

Educating business students towards the common good: exploring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a teaching tool for intellectual and practical engagement

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The UN-based network of business schools promoting responsible management education PRME (Principles of Responsible Management Education) has proposed to use the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as common ground for the development of a Responsible Management Education framework for business schools, especially to help “sensitize future business leaders to values like sustainability and responsibility” (UNPRME, 2018). Accordingly, the SDGs would “present us with a common language around sustainable development, one being used by governments, NGOs, and business. (...) they can also be used externally as a platform to engage stakeholders, and in particular business in a common set of goals and targets” (Weybrecht, 2017).

The aim of this paper is thus to develop a curriculum for a core management subject that will encourage students to develop a wise understanding of business and at the same time to start thinking about concrete strategies for contributing towards the common good. The SDGs will be explored here as a teaching tool to help introduce the concept of the common good to business students. In this paper, we understand the common good as it is defined in *Gaudium et spes* (Chapter II, Nr. 26): “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment”. We further acknowledge that today, the common good “takes on an increasingly universal complexion and consequently involves rights and duties with respect to the whole human race” (*Ibid.*).

The first section of the paper presents a theoretical outline in which we explore how the common good has been applied in the business ethics literature, specifically how common good is related to the concepts of CSR and sustainability. We also investigate the connection of common good to the SDGs, as well as to the principles of UNPRME. In the second chapter, we develop a curriculum to be implemented at the onset of a management study program to teach sustainability and ethics, based on the notion of common good. We focus on the SDGs as an instrument to foster intellectual and practical engagement of management students leading to a basic understanding of the common good and its achievement. The third chapter presents the discussion and some concluding remarks.