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Just old wine in new bottles?
Conceptual shifts in the emerging field of responsible management

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Responsible Management Responsible Managers Managing Responsibly	While responsible management increasingly consolidates as a field of study, the question about the identity of this emerging field arises. Are there novel conceptual themes or is it all just 'old wine in new bottles'? In this paper I propose a non-exclusive list of three conceptual shifts distinguishing responsible management from related discussions: A first shift moves the corporate sustainability, CSR, and business ethics discussions from the organizational to the individual level of the responsible manager and of her processes of managing responsibly. A second shift moves the responsible management learning and education discussion's focus on academic practices to managerial practices. A third shift moves the discussion centered on responsible leaders, social entrepreneurs, ethics officers, or environmental managers, from unique specialized managers to every 'normal' mainstream responsible manager. In summary, the field of responsible management studies the integration of sustainability, responsibility, and ethics (SRE) into the managerial practice(s) of 'normal' managers. The conceptual shifts not only delineate the responsible management discussion, but also imply a potentially synergetic connection to related fields such as micro-CSR, humanistic management, and to the professionalization of management discussion.

Just Old Wine in New Bottles?

A field of research and publication is emerging which centers on responsible management as a type of management that integrates sustainability, responsibility, and ethics into managerial practice(s) (Laasch & Conaway, 2015). This discussion features prominent contributions in mainstream journals like Harvard Business Review (Abrams, 1951; Prahalad, 2010) as well as vivid discussion in specialist journals, most prominently the Journal of Business Ethics (Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2013; Hilliard, 2013; Laasch, Moosmayer, Antonacopoulou, & Schaltegger, 2017; Nonet, Kassel, & Meijs, 2016). Various edited volumes (Buckingham & Venkataraman, 2016; Sharma, Csuri, & Ogunyemi, 2017), monographs (Ennals, 2014; Ogunyemi, 2012), full-blown textbooks (Haski-Leventhal, 2018; Laasch & Conaway, 2015, 2016), and even a responsible management research handbook have been published (Laasch, Jamali, Freeman, & Suddaby, 2019).[1]

All of these publications share an explicit reference to responsible management, but what's new? We have discussed topics of social and environmental responsibility and business ethics for almost 100 years (Donham, 1927a, b; Follett, 1927). The field of responsible management education has been flourishing for over a decade (e.g. Alcaraz & Thiruvattal, 2010; PRME, 2007; Waddock, Rasche, Werhane, & Unruh, 2010). We know much about responsible leadership (e.g. Lawrence & Beamish, 2012; Maak & Pless, 2006; Stahl & De Luque, 2014; Waldman & Siegel, 2008) and about the work of specialized professionals, such as ethics officers, environmental managers, and CSR managers (e.g. Adobor, 2006; Chaudhri, 2016; Friedman, 1992; Morf, Schumacher, & Vitell, 1999). Is there anything novel that distinguishes

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[1] See http://responsiblemanagement.net/responsible-management-literature-list/ for a continuously updated list of publications making explicit reference to responsible management.

the emerging responsible management discussion from these important streams of research, or is it just old wine in new bottles?

Conceptual Shifts Distinguishing the Responsible Management Discussion

The main argument of this paper is that the responsible management discussion has at least three distinctive characteristics illustrated in Figure 1. First, responsible management is distinct from *corporate* social responsibility, sustainable *business*, and social *enterprise* discussions as it moves the unit of analysis from the organizational level to the individual, group, and processual levels of responsible manager(s) and of managing responsibly. Secondly, responsible management is distinct from the responsible management *education* discussion, as it explicitly focusses on managerial practices outside the academic context. Third, responsible management is distinct from the study of specialized professionals, such as CSR managers or ethics officers, and from salient responsible leaders or social entrepreneurs. It is primarily interested in 'normal' mainstream managers' efforts to manage responsibly. In the following brief sections, we will outline each shift at some detail.

Figure 1 Conceptual Shifts Characterizing the Field of Responsible Management Research

1. Organizational →**Individual**

A first shift moves the *corporate* sustainability, CSR, and *business* ethics discussions from the organizational to the individual level of the responsible manager and of her processes of managing responsibly.

2. Academic →**Managerial**

A second shift moves the responsible management *learning and education* discussion's focus on *academic* practices to managerial practices of managing responsibly.

3. Specialization →**Mainstream**

A third shift moves the discussion centered on responsible leaders, social entrepreneurs, ethics officers, or environmental managers, from unique specialized managers to every 'normal' mainstream responsible manager.

The field of responsible management studies the integration of SRE into managerial practice(s) of 'normal' managers.

From Organizational to Individual and Processual Focus. There was a discussion of responsible management long before we talked about business sustainability, responsibility, and ethics (Laasch, 2016). As early as the 1920s, Wallace B. Donham, Harvard Business School's second dean highlighted an idealistic image of managers' social role and responsibility (Donham, 1927a, b). The same year, iconic management pioneer Mary Parker-Follett (1927) envisioned management as a profession with a key role in society's welfare through the efficient provision of needed goods. Such early calls for responsible management were echoed further by aspirational descriptions of the responsibility of the business man in the 1950s (Acquier, Gond, & Pasquero, 2011; Bowen, 1953), with a genuine concern for "management's responsibilities in a complex world" (Abrams, 1951). Even centuries before, ideals of responsible management have outlined responsible management conduct locally, such as Germany's 'honorable merchant' ('ehrbarer Kaufmann' in German) (Beschorner & Hajduk, 2015; Schwalbach, 2016; Schwalbach & Klink, 2012).

However, in the 1960s a consensus emerged that management was failing to fulfill its societal role and to act responsibly (Donham, 1962). In the 1970s, such behavior was further normalized by Milton Friedman's (1970) normative claim that managers should not engage into social responsibility and may therefore be expected to be irresponsible (Armstrong, 1977). Shifting attention from the individual to the organizational level, 40 years followed of construction of an eclectic research field discussing responsible organizations instead of managers. Prominent examples are the fields of *corporate* social responsibility, *corporate* citizenship, *corporate* sustainability, social *enterprise*, and *business* ethics (Carroll, 1999; Montiel, 2008; Schwartz & Carroll, 2008). Labels vary for this *business* and society field (Schwartz & Carroll, 2008), but the organizational level focus is apparent also in main

journal titles, such as, *Business* & Society, *Organization* and Environment, and the Journal of *Business* Ethics. Although the Academy of Management's Social Issues in *Management* (SIM) division's name would suggest otherwise, also here the main focus is organizational (Walsh, Weber, & Margolis, 2003).[2]

These discussions have produced considerable achievements for the institutionalization of sustainability, responsibility, and ethics and for their promotion on an organizational level. However, related discussions, while not denying the importance of sustainable, responsible, and ethical management, appear to have distracted from the original concern for the *individual* manager and her processes of managing responsibly (Schneider, Zollo, & Manocha, 2010). In a first conceptual move, the responsible management discussion distinguishes itself from such organization-level discussions, by its explicit focus on the individual and processual aspects of responsible managers and management. The emerging responsible management discussion puts "The Responsible Manager" front and center (Prahalad, 2010), for instance, by focusing on managers' "human nature" (Ogunyemi, 2012). It highlights processes and practices (Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2013; Palazzo & Wentland, 2011) of "managing responsibly" (Buckingham & Venkataraman, 2016; Sharma et al., 2017), across managerial occupations (Laasch & Conaway, 2015).

From Academic to Managerial Practices. Since the beginning of the new millennium, criticism of business schools has emerged, highlighting our failure to educate responsible managers, even fostering irresponsible management (Amann, Pirson, Dierksmeier, Von Kimakowitz, & Spitzeck, 2011; Ghoshal, 2005; Khurana, 2010; Wang, Malhotra, & Murnighan,

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[2] Ironically, Milton Friedman's (1970) observation that organizational responsibility was nonsense, as "only people can have responsibilities", supports the study of responsible management over that of responsible organizations.

2011). Accordingly, it is not further surprising that much of the last decade's efforts at strengthening responsible management have evolved in the context of business school-related initiatives. Arguably, the largest initiative is the United Nations led Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) network with over 700 signatories worldwide. Also, accreditations agencies such as EQUIS' emphasize the importance of SER (standing for sustainability, ethics, responsibility), as do individual initiatives like the managerial oath projects (De Bruin, 2016; Khurana, 2010; Khurana & Nohria, 2008).

The related discussion not only covers practices of educating managers for sustainability, responsibility and ethics (Forray & Leigh, 2012; Rasche & Gilbert, 2015). It also addresses a wide variety of other practices in the academic realm, such as (hidden) curriculum design (e.g. Blasco, 2012), examining students (e.g. Carteron, Haynes, & Murray, 2014), and faculty development (e.g. Solitander, Fougère, Sobczak, & Herlin, 2011). As a consequence, most of the research in the larger responsible management learning and education field has been directed towards a wealth of academic practices, but there is very little research on responsible management practices (Laasch, 2017).[3]

This kind of academic navel gazing puts the effectiveness of responsible management education in question: How can we believe to be able to teach students to become responsible managers, if we do not know what makes a responsible manager and have very limited knowledge about the processes and practices of managing responsibly? Accordingly, there is a need for the responsible management field to emancipate itself from its origin in the education

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[3] See http://responsiblemanagement.net/literature-base/ for a continuously updated list of publications in the responsible management *learning and education* discussion.

field. We need more research to start studying responsible *management* practice(s) 'in the wild',

in businesses, managerial workplaces, and through the eyes of practicing responsible managers.[4]

Therefore, the second move of this paper is to provide a line of delineation and to aid in

an emancipation of responsible management as a managerial field from its origins in academic

and educational practices. This means to talk about responsible management, without having to

automatically imply an educational or academic link. Accordingly, most pioneering responsible

management publications study responsible management in 'working life' (Ennals, 2014),

interested in particular workplace-related aspects such as incentive systems or productivity

(Hilliard, 2013), and by paying particular attention to responsibility-relevant constructs like

dignity in the managerial job (Davila-Gomez & Crowther, 2012). Importantly, some responsible

management publications have started studying learning in the managerial job without having to

rely on the 'crutch' of formal education and academic practices (Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2013;

Laasch et al., 2017). Others are still located on the boundary between responsible management

and responsible management education, for instance, in the case of Nonet et al. (2016), who

study definitions of responsible management through the eyes of students.

From Specialized to Mainstream Management. There is a wide variety of valuable individual-

level discussions related to responsible practice(s) in the managerial workplace. These

discussions fit well into the domain of responsible management implied by the first two shifts

described above. Discussions include, among others, responsible leadership (Gond, Igalens,

Swaen, & El Akremi, 2011; Lawrence & Beamish, 2012; Pless, Maak, & Stahl, 2011; Waldman

& Siegel, 2008); social entrepreneurship (e.g. Dees, 1998; Ridley-Duff, Bull, & Laasch, 2015;

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[4] Practice(s) here should be understood both ways, in the wide sense of practicing responsible management, as something that is done (praxis), or more specifically to the study of responsible management through the lens of theories of practice (Gherardi, 2012; Schatzki, 1996; Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012).

Seelos & Mair, 2004; Simms, 2009; Siqueira, Ramos, Kelly, Mnisri, & Kassouf, 2015); and specialized environmental managers, ethics officers, or CR managers (Chaudhri, 2016; Cordano & Frieze, 2000; Morf et al., 1999; Osagie, Wesselink, Blok, Lans, & Mulder, 2016). However, all of these discussions describe responsible management practice(s) of somehow 'special' managers. For instance, formal leaders are special as they are often positioned in particularly powerful positions in the organizational hierarchy, or gain power through their followership. Social entrepreneurs, CSR managers, environmental managers, ethics officers, and the like are 'specialized' responsible managers with their main job being centered on sustainability, responsibility, and ethics (Laasch & Conaway, 2015). They are sometimes labelled as sustainability, responsibility, or ethics 'professionals' (Bootsma & Vermeulen, 2011; Visser & Crane, 2010; Willard et al., 2010).

Responsible management, however, has a stronger focus on the 'normal' manager who practices sustainability, responsibility, and ethics as part of their job in one of the 'mainstream' managerial occupations like marketing or accounting (Child, 2015; Laasch & Conaway, 2015; Maon, Swaen, & Lindgreen, 2010; Smith & Lenssen, 2010). Responsible management aims at making management responsible by deeply integrating SRE into every and any manager's job, leading to a focus on such 'mainstream managers', all of them, not the (self-) chosen few responsible leaders, social entrepreneurs, and environmental managers. The resulting third move of responsible management is to refocus on the large number of 'normal' mainstream managers and on their efforts of managing responsibly, by integrating sustainability, responsibility, and ethics into their practice(s).

Conclusions and Discussion: Connecting to Related Streams of Research

Summarizing the three conceptual shifts and differentiators outlined in this short working paper we can outline our field of study as follows: *Responsible management studies the integration of sustainability, responsibility, and ethics (SRE) into the managerial practice(s) of 'normal' managers.*

Each of the three conceptual shifts contained in this brief definition not only imply delineations from existing fields of study, but also imply potential synergies with related discussions. For instance, the move from organizational level to managerial level has much in common with the vivid discussion of micro-CSR (e.g. Dillon, 2014; Glavas, 2016; Gond, El Akremi, Swaen, & Babu, 2017; Maak, Pless, & Voegtlin, 2015). The second shift from academic to managerial practices has much in common with the humanistic management discussion (e.g. Dierksmeier, 2016; Laasch et al., 2018; Lawrence & Pirson, 2015; Melé, 2003; Spitzeck, 2011), dominantly focused on management practices in a business context, not on educational practices. The third shift from specialized to mainstream management relates strongly to efforts of management professionalization, implying the institutionalization of a widespread institutionalization of responsible management conduct for any manager (e.g. Khurana, 2010; Khurana & Nohria, 2008; Laasch & Moosmayer, 2016; Muzio, Brock, & Suddaby, 2013; Trank & Rynes, 2003).

Of course, these connections to salient streams of literature are not intended to be an exhaustive list. They rather are exemplifications meant to inspire readers' further reflection on the interconnectedness of the emerging field of responsible management with other promising discussions.

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