

TRANSCULTURALITY AS A DRIVE FOR THE SDGS ACHIEVEMENT

Abstract

In order to engage educational institutions in the search for sustainable development, in 2007 the United Nations launched the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME). Ten years later, with more than 655 signatory schools in several countries, the PRME keeps on promoting partnerships through educational projects that transcend geographical and cultural barriers, developing globally responsible leaders. In this scenario, this study aims to assess how transculturality can potentiate projects developed between PRME-institutions from different countries. It focuses on three projects developed in partnership between institutions from Brazil and other countries, considering significant cultural differences, number of countries involved, and the interaction between the academia and the companies. A preliminary analysis indicates an important advantage for teams with people from different nationalities: a multifaceted vision, which overlaps cultural differences to develop projects with a high degree of replicability. Therefore, transculturality is seen as a key factor to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, launched by the UN in 2015.

Keywords

PRME, Sustainable Development Goals, transculturality.

INTRODUCTION

In 2007, the PRME initiative started as an educational arm of the UN Global Compact in order to help educational institutions develop globally responsible leaders. After ten years, the PRME is structured with a headquarters in New York and 14 chapters all over the world.

In Brazil – the only country that has its own Chapter – the PRME has 28 signatory institutions, which promote projects to disseminate the 6 PRME principles and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2015).

Following guidelines from the PRME Champions Group and Advisory Committee, signatories are encouraged to establish partnerships with schools from different parts of the world. This interaction involves profound matters – increasingly present in the globalized world – such as how cultural differences relate to mental models and produce different ways of interpreting data. Therefore, this study aims to discuss how transculturality advances projects developed between PRME institutions from different countries.

This research focuses on three major projects developed between Brazilian and international PRME institutions, discussing issues such as cultural differences between schools in different continents, large number of countries involved, and interactions between the academia and the company.

Next section brings a historic panorama of the PRME and the SDGs – the UN initiatives that helped articulate the projects studied.

Historical Context

Before describing the PRME, here is an overview of the Global Compact (GC). Launched in 2000 by the UN, the GC is the largest global private-public initiative in the area of corporate citizenship and sustainability. Present in over 160 countries, it is a political framework to develop, implement and disseminate sustainability principles and practices.

As a means to expand the scope and encourage the adhesion of large companies to the initiative, seven years later the UN launched the GC educational arm – the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME).

Once the PRME is focused on the next generation of leaders, the demands stimulated educators to restructure management education in business schools all over the world. They had to include issues relating to corporate social responsibility in the curricula, and further promote a significant change in the mentality of the faculty.

A meeting between 60 representatives from major universities, business schools and academic institutions around the world (organized by the Academy of Management, UN Global Compact and Case Weatherhead School of Management) set the PRME task-force, which established six principles to be followed by educational institutions (Escudero et al., 2007). These principles are:

- 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.
- Values: We will incorporate into our academic activities and curricula the values of global social responsibility as portrayed in international initiatives such as the United Nations Global Compact.
- Method: 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 dialog and debate among educators, students, business, government, consumers, media, civil society organizations and other interested groups and stakeholders on critical issues related to global social responsibility and sustainability.

After ten years, the PRME gathers over 650 signatory institutions, committed to develop globally responsible leadership through values such as ethics in relations, environment conservation and respect for people.

PRME Governance

The PRME organizational structure comprises the New York secretariat and the following committees, which guide the initiative's actions:

- **Steering Committee** – Formed by representatives of companies and organizations.
- **Advisory Committee** – Group of leaders of PRME schools that have helped advance the initiative worldwide.
- **Champions Group** – Formed by representatives of the 30 most active PRME schools.

Seeking to disseminate the PRME locally, the initiative has 14 chapters organized in regions throughout the world, considering the interaction of continents. According to the PRME website, the chapters are regional platforms that advance the six principles within a particular geographic context, performing an important role in rooting the PRME within different national, regional, cultural and linguistic contexts, and facilitating the growth and engagement of the PRME with respect to implementing the six principles (www.unprme.org).

Besides the meetings between the committees and the chapters' local agenda, the greatest annual event involving all members is the PRME Global Forum – an opportunity to learn new guidelines, present projects, discuss the initiative's role and establish partnerships.

The PRME Chapter Brazil gathers 29 institutions, being governed by a secretariat under the guidelines of a board.

The secretariat works collaboratively with the Brazilian network to define policies for the chapter's strategic planning, organizing a wide diversity of visions on the theme to help achieve the group's objectives. Besides representing the chapter in events and negotiations, the secretariat is connected to the global network and the PRME office in New York.

The board is composed of five members – including the secretariat – who deliberate on the chapter's strategic planning and actions and supervise its guidelines. The chapter chooses the secretariat and board members every two years (www.prmebrazil.com.br).

ISAE is the current secretariat and board members are representatives of the following institutions: Industry Social Service (SESI/PR), Fundação Dom Cabral (FDC), Fundação Instituto de Administração (FIA), Brazilian School of Public and Business Administration (EBAPE/FGV).

Institutions interested in joining the PRME network have to: commit to adopt the initiative's principles in their operations, curricula and research; present progress reports to the UN and stakeholders regularly; and publicly promote the PRME values. Moreover, PRME signatories are welcome to participate in different ways to disseminate the initiative, maximizing the benefits of their work.

After 2015, with the definition of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, PRME schools have faced new perspectives, reviewing deadlines according to the global goals.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The most recent issue incorporated into the business school curricula is the UN 2030 Agenda, which sets new goals to be achieved by 2030. Created in a collaborative way among several nations, the Agenda presents 17 goals and 169 targets focusing on a set of global priorities to achieve sustainable development in five instances: People, Planet, Peace, Prosperity and Partnerships. The SDGs guidelines are primarily focused on the three pillars of sustainability: social, environmental and economic. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are:

- Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere;
- Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture;
- Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning
- Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- Goal 6: Ensure access to water and sanitation for all
- Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- Goal 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all
- Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
- Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries
- Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources
- Goal 15: Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss
- Goal 16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies
- Goal 17: Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

These global goals have helped PRME schools to restructure ongoing projects and create new ones following the SDGs targets and deadlines. Thus, as stated in Goal 17, strategic partnerships are essential, since they develop comprehensive projects that reach a greater number of people.

THE ROLE OF TRANSCULTURALITY IN EDUCATION

Before discussing transculturality, we have to understand the differences between the concepts of multiculturalism, interculturality and transculturality. Most dictionaries define multiculturalism as a reference to cultural plurality, while interculturality is about the interaction and synergy between different cultures. And transculturality considers the changes these interactions generate.

In the educational ambit, scholars state that:

(...) the concept of transculturality broadens the horizons of a pedagogical practice that is politically consistent with the principles of "plural unity", for it strongly emphasizes (in relation to inter and multiculturalism) mechanisms of "interpenetration" for cultures – so that harmony and confrontation provide the basis for a significant and

respectful meeting among individuals who share their cultural differences in the same environment for common project. (Peroza J., da Silva C.P., Akkari A., 2013)

The great question here is to see transculturality as a positive consequence of diversity, recognizing its potential to develop skills and systemic thoughts that break individual paradigms.

In groups of people from different regions or nationalities, besides the respect for differences – increasingly discussed in the globalized world –, the valorization of cultures is essential for a successful interaction.

Condorelli (2010) states that:

Promoting transcultural pedagogies requires a radical epistemological rupture, but inevitable when we conceive knowledge as a subjective and intersubjective construction, product of the interactions of our vision with the world: the recognition that all forms of knowing and interact in the world have the same cognitive-operational status, that there are no methods of knowledge production which are more valid, more legitimate or "superior" than others. (Condorelli, 2010)

In the context of projects developed by teams of different cultures, studies indicate that researchers have been able to explore new understandings of their own theories, as well as to identify potentialities and limitations in research. As defended by Stigler *et al.* (2000) cross-cultural comparison is a powerful approach to uncover unnoticed but ubiquitous practices, inviting examination of the things “taken for granted” (...) as well as suggesting new approaches that have not evolved in our own society.

In the research field, Al Abuljabber (2006) apud Dapudong (2013) mention that cross-national studies are important as they might reveal differences, which perhaps will in turn motivate and challenge researchers to re-examine the entrenched practices and theories that prevail in their own countries.

Understanding the world in a globalized way and recognizing the role of the internationalization of education is one of the keys to achieve fair and sustainable development, once mutual contribution becomes a natural process.

This study describes three major projects developed by teams of different nationalities (members of PRME educational institutions) in order to analyze how transculturality potentiates projects. These cases were chosen among projects that involve ISAE Business School, which currently presides the PRME Chapter Brazil.

CASE STUDY: GLOBAL INTEGRATION IN PRME PROJECTS

To evaluate how transculturality contributes to enrich projects developed between PRME members, this research explores three case studies. The first one addresses the CR3+ Conference, a project that brings together schools from Brazil, Australia, France and Finland. In the face of geographical distances and cultural differences of these institutions, the case involves sharing different experiences and perspectives.

The second case presents a global research project in sustainability knowledge. The project involves several members of the PRME Global in global and regional issues, seeking for a diagnosis of the dissemination of the theme throughout the world. The analysis takes into account the final report of the 2013 edition of the research.

And the third case brings the relationship between companies and the academia, for it stimulates students in PRME schools to find solutions for challenges faced by ten large

companies (Global Compact signatories). This event is even more significant for breaking paradigms, exploring the strategic character of transculturality.

Selecting projects that involve the school who currently heads the PRME Chapter Brazil contributed to enrich the analysis of cases, once the institution is presided by the author of this study.

Case study 1: The CR3+ Conference

Created in 2009, the project involves ISAE Business School (Brazil), La Trobe Business School (Australia), Audencia Nantes School of Management (France), and Hanken School of Economics (Finland).

The project was named CR3+ Conference, consisting in biannual meetings that gathers researchers to evaluate how the academia can help companies promote sustainable development. The four schools have worked together in an effort to exchange ideas, pedagogies, curricula and research in corporate responsibility. The event is open to researchers from other institutions working in the area, what stimulates other schools to sign the PRME.

The biannual conference takes place in one of the countries of the organizing schools, allowing participants to get in touch with different educational structures.

The 2017 edition, which will take place in Finland in April, has specific tables to discuss projects for implementing the SDGs.

Case study 2: The Sustainability Literacy Test

The Sustainability Literacy Test (Sulitest) is the result of a collaborative effort between various institutions. It aims to measure the level of students' global knowledge in sustainability.

According to The Sustainability Literacy Test Report published in 2014, the proposal was to create a tool that could help faculty to measure the sustainability literacy level of their new incoming students, to assess their level before graduating and use these indicators to drive changes in pedagogy and in the curriculum. In 2013, the pilot project brought together more than 200 volunteers from all over the world (professors and researchers, students, business, NGOs). One-third of the questions are produced by local networks all over the world, made up of academics, practitioners, the corporate world and civil society. The version was customized in seventeen different countries and regions (www.sustainabilitytest.org).

The balance of the first edition of the research showed a total of 24,000 respondents and 261 universities from 34 countries. Brazil was the second country with the highest number of students / respondents, only behind France – country which hosted the project development. Out of the 18 schools registered in Brazil, 9 are PRME signatories.

Currently, the test is used in many higher education institutions around the world, in the context of specific courses and programs. The great diversity of use and users directly contributes to the value of the project, adding credibility to the learning tool. Besides, the global test allows the academic community to map the knowledge on sustainability across the globe.

Case study 3: The Breakthrough Innovation Challenge

The Breakthrough Innovation Challenge (BIC) is part of a larger UN Global Compact initiative, Project Breakthrough, which aims to connect mainstream companies with next

generation innovators and entrepreneurs to catalyze breakthrough, rather than incremental, corporate innovation to advance the SDGs.

Ten companies representing the Pharmaceutical, Agricultural Processing, Chemical, Digital Imaging and Consumer Goods Industries will define a challenge specific to their own business. And 21 young professionals and PRME students will develop a solution to the company-defined challenge. These challenges will focus on future business models at the intersection of sustainability and disruptive innovation.

This project is mainly focused on the fact that students from all over the world can help companies from different countries, promoting cultural exchange through different perspectives and mental models.

The three projects analyzed are the result of structuring the PRME globally and through the regional chapters' meetings, in which institutions volunteer to participate in joint actions, define sponsors and map the form of contribution of each country.

DISCUSSION: PARTNERSHIP AS MAIN TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

The PRME initiative was set to inspire leaders of business schools to act on behalf of globally responsible leadership. Its constant challenge is to broaden the initiative's scope by expanding the network of signatories – factor that represents the institutions' engagement to the cause.

Since its establishment, the PRME has formed multicultural teams, such as the advisory committees with members from different countries. In this scenario, school leaders expose their positions based on what is discussed in the chapters. This way, decisions have a hybrid character that meets the needs of various teams throughout the world.

The strength of the initiative is related to the local work, which culminate in larger projects presented in large events, such as conferences and forums that promote discussions between researchers and the sharing of experiences.

In the cases presented in this study, we considered the links between the institution that presides the PRME Chapter Brazil (ISAE Business School) in partnership with foreign signatories, so as to understand how transculturality can potentiate projects. The starting point of this analysis is based on the assumption that if these projects were developed in only one place, they would only reach small groups of students. After the integration with foreign members, the projects advance, extrapolating international borders and promoting global change.

In the CR3+ Conference, students and researchers have access to different educational structures and research processes, when comparing countries in distant continents. Experiencing these differences helps to build counterpoints, expanding the participant's horizon and encouraging new interactions.

A very special feature of the Conference is that students and professors interact constantly during presentations and group discussions. In these cases, differences between generations represent the connection of the youth's immediacy and speed with the traditional macro vision of experienced professionals. This factor may generate conflicts or provide an opportunity for complimentary skills.

The Sulitest result is an immeasurable source for mapping actions and defining projects. The fact that the researcher can see sustainability from the point of view of 34 different countries allows to assess the outcomes of actions to disseminate the theme. More than that, it contributes directly to identify skills and weaknesses, stimulating the exchange of experiences. For example, a topic that is not much disseminated in France can be strong in Germany – and

the disclosure of such data may help German researchers to identify an opportunity to work with the French team.

In the BIC case, the multicultural interaction promotes a change in the company's management model, bringing a new way of comprehending innovation and knowledge. Problems solving has a new format, advancing the implementation of projects with different frameworks, customized for the company's needs.

Different regional customs, ways of doing business, intersectorial frameworks from various entrepreneurial cultures are disseminated and replicated. Therefore, companies have the opportunity to change their management and innovation approach based on new studies and cases worldwide.

These evaluations start a process of understanding the great potential of transculturality to generate value for projects. By promoting dialog and partnerships, the teams align purpose and values, setting a method and carrying out research. Thus, they put the six PRME principles into practice, focusing on sustainable development and the global goals.

CONCLUSION

With the Global Compact and PRME initiatives, the main focus of the UN is to create a network of businesses and schools that act according to the precepts of sustainable development. By establishing principles for the network of signatories, the UN seeks to align speeches with a focus on achieving the global goals.

Projects developed locally and globally between businesses and schools are acknowledged by the UN. In order to honor this pact, it is essential to have a high degree of commitment and report from those involved.

When we consider the establishment of projects between multinational PRME teams and the internationalization process of education, transculturality becomes strategic. Changes deriving from works stimulate the constructive contact between different cultures in a synergistic and harmonious process.

Joint projects between educational institutions from different countries and roots promote a multicultural exchange with positive outcomes, once they explore different perceptions. By building new frameworks, participants rethink their planning and performance, and changes represent an advantage.

The counterpoints allow participant to map more positive and negative points, strengthening the analysis of viability of projects. Experience exchange helps implement projects of high complexity in a fast and cheap way, avoiding rework. The development of a multifaceted vision, that overlaps cultural differences, allows projects to have a high degree of confidence and replicability.

Considering that the implementation of the 17 SDGs is the greatest current challenge of UN-signatory states, global partnerships are key factors to achieve unified results. The role of the PRME as main conductor of the integration between schools helps align discourses, fostering the alliance of purposes.

Following the particularities of institutions with different performance profiles – either with a focus on research or on solutions for enterprises – it is essential to use transculturality from these associations to strengthen the role and importance of the UN and its initiatives in the quest for sustainable development and global goals.

For future research, a direct approach with students / researchers working in teams from different regions can extend this study, mapping the impact on the participants' routines and learning models.

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