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Capability approach for realising the sustainable development goals through responsible management education: the case of UK business school academics.

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Keywords	Responsible Management Education; Sustainable Development Goals; Academics; Business schools; Capability Approach; SDGs
Taxonomy	Ethics, Pedagogy, Sustainability, Learning, Curriculum Development, Sustainable Development
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1. INTRODUCTION

The current paper focuses on the further call to action for the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) initiative and its signatories to contribute to realising the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By committing to align their education, research, and engagement activities with fundamental global development problems outlined in the United Nations new SDGs framework. Embed new contents and transformative learning approaches (such as the likes of experiential learning) throughout their curricula to develop essential competencies that can aid businesses to address the SDGs. Participate in new forms of action research centred on sustainable development issues facing the world and create global solutions that are innovative to support businesses to play more roles that are active in diverse local contexts. Work as public opinion leaders, advisors, providers of solutions and facilitators to enable businesses to become active agents of sustainable development, and conduct themselves as unbiased facilitators for and between businesses, governments, and society (PRME, 2014).

The objective of this paper is to contribute to the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The perceptions of UK business school academics were explored to find out what they thought about the possibility of using RME to promote the SDGs. We will discuss the case for RME and the pertinence of mapping it to the SDGs. Followed by a review of how RME differs from traditional management education (which we refer as TME in this paper) to highlight its potency to support the achievement of the SDGs based on Amartya Sen's Capability Approach. Then we discuss how RME and the SDGs are similar and different, and the challenges in making the transition for PRME signatories. We conclude the paper by providing practical recommendations for diverse actors and offer a few suggestions for further studies.

2. THE CASE FOR RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT EDUCATION (RME)

Since Agenda 21 and the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD) launched, sustainability-related issues have gained attention from the public and policymakers (Jorge et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2013). Many scholars realise the role that higher education institutions (HEIs) can play in shifting the awareness of societies towards sustainable development (Ceulemans et al., 2014).

The decade offered HEIs the platform to effect deep-rooted change that is essential for building a better and sustainable future (AdomBent et al., 2014). The traditional view of universities as a mere training ground for would be-professionals (Milutinovic and Nikolic, 2014) where only diplomas are awarded to students without caring if their social relevance is developed or encouraging them to think beyond self-interest to societal interest (Vasilescu et al., 2010) no longer holds. Increasingly, companies expect HEIs to produce graduates that can efficiently apply sustainability and system thinking to complex day-to-day challenges, but business schools have been slow to act (Adams, 2013). Business students will someday become managers and initiators of the global society; hence the relevance the ideas of ERS (Ethics, Social Responsibility and Sustainability) is instilled in them. These three concepts are vital for addressing current (and yet to emerge) global challenges (Arac and Madran, 2014).

HEIs have a crucial role to play in aiding businesses to advance the SDGs and contributing to sound managerial educational approaches (Kolb et al., 2017). They are in a unique position to catalyse a societal transition towards environmental sustainability, but many seem to be struggling on this front (Jones, 2014). Perhaps business schools have a lot to prove given the series of corporate fraud and economic malpractice that resulted in the 2008 world financial crisis. They were partly blamed for that because they taught some of the executives that were involved (Brooks, 2009). Some believe the ideologies they propagate is inspired by amoral theories which do not foster a sense of responsibility in students (Ghoshal, 2005). They reportedly are sold out to tyranny of rankings and over-prioritise profit-making at the expense of socio-environmental values (Durand and Dameron, 2011; Adler and Harzing, 2009). Offer too specialised courses (Mintzberg, 2004), and are partly responsible for climate change issues (Hayes et al., 2016). Misconstrued the well-meaning suggestion of the 1959 Ford and Carnegie Foundation report (to pursue scientific rigour to gain legitimacy) and have become a self-absorbed community with minimal contact with society (Dyllick, 2015).

According to Thomas (1977), "management education cannot continue to be viewed as objective value-free transmission of knowledge" (p. 484). The challenge with the educational offerings of business schools revolves around three questions, including what students learn and what they do not learn; what learning looks like; and what calibre of students business schools attract. Some schools exacerbate these problems through continuous reliance on traditional management education (TME); we discuss its

shortcomings in line with the three questions. First, concerning what students learn and do not, TME offers narrow functional knowledge that has a dominant market logic and is inspired by amoral theories. It is less concerned about promoting integrative thinking, developing the soft skills of students including their reflexive and critical thinking and is selective in focus; favours powerful large corporations over small ones. Second, regarding what learning looks like, TME's predominant focus on teaching is detrimental to self-directed learning. A knowledge-doing and doing-being gap characterise the learning it promotes. Third, in terms of what calibre of students that business schools attract, TME encourages students to be instrumentally driven, like focus primarily on the instrumental value of their study. It does nothing to challenge or balance the learning-to-earning mentality that some students long-held before gaining admission. Instead, it fuels the notion that the ability to secure a well-paid career is the sole measure of success (Dyllick, 2015).

3. FROM RME TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

To acknowledge the relevance of ERS, the United Nations launched the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) in 2007 so as to transform the education, research and thought leadership of business schools (worldwide) through its six principles¹ (Haski-Leventhal and Concato, 2016). Responsible Management Education (RME) aims to train leaders that are committed to building a sustainable future, which makes it an antidote to Traditional Management Education (TME). The latter is the reason why business schools were found culpable in the 2008 Wall Street financial crisis (Koljatic, 2015).

Concerning what students learn (and what not), RME, unlike TME, offers a problem-based pluralistic knowledge that cuts across diverse disciplines (interdisciplinary knowledge). In doing so, it promotes critical thinking, develops the soft skills of students in addition to their analytical and reflexive skills. It also encourages statesmanship and highlights the relevance of values and ethics, as well as teaches students to learn how to learn. The relevance of interdisciplinary knowledge is reinforced by Annan-Diab and Molinari's study (2017). They found that diverse perspectives exist when it comes to issues related to sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR); hence they urged HEIs to adopt an interdisciplinary approach in educating for sustainable development.

¹ Click on the link for details (<http://www.unprme.org/about-prme/the-six-principles.php>).

Regarding what learning looks like, RME aims to achieve a balance between learning and teaching and incorporates 'students' perspective into learning and the learning process. It equips students with practical skills and provides the opportunity for their testing. It also fosters students' sense of responsibility and hones their ability to make a sound judgement. Concerning what kind of students that are attracted to business schools, RME seek to remould instrumentally oriented students to become driven by curiosity and intellect. It aims to balance the aforementioned learning-to-earning mindset that some students have instead of responding with an equal emphasis on career development and strong market orientation (Dyllick, 2015).

PRME, via RME, seeks to train future leaders capable of running reputable and profitable firms and are able and willing to help address complex value-laden global issues in the social, political and environmental spheres (Dyllick, 2015; Robin, 2015). It has attracted tremendous attention from a total of 785 signatories from about 85 countries (as of September 2019). PRME's recent directive to signatories is to make meaningful contributions to promote and help realise the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals² (SDGs). The SDG agenda is underway and is underpinned by 169 targets that aim to address the most critical economic, social, environmental and governance issues facing our world (UN Global Compact, 2016). It builds on the success of the Millennium Development Goals, MDGs (Le Blanc, 2015). Some authors the likes of Storey et al. (2017) dubbed the SDGs a worthy replacement for the MDGs possibly because it applies to all nations, leaving no one behind, including the PRME community who alongside PRME pledged to champion the SDG agenda. It means that PRME is now a platform for raising the profile of ERS (three core skills essential for delivering lasting change) and the SDGs in schools as reflected in its updated vision³. So, its signatories have two core responsibilities – institutionalise RME and promote the SDGs.

Business schools make up the majority of the PRME community. Thus, they have and should play a vital role in efforts targeted at helping the United Nations realise the SDGs (Haertle et al., 2017). They, like other HEIs, have a moral responsibility to raise the

² Goal 1 – No poverty, Goal 2 – Zero hunger, Goal 3 – Good health and well-being, Goal 4 – Quality education, Goal 5 – Gender equality, Goal 6 – Clean water and sanitation, Goal 7 – Affordable and clean energy, Goal 8 – Decent work and economic development, Goal 9 – Industry, innovation and infrastructure, Goal 10 – Reduced inequalities, Goal 11 – Sustainable cities and communities, Goal 12 – Responsible consumption and production, Goal 13 – Climate change, Goal 14 – Life below water, Goal 15 – Life on land, Goal 16 – Peace, justice and strong institutions, Goal 17 – Partnership for the goals.

³ Realising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through Responsible Management Education (RME).

awareness, knowledge, skills and values required to create a just and sustainable future (Cortese, 2003). If they fail on this front, they would to some extent, limit and elongate humanity's best hope and the timeframe set to realise the SDGs, respectively (UNESCO, 1997). Promoting the SDGs is undoubtedly an additional responsibility to the task to implement RME, especially since both must be done concurrently by PRME signatories. However, they have the capacity (acumen, creativity and entrepreneurial vision) to support the development of composite solutions for combating current world issues (Arac and Madran, 2014). Central to these issues is sustainable development and sustainability because of their relevance to humanity's survival - both current and future generations. Business schools are one of the highest-paid schools on campus (Acito et al., 2008), indicating they have the financial capital to implement RME and promote the SDGs simultaneously. However, anecdotal and empirical evidence suggests otherwise as HEIs increasingly are struggling in an era of austerity (e.g. government funding cuts) and uncertainty (e.g. the looming Brexit). There is also a fierce competition (encapsulated in the Research Excellence Framework - REF) to secure research grants from the ever-shrinking funding pockets of the UK government and other funding bodies. The REF is an assessment mechanism that is used to evaluate the quality of the research of UK HEIs. Its outcome determines which institutions get research funds and the amount they are allocated. The better the REF profile in terms of a high amount of 3* and 4* activity of an institution, the higher the chance that it will receive a research grant. So, REF-related grant is commensurate to participating institutions performance⁴.

These issues influence UK HEIs. For instance, Doherty et al. (2015) reported that only a few business schools had made institutional effort to embed RME compared to agendas such as student employability and the REF. Some studies have identified some of the barriers hindering the institutionalisation of RME in business schools. Thus, it will be naive to think that the task to promote the SDGs will be without challenges (see the Table in section 7). Business schools, regardless, are expected to contribute to the broader sustainability agenda as other organisations; they are not separate from the ecosystem (Nejati et al., 2011). It is pertinent that they raise the profile of ERS and make sustainability the golden thread in their core curricular and practices. In the following

⁴ For more details on the REF, click on this link: <https://www.ref.ac.uk/>

section, we briefly look at responsible management education for sustainable development; what others may refer to as education for sustainable development (ESD).

4. EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (ESD)

Students increasingly recognise the value of business knowledge in attracting and retaining high-impact careers, which can be a useful platform for students that are keen to make a lasting change in the world (Parris and McInnis-Bowers, 2017). To produce this calibre of future leaders, the educational offerings of business schools must be forward-thinking, and aimed at developing students to become more knowledgeable, well informed, ethical and responsible, and critical in thinking and be able to engage in lifelong learning (Parris and McInnis-Bowers, 2017; UNESCO, 1997). ESD necessitates that business schools move away from “usual” education characterised by a continued lack of innovation, problem-solving and critical thinking skills (Thomas et al. 2014). To one committed to generating new knowledge and ideas, developing competencies and raising awareness about sustainability-related issues facing the world (Adom̄bent et al., 2014) and empowering students to practice sustainability and create social impacts instead of conditioning them to be profit-oriented (Parris and McInnis-Bowers, 2017). Even Mindt and Rieckmann (2017, p. 625) hold that “the transformation of current economic systems towards sustainable development requires innovative sustainability-driven enterprises with competent managers and staff;” HEIs inclusive.

Business school curricula should be designed to challenge prevailing assumptions that resources are free and infinite. Humans beings are the dominant species and can survive outside the rest of nature. Technology is the bottom-line of all society’s problems, and material means is the sole answer to human needs and wants. They should also debunk the notion that one’s success is independent of communities’ wellbeing and health, cultures and the life support system, and that the ecosystem will continue to assimilate the ever-increasing negative human impacts (Cortese, 2003).

ESD bears the mark of RME as discussed in and can be inferred from section 3. Again, the challenge to promote the SDGs alongside the task to implement RME is not necessarily one of capacity for business schools. They can facilitate a societal transition towards environmental sustainability (Jones, 2014) and like other HEIs have what it takes to become leaders and change drivers in projects that seek to understand the needs of current and future generations in greater detail (Lozano et al., 2013). That way, the ability of both

generations are enhanced towards meeting their needs responsibly and sustainably. Business schools as an essential arm of the education sector can even train professionals that can champion sustainable business practices (McInnis-Bowers, 2017), and in doing so create sustainable values for both business and society (Parkes et al., 2017). It is perhaps the willingness and timeframe needed to meet this audacious but achievable task of creating a sustainable future (Cortese, 2003).

However, some business schools are already promoting the SDGs in their institutions. For instance, Ashridge Hult business school through their mission, strategy and governance, research and global leadership are promoting and contributing to all the 17 SDGs. They have competent faculty with expertise across all the goals, and 10 of the 17 goals align closely to their strategic areas – “what they teach” (SDG4) and “sustainable campuses” (SDGs 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 15 and 16)⁵. Thus, business schools that are keen to make meaningful contributions towards the realisation of the SDGs have to invest in the knowledge development of staff appropriately. Some may need to recruit staff with the required expertise if existing staff lack the know-how around this area.

The following section discusses the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Again, the paper primary revolves around UK business school academics' perceptions of how RME can contribute to the task to promote the SDGs - PRME's second and most recent mandate to its signatories.

5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Education, although a fundamental human right, should be designed to develop the capability of learners. That way, they have the “freedom to promote and achieve valuable functionings” (Walker, 2005, p. 104, citing Sen, 1999) and freely choose and lead a life they value based on an informed decision (Dreze and Sen, 1995). This resonates with the capability approach, which simply is about freedom and the development of a thriving environment for humanity. It argues for well-being and quality of life, not only income generation or consumption, since an individual’s well-being is not only a measure of how rich they are. The capability approach assesses educational quality in terms of the ability of people to freely achieve valuable functionings. Functionings are influenced by individual

⁵Click the link for further details (<https://www.ashridgehouse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Hult-Ashridge-UN-PRME-Report-2018.pdf>).

and institutional conditions and contexts within which possibilities (freedom) can be achieved (Walker, 2005). It is modulated by people's relative advantages in society and improved by enabling public and policy environments such as a gender equality policy in schools (Sen, 1999).

Freedom in this approach is influenced by social and economic arrangements, including political and civil rights. To then think of accomplishments only in terms of one's active choice will be naïve because what we can positively achieve is influenced by economic opportunities, political liberties, social powers, and the enabling conditions of good health, basic education, and the encouragement and cultivation of initiatives (Walker, 2005, citing Sen, 1999). So, the quality of the educational offerings of business schools (and that of other HEIs) amongst other factors can limit or enhance the freedom of learners to do and be what they will have reason to value (Sen, 1992). There are international, national or regional laws, policies and regulatory measures that control the formal education system; the HEI sector falls under this category. Children mostly (adults inclusive) have limited opportunity to choose the type of education they can pursue or the place and form in which it takes place (Hart, 2012). That can curtail or enhance their freedom to do and be what they will have reason to value (Sen, 1992). The same applies to the quality of the educational offerings of schools. In the context of business schools and this paper, we argue that RME is a better-quality education than TME as far as developing students' capabilities is concerned.

In educational settings, the capability approach recognises that learners' ability to participate or benefit from similar education will vary, because not all will be involved or reap the benefit from education in a similar manner. Neither can they all translate the resources that education affords to create the same or similar advantages; that too will vary (Hart, 2012). There are empirical studies to show that not all activities that take place in schools like HEIs are indeed beneficial to all learners (see Raynor, 2007; and Unterhalter, 2003). For instance, Hart (2012) tells us that some experiences in educational settings do reinforce some of the current global challenges (e.g. social inequalities in terms of class, gender and race). Schools should consider and devise mechanisms for addressing these. The SDG agenda and what it represents makes it even more expedient. They consciously must ensure they are not exacerbating the existing problems through their education, practices, policies and even partnerships with external organisations. TME is not necessarily a good role model in this instance, since the ideologies it promotes are not akin

to the principles underpinning sustainability and sustainable development. It does not imply that RME is the be-all and end-all education for business schools, but it is arguably the best choice for helping realise the SDGs through the capability approach.

The following section presents the methodology utilised in this study.

6. METHODOLOGY

The study aimed to investigate if and how RME can support the promotion of the SDGs in UK business schools, thereby contributing to the realisation of the UN agenda2030. It employed an interpretivist approach that allowed for the multiple, subjective realities of study participants to be explored concerning the subject of inquiry (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). The information used in this paper was drawn from semi-structured in-depth interviews held with UK business school academics that at the time were directly involved in RME/PRME related activities. It was assumed they most likely would be at the forefront of championing PRME's additional task to its signatories to promote the SDGs. A total of 17 interviews⁶ was conducted between June 2017 and September 2017 - it was a combination of face-to-face, video and phone call via Skype, Google Hangout, and telephone interviews. The sampling technique was purposive. Study participants were identified via the web search of RME/PRME related articles on research database like Google Scholar, including PRME's webpage and relevant UK & Ireland PRME conference proceedings. The study was designed and carried out ethically, participants' confidentiality and that of their institutions were both assured.

Fifteen academics were asked how the implementation of RME can promote the SDGs to determine if both agendas can complement each other. That is, if efforts to achieve the first task (implementation of RME) can help achieve the second (promotion of the SDGs) and vice versa. Their job titles at the time included Lecturer (L), Assistant Professor (AsP), Associate Professor (AP), Reader (R) and Professor (P) – this might have changed for some since the study concluded. All were employed on full-time basis (except for one that was part-time) by UK business schools that were signatories to the PRME initiative. The schools

⁶A pilot study was conducted before the main study as part of the doctoral study of the lead author. However, the questions considered in this paper were not posed to the pilot study participant - the conference that inspired the questions was held a few weeks after the interview. Also, the questions were not posed to another respondent in the main study due to time – she only had 30 minutes to spare. Thus, the lead author was selective with the questions. Consequently, the data presented in this paper is from 15 interviews from academics employed by 11 UK business schools. Albeit a total of 17 interviews with academics situated in 13 UK business schools was conducted (including pilot study and main study).

membership status at PRME included PRME Champion, Advanced, Basic and Non-communicating signatory. Since PRME is known to have quite a dynamic membership, the status of some of the institutions might have changed since the study. A detailed overview of the respondents is presented in Table 1 below. The names used are pseudonyms, and the suffix represents their job title⁷ at the time of the study.

Table 1: Overview of Study Participants

Discipline/Research Area	S/N	Respondent Code	Interview Method	Gender
Strategy & Leadership	1	Liam-P	Face-to-face	Male
Business Ethics	2	Nick-SL	Skype	Male
Management (Strategy)	3	Lee-SL	Skype	Male
HRM (Responsible Business & Management Education)	4	Mark-SL	Skype	Male
Business Ethics and CSR	5	Louis-P	Skype	Male
HRM & Organisational Behaviour (Sustainable Business)	6	Amy-AP	Telephone	Female
Business and Management (Ethics)	7	Lisa-SL	Google Hangout	Female
Financial Ethics	8	Bill-P	Skype	Male
Critical management, sustainability & CSR	9	Guy-AP	Face-to-face	Male
Business Ethics and Social Enterprise	10	Rita-R	Skype	Female
Strategic Management	11	Sue-L	Skype	Female
Management (Strategy and Sustainability)	12	Zoe-L	Telephone	Female
Management (Sustainability)	13	Pete-L	Skype	Male
HRM (Responsible Leadership)	14	Gale-SL	Skype	Female
Marketing and Ethics	15	Rose-SL	Skype	Female
Business and Management	16	Theo-L	Skype	Male
Operations Management	17	Bell-AsP	Skype	Female

Source: Compiled by Authors (2019)

The use of NVivo software supported the thematic analysis of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Rigour was ensured through member checking but for only the participants that requested to review their interview transcript. The findings and discussions are presented in the following section.

7. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings that emerged from the participants' perception of how they can promote the SDGs through RME implementation. The most prominent is the fact

⁷ L – stands for Lecturer, SL – Senior Lecturer, AsP – Associate Professor, P – Professor, R – Reader.

that most of the academics interviewed were confident at the time that they can contribute directly to the realisation of SDG4, quality education, via RME.

Sue-L: "We've got PRME...so I think possibly through that as a conduit."

Rose-SL: "Of the 17 SDGs, the obvious one is a quality education. I guess we belong to that part and other than that our direct engagement will be beyond our operation."

Rose-SL's statement hints that RME can aid business schools to make a meaningful contribution to achieving SDG4 a lot more compared to the remaining sixteen goals. It also indicates that RME has the semblance of quality education, since ERS underscores the importance of inclusion, equity and is committed to equipping students with essential life skills, so they can engage in and embrace lifelong learning. The Dakar Framework for Action expands the quality set (2000) including the attributes of learners (healthy and motivated), processes (capable educators utilising active pedagogies), content (relevant curricula) and systems (good governance and equal allocation of resources). They are reflective of the challenges with the educational offerings of business schools as identified by Dyllick (2015) except for the governance aspect of systems which RME also covers. It advocates for good governance no matter the size of the firm, unlike TME (see section 2). The "systems" factor calls for adequate investment in the development of teacher training workshops for HEIs. Also, the UK government need to equitably allocate resources to HEIs to foster education for sustainable development. After all, it claims to be committed to advance the global goals.

Sue-L's above statement points to the crucial role of PRME in the active support of business schools within and outside the UK on this all-important journey to promote the SDGs. It is indicative of the complementarity that exists between both agendas (RME and the SDGs). Both agendas are championed by PRME in the context of business schools and even universities worldwide and therefore, can share similar resources in terms of their development. However, it is not clear which requires more resources although we may assume the SDGs given their collective pertinence to humanity's survival; not to undermine the importance of RME - both are essential for building a sustainable future.

We represent both participants statement with Figure 1 which shows how RME links to the SDGs. By link, we mean how RME can support either of the SDGs, albeit we also consider how both agendas can complement each other. So, we denote Figure 1 as RME → 4 and call it Model 1. The idea behind the use of the term "model" is to simplify our findings,

especially for institutions that are yet to commence work on PRME's second directive to signatories (i.e. the promotion of the SDGs). They can consider which model to adopt or gauge the model that speaks to their current situation for those already doing something on this front.

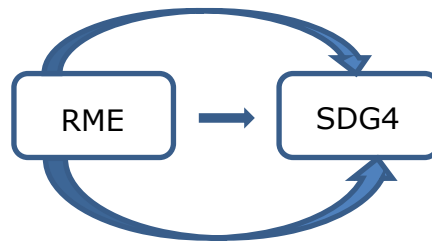


Figure 1: Model 1 – RME → 4

There was a sense of optimism from Nick-SL regarding business schools' potential contribution in the fight against poverty (i.e. SDG1 - no poverty) through RME, but not direct contribution as envisioned in the case of helping realise SDG4.

Nick-SL: "You maybe can teach your students things like poverty, but you wouldn't necessarily be teaching every single SDG and awareness of it."

His optimism did not extend to all 17 goals, as he hinted that it is challenging to teach all to students effectively. A possible explanation is the SDGs are broad, including the 169 targets underpinning them. While surface awareness of the 17 goals is conceivable, an in-depth unpacking of all to students and even staff seems onerous. However, a few business schools claim to be promoting a number of these goals as aforementioned. But we also know from some of the lessons learnt from the task to implement RME that some schools' rhetoric is not akin to their reality – i.e. actual happenings. It has a lot to do with the underlying intention for pledging to implement RME and more recently to promote the SDGs. If they are solely for instrumental benefits such as the desire to gain specific accreditations (e.g. AMBA, EQUIS, AACSB, etc.), it will increase the risk of decoupling (see Rasche and Gilbert, 2015). James and Schmitz (2011) note that the view of sustainability as a tool for profitability instead of responsibility partly explains why some business schools fail to explore sustainability holistically.

A commitment that stems from the normative desire to make a difference based on what an institution stands for will afford instrumental benefits. It also will enhance its opportunity to experience notable transformation in its core areas/activities/operations, which is more valuable long-term. So, instead attempt to promote all the SDGs, business schools and other HEIs worldwide can select a few goals they can effectively address and

teach to students. That will still enable them to develop students' capability to freely choose to pursue responsible and sustainable ways of being and doing they will value (Sen, 1999). That way, they reduce the risk of decoupling, which is counterproductive to the SDG agenda given the time left (less than 11 years per agenda2030). While a business school may get away with decoupling its SDG agenda from its formal structures, they risk losing their legitimacy if exposed (Snelson-Powell et al., 2016).

Speaking of counterproductive, one may argue that the proposed approach is, in fact, counterproductive to the realisation of the goals. All hands need to be on deck, and the valuable contribution of all towards achieving any of the 17 goals is expedient. Albeit contribution of all (including business schools) across all the goals will be ideal owing to the timeframe. Again, Cortese (2003, 16 years ago) highlighted time as the main challenge in the fight to create a just and sustainable future. We all are affected and are not separate from the ecosystem and thus should be concerned. This interconnectedness is also evidenced in the capability approach, which argues that our accomplishments (including existence) depend on several factors (Sen, 1999; see Section 5). While a selective approach to promoting the SDGs seem reasonable, the risk of decoupling may warrant the adoption of a phased approach which will entail addressing the SDGs in chunks over a set period. Schools can spend a few years/months to promote two or three of the SDGs and move onto the next set of SDGs, and repeat the cycle until all the SDGs are covered. However, an obvious challenge with this approach is the number of students that will gain awareness and in-depth knowledge about them, since students come and go – that is how the university works. It means that some may learn about 3 or 4 of the SDGs before they graduate, others a different set, but they will not grasp all the 17 SDGs at least formally from the schools that opt for this approach, leaving businesses to pick up where business schools stopped. Although they will likely appreciate the application of the set of goals (3 or 4) they were taught, assuming that includes the use of real-life contexts/scenarios and how that applies to their capabilities.

Another participant, Rose-SL, had the following to say about the possible contribution of business schools to SDG1 via RME.

Rose-SL: "Poverty? Business schools will only be indirectly contributing to that agenda by making people who are useful to society."

Her use of the term "useful" to qualify RME relating to poverty eradication buttresses the need for business school education to be designed to develop the capabilities of students.

It should offer learners the real opportunity to be and do what they value, one of which might be the freedom to live a good quality of life and well-being; poverty does not represent this life. Then again, well-being is not only measured in terms of income or consumption or how rich one is (Walker, 2005) albeit a good indicator of the quality of an individual's life and to some degree their capabilities. As established, the quality of the education that business schools provide is not only the factor that can limit or enhance students' freedom to choose to lead a life they will value (within the confines of acceptable laws) when they graduate. In the context of this paper, we argue that RME will likely enhance that freedom while TME will limit it.

The problem with TME is not in aiding business schools develop the capabilities of students; rather, it lies in how students will use these capabilities as future managers and leaders. Will they appreciate the importance of sustainable development and how their actions and decision-making can negatively hinder the attainment of a sustainable future? Negative practices can easily have ripple effects when the people responsible are in positions of power presumably. Exposing students to RME-related contents or subjects instead of TME-related ones that were outdated long before the UN SDGs agenda launched, will stand business schools in good stead to mould future responsible leaders that will be committed to impacting business and society positively. Amoral theories birthed the values underpinning TME – it is fundamentally deficient, not grounded in the tenets of sustainability and therefore not akin to ESD (see Dyllick, 2015).

For instance, RME, unlike TME, considers the importance of responsible consumption and production (SDG12) as it pertains to the dream of attaining a sustainable future. TME is more concerned about profit-maximisation even if it entails the indiscriminate squandering of limited natural resources; hence, it is counterproductive to the sustainability agenda. Such a mindset can make it difficult for current students to consider sustainable development when they become leaders, thereby exacerbating the problem at hand. How can zero hunger (SDG2) be achieved without responsible innovation, production and consumption? If some big corporations keep depleting limited natural resources, contaminating the lands of developing or underdeveloped countries with no regard, they will only be contributing to the problem and not solving them. Some communities in these countries are already facing abject poverty, to contaminate their source of minimal livelihood (lands and water) does not signal sustainable development in any form. These are real issues that should be taught in class through case studies. Drawing on Moon et al.

(2018), how does business school education balance the tension between traditional entrepreneurship and sustainable development? For instance, the exploitation of resources versus the conservation of resources.

Another salient point to draw from Rose-SL's above comment (bearing in mind the capability approach) is the need for HEIs worldwide to address human development as lived capacities at the level of everyday life, instead of treating it as mere abstract ideas (Walker, 2005).

Considering the responses relating to SDG4 and SDG1, we propose another model (denoted by $RME \rightarrow 4 \rightarrow 1$) that shows how RME can help business schools promote the SDGs. Figure 2 shows that RME can, directly and indirectly, contribute to the realisation of SDG4 (quality education) and SDG1 (no poverty), respectively.

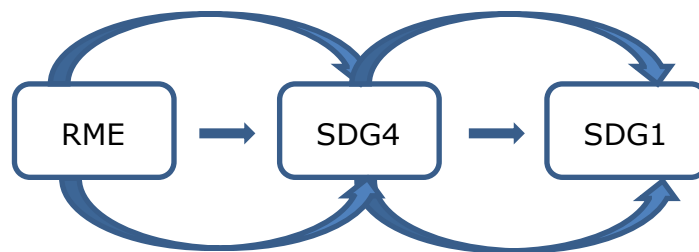


Figure 2: Model 2 - $RME \rightarrow 4 \rightarrow 1$

Another glance at Figure 2 hints that SDG4 can contribute directly to the attainment of SDG1, implying that the provision of quality education and widening the access to it can contribute significantly to the audacious task to eradicate poverty in all its form. However, that is just one crucial aspect of the fight; there are other factors at play and should be considered as already discussed. In addition to those are innovation, commitment backed with action from diverse sectors (e.g. governments of all nation, businesses, business schools and universities) in the society (Rosenbloom et al., 2017).

The relevance of the capability approach in terms of how RME can aid business schools contribute to the achievement of the SDGs is reinforced by the statement below, particularly concerning SDG1 (no poverty), SDG4 (quality education), and SDG8 (Decent work and economic growth).

Rose-SL: "The poor, for example, they have to be able/equipped to access that economic development. Have you heard of Sen's capability approach? His argument is you actually have to give education to develop capability they [poor individuals] cannot actually develop. Basic literacy and basic curricular ability are more critical than creating economic development in the country because only the abled people can access economic development."

Capable individuals are asserted to have a better opportunity at accessing economic development. It is futile to develop the economy of a society without developing the capabilities of its inhabitants, more so those of the upcoming generations that will sustain it. Rose-SL drawing on Sen (cited in Lessmann and Rauschmayer, 2013) almost argues that the poor will remain poor if their capacity to function and the freedom of doing and being is severely limited. It might leave most of them at the mercy of aid givers some of whom are severely underfunded to fill in the gap by developing their capabilities in addition to offering them basic life necessities. Hence, they remain in a poverty bubble; the freedom to choose and have a good quality of life (one not characterised by the lack of fundamental competencies to function at minimally acceptable levels, Anafo, 2014), remains a utopia. We construct a third model (denoted by RME → 4 → 1 ✓ 8) visually represented by Figure

3.

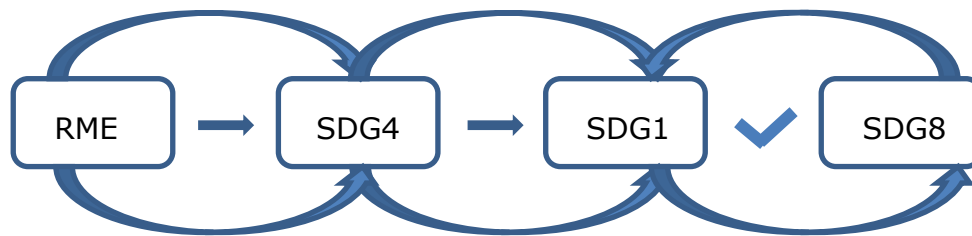


Figure 3: Model 3 - RME → 4 → 1 ✓ 8

Model 3 suggests that business schools through RME can make a direct contribution to the provision of quality education (SDG4). The quality education they provide through RME will then help develop the capabilities of learners to freely function above designated poverty line (SDG1) characterised by (but not limited to) access to economic growth and decent jobs (SDG8). Schools should recognise that an individual’s quality of life is mostly contingent on or linked to their capabilities. The more capabilities they help them cultivate, the higher their opportunity to have a quality of life that meets or possibly exceeds the acceptable threshold. In doing so, schools will be contributing positively to society and the SDG agenda. RME can help facilitate this journey compared to TME.

The capability approach perhaps offers a more sustainable and empowering approach to aid giving. Its adoption by relevant organisations will help ensure that people are not trapped in the system. That way, aid givers can enlarge their reach and influence (support more people that need it but for short periods), and aid receivers can become independent (acquire the capabilities that will assure their freedom to achieve valuable functionings).

Rose-SL: "So, rather than putting the resource in, if you are given food aid, it is better to develop to be able to produce food rather than given the food itself. So, rather than giving

water, let's think about how we create the water resource and what we need. And the people to be able to do that, what do they need?

The statement above suggests that business schools through RME can partner with aid organisations (charities) to drive SDG2 - zero hunger [see Figure 4, Model 4 (RME → 4 → 2)] and SDG6 - clean water and sanitation [see Figure 5, Model 5 (RME → 4 → 6)].

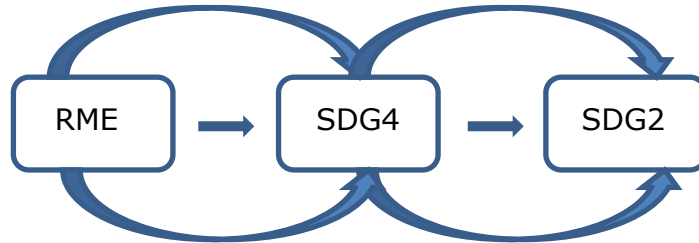


Figure 4: Model 4 - RME → 4 → 2

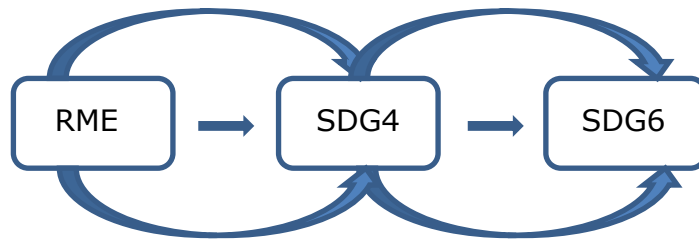


Figure 5: Model 5 - RME → 4 → 6

Rose-SL further said the following:

"So, poverty is caused by maybe 1% of the rich...how we can redistribute the world's wealth to reduce poverty. I can talk about that in the class then I just have to see the students go anywhere they want to go and engage in that issue professionally."

It implies that business schools through RME can raise students' consciousness to the realities of wealth inequality and equip them with tools that may likely cause them to freely choose to balance the scales (SDG10) when in positions of power – as responsible leaders. While schools and academics can develop the capabilities of students, they do not necessarily have control over how they will be used. We develop model 6 (denoted by RME → 4 → 10 → 1, see Figure 6) based on the above statement.

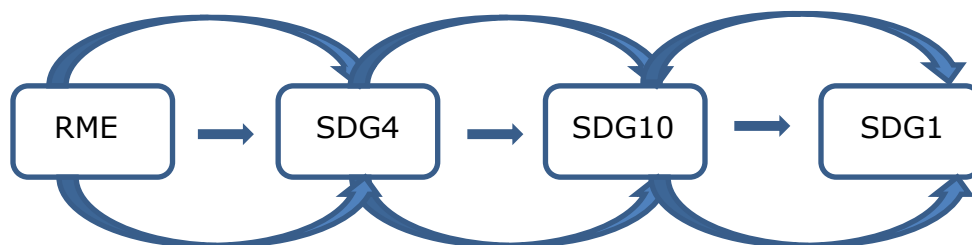


Figure 6: Model 4 - RME → 4 → 10 → 1

Another work the respondent cited is that of Kolb et al.'s (2017). They developed a comprehensive model useful for schools that are keen to promote the SDGs.

Rose-SL: "Kolb et al.'s (2017) work, this is a case from Germany, and one section considers how business schools address these SDGs. Their interpretation is first, through quality education, they would have a direct impact on decent work and economic growth, industry innovation, and infrastructure, responsible consumption and production, a partnership for the goals. Then that internally would force the innovation for clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, life below water, life on land. And then would lead to the rest of the SDGs."

There were also discussions about RME being predominantly concerned about the role of business in society and how it aligns with the SDGs, which also is about society.

Lee-SL: "The SDGs are about society...When we talk about RME, we think about the role of business in society. It's how business can use its financial resources, networks, management knowledge and capability, and skills in order to solve or help to solve societal problems? So, one thing that businesses and managers are good at is innovation. So, if we were to achieve the SDGs, we need innovation, and the people who are gonna do that are businesses...we can contribute to the SDGs."

Lee-SL further hinted that business schools through RME can equip future responsible leaders and managers with innovative skills needed to progress the SDGs and gave an example of how a UK-based company is using innovation to progress SDG2 (zero hunger).

Lee-SL: "A colleague gave me the name of a company in X called Y, and I've never heard of it. It breeds livestock like chickens, broilers. This company is also into genetic engineering I'm told...has a 40% global market share in broilers. And you say, well, how does that work? Well, if you take SDG 2, this company what they do is if you take a Scottish chicken that's made for breeding and you sell it to somebody in Nigeria. This person in Nigeria on a farm can't breed other chicken from this chicken because it will die probably because the conditions in Nigeria are different from the conditions in Edinburgh. So, what the company in Edinburgh does is they study the environment, the air, the soil, the food in Nigeria and they try to modify the chicken so that when I sell it to the person in Nigeria, this chicken won't die. In that way, we contribute to solving parts of the food problem and people starving because there's not enough."

The above statement is visually represented by Figure 7 (i.e. Model 7, denoted by RME → 4 → 9 → 2).

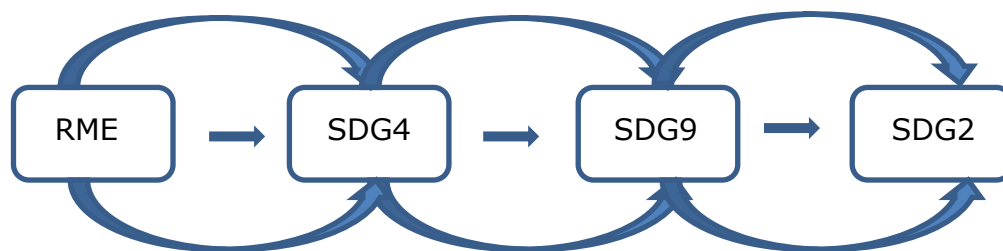


Figure 7: Model 7 - RME → 4 → 9 → 2

The notion that business schools can achieve social equity, justice and inclusive development through their PRME (Lisa-SL) and RME-related activities more broadly (Guy-AP) is another interesting finding. Contributions to progress the SDGs will be more

meaningful by having a robust and holistic approach to RME (Guy-AP). That includes the fight against climate change - SDG 13 (Nick-SL) and the irresponsible consumption of natural resources (SDG 12), some of which takes decades to replenish (Rose-SL).

Concerning SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), *Rose-SL* was optimistic that business schools can indirectly help tackle crime through RME; predominantly from an ethical angle. She further noted that business schools do not exist to keep the world clean, unlike engineers. However, we argue that there are institutions worldwide that have university-type memberships at PRME. Several of them have engineering departments/schools and therefore can promote SDGs 6⁸, 7⁹, 11¹⁰, 12¹¹, 13¹², 14¹³ and 15¹⁴ to keep the world clean as uttered by *Rose-SL*. The outlined goals in our view relate to cleanliness, implicitly and explicitly. Moreover, we already noted that Ashridge Hult business school claims to be contributing to most of the goals (see section 4).

A few warnings came through. For example, the existence of an RME agenda does not guarantee that a business school will be committed to contributing meaningfully to the SDGs agenda (*Rose-SL*). Not even if it will help them tick a couple of boxes, like gain the desired accreditation or maintain one (*Nick-SL*). Another came from *Pete-L* who said the following:

"Using one to drive the other I think that is a foolish way of going about it - to hope that RME will directly drive the attainment of the SDGs."

What we take from his comment is the need for PRME signatories to explore other creative means of contributing to the SDGs besides through RME; it is not a be-all and end-all tool/initiative in this arena. *Pete-L* further urged business schools also to seek out opportunities to instil ERS values and ideas into existing managers, decision-makers and influencers in private corporations. They are capable of facilitating and generating wide-reaching impacts that can massively help attain the SDGs.

Pete-L "The more you have managers, decision-makers, decision influencers within private organisations who see the role of their organisations as being greater than simply providing shareholder return, the more you are likely to have decisions being taken that promote sustainability; that's the hope broadly speaking. And the more you have that, the more likely it is that these companies will directly or indirectly contribute to the SDGs and whatever that comes after them."

⁸ Clean water and sanitation

⁹ Affordable and clean energy

¹⁰ Sustainable cities and communities

¹¹ Responsible production and consumption

¹² Climate action

¹³ Life below water

¹⁴ Life on land

Pete-L's statement is a reminder that the mandate to realise the SDGs is time-bound. While an extension is possible, the current situation can deteriorate further if the buy-in of top influencers is not sought as a matter of urgency. His recommendation echoes Parkes et al.'s (2017) remark, they said the following: "educators are uniquely positioned to influence the mindsets and actions of some of the largest and powerful organisations on planets" (p. 61). *Pete-L* also alluded to the limited capacity that current undergraduate students have to champion a large-scale change towards realising the SDGs, in comparison to current leaders in positions of power, and added that it would depend on how their careers progress. Nonetheless, he seemed confident that they will not be in positions of power until the tail end of agenda2030 to contribute enormously to the SDGs. Hence the need for a double focus on the parts of business schools – instill the ERS value in students and get the leaders of all corporations (small, medium and large) on board in this all important fight.

Worth mentioning is the relevance of having a critical mass to progress the SDGs through RME. The more students are exposed to the RME-related contents towards the development of their capabilities, the higher the number of future responsible leaders businesses and societies will likely have, which in turn will be beneficial to the SDG agenda.

Pete-L: "The greater the number of organisations teaching RME, the greater the number of people coming out of university and going into private organisations with the notion of responsible management. Without a script in their head telling them they have to go and make money and screw over the competition and screw over people in order to make money. And the more likely that there would be a greater level of creativity that is involved in achieving the goals."

The SDGs may be an incentive to schools yet to commit to RME implementation, thereby increasing the number of students exposed to RME and equipped with relevant capabilities to achieve valuable functionings.

Interestingly, human rights was another salient point raised. Guy-AP indicated that RME can aid business schools to address issues around it due to the increasing internationalisation of universities. Albeit he seemed doubtful that many will follow through. It perhaps reinforces Pfeffer's (2010) remark about the social and the human rights dimensions of sustainability having so far received little attention in comparison to the economic and environmental dimensions. Again, a piecemeal approach to RME in his view will not suffice in the advancement of the SDGs, including the human rights agenda.

Referring to research and scholarship, Guy-AP stressed that business schools need to be acutely aware that they cannot perpetuate a system that arguably is not only failing in the top 1% but the 99% in the world. He also alluded to what has happened to many governments across the world, becoming possibly the fate of universities if they fail to pay attention to their wider responsibility. For instance, he said that the vote for Brexit was a statement about not accepting the business as usual stance. The way people voted in the last US presidential election on the surface seemed like a vote against the status quo when what was voted for was, in fact, a reaction that people have had. He maintained that academics must recognise that they have a responsibility to move both the RME and the SDG agendas forward, and recommended the adoption of a more rigorous route on both fronts. Guy-AP urged business schools to stand and be counted and assume a leading role in the fight to protect and uphold human rights. He noted that the SDG movement should awaken their consciousness to the reality of their responsibilities to various actors than what their self-interest will allow them to recognise.

The notion that the SDGs may be used by some institutions that have business school-type memberships with PRME as a bargaining tool for a university-type signatory was voiced.

Mark-SL: "It's a way of integrating all the work that we do in so many different parts of the university around the principles [PRME]. Because they [SDGs] tie-up with our own university mission and our public engagement work and the impact agenda, obviously, in relation to REF."

Despite the varied responses received, it is clear that RME can aid business schools to meet PRME's second task to existing and new signatories, to promote the SDGs. Business schools within and outside the UK can contribute towards the realisation of all 17 SDGs via RME.

Zoe-L: "I think RME can make sure that students know all the seventeen SDGs and are aware of all the different challenges and how they are linked with business. That business is not this bubble there."

Teaching the SDGs to students and developing their capabilities to increase their chance to choose freely to lead sustainable life patterns they can value does not have to be only an inward-focused contribution. Business schools can collaborate with other establishments (including charities) in the fight for a sustainable future. Existing students

regardless of their disciplines can also contribute to the SDGs within and outside the campus¹⁵.

Gale-SL: "Business schools can help students personally connect with some of those goals...show how business has an impact on all 17 of them. So, when students go into businesses for the first time, they can aid highlight the awareness of the SDGs...connect what business is doing with the SDGs and show people how important more actions like recycling or thinking about water usage can have because it connects to a huge global agenda."

Their contribution is just as significant as those from businesses, graduates, communities, governments/nations, all and sundry. Agenda2030 is for all – leaving no one behind, as we are not separate from the ecosystem. Neither is our positive accomplishments possible without several interconnected networks of factors. The development of students' capabilities towards attaining a sustainable future has never been more expedient than now; all hands are needed on deck and business schools worldwide are not exempted. The potency of RME as a catalyst for the remainder of the Agenda2030 journey is one that business schools and universities can exploit.

Some of the challenges that the study participants envisaged encountering with the task to drive the SDGs are outlined in Table 2 below. They include acceptance, scope, implementation, skills and expertise and time. They mirror the four main barriers to implementing ESD (including overcrowded curriculum, perceived irrelevance by academic staff, limited staff awareness and expertise and limited institutional drive and commitment) as identified by Dawe et al. (2015).

¹⁵ There are students under Enactus that are in the fight to develop a sustainable future (click link for more details <https://enactus.org/globalgoals/>). It is one out of several student-oriented organisations and those in partnership with other organisations.

Table 1: Possible challenges with promoting the SDGs according to UK Business School Academics in the RME Field

Themes	Responses
Acceptance	<u>Faculty</u>
	Nick-SL: "...many of [the SDGs] 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."
	Lee-SL: "...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."
	Theo-L: "...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."
	<u>Business school senior executives</u>
Nick-SL: "I think it would be hard to make a case for teaching Life underwater (SDG14), for instance."	
Guy-AP: "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."	
<u>Students</u>	
Pete-L: "It's late say we've got an undergraduate student now, they are not gonna be in the position of responsibility, position of power within their firm until, well, depending on how their career progresses. But probably not before the SDGs are leading towards their tail end."	
Gale-SL: "It's actually about the readiness & maturity of students to connect to the SDGs. You know, what relevance does it have to them? I had a 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."	
<u>Businesses</u>	
Gale-SL: "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."	
Scope	Sue-L: "My concern is that if as a school we haven't quite got our heads around PRME in itself, then tackling 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."
	Mark-SL: "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."
Implementation	<u>Complex</u>
	Rose-SL: "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."
	Zoe-L: "With the increased complexity, how do you teach that to students not to overwhelm them, not to make it superficial but actually be in-depth?"
<u>Vague</u>	
Lee-SL: "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."

Preachy

Bell-AsP: "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."

Skills & Expertise

Bill-P: "There is a general resource issue...then a question may be 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? "

Zoe-L: "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."

Louis-P: "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."

Time

Pete-L: "You can either incorporate sustainability stuff, RME into every course and/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."

Source: Authors (2019, based on interview raw data)

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Responsible Management Education can help business schools contribute to the realisation of the United Nations SDGs agenda, although the extent to which that is possible varied across the participants. Our analysis shows that some academics in the RME field believed that business schools that are signatories to the PRME initiative could raise awareness of all 17 SDGs through RME, there were also concerns about how broad the 17 SDGs are, including 169 targets underpinning them. Kolb et al.'s (2017) statement: "it is almost impossible to address all SDGs at the same time, and so priorities have to be stated" (p. 288) encapsulates their concern vividly. The statement also reinforces our proposed approaches that schools consider adopting, factoring in the challenges associated with those. Unanimously, the study participants said that RME could help progress the realisation of SDG4 because the provision of quality education is at the heart of business schools and other HEIs (worldwide). However, we have also established that Traditional Management Education (TME) - "usual" business education, is mostly counterproductive to the principles and values that underpin the SDGs. Including what they stand for and therefore will not suffice for the journey towards meeting the Agenda2030 goals and targets.

We cannot overemphasise the relevance of SDG9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) towards the realisation of the other 16 SDGs. Innovation can expedite the achievement of the other goals and therefore pertinent given the race against time. Again, we all have less than 11 years to realise Agenda2030; it is a collective responsibility that requires all hands on deck. All contributions are valuable no matter the level, size, amount, nature/type, so long as they are grounded in ethics, social responsibility and sustainability.

Some of the SDGs featured prominently than the others. For instance, SDG3 (Good health and well-being) was not mentioned, at least not explicitly. The timing of the study could have contributed to why participants said little/nothing about RME helping them contribute to its realisation. Most of the study participants admitted to having not given all the 17 goals a critical thought. They also said that there were no concrete plans in place for their promotion and advancement at their institutions at the time.

"So, I think RME can link with the SDGs and should. I'm only aware of maybe two universities in the UK who are using RME to bring the SDGs into business schools; I don't think many are at all" (Nick-SL).

Undoubtedly, the situation would have changed, given the considerable time that has elapsed since the study concluded. Presumably, most of the business schools where the participants were employed at the time would have made progress in meeting the task to promote the SDGs. The extent of the progress made is challenging to say within the scope of this study. However, the strategy of the Ashridge Hult Business School pointed out earlier evidence our claim of progress made on this front. SDG3 is one of the goals they claim to be progressing and thus, likely to be in the radar of other business schools that are committed to the SDG agenda. Therefore, we cannot conclude that RME cannot aid business schools to contribute to SDG3 and that academics in the RME field are genuinely not convinced of the possibility of that. We suggest that future study explores in-depth the number of business schools reporting against SDG3. A comparison of the strategies in use by UK-based business schools and those outside on this front presumably would yield a broader perspective, and in doing so, enhance learning and development. We recommend studies around progress made thus far by business schools against all the 17 goals. It can also be comparative since PRME is a global initiative with more than 80 signatories. Without a doubt, there will be differences in the progress made, but it is worth knowing the key drivers, enablers and barriers for promoting the SDGs through RME in business schools (worldwide). Including how they can be exploited and eradicated, depending on those winning and struggling in the fight to achieve a sustainable future.

There is also a chance that some business school signatories have since used the SDGs as a bargaining tool to secure a university-wide signatory status with PRME. A study along this line would be interesting.

Another area of interest is the idea that the values and principles underpinning the SDGs are somewhat related to the impact component of the REF. A viewpoint that we share considering the significance of the SDGs to the sustenance and continuity of humanity. Thus, we argue that an impact case study that narrates how academics/institutions have contributed meaningfully to achieving even one of the SDGs be judged impactful in the REF2021 exercise. A conceivable implication for policymakers and REF executives/panel is the need to design the assessment criteria for all disciplines to capture research-related impacts of that nature for the next cycle - that is if it is late already to do so for the REF2021 cycle.

The implication of the study for business schools/universities (worldwide) is the need to broaden their target when it comes to instilling the ideas of ERS. They need to adopt a pluralistic approach and make concerted efforts to educate influential managers, decision-makers and top executives in positions of power on the relevance of ERS and why they must promote sustainability in their operations and business practices. It should, in turn, go a long way to help realise the goals.

There was also a clear warning that a piecemeal approach to RME will not suffice in this era of the SDGs. In a way, it is a call for PRME to take stock of its members' performances and approach to RME implementation to identify areas for improvement and provide the much-needed support to members with subpar strategies/performances, more so the non-communicating signatories.

It is of paramount importance that schools, charitable organisations, individuals and groups (worldwide) ground what they are doing (and intend to do) to help realise the SDGs in the capability approach. At least because of the reasons outlined earlier. Concerning aid giving, it is a commendable act of kindness, but should not be the end goal of those operating within this sphere. The reason being that while it provides short-term relief, it is hardly sustainable long-term. On-going and tentative projects should be augmented with programs geared toward developing the capabilities of the individuals or communities involved. Short-term and long-term relief is essential, but they ought to be underpinned by some research relating to the capability approach. That way, the risk of having people stuck in the poverty bubble or cycle is averted or minimalised. Developing the capabilities of the poor, vulnerable nations, communities, groups or individuals, so they are empowered to choose freely to lead a quality life they can value; one that can hopefully propel them to choose then sustainable patterns as their circumstance improves should be the way forward. After all, it is part of system thinking.

The UK government also need to provide adequate funding to aid HEIs so they can make meaningful contributions towards the realisation of the SDGs. They also must become actively involved in this fight, just throwing money at it will not suffice; there needs to be visible action at the bare minimum. They must also ensure that they and other funding bodies and organisations at the helm of affairs related to the REF are not contributing to the problem through specific policies, organising and requirements related to the assessment framework.

For instance, the gender inequality (Davies et al., 2019; Yarrow, 2016) and poor health¹⁶ (Morrish, 2019) that was associated with REF2014 exercise (and seems to be still an on-going issue), how did they contribute directly and indirectly to those? Those are counterproductive to the realisation of SDG 5 and SDG 3. The UK government must not forget its pledge to help move the SDGs forward; the highlighted scenario comes under that responsibility umbrella. Further studies can explore if the mechanism underpinning the REF are indeed fit for purpose in an era where sustainability and sustainable development is a must. Evaluation of those against sustainability principles is essential. It is not enough to evaluate and regulate HEIs, the evaluator and their tools, processes, procedures, policies, requirements and guidelines should also be evaluated and regulated as appropriate.

Business schools can certainly tell stories about what they are doing to implement RME to fit into the SDG agenda. However, a clear connection between both agendas must be established to secure the buy-in of senior executives, faculty members and even funding bodies. That way, they increase the chance of moving both agendas forward with very minimal conflict. Also, the risk that RME's potency to move the SDG agenda forward will be tagged coincidental instead of seen as a key driver and enabler will be reduced. Conclusively, it is evident that the RME agenda undoubtedly can support the advancement of the SDGs because of its direct link to SDG4. It is also clear that SDG4 (quality education - RME) and SDG9 (innovation) have a crucial role to play in the realisation of the other goal areas.

¹⁶ <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/HEPI-Pressure-Vessels-Occasional-Paper-20.pdf>

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