Developing Responsible Management in the Middle East and North Africa Region: Reviewing PRME Progress

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Abstract

Purpose-Reflecting emerging concerns about PRME's reach beyond the West, we provide an analysis of its contribution to responsible management development in the MENA region.

Design/methodology/approach- Drawing on 18 PRME MENA signatories' Sharing Information on Progress Reports, we examine levels of engagement with PRME, as well the practices used in the region to progress its six principles. We examine the depth of integration based on Rusinko's (2010) typology and its success in addressing local responsible management challenges.

Findings- Our analysis revealed modest levels of engagement with PRME in MENA. Consistent with other regions, for those actively participating, we identified a wide variation in PRME responses. First, we found wide variation in the interpretation of the six principles. Second, we found a diversity of practices, especially the extent to which efforts were linked to progressing local management challenges. Third, we also found variability relating to the depth of PRME's integration into the curricular of MENA signatories with, most displaying Ruskino's (2010) narrower approaches.

Originality/Value-We address calls to understand the contribution of PRME beyond Western contexts and offer suggestions for how PRME can be strengthened to facilitate responsible management development in MENA.

Keywords Responsible Management Education, PRME, Sharing Information on Progress Reports, Business Schools, MENA

Paper type Research

Introduction

Recently business schools have been heavily criticised for contributing to escalating societal problems including ethical scandals, rising inequality as well as financial, environmental, and humanitarian crises (Burchell *et al*., 2015). Notably, they stand accused of producing immoral managers who fail to reflect on their social, economic, and ecological responsibilities. In response, business schools have been urged to advance more responsible education (Allen *et al*., 2019), which aspires to develop ethically and sustainably minded managers who can ultimately improve their societies (Stachowicz-Stanusch, 2011).

Positioned as a key catalyst to drive the much-needed transformation in management education (Haertle *et al*., 2017), the United Nations (UN) Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME) promotes responsible management and offers guidance for business school to adapt their curricula, research, teaching, and institutional strategies to foreground themes of responsibility, sustainability, and ethics (Cullen, 2020; Godemann *et al*., 2014). The initiative emphasises the importance of progress against six key principles (PRME, 2022b) (See Appendix 1). Questions remain, however, as to the success of PRME generally (Burchell *et al*., 2015) and despite its recognised *global* call to action (Haertle *et al*., 2017), its reach beyond the West in particular (Cullen, 2020; Jamali and Samara, 2020). Given that the 'non-Western' context has significant cultural, regional, and historical idiosyncrasies that present unique challenges for PRME's implementation and responsible management development, research is urgently needed to understand its progress beyond Western countries (Abdelgaffar, 2021; Gherardi and Laasch, 2022).

Against this background, we seek to provide an analysis of the state of PRME efforts in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This is especially important given heightened

calls for more responsible management in the region with Sidani (2020: 477) noting that "the list of societal problems in relation to (ir)responsible management is sadly long". Drawing on PRME MENA signatories' Sharing Information on Progress (SIP) Reports, we provide an overview of engagement levels with PRME against its six principles as well as an analysis of the depth of integration into business school's curricular based on Rusinko's (2010) typology. Our findings suggest the equivocal state of PRME in MENA which questions the development of responsible management in this context. Accordingly, we offer suggestions for how PRME might be strengthened to facilitate responsible management development in MENA.

The Need for PRME in MENA

The MENA region consists of nineteen countries, spreading from Morocco in the West to Iran in the East (World Bank, 2021). Despite being a diverse region with varying levels of economic and social development, political systems, and ethnic compositions, countries nevertheless share similar economic, environmental, and social problems (Billeh, 2002). Bayoumi *et al*. (2022) highlight that common challenges of gender equality, decent work and economic growth, and sustainable food production are amongst the region's most pressing. Like many regions globally, tackling such challenges has been complicated by the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, with the region's overall progress towards sustainable development goals remaining low (Bayoumi *et al*., 2022). While this is not the place to discuss these challenges in depth, below we outline the most pressing concerns that explain the urgent need for PRME in MENA.

Gender inequality

Gender inequality has been highlighted as the region's largest challenge (Bayoumi *et al*., 2022:21). According to the Global Gender Gap Index, the MENA region is the second worst performing, highlighting persistent gender inequalities (World Economic Forum, 2021). While noticeable improvements have been achieved relating to measures of educational attainment,

and health, with both achieving more than 94% parity, economic participation and political empowerment remain key challenges with gaps for both measures above the global average. Moghadam (2002) argues that improving gender parity of economic participation demands attention to deeply embedded issues, notably tackling hostile work environments and sexual harassment.

Decent work and economic growth

While MENA's forecasted growth for 2022 was 5.5% (World Bank, 2022b), Gatti *et al*. (2022) question whether the region's recovery to pre-pandemic standards of living is possible. They also note that this optimistic figure masks variations in regional growth between the more prosperous oil exporting and less wealthy oil importing countries. Further, the continuous rise in extreme poverty with rates increasing to 7.2% in 2018, as highlighted in the World Bank Poverty and Shared Prosperity Report (2022a), questions the region's economic prosperity, especially for war-torn countries such as Yemen and Libya. Economic prosperity also continues to be hindered by ongoing corruption, notably the use of personal connections known as 'wasta'. This represents a key obstacle to the development of responsible management, reinforcing regional inequality. For example, MENA scores just 39/100 in relation to 'clean' working practices (Transparency International, 2022) despite the passage of almost a decade since the Arab Spring protests against corruption and economic stagnation. As Sidani (2020: 277) observes, the region continues to "suffer from acts of irresponsible management" with Samara (2021) for example, noting the problematic effects of corruption to the development of family businesses which constitute nearly 90% of the region's businesses and employ 80% of its workforce.

Sustainable food production and water use

MENA countries represent some of the world's highest import-dependent countries (Bayoumi *et al.*, 2022). Strikingly, ~~overall~~ half of the region's food is imported (Belhaj and Soliman, 2021). Together with rising global food prices fuelled by the war in Ukraine, the region faces intensified challenges of food poverty and insecurity. So significant are such challenges, that Gatti *et al.* (2022) predict that social unrest is likely to follow. Furthermore, the region includes some of the world's most water scarce countries which consequently threatens their access to fresh water (Sakmar et al., 2011).

All the above suggest an urgent need to promote PRME in MENA. Indeed, the PRME MENA Chapter was endorsed in 2012 with eleven countries (namely, Egypt, Bahrain, Iran, Kuwait, UAE, Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia) subsequently joining. In 2014, it was agreed that PRME MENA should focus on: "(a) teaching; involving curriculum development, content sharing, and faculty webinars on topics of interest, (b) research (with a focus on issues of anti-corruption among others), (c) outreach on the sustainability literacy test[i], and (d) advocating the role of women on boards in the MENA region" (PRME, 2020). In September 2021, responding to stalling progress, a committee was formed to revitalize the MENA Chapter (PRME, 2022c). Arguably, the stalling progress relates to a variety of challenges which present barriers to PRME advancement and investment in responsible management development in the region (Sidani, 2020). We discuss the most salient below.

The Challenges of PRME Advancement in MENA

Profile and Purpose of Business Schools in MENA

While there has been a noted increase in HE provision across the MENA region, with for example 183 institutions now offering business and management studies (The Times Higher Education, 2022), questions remain regarding the quality of education in the region (Elkhayat, 2018). This is especially apparent in public universities which dominate MENA, and which are

notably underfunded (Mousa *et al.*, 2019). In response, there has been a growing influx of private universities, which are typically partnered with American and British universities (El Hassan, 2013). Reflecting the neo-liberal approach found in the West, business schools across MENA are increasingly focused on short term goals which bolster their market position. Elkhayat (2018), for example, notes efforts to increase student numbers, research publications and employment opportunities. This potentially prioritises narrow business needs (Ramboarisata, 2021), instrumental and self-interested learning, undermining efforts to adequately respond to the societal needs championed by PRME (Alnodel *et al.*, 2018; Mousa *et al.*, 2020). This stance is also underlined by research which identifies MENA student orientations supportive of business skills and profit and an ambivalence towards RME (Jamali and Samara, 2020; Mousa, 2021).

Faculty Support, Skill, and Autonomy

Ambivalence towards responsible management in MENA has also been echoed by faculty (Moussa *et al.*, 2020). Work in the Egyptian context, for example, has suggested that faculty view sustainability issues as "marketing propaganda", and "irrelevant" (Mousa *et al.*, 2019). Faculty have also questioned the prioritisation of RME in their local contexts highlighting a greater need for immediate attention to feelings of injustice and insecurity in their workplaces (Ramboarisata, 2021). These attitudes are consistent with an absence of qualified faculty with the requisite knowledge to teach and develop RME syllabi in the region (Hajj *et al.*, 2017). Of concern, it is also noted that where faculty are suitably qualified, they often lack the necessary academic freedom to choose appropriate curricula (Mousa, 2021). This position severely limits PRME's supposed strength of 'playing angel's advocate' (Starkey *et al.*, 2004), questioning irresponsible management as usual views.

Paucity of MENA specific teaching resources

A further challenge to responsible management advancement in MENA relates to the paucity of teaching materials which manifest the local responsibility challenges outlined earlier. Primarily, teaching is based on theories and concepts developed in Western contexts resulting in resources that do not resonate with local cultures (El Hassan, 2013). For instance, teaching resources that promote gender equality (as defined in the Western context) may defy the region's cultural norms which accept gender stereotyping (Jamali and Samara, 2020). In Egypt for example, faculty are reluctant "to address differences in religion, gender, age and political ideology" to avoid fuelling cultural clashes outside of the classroom (Mousa, 2021:112). This underlines the importance of increasing the availability of teaching resources which are culturally sensitive as an important stepping stone to systemic capacity building and improving institutions' connectedness to the MENA context (Painter-Morland *et al*., 2016). Developing

Resources that are nuanced to responsible management challenges of the region requires dedicated research. While research related to facets of responsible management has significantly grown over the past decade globally, research in MENA is notably scarce (Abdelgaffar, 2021). Laasch (2021), for example, was only able to identify one case study of responsible management practice in the region. Gherardi and Laasch (2022) call for research which examines practices in-situ to identify unique local issues, concerns, challenges, and solutions with local relevance. Yet as Mousa *et al*. (2019) note, gaining access to undertake such research is problematic.

In light of the paradoxical urgent need for more responsible management development in MENA and local circumstances which hinder its advancement, we now turn to our analysis of current efforts to develop responsible managers through PRME initiative. We address the following research questions:

1. What is the overall level of engagement in PRME across the MENA region?

2. What are the main practices used by the MENA signatories in relation to each of the six PRME principles?

3. To what extent do the practices identified meet the stated aims of the MENA chapter agreed in 2014?

4. How deeply integrated into the curriculum are MENA signatories' responsible values?

Research Approach

Business schools committed to PRME are labelled 'signatories' and are required to produce Sharing Information on Progress (SIP) reports at least every 24 months (Burchell *et al.*, 2015). Failing to do so results in a signatory's delisting. Disclosing and sharing progress, experience and good practice constitute a key learning opportunity for the PRME community and crucially for this paper's purpose, offer a database that can be used to examine PRME progress in local contexts. Indeed, SIP reports have been used to understand PRME progress (Alcaraz *et al.*, 2011; de Assumpção and Neto, 2020; Stachowicz-Stanusch, 2011) and here we purposefully focus on the reports within the MENA region.

According to UN PRME (2022a), the SIP should contain:

1. A letter signed by the highest executive of the organization to renewal commitment to PRME.

 2. A description of practical actions taken to achieve one or more of the six principles during the last 24 months.

3. An assessment of the degree to which stated goal were met.

4. Key objectives for the next 24-month period regarding the implementation of the principles.

Given this loose guidance, we adopted an abductive approach, combining deductive and inductive analyses. We firstly used PRME's six principles as pre-existing categories and then secondly, allowed additional themes to emerge from the data given the varying local

interpretations and presentations of the reports. However, reflecting on previous analyses of SIPs (de Assumpção and Neto, 2020; Goodemann *et al.*, 2011), we found significant variations in the interpretation of the principles across MENA, and therefore an important part of our analysis involved developing our own working definitions of the principles (see Appendix 1). We then used NVivo to organize our analysis. Finally, given our interest to understand the depth of integration of RME into the curriculum, we also deployed Rusinko's (2010) typology (see Figure 1), to categorise the level of incorporation of responsibility values (Principle 2). Briefly, the typology outlines four approaches to integrating RME values into business school curricula. Piggybacking and digging deep approaches are easiest to implement, narrower in reach and are less resource demanding while focussing and mainstreaming both represent more difficult, broader and resource intensive approaches (Mburayi and Wall, 2018). Our approach is further informed by work that develops the typology by acknowledging that the curriculum does not develop independently of the internal business school system or the external environment in which it operates, and hence there is a need to move beyond the curriculum to also focus on systemic support for responsibility concerns across the business school and throughout its operations (Hindley, 2022; Mburayi and Wall, 2018; Painter-Morland *et al.*, 2016). Accordingly, our analysis ultimately aims to consider curriculum integration efforts alongside the range of initiatives across the six Principles.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Findings

Overview of PRME Engagement in MENA

Our analysis identified that in March 2022 there were a total of 42 MENA signatories- that is, those who have made a confirmed commitment to PRME. As detailed in Table 1, 11 countries are represented. This equates to approximately 58% of the 19 countries which comprise the region (World Bank, 2021). The most active countries by number of signatories are United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, and Egypt. Our analysis also illustrates that out of the 42 institutions who have signed up in the region, 21 are labelled as 'communicating' which ostensibly denotes that they have submitted their SIP report in the last two years and are therefore currently considered active members of PRME. Of concern, this means that, 50% of the MENA chapter are currently considered inactive and face being delisted. However, on closer inspection, there were numerous inconsistencies in the categorisation of signatories. There were 9 listed as Communicating Signatories who had not submitted a SIP Report (or at least, it was not displayed on the PRME website) and 5 who were listed as non-Communicating but who had submitted a SIP in the preceding two-year period, who would then be considered as Communicating. Our deeper analysis thus suggests a bleaker picture with 57% identified as inactive. Given that those who did submit reports highlighted the hindering effect of the pandemic, the current levels of PRME inactivity may plausibly relate to the stalling influence of Covid. It was also notable that the MENA chapter currently only has one PRME Champion; namely a signatory that is recognised as a thought and action leader in the responsible management community, who plays an important role in advancing and promoting the PRME agenda. An under-representation of MENA signatories in this group (currently 47) raises questions regarding the championing of PRME in the MENA region, as well as the influence of MENA concerns on the PRME agenda. Finally, 14/18 signatories are private universities which is especially striking given the dominance of publicly funded universities in the region.

Insert Table 1 around here

Practices under the Six PRME Principles in MENA

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Given the inconsistences noted above, we included a total of 18 signatories who *we* classified as Communicating based on the submission of a SIP report since 2019 for a more detailed analysis. Below, we identify examples for each of the six principles, including both stronger and weaker examples of MENA signatories' initiatives, in a conscious effort to mobilise the reports as a mechanism to learn about practices to develop responsible managers - an effort which, to date, has been highlighted as notably absent (Godemann *et al.*, 2011).

Principle 1: Purpose

While our analysis identified the development of a diverse range of skills to advance responsible management in MENA, two skills were dominant:

Soft skills: Reports highlighted a focus on developing skills such as communication, critical thinking, and creativity to strengthen capabilities of the region's emerging talent:

"*The course is designed to prepare students for the contemporary world where critical thinking, communication skills, and lifelong learning have become imperative.*" [American University in Kuwait, 2020]

Responsible Citizenship Behaviour: Students were often encouraged to develop "*good citizenship qualities",* to engage "*in community affairs",* and be *"mindful of contemporary issues*" [Sultan Qaboos University in Oman, 2019]. Reflecting resource scarcity in the region, efforts frequently centred on raising awareness of food wastage, recycling, and litter reduction as illustrated below:

"*The campaign's objective was to make students self-aware and reduce food wastage habits.*" [IMT Dubai in UAE, 2021]

The examples highlight a clear motivation to identify skills necessary to advance responsible management in a way that relates to the region's specific challenges. However, we also noted

numerous examples where skill development was somewhat generic and ostensibly unrelated to responsible management advancement:

"..., *a training course "Start your Career". aimed, at preparing [students] for their future professional careers. briefed [students] about the knowledge and skills needed to develop in different specializations like Accounting, Finance, and Economics…*" [Qassim CBE in Saudi Arabia, 2021]

To build these skills, signatories applied a variety of curricular and extracurricular activities. Common curricular activities included guest lectures, student research projects and case studies, with the latter being the most popular with 53% of signatories reporting their use (See Figure 2).

Insert Figure 2 about here

Student projects were notably related to local responsible management challenges, for example, the study of sustainable communities and the application of social innovation as a route to sustainable development:

"*…the project requires employing research… regarding the selected SDG. ...research is tackled through both conceptual and empirical research that advances students' understanding of the role required for creating sustainable value.*" [British University in Egypt, 2021]

However, there were also examples of curricular activities with unstated links to PRME initiative, for example, in relation to guest lectures:

"*MBS is holding weekly seminars called "a cup of tea with the flavour of experience" where students can take advantage of the experiences and ideas shared by the guest speaker*" [Mahan Business School in Iran, 2020].

While there were many examples of curricular activities which sought to advance PRME, our analysis found a greater emphasis upon extra-curricular activities. A range of such activities were found including case competitions, external training programmes and internships (See figure 3).

Insert Figure 3 about here

The use of case competitions was notable for their attention to progressing unique MENA challenges. For example:

"*The PEARL Initiative each year holds case study competitions,…, to research, write and submit case studies on the topic of corporate good practice, ..., in line with our mission, to grow a knowledge base on regional responsible business practices and to enhance the capabilities of future business leaders...*" [Sultan Qaboos University in Oman, 2019].

Further, the importance of these extracurricular activities, which were often student-led, was reflected in signatories' future agendas with many reporting plans to extend "*student driven social and civic projects*" [King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia, 2021] and to work on "*special initiatives ...that tackle the unique responsible management challenges facing companies*" [American University in Beirut, 2020]. Notably too, signatories' community service projects often demonstrated direct links to the UN SDGs, encouraging students to demonstrate pride in their citizenship roles. The progression of context-specific SDGs was also evident through student clubs, for example:

"*Faculty launched the "Youth for Sustainable Development" Club, which aims to enable students to become change agents ... contributing to the 17 SDGs within the framework of Egypt's 2030 Strategy...*" [British University in Egypt, 2021].

Principle 2: Values

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Our analysis found that a range of responsible management themes were infused into the programmes of MENA signatories. A focus on ethics and sustainability were most highlighted (44% of signatories) as illustrated below:

"CBE incorporates sustainability and ethics in the contents of business management, marketing, accounting, economics, human resources, and finance." [American University in Kuwait, 2020]

However, half of the signatories also cited the inclusion of diverse content focused on for example, ethics as it relates to IT, responsible leadership, and governance. Some went further and explained how this related to specific challenges of their region, such as tackling corruption and fraud. For example, the American University in Beirut embeds 'themes' that run across different disciplinary modules such as the "Fraud Prevention & Anti-corruption" theme.

However, discussions of content working with pressing regional concerns of poverty, war and conflict were notably absent. RME content then typically remained generic, arguably reflecting a lack of MENA specific resources (Laasch, 2021).

Our analysis further revealed an overall shallow integration of responsible content into curricula. Using Rusinko's (2010) typology, (see Figure 4), we classified 61% of signatories' approaches as either piggybacking (n=3) or digging deep (n=8), both of which reflect a narrower discipline specific focus. For example, many signatories had developed new, yet standalone modules which focused on business ethics or corporate social responsibility:

"The FMT has also introduced a core course on Business Ethics in its undergraduate program" [GUC in Egypt, 2022]

Insert Figure 4 about here

In contrast, examples of mainstreaming (n=5) or focusing (n=1) where signatories sought to integrate RME content *across* their offerings were rarer. Below is an example of mainstreaming:

"*Academically, ethics and responsible business practices have been integrated throughout the courses offered … as this was deemed a more effective means to convey the principles of responsible business practices rather than offer courses particularly addressing the issue. The latter approach risks that students compartmentalize the topic of responsible business, while such practices should truly become ingrained within an individual's thought and action processes*." [American University in Cairo in Egypt, 2020]

Principle 3: Methods

We found a range of supporting infrastructures and mechanisms which sought to enable effective responsible management learning experiences. The most cited were faculty recruitment and development, accreditation processes and digitalization of delivery (see Figure 5), which we discuss in greater detail below.

Insert Figure 5 about here

First, our analysis highlighted multiple examples of efforts to enhance the educational level of faculty:

"*The vast majority (87%) of core faculty hold a PhD. They are supported by industry experts as part-time faculty (adjuncts and consultants), the proportion of which is typically 10-20 % of total core faculty*". [Sultan Qaboos University in Oman, 2019]

However, reflecting the noted concern with the under development of faculty RME expertise (Mousa, 2021), discussion of faculty development was rarely linked to RME except for the

example below. Faculty development tied specifically to RME is of course important to facilitate a systemic integration of RME content.

"For the faculty, a teaching forum has been conducted for SDG introduction for teaching and research". [University of Dubai in UAE, 2021]

Second, it was notable that over half of the signatories referred to the role of accreditation processes as an important mechanism which supported their PRME efforts. Accreditation bodies potentially play a vital role in encouraging PRME's progression in the region, especially as many of the region's universities exist in partnership with universities in the West. As we see below, efforts to satisfy international quality standards simultaneously satisfied the promotion of responsible management and arguably reflect a nascent systemic integration of RME for some across the institution (Painter-Morland *et al*., 2016):

"Mission to be the leading Faculty in Egypt and the region, by providing high quality UK education, satisfying both UK-QAA and NAQAAE quality standards and contributing to the development of our community through innovative research that impacts the education process and the welfare of the community." [British University in Egypt, 2021]

However, we also found several examples where signatories did not explicitly utilise accreditation to speak to the unique challenges of the region. For example:

"In line with our international commitment, Mahan Business School always updates its educational standards based on ACBSB and AMBA components…to ensure the educational standards and learning processes are fully compliant with the students' needs since high quality programs [are]perfect proof of what we would like to become." [Mahan Business School in Iran, 2020]

Third, reflecting the global necessity to increase the use of remote learning technologies in response to COVID 19, our analysis found that half of signatories highlighted their increased

use of digital learning platforms, which for some was identified as a mechanism to accelerate more progressive and inclusive learning environments in line with the PRME agenda (Falkenstein *et al.*, 2021):

"*The crisis compelled the University to adjust its approach in its method of delivering "education", distinct from mere "instruction" to students; adjusted its leadership approach to a shared leadership that benefitted from a greater degree of agility, innovation, and collaboration in which servant leadership empowered and involved all stakeholders where the interests of others were placed above one's own; and provided a stable and sustainable operational environment that supported the education of our student body on all levels.*"
[American University in Kuwait, 2020]

Principle 4: Research

As previous SIPs' analyses have highlighted, many MENA signatories focused on demonstrating progress against Principle 4 by listing their faculty's research publications. While many examples related to local responsible management challenges, such as gender equality, and small business support which aimed to reduce poverty, this was not always the case. This questions the region's progress in responsible management specific research areas. Reflecting a slower rate of research progress, only 7 signatories reported the establishment of RME related research centres. Below is one illustrative example:

"*The Centre for Inclusive Business and Leadership for Women seeks to improve and support women's right to dignified work, successful careers, and leadership roles in organizations across the region. We engage in rigorous research, host regional conferences, and advance strategic partnerships to nurture the next generation of leaders*". [American University in Beirut, 2020]

Reflecting the nascent state of research progress, the reporting of research impact was noticeably absent. Nevertheless, 4 signatories expressed future interest in measuring whether their investment in advancing responsible management related research provided "meaningful impact" on different stakeholders. For instance, the advancement of managers' efforts to encourage social and environmental development. Of interest, some also highlighted intentions to mobilise research to impact teaching for example, through translating research findings into case studies. This would be an important development given the scarcity of MENA specific teaching resources (Laasch, 2021). Crucially, capitalizing on these intentions ostensibly promises a greater level of systemic integration of RME moving forwards (Painter-Morland, *et al*., 2016).

Principle 5: Partnership

As with the other principles, we found diversity in the range of partnerships held to advance PRME (see Figure 6). As Painter-Morland *et al*. (2016) note, business school's connections with external stakeholders are vital to better understand their core constituents' demands and needs to allow a deeper integration of responsibility issues into the curriculum. Partnerships with business were the most reported (83% of signatories), and these were sometimes explicitly related to meeting environmental and social responsibilities, such as socio-economic development as illustrated below:

"*This (partnership) involves advancing our strategic pillar to form additional 'bridges' between ourselves, companies, and organisations (locally and internationally) ... building more employment and training opportunities and contributions for graduates, and to expand our role in socio-economic development through effective partnerships with the corporate world*". [Sultan Qaboos University in Oman, 2019]

Insert Figure 6 about here

Reflecting the collaborative setup with Western universities, academic partnerships were also reported as pivotal by 14 signatories which is seen to facilitate 'locally relevant management education':

"*OSB was invited to join the Global Business School Network. (. This allowed the school to become part of a distinctive group of over one hundred business schools on six continents, committed to international collaboration, and improving access to quality, locally relevant management education.*" [American University in Beirut, 2020]

However, for many, while the prestige of their academic partnerships was clear, it was less clear how this progressed RME:

"*BUiD has strategic alliance partnerships with UK based universities, including the University of Edinburgh, the University of Glasgow.*" [British University in Dubai, 2021]

While less reported, partnerships with governmental bodies played a notable role in progressing local responsible management. Below we see the facilitation of reform focused on women's rights, a pressing regional challenge, through a collaborative project:

"*The Knowledge is Power Project on Gender and Sexuality in partnership with the Office of the Minister of State for Women's Affairs, also launched "Mesh Basita", a national campaign that aims to highlight the need for legislation around sexual harassment within the Lebanese landscape and mobilize the general public's opinion towards pushing for legal reform*". [American University in Beirut, 2020]

Principle 6: Dialogue

Finally, we found a variety of channels to ensure continuing conversations of responsibility concerns (See Figure 7).

Insert Figure 7 about here

We found that the most reported events which brought together key stakeholders such as conferences, symposia, and forums were often explicitly linked to emerging local responsibility concerns. For example, dialogue to facilitate the translation of global SDGs to the Egyptian context:

"*The SDGs round table series is jointly organized by the Gerhart Centre, UN Global Compact Network Egypt and Care International. The main aim is to launch a dynamic dialogue on the localization of the SDGs in Egypt. This dialogue will help to develop a shared understanding of priorities and pre-requisites for their localization and implementation, while bringing together the civil society, private sector, key government actors and other key stakeholders*". [American University in Cairo, Egypt, 2020]

Less common dialogue forms included social and environmental collaborative projects, charity events, and public talks. However, in line with earlier findings, events did not always seem to be obviously aligned to PRME.

"*Conducting (5) training sessions for the community in the area of feasibility studies, SMEs, finance, business, and accounting*". [Qassim CBE in Saudi Arabia, 2021]

Discussion

Overall, our analysis suggests modest engagement levels with PRME in the MENA region - given that 57% of signatories were identified as inactive. However, supporting Falkenstein *et al*. (2021), this might reflect a regional example of COVID 19's 'demolishing' impact on PRME progress. Nevertheless, our analysis highlights that PRME efforts are concentrated in only a handful of MENA countries and are notably scarce in the region's public universities.

Consistent with studies in other regions (Alcaraz *et al.*, 2011), active signatories show a wide variation in responses to PRME. This took three major forms. First, as others have reported (de Assumpção and Neto, 2020), there was a strikingly wide variability of interpretations of the principles, which while seen as a strength by PRME to encourage local adaption in the MENA context, could potentially hinder PRME's progression because of a lack of common understanding. As Høgdal *et al.* (2021) observe, without a common language, practices can barely be compared.

Second, we found a varied range of practices in response to PRME. While we found many examples of excellent practices which clearly showcased specific efforts to progress pressing local concerns, such as, collaborative projects which promoted women's rights and curricular content focused on reducing corruption, we also found examples which were not explicitly related to either general responsibility concerns or particular local challenges. Notably too, explicit discussions of the promotion of the sustainability literacy test were absent. These findings question the extent of progression of local concerns stated in the 2014 MENA chapter. The variability in practices is on one hand a strength, but on the other also reflects a common weakness in the depth of SIP reporting across the region. Consistent with previous observations (Burchell *et al.,* 2015), SIP reports appear to be typically used as a self-promotional tool which prioritized showcasing as many examples as possible. However, supporting Alcaraz *et al.* (2011), we suggest that 'less would be more' since this would allow more in-depth discussion of purposefully selected examples-including how specifically they advance pressing local management challenges. This would facilitate the mobilisation of SIP reports as a genuine mechanism for learning amongst signatories, which is particularly important in regions like MENA that are currently at earlier stages on their PRME journeys. Indeed, a recent meeting of the Middle East PRME chapter identified the importance of creating "a shared communication, experience and knowledge platform that enables the region to learn from each other and

proactively to act on the Principles and the SDGs" (PRME Chapter Middle East Second Provisional Committee Meeting, 2021). In future, the SIP reports might themselves constitute an important form of dialogue.

Third, we also found variability in the depth of integration of RME into MENA signatories' curricular. Reflecting the region's nascent state of PRME, over half of signatories displayed Rusinko's (2010) narrower approaches, focusing on small adjustments to existing courses. Echoing this, an overemphasis on the use of extra-curricular activities to progress RME is noted. Our analysis thus shares a concern that such an emphasis might inadvertently create a harmful perception that responsible management is a philanthropic practice rooted in the region's cultural and religious values (El-Bassiouny *et al*., 2018) or more pessimistically, an optional extra which does not really matter (Blasco, 2012). Accordingly, there is a need for a greater focus on curricular activities which critically aim at shaping future managers' perceptions of their social, economic, and ecological responsibilities. We did however also find examples of deeper levels of integration where signatories integrated RME across their courses. It was notable that these more advanced signatories often worked with international accreditation standards suggesting the value of PRME working in tandem with other mechanisms to facilitate responsible management development in MENA. Significantly too, working together with governmental bodies to progress local responsible management challenges also represents an effective approach to strengthen PRME integration in the region. While overall, then, there was limited evidence of systemic institutional integration of RME in MENA (Painter-Morland *et al*., 2016), for some there were emerging signs of systemic thinking which potentially deepens the reach of RME moving forwards.

Future Directions

We suggest that despite the region's diversity (Billeh, 2002), PRME plays a crucial role in developing leaders' commitment to advancing efforts to address the region's shared challenges. Accordingly, our study offers several recommendations to strengthen PRME as a mechanism to advance the development of responsible management in MENA.

For the PRME initiative

- Given the low levels of activity across the MENA signatories, there is a need to re-engage inactive members. This is especially pressing in countries which exhibit low levels of engagement such as Tunisia, Jordan, and Bahrain.
- There is also a particular need to encourage membership from public sector universities given that currently there are only four such signatories in the region.

For MENA PRME signatories

- We suggest the importance of developing a shared local understanding of the six principles to facilitate PRME progression in the region. Our own working understanding detailed in Appendix 1 may provide an initial starting point.
- Efforts might concentrate on focusing on selected PRME initiatives in greater depth, for example, by carefully unpacking how efforts progress specific local management challenges as well as evaluating their impact. In addition, this effort might seek to cross fertilize practices, notably for example, identifying how research might inform teaching which is especially important given the noted lack of MENA specific teaching resources (Laasch, 2021). Such work would facilitate a more systemic orientation towards RME.
- There is advantage in repositioning SIP reports as learning vehicles rather than self-promotion instruments, which would consequently involve crucial discussions of

struggles and challenges of PRME implementation. For example, considering the recognised restrictions on faculty autonomy.

For RME scholars

- In terms of future research, since our study was based on the analysis of SIP reports and has identified a variability of practice across the region, there is a need for more intensive study in specific MENA contexts to better understand the nuances of local PRME practice.
- So too, work with those who are not actively involved with PRME is important to understand barriers to implementation.

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List of Tables and Figures

Country	Total Number of Signatories	Communicating	Non-Communicating	Number included in our sample
United Arab Emirates	12	8*	4	5
Lebanon	7	2	5	2
Egypt	5	2	3	3
Morocco	4	1	3	3
Kuwait	3	2	1	1
Saudi Arabia	3	3	0	2
Tunisia	3	1	2	0
Oman	2	0	2	1
Bahrain	1	1	0	0
Iran	1	1	0	1
Jordan	1	0	1	0

Table 1: Overview of MENA PRME signatories' activity

PRME Champion *

Figure 1: Approaches to integrating PRME within curricula (adapted from Rusinko, 2010; Painter Morland *et al.*, 2016)
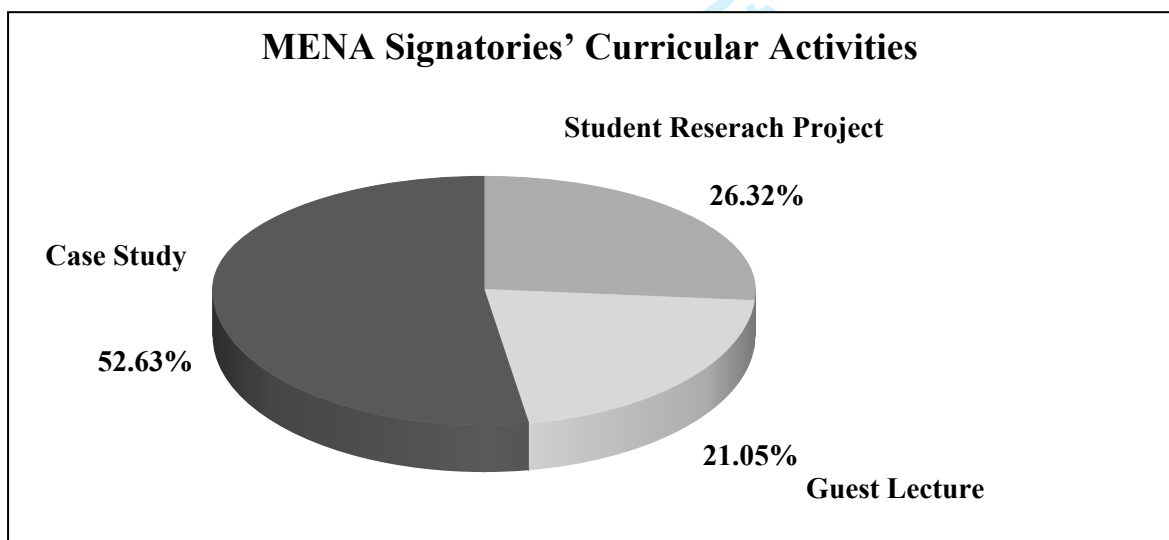
Figure 2: MENA Signatories' Curricular Activities
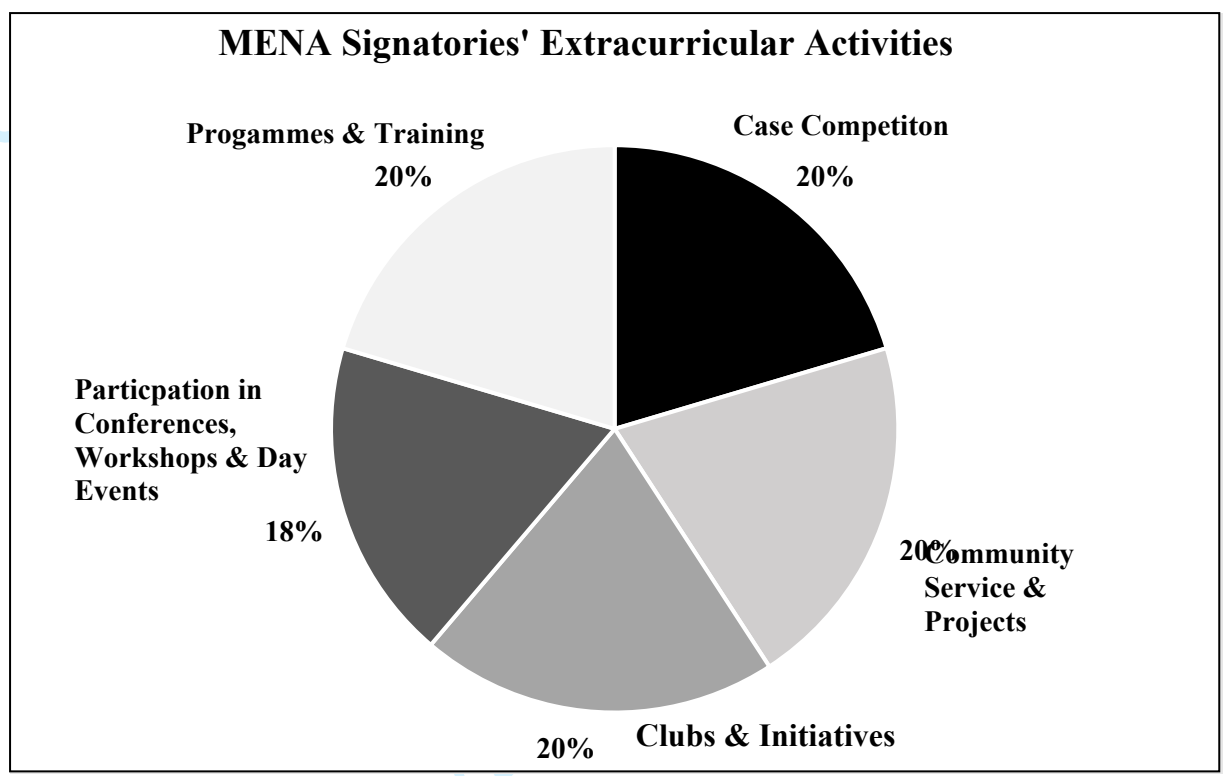
Figure 3: MENA Signatories' Extracurricular Activities
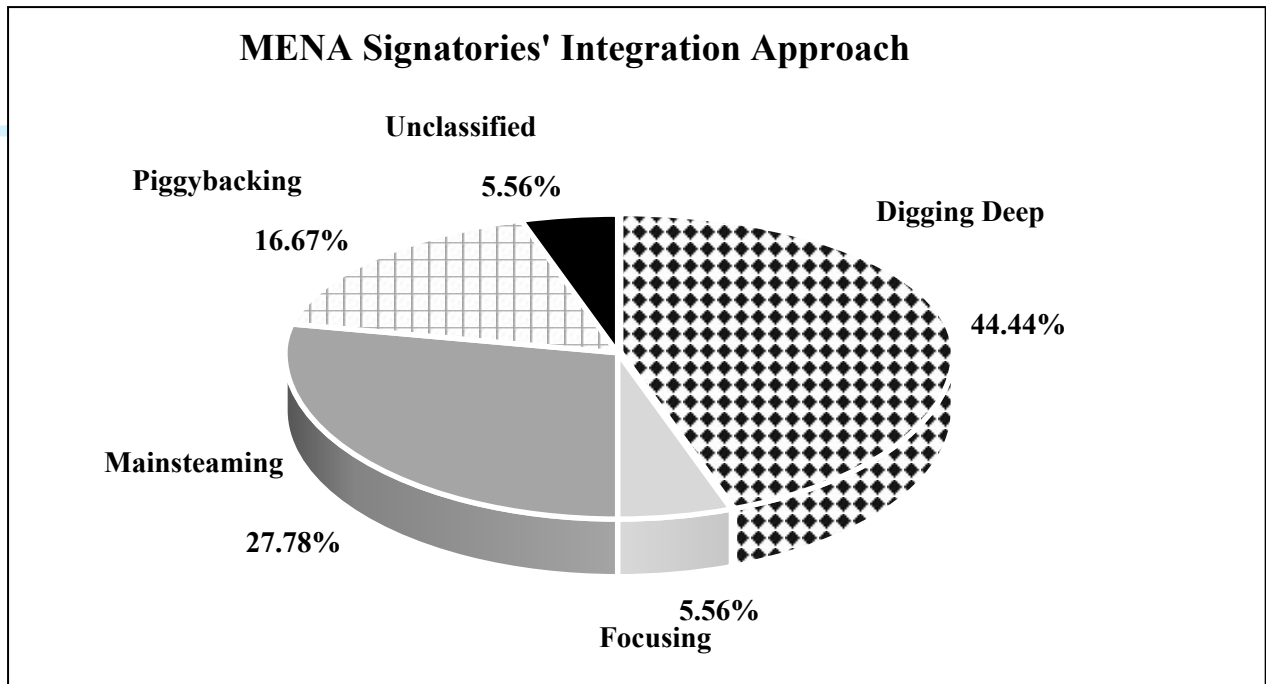
Figure 4: MENA Signatories' Integration Approach
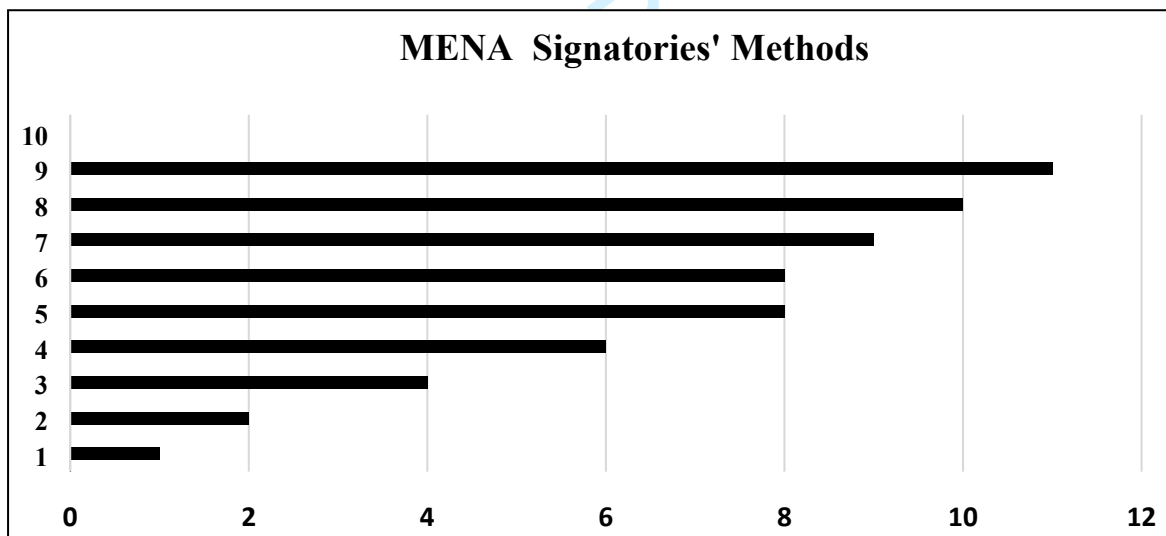
Figure 5: MENA Signatories' Methods

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MENA Signatories' Types of Partnership
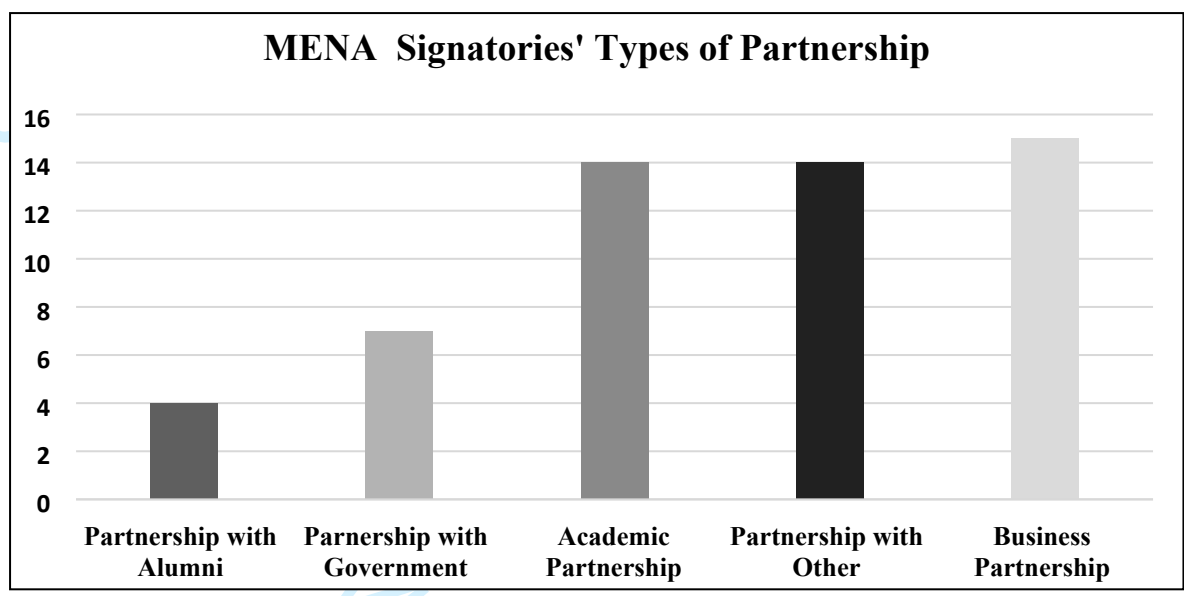

Figure 6: MENA Signatories' Types of Partnership

MENA Signatories' Dialogue Channels
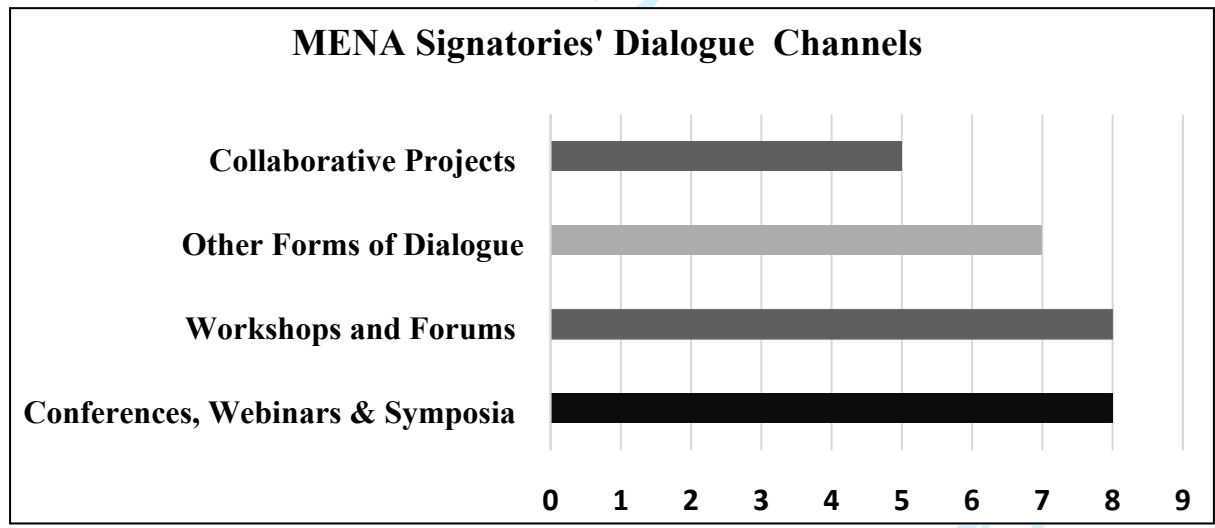

Figure 7: MENA Signatories' Dialogue Channels

Appendix 1 Our Interpretation of the Six Principles of Responsible Management Education in MENA

Principle	Our Interpretation	Examples
1. Purpose We will develop the capabilities of students to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society at large and to work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy.	The capabilities or skills in relation to PRME that are central to the institution. Activities by which these capabilities will be developed.	• *Skill Development* -Developing soft skills e.g. leadership, critical thinking - Promoting responsible citizenship behaviour • *Curricular Activities* - Guest Lectures - Student Research Projects - Case Studies • *Extra-Curricular Activities-* - Case Competitions - Student Clubs - Student Participation in External Programme & Training - Community Services/ Projects - Participation in Conferences, Workshops & Day events
2. Values We will incorporate into our academic activities, curricula, and organisational practices the values of global social responsibility as portrayed in international initiatives such as the United Nations Global Compact.	The themes of RME that are embedded into curricula content.	-Environment -Ethics -Ethics & IT -Leadership Development -Sustainability
3. Methods We will create educational frameworks,	The supporting infrastructure, mechanisms, and environment	• *Faculty Recruitment & Development* • *Accreditation Processes*

materials, processes, and environments that *enable* effective learning experiences for responsible leadership.		• *Digitalization of Delivery* • *Internal Organising Body, Unit of Committee* • *Institution Code of conduct Culture or Values* • *Sustainable Campus* • *Mapping Learning Outcome & Assessment* • *Teaching Pedagogy* • *Inclusive Environment*
4. Research We will engage in conceptual and empirical research that advances our understanding about the role, dynamics, and impact of corporations in the creation of sustainable social, environmental, and economic value.	Research activity in relation to PRME.	• *Research Publications* • *Research Units* • *Research Culture*
5. Partnerships We will interact with managers of business corporations to extend our knowledge of their challenges in meeting social and environmental responsibilities and to explore jointly effective approaches to meeting these challenges.	The key relationships with external stakeholders which advance the PRME agenda.	• *Academic Partnerships* • *Business Partnerships* • *Alumni Partnerships* • *Government Partnerships* • *Partnerships with other organisations e.g. NGOs, think tanks*
6. Dialogue We will facilitate and support dialog and debate among educators, students, business, government, consumers,	Communication channels which further conversation about PRME.	• *Conferences, Symposia, and Webinars* • *Forums and Workshops* • *Collaborative Projects* • *Other Forms of Dialogue*

media, civil society organisations and other interested groups and stakeholders on critical issues related to global social responsibility and sustainability

[i] A tool which tests a learner's sustainable knowledge development designed to assess progress towards RME (SustainabilityTest.Org, 2016).