

Building a Case for Responsible Management Education in Nepal

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ABSTRACT

There is a need for substantial management development, which is a precondition for Nepal's social and economic transformation. Responsible management education can play a crucial role in this transformation, and the Six Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME) can guide business schools in the development of responsible management education. However, there are specific challenges faced in advancing responsible management education in Nepal. These challenges include the perceived identity of the higher education sector in Nepal, capacity development for management educators, and the need for country-specific teaching resources. The education sector in Nepal needs to prepare skilled human resources necessary to achieve its vision of "rebuilding a resilient nation, promoting entrepreneurial spirit, and creating a knowledge-based society". Responsible management education can contribute to this vision by promoting sustainable development and social transformation. There is a need to examine its impact on the quality of education. The COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted the education system in Nepal, highlighting the need for sustainable solutions to manage the crisis and build a resilient education system. In conclusion, responsible management education is crucial for Nepal's social and economic development. The Six Principles of Responsible Management Education can guide business schools in the development of responsible management education. However, there are specific challenges faced in advancing responsible management education in Nepal, which require a concerted effort from all stakeholders to address. responsible management education should be incorporated.

Keywords: management education, responsible, quality, challenges, development

Introduction

The core business of business schools is to educate students to be responsible leaders who can make a positive impact to the community they serve. Professor Robert A. Giacalone, a pioneer in the field of business ethics and social responsibility, has challenged the prevalent role of management education and proposed a transcendent business education model for the new generation (Giacalone 2004). Professor Giacalone advocated for business education that should help students think beyond

profits and self-centred interests and consider five objectives:

- **Empathy:** Students must 'feel' their business decisions and understand their impact on others.
- **Generativity:** Students should aspire not only to 'make' millions but also to 'help' millions.
- **Mutuality:** Success is best achieved when everyone benefits, not just a select few.
- **Civil Aspiration:** Students must recognize that we live in a finite world with limited

resources and that unlimited economic growth is not possible.

- **Intolerance of Ineffective Humanity:** Students should recognize that the singular pursuit of wealth is not good for humanity.

These five objectives provide a foundation for a responsible management education model that can help to create a more just and sustainable future for everyone.

Nepalese management academics can learn a lot from the Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME in short). PRME is a set of six principles that guide business schools in the development of responsible management education. These principles are relevant to Nepal, as we are a developing country with many challenges, such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. In this article, I will explore why we should educate our business students about the tenets of responsible management?

Problem Statement

The management degrees are one of the most sought-after educations in Nepal. The four major universities of Nepal, namely Tribhuvan University, Pokhara University, Kathmandu University and Purbanchal University, teach business programs through their central school administration, constituent campuses or various affiliated academic colleges across the country. These universities teach the largest cohort of Nepalese students in business programs both at the undergraduate level (such as BBA, BBS, BBM) and at the postgraduate level (MBS and MBA). Further new universities are also focusing on the same like Rajarshi Janak University (RJU).

A review of the websites of the four premier universities in Nepal found little evidence of responsible management education. The Tribhuvan University Faculty of Management lists one of its objectives as ‘producing socially responsible entrepreneurs’ (Tribhuvan University, n.d.), while the Pokhara University Faculty of Management Studies promotes its goal of ‘producing responsible citizens of the world’ (Pokhara University, n.d.).

However, neither university provides any specific details about how they are achieving these goals. The Kathmandu University School of Management (Kathmandu University, n.d.) and the Purbanchal University School of Management (Purbanchal University, n.d.) do not mention responsible management at all. Few innovative attempts are found as suggestion in teaching and research operation at Pokhara University as continuous conference, individual faculty involvement in research along with students (Mishra, 2022). Remarkable requirements for quality improvements suggested (Mishra and Jha,2023) without evidence from implementation.

In addition, there is little evidence that these universities are taking meaningful action to promote responsible management. Instead, they seem content to integrate Western business philosophies and practices into their curriculum in the name of global and "world-class" education. This approach is of limited value to students in Nepal, as it does not consider the local business context or the need for sustainable business development practices that works for Nepal. Nor it considers specialization during faculty recruitment.

Research Objective

The research aims to build a case for responsible management education in Nepal. It outlines the UN-endorsed PRME framework, discusses how they can be relevant for Nepal given its socio-economic challenges, and presents a case for responsible management education for the next generation of business leaders in Nepal.







The Six Principles of Responsible Management Education

The concept of responsible management has been around for almost 50 years, but there is no single consistent definition of what it means. Pioneering scholars in this field have offered many different interpretations of managerial responsibilities (Carroll et al., 2020). However, as business leaders continue to engage in corruption and exploitation around the world, it has become increasingly clear that the need for responsible management education is imperative (Hauser, 2019).

In response to growing unethical behaviour in the business world, former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon initiated the UN Global Compact to launch the "Principles for Responsible Management Education" (PRME) initiative in 2007. The PRME agenda was conceived as a call to action based on six principles: purpose, values, method, research,

partnership, and dialogue (UN PRME, 2023). These principles provide a framework for business schools to develop responsible management education programs that will help to create a more just and sustainable world. An overview of the PRME principles is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The UN Six Principles of Responsible Management Education (UN PRME 2023)

SN	Principle	Description
Propose		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.
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.
Methods		We will create educational frameworks, materials, processes and environments that enable effective learning experiences for responsible leadership.
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.
Partnership		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.
Dialogue		We will facilitate and support dialogue and debate among educators, students, business, government, consumers, media, civil society organisations and other interested groups and stakeholders on critical issues related to global social responsibility and sustainability.

The goal of PRME is to develop responsible business decision makers to advance sustainable development, hence the PRME can be used to align business programs to the Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) and the work of the United Nations Global Compact (Wersun et al., 2020). The 17 SDGs provide measurable targets and a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for the people and the planet, now and into the future (United Nations, 2015). In the context of management education, the practical focus on the SDG supports educators to align PRME to teaching that contributes to the realisation of the goals (Weybrecht, 2022).

Nepal's Socio-economic Challenges

Three of the most pressing concerns in the Nepalese socio-economic environment that validate the

urgent call for PRME initiatives in Nepal was outlined.

Gender Inequality

Nepal has committed to advancing gender equality as part of its 15th Development Plan, but it remains one of the worst performing countries in the world in terms of gender inequality (UN Women, 2022). While Nepal has made progress in women's political representation, the ranking for women in economic participation and educational attainment has declined based on the Global Gender Gap Index from 2006 to 2020 (World Economic Forum, 2021). This suggests that persistent gender inequalities remain in Nepal.

Dahal et al. (2022) argue that male-centric socio-cultural norms and practices have given men privilege, power, and the opportunity to exploit

women in Nepal. As a result, women have lower status and fewer opportunities for independence and economic empowerment that is contributing to stalled economic growth of the nation.

The male-centric structures of the business world limit women's access and accountability, creating discriminatory hierarchies that contribute to violence against women, thereby producing more social challenges in the country. Responsible management education can expand opportunities for women's independence and growth.

Economic Slowdown and Systematic Corruption

Nepal made progress in reducing poverty in 2019 according to the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index in 2019 (Government of Nepal, 2021), but the COVID-19 pandemic has reversed these gains. The country's account deficit has reached a historic high of 12.8% of GDP in FY2022, due to a drop in remittances and a larger trade deficit (World Bank, 2023). Remittances, which make up over 22% of Nepal's GDP, have fallen sharply as a result of the pandemic. The pandemic has also rendered over 2 million people jobless in Nepal (Subedi, 2020). Joshi et al. (2021) argue this has put many families under financial pressure and has led to a decline in investments in human capital. The informal economy, which is a large part of Nepal's economy, has also been hit hard by the pandemic. As a result, it is unclear whether Nepal will be able to recover to its pre-pandemic standards of living in the next five years.

Economic prosperity in Nepal continues to be hindered by corruption. According to the Global Corruption Barometer – Asia 2020 data, 84% of people in Nepal think that government corruption exists (Transparency International, 2020). This is the highest proportion of people in Asia who think corruption has increased significantly. Corruption is a major obstacle to responsible management and reinforces regional inequality. Nepal scores just 34/100 on the Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International, 2022), despite having numerous anti-corruption laws and agencies including a supreme body for fighting corruption, the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of

Authority (CIAA) that has been empowered by the constitution of Nepal (Aryal, 2023). Bidari and Djajadikerta (2020) observe that Nepal's corporate social responsibility (CSR) disclosures are mostly descriptive, with charity and donation being the most disclosed items. Responsible management education must go beyond mere CSR reporting, as charitable activities alone cannot make significant contributions to the community. Authentic socio-economic development programs must be integrated into core business strategies in a way that benefits both the business and relevant stakeholders.

Food and Water Insecurity

Nepal is one of the world's poorest countries with food insecurity and the problem exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic (Singh et al. 2021). More than half of the food consumed by Nepalese comes from overseas, and the country is increasingly dependent on food imports that could be produced domestically (Adhikari et al., 2021). This is ironic, as Nepal is historically known as an agro-based economy. The war in Ukraine has intensified the problem by driving up global food prices. As a result, Nepal faces intensified challenges of food poverty and insecurity. So significant are such challenges that Adhikari et al. (2021) predict a threat to national security and sovereignty is possible.

Despite having an abundance of natural water resources, Nepal also has a problem with access to safe drinking water. Only 25% of the population has access to safe drinking water, and 95% of industrial waste is untreated (UN SDG, 2020). This is a major public health problem, and it also limits the country's ability to develop its agricultural sector.

Despite the government's stated goal of agricultural self-sufficiency, Nepal continues to import food that could be produced domestically. This is due to the lack of commercialization in the agriculture industry. Nepal needs to educate its business students on how to reverse the country's role from being a net food importer to becoming a net food exporter. Adopting a sustainable food production

strategy for growing fresh, local produce can be a start. Using the PRME lens can help set the right pathway to achieve this result.

The three examples of socio-economic challenges in Nepal paint a grim picture of the current state of affairs in the country. However, these challenges also highlight the urgent need for a sustainable development framework. PRME can help Nepal to navigate the management complexities of these challenges and others.

Why Responsible Management Education in Nepal?

In a recent systematic literature review on the adoption of PRME by business schools, I found that most of the work in this area is concentrated in Europe and North America. Only three studies were found in Asia, and a single study was conducted in India (Russo et al., 2023). Unsurprisingly, there is no research or evidence of teaching activity on PRME in Nepal.

Despite the global call to action for PRME adoption (Haertle et al., 2017), the work in this area is limited to Western countries. Developing nations like Nepal, which could benefit from this initiative, are not adopting these principles. This is especially important given the heightened calls for more responsible management in developing countries (Sidani, 2020).

In the last five years, the PRME agenda has been gaining more traction across the world. This is because it has become clear that business schools play a vital role in shaping the future of our world. The millions of graduates that business schools produce every year go on to lead and influence virtually every type of organization (Weybrecht, 2021). This means that they have the power to make a real difference in the world. Therefore, we should use PRME to promote responsible management and adapt our learning and teaching strategies to advocate for responsibility, sustainability and ethics (Cullen, 2020).

While all professional education should have a strong ethical foundation, it is important to consider how different professions have different

impacts on society. For example, a medical doctor must uphold a very strict standard of ethics in their practice. If a doctor cuts corners, this could lead to a medical tragedy for one person. An engineer who cuts corners while building a bridge could cause a tragedy for ten people. When businesses make unethical choices, this could mean hundreds or thousands of lives are at stake. For example, the World Health Organization reports that almost 1 in 10 people in the world fall ill after eating contaminated food, and more than 4,00,000 people die every year due to food safety issues. This is often linked to large businesses cutting corners due to corporate greed and selling a "product" rather than food.

Our business graduates go on to manage all types of companies, both private and public, for profit and not-for-profit. They will be key decision-makers who may impact the lives and livelihoods of thousands of people. This means that we as management educators have an important responsibility to instill the requirements of an ethical lens in businesses.

UNESCO(2022) calls for education that is grounded in human rights and ethics of care, reciprocity, and solidarity. This can be achieved by adopting critical pedagogy in business curriculum, which helps students to become critical thinkers about the historical, social, political, and philosophical traditions that underpin today's business practices.

As concerns about sustainable practices and the achievement of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) continue to rise around the globe, authentic PRME can be a critical driver of change for Nepal. We must view PRME as a framework of our contract with society and recognize that we are currently not meeting this obligation. However, we should make it a key target for our academics moving forward. This aligns with Muff et al. (2013), who argue that business schools should aim to deliver management education that is "not just the best in the world, but is the best for the world". In other words, we need to educate our students to be responsible leaders who are committed to using their skills and knowledge to create a more just and sustainable world. This is especially important in

Nepal, where there is a need for responsible leaders to address the challenges facing the country. By adopting critical pedagogy and PRME, we can help to produce graduates who are equipped to make a difference in Nepal.

Unfortunately, Nepalese universities and colleges are under pressure to marketize and commercialize their business education programs. This is due to a desire to teach Western business principles that are often not aligned with the true business environment of Nepal. Additionally, Nepalese higher education institutions are offering global accreditation to compete with private academic institutions that have foreign university affiliations but are not regulated by a national education body. These practices hinder Nepalese business schools that are seeking to deliver business education for critical thinkers who can challenge and change industry to do better for society in Nepal.

Nepalese business schools are under increasing pressure to conform to the demands of consumerism in Education and imposed political and neo-liberalised agenda. This pressure is leading schools to focus on producing graduates who are suited to what businesses demand. In other words, we are producing graduates who are simply good at following orders rather than critically reflective citizens who can apply innovative solutions to local business conditions. This is a break from the social contract that business schools have with society, which is to educate students to be responsible leaders who can use their skills and knowledge to make a positive impact on the community.

Manager educators in Nepal can make a real difference to the country's economic development and its future sustainability by integrating PRME in all three areas of Teaching, Research and Engagement. I outline some prompts to make a start here:

Teaching: Management educators in Nepal should focus on developing curriculum, sharing content, and conducting academic seminars on topics related to PRME. This will help to ensure that students are exposed to the latest thinking on responsible management and are equipped with the skills and

knowledge they need to be responsible leaders. To be more specific, new business curriculum must include courses on responsible leadership, sustainable business practices and ethical decision making. We should share content on these topics in Nepalese context through online platforms and academic journals. Finally, we should conduct academic seminars and workshops to bring together students, academics and practitioners to discuss how to apply the latest thinking on responsible management in Nepal.

Research: Management educators can conduct research on topics such as the impact of gender inequality on economic growth, the role of businesses in reducing corruption, and the challenges of sustainable food security in Nepal. They can also collaborate with other researchers to share their findings and develop new research agendas. Research on these topics can help to inform policy and practice and make a real difference to the lives of people in Nepal.

Engagement: Management educators in Nepal should also engage with governments, businesses, and academics to build the sustainability capacity for Nepal's economic development. This will help to ensure that Nepal's economic growth is inclusive and sustainable, and that the benefits of economic growth are shared by all.

By engaging broadly with PRME, we can rebuild our social contract with the community and the nation. We can continue to educate students to deliver the practical and technical skills that industry needs, but we must also balance this with our obligation to equip future business professionals with the critical thinking skills they need to improve the current state of business in Nepal.

Challenges of Responsible Management Education Advancement in Nepal

I have presented a case for PRME integration in Nepal using a social contract lens. I have also attempted to lay a foundation on how to equip management educators with a tool to help students understand the need to balance economic goals with sustainability goals in their future business roles. However, there are challenges to advancing PRME

in Nepal. I have identified three key challenges to responsible management advancement in Nepal that we must overcome to build our capacity towards PRME.

Perceived Identity of the Higher Education Sector in Nepal

While there has been a noted increase in the quantity of higher education providers in Nepal with Tribhuvan University as the oldest higher education provider featuring in The Times Higher Education University ranking, questions remain regarding the quality of education in Nepal (Gautam & Gautam, 2021). This is especially apparent in state-financed universities of Nepal that are heavily politicized and notably underfunded (Mathema 2007). In response, there has been a growing influx of private colleges, which are typically partnered with American and British universities.

Reflecting the neoliberal approach found in the West, a number of higher education colleges across Nepal are increasingly focussed on short-term goals that bolster their market position. This neoliberal-globalist ideology has promoted unhealthy globalisation and marketisation effects in the higher education sector in Nepal.

Bista et al., (2019), for example, notes efforts to increase student numbers, research publications and scholarship opportunities in the Higher Education sector, however, questions the relevance and value of these metrics to the society and professions in Nepal. This potentially prioritizes narrow business needs (Ramboarisata, 2022) but undermines the efforts to adequately respond to the societal needs championed by PRME (Mousa et al., 2020). This poor identity and the state of affairs of the Higher Education sector in Nepal will cause significant challenge for RME advancement given the lack of institutional support.

Here are some specific examples of how the neoliberal approach has affected the higher education sector in Nepal:

Increased Focus on Profit: Colleges with foreign university affiliation are often focused on making a profit, rather than providing quality education.

This can lead to cuts in spending on faculty and resources, as well as a focus on courses that are popular with students, rather than courses that are important for their professional development.

Competition for Students: Colleges with foreign university affiliation compete with each other for students, which can lead to a decline in standards as there are no national university framework. Colleges may offer lower tuition fees or more lucrative facilities in order to attract students, even if this means sacrificing quality.

Emphasis on Short-term Goals: Colleges with foreign university affiliation are often focused on short-term goals, such as increasing student enrolment or showcasing their university rankings from abroad that have no impact on education quality or employability. This can lead to a neglect of long-term goals, such as developing critical thinking skills or preparing students for the workforce.

These are just some of the challenges that the higher education sector in Nepal faces. If the sector is to improve, it needs to address these challenges to promote responsible management that meets the needs of society.

Capacity Development for Management Educators

Job creation is a key goal of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and it is especially important for Nepal, where there is a high level of poverty and vulnerability. The 15th Development Plan of Nepal also emphasizes the importance of job creation. Nepal has a high level of informality in its economy, which means that many businesses are not registered or regulated. This makes it difficult for these businesses to grow and expand, and it also makes it difficult for them to improve their product quality and earnings. Therefore, it is important for educators to teach business students the skills and knowledge they need to foster the productivity and growth of small businesses, and to improve the business environment and labour market policies. This will help to create more jobs and improve the lives of people in Nepal.

In the short term, educators should advocate for labour markets to provide more opportunities for wage and self-employment, especially for the poorest and most vulnerable people. This will help to reduce poverty and improve the lives of people in Nepal. Introducing a comprehensive employment support services package for sustainable livelihoods, which leverages existing safety nets and ongoing financial inclusion efforts, is a possible entry point for business education that can be supported by PRME. This will help to provide more people with the skills and resources they need to find sustainable employment.

Educators cannot simply perform this duty from the goodness of their hearts without broader institutional support. The lack of teaching infrastructure has been cited as a reason for the ambivalence towards responsible management education in Nepal (Devkota, 2021). This is because educators often do not have the resources they need to teach responsible management, such as textbooks, online resources, and training.

Specialization should be introduced in management educator recruitment as it exists in engineering and medical sciences.

Another skill area in need of improvement is digital skills. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of investing in digital development. In 2019, the government adopted the Digital Nepal Framework (DNF), which outlines its vision for promoting digital economy development. However, there are gaps in Nepal's digital readiness, such as limited access to affordable, high-speed digital connectivity, core digital infrastructure capacity, and cybersecurity.

Investing in the digital capacity development of educators in Nepal can provide access to information, services, and markets, and promote innovation in delivering quality education to our students who are very agile and active in the digital world. Given the informal economy and flourishing digital disruption in Nepal, Educators should be given support to build their digital literacy so that they can adopt PRME as a framework to promote their education offerings digitally that are more

receptive to the younger generation as well as to broaden PRME reach and impact to the business needs of Nepal. Similar requirements found to be expressed by Mishra & Nepal, (2022), & Mishra (2023).

Country-Specific Teaching Resources in Nepal

Another challenge to the advancement of responsible management education in Nepal is the paucity of teaching materials that are relevant to the local context. Most teaching materials are based on theories and concepts developed in Western contexts, which do not resonate with Nepal's culture (Devkota, 2021). For example, teaching materials that promote gender equality (as defined in the Western context) may defy Nepal's cultural norms that accept certain degrees of gender stereotyping (Jamali & Samara, 2020).

This underlines the importance of increasing the availability of teaching materials that are culturally sensitive. This will help to ensure that students are learning about responsible management in a way that is relevant to their own context. It will also help to build systemic capacity and improve institutions' connectedness to the Nepalese context (Painter-Morland et al., 2016).

Here are some specific examples of how to develop culturally sensitive teaching materials for responsible management education in Nepal:

- Co-author teaching materials between Nepali and foreign scholars. This will help to ensure that the materials are grounded in the local context and are relevant to the needs of students and businesses in Nepal. We can tap into the expertise of the Non-Resident Nepali scholar community for their support on this matter.
- Incorporate case studies and examples from Nepali businesses and organizations. This will help students to see how responsible management principles can be applied in the business world in Nepal.
- Use local language and terminology. This will make the materials more accessible to students and practitioners who are not fluent in English.

By developing culturally sensitive teaching materials, educators can help to ensure that responsible management education is relevant and effective in Nepal.

Developing resources that are tailored to the responsible management challenges of Nepal requires dedicated research. While research on responsible management has grown significantly worldwide in the past decade, business research in Nepal is notably scarce. Russo et al. (2023), for example, were unable to identify a single case study of responsible management practice in Nepal. Gherardi and Laasch (2022) call for research that examines practices in situ to seek unique local contexts and solutions that work in the local environments. However, as Bista et al. (2019) note, gaining access to conduct such research in Nepal is problematic.

There are some specific challenges to conducting research on responsible management in Nepal, including the lack of access to data given Nepal has a weak data infrastructure making it difficult to collect data on businesses and the lack of trust since businesses in Nepal are often distrustful of researchers that makes it difficult to gain their cooperation.

Conclusion

Despite the paradox of the urgent need for more responsible management education in Nepal and the local circumstances that hinder its advancement, management educators in Nepal must launch their efforts to develop responsible managers through the PRME initiative. These principles provide support to management educators in teaching business students the skills, attitudes, and beliefs they need to balance economic and sustainability goals in order to drive positive change for the future.

The reason for making sure that business students should learn responsible management are expressed as follows:

First, responsible management can help to address the challenges facing Nepal by reducing poverty and inequality.

Second, Businesses that are committed to responsible management are often more trusted

by their customers and stakeholders. They are also more likely to attract and retain top talent.

Third, responsible management can help to create a more just and sustainable world to become leaders who will make a positive impact on our communities and the world.

By promoting PRME, Nepal can educate its business students to be responsible leaders who are equipped to address the socio-economic challenges facing the country. PRME can also help Nepal to develop a more sustainable economy and to create a more just society.

Specific ways that PRME can help Nepal to address its socio-economic challenges:

- Promote ethical business practices: PRME can help Nepal to promote ethical business practices by educating students about the importance of ethics and responsibility. This can help to reduce corruption and to create a more level playing field for businesses.
- Develop sustainable businesses: PRME can help Nepal to develop sustainable businesses by educating students about the importance of sustainability. This can help to protect the environment and to create a more prosperous future for Nepal.
- Create a more just society: PRME can help Nepal to create a more just society by educating students about the importance of social responsibility. This can help to reduce poverty and inequality and to create a more equitable society for all.

By adapting PRME to the Nepalese business landscape, business schools can help to produce graduates who are equipped to make a difference in the country. These graduates can then go on to lead and influence businesses, governments, and non-profit organizations to create a more just and sustainable future for Nepal.

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