

Realising the sustainable development goals (SDGs): challenges for business school academics in the responsible management education (RME) field.

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Realizing the SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Challenges for UK Business School
Academics in the RME Field

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STEP4

Nkeiruka N. Ndubuka

Dr. Emmanuelle Rey-Marmonier

26th June 2018, QMUL

Methodology



1

Semi-structured interviews



2



Thematic Analysis



2

12



Qualitative

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Potential Challenges



**SUBTOPIC
1**

**SUBTOPIC
2**

**SUBTOPIC
3**



Faculty

**Top
Management**

Students

Businesses

Faculty & Staff

No place in the curriculum

R2SL1: "...many of them would be seen by faculty not to actually have a place in the curriculum. Not that I agree with that, but I do think that's what most people would see."

R3SL2: "...for colleagues who are not involved in PRME it would be a challenge if I went to them & said we are a signatory of PRME & now the topic is the SDGs so you need to talk about the SDGs. I think that would be a real challenge...unless that person was heavily committed to PRME it will probably fail because they wouldn't understand it."

Mixed messages

R16L4: "...colleagues in school may feel some commitment towards them or...are far more committed to their particular research area & be more interested in pursuing those particular issues that they are working on rather than that sort of broad spectrum of the different goals."

Research interests

Hard to make a case for some SDGs

R2SL1: "I think it would be hard to make a case for teaching Life under water (SDG14), for instance."

Misplaced priorities

R9AP2: "...their priority is more around developing a legitimacy around accreditation...that type of agenda is running university policy rather than university policy being able to think about what is appropriate contextually for around...wider goals like the SDGs."



R9AP2: "...it's a leadership challenge really & how it goes back to how an RME agenda can be seen as a way of moving the university forward on an alternative path. The prevailing norm is not about RME at all...it's about following the money & an increasing managerialism in universities."

Hard to move against the prevailing norm



Too career focused

R14SL5: "...I had discussion with one MBA student who basically said my job is to sell medical equipment & I will sell that come hell or high water. You know, I'm not too worried about sort of ethics & SDGs & how that affects my job.

Maturity of students

R14SL5: "...it's actually about...the readiness & maturity of students to connect to the SDGs...You know, what relevance does it have to me?



R14SL5: "...the biggest barrier we have...many businesses still see this area as being not core to their businesses, sort of tucked away in the CSR department. Even if a company has got a great CSR department, I still think the core business will be very much focused on performance...We then have a difficulty in our institutions convincing our students that these things really, really matter. So, if you like, it's the clash of culture."

**Not considered
fundamental**

Implementaton



**Delivery
technique**

**Too
Broad**

R12L2: "...with the increased complexity, how do you teach that to student not to overwhelm them, not to make it superficial but actually be in-depth."

Complexity



R3SL2: "...if you look at these goals, it's very easy to look at them & to subscribe your own meaning to them...the challenge is to get beyond...colleagues saying oh the SDGs are very important...there are 17 goals & 169 targets, and that's a lot. Because if we are serious about these SDGs, you got to go beyond the 17 pictures to...understand the goals & the targets...so the challenge is how do you get colleagues to go beyond the nice picture & the minimalist meaning of the SDGs to this macro level..."

Vagueness

R17AsP1: "There is a risk here to be accused of preaching. Some students feel uncomfortable that some lecturers present their values. But I think that's fine, I think it's just being mindful that this can happen."

Preachy

May compound current challenges with RME

R11L1: "...my concern is that if as a school we haven't quite got our heads around PRME in itself, then tackling on the SDGs as well...it could either be that we can sort of maximize doing it at the same time or it's gonna feel like another big step beyond just the principles that are already there."

R15SL6: "...I just can't see how all the SDGs can be translated into our curriculum. This is not very indicative for our practice; it only gives you this kind of too abstract, too broad...that's vaguely relevant. So, when we talk about sustainability, those principles are as broad as the word sustainability or the word responsibility or the word ethics. So, yeah. It's been a year or two...I think attending the conference haven't helped really."

R4SL3: "...I can see the real value in for the first time having an integrated set of sustainability & development goals...but it's then how you make not just the goals but also the targets & your contribution to those targets real in an institutional sense.

Scope





**Skills
&
Expertise**

Time

Resources

R8P3: "...there is a general resource issue...then a question maybe about recruitment. Do you recruit people who have expertise so that they can run specialist module...in certain subject areas or contribute to a module that they are experts on? "

R12L2: "...to integrate the SDGs you need people who know things about all the SDGs. Not one person knowing it all, but you need maybe researchers to know more about water, others who know more about poverty or hunger. So, just making sure you're able to teach on those different topics mean you have to have a certain number of staff...within the business school or...from other departments to come as guest speakers."

R5P2: "...we recognize that there's a problem for academics who don't specialize in this area of getting to grips with what is potentially quite a complex stuff...To institutionalize it...we need to have more readily accessible resources & easily transportable into your classroom...It's looking at the resources that are available or indeed potentially developing [them] ourselves to build up a database of material that would be useful for embedding the SDGs into the curriculum a bit more."

Expertise



Time

R13L3: "...you can either incorporate sustainability stuff, RME into every course or you can have a dedicated course. Having dedicated courses is possible, but it is a hell of a battle to win as it is a question of time..."



R13L3: "...say we've got an undergraduate student now, they are not gonna be in the position of responsibility or power within their firm until, well, depending on how their career progresses. But probably not before the SDGs are leading towards their tail end."

**Hard to make tangible
impact given the time-frame**

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Recommendations



Academics

Business
school
leadership

PRME
Champions

PRME

Professional
bodies

UK
Government

All & Sundry

Academics



**Stand up &
be counted**

**Collaborate
more**

Teach Good

R9AP2: "...it's a leadership challenge...To effect real change academics need to creatively contest the prevailing norm [follow the money]...That's really what my RME agenda is in this university...I just don't think our universities are very effective...Effectiveness is about meeting the challenges in our society...It's no good if we're effective financially in the short-term...It's like a big tanker trying to turn quickly...universities are a bit like that. Everyone on the tanker knows that there's an iceberg coming up...they know they're working for quite a stupid organization...If we all know collectively that we're gonna go into this iceberg, [we] need to stand up & be counted to engage leaders...with this agenda of effectiveness to meet the challenges of inequalities that are increasing rather than decreasing..."

"The world suffers a lot. Not because of the violence of bad people, but because of the silence of good people." –Unknown

STAND UP AND BE COUNTED



Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, PhD

Collaboration more with Colleagues & Students

R12L2: "...the key is collaboration...get colleagues together...to understand what they know about these goals...Mapping like okay we can deal with SDGs X, Y, & Z but we don't know anything about SDGs A, B, C. Then trying to figure out okay how could we deal with that? Do we have other people in the university that we could use...practitioners we could ask to join us?...to understand where our strengths & challenges are...then trying to actively deal with them."



R11L1: "...a quarter of my students were doing dissertation on topics related to...certain SDGs [equality & diversity] in organizations...As the dissertation module leader...that's something that could enter into subject group discussions to say look the students are interested in this agenda. They want to be learning the practices & be a bit involved in being responsible in their management."



Teach good

R2SL1: "...take a principles & values approach to working with your curricula...teach the values & the understanding of the issues at...the undergraduate level then go a bit level up to teach some practical solutions. You go a level up again to teach how to implement it in business for instance."

A good teacher can
inspire hope, ignite the
imagination and instill
a love of learning.

Good Thinks



R14SL5: "...it's a hugely competitive world out there...companies are under huge pressures & performance matters. A good teacher will help students make the connections to their lives & to their working life. If you have inspirational great teaching, then you've got a much cynical barrier overcome."

R12L2: "the more we make sure that more students who have a mgt. degrees understand the complexity of responsibility & SDGs...the more they can influence the companies they go into...potentially change the mindset of decision-making over the next decade...They see themselves as part of society & not a separate thing."

R17AsP1: "...it's being mindful of your own vision & making sure that you make that transparent to the students."

Don't be the
Same
Be Better!

Make the SDGs part of
the culture & visible in
the hiring policy

Adopt PRME
(non-signatories)

R8P3: "I don't see much use of funding
or donations to push this forward...a lot
of it is whether a Dean is interested."

Adopt a capability
building approach

Equip current
professionals

R2SL1: "have a non-prescriptive approach...if I was to
go to...my colleagues to say you should be teaching
this there & that there...they will tell me to politely go
away & would not make any space for it. It's a case
of having to say look what you are already doing is
speaking to RME & maybe SDGs...let's just make it a
little bit more explicit...tweak that bit there...You have
to work with what you've got rather than steaming
in & saying right you need to change a whole
curriculum..."

R14SL5: "...if you've got great leadership, that
leadership will promote understanding & support
staff in engaging with the agenda if it's something
that they don't feel particularly knowledgeable or
competent in. So, they will help. I think leadership is
very, very important."

Promote
wider engagement

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"Nine out of 10 people disagree with my idea, which sends
a very clear message — nine out of 10 people are wrong!"



Provide relevant resources

R3SL2: "...what is the role of the PRME Champion in an institution...not in PRME Champions group?...they need to think carefully about reaching out to colleagues, making resources available, try to create a discussion...and in that way, hopefully, we can overcome some of the challenges. You know, bringing ideas, bringing resources from the PRME community. How are other people doing it? And then when they see other people are doing it the chances are perhaps a bit better that somebody will follow."



Organize relevant workshops





R11L1: "PRME as a conduit, an exercise could be undertaken to sort of look at okay these SDGs how are we connecting it, how are we not connecting it & what could we do more? Then hopefully that would filter down to our subject groups & then....down to the classrooms."

Come up with simulations & exercises
(innovative tools & techniques)

Develop relevant case studies
for learning purposes

Hold accrediting degrees
accountable

R8P3: "...if professional bodies required ethics, responsible management, sustainability, whatever or however they wanted to frame it, you know, if they required that for the accrediting degrees or sensing degrees whatever you call it, I think that would be quite an interesting lever on business schools, however, externally."



Require ethics, responsible
management & sustainability

Localize the goals

R4SL3: "it needs to be matched as well by national policy level & political level support. And I don't really sense that very strongly at the moment. Although, you know...clearly the UK has signed up to them..."



R3SL2: "...make these global goals local. The MDGs that came before the SDGs were really about...the poor countries...like it's those over there & we are okay, but we are not okay. Every country has: poverty using its own definition, problems with nutrition & health & well-being...problems with inequality & gender inequality. Every country is suffering the consequences of climate change...looking at what the role of business & management in helping solve them can be very, very, powerful."



Raise awareness of the SDGs

R14SL5: "...the most important thing about the SDGs is that people have to know about them...it's astonishing how few people outside of the universities & the NGOs know about the SDGs. I talk to a lot of people in business & I get blank stares. So, one of the first thing that they can do in terms of institutionalization is actually make sure that no student who comes away from business school is ignorant about anyone of those goals. That's really important."



R10R1: "...if we don't create awareness of them, we are not going to create the capacity for student to develop them further and advance them further.."

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Thank You!

