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**Promoting Engaged Scholarship for Sustainability Regionally: The Case of the PRME  
France-Benelux Chapter**

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**Abstract (ENG)**

Over the last twenty-five years, the concept of Engaged Scholarship has gained momentum in the academic world striving to value knowledge developed through academia while actively engaging and dialoguing with society. Yet, how business schools and faculties, and universities at large, can move beyond institutional boundaries to engage deeply with society on complex urgent problems, such as sustainability remains less explored. To address this issue this study focuses on the role of boundary-spanning intermediary organizations for responsible education, namely the PRME France-Benelux Chapter. Relying on evidence from multiple internal Chapter documents and PRME global sources of information, and exemplifying the three levels of engaged scholarship drawing on concrete engaged educational, research and service actions of the PRME France-Benelux Chapter, our research shows evidence of how the Chapter convenes and facilitates collaboration for sustainability at a regional level. We conclude that PRME Chapters, as well as other regional and national networks, have the potential to further foster substantial responsible management education among their signatory schools through

creating space for conversations, knowledge and practice sharing, and capacity building on the urgent topic of sustainability and CSR.

## **Abstract (FR)**

Au cours des vingt-cinq dernières années, le concept « engaged scholarship » a pris de l'ampleur dans le monde universitaire, s'efforçant de valoriser les connaissances développées par le milieu universitaire tout en s'engageant activement et en dialoguant avec la société. Pourtant, la manière dont les écoles et facultés de management, et les universités en général, peuvent dépasser les frontières institutionnelles pour s'engager profondément avec la société sur des problèmes complexes et urgents, tels que la durabilité, reste moins explorée. Pour répondre à cette problématique, cette étude s'intéresse au rôle des organisations régionales transfrontalières qui sont vecteurs d'une éducation responsable en management, et plus précisément le chapitre PRME France-Benelux. S'appuyant sur des exemples tirés de multiples documents internes du chapitre et des sources d'informations de PRME Global, et illustrant les trois niveaux de « engaged scholarship » en s'appuyant sur des actions concrètes d'éducation, de recherche et de services engagés par le chapitre PRME France-Benelux, notre travail de recherche montre comment le chapitre se réunit et facilite la collaboration pour contribuer aux efforts de développement durable au niveau régional. Nous concluons que les chapitres PRME, ainsi que d'autres réseaux universitaires régionaux et nationaux, ont le potentiel de favoriser un enseignement substantiel du management responsable dans leurs écoles signataires en créant un espace pour des échanges, le partage des connaissances et pratiques et le renforcement des capacités sur le sujet urgent de la durabilité et de la RSE.

## **Introduction**

Over the past two decades, the concept of Engaged Scholarship (ES) has come under heightened scrutiny among academia (Bansal *et al.*, 2012; Boyer, 1996; Ferraro *et al.*, 2015; Gelmon *et al.*, 2013; Sandmann *et al.*, 2016; Tsui, 2013; Van de Ven, 2007). This increased interest in ES, as manifested in the number of publications in peer-reviewed academic journals, strives to value knowledge developed through academia actively engaging and dialoguing with society (Boyer, 1996; Gelmon *et al.*, 2013; Sandmann *et al.*, 2016). Although this stream of research has contributed a great deal of insight, there is a need to better understand how Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and faculties interact deeply with society on complex urgent

problems, and more particularly sustainability (Adler, 2016; Bansal *et al.*, 2012; Silka *et al.*, 2013; Wells & Nieuwenhuis, 2017).

To address this issue, our study focuses on the role of boundary-spanning intermediary organizations for responsible education, namely the PRME France-Benelux Chapter, in facilitating collaboration for sustainability at a regional level by way of three levers: (1) engaged education, (2) engaged research, and (3) engaged service. To do this we rely on evidence from multiple sources of information including prior academic studies on responsible management education; the PRME website and reports, France-Benelux Chapter internal documents detailing the activities and governance mechanisms as well as educational, research and service actions of its member institutions; and Chapter's Steering Group meeting notes since the inception of the Chapter. All three authors of this paper are PRME Chapter France-Benelux signatories and are currently part of the Chapter's Steering Group.

This paper proceeds in four main sections. First, we briefly revisit literature on ES, focusing on the role of business schools and universities as educators, and their unique position to influence the mindsets and actions of various stakeholders to address key sustainability challenges. Second, we present the PRME initiative, the newly formed France-Benelux Chapter and its framework on developing collaborative projects for sustainability. We then exemplify the three levers of engaged scholarship by drawing on concrete engaged educational, research and service actions of the PRME France-Benelux Chapter. The last section offers a discussion on intermediary organizations, and the implications for engaged scholarship literature, and a conclusion.

### **Engaged scholarship: Bridging the gap between academia and society**

Over the last 25 years, the concept of ES has gained momentum in the academic world, starting with the foundational discourse of Boyer, former President of the American 'Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching' in 1996 (Beaulieu *et al.*, 2018). According to Boyer (1996), practicing ES means:

*“Connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems, to our children, to our schools, to our teachers, and to our cities (...) Campuses would be viewed by both students and professors not as isolated islands, but as staging grounds for action”* (p. 19-20).

Boyer's call for ES captured the need to broaden the scope of academic scholarship by continuing to research and teach as scholars, while framing academic work in a societal context, creating more interdisciplinary conversations, encouraging academics to share their

work with other stakeholders, and using it to advance practice. In general, the aim of ES is to value the knowledge developed within academia more broadly, through engaging and dialoguing with society (Boyer, 1996; Gelmon *et al.*, 2013; Sandmann *et al.*, 2016).

Central to the ES approach are professors, who are, nowadays, often primarily focused on the arduous requirements for becoming tenured, and as a result refrain from bridging the research-practice gap or are unable to spend sufficient time on their teaching mission (Adler, 2016; Empson, 2013; Vermeulen, 2005; Watson-Thompson, 2015; Wells & Nieuwenhuis, 2017). As pinpointed by Tsui (2013), practicing ES entails that professors have “*a profound respect and empathy for the phenomena, the people, or the problems they study and the views of others, such as practitioners, students, or academics in other disciplines*” (p. 176). Committing to ES would reflect in the threefold mission we have as professors or academics, i.e., ensuring high quality research, teaching and service for our institutions (Beaulieu *et al.*, 2018; Gelmon *et al.*, 2013; Watson-Thompson, 2015). As such, ES relies on three important levers: (1) engaged education<sup>1</sup>, (2) engaged research<sup>2</sup>, and (3) engaged service<sup>3</sup>.

Calls for an increased emphasis on ES have also penetrated more specifically the management field, for example, in Cummings' (2007) presidential address ‘Quest for an Engaged Academy’ for the *Academy of Management (AOM)* or Huse's (2010) editorial ‘Building a community of engaged scholars’, addressed to the *European Academy of Management (EURAM)*. A number of influential management scholars have acknowledged that the management field would benefit from stronger connections with organizations and society at large, resulting in more profound contributions to shaping organizations and training future managers (Adler, 2016; Aguinis *et al.*, 2014; Cummings, 2007; Huse, 2010; Thomas & Ambrosini, 2020; Tsui, 2013). In the management field, the debate has mainly centered around ways to foster *engaged research*, for example, through Van de Ven's (2007) seminal work on ES, defined as a collaborative approach to scholarly enquiry through co-designing, with stakeholders, ways to formulate problems and design solutions.

Less commonly addressed, however, is how business schools and faculties, and universities at large, can move beyond institutional boundaries to engage deeply with society on complex urgent problems, such as sustainability (Adler, 2016; Bansal *et al.*, 2012; Silka *et*

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<sup>1</sup> *Engaged teaching/education* equates to transmitting, transforming, and extending knowledge and bringing about change in learning with various audiences through either formal or informal arrangements (Beaulieu *et al.*, 2018: 10)

<sup>2</sup> *Engaged research* incorporates reciprocal civic engagement practices into the discovery, development, and mobilization of knowledge to the mutual benefit of community and academic interest (Beaulieu *et al.*, 2018: 11)

<sup>3</sup> *Engaged service* is defined as the application of a professor's expertise and scientific or professional knowledge to address specific issues for the benefit of policy makers, public officials, agencies, organizations, professionals, and civil society (Beaulieu *et al.*, 2018: 11)

*al.*, 2013; Wells and Nieuwenhuis, 2017). Global issues such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, poverty and international migration are increasingly receiving attention around the world, yet business schools and faculties are still criticized for not sufficiently addressing these topics in their research, teaching and service missions (Bansal, 2019; Crane *et al.*, 2018; Ghoshal, 2005). ES has been identified as a fitting approach to investigate sustainability issues, which are highly complex and interdisciplinary, and require collaboration between interdisciplinary actors in society (Bansal *et al.*, 2012; Curşeu & Schrujier, 2017; Ferraro *et al.*, 2015; Tsui, 2013). Nevertheless, engaging deeply with sustainability topics, in collaboration with other societal actors, remains a challenging endeavor for management scholars (Easter *et al.*, 2020; Laasch *et al.*, 2020; Winn & Pogutz, 2013), among others, due to different knowledge traditions, ways of dealing with problems, and time orientations of management scholars and practitioners (Bansal, 2019; Empson, 2013; Vermeulen, 2005).

In their article called ‘Bridging the Research-Practice Gap’, Bansal *et al.* (2012) observe that boundary-spanning intermediary organizations are best positioned to bridge the gap between academia and society for addressing sustainability challenges. The authors elaborate on how the Canadian *Network for Business Sustainability (NBS)* serves as an intermediary organization, bringing together scholars and practitioners through an engaged scholarship approach, to co-produce knowledge on sustainability topics (Bansal *et al.*, 2012). They posit that the NBS is a boundary-spanning organization, as it maintains the strengths of both academia and practice, can help address conflicting priorities of academics and practitioners, and extracts value from the differences between academia and society/practice. (Bansal *et al.*, 2012).

Through their study, Bansal *et al.* (2012) identify a portfolio of formal and informal practices (grouped in these four sub-themes: clarifying expectations, fostering commitment, building momentum for change, and instilling capacity for change) that can be used by intermediary organizations, such as NBS, to help build and support sustainability integration in organizations. In conclusion, they describe the key role of boundary-spanning intermediary organizations in relation to academic and practice communities as threefold: convening, facilitating and supporting. Most importantly, Bansal and colleagues’ (2012) overall aim is to motivate the shaping of new forms of intermediary organizations, as to foster communities and make the management field more relevant in discussions on pressing sustainability topics.

## **PRME and the France-Benelux Chapter acting for engaged scholarship**

PRME is the United Nations (UN)-supported initiative with a mission to transform management education, research and thought education leadership globally, by providing the PRME framework, developing learning communities, and promoting awareness about the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Through its mission, PRME presents an alternative perspective to the neoclassical economic model, proposing that businesses have substantial responsibilities to the societies and the natural environment in which they operate and which they depend on, which transcend traditional responsibilities centred solely on the creation of economic value (Waddock *et al.* 2011).

Rolland and Majou de La Debutrie (2018) refer to the PRME initiative as an example of University Social Responsibility (USR) based on strong ethical values. The PRME multi-stakeholder platform is built around the following Six Principles (PRME, 2020a) from underlying purpose, values, pedagogical methods, and research, to partnerships and dialogue with stakeholders. These principles are based on internationally accepted values endorsed by UN Member States and provide an engagement framework for higher education institutions to embed responsibility and sustainability in education, research, and campus practices through a process of continuous improvement. PRME signatories are required to biennially report on their schools' USR journey and achievements through Sharing Information on Progress (SIP) reports (or more simply, PRME reports) (Travaillé *et al.*, 2018).

As visible in its 6<sup>th</sup> Principle, PRME “*facilitates and supports dialogue 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*” (PRME, 2020a). In this sense, PRME extends the traditional responsibilities of business schools and faculties, by suggesting that their responsibility goes beyond solely considering the academic community and its students. Rive and colleagues (2017) point out that PRME implicitly relies on stakeholder theory (see Freeman, 1984; Hörisch *et al.*, 2014; Mitchell *et al.*, 1997), as the network highlights the importance of a broader stakeholder orientation of individual schools (Principle 6) and aims at bringing together those schools willing to jointly move towards responsible management education.

Since its official launch in 2007, the PRME initiative has grown to more than 800 leading business schools and management-related academic institutions from over 80 countries across the world (PRME, 2020b). Signatory institutions are allowed the necessary room to formulate contextualized solutions that fit their respective contexts and are encouraged to give their own contents to the Principles (Moratis, 2020). With the rise of interest in PRME, researchers have

started to regularly publish articles on this networking organization (Haertle *et al.*, 2017; Millar & Price, 2018; Moratis, 2020; Solitander *et al.*, 2012; Tyran ,2017; Young and Nagpal, 2013), and worldwide managerial reviews devote special issues to PRME (Parkes *et al.*, 2017). PRME operates as a ‘network of networks’, bringing together PRME signatories, PRME Champions, PRME Regional Chapters and issue-specific PRME Working Groups.

As of today, fourteen established PRME Chapters plus three emerging PRME Chapters help to advance the Six Principles and the seventeen SDGs regionally, rooting PRME in different geographical, cultural and linguistic landscapes. PRME Chapters function as localized platforms for dialogue, learning and collective action on responsible management education, as well as facilitating a better exchange of experience and best practices in the area of responsible management education relevant for each region. Moreover, these platforms increase the visibility of PRME and its signatories in the regions (through events, conferences, publications and associated activities) and strengthen the relationships between HEIs and local UN Global Compact Networks.

The PRME France-Benelux Chapter is one of the fourteen established chapters of the PRME network. The Chapter was created in November 2017 during a meeting that brought together over forty deans and representatives of Belgian, Dutch and French business schools, universities and their stakeholders (Avetisyan *et al.*, 2021). During this inception meeting, the participants agreed on the purpose, mission, vision and goals of the newly born Chapter by way of the World Café method (Silva & Guenther, 2018), so as to insure the voice and input of all those present.

Today, the France-Benelux PRME Chapter aspires to drive and accompany a change in mindset of the business community and society in the region, by making ethics, sustainability, and responsible management education a priority on the agenda. The mission of the France-Benelux PRME Chapter aims “*to embrace, engage and achieve its vision in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, and through a proactive co-creation of solutions by firstly, steering an agenda for impact and secondly, going above and beyond the achievement of the SDGs through developing joint research and educational projects*” (PRME France-Benelux Chapter, 2019). Collaboration among all relevant stakeholders is underlined, as is the importance of a proactive co-creation approach for engaged research, education and service (Avetisyan *et al.*, 2021). The PRiME acronym “*Passion, Respect, Inclusiveness, Motivational, Entrepreneurial*” relays the values that are core to the France-Benelux PRME Chapter (PRME France-Benelux Chapter, 2019).



Inspired by the PRME Six Principles, four major themes guide the development of collaborative projects of the Chapter (see Table 1). This framework is the key reference for the organisation and communication of the year-round activities and aligns with the three levers of the engaged scholarship, as found in the ES literature (Beaulieu *et al.*, 2018; Gelmon *et al.*, 2013; Watson-Thompson, 2015). As such, engaged education is covered in Theme 3, engaged research in Theme 2, and engaged service respectively in Themes 1 and 4.

**Table 1: France-Benelux Chapter Framework for the Development of Collaborative Projects**

<p><b>Theme 1: Sharing of practices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operational practices on implementing PRME principles</li> <li>• Faculty engagement</li> <li>• Student engagement</li> <li>• Inspirational campus management</li> </ul>	<p><b>Theme 2: Research Collaboration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing research on platforms</li> <li>• Creating of collaborative research</li> <li>• Developing joint EU funded research projects</li> <li>• Preparing special issues of academic journals</li> </ul>
<p><b>Theme 3: Education Collaboration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting up a Sulitest PRME Chapter module</li> <li>• Organizing a Summer School</li> <li>• Developing MOOCs</li> <li>• Skills Framework Building</li> <li>• Developing case studies</li> </ul>	<p><b>Theme 4: Outreach / Stakeholder Engagement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dean’s Influence: rankings (especially within our region), peer review visits for accreditations (EQUIS and AACSB)</li> <li>• Creating PRME Chapter awards</li> <li>• Interaction with external stakeholders to work on specific societal issues in France-Benelux region</li> <li>• Encouraging student involvement in society (in particular via competitions)</li> </ul>

*Source: PRME France-Benelux Chapter, 2019*

In the following, we will present a selection of key initiatives that illustrate how the France-Benelux Chapter develops collaborative projects for sustainability through engaged teaching, engaged research and engaged service. As pointed out by other scholars, yearly conference meetings are factors of development and enrichment that are vital for the life of the association (Bonnet and Roger, 2018). Yearly association meetings have the potential to generate data-rich

reports. In the case of the PRME France Benelux annual meeting, extensive notes taken by steering committee members as well as other attendees serve to draft the final report.

### **Engaged educational actions within the PRME France-Benelux Chapter**

If engaged education actions equate to transmitting, transforming and extending knowledge with various audiences (Beaulieu *et al.*, 2018), how does the Chapter stage such activities? The yearly physical meeting, and virtual chapter meetings and chapter talks provide opportunities for members to learn from each other as how to build the Principles into curriculum and measure and map efforts overtime. The following are examples of experience transmitting through formal best practice sessions and informal networking interactions at the PRME Chapter meetings. Best practices in integrating sustainability in curriculum serve as inspiration and emulation for other signatory schools. Best practices on designing sustainability in curriculum are shared between schools.

#### *The Plastic Forum (Audencia Business School)*

Audencia Business School runs a yearly event under the name “The Plastic Forum”, which a professor presented to the PRME France Benelux Chapter members during an annual PRME Chapter meeting. The one-and-a-half-day “Plastic Forum” event brings together 120 students every year to address the global issue of plastic usage. To prepare the course materials, two professors conduct a number of interviews with actors directly involved in the plastic issue. Those interviews help better understand the context, challenges, positions and interests of different stakeholders using concrete stories during the class. Over the course of the event, students discover the concept of CSR by tackling one of the biggest environmental challenges facing our planet today: plastic pollution. Prior to the course, students have to follow a MOOC on CSR, and complete a survey on the plastic issue. In addition to stimulating discussion and creative thinking to solve the challenges presented in class, the event creates awareness of the students’ own plastic use. It also empowers them to question the options available to the student community to reduce environmental impact. In this way, the event has the potential of generating action among the student community towards a reduced-plastic school environment.

Audencia chooses an experiential learning approach to build this course. Professors want the students to learn through the reflection of doing and interacting with each other. The students are immersed in an event that mimics a real-world challenge: as future leaders of the world they have to find solutions to the plastic challenge our planet is facing. They first take the role of different stakeholders, conducting research and debating the various perspectives,

interests and concerns about plastics. Building from this knowledge during the second half day, the students are put in the position of managers representing different types of enterprises (large, medium or start up), of different sectors, and from different countries. They work in teams collectively developing strategies and innovative solutions that are feasible, implementable, scalable and impactful to overcome plastic pollution all the while keeping their organisations in business in the face of new global regulation.

The participants of this best practice session at the PRME Chapter event had several questions about this initiative, such as the time needed for the event preparation and the number of instructors involved. The Audencia professor was able to provide more details about the resources required to organize this sustainability-focused event. Every year it takes about two months to organise all the details of the event. While currently there are only two professors teaching and animating the event, they had great support from the programme director and coordinators. In addition, every year three to four students who participated in the same event in previous years, play the role of assistants to the professors. Hence, as for most sustainability-focused educational initiatives, broader support from the school's internal stakeholders is strongly recommended. In terms of the future prospects of the event, the professor was able to share with the participants that they continue to refine the Plastic Forum to ensure that students have the maximum opportunity to interact and develop their thinking. For example, in 2019 the school implemented a short session of crowd-funding poster pitches where students challenged each other and made suggestions in order to improve the projects. Other future prospects include extending the event to two full days and holding panel sessions with practitioners.

#### *Sustainable Development Pathway (Solvay Business School)*

Solvay Business School Brussel's sustainable development pathway was highlighted during one yearly meeting. The Sustainable Development (SD) pathway is a set of courses covering material relevant to SD themes designed by professors interested in working together to develop synergies. The pathway consists of three blocks of courses over three years. The successful implementation of the project requires the engagement of different internal and external stakeholders. Progress over time is mapped through the number of key stakeholders involved. During the first year (exploratory phase), six professors and fifteen percent of the students were engaged in the pathway. The second year (launch of thematic pathways), more than fifteen professors and thirty percent of the students participated in the pathway. By the third year, eighty percent of the students were involved.

Question and answer interactions between session participants allow for exchanging tips on preoccupying questions, such as the extent to which sustainability is integrated in curriculum. Examples given included requesting professors to estimate and indicate on their syllabi the percentage of CSR in the module, identifying CSR/sustainability related courses, engaging in ISO 26000, creating sustainable e-book bookshelves and CSR book clubs with librarians, and supporting student consulting projects linked to a sustainable topic. Sessions such as the SD pathway presentation stimulate professors and CSR policy leaders to reflect on their own efforts to integrate sustainability and map their collective efforts over time. Participants return from the yearly meeting to their schools and, in turn, engage in conversations with their own colleagues, which bring about transforming activities, or changes in learning through experimental actions and policy development.

#### *Student Competency Development for Sustainability (PRME Chapter Project)*

Knowledge extension, which is central to engaged educational actions, can be well illustrated by one of the Chapter's flagship ongoing projects: Student Competency Development for Sustainability. The work group, which brings together both administrative personnel and professors from PRME Chapter schools such as TIAS and Antwerp Management School, collaborates on building a framework inspired by an inventory of existing tests on individual knowledge, mindsets and skills in relation to sustainability. Meetings between work group members allow to clarify the goal of the project, and decide on steps to take, beginning with developing a format for testing existing tools. Knowledge extension is manifest through collaborative decision-making processes despite, and most likely in consideration of, the complexity of the task. Group members unanimously agreed for the need to take an inventory and start building even an imperfect tool to be improved over time, as opposed to not moving forward at all due to the complexity of the task at hand. As concepts such as mindset, competences and skills are often used interchangeably, the team decided that as a first step, the theoretical background required more clarification including defining the key concepts.

An inventory of competency-related tools in use among Chapter members is underway. Such an inventory lists the tools, as well as 'user comments' on questions such as: How does the tool work in the experience of the user? What makes it work and what not? It is interesting to note that the very identification of limitations in existing tools spurs the work group members' interest for finding improvements. The work group continues to welcome new members with expertise concerning soft skills and assessment. For example, one of the PRME

Chapter schools' PhD students, who is working on a competency framework, has been invited to join the project.

In sum, the Chapter experience demonstrates that engaged educational actions give way to spending quality time on the sustainability teaching mission with not only scholars of different disciplines, different schools and different countries, but with administrative staff as well. The associated actions of transmitting, transforming and extending knowledge are supported by the Chapter's aforementioned PRiME acronym: "Passion, Respect, Inclusiveness, Motivational, Entrepreneurial".

### **Engaged research actions within the PRME France-Benelux Chapter**

Engaged research benefits both community and academic interests via civic engagement practices involving the discovery, development, and mobilization of knowledge (Beaulieu *et al.*, 2018). Corporate and institutional members of the community work alongside researchers in the spirit of co-discovery and co-development. The Chapter's furthest advanced engaged research project to date is undoubtedly the SDG Barometer. The SDG Barometer is a Belgian initiative of Antwerp Management School, Antwerp University, and UC Louvain, all PRME Chapter members, with the support of the Federal Institute for Sustainable Development (IFDD). The schools collaborated with the IFDD to create the first barometer to measure the adoption of the SDGs by Belgian organizations. The 2020 version of the SDG Barometer builds on the 2018 SDG Barometer, which is built on learning from the Belgian Corporate Responsibility Barometer studies dating from 2015 and 2011. The very design of the survey exemplifies an iterative process of discovery, sharing and development of knowledge between academics and public authorities and corporate networks on a national level. Today's Belgium SDG Barometer derives from both quantitative surveys (961 respondents) and qualitative interview-based research (15 interviews). The Barometer aims to generate insights for policy and practice on how Belgian organizations in the for-profit and the non-profit sectors address the SDGs. The pool of respondents includes corporations, non-governmental organizations, governmental organizations, and educational institutions.

Results from the project attest to headway made in terms of organisational SDG awareness: *"Nearly all organizations (98%) pay at least some attention to sustainability. Compared with the SDG Barometer 2018, a considerably smaller percentage of organization appear unaware of the SDGs (9%)."* The results contribute to a deeper understanding of the most important

driving forces for organizations in Belgium to adopt SDGs. These organizational motivations for change appear to be complying with societal expectations, reducing social and environmental risks, and showing respect for the communities in which organizations operate. The results also reveal different organizational priorities toward SDGs depending on the type of organization. Companies perceive SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth), SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), and SDG 9 (Industry, innovation, and infrastructure) as the most relevant. Both companies and governments deem SDG 2 (Zero hunger) the least relevant SDG. Finally, SDG 14 (Life below water) is at the bottom for all types of organizations when it comes to relevance.

SDG Barometer results are presented in yearly PRME Chapter meetings to regional members and in 2021 during a PRME Chapter Talk open to international signatory members and the general public. The internationally sponsored PRME Chapter Talk 2021 provided the opportunity to inform on the SDG Barometer research project and ongoing journey and learnings. The Barometer evolves taking into account new critical societal issues. For example, in 2020, the Barometer included questions on the effect of COVID-19 on the SDGs.

Various signatory members from other countries have shown interest in joining forces to work on a Chapter-wide research and awareness-building project. Hence, Dutch and French project groups are now formed, and related research projects are taking shape in both The Netherlands and France. Steps common to both the Dutch and French research work groups include: reviewing the Belgium survey to gain a deep understanding of both the design of the project and results, exploring the national landscape to identify other similar SDG initiatives in place, discussing with business/CSR/SDG networks, and sharing individual and institutional motivations for committing to the project. Of common concern is finding funding to carry out research projects, and mutualising resources with CSR-dedicated corporate and public networks to work together on SDGs. It has been observed that bringing together both quantitative and qualitative researchers is ideal for such a research project albeit there are challenges in finding a balance. Furthermore, combining forces between researchers and school CSR administrative leaders makes for a balanced skill set.

Engaged research actions within the Chapter are without doubt the most complex to design and implement, already on a national level and even more so on tri-national level. Although the pathway toward a larger Chapter SDG Barometer seems arduous and long, and the map to follow unfolds with the journey, the participating members acknowledge that the awareness-building effect is in itself a stimulation to move forward with partner networks.

### **Engaged service actions within the PRME France-Benelux Chapter**

Engaged service is defined as the application of a professor's expertise and scientific or professional knowledge to address specific issues for the benefit of policy makers, public officials, agencies, organizations, professionals, and civil society (Beaulieu *et al.*, 2018: 11). The yearly PRME Chapter meeting features the host school dean's opening speech and researchers as keynote speakers who address an issue associated with the meeting theme of importance to key stakeholders. The Chapter's key stakeholders include PRME Global, Global Compact (a network of corporations in support of sustainability), deans, professors, administrative personnel, students and youth leaders, and NGOs.

The Dean's speech frames the annual meeting and recalls the PRME purpose and spirit: the role business schools play in building awareness and meaningful participation, through engaging in forward thinking and mindfulness, to create impact whilst sustaining humanity. At the 2020 meeting in Brussels, notions of collaborative-based engaged service pervade the Dean's discourse: "*As members of society, it is important to find answers to sustainability challenges together*" (2020 PRME France-Benelux Chapter meeting report). In what ways do engaged scholars and other PRME stakeholders serve as responsible relays of sustainability? They use evidence-based stories to communicate beliefs and aspirations to motivate people to take actions. By experiencing, trying, failing, and co-creating, sustainability partners, in essence, demonstrate care. As the Dean pointed out, as it is in society's best interest to have healthy businesses, markets, consumers, and suppliers, public and corporate collaboration is key. The profound role that business schools play in serving their communities in collaborative ways echoes the need for academia to actively dialogue with society on a wider scale to address complex urgent problems.

The role students and youth play in serving society as sustainability change makers is recognized in the Chapter's strategy (see Table 1, Theme 1). The 2020 annual meeting "Young People as a Force for Change" included a keynote address by a professor from KU Leuven on generations, workplace behaviour and stereotypes. The scholar called for the need for increased awareness about the challenges of working in multi-generation workplaces, and the need for understanding different generations' values, perceptions and behaviours in different situations. Negative stereotyping between generations occurs as a result of people's tendency to judge more positively the generation group to which they belong, and more negatively other groups. The generational identity perspective can result not only in better organisational performance, but also in greater social sustainability for organizations.

Another way the Chapter demonstrates engaged service is through recognizing school graduates' commitment to SDGs. The 2020 meeting "Young Leader of Tomorrow" panel was composed of three young graduates from Belgian, French and Dutch business schools. The graduates were chosen thanks to their strong commitment to sustainable development values as illustrated by their early career choices. The Netherlands' TIAS/WUR graduate worked at Amfori as a food sustainability expert in strategy and innovation. In this position she helped corporations understand global supply chains and, in so doing, become more socially and environmentally sustainable. The French ICN Business School graduate was nominated top student of her Bachelor and Master graduating years. During her management school years, she combined microfinance, HR, and CSR through various student association missions, internships, and jobs, in Nepal, Chili, Peru, Tajikistan and France. Two years after graduating, she is working for Entrepreneurs du Monde on Incubation Création Inclusion (ICI), a French state-sponsored programme, dedicated to fighting poverty and supporting small business creation. The Maastricht School of Management graduate presented a video about her experience. After completing her Bachelor's degree in India, she studied management in the Netherlands and obtained a UN internship as peace ambassador working on the prohibition of chemical weapons. She won a case competition on sustainable farming and was a volunteer facilitator for warchild/UNICEF, a global volunteer project via AISEC. The career pathways of youth leaders committed to SDGs, take root during their schooling. But it is not only what the students do with their sustainability knowledge and skills that is of interest to the PRME Chapter, it is also what new perspectives they bring to sustainability issues.

The three panelists shared their perspectives on a number of topics such as the role their business school played for their professional development, the importance of sustainability and the future of the France-Benelux region with regard to achieving the SDGs. They readily recognised that their business school education helped them to reflect on self and acquire key skills, such as creativity and technical competencies, as well as understand strategic management decisions. However, they critically assessed how business schools could go further. They pleaded for greater sustainability learning about alternative business models, creative solutions, and circular economy. They wanted to see more CSR/sustainability related courses, more encounters with social entrepreneurs, more focus on SMEs in class discussions and case studies, and more discussions on the social impact of enterprises in relation to their core activities. They regretted that they learned more about competition than collaboration in their business school education, whereas the greatest challenges they faced in their everyday work consisted of breaking down the barriers between competition and collaboration. All the



participants generally believed that the worst-case scenario horizon 2030 would be continuing to carry out business-as-usual, failing in scale, and expecting different results. They expressed their hopes that the new generation will work together and make the transition in the best way possible, excluding no one. This would assume that everybody is capable of taking off judgmental glasses to work towards a common agenda. The current worst cases for the panelists include human dependence on smart technologies, devastating widespread forest fires and climate change, and violent intolerance toward social diversity. The best scenarios include circular economies, waste management systems, and growing concern for making positive impacts by moving toward SDGs. One of the panel participants expressed the wish that the care and education sectors would be recognised wage-wise, as much as other sectors. At the end of the panel session, one of the panelists questioned whether business schools might consider opening some of their sustainability/CSR classes to the public.

By designing annual meetings that bring together key stakeholders, the PRME France-Benelux Chapter acts as a regional convener, facilitator and supporter of Responsible Management Education. Different stakeholders including, as illustrated in the preceding examples, deans, scholars and young graduates, share the agenda for engaged service to society. As noted previously, actions aimed at serving sustainability issues of key importance to the wider community, demonstrate a profound respect and empathy for the phenomena, people, problems studied, views of practitioners, students, and academics of other disciplines (Tsui, 2013).

### **Discussion: the role of boundary-spanning organizations and engaged scholarship to foster responsible management education**

The previous sections show evidence of how the PRME France-Benelux Chapter convenes, facilitates and supports its members and their stakeholders on their journeys towards substantial responsible management education. Through deeply engaging with its members on responsible education, research, and service initiatives, the Chapter has been able to create momentum in the region on sustainability, one of the most pressing issues of our time. Indeed, in times where students are asking schools to take action, and accreditation bodies are integrating responsible management into their requirements for certification, business schools and faculties are on the lookout for tools and best practices that facilitate USR implementation (Travaillé *et al.*, 2018).

Through an engaged scholarship approach, the PRME Chapter encourages its regional members to follow their unique path as schools with their own identity, along with a common

goal of educating future responsible leaders and making their schools more competent in dealing with the pressing issues of our time, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, migration, and diversity (Adler, 2016; Ferraro *et al.*, 2015; Tsui, 2013). The PRME Chapter operates as a network fostering discussions on sustainability topics between different stakeholders and communities (see Rive *et al.*, 2017), in the spirit of what Bansal *et al.* (2012) call “boundary-spanning organizations”. By engaging with schools and their stakeholders, the Chapter helps shaping the meaning of responsible management education, fostering commitment for the SDGs, and building momentum for action and substantial change. The Chapter enables collaboration *between* schools, (e.g., by encouraging the sharing of best practices), rather than creating competition *among* them in a time where university rankings are playing a prominent role.

From a methodology point of view, rich observations from the Chapter steering committee members as well as other members of the Chapter who volunteer their notes for yearly reports, contribute to giving a particularly rare inside look into the activities and decision-making of the regional network. Such reports themselves reflect the collaborative co-learning spirit that characterizes the sustainability network, and inevitably the positive forward-looking members who are passionately committed to driving the ambitious agenda. It is to be noted that internal PRME Chapter documents, inaccessible to non-members of the regional networks, although critical to providing authentic examples of engaged scholarship on the regional level, are seldom used to investigate the human journey of PRME regional Chapters. The mobilization of such sources of data are in line with the FNEGE association, the French Foundation for the development and inclusion of science education in all fields of management, that made a recent call to better recognize the value of less traditional research outputs such as conference proceedings and academic actions with impact (Bonnet and Roger, 2018).

In order to further study how the PRME Chapter France Benelux fosters responsible management education in the region, future research could look into existing PRME SIP reports of its Chapter members and identify ongoing collaborations and cross-pollination between signatory schools. As highlighted by Rive *et al.* (2017), however, such reports can take a variety of forms and schools are free to describe the actions they prefer to put into the spotlight. Therefore, the PRME Chapter could also further extend its engaged service actions by creating a platform (e.g., during its annual meetings) to share best practices on SIP reporting, or to co-create a unified report format to streamline reporting on schools’ contributions to responsible management education.

From its inception in 2017 until today, the PRME Chapter continues to play a significant role by creating mutual understanding and mutual value on responsible management education for its members. While engaging in such a collaborative approach to address sustainability topics is challenging for management scholars (Easter *et al.*, 2020; Laasch *et al.*, 2020; Winn & Pogutz, 2013), boundary-spanning organizations can help by connecting the rich sources of knowledge present in HEIs on sustainability topics with the broader society. The overall aim of this challenging endeavor of boundary-spanning, as Bansal *et al.* (2012) neatly describe, is to make the management field more relevant in discussions on pressing sustainability topics. For business schools and faculties, the only way to do this all together, is by creating forums for engaged discussions, knowledge and practice sharing, and building new initiatives and projects.

## **Conclusion**

Boundary-spanning intermediary organizations make visible, as well as drive, responsible management practices that aim to make an impact on a societal level. PRME Chapters, behaving as a regional network of business schools and faculties with multiple stakeholders, are particularly well-placed to make an impact on the local community and regional levels. The PRME France-Benelux Chapter accompanies business schools in their quest to embed responsible management education in their institutions, while leaving space for each school to develop a unique sustainability strategy and approach. The Chapter encourages the sharing of best practices and fosters engagement through the organization of annual meetings and the creation of working groups on timely sustainability topics, as part of the schools' educational, research and service missions. The Chapter's boundary-spanning role of convening, facilitating and supporting its members and their stakeholders has been critical in creating momentum over the beginning years of the Chapter.

The authors make a call for a veritable research agenda based on the experience of boundary-spanning academic networks to understand, capture and learn from the growing momentum of commitment to sustainability in business schools and their interactions with society. Future work merits critical inquiry into not only the opportunities for engaged scholarship in contributing to this momentum, but the obstacles encountered along the way. Another seldom-explored theoretical and empirical venue implied by engaged scholarship that deserves attention is that of the business professor, faculty member or student as a role model for pioneering and driving the sustainability agenda.

If collaborative projects stem from a profound respect and empathy for phenomena, people, and problems studied, the France-Benelux Chapter actions move forward thanks to the teaming up of engaged signatory school administrative staff and professors. In this way, engaged scholars or professors are but one category of business school stakeholders committed to furthering the agenda for engaged education, research and service. Indeed, the strength of such a boundary-spanning organization with a sustainability agenda is its capacity to bring together multiple stakeholders with common values and aspirations. The metaphor of the campus as an isolated island is replaced by that of a staging ground for deans, professors, students and administrative leaders to engage in responsible actions for a more sustainable society. PRME Chapters, as well as other regional and national networks, have the potential to further foster substantial responsible management education among their signatory schools through creating space for conversations, knowledge sharing, and capacity building on the urgent topic of sustainability and CSR.

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