

Editorial: Grolar bears in responsible management: establishing partnerships toward sustainability

In June 2021, CBS International Business School in Cologne, Germany and the German University in Cairo (GUC), Egypt co-hosted a global panel entitled “Grolar Bears in Responsible Management Education: Futurism, Hybridization and Sustainability in a Post-COVID-19 World” at the United Nations – Principles for Responsible Management Education (UN-PRME) Global Forum. The panel aimed at raising debatable questions around the future of responsible management education. The analogy of a “Grolar bear”, which is a hybrid between Grizzly and Polar bear (Turner, 2021), was used to represent unusual hybridization that could present unique opportunities as a consequence of global mega trends, such as climate change. Hybridization could take the form of novel teaching methodologies or pedagogies in responsible management education that could match future occurrences (e.g. online tools and the use of artificial intelligence, amongst other methodologies). It could also take the form of innovative concepts in the responsible management education literature that are advocated by researchers as a result of foreseeing certain future trends affecting management scholarship (e.g. diversity and multiculturalism, spirituality, etc.). Another interesting hybridization as a necessary consequence of the global poverty, inequalities and climate change trends is sustainable business models (SBMs). Such SBMs are also a hybrid that blend – potentially conflicting – commercial and welfare institutional logics (i.e. a mix of purely profit-oriented and purely nonprofit, societal business model). The panel, therefore, linked the three important notions of futurism, hybridization and sustainability to the surfacing and stipulation of “Grolar bears” in responsible management education.

According to Dixon (2019, pp. 205, 256), “sustainability will be a dominant theme for 300 years” where over \$50 trillion will be invested in green technologies. In his book, *The Future of (Almost) Everything* (2019: 11), the six “faces” of the future are as follows: **F**ast with high-tech speed of change; **U**rban yet **T**ribal with social networks and nation brands; **U**niversal with an ever-evolving globalization; **R**adical with trends like activism and sustainability and (fortunately) **E**thical with good values and an increased spirituality (e.g. Smith, 2011; Amin, 2017). Despite this rather positive outlook, unfortunately, there are witnessed setbacks from the excessive evolution of technology for example such as the weakening of human relations, especially family (Dixon, 2019, p. 149). Whether or not there is a relationship between wealth and happiness, with “1% of humanity (owning) 65% of wealth”, there will be an increased “search for purpose” (Dixon, 2019, pp. 64, 296). This research is relevant to what is now termed “the sustainability mindset” (Kassel *et al.*, 2016; El-Bassiouny *et al.*, 2022). This mindset, which represents a mode of thinking, being and doing toward sustainable living and a more sustainable future, requires concerted efforts from academia, the private sector, the third sector and the public sector. A question we had raised, but not yet answered, at the end of our UN-PRME panel was as follows: Can sustainability objectives, and the realization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDGs), be aligned with the Dominant Social Paradigm (DSP) which is necessarily linked to a myopic view of CSR or do we need a whole new paradigm (Kilbourne, 2004), one that has sustainability concerns at its core?



In the current era of globalization, social and environmental problems transcend local borders and international successful partnerships are more essential and critical than ever (Choi *et al.*, 2020). The UN stresses on the importance of multistakeholder collaborations if we are keen to accelerate the progress in attaining sustainable development goals (Berrone *et al.*, 2019). Partnerships are perceived as an effective tool for addressing shortcomings of global environmental politics. Scholars describe successful partnerships as innovative forms of governance. They can also be seen as value networks that overcome individual limitations by sharing skills, resources, technologies and knowledge. In such networks, stakeholders are both: value recipients and creators. Problems related to governance, implementation and participation could be tackled through effective partnerships (Bäckstrand, 2006). Multistakeholder partnerships involve voluntary agreements between different stakeholders such as governments, international organizations, civil society, the private sector and key stakeholders at the local, national and intergovernmental levels. The aim of these partnerships is to develop and endorse innovative solutions for sustainable development as well as to draw a roadmap for overcoming global sustainable development challenges (Choi *et al.*, 2020).

Knowledge-based institutions such as universities are considered catalysts for sustainable development and hence are key stakeholders to be integrated in stakeholder partnerships (Vidican, 2009; Filho, 2011; Sedlacek, 2013; Groulx *et al.*, 2020). Traditionally, new sustainability thinking is disseminated by universities through teaching and research (Piasentin and Roberts, 2018; Groulx *et al.*, 2020). Efforts to change current unsustainable practices require a significant paradigm shift in the relationship of humans with nature (Piasentin and Roberts, 2018). The complexity of sustainability problems requires critical thinking skills where individuals are willing and able to go back and forth between different mindsets (Stubbs and Cocklin, 2008; Wals, 2011). Higher education institutions can turn people into “critical thinkers” and have thus long been required to support their communities and are expected to act as active participants in their multifaceted learning societies. The process of knowledge creation is a complex one and is usually pursued in various settings by a number of different contributors. It involves the integration of a variety of activities including discovery, learning and engagement (Holland, 2005). University–community collaborations are a form of partnerships that focus on these activities and eventually boost community sustainability and democracy. Thus, effective university–community partnerships are expected to help solve problems encountered by people in their daily lives using a place-based knowledge creation approach. Unlike the conventional one-way mode of exchange that had long been known, modern community engagement models emphasize on two-way mode of exchange. Initially, knowledge and services were delivered by higher education institutions to the community; now it is more of a reciprocal process where mutual learning is expected to take place (Porter, 2015; Groulx *et al.*, 2020). Collaborative learning – known as co-learning – is considered the essence of fruitful university–community partnerships. Not only does it aim to empower marginalized and oppressed community segments but also the two-way exchange approach provides a greater chance for universities to truly understand and empathize with the surrounding communities (Groulx *et al.*, 2020).

Others are specifically interested in promoting local and international development cooperation through public–private partnerships (PPPs) (De Los Ríos-Carmenado *et al.*, 2016; Yu *et al.*, 2018; Choi *et al.*, 2020; Xiong *et al.*, 2020). The PPP is a long-term agreement between a public and a private entity to share complementary skills and resources in order to achieve a public goal or develop a public facility (Yu *et al.*, 2018). Based on mutual trust, partners can create synergies that help in building up and reinforcing competences. Such voluntary alliances open avenues for financing and project management opportunities in various sectors (De Los Ríos-Carmenado *et al.*, 2016). The PPP is a viable method of financing

sustainable development because it allows for the alignment of private and public interests, the unification of entrepreneurial and government investments and the development of highly effective and large-scale implementation of sustainable development initiatives. This is particularly important since most of the private sector initiatives for sustainable development are characterized by limited entrepreneurial efforts to combat unsustainable behaviors through small-scale and often myopic corporate responsibility initiatives. The same pattern of small-budgeted projects is apparent among the public sector. Most sustainable development projects are not only financed but also managed by the government. In practice, this means that programs in the field of sustainable development are less flexible and less effective (Sergi *et al.*, 2019).

In recent years, the PPPs for sustainable development have been growing rapidly. PPPs have been used extensively as a means to bridge sustainable development gaps in different regions in the world (e.g. Mohd-Rahim *et al.*, 2018; Morea and Balzarini, 2018; Vorotnikov and Tarasov, 2019; Khan *et al.*, 2020). China is one of the most prevalent test centers for PPP development around the world (Xiong *et al.*, 2020). Numerous studies have investigated the role of PPP on different sustainable development goals including food security and agricultural development (Spielman and Von Grebmer, 2006), water supply (Ameyaw and Chan, 2013), solid waste management (Colverson and Perera, 2012), sustainable energy (Owusu-Manu *et al.*, 2020) and sustainable urbanization (Xiong *et al.*, 2020). Many still question the effectiveness of using PPPs as a tool for achieving sustainable development. There are several critiques concerning the current assessment systems that are used to evaluate impact of such partnerships. Partnerships assessment systems are criticized for either being complex or failing to evaluate partnerships effect beyond the concept of value for money (Berrone *et al.*, 2019).

We would like to reiterate with this editorial for the *Management and Sustainability: An Arab Review (MSAR)* community that it remains conducive to work on the determining factors shaping the success of partnerships. One of the most important pillars of successful partnerships is flexibility and partner engagement. Collaborations should exhibit an adequate degree of flexibility that ensures that all the partners' motivations are met and understand that different partners may hold different motivations – across different collaborations – depending on the problem type or the nature of the collaboration itself (Groulx *et al.*, 2020). Partnerships and collaborations built on collective/unified vision and shared power yield better results in inducing social change (Groulx *et al.*, 2020) as well as open venues for future collaborations. We are yet far from reaching the SDGs goals. The question “how the world would look in 2030?” is still a vague one. Sustainability and sustainable development in 2030 will greatly depend on the ways different actors will collaborate together and how they will come up with new innovative modes of cooperation (Duran y Lalaguna and Dorodnykh, 2018).

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