



## **Preparing Leaders to Tackle Grand Challenges**

*A special issue of the Journal of Management Education*

### **GUEST EDITORS**

#### **Sandra Seno Alday**

sandra.seno-alday@sydney.edu.au

Academy of International Business Sustainability Shared Interest Group

Associate Editor, Journal of Management Education

#### **Allan Bird**

allan@bird.org

Co-Founder and Inaugural Chair

Consortium for Undergraduate International Business Education (CUIBE)

#### **John Dilyard**

jdilyard@sfc.edu

Co-Founder and Co-Chair

Academy of International Business Sustainability Shared Interest Group

#### **Daria Panina**

dpanina@mays.tamu.edu

Founder and Chair

Academy of International Business Teaching & Education Shared Interest Group

#### **Shasha Zhao**

shasha.zhao@surrey.ac.uk

Co-Founder and Co-Chair

Academy of International Business Sustainability Shared Interest Group

## SPECIAL ISSUE OVERVIEW

The proposed special issue on *Preparing Leaders to Tackle Grand Challenges* reinforces the commitment of the Journal of Management Education (JME) to develop the responsible leader. The journal has consistently supported the idea of responsible leadership that extends beyond the boundaries of the organization.

Acknowledging the wide impact of business operations and management practices, JME devoted a **2003 special issue** on *Teaching About The Natural Environment In Management Education* (Egri and Rogers, 2003). This was followed by a **2009 special issue** on *Greening and Sustainability Across The Management Curriculum* (Rusinko and Sama, 2009). This issue extended the environmental focus of the previous one to include social and economic concerns. These two early special issues focused on embedding non-traditional management content into management education.

The **2012 special issue** (*Principles of Responsible Management Education - PRME*) raised awareness of the critical role of management education in supporting the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Forray and Leigh, 2012). The issue specifically explored opportunities to embed the SDGs into management curricula. This was consistent with the trajectory of the previous special issues to expand the scope of management responsibility from environmental stewardship to social and economic sustainability.

Finally, the **2020 special issue** (*Sustainability in Management Education*) reconnected with the ecological roots of the journal's sustainability discourse while continuing to recognize that sustainability goes beyond environmental concerns. The special issue highlighted that much has been accomplished in terms of incorporating sustainability in management education. However, the special issue highlighted that business schools need to continue expanding the range of sustainability topics in management courses and curricula. Educators also needed to explore the impact of management education beyond the classroom. Scholars further pointed out that managers needed to acquire the interdisciplinary skills and mindset to tackle wicked or complex problems (Arevalo et al, 2020).

Over the past twenty (20) years, the management education scholarship has successfully established the need to progressively broaden the range of topics to incorporate into management curricula. These topics — the environment, societal issues, sustainability, the SDGs — fall under the broad category of Grand Challenges (George et al., 2016).

Grand Challenges are large-scale complex problems that require particular problem solving skills (George et al., 2016). The proposed special issue thus takes the JME narrative on responsible leadership further. It calls for ways to broaden and deepen management skills, cognition, and affect in support of large-scale interdisciplinary efforts to address Grand Challenges.

### ***Advancements in Management Education***

Studies in JME have explored approaches to the design and delivery of courses and programs that embed the constantly evolving concerns on upholding responsible and sustainable business and management. Studies have investigated ways to incorporate specific topics related to sustainability and responsible management in business and management courses. These include gender issues and environmental sustainability, among others (Arevalo, 2020; Jolly et al., 2011; Wagstaff et al., 2020).

The journal has also published studies exploring myriad pedagogical approaches that harness synergies in research, social impact, and teaching in designing a range of courses on sustainability (Viswanathan, 2012). In line with its orientation towards experiential learning, JME has published studies and instructional innovations that have delved into ways to integrate sustainability into



business courses through the use of action research, service learning, field trips, design thinking, innovation, entrepreneurship, and technology-based pedagogies (Audebrand and Pepin, 2022; Benn and Dunphy, 2009; Lean and Emery, 2021; Parris and McInnis-Bowers, 2017; Rands, 2009; Sroufe et al., 2015). These and other approaches have been investigated as means to deepen learning on responsible management, values-based management, and social impact.

Studies have highlighted ways to help students look *outward* to foster their appreciation of social and environmental factors in the business environment (Abzug et al., 2020) and how business activity in turn makes an impact on these external factors. For example, scholarly work has explored the employment of theories of stakeholder engagement to frame pedagogical approaches in teaching sustainability in business (Collins and Kearins, 2007). Studies have investigated the employment of the threshold approach to foster learning on how business concerns go beyond creating value for shareholders (Vidal et al., 2015). Others have explored how design lenses can be employed as vehicles for learning about how the built environment makes an impact on broad sustainability issues related to financial, environmental, and human health and productivity (Sroufe, 2020).

Studies have also explored ways to help students look *inward* to understand their own social responsibility orientation and awareness (Saunders et al., 2022). Pedagogical approaches have attempted to help students better appreciate issues on poverty and social exclusion by establishing how these are connected to their own personal interests related to careers, management practices, and wealth creation (Dart, 2008). Instructional innovations have further explored the use of negotiation simulations and role plays to reinforce the interconnectedness between business, climate change, and individual careers (Paschall and Wüstenhagen, 2012).

These pedagogical approaches designed to foster appreciation of the economic, social, and environmental responsibilities of management have been explored along with assessment regimes (Vidal et al., 2015) and a range of critical and ethical thinking tools (Deer and Zarestky, 2017; Dyck, 2017). These further support and scaffold learning, thus inspiring confidence among students to engage with the challenges of problem solving in the complex spheres of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability (Deer and Zarestky, 2017).

In line with the commitment to bridging theory and practice, studies have employed management theories to inform management education pedagogies, underscore implications on management practice, and further highlight the impact of management practice beyond the bounds of the organization. Notably, research has highlighted the increasingly strategic (rather than operational) importance of sustainability to the business. For example, studies have explored ways to employ decision-making frameworks to foster students' learning about sustainability (Peoples, 2009). The use of scenario planning -- traditionally a method employed in practice to craft organizational and business strategy -- was explored as a pedagogical approach to teaching sustainability (Wade and Piccinini, 2020). JME subsequently awarded this contribution the Fritz J. Roethlisberger Award for best paper (Tarr and Mullane, 2021). This highlights the journal's commitment to not only finding creative ways to integrate sustainability in management education but also to ensuring that management education serves as a bridge to effectively link research and practice.

### ***Opportunities for Further Advancement***

These significant advances pave the way for important future work in embedding sustainability issues in international business and management education. Indeed, recent work has highlighted significant barriers that have held back management programs from developing the multidisciplinary perspectives required by managers to address Grand Challenges. Opportunities clearly remain for designing education models that can better equip students with the competencies required to address



current and future Grand Challenges (Shantz et al., 2023).

Recent human health, financial, technological, and geopolitical crises in the past two decades have underscored the dynamism of the environment and the deep and complex interconnectedness of issues and stakeholders at the global level. These have highlighted the urgency with which individuals, businesses, and governments need to rapidly take action in order to curb or soften the negative impact of crises at multiple fronts.

Scholars have highlighted that the dynamism of different factors both external and internal to business schools continue to apply pressure to integrate sustainability issues into business and management education. While factors may dynamically change and external pressures wax and wane, it is important for business schools to stay the course (Walck, 2009). Managers are required to continually acquire different skills and mindsets as business environments transform over time. Management education programs will thus continue to play a role in the development of these skills and mindsets, which will in turn enable business organizations to nimbly design and implement sustainability management initiatives (Bradfield, 2009).

The deep and complex interconnections that characterize Grand Challenges likewise require different ways of thinking. Management education has an important opportunity to develop this among students. For example, there is much potential for future scholarly work to build on existing research exploring how integrative learning theories can be used to frame the design and delivery of business leadership courses that integrate, for example, climate sustainability. This requires management educators to foster big picture thinking and point students towards a much broader concerns that go beyond the sustainability of business operations (André, 2020).

There continue to be significant challenges associated with developing the relevant cognitive skills required to analyze and address highly complex problems. For example, research has pointed out that while systems thinking has been identified as a relevant and critical approach to sustainability education, the way in which it is employed in practice tends to be unclear. This highlights critical opportunities to clarify the various approaches to wielding systems thinking before exploring ways to design novel pedagogical approaches that help students use the tools to address sustainability issues in management (Porter and Córdoba, 2009). This lack of clarity is characteristic not only in practice but also in theory. For example, scholars have noted how the lack of a clear-cut definition of sustainability poses challenges to sustainability education (Urđan and Luoma, 2020). That is, the absence of clear theoretical grounding leads to ambiguity and uncertainty regarding the knowledge, skills, and competencies that management education programs need to develop among students.

Finally, the sheer urgency of the action required to address serious sustainability concerns calls for multiple interventions at multiple fronts. The implication is that there are important opportunities to introduce management education innovations at various levels: classrooms, programs, degrees, and business schools. As described above, there has been a substantial body of work published on pedagogical innovations in the classroom designed to foster learning in responsible and sustainable business and management. Beyond the individual course or subject, however, there is scope to explore the design of programs and degrees specifically focused on sustainable business (Steketee, 2009). This will require reflecting on the evolving relationship between business schools, industry, and other stakeholders, and further evaluating the impact these relationships may have on current and emerging paradigms of management education (Louw, 2015).

Research has also highlighted the need to understand the critical role of faculty in supporting the United Nations Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) and to explore ways to





effectively rally this support. Studies have found that institution-level support for PRME is insufficient to affect meaningful innovation and transformation in management education (Maloni et al., 2012). Rather, champions at all levels in higher education institutions are required to support an internalized transformation (Solitander et al., 2012). There is certainly much scholarly investigation to be done in this space that lies at the intersection of sustainability, management education, and indeed individual careers in management education. For example, a JME opinion piece argues that management educators themselves can serve as sustainability role models by internalizing sustainable behavior in their professional and personal lives (Kanashiro et al., 2020).

Findings on the importance of internalizing sustainable behavior at the individual level point to opportunities for further research on how this can be done in the classroom as well as the workplace. For example, research has explored the impact of embedding interdisciplinary sustainability modules into business curricula not only on cognition but also affect or emotions (Craig et al., 2022). The exploration of how education approaches influence affect is important given findings that feelings influence comprehension and that positive emotions facilitate learning transfer (Plass et al., 2014).

In summary, there are significant and urgent opportunities to build on existing research to further enhance understanding of Grand Challenges and the role that responsible businesses play in shaping a sustainable future. There is much more that needs to be done to explore the corresponding role of higher education in fostering the development of managers who have the capability and the courage to take meaningful action at multiple levels and fronts.

## **ANSWERING THE CALL**

For better or poorer, business actions reverberate beyond the boundaries of the organization.

On the poorer end of the impact spectrum, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that businesses directly or indirectly pinned 17.3 million people into forced labor in 2021 (International Labour Organization, 2022). This is equivalent to enslaving a country roughly the size of the Netherlands (United Nations, 2022).

On the better end of the spectrum, Grameen Bank received the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize for pioneering work in microfinancing. These small, long-term loans made credit accessible to the “poorest of the poor” (NobelPrize.org, 2006). In 2023, the Bank had a borrower base of more than 10 million (Grameen Bank, 2023). This is equivalent to alleviating poverty in a country roughly the size of Greece (United Nations, 2022).

Business actions aggravate or mitigate major global issues such as inequality, poverty and sustainability. Business leaders drive these actions and thus determine the direction of their impact. Scholars assert that the field of management has much potential to help address these Grand Challenges (George et al., 2016). However, some lament that scholars are “not even trying” to engage with these critical issues (Harley and Fleming, 2021).

This Special Issue responds to the urgent call for scholarship. It aims to stimulate advances on how management education can develop leaders who are ready to tackle Grand Challenges.

## **Grand Challenges**

Grand Challenges are large-scale complex problems requiring distinct problem solving skills (George et al., 2016). They are *large scale*, involving multiple stakeholders at various levels (individuals, organizations, countries, the world). They are *complex*, traversing disciplines and dimensions (economic, social, environmental, others). These dimensions may differ across contexts and they are interconnected in ways that are not always transparent. Further adding to the complexity is *dynamism*. The kinds of dimensions involved and/or their characteristics tend to transform over time (Funke, 2010).

Scholars classify the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) as Grand Challenges. These include climate change, poverty, inequality, and ecological sustainability (George et al., 2016; Seelos et al., 2023). Businesses can create and perpetuate these complex problems (Caruana et al., 2021). But with responsible leadership, they can also craft their solutions (Alkire et al., 2020; Cezarino et al., 2022; Vedula et al., 2022).

Management education is well placed to develop and inspire leaders who can steer business organizations towards addressing Grand Challenges (Dorado et al., 2022; Hart et al., 2016; Martí, 2018).

## **Opportunities for Management Education**

Tackling Grand Challenges requires responsible leaders who are capable complex problem solvers. The characteristics of Grand Challenges provide direction on the relevant outcomes for management education.

Grand Challenges are **complex**. This requires leaders who have both insight and foresight: insight on the nature of the complex problems, and foresight on how they may change over time.

Grand Challenges are **dynamic**. This requires leaders who are adaptable and flexible. They are mindful that complex problem solving involves constantly redefining goals, reconsidering obstacles, and remapping steps to achieve mutating objectives (Funke, 2010).

Grand Challenges are **multi-dimensional**. This requires leaders who can collaborate across disciplines and contexts and negotiate competing stakeholder interests (George et al., 2016).

Management educators must thus employ novel approaches to develop the relevant leadership skills, cognition and affect needed to tackle Grand Challenges. Educators must enhance students' higher-order cognitive skills and big picture thinking (André, 2020; Porter and Córdoba, 2009; Urdan and Luoma, 2020). They must also advance capabilities to think and act across disciplinary, geographic, economic, socio-cultural, and ecological boundaries (Buckley et al., 2017; Shantz et al., 2023). Finally, they must foster champions at all levels in higher education institutions for the internalized transformation required to collectively address Grand Challenges (Kanashiro et al., 2020; Solitander et al., 2012).

## **Illustrative Questions**

We invite conceptual and empirical papers that apply quantitative or qualitative methodologies. We suggest these illustrative (and similar or related) questions:

### **On Teaching and Learning**

- How do disciplinary norms and institutions (culture, regulations, policies, others) influence the ways in which Grand Challenges are exposed, expressed and addressed across disciplines and contexts? What are the implications on teaching and learning assumptions, theories and pedagogies in management education?
- How can business and management theories (for example, international management theories) ground teaching and learning approaches?
- What instructional innovations can develop and evaluate (assess) the leadership mindset and competencies required?

### **On Management Education Scholarship**

- Given the unique nature of Grand Challenges, what management education theories, assumptions or paradigms should be questioned or advanced?
- How might we develop new management education theories to better ground leadership development?
- How does/can management education contribute to the attainment of the UN SDGs?

### **On Management Education Institutions**

- How can undergraduate, postgraduate, and executive education programs remain relevant given urgent pressures to address Grand Challenges?
- How can management educators internalize the leadership behavior required? What are the connections between what we do as educators and what our students learn? What should we ourselves be learning and why?

### ***Submission Guidelines***

We encourage potential contributors to consult with any of the Special Issue Editors to discuss paper ideas.

We also encourage participation in any of the idea and paper development workshops in the lead-up to paper submission.

All manuscripts must adhere to the guidelines of the Journal of Management Education<sup>1</sup>. Different types of articles are encouraged. Contributions will be reviewed as a cohort and all submissions will undergo a double-blind peer review process according to journal protocols. The deadline for the submission of full papers is on the 30th of August 2024.

### ***Submission Deadline***

August 2024

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<sup>1</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/author-instructions/JME>

## GUEST EDITOR PROFILES

**Sandra Alday** is Senior Lecturer and Deputy Head of the Discipline of International Business at The University of Sydney Business School. She was previously the Program Director for an undergraduate interdisciplinary program for high achievers, where she designed the curriculum to prepare students to address the Sustainable Development Goals. She currently teaches undergraduate courses on complex problems, risk, and sustainability. Her research interests are in international business networks, risk, sustainability, and management education. She is an External and Member Engagement Officer of the Academy of International Business Sustainability Shared Interest Group.

Sandra has a sustained record of excellence in teaching practice and scholarship, which has been recognized by award-giving bodies in Australia and overseas. Her scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) has been published in the *Journal of Teaching in International Business (JTIB)*, the *Journal of International Education in Business (JIEB)*, and in the *Handbook of Teaching and Learning at Business Schools: A Practice-Based Approach* (Edward Elgar Publishing).

Sandra has served as co-editor for special issues of the *Journal of Risk Research* and the *Risk Analysis* journal. She is an Associate Editor of the *Journal of Management Education (JME)* and regularly reviews for the *Journal of International Management (JIM)*, the *British Journal of Management (BJM)*, the *Journal of International Education in Business (JIEB)*, and for academic conferences including the *Academy of Management (AOM)*, *Academy of International Business (AIB)*, and the *Management and Organizational Behavior Teaching Society (MOBTS)*.

**Allan Bird** is Special Professor College of Business, Rikkyo University (Japan) and Visiting Professor at the Goa Institute of Management (India). Prior to his arrival at GIM, he was the Associate Vice President for International Affairs at Pacific University. From 2009 to 2019, he was the Darla and Frederick Brodsky Trustee Professor in Global Business at Northeastern University. Previously, he was the Ei'ichi Shibusawa-Seigo Arai Professor of Japanese Studies and also served as Director of the International Business Institute and Director of the International MBA program in the College of Business at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. He has authored, co-authored or edited 9 books, 70 refereed journal articles, and 45 book chapters. His articles and commentaries have appeared in leading scholarly outlets, including the *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Strategic Management Journal*, *Journal of World Business*, *Academy of Management Executive*, and the *Academy of Management Learning & Education*.

Allan has published 17 journal articles related to business education that touch upon issues involving pedagogies, course development and design, and program development, design, and assessment. He chaired the Teaching Committee in the International Management Division of the Academy of Management and has served as Chair of the International Business Education Track at the Academy of International Business annual meetings. He was the co-founder and inaugural chair of the Consortium for Undergraduate International Business Education (CUIBE).

Allan currently serves as Reviewing Editor at the *Journal of International Business Studies* and has served on the Editorial Review Boards of *Advances in Global Leadership*, *AIB Insights*, the *Journal of International Business Studies*, the *Journal of World Business*, the *Journal of Business Research*, the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Management*. He is on the Advisory Council of the *Harvard Business Review*. He has served as an Area Editor for the *Journal of Cross-*

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Cultural and Strategic Management as well as Deputy Editor of that journal from 2017 to 2019. In 2009 he co-edited a special issue of the Journal of Cross-Cultural Management. And in 2021 he co-edited a special issue of AIB Insights on “Teaching international business responsibly.”

**John Dilyard** is a retired Professor from St. Francis College, Brooklyn, New York, who has served in the Management & Information Technology and Interdisciplinary Studies Departments and was co-director of the Environmental Studies Program. He has taught a range of courses in international business, finance, and sustainable business. He is widely published and has presented his work addressing the relationships between international business, technology, climate change, poverty alleviation, and the sustainable development goals. His current research interests include the importance of supply chains in promoting and achieving sustainable development and what governance structures in multinational enterprises are best suited for sustainability. He is actively involved in the Academy of International Business, the European International Business Academy, the Columbia Center for Sustainable International Investment, and United Nations Sustainable Development Network (UNSDN).

John regularly serves as a panelist on issues associated with education and sustainability, including one entitled “Interconnected and Indivisible: Strengthening post-secondary education for sustainable development with interdisciplinary ideas” sponsored by the SDG Academy and hosted by the International Conference on Sustainable Development.

He was an editor for a special issue of AIB: Insights and Guest Editor (with Caroline Witte) of a special issue entitled “The Contribution of Multinational Enterprises to the Sustainable Development Goals” in *Transnational Corporations*. He is a regular reviewer of papers for the Academy of International Business, as well as such journals as *The Journal of International Business*, the *Thunderbird International Business Review*, the *Journal of Eastern European and Central Asian Studies*, and the *International Journal of Emerging Markets*.

**Daria Panina** is a Clinical Associate Professor in the Management Department of Mays Business School of Texas A&M University. She teaches international business and management courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels and leads multiple Business Study Abroad programs. She does research in the areas of global mindset, global competencies, and international business teaching and learning. Daria is a member of the Academy of International Business (AIB) and chairs the AIB Teaching and Education Shared Interest Group.

Daria was a Guest Editor (with A. Bird and W. Newburry) of the Special Issue on Responsibilities of Educators in International Business, of *Academy of International Business Insights*, vol.20(1), 2020. She is currently a Guest Editor of a Special issue of *The Journal of Teaching in International Business* on Teaching Innovations in the Field of International Business (with M. Dieleman, A. Silenskyte, K. Linden, and M. Fletcher). Daria has contributed to multiple publications focused on teaching in the areas of management and international business, such as *Handbook of Research on Cross-Cultural Business Education*, *The Palgrave Handbook of Learning and teaching International Business and Management*, *Developments in Virtual Learning Environments and the Global Workplace*, and *The X-Culture Open-Source Handbook of Global Virtual Collaboration*. She serves on the Editorial Review Boards of the *European Journal of International Business* and the *Academy of International Business Insights*.



**Shasha Zhao** is Associate Professor of International Business and Innovation in the Department of Strategy and International Business, Surrey University Business School. She is an Associate of the Centre for International Business and Development at Sussex University, was a Visiting Research Fellow at Sussex University Business School, a Sustainability Fellow at the Institute for Sustainability at University of Surrey, and Member of the Africa-Asia Sustainability Research Centre at University of Aberdeen. She is widely published in a range of sustainability, business and management, and education journals including the Journal of World Business, International Business Review, the Asia Pacific Journal of Management, Human Resource Management Journal, the International Marketing Review, Critical Perspectives on International Business, Thunderbird International Business Review, and the Journal of Teaching in International Business.

Shasha is very passionate about the impact of international business research and teaching on sustainable development. She is Co-Founder and Co-Chair of the Academy of International Business Sustainability Shared Interest Group which promotes international business and sustainability research and education.

Shasha has served as guest editor for several special issues in academic journals including the International Business Review, Asian Business and Management, AIB Insights, and Critical Perspectives on International Business. She is Deputy Editor of Asian Business and Management and Senior Editor of European Journal of International Management, an active editorial review board member of Management International Review, Asia Pacific Journal of Management, among others.

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