lack of journals where that audience will be interested in reading."*
>
> *G-SLNR: "…The REF has an impact in that we have to be published in particular journals. If those journals aren't open to or don't have a conversation about responsible*

management within them, then, obviously, the REF will have a negative impact…Only a limited number of journals do publish in the area [of responsible management] that we can submit to."

K-LR: "… I think top journals would probably push back anything related to RME agenda to those other journals that are more HE or Management Learning focused, and I think that's a shame. I can't also help feeling like management education research is not considered to be as robust or clever than other types of research."

D-SLNR: "Until responsible management becomes more institutionally valued and seen as an essential thing for a business school to be doing, you won't get the momentum in [people generating REFable impacts in the RME field] than there are in some other areas."

2.2 The Heterotopic call for a Value of Academic Trust

Similarly to other scholars/academics, some of our respondents seemed simply fed up with the targets and terror and the symbolic violence the Performative University imposes on the working lives of university actors (Jones *et al*., 2020) with far-reaching negative impacts (Dean *et al*., 2020). Instead of continuing to draw on the 'labour of love metaphor' (which frankly does nothing but blur the boundary line between work and leisure) to mask the dehumanising lived experiences (Zawadzki and Jensen, 2020) and remain complicit in accepting the incessant audits revolving around research and publications, they seemingly would rather be perceived as rebelling from accepting this culture (Clarke *et al*., 2012) promulgated further by the REF. This strongly signals the desire for a shift in the micro-managing distrustful approach linked to performative practices the likes of the REF Directorates adopt to an alternative reality where the professionals (academics) are trusted to do the jobs they are hired to do, a step in the right direction to taking back their eroded freedom and power (Jones *et al*., 2020).

O-SLNR: "Get rid of TEF[8]! Get rid of REF! Get rid of QAA[9]! Trust the professionals! No, seriously, this whole auditing culture is coming from the distrust of professionals."

I-APNR: "The government needs to place more trust in the professional academics who work within the system, because I think that professional academics have been undermined for far too long. Universities have now become almost modelled on a business…I'm a qualitative researcher, and you can't judge one institution (or an academic here) against another or hundreds of institutions (or an academic in say a place I used to work) . Because I've been taught that context is all-important.

I-APNR: "We don't need more metrics and quantitative information; we need to rely on people's qualitative judgment. Metrics can be abused - you can create a story around metrics that isn't true. I'd rather rely on peoples' expertise. If I was going into an operation and a surgeon came into my room, taking that example, you would want to know some standard metrics about that person. For example, has he killed anyone in the operating theatre or whatever? So, I'm not arguing for this blind trust. What we've done is created a system where metrics have taken over. So, instead of relying solely on metrics, I'd converse with my surgeon about my problems and particular issues, so he knows that maybe he needs to operate on me in a certain way to get the best outcome."

2.3 The Heterotopic Call for a Value of Creativity

Mainstreaming responsible management through teaching, research or enterprise activities related to ethics, sustainability, and responsible corporate practices requires new creative, authentic, immersive, and collaborative methods, such as experiential learning in the case of

[8] Teaching Excellence Framework – a similar framework as the REF but with a focal point on assessing the quality of teaching and related practices in UK business schools.
[9] Quality Assurance Agency for higher education; an independent charity tasked with supporting UK higher education providers in maintaining their academic standards and quality for the benefit of students.

teaching, as it enables a better learning environment in which students' consciousness and awareness beyond self to societal interests/issues can be raised (Abdelgaffar, 2021; Beddewela *et al*., 2021). Novel pedagogical techniques take time and energy to install into existing modules or courses; sometimes, these changes will require an overhaul or complete redesign of modules/courses. Time is a finite resource with which academics particularly struggle owing to the sheer volume of tasks/workload they have to complete in any given time compared to other professionals in other sectors (Darabi *et al*., 2016). The legitimacy business schools and universities gain from powerful exogenous institutions such as the REF and accreditation bodies may partly explain why related activities are frequently prioritised and have direct/indirect implications for career progression and mobility in academia. Alongside these external powerful institutions are discipline-specific professional bodies that often govern what is included/excluded in a curriculum, which could make responsible management academics practically (not ideologically) resistant to (or unable to develop) novel pedagogical methods if these changes mean having little or no time for research or scholarly activity (Cornuel and Hommel, 2015; Doherty *et al*., 2015; Rasche and Gilbert, 2015; Warin *et al*., 2016).

While research as teaching is a valuable conduit for progressing responsible management, career progression seems to be hinged on high-level publications that do not promote "messy" research on complex issues such as sustainability/RME (Warin *et al*., 2016). However, with the increased focus on evidencing engagement and impact in REF 2029, there is a unique opportunity for scholars and universities keen to mainstream responsible management to leverage the diverse impact pathways responsible management seems to offer—related values and principles are in sync with those underpinning the sustainable development goals. So, one cannot overemphasise the relevance of the sustainable development goals (and therefore responsible management) to the sustenance and continuity of humanity. To creatively advance this area through research and related impact case studies is inherently impactful, thus REF-

able (Ndubuka and Rey-Marmonier, 2019).

> *L-LNR: "…If your schools are pushing you more and more to get your research output …doing impact and getting research grants …making sure that the students' satisfaction levels are really high and the employability of students ….at some point, it makes it harder to be innovative or to teach on those more complex topics, including RME."*
>
> *O-SLNR: "[Responsible management progression in a way is hindered by] accreditation process, or quality assurance because it gives less freedom to be more spontaneous…The scope of subjects and how they are being taught and assessed are dictated by professional bodies' guidelines…There are very subject-specific contents that we have to include. So, how do we integrate RME in there?"*

2.4 The Heterotopic call for an Intrinsic (in contrast to instrumental) Value of Making a Societal Difference

The efforts of the REF2014 panellists who were convened to adjudicate and score the impact claims of UK academics were observed to be shaped by the fragility of self-concept, the inadequacy of criteria, the inconstant and inconsistent use of evidence, the absence of theory, and the moderation of panel Chairs, and the intervention of Main Panels (Watermeyer and Chubb, 2019). Directorates of university research evaluation need to recognise that university research is a viable conduit for preserving and enhancing democratic society. To then narrowly define research impact not to capture political ideals such as equality, democracy, justice, freedom, and fairness/rights effectively strips out these ideals from the assessment fabric of the likes of REF, consequently neutralising the important democratic function of universities (Rhodes *et al*., 2018). Exploring other forms of impact is necessary, including leveraging universities' role as places/spaces that generate dialogue, knowledge, informed doubt and

pragmatic and evidenced-based problem-solving methods and use formal and tacit knowledge such as critical and analytical thinking and creativity skills. Thus, REF's impact agenda should also focus on the why and how—specifically, why some institutions are better at research impact than others and how some find themselves in more impactful knowledge exchange framework clusters than others instead of generally assuming that all academics/universities know how to do better quality research and readily have resources that will support them to translate that knowledge into impact. It should not mainly encourage a transactional approach to impact whereby a parcel of formal knowledge is only evaluated in its effects on regulation and practice (Mitchell, 2022).

Our finding is also consistent with what a UK professor, a respondent in Chubb *et al.'s* (2020) study said: The REF's impact agenda reinforces the idea that the only valuable thing in life is money, and that is deeply worrying. As well as what some other respondents from Watermeyer and Tomlinson's (2022) study said: 1) *Frankly…the impact agenda is a performative system which my institution is required to abide by*. 2) *The fact that my institution did nothing to build upon or sustain the research after the REF shows to me it was nothing more than a hollow, meaningless – and possibly duplicitous – exercise to just pull the wool over the eyes of the REF judges.* Many of their respondents felt REF-impact distorted and exploited their public contribution for positional gain.

O'Regan and Gray (2021) have called for a resolute and vocal resistance whereby academics are encouraged and empowered to research and write freely and actively in ways they (not the REF) deem meaningful. To openly challenge how they produce the work they publish within their universities and the assumptions on which the REF is based, and to seek alliances with like-minded people in the public sphere committed to ending the neoliberal immiseration of human wellbeing. This stance also resonates with our respondents.

B-SLNR: "If you look at the CABS list…I have to make sure that my research is likely to fit A, B, or C. Rather than saying, well, actually, I think this is where the research is needed, I'm gonna go there. I look at those journals and say, well, what they work on at the moment, our writing doesn't speak to that."

J-RNR: "It's much better to find a journal where the audience will be interested in reading that, and it fits with the journal's aims and objectives…What ends up happening with the citation route is this game where everyone in each institution will just end up citing their colleagues' papers. You end up with this kind of perpetuating cycle of referencing your colleagues' publications."

N-SLNR: "I feel it's really, really, difficult for these younger people to get their careers started in academia. I think the REF doesn't help that at all; it contributes to individualism, competitiveness, and a certain degree of arrogance, which is very unattractive to be honest with you."

Q-AsPR: "I think it's a good wake-up call that sometimes we become obsessed with these things that actually in the grand scheme of things don't really matter. I think we should all be more concerned about whether our research and teaching have some sort of value for the wider society. Are they transformational in many respects? Are they serving to advance knowledge in science?"

K-LR: "I feel [the REF] is a pressure…I'm quite scared of it. Well, I can't control that, I can put stuff out there, and I will put stuff out there. But in terms of actually converting it? It's completely out of my hands! So, it feels a bit peculiar, but certainly, I don't feel it's a positive force."

B-SLNR: "I think the most productive, big ideas and the things that change the world come from people exploring their interests, failing, trying again, coming up with completely

crazy ideas, trying them, and seeing what happens. I think the REF strongly discourages that kind of research."

Q-AsPR: "...Pure research shouldn't disappear or be less valued because they don't fit the impact agenda of the REF. That's why you can say impactful research is research that makes a difference; then, you have more of an inclusive view. They could be making a difference in the way you think about things, which in hundreds of years will potentially have an impact on society that we don't know. And it's hard to measure impact. Many funding bodies also want you to have a pathway to impact; they want you to know your impact before you actually do your research! Really? Why would you want to fund someone who knows what happened? There is a really big risk there; it kills creativity."

G-SLNR: "On the conceptual level, I have some problems with REF. Its policies and strategies sort of focus on looking for specific outcomes arising from either directly or indirectly from research. It's about value for money, not understanding for the sake of it, which, for example, undermines the idea that education is a public good."

B-SLNR: "During the last REF exercise, the rhetoric coming out from research councils, the government, and the higher education academy was that impact was more important than where you published and citation counts. So, the idea was that REF assessors (who are also academics) wouldn't be looking at journal quality and ranking which is hard to believe."

2.5 The Heterotopic call for a Value of Long-Termism

In order to enact such authenticity in research, this translates into a strong focus on the longer term, in contrast with the short-termism evident in the push to satisfy external benchmarks and audits (Muller, 2018), which does not encourage those types of responsible management-type

research that require time to mature. It is likely to encourage increasing MIIM effects across universities, with the downside of stifling creativity, innovation, and investment in inter-disciplinary and long-term research in responsible management and related areas.

O-SLNR: "One of the difficulties that we have is that impact doesn't come through in a very short-term or obvious way… I cannot produce a research paper according to their principle because research is such a long-term [activity]. For example, the piece I was working on last month (revise and resubmit) – a very basic idea, is coming from my PhD. We are talking about over a decade kind of marinated [idea]."

J-RNR: "I know every academic won't tell you that they don't have enough time to do everything, but I think the impact side of things that's the big challenge, is getting enough time to work on that."

Q-AsPR: "The RME agenda requires a more thoughtful approach to teaching in terms of engagement with the students; activities to help them reflect and be more engaged. So, that takes more time than just coming into the lecture, delivering material, and then going out. So, you've got that time dilemma."

2.6 The Heterotopic call for a Value of Authenticity in Research

The next issue/value call is echoed by Manville *et al.* (2021), who reported that academics in the run-up to the REF2021 exercise felt that the REF is decreasing the authenticity of research reflecting the true intellectual interests of researchers and the research community, and with it the novelty of research; research areas and approaches that are not deemed REFable are side-lined. Thus, most participants described an organisational context in which they were subjected to significant pressure to publish forcefully and rapidly with the REF in mind. This instrumental focus of responsible management being subsumed under the accreditation drive, with PRME as its ambiguous bedfellow, is driven home by the following quotes which focus on the external

orientation and a critique of the impact agenda, including how it is linked to the managerialist, corporatisation push for attracting funding (Gunn and Mintrom, 2016). It reflects the hidden agenda of senior managers, who are required to implement this whilst using responsible management language, such as 'impact' as a progressive veneer. Ironically, responsible management activities are impactful to society and therefore fit into the impact agenda, yet are historically under-valued by the REF and directorates (Cotton *et al*., 2018; Kneale *et al*., 2016). There is a sense of incredulity with this situation among the respondents:

> *O-SLNR: "Poverty or things like collaboratively researching with students, sort of community engagement for example, that could be a good impact case…Education for sustainable social enterprising is making students make the impact itself."*
>
> *I-APNR: "Senior management see REF and its impact agenda in a very narrow sense… you need some money to be able to make an impact. And where do you get that money from? Normally, you go to business. So, for me, maybe impact represents for senior management almost a push toward follow-the-money, that's a real critique of maybe the future of REF."*
>
> *O-SLNR: "We are driven by external forces [accreditations etc), so people think they have to think that RME is important. I'm personally very sick of the discourse…When you scream out responsibility, ethics, and good practice, I feel like it just devalues the whole thing. We are saying, look, I'm good because I don't kill or harm people kind of rhetoric. Of course, you wouldn't do that, and you don't scream your lungs out saying we don't harm them."*
>
> *P-LNR: "I'd see action research as very much impactful research where I'm working with people to change their circumstances, and that action becomes the research. So, the changes and the impact, in a sense, are the research process rather than a result of it.*

Those types of ways of researching are harder to publish, and fewer journals support responsible management themes."

3. *Emergent heterotopic career pathways: A Foolhardy Pursuit?*

We were keen to explore whether the above six values of trust, creativity, institutional recognition, authenticity, making a societal difference as an intrinsic value and long-termism could open up a conversation around possibilities for enacting an emerging heterotopic space, which has a resistant and a reordering overtone. By taking seriously the respondents views that external benchmarks and audits (including PRME and the greater focus placed on impact in the REF) do not offer a sufficient pathway to what they see as embodying specific responsible management values, could the implication be not just resisting but opening up a conversation about reordering REF in the future? For example, could this mean encouraging more formal contributions of responsible management-related studies or impacts; for instance, in the impact case studies requested from universities or in the way any requests for evidencing impacts on society are formulated (aligned to the value of institutional recognition)? However, these institutionally bounded suggestions are just that (suggestions) and alternatively we were keen to explore what were the possible reordered heterotopic pathways these responsible management expert respondent academics could follow on a personal level. We highlight here how the respondents were particularly keen to progress their career around responsible management for its own sake, embodying the value of authenticity in research, the intrinsic value of following a career to make a difference in the process of research, long-termism (with all the requisite compromises).

I-APNR: "I've always tried to integrate responsible management into my teaching. I came into academia because I was interested in responsible management for want of better

words. So, it's not been a case of coming into academia and then being changed by any REF agenda or responsible management."

B-SLNR: "The REF influences your career choices quite heavily! You've got to really decide where your skillset lies? Do I want to get ahead of my research and follow that trajectory, or follow what I believe in and enjoy, which for me is responsible management and accept that maybe it would take longer or be harder to get that career progression if I'm not producing REFable papers that are going to get me to teach in a great institution? Or take on a faculty leadership role and maybe go down the route of being a pro-vice chancellor at some point? I feel like I've tried a bit of everything. It has influenced me, and probably other people."

K-LR: "I've gone for the tactic of writing something I'm interested in and submitting it to journals I think I connect with rather than trying to get into these other journals, which isn't very strategic in terms of the REF… I want to do my job well and stay in a job; I'm not looking for a promotion. So ticking along and plugging away is all I'm doing."

Ironically, this is indicative of the normative pillar of institutional theory grounded in appropriateness logic—i.e. doing the right thing (Scott, 2014)—but they appeared to be potentially jeopardising their career progressions. Indeed, our respondents highlighted that prolific (non-responsible management) research actions are generally much more suited to supporting career progression within academia. Consequently, those academics who research responsible management understand they are doing so at the possible expense of their career progression, predicated on one's ability to publish in limited but highly coveted top-tier journals (Torrance, 2020). This informs recruitment strategies in business schools, problematising responsible management institutionalisation in teaching, research and wider engagement and

again creates a considerable barrier to academics who are tempted to progress along an alternative career path, as mentioned above:

> *B-SLNR: "People have to decide, do you want to leave the RME institutionalisation and the curriculum to one side and publish and see your career soar, or do you want to put that on the back burner and work on RME? Doing both is very difficult, although those of us who are interested are trying that."*
>
> *Q-AsPR: "The REF also has an impact on future careers. In terms of personal development, I don't necessarily like it. Institutions don't seem to be able to have a proper promotion system in place - it's whether you're marketable and what your position in the market is, creating a competition."*
>
> *B-SLNR: "The conference I ran last week accounts for nothing in terms of career progression. It's a line on my CV—I organised a conference. So what? Where are your 4* papers? That is literally to be very blunt…I've been on the receiving end of this many times."*

This alternative career path, which chooses to adopt a responsible management heterotopic orientation around resistance to managerialist practices appears to be a significant recommendation emerging from our discussion with academics. However, this emergence of a heterotopic career, closely associated with maintaining academic identity, which resists the temptation to play the institutional game is certainly not an easy choice to make. Given the considerable pressure exerted by accreditations, league tables, and the REF, there is a recognition that is much easier for many organisational members to align their behaviours, values, and actions to those of the social system surrounding them. This resonates with mimetic isomorphism, whereby organisations and individuals are pressured to model themselves after other organisations and individuals—who they perceive as more successful—by imitating their

structures, behaviours, activities, and systems, particularly when faced with uncertainty in their operating environment (Lieberman and Asaba, 2006). Similarly, it echoes coercive isomorphism, which arises from the formal and informal pressures towards compliance to prescribed rules that exogenous and powerful institutions exert on organisations within the same operating environment through sanction and reward regulative mechanisms (Hanson, 2001; Lammers and Garcia, 2017). However, there was a growing recognition amongst the respondents that the predominant career pathway which connects much more to institutional pressures have become detrimental to the mental health of a number of British academics (Morrish, 2019).

F-APR: "Everyone's busy trying to jump through hoops and to tick boxes and they are constantly moving the goalposts. Never quite sure what you're gonna be assessed on, if you're going to be submitted to the REF, and general high-level of stress…I feel constantly monitored and overlooked. You lose confidence, no one has confidence in your judgement and that rubs off. I don't like it all."

Q-AsPR: "There is constant pressure to publish, publish, publish in high-ranked journals, and that takes time…while trying to maintain a healthy work-life balance. All that is a difficult thread to walk on."

K-LR "There are days when I'm just exhausted and I've got to try and get something written, and there is no time. I know that some colleagues will work all weekend, I don't feel I should have to do that. I don't want that to become my norm, and I guess that will always put me at a slight disadvantage. I'm reconciled to that, I rather have good mental health and a good balance of life, and if that means that I don't get promoted, then so be it."

> *O-SLNR: "The REF is a tricky monster; it drives us mad…I contemplated quitting because my intellectual thinking could be done outside the academic community and disseminated. But sometimes you have good days; when students bounce back, or you have conversation with colleagues at seminars talking about idea exchange, and then you feel like, yeah!"*

Our respondents also were well aware that such gameplaying can result in, and exacerbate (existing), mental health conditions, with feelings of partial or complete disconnect from one's institution, loss of identity and individualism. The gameplaying behaviour is not peculiar to REF2014. Manville *et al*.'s (2021) study evaluated real-time attitudes and perceptions of a diverse range of stakeholders across the UK higher education sector towards REF2021 and found that the majority of researchers think the REF has increased game playing in the research community, particularly in staff recruitment and the embellishment of impact; *the best person or institutions do not win the race but those who play the best game*. So, despite they said the REF2021 had laudable aims, such as the two principles of *no selectivity of staff*[10] and *no portability of research outputs*[11] recommended by Lord Stern towards offering a more accurate view of the scale and quality of research in UK higher education institutions by curbing their practice of buying-in outputs through the hiring of academics with high-quality publications later in the REF cycle (Blackburn *et al*., 2023; Stern, 2016), they did not believe it removed/stopped gaming. Although an academic in Manville *et al*.'s (2021) study reported a positive around the portability principle—*the inclusion of publications from staff previously employed had a significant impact on early career researchers, black and minority ethnic colleagues and gender, as it allowed them to progress their careers at the back of the publications they have built*. Moreover, in some cases, there was a recognition that they had

[10] Compared to REF2014 and previous research assessment exercises, REF2021 generally allowed for all staff with significant responsibility for research to be submitted by institutions.

[11] REF2021 output pool included outputs of former staff, increasing the number of duplicate outputs returned by the same staff who had moved institutions.

contemplated resignation in order to take back what they considered as their academic identity, freedom, balance, and sanity, which had been eroded. The perceived poor evaluation design and the excessive focus on evaluation for evaluation's sake is recognised as a key driver of many mental health issues suffered academics (Himanen *et al*., 2023), driving many to seek posts in industry (Gewin, 2022). In this way, they recognised that their universities are anxiety machines that purposefully flout the legal requirement to prevent work-related stress (Morrish, 2019), exhibited performative university environments characterised by the quantification and targets and terror (Jones *et al*., 2020), with dehumanising effects (Zawadzki and Jensen, 2020); a situation that is a stark contrast with responsible management and the intent espoused by PRME principles.

We view this realisation by the respondents that current heterotopic career paths which align to MIIM pressures are detrimental to academics working life, as a significant finding in relation to fuelling a possible shift in alternative career pathways which place responsible management as an end rather than a means to an end. This inevitably would place such an alternative responsible management career path as heterotopic process of disconnection with institutional structures, rather than one of connection to critically engage and reorder these institutionally induced stressful practices.

The issue here for our respondents is that they recognise that organisations gain legitimacy from powerful institutions by conforming to the normative rules to which they subscribe (Palthe, 2014). However whilst they realise that that organisations live and die by the degree to which they adhere to wider rules—e.g., accreditations and the REF (Meyer, 2008), they do have a choice in terms of their own career path – rather progressing in an alternative fashion is recognised as not for the faint hearted, with challenges to be overcome. Whilst tokenistic game-playing represents one possible response, the respondents here suggest an approach which casts

the research and teaching spotlight back on such impacts and their constituent managerialist institutional practices. An alternative heterotopic responsible management career agenda that embraces more of a resistant tone and craft a research and curriculum agenda which critically contests such practices may be the way forward, and academics within this realm and, indeed, other academics affected by the issues covered within this paper could leverage the set of recommendations made by DORA – The Declaration on Research Assessment, and participate in global movements aimed at fostering the implementation of RRA – responsible research assessment (Curry *et al*., 2022) in further resisting the targets and terror reign linked to the REF and attempting to reorder practices collectively. This follows Jones *et al*. (2020) who argue that an academic game-playing career is paradoxical to responsible management principles and impinges academics' careers and work experience. This could build upon the emerging wider global influence of the UN-SDGs, with a keener recognition that this type of research has considerable potential to impact society (Ndubuka and Rey-Marmonier, 2019). The sustainable development goals agenda is identified as having an agency function that can be leveraged for the progression, institutionalisation, and legitimisation of the responsible management field (teaching, research, and engagement) by committed academics and business schools, which supports impact creation (or in our terms making a societal difference) and context, as well as outcomes:

> *O-SLNR: "If they do any sort of sustainable development goal-related research, there will be quite an immediate impact… Having the* SDGs *as a context of research, I can see a lot of potential to make impactful research. I just don't do it personally."*

Conclusions, implications of the study and directions for future research

There is an increased call for higher education institutions (including business schools and universities) to equip students (Pradini *et al*., 2012) with knowledge and skills needed to tackle

complex responsible management issues within organisations and societies (Adomßent *et al*., 2014; Lee *et al*., 2013; Milutinović and Nikolić, 2014; Petriglieri, 2012). It would seem that many higher education institutions are uniquely placed to facilitate a societal transition towards CSR, sustainability, etc i.e. responsible management (Cortese, 2003). However, the impact of RME has been questioned (Burchell *et al*., 2015), operating within a growing market-driven, neo-liberal institutional environment (Blasco, 2012), pushing learning from responsible management education to the fringes of university life, for both students and academic staff. As such, responsible management becomes hidden by mainstream curricula and, equally, so to, it would seem, do many of the academics' careers who pursue responsible management informed work and agendas.

Since their inception, business schools, in tandem with business in general, have variously debated and developed a sense of responsibility towards engendering positive impacts on society and wider stakeholders. Commensurately, in recent decades, a range of societally-focused business academic topics have emerged (e.g., business ethics, corporate social responsibility, and business sustainability) including responsible management. Equally, a series of institutional accreditation frameworks have emerged—including the AACSB, EQUIS, AMBA and national institutional academic research assessment processes (e.g., the REF in the UK). The PRME—which is expressly focussed on responsible management—is a relatively recent addition to these. All of these have sought, in varying degrees, to enhance any beneficial impacts for society. Nevertheless, in spite of these apparently overall positive developments within business schools and research, responsible management appears to have been marginalised due to the ways in which institutional accreditation and research assessment exercises are modernistically conceived, structured, and operated. Moreover, the PRME—as an initiative set to promote responsible management and its impact—appears to be increasingly drawn towards mimetic institutional isomorphic patterns with other accreditation frameworks,

with the risk of it being viewed by business schools as part of the wider impression management behaviours. Thus, PRME and responsible management risk being subsumed into the extant modernistic framings of business schools – with little opportunity for resistance - and their influence diminished and concealed in relation to more mainstream topics and activities. Therefore, this has produced a multiple institutional series of pressures and impacts for responsible management that, in the present argument, have been characterised and conceptualised by the term MIIM (multiple institutional isomorphic marginalisation)—a process whereby a series of multifarious normative, coercive, and mimetic institutional isomorphic effects combine to have a concealing effect on a focal domain and a particular heterotopic impact which connect more than disconnects with MIIM - in the case under consideration – responsible management. This is important and significant because, if responsible management continues to be hidden and experience marginalisation in business school curricula, it does not bode well for the potential conduct of students when they embark on their careers. In terms of addressing the MIIM state of responsible management identified above, it is important to revisit a number of issues.

One of the emergent issues which this research has surfaced has been the realisation from the main players within the responsible management field that academic careers can be crafted in an alternative way, which make responsible management central to one's whole career. This paper has identified six values (based on the respondents' views) in which such a career could embody: long-termism, trust, creativity, authenticity of research, responsible management institutional legitimacy and the intrinsic value of making a societal difference. This contrasts with the instrumental, short-term, mistrustful gameplaying around trying to satisfy multiple research, teaching, and accreditation institutional demands. This recognition of alternative careers is reinforced by the negative reaction by the respondents to the stressful pressures brought on by the current MIIM context and order. The alternative career pathway was framed

as a change to the heterotopic space which is more about disconnection and resistance to MIIM, in contrast to the responsible management heterotopia above, with a hidden marginalisation of responsible management practice and impact. Whilst not shying away from the difficult journey of this heterotopic process of career development, the academic respondents here reflected upon career pathways which endeavoured to enrich their responsible management research and teaching through a head on focus on wider managerialist institutional practices and their effect on higher education at its different levels i.e. responsible management in higher education. In this way, a career which may contest MIIM pressures could emerge which enables academics to engage the different institutional frameworks on a critically informed basis. This paper represents part of such a process. For example, whilst recognising that accreditations exert a powerful influence over business schools and, while responsible management is considered as a minor part of these, to some degree, within these processes—especially for example, within the mandatory criteria of 'Ethics, Responsibility and Sustainability' for AACSB and EQUIS accreditation – there is nevertheless scope to position it not only more centrally, but more critically in terms of critiquing the raison d'etre of accreditations and their inefficacy to further practice and impact. On the one hand, as it seems inevitable that business school directorates will continue to be preoccupied with league tables and accreditations, the temptation would be to implement the former and reposition responsible management within them to garner more attention and resources for responsible management. However, such a turn would lose the heterotopic potential of responsible management to contest the systemic use of accreditations within higher education. The PRME initiative is one such scheme, as our respondents were concerned that this is viewed simply as 'another process,' with the danger of being perceived as a 'box-ticking' or retrospective 'window-dressing' accreditation exercise. Rather than embed such principles within other more

widespread institutional frameworks, could a greater focus be placed on whether such top-down initiatives foster responsible management practice of academics and students.

However, suggestions for further responsible management between institutional frameworks could be leveraged. The powerful confluence of accreditation processes with research assessment ones (such as the UK's REF) could be modified to more readily support responsible management-style inter-disciplinary work, rather than the current business school trend of focussing on either, for example, ethics, sustainability, or responsible management as if they were isolated competencies (Smith and Alexander, 2013). Particularly since we have ascertained that responsible management does have the potential to serve as both a heterotopic process and space for disconnecting, resisting and critically reordering dominant managerialist structures and institutional pressures. In other words, conducting responsible management research with an enhanced focus on advancing the realisation of the UN's sustainable development goals could bring about a wide range of tangible beneficial societal changes and impacts, and in turn, boost the REF profiles of business schools and universities in the upcoming REF 2029 evaluation and beyond.

In summary, recognising and tackling the MIIM phenomenon and its effects is therefore of great significance. It is at this point that we concur with Millar and Price (2018), who argued that we need to be forever watchful of the fact that such institutional initiatives can reduce the critical reflexivity required to understand the meaning of responsibility and the challenges involved in contesting the dominant neo-liberal (modernistic) ideology (Baden and Higgs, 2015). On a more progressive note, while recognising the dash for external legitimacy by means of the instrumental interweaving of responsible management within assessments and accreditations, we also acknowledge that, if real systemic change is to be achieved, we need to see beyond this institutional 'mask' of responsibility (Berliner and Prakash, 2014). This

unmasking has been the main contribution of this paper, and our hope is that it will represent the start of the process of moving beyond simplistic solutions, to embrace the provocation around whether the entanglement and complexity of institutional complicity diminishes ethical and societal values (Jack, 2019). We concur with Moratis and Melissen (2021) and assert that this action needs to move much further by adopting a pluralistic, affective, activist posture towards responsible management in order to tackle the systemic issues of human suffering, inequality, and climate change.

The MIIM of responsible management has clear and important societal and practical implications. Given the wider international drives to espouse agendas such as, for example, the UN's SDGs, responsible management has a potentially important role to play, as students develop their own careers, in informing business school curricula and, consequently, organisations. Following Jack (2022), whilst a reordered responsible management may have a role to play in better re-shaping and informing societal impact as a core element and purpose of potent metrics such as *The Financial Times* league table, we suggest that we as academics could re-shape and contest these very same metrics to engage responsible management practice in supporting a wide range of positive change and influence. Alternatively expressed, responsible management academics could leverage the heterotopic process and space responsible management offers to critique (reveal and destabilise) the grounds on which these prevailing dominant modernistic paradigms, structures, and institutional pressures stand. By doing so, they could reorder these exogenous powerful institutions (including the REF and accreditation bodies) in a way that diminishes their MIIM effects on responsible management—its *occlusion* and *displacement*—while enhancing their efficacy to promote responsible management practices and impacts and strengthening knowledge—producing new ways of knowing that make order legible. Future research could explore the extent to which diverse stakeholders, including responsible management scholars, leverage some of the

suggestions offered in this paper. For example, to what extent does a critically engaged responsible management heterotopia reorder powerful exogenous institutions such as the REF and accreditation bodies, and do these reorderings (and to what extent) enhance their efficacy to bring about real systemic societal changes such as contributing tangibly to combat issues of human suffering, inequality, climate change, etc?

What this research has shown is that academic life is not after all an extraordinary career option which outsiders may imagine to be an easy pathway through a rose garden. Instead, it is a reality known too well by academics as a pathway surrounded by roses with thick, sharp thorns (Bristow, 2024). However, even from a heterotopic situation where responsible management is positioned subserviently to wider institutional calls, the main responsible management protagonists remain hopeful amidst MIIM pressures. In relation to practical implications, the recognition and acknowledgement of the encroachment of MIIM on responsible management provides clear signals to accreditation bodies and university and business school directorates in relation to the need to listen to such dissenting (previously hidden) voices in order to better support and promote responsible management.

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Table I: Overview of Study Participants

#	**Discipline/Research area**	Participant code	**REF2014 Status**		**Gender**	
			Returned	Not returned	Female	Male
1	Strategy and Leadership	A-PNR		x		x
2	Business Ethics	B-SLNR	x			x
3	Management (Strategy)	C-SLNR		x		x
4	HRM (Responsible Business and Management Education)	D-SLNR		x		x
5	Business Ethics and CSR	E-PR	x			x
6	HRM and Organizational Behaviour (Sustainable Business)	F-APR		x	x	
7	Business and Management (Ethics)	G-SLNR		x	x	
8	Financial Ethics	H-PNR	x			x
9	Critical management, sustainability, and CSR	I-APNR		x		x
10	Business Ethics and Social Enterprise	J-RNR	x		x	
11	Strategic Management	K-LR		x	x	
12	Management (Strategy and Sustainability)	L-LNR		x	x	
13	Management (Sustainability)	M-LNR		x		x
14	HRM (Responsible Leadership)	N-SLNR		x	x	
15	Marketing and Ethics	O-SLNR		x	x	
16	Business and Management	P-LNR		x		x
17	Operations Management	Q-AsPR		x	x	
Total			4	13	8	9

Table II: Interview Questions

Could you kindly tell me about your experience of the REF exercise?
How might have the REF influenced your commitment towards the institutionalisation of the RME agenda in your institution?
What perceived influence do you think the REF has had (or may still have) on senior management (the likes of Vice-Chancellors and Deans) in relation to the institutionalisation of the RME agenda in your institution?
Do you think the REF is an important agenda for UK Business Schools?
What role do you envisage the next REF exercise (2021) would play in the institutionalisation of the RME agenda?
In what ways do you think both agendas are similar?
How do you think RME can potentially assist in achieving research excellence in relation to the next REF (2021)?
How do you think the REF can assist in the institutionalisation of RME in UK business schools?
How can the REF possibly facilitate RME-related research?
To what extent do you think both agendas are compatible in the UK business school context?