

# A posthumanist research agenda on sustainable and responsible management education after the pandemic

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to explore how posthumanism can contribute towards reframing responsible management education (RME) after the pandemic. Ethics has been a growing concern in management education for some time now, but the need to acknowledge the limitations and side effects of the global economy and the interdependences between biological and societal systems has come to the forefront in dramatic fashion during the pandemic.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Posthumanism proposes moving beyond traditional dichotomies such as nature-culture and social-material to introduce a relational epistemology in which attention is focused on local sociomaterial entanglements. This also introduces a new moral posture that is not based on formal principles but on a strong commitment to assembling the world and a capacity to cultivate response-abilities. As far as responsible management is concerned, it means moving the focus from managers to managing practices.

**Findings** – The contribution casts an original and critical eye on the reframing of RME and encourages a movement towards a “decolonisation” of educational methodologies. Posthumanist research acknowledges that pedagogical practices are the loci power relations and inclusion or exclusion come into play and are inscribed in the materiality of education, in the sense of objects as well as human bodies. Then, by applying on the author’s experience as teacher, the paper provides inputs for developing a posthumanist research agenda for RME after the pandemic.

**Originality/value** – The contribution uses posthuman lens to explore RME and develops an original research agenda starting from the author’s teaching practices.

**Keywords** Practice, Research agenda, Posthumanism, RME

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a growing attention to the environmental and social consequences associated with business practices emphasis and consequently an emphasis on the need to strengthen the ethical dimension of management education (Painter-Morland, 2015). This issue has emerged as a consequence of increasing irresponsible management practices on the part of business actors in neo-liberal times (Mintzberg and Laasch, 2020). In this regard, management education has been blamed for being part of the problem



(Painter-Morland, 2015). For some observers, the specific epistemological assumptions of management education are rooted in an instrumental approach based on a utilitarian premise that has it that the final aim is not to deliver a service for the benefit of society or the public good (Buchholz and Rosenthal, 2008; Starkey and Tempest, 2009).

The concept of responsible management education (RME) (Waddock *et al.*, 2010; Haertle *et al.*, 2017) appeared in an attempt to reverse the situation and show that management education is not part of the problem, but can prepare students for more sustainable and responsible futures (Nonet *et al.*, 2016; Arevalo and Mitchel, 2017). RME implies the integration of responsibility, sustainability and ethics in management and business education typically by introducing related topics in courses which did not address these areas (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015). The term emerges with some international initiatives and in particular the UN Principles for Responsible Management Education and the Global Compact, both of which set out a decalogue of principles for introducing responsibility in university management programmes and in business (Forray and Leigh, 2012). The tendency has been to identify general principles that might provide a reference framework on the basis of which programmes and activities can be developed. As observers have claimed, the definition, implementation and observation of those principles are not straightforward, and it may even introduce a decoupling between the academic discourse on responsible management and actual academic practices (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015).

Moreover, emergent anthropocenic challenges require new approaches and methodologies. In this regard, the recent pandemic has abruptly provided us with an exceptional new framework in which the question of sustainability and responsibility are not merely external subjects to be taught in university programmes, but have become ordinary issues that have entered the everyday lives of all of us (Bensaude-Vincent, 2020). The need to acknowledge the interdependencies between biological and societal systems has come to the forefront in the recent pandemic in dramatic fashion, alongside the obligation to accept the limitations and side-effects of the global economy (Bensaude-Vincent, 2020). So how the discussion on responsibility, sustainability and ethics in management education can be reconfigured to better face anthropocenic challenges?

The aim of this article is twofold. On the one hand, it invites a consideration of how posthumanism can offer a better way of reframing RME. In recent times, it has invited to undertake a radical reframing of traditional ontologies and epistemologies to take on anthropocenic challenges. To do so, it will be necessary to travel across different disciplinary boundaries – from gender studies to organisation and education studies – to be able to account for how posthumanism reconfigures each term of the concept of “responsible management education”. This will make it possible to identify posthuman lenses based on relational epistemology, managing practices – instead of management – and diffractive educational methodologies. On the other hand, a research agenda will be outlined for initiating posthumanist education in academic management programs. This will be achieved by taking a posthumanist view of some contextual educational practices.

The paper is organised as follows. In Sections 2–4, I will introduce posthumanism as epistemology and its influence on management and education studies. Section 5 will provide elements of the empirical inquiry. In Section 6, I develop the specific point of a posthumanist education research agenda.

## **2. Posthumanist epistemology or the power of engaging with ordinary material-relational practices**

In this session, I introduce what posthumanism is about and how it challenges anthropocenic visions of society, and in particular how sustainability and responsibility are viewed from this philosophical perspective.

The term posthumanism is mainly based on the work of feminists and major works by Donna Haraway (1991, 2008) and Braidotti (2013) and was developed further by other authors (Alaimo, 2016; Fox and Alldred, 2020). It is a reaction to what is considered to be the humanistic basis of our anthropocentric societies. In this regard, one recognizes the origins of posthumanism in postmodernist and poststructuralist thinking and their critique of the human as autonomous subject and of universal and enlightened agent. The search for other positions in the relationship between the human and the world is visible in the poststructuralist postures – of anti-humanism and of “the end of Man” – as well as in the posthumanist thinking – with its projection towards “after the man” (Braidotti, 2013; Herbrechter, 2020). Posthumanism is not a monolithic position; rather, it embraces different sensibilities and approaches. We can speak of posthumanism (Braidotti, 2013), feminist new materialism (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008; Lenz Taguchi, 2011) or of a decolonial critique (Zembylas, 2018). What these different sensibilities share is criticism of a concept of society based on the primacy of human exceptionalism and the white male human, which has led to the degenerative consequences of today’s “immoral” neo-liberal practices, the exclusion of “others” – other-than-white, other-than-rich, other-than-male or with disabilities – and an instrumental attitude towards environmental resources.

At the centre of posthumanist criticism is the dualistic framework on which the humanistic perspective is grounded. The dualistic approach between human and nature is particularly evident in utilitarian attitudes to environmental resources. This separation is under attack today, as it provides a false framework for understanding and tackling contemporary social phenomena (Alaimo, 2016; Latour, 2018). At the heart of posthumanist discourse lies the central idea that our existence as humans is closely interdependent with that of non-humans (other beings as well as technologies) (Braidotti, 2013). This implies the introduction of a relational epistemology (Law, 1994) which sees knowing as based on the mutual reciprocity among different beings. The grounding idea of a relational epistemology is that the knowing subject and the object of knowledge are not separated but mutually entangled in a process of becoming-with (Haraway, 2008). These interconnections become clear if we look at the effects of climate change, the effect of human actions on biodiversity and the recent spread of the COVID-19 virus. The focus is thus on processes of mutual interdependence between humans and other-than-humans, on intra-actions (Barad, 2007) – instead of inter-activity, which would imply the separation of pre-existing entities – and on new materialistic transcorporeal approaches (Alaimo, 2016). In this regard, Barad (2007) refers to posthumanism as an onto-epistemology, whereby it is not possible to separate the knowing from the being.

The relational onto-epistemology introduced by posthumanism also bears a specific moral vision whereby ethics is not connected to abstract principles. It is rather embedded in sociomaterial entanglements – that is made of heterogeneous material such as humans, non-humans, technologies and other objects – and “rooted in the ordinary micro-practices of everyday life” (Braidotti, 2006, p. 278). Attention to ordinary gestures also defines a new moral posture based on a strong commitment to the assembling the world and in the capacity of cultivating response-abilities. The term “response-ability” refers to a person’s ethical sensitivity and the ability to respond accordingly. Haraway defines “response-ability” as “cultivating collective knowing and doing” (Haraway, 2016, p. 34). In this view, ethics does not refer to general principles; rather, it is connected to local assemblages and therefore always context specific. In this sense, sustainability is not conceived as a “matter of fact” – as formulated in principles, policies, scientific data or technological solutions. It even goes beyond being a “matter of concern” (Latour, 2004) or political debate to become a matter of care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011) and of an ethical commitment.

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In this session posthumanism was introduced as paradigmatic change in social theory. It affirms a relational posture of non-separateness of the human beings from other beings and materialities and an idea of responsibility as embedded in ordinary gestures and in the capacity to respond. In Section 3, we will see how the recent encounter between posthumanism and management studies has brought to a new understanding of management and responsible management.

### 3. A posthumanist approach to responsible management: from the power of principles to *managing practices*

As we noted at the beginning of this contribution, the drive towards responsible management has been inspired by the formulation of general principles that should guide towards more ethical behaviours. However, this way of framing management is centred around a cognitivist approach to management that focuses on an individualistic and voluntaristic vision of organisational phenomena. This mirrors the specific position of RME in the literature, which is focused on what managers should do and the specific skills they should acquire (Nonet *et al.*, 2016).

This stance has recently been criticised by scholars, who see the “practice” as an alternative to a cognitive understanding of organisational life. The practice turn has acted in fact as a central pathway towards a different understanding of organisations which are not reducible to organizational actors and their will. Organisational phenomena are rather conceived as specific local entanglements or *agencements* (Gherardi, 2019a) of different materials – both human and non-human. Despite the heterogeneous nature of the studies (Gherardi, 2019a; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2015; Orlikowski, 2009; Schatzki *et al.*, 2001), the practice turn has outlined an epistemology of non-separateness of theory and practice and a theory of knowledge in which doing and knowing are not separate. Here, a practice epistemology reconnects with a posthumanist understanding of the non-separateness of human actors from materials (in the sense of not only technologies and artefacts, but also bodies). The practice turn has made a fundamental contribution to management studies in reframing organisations as processes of organising in which the unit of analysis is organisational practices (Gherardi, 2019a). More specifically for the purposes of this article, the fundamental contribution of the practice turn in management studies is the idea of moving attention away from what managers do to look instead at *managing practices*. This means that the focus should be on a more complex understanding of organisations, not just as being populated and enacted by managers/leaders but as situated interactions between human and non-human actors.

The understanding of organisations as processes and practices has also specific ethical implications. As Gherardi (2019b) has recently shown, practices are not only the *loci* where organising takes place but also the places where ethical issues arise and can be solved. The question of ethics is therefore posed differently from how it was described at the beginning of this contribution. It does not rely on principles or moral prescriptions of conduct that leaders or organisations (such as business schools) should follow, but on the choices and values associated with and inscribed in practices. Responsible management is re-framed here as the need to move away from what leaders or managers do – or should do – to concentrate more on the level of the practice and to look at *how* things – tasks, activities – are done (Gherardi, 2019b; Clegg *et al.*, 2007, Milani Price *et al.*, 2020). What matters then is not how managers behave or should behave, but rather how *managing* – as a verb – is accomplished in local practices. The association of ethics with managing practices becomes thus relevant as the attention moves to the way in which actors make judgments in specific

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contextual situations while accomplishing their tasks. Practices are therefore the context in which values are generated and performed.

In this section, we have seen that according to a posthuman paradigm practices are the *locus* of organising and of ethical/responsible management. But, one may ask, what are the implications of a posthuman vision in management education? How should the question of responsibility be framed in educational programmes and pedagogical interventions? What kind of programme might help students learn about practicing responsible management and work? To explore this issue further, we will look at the contribution of education studies towards embracing posthumanism.

#### 4. Posthumanist education or the decolonisation of methodologies

Educational studies embraced posthumanist thinking very early on as a way of reacting to neo-liberal utilitarian approaches to education whereby “economic instrumentalism and measurement imperatives are conditioning teaching, learning and the student experience in higher education” (Taylor, 2017, p. 420). In reaction to this, a need to “decolonise” education has been expressed as an urgent matter (Sund and Pashby, 2018; Bayley, 2018; Taylor, 2017; Lenz Taguchi, 2011; Battiste, 2017; Smith, 2021), also in view of facing anthropogenic challenges. The term “decolonising” as used here means emancipating education from the neoliberal *esprit* that has forged pedagogical theories and contemporary education methods as a whole, and not management education alone. Posthumanist education studies claim that neoliberalism has had a powerful effect on education through marketization processes which frame students as consumers, without making any commitment to social and ethical issues (Molesworth *et al.*, 2011; Ransome, 2011; Taylor, 2017).

The appropriation of posthuman philosophy by educational studies has gone hand in hand with a questioning of (pedagogical as well as research) methods (St. Pierre, 2011; Lather and St. Pierre, 2013). Lenz Taguchi (2011) highlights the extent to which established pedagogical approaches have been centred around so-called “humanistic values” and logocentric approaches, where the centre is the learner and their individual cognitive capacities and their state of separation from the external environment. What characterises a humanistic framework is the affirmation of a pedagogic posture independent of racial or sexual differences. Informed by the work of Barad (2007), Lenz Taguchi proposes a relational materialistic approach (2020, 2012) as a new methodological sensitivity centred around the idea of taking materiality into account in learning processes, materiality being taken to mean both objects and our own materiality – our bodies. A posthumanist sensibility is proposed as a way of overcoming hierarchies between humans and matters. Learning and subjectivity happen through embodiment in the world and being part of the world on equal terms with humans and others (living organisms as well as materialities) (Lenz Taguchi, 2011). According to Taylor (2017), posthumanism has provided educational studies with the tools to treat the fundamental question of materiality in teaching and learning. While materiality has always been central for the discipline, the tools for analysing it were missing (Taylor, 2017).

Lenz Taguchi’s (2012) reflections have developed around the difference between reflexivity and critical reflection on the one hand and diffraction on the other. The term diffraction comes from physics and indicates the superposition or interference of waves. It was first used by Haraway (1997), and was then developed further by Barad (2007). Diffraction is the result of the interferences that take place when an original wave partly stays the same and partly transforms when meeting an obstacle. Thinking diffractively means taking account of interferences between ideas and other materials in the process of knowing and becoming of a phenomenon. In Lenz Taguchi’s words, “diffractive analysis

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constitutes an alternative methodology to critical reflection” (Lenz Taguchi, 2012, p. 268). Whereas in a critical reflexive posture there is an independent subject that is the *locus* of reflection, in a diffractive framework the subject and object are not separated or independent, but are seen from the standpoint of their mutual entanglement. As Barad claims, “unlike methods of reading one text or set of ideas against another where one set serves as a fixed frame of reference, diffraction involves reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge: how different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how these exclusions matter” (Barad, 2007, p. 30). In this sense, diffraction is a way of challenging binary thinking, and looking instead at what emerges from relational materialistic interferences.

But how should the value of difference (as opposed to a politics of same-ness that is purged from what is specific, particular and emergent) be cultivated, and how can we “decolonise the higher education curriculum” (Taylor and Bayley, 2019, p. 12)? According to Taylor, a diffractive methodology would start out by focusing on the pedagogical practices that are the place where power relations, discrimination, inclusion or exclusion are in play. Barad (2007) claims that phenomena and identities are not pre-existing, but are generated in discursive-material entanglements. And it is only in so-called “agential cuts” (Barad, 2007), which are momentary stabilizations of a phenomenon, that it is possible to separate one entity from another, to establish boundaries. In “agential cuts” it is possible to identify what is inside and outside phenomena. It is also through “agential cuts” that it becomes possible to account for the choices that are made, the specific power relations that frame an action and what is excluded from it: in other words, where things come to matter. Lastly, diffractive thinking and pedagogies also open up a path to a diversification of methodologies and the need to move away from representational approaches to more presentational and participatory methodologies of confrontation and simulation, art-based practices and ecosomatics (Clavel *et al.*, 2019). Despite their divergences, what all these methods have in common is that they are praxis-oriented pedagogies (Taylor and Ulmer, 2020). The intention behind using these methodological approaches is not to stand back from abstract concepts, but to stimulate students’ capacity to formulate their own judgments on values and power relations and to cultivate response-abilities (Haraway, 2016).

## 5. Elements of the research inquiry

In the previous sections, I have deconstructed and revised all the terms that constitute the concept of sustainable and RME through posthumanist lenses:

- Posthumanism proposes a new relational onto-epistemology in which sustainability and responsibility are not given concepts or expressed in abstract principles, but are tied to everyday sociomaterial assemblages, which are the *loci* of an ethical and political mattering.
- Responsible management is not understood as what managers do; rather, it designates the values and choices that are mobilised in managing practices.
- A posthuman pedagogy hints at decolonising education by working with diffractive methodologies.

In Sections 6.1–6.4, I use those inputs as starting point for sketching out some elements of what I call a posthumanist research agenda for responsible management education at university. How can these elements guide us to reconfigure RME at a university campus level, and how can they inform concrete actions? Where should such an agenda start from to

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free educational and management practices from humanistic and colonial frameworks? What elements should be part of it?

The idea that inspires me in this endeavour is not how to bring the world, with its sustainability and responsibility issues, into university classrooms, but to consider university campus as the world (Sund and Pashby, 2018). So, the intent with outlining a research agenda is not to provide a “programme” or a new set of principles. The aim is rather to apply posthumanist lens on our own teaching practices to account for specific power relations and values they are made of and to suggest some new opportunities that may be offered by diffractive methods. More concretely, I have focused on my own practice as a teacher on a course in business research methods (graduate degree level) and on a course in organisational processes and leadership (undergraduate degree level) over two years: September–December 2019 and September–December 2020. Informed by the inputs I highlighted in Section 4, I have selected specific “agential cuts” (Barad, 2007) which may inform of the choices, values, possibilities as well as impossibilities connected to that practice. The selected agential cuts will allow me to raise relevant considerations connected to education practices connected to responsibility and might form the basis of a new approach to RME.

The material consists mainly of ethnographic notes collected during workshop discussions, extracts from students’ dissertations and extracts from interviews students have conducted as part of their assignments.

What these moments all relate to is students’ personal experiences of participation in management practices (either as “leaders” or “followers”) or to their experiences in academic learning. In the selected extracts matters of ethics, responsibility and choice are not pre-established or formalized in principles but emerge from the specific situations and are embedded in specific “agential cuts.” The intent was to give account of ethics and responsibility as relational endeavours and then, starting from them, to suggest alternative pedagogical approaches informed by diffractive methods.

Finally, I wish to make explicit the specific methodological posture that has guided this study and which is informed posthumanist and post-qualitative inquiry (Lather and St. Pierre, 2013). This is based on the criticism of conventional humanist qualitative methodology (St. Pierre, 2021), which focuses on pre-established research design and data analysis methods, to rather see the research process as immanent and situated and “which requires making methodology anew with each research endeavour” (Taylor, 2017, p. 322). This posture states the non-separation of the researcher by the object of the research, rather their local mutual assemblage and how researcher are engaged in the manufacturing of data. The question of methodology becomes thus a matter of methodological sensibilities (Law, 2004). This means a sensibility to the network of relations and of assemblages which may happen in the process of inquiry itself. That is what we have tried to do in this work, where the analytical principle is what this specific methodological posture produces in this specific context of inquiry (Bodén *et al.*, 2019) and how a posthuman research agenda can be imaged starting from that.

## **6. A posthumanist research agenda on sustainable and responsible management education for a university campus**

### *6.1 Students becoming with their learning process*

An initial component of the agenda would allow students’ everyday practices and personal experiences to come into play in their curriculum and learning process.

Let us consider this story:

First year undergraduate students in business administration were asked to describe some leadership practices they had experienced themselves and to describe the interactions among the different organisational actors.

In one case, a student reported a situation he had experienced when working in a supermarket in Germany, where the work was particularly affected by the newly hired manager, who was considered to be a “bad leader”: “The new manager failed to build relational connections with his employees because of the way he communicated with us. He always made sure the employees knew he was the best performer and ranked higher in the hierarchy. Additionally, his political views and sexist behaviour increased the difficulties between him and the employees. One concrete example of this was when he jokingly told a [female] employee to unbutton her shirt more, which upset the employee and other co-workers greatly.”

In this essay, the student makes reference to the employer’s political views without saying what they involved. In the oral section of the test, he was asked to elaborate on these political views and said that his boss was accustomed to making racist comments about customers, especially immigrants. I asked why he did not mention this in his essay, and he said he believed “it was not relevant to the assignment.” It happened that the student himself was from Turkey, and his manager’s comment might have affected him as well, but this personal element was deemed not to be “relevant” to the assignment. He limited himself to reporting a sexist act against a colleague and choosing a more neutral formula (“political views”) to refer to discriminatory behaviour and did not talk directly about his personal experience and how it affected him.

One might think that this situation is not unusual in academic education where what is valued is the universal and not the particular, or what is different. How could it be otherwise? Our university welcomes students from every part of the world. Their specific status as migrants, people of colour, persons with specific geographical origins or even a disability count in their experience as students. At the moment, however, these elements remain invisible in the name of a professed universalistic knowledge. Diffractive methodologies would encourage these visions and personal trajectories as starting point to elaborate ideas and to trigger a discussion on management practice, responsibility and ethics. This would be a way to explore a different kind of commitment from students in their studies. But not only. Recently, authors ([Laasch and Gherardi, 2019](#); [Gherardi and Laasch, 2021](#)) have called upon the need to overcome the “great divide” between the academic practices on responsibility (in teaching and research) and managerial practitioners’ responsible practices. They rather claim for a cross fertilization of learning processes. Attention is given on situated examples of responsible practices and on how processes of learning (ir)responsible management is done in local practices. Learning from real-life participation to managerial practices is also encouraged. In the case at stake attention could be given on how practices of irresponsible management are performed in real-situations and starting from the specific students’ standpoint.

6.2 *Material-relational methodology*

As we have seen, posthumanism sees pedagogy as sociomaterial assemblages that are also the *loci* where specific possibilities and impossibilities arise.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote digital platforms have been a powerful tool for ensuring the continuity of learning activities, but how has distance teaching affected conditions for learning under these exceptional circumstances? In the framework of a course in business research methods, students were asked to conduct interviews to other students of the same university on “How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected students’ living and studying conditions?”

The experiences testified to by the students reveal *de facto* important differences in the way distance learning has been perceived.

Some have welcome distance learning, as it has allowed them more freedom (“[Distance learning] has made my studies easier. I think it is easier now to plan my time because I do not have to travel to school. Now, for example, I can be at the gym and listen to a lecture at the same time, which makes my day more efficient”).

For others, in contrast, distance learning is seen as being more demanding for students and is experienced as a “loss” of motivation and of the collective learning experience and even as a source of depression (“My discipline has gone down the toilet. I don’t feel like I’m part of anything. Personally, I do not feel like a student anymore”).

While the available technical solutions such as Zoom has introduced new possibilities, like being able to see each other – students and teacher alike – on the screen by reconfiguring the traditional classroom configurations where the teacher is typically the only person who can see the students, in practice this possibility has translated into an impossibility, as most students prefer to keep their cameras turned off. This can cause a sense of isolation, including among teachers, who may experience a strange panoptical feeling of “being seen” without being able to “see.”

In this situation, the specific sociomaterial assemblage reinforces the gap between those (very few) students who decide to remain visible and interact and the majority – especially in the case of large groups – who remain silent and physically disappear from the on-screen class. These may include some students who use it as an opportunity to free up their time, and others who are just lost and feel isolated or depressed, and for whom distance learning means not being a student anymore. The disappearance of students’ bodies in distance learning becomes a matter of concern, not because, as we all know, the fact of showing that one is present automatically translates into an active involvement in learning activities, but because it reconfigures the sense of the collective learning experience and requires finding other ways of interacting and being involved. This is true for both students and teachers. The specific “cuts” caused by distance learning show the possibilities associated with this teaching method, while also affirming new impossibilities and even risks. The question of possibilities and impossibilities is associated with the dual option of the visibility or invisibility of physical presences enabled by the technology.

In a post-pandemic era, it is likely that distance learning will continue to be an alternative or complement to traditional classroom lectures. A diffractive methodology would make it possible to take the specific alignments of technologies, bodies and teaching programmes into account to reduce the impossibilities, and even risks, linked to distance learning. At the same time, it provides the basis to explore other ways of framing participation and involvement. The question is rather to consider pedagogy in the alignment of technologies, bodies and curricula.

### 6.3 *How things get done*

In Section 6.2, we noted how a posthumanist approach encourages a shift in focus from “what managers do?” to managing practices (Gherardi, 2019b), or in other words, “how things get done?” How can we bring students to adopt other (posthuman) lenses and what does this shift lead to?

I present a brief case in which students were asked to describe an organisational activity or problem in which they had been involved and how it was accomplished or solved among the different organisational actors. One student reported her work experience in a liquor store and how a conflict with a client was tackled.

Customer: Hi. I bought this wine a week ago, but it tasted awful, so I had to pour it away. I want to change it to something else.

Me: Oh, that’s bad! I’m sorry about that. I can change it to something else if you have some wine left in the bottle. Can I have a look at the bottle?

Customer: I poured everything away. I don’t have any wine left in the bottle.

Me: That’s hard. I really need some wine in the bottle for my supplier. Without it I won’t get a replacement.

Customer: I want to speak to your boss. You are not helpful. Where is your boss?

I called my boss and described the situation to him.

Boss: Hello, Madam!

Customer: I want a new bottle! I can’t pay for something I haven’t used. She’s refusing to help me.

Boss: She’s trying to help you but there’s not much she can do. We have rules that must be followed.

Customer: Oh, so no one wants to help me (in so many words).

My boss and I stepped aside. I said “This woman is being difficult and won’t understand, so I think we should take this bottle on good will and allocate the cost to broken goods.”

We called in another colleague and decided to allocate the bottle to our good will account.

Me: Madam, I will change your bottle, but remember to come with the bad drink next time if you want a replacement. It is usually unacceptable to replace empty bottles, but we will make an exception for you today.

Customer: Thank you so much.

This case was proposed to students the following year as an example of managing practice. Among the students' reactions to the case ("the client is always right"; "a passive leader"; someone noted the specifically non-hierarchical relations between leader and employees that was very different from the context that person was coming from) one student stood up to make the point that breaking the rule was an immoral act that would not be good for the company under any circumstances. Another student, who happened to have worked in the same sector, promptly replied that in these situations it is more costly and time-consuming for the company to deal with the customer's administrative claim than it is to make an exception to the rule and give the client a new bottle.

This short example is an interesting one, as, on the one hand, it makes students use different lenses to look at organisational phenomena in which the centre of attention is neither a manager's action nor abstract requirements, but a description of what happened in an actual situation and the interactions among the participants in that managing practice. On the other, it makes it possible to discuss how both roles and ethical positions emerge from the specific situation. In the case at hand, roles emerge from a specific organisational culture that allows employees considerable autonomy and freedom to take the initiative and where the decision to break a rule is based on a situational logic. Diffractive pedagogies encourage going beyond formal roles and abstract principles to bring students closer to "how things get done?" and to see how organising and ethics emerge from managing practices.

#### *6.4 Multiplying visions*

A final element of the proposed agenda relates to the need to multiply the visions on various phenomena. As mentioned before, neoliberal academic education is at the core of the posthumanist criticism. And the same time the claim is for a new a civic engagement to be able to tackle anthropogenic issues of ethic and responsibility (Braidotti, 2013). In this regard, the invocation of a type of knowledge and sensibility which comes from the affect is view as a way for not reproducing same-ness but to multiply the visions on contemporary matters. In this regard, Taylor calls forth "more profoundly hopeful modes of knowing – including affect, sensuousness, relationality, intuition, hap-hazard, experiment and love – which seem to offer better epistemological alternatives to the self centred arrogance of human exceptionalism and the forms of knowing – cognitive, individualised, objectivising, specular – it requires and promotes" (2019, p. 9). And it is for this reason that Braidotti (2013) proposes "a university that is seriously committed to representing today's world needs to tackle these issues by instituting trans-disciplinary areas which explore the production of knowledge in a technologically mediated world; the new relationship between the arts and sciences; and the poly-lingual realities engendered by globalization" (2013, p. 183).

What if the teachers were to come not only from the business school environment but also from other disciplines such as fine arts, or in which they are artists or activists? (Bayles, 2018). For example, environmental and posthuman humanities (Neimanis *et al.*, 2015) are an interdisciplinary field of enquiry that calls on insights and approaches from the humanities to question and raise awareness on meanings, values and ethics in contemporary society. The separation between "scientific" disciplines and the humanities is believed to reproduce the dualistic vision that it is now suggested being incapable of tackling anthropogenic issues. Other disciplines and registers can also provide alternative languages, materials and perspectives with a view to framing management education and responsibility.

Let's take tango. This couples' dance has been widely used in management studies and consultancy practices to portray a strong sense of direction and effective leadership in which the division of roles is symbolically reinforced by the sex of the actors involved: a man

leading and a woman following. More recently, the queer tango movement and literature (Batchelor *et al.*, 2021) have brought a different view to this highly stereotyped dance. What is being affirmed here is the active role of “followship” – a role that is not limited to “following” the leader – the power of coordination and mutual listening, and a situation in which the differences between roles do not reside in any hierarchical order, but are functional to the management of the space (Stridsberg *et al.*, 2021). Roles are freed from gendered identification and both are considered to be equally important. The dancing is thus a matter of reinventing and adjusting the roles and steps for each dance.

In the following example, a student chooses to use tango to describe her own work experience, after a video on tango and “the power of followship” which has been shown during a lecture in the course of organizational processes and leadership: “The dialogism is traceable in tangoing, where there exist two-way communications allowing the follower the opportunity to respond in her own unique way [. . .]. In our case (working at Sigma), our leader communicates with us not as the boss but as a co-worker. He communicates so as to assemble ideas, not to give ideas, which allows us to contribute in our own unique way to help achieve goals and work towards the mission of the organization.”

While tango offers easy images for traditional forms of management, it can also provide elements for deconstructing stereotypes and exploring other qualities of managing a dance as well as organisational processes, such reciprocity, communication, mutual interdependence and creative improvisation.

## 7. Discussion and conclusion

While RME has increasingly become an issue for management education and society, it is still difficult to say what the concept identifies and how it could be implemented. Moreover, the recent pandemic has forced us – teachers and academics in general – to rethink these matters while improvising measures to keep education ongoing and to try to deal with an unprecedented situation. Academics will not go back to “normal,” that is, to the time before the pandemic, while it is too soon to have a complete overview of the heritage of the pandemic on education. This article has sought to investigate the concept of sustainable and RME by embracing posthumanism as epistemology. Posthumanism is meant to offer a more complex sensitivity and understanding of anthropocenic matters, the pandemic is just one of its expressions. By applying a posthumanist paradigm (Braidotti, 2013; Barad, 2007), I have proposed an alternative framework that first seeks to distance itself from a humanistic understanding of RME – as anchored in formal principles – and to see it as local sociomaterial assemblages.

To do that I have proceeded to the deconstruction of each of the terms that compose “sustainable and RME” of what has become a taken for granted concept and to propose a more explorative understanding what RME may entail. As for sustainability, posthumanism introduces a relational posture of non-separateness of the human beings from other beings and materialities and an idea of responsibility as embedded in ordinary gestures. As for management, a significant feature of the posthuman paradigm is to shift

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the focus from what leaders or managers do (or what their skills are) to *managing* practices, or to move the focus on “how things get done?” Practices are the *loci* where organising happens, but they are more than just that: they are also the places where choices are made and values are mobilised. In other words, practices define specific ethical positions that are not connected to general principles or moral requirements, but to a capacity to respond, or response-abilities (Haraway, 2016). Then, I have shown how education studies have embraced a posthuman sensibility as a way of resisting contemporary colonial pedagogy based on neo-liberal and cognitive-based knowledge to develop an understanding of knowledge that is integrated and entangled in materiality. The aim of the posthumanist turn in this context is not to reproduce “sameness” (Bayley, 2018) (i.e. to reproduce a certain knowledge which is acknowledged as being as main reference), but to trigger and encourage a culture of difference. As a final step based on concrete teaching situations, I have outlined a posthumanist research agenda for RME grounded on diffractive methodologies. What is suggested not to consider sustainability and responsibility just as other “topics” to bring into classrooms – knowledge *on* sustainability – rather to consider university classrooms as the *loci* where sustainability and responsibility are performed (or not).

In this endeavour, the paper has contributed to the field of RME by proposing a posthumanist research agenda, grounded on concrete teaching experiences and based on four specific areas that might be explored: firstly, the integration of more participatory pedagogical practices that would encourage students to become involved in their learning processes with their bodies, emotions and biography. This could be done, first of all, by allowing students’ personal experiences – of persons with disabilities, of migrants, of women, of LGBTQ persons and other – to enter their pedagogical curriculum. This would encourage a culture of difference in alternative of a universalistic type of knowledge and subject. Secondly, attention goes to pedagogical practices as sociomaterial assemblages and the places where both power relations and impossibilities and values are played out. As we have seen, pedagogy is also rooted in material practices which are not neutral and have the power of including as well of excluding and therefore should be a matter of attention and concern. Thirdly, the focus should be on pedagogical methods that trigger a shift from managers to managing practices and draw attention to a situational understanding of organisational phenomena and ethics. This means to train student to a “taste for details” – rather than to what is generic and universal – and to interactions among a plurality of actors rather than on formal roles. Finally, diffractive methodologies invite to cultivate a multiplicity of visions of phenomena by applying other disciplines and registers. The collaboration with artists and teachers in the humanities offers a great potential to develop other sensibilities as well as to decolonize academic pedagogical practices.

By sketching out a posthumanist research agenda, the intention is to develop interventions that do “something – instead of commenting on something” (Bayley, 2018: 82) or reproducing sameness – such as cultivating students’ own capacities to judge power relations and ethical choices. That is what Haraway (2016) calls cultivating response-abilities. Finally, it is worth noting that diffractive pedagogy does not aim to be reassuring and comfortative (Taylor and Bayley, 2019): its aim is to lead students towards confronting the world’s complexity, precarity and differences, or, to quote Haraway (2016), to “stay with the trouble.” At the same time, it is also suggested as a means of taking management education out of the neoliberal competitive culture and developing more hopeful and imaginative futures (Taylor and Bayley, 2019; Braidotti, 2013).

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