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Faculty transformation for enhanced student learning: A structural equation modelling study on responsible management education in India

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Abstract

In a world grappling with environmental and social challenges, the role of Responsible Management Education (RME) remains underexplored in emerging markets such as India. While existing studies focus on the transformative effects of RME on students, research on its impact on faculty in higher education institutions (HEIs) is limited. This study combines Mezirow's transformative learning theory with DiMaggio and Powell's institutional pressures theory to conceptualise faculty transformation pathways. A survey completed by 508 Indian business school faculty, analysed using structural equation modelling, found that mimetic, coercive, and normative pressures influence faculty 'habits of mind', but motivation is key for RME-driven transformation. Additionally, 19 semi-structured interviews with recruiters of new management graduates indicate that HEIs must refine their pedagogical approaches to enhance the impact of RME, even though students are increasingly aware of sustainable development issues, mainly through social media.

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Practitioner Notes

1. Faculty development programs must focus on fostering self-motivation, as it plays a pivotal role in enabling transformative pedagogical shifts aligned with RME principles.
2. Institutions should create engaging and reflective learning spaces to reshape faculty mindsets.
3. Redesign pedagogy to inculcate sustainability and ethics capabilities in graduates.

Keywords

responsible management education, transformative learning, institutional pressures, self-motivation, higher educational institutions, environment

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Introduction

Education is a fundamental device for transforming how one perceives and visualises the environment, society, and one's role in them (Tilbury, 2004). Education empowers individuals by providing the information and abilities that stakeholders need to comprehend the old as well as the unpredictable challenges related to sustainability, well beyond the spatial constrictions of their respective academic institutions (Papenfuss et al., 2019). By integrating economic, social, and environmental dimensions, Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME), under the auspices of the United Nations Global Compact, encourage management schools to adopt a panoptic vision of sustainable development, one that transcends financial considerations. This also contributes to fulfilling Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on Quality Education. The inclusive and moral dimensions of this goal require educational institutions to foster social and ethical values in students, which have ramifications on students' attitudes and behaviours towards responsible management practices (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2022). An appreciation of the interlinkages between business activities and their importance to society and the environment is crucial for students. This is especially true for business schools whose students will eventually become prospective CEOs and leaders and, in their future corporate roles, will promote cleaner production systems and social responsibility in their organisations (Aguilera et al., 2021). The importance of responsible management education (RME) becomes paramount as it integrates ethics, sustainability and responsibility in business decision-making and practices (Gherardi & Laasch, 2022). Several studies have substantiated the importance of embedding RME in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), with faculty members, top management of these institutions, and students serving as active stakeholders (Leal et al., 2024).

The values and knowledge gained during the teaching and learning processes of RME can not only impact students but also transform faculty. The theory of transformative learning provides an appropriate framework to understand the evolution of faculty through a shift in their frames of reference (Mezirow, 2000). These frames of reference, defined as Habits of Mind (HoM), are a set of assumptions and expectations that require a strong impetus to alter. One of the ways through which the HoM of faculty mutates is through institutional pressure (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), for which there are various categories. This alteration in the faculty's frames of reference changes their teaching practices, which are inextricably intertwined with students' learning processes (Condon et al., 2016).

Faculty transformation has been extensively researched worldwide, with some studies focusing on the impact of RME from a faculty perspective in specific geographies (Sammalisto et al., 2015; Zsóka et al., 2013). However, studies on emerging economies, especially in India, are somewhat limited. This is despite the fact that the student and teacher population are burgeoning in India due to the demographic dividend (Joshi & Dewangan, 2021), which ultimately places an enormous burden on the environment as well as the concomitant societal and ethical responsibilities of multiple stakeholders, necessitating urgent action (Mengistu M. & Samuel F., 2021).

The primary objective of this study is to analyse the role of RME in transforming faculty. Additionally, the study examines the enhanced awareness of sustainable and societal responsibility among students and their readiness for the job market as a result of RME. The focus

here, therefore, is on the transformative role of RME in faculty and, ultimately, students in business schools.

Literature Review

Responsible Management Education (RME)

The significance of sustainability and social responsibility in management cannot be overstated in today's rapidly changing world. RME emphasises the interconnectedness between business activities and their impact on society and the environment (Azmat et al., 2023). This is best illustrated by PRME, which promotes a holistic understanding of sustainable development beyond financial considerations. This comprehensive approach ensures that future managers and leaders are equipped with the knowledge and skills required to address complex sustainability challenges, as well as financial ones. It is widely recognised that HEIs have the role of promoting various actors that participate in sustainability efforts and enhancing their contributions to sustainable development. According to Aleixo et al. (2021), although students are aware of SDGs and sustainability practices, HEIs can strengthen this further. To fulfil these roles, both faculty (Leal et al., 2024) and curriculum need to be updated regularly, drawing upon various academic and non-academic sources, such as online information resources (Al-Mulla et al., 2022). The ability of active faculty members in business schools to impart RME by updating their knowledge has been extensively studied in various contexts, such as in European (Matten & Moon, 2004), UK (Burchell et al., 2015) and Brazilian (de Paula Arruda Filho & Przybylowicz Beuter, 2020) business schools.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Faculty professional development can influence student learning and boost student interest in learning itself (Pressick-Kilborn & Walker, 2002), enhance teaching efficacy, and increase student learning (Balmer & Richards, 2012; Carini et al., 2006). Developed by Jack Mezirow in 1978, the theory of transformative learning posits that, when confronted with new information, adults can analyse their own set of knowledge and assumptions, which may lead to a shift in their outlook towards the world. Existing knowledge and assumptions are termed 'Frames of Reference', which constitute HoM that shape the way we decipher the world through our experiences, structure the ways that we interpret the meaning of our experiences, configure our decision-making processes, and rationalise our actions (Apte, 2009). Once education can produce a discordance between what is new and relevant versus the way the thought process was initially programmed, it starts creating what is known as the 'disorienting dilemma'. According to Mezirow and Illeris (2018), disorienting dilemmas are encounters that prompt individuals to question their existing worldviews, leading to critical reflection of their state of beliefs and free dialectical discourses. This leads to a re-examination of one's HoM and ultimately a transformation in one's perspective, including ethical dilemmas as well as behaviour that incorporates responsibility and openness. This is especially visible in HEIs where, before commencing their studies, students have undergone initial experiences that form a set of HoM, and later exposure in universities introduces new perspectives.

HoM is the set of schemes of instructions that adults instinctively follow, learned through various institutions, society, family, and communities. It is the key construct on which transformative learning theory is nested. HoM influences adults' emotions and reactions, and where they see themselves in the systems that govern life and behaviour. Costa and Kallick (2000) describe 16 HoM, which consist of 'mindful' and 'thoughtful' tendencies while displaying intelligent behaviour in resolving unknown problems. Lane et al. (2024) used Costa and Kallick's (2000) framework to identify the key HoM components that influence environmental education teaching. These components are characterised by responding with wonderment and awe, remaining open to continuous learning, striving for accuracy, taking responsible risks, and persistence, which can be analysed to understand the impact of education on the faculty transformation process.

However, individual responses can be altered under certain stimuli (Costa & Kallick, 2000), including institutional stimuli that are nested in regulatory and policy environments and tend to display 'isomorphic pressures' (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). There are three kinds of institutional isomorphic pressures: coercive, mimetic, and normative (Scott, 2005). Coercive pressures are those exerted by other organisations that have punitive powers or are influenced by politics and dominate the other two pressures (Alziady & Enayah, 2019). Clemens and Douglas (2005) discuss them in the context of regulations and penalties for violating laws and, in the case of HEIs, international rankings and accreditation body requirements create coercive pressure (EFMD, 2023). Mimetic pressures involve organisations capitalising on the success of peers through imitation (Bansal, 2005). They tend to reduce environmental uncertainties by following successful organisations. Normative pressures are related to the social and ethical obligations and responsibilities of organisations (Wijethilake et al., 2017) and involve interactions with professional trade organisations (Morris, 2017). Cardona Mejía et al. (2020) indicate that coercive pressure is exerted through regulatory and government agencies, mimetic pressure is exerted through behavioural patterns of HEIs, and normative pressures are presented through specialised groups within HEIs. Collectively, these three pressures encourage faculty to introspect and reflect on them, adopting new methods of teaching social responsibility and sustainability (Andrades et al., 2025). These pressures will, hence, constitute the antecedents for the HoM. Therefore, we postulate the following three hypotheses:

H1a: Coercive pressure is positively related to HoM

H1b: Mimetic pressure is positively related to HoM

H1c: Normative pressure is positively related to HoM

Changes in HoM lead to transformative learning through critical reflection (Mezirow, 1997), which forms the basis of the next hypothesis. Schafersman (1991) believes that critical thinking leads to critical reflection and should be incorporated into the curriculum. However, such pedagogical shifts that incorporate RME require the involvement of faculty professional development (Natkin & Kolbe, 2016) since faculty members' values and ethics are essential to these alterations (Audebrand & Pepin, 2022). In this study, the outcomes of the faculty transformation process through the process of imparting RME were evaluated by adapting the scale developed by Stuckey et al. (2013), which included acting differently, creating a deeper self-awareness, adopting more open perspectives, and experiencing a profound shift in worldview. Hence, the following hypothesis was proposed:

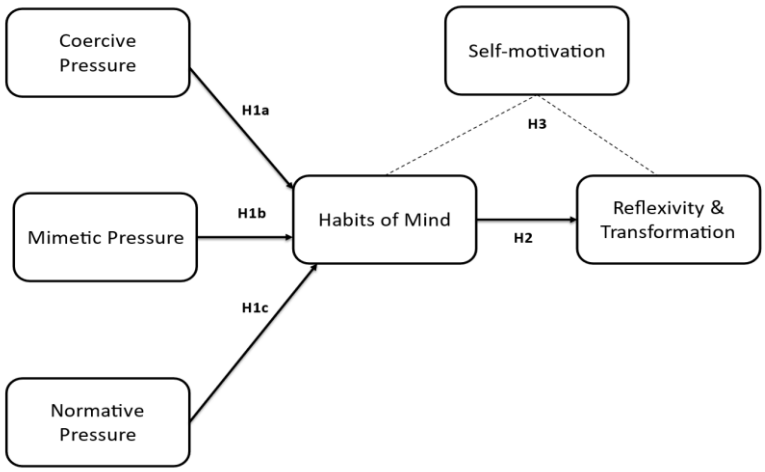
H2: HoM is positively related to reflexivity and transformation

Cebrián et al. (2015) found that integrating responsible management practices into the curriculum requires tremendous faculty motivation as it entails them to go beyond existing disciplinary constructs. This has been substantiated by Roth (2007), who demonstrated that teachers' motivation has a positive impact on student learning. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), this motivation is defined as an impetus or inspiration to act, which can be pivotal in transforming faculty. According to the theory of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985), there are two fundamental types of motivation: (1) intrinsic motivation, which refers to actions undertaken because of innate joy and drive; and (2) extrinsic motivation, where the actions lead to a 'separable outcome'. The taxonomy of extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017) includes interest, enjoyment, and inherent satisfaction and opportunities for professional development of HEI employees are a major extrinsic motivator in the context of RME and transformative learning (Bouwma-Gearhart, 2012). Intrinsic factors include the socially and environmentally relevant purpose of life, happiness, satisfaction from research in sustainable development, and respect for all stakeholders (Höller et al., 2024). Motivation, thus, becomes a key component that contributes to relatedness and enhances the teaching process for faculty (Klassen et al., 2012), shifting their frames of reference and ultimately changing their HoMs. This means the nature of the relationship between HoM and reflexivity and transformation is determined by the faculty's extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, which leads to the third hypothesis:

H3: Self-motivation mediates the relationship between HoM and reflexivity and transformation

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework for the Study



The urgency of sustainability challenges necessitates a shift in how future business leaders are educated. Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how integrating sustainability into management education can foster a profound change in the values, beliefs, and management practices of students. Institutional role, regulatory

environment, peer activities, and overall growth are viewed as necessary in impelling the HoM of faculty engaged in imparting RME.

According to the literature review, Mezirow's (1997) framework of transformative learning, which involves reflexivity and transformation, is modified by HoM. This process is initiated when faculty members demonstrate self-motivation. The HoM themselves are influenced by isomorphic pressures (coercive, mimetic, and normative) based on DiMaggio and Powell (1983). This is illustrated in Figure 1, which serves as the theoretical framework of the study

Thus, this study seeks to answer the following two research questions:

RQ1: How does RME bring about a transformation in faculty that leads to better student learning?

RQ2: What is the students' awareness and learning from RME in the HEIs as they enter their workplaces?

Method

In line with a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, the initial phase of the study employs a quantitative approach, followed by a qualitative phase, to comprehend the survey findings (Creswell, 2011). Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to yield a quantitative analysis of the factors related to the transformation of faculty. A qualitative study, based on semi-structured interviews with recruiters, was conducted to determine the awareness levels of RME among new hires in business schools.

Participants

The sampling process for the quantitative analysis involved selecting faculty from business schools in India based on the details of their engagement with responsible education practices shared on their institutional websites. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure a balanced representation of respondents from business schools in northern, southern, eastern, and western parts of India. The survey was disseminated across multiple platforms to a diverse range of demographics, aiming to reduce self-selection bias and was sent to 2143 professors from 135 business schools in India, garnering 553 responses. After removing any incomplete or partial responses, the final sample comprised 508 responses. According to Hair et al. (2011), the sample size should be at least 10 times the number of indicators for the most predicted construct when using the covariance-based method (CBM), and for this study, that construct is Normative Pressure, with 8 items.

As shown in Table 1, most respondents were female (56.4%) and had tenure of more than five years (77.4%) at their institution.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Category	Subcategory	Frequency
Region	North	121
	East	124
	South	137
	West	126
Gender	Male	204
	Female	304
Age	20 - 40	249
	41 - 60	249
	61+	10
Work Experience (years)	< 10 years	149
	11 – 20 years	214
	21+ years	145
Academic Position	Top management / Head or Board Member	57
	Faculty engaged in sustainability education	290
	Faculty not involved in sustainability education	105
	Others	56
Size of Program	< 500 students	141
	501 - 1000 students	110
	1001 - 2000 students	76
	2000+ students	181

The qualitative analysis of the extent of RME contribution was investigated through interviews with 19 recruiters who hire new management graduates. A database of recruiters available on the websites of business schools was used to recruit the sample based on the following selection criteria: (1) at least five years of experience; (2) worked with recruits from business schools; (3) and be knowledgeable about, or have been associated with, projects related to sustainability. Two researchers started connecting with hiring managers of these organisations over LinkedIn, requesting a meeting/call to explain the research context. Out of 98 requests sent on LinkedIn, 28 managers responded, and 19 managers with extensive knowledge and proven experience in various sectors agreed to an online meeting. Due care was taken to ensure that the participants were available and willing to participate, and that they had the requisite expertise in the topic under evaluation. The 19 participants comprised 15 males and 4 females, with 5 to 35 years of experience across diverse sectors including consulting, information technology enabling services, fast-moving consumer goods, Fintech, non-governmental organisations, education, international development, and manufacturing. Most occupied senior leadership roles, such as Director, Vice President, and Senior Manager, working in small, medium, and large organisations.

Instruments

For the quantitative analysis, a structured survey was used to collect data, capturing essential associations among the variables. The survey was drafted with affirmative answers, which provided respondents a choice on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The measurement items were adapted from DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) existing literature on institutional pressures, which includes six items for coercive pressures (CP), six items for mimetic pressures (MP), and eight items for normative pressures (NP). The HoM construct consisted of six items and was adapted from Lane et al. (2024) and Costa and Kallick (2000). The six items of the construct Reflexivity and Transformation (RT) were framed based on the three processes outlined by Stuckey et al. (2013). The items of the mediating variable self-motivation (SM) were adapted from Ryan and Deci (2000).

Five academic experts examined the face validity of each construct's scale, and a pilot study was conducted by distributing a survey to 30 senior academics to explore the reliability of each scale. Based on their feedback, a few questions in the survey were revised.

For the qualitative analysis, semi-structured interviews were used to gain insights into participants' perceptions of RME (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). When additional data produced no new insights and consistently confirmed previously identified, well-defined and repeated trends, saturation was deemed to have been attained, which occurred after 19 interviews. The interview questions covered three sections: assessing the student's depth of knowledge on sustainability, the role of management education in the student's knowledge creation, and future possibilities in sustainability-related jobs. The same two researchers conducted all the interviews, which were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Analysis

The survey data were analysed using SmartPLS 3.2.9, a partial least squares-based structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) software, which facilitates the analysis of complex models with numerous variables, indicators, and paths (Richter et al., 2016). Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess the validity of the measurement model and examine the relationships between latent constructs and their respective observed variables. To evaluate internal consistency, both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values were analysed.

The semi-structured interview transcripts were checked for accuracy against the recordings, and any potential inconsistencies were resolved through discussion among the research team. Data analysis employed a thematic analysis approach, enabling the identification of key patterns and themes that emerged from the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

Measurement Model

According to Hair (2010), a Cronbach's alpha (Cα) value above 0.70 indicates acceptable reliability. In this study, 27 items were identified as suitable for the analysis, which are presented in Table 2. Composite reliability (CR) values ranged between 0.85 and 0.93 (Table 2), which are acceptable (Hair et al., 2012) and further confirm internal consistency of the factors.

Table 2

Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Items	FL*	Cα	CR	AVE
CP 2: Regulation on mandatory courses on labour laws and social responsibility	0.770	0.772	0.853	0.592
CP 3: Mandatory requirements on responsible education by accreditation & ranking agencies	0.814			
CP 4: Mandatory practices by the institution on diversity and inclusion	0.715			
CP 6: Creating awareness of sustainability in the institutions through outreach activities	0.775			
MP 1: Curriculum benchmarking on responsible management education	0.776	0.857	0.904	0.702
MP 2: Attractiveness of green campuses	0.934			
MP 3: Media presence due to sustainable practices	0.822			
MP 4: Inclusion of community service as part of the programs offered	0.811			
NP 1: Guidelines on Principles of RME	0.764	0.831	0.886	0.662
NP 2: Enhancing the market value of students	0.868			
NP 3: Collaboration with external agencies	0.790			
NP 4: Emphasis on collaborative teaching and learning	0.827			
HoM 1: Sustainable development: SDGs are a novel aspect of management	0.788	0.842	0.888	0.615
HoM 2: The responsibility to society should never be ignored	0.886			
HoM 3: Ethics and values are to be kept in mind during work	0.722			
HoM 5: ESG** is a new dimension in management and is important	0.764			
HoM 6: Multi-stakeholder engagement is important in decision-making	0.750			
SM 1: More and better job prospects	0.770	0.908	0.929	0.686
SM 2: Finding a more social and environmentally acceptable purpose in life	0.838			
SM 3: Values that respect multi-stakeholders and the planet	0.827			
SM 4: Gaining consensus and approval	0.885			
SM 5: Research gives me contentment and pleasure	0.788			
SM 6: Collaboration and networking as an outcome	0.854			
RT 1: I can integrate sustainability concepts seamlessly into the curriculum	0.785	0.845	0.895	0.681
RT 4: Gaining consensus and approval	0.894			
RT 5: Research gives me contentment and pleasure	0.765			
RT 6: Collaboration and networking as an outcome	0.850			

**FL = Factor Loading; **ESG = Environmental sustainability, Social responsibility and Governance*

In PLS-SEM, convergent validity is assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), where values above 0.50 indicate that a construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators. According to the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion, an AVE value of 0.50 or higher is considered acceptable. In this study, all constructs demonstrated AVE values above the recommended threshold (Table 2), thereby confirming adequate convergent validity and supporting the reliability of the measurement model.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) (Henseler et al., 2015) criterion. According to the HTMT criterion, the value between the two constructs should be below 0.90, which was satisfied (Table 3).

Table 3

Discriminant Validity Results - HTMT

	MP	HoM	RT	CP	NP	SM
MP						
HoM	0.811					
RT	0.547	0.556				
CP	0.728	0.794	0.644			
NP	0.794	0.798	0.590	0.726		
SM	0.750	0.865	0.668	0.846	0.688	

Structural Model

After assessing the measurement model, common method bias (CMB) was checked to verify collinearity issues using the variance inflation factor (VIF) that is generated for all latent variables of the structural models. VIF values above 5 indicate no collinearity issues among the constructs (Becker et al., 2015), which the study satisfies.

R^2 values are essential for assessing a model's predictive power, and they should range between 0 and 1, with higher values indicating greater predictability (Rigdon, 2012). The R^2 for HoM is 0.618, indicating a 61% variance. SM is 0.36, i.e. 36%, and RT is 0.58, i.e. 58% variance. Therefore, it can be said that R^2 for the study explains moderate to substantial variance (Rigdon, 2012). Further, to substantiate R^2 values, Stone-Geisser's Q^2 value is derived in PLS-SEM using the blindfolding method. Q^2 quantifies the proportion of variance in the endogenous construct that is explained by the exogenous construct, and values of Q^2 above 0 are acceptable (Hair et al., 2021). The results showed that the Q^2 values for HoM, SM, and RT were 0.61, 0.58, and 0.36, respectively (Table 4).

Table 4

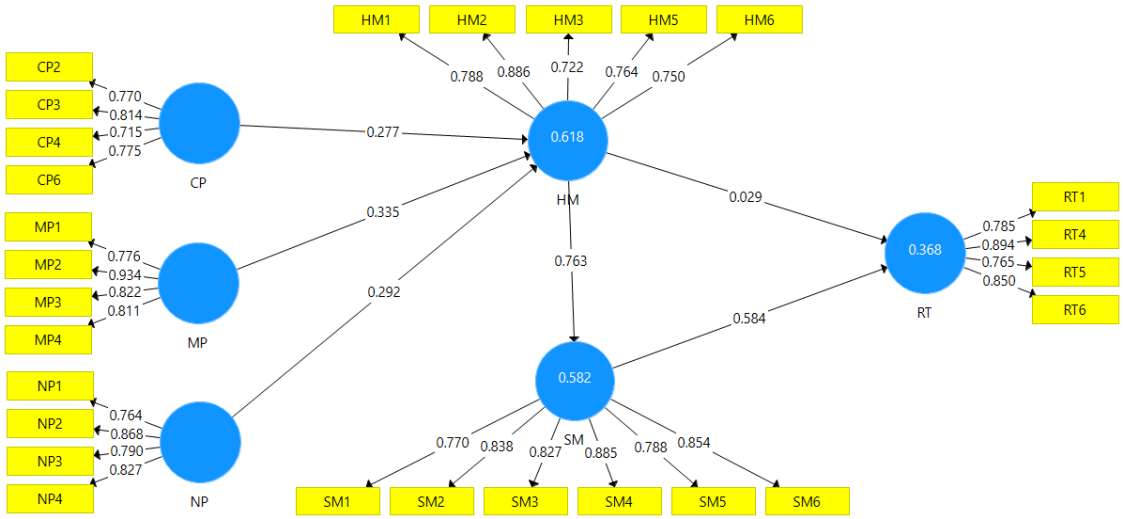
R^2 and Q^2 values

Item	R^2	Q^2_predict
HoM	0.618	0.610
RT	0.368	0.285
SM	0.582	0.548

The SEM-PLS bootstrapping method was used to test the hypotheses. Table 5 shows the results of bootstrapping 508 responses for the structural model (two-tailed, 0.05 significance level) and Figure 2 illustrates the values of the path coefficient leading to faculty transformation.

Figure 2

Measurement Model



The analysis shows that positive relationships exist between institutional pressures, including CP (β = 0.27, t = 8.43, p = 0.000), MP (β = 0.335, t = 5.461, p = 0.000), and NP (β = 0.292, t = 6.95, p = 0.000), and with HoM. Therefore, hypotheses H1a, H1b, and H1c are found to be true (Table 5). The path coefficient values also suggest that MP (0.335) has the most substantial impact on HoM, followed by NP (0.292) and then CP (0.277). The analysis does not support a direct relationship between the HoM of faculty (β = 0.017, t = 0.267, p = 0.790) and their RT.

Table 5

Hypothesis Testing

Effect	Hypothesis	Path co-efficient	T statistics	P values*	Status of hypothesis
Direct	H1a: CP -> HoM	0.277	8.418	0.000	Accepted
	H1b: MP -> HoM	0.335	5.614	0.000	Accepted
	H1c: NP -> HoM	0.292	7.059	0.000	Accepted
	H2: HoM -> RT	0.029	0.467	0.640	Not accepted
Indirect	H3: HoM -> SM -> RT	0.445	8.804	0.000	Mediation Accepted

**P values < 0.05; P< 0.005*

Mediation

The mediating impact of the factor self-motivation between habits of mind, reflexivity, and transformation was found to be significant (β = 0.458, t = 8.881, p = 0.000). Mediation is considered adequate when the direct relationship between the constructs is insignificant and the indirect effect becomes significant (Nitzl et al., 2016).

Semi-structured Interviews

The key themes that emerged from the analysis of semi-structured interviews with industry recruiters were organised into the two categories of drivers and barriers to student learning from RME (Table 6).

Table 6

Key Themes from Interviews

Category	Themes	Participants (n =19)
Drivers	Growing industry demand	12
	Alternate sources of knowledge	14
	Sustainability and ethical consciousness	7
	Regulatory and compliance requirements	13
Barriers	Curriculum inadequacy	18
	Lack of practical learning and engagement	18
	Inadequate funding	14

The interview data suggest that certain critical variables enable student learning due to RME, including the growing demand in industry for careers in sustainability, which is likely to increase in the coming years. As businesses face growing pressure from stakeholders to address environmental, social and governance issues, the demand for professionals with expertise in these areas is expected to become more pronounced. This is viewed as essential for brand building and cost savings, thereby contributing to the sustainability of businesses. One of the respondents, who is a human resources manager (P13) from the government sector, also mentioned, *"There are regulatory mandates which make such jobs even more in demand."*

Alternative sources of knowledge also emerged as a key theme, with the use of social media among higher education students identified as a significant driver of this trend. One of the interviewees (P1) from a large consulting firm stated, *"The role of online influencers also plays a major role in shaping their attitudes towards sustainability-related issues."* In addition to the media, self-learning through online courses is an important source of information for students.

The rise of sustainability and ethical consciousness among students also emerged as an essential driver of responsible behaviour promotion in the interview data. The students' beliefs, feelings, and actions indicate their level of awareness of the consequences of irresponsible human behaviour on the planet and society. It was also observed that students want to be associated with brands that make a difference, such as those that are planet and people-conscious. This type of consciousness tends to encourage behaviours in concurrence with sustainable consumption.

The interview data indicate that pressure to comply with regulatory frameworks and government guidelines is another propeller of sustainability. The New Education Policy of India mandates that HEIs map their curriculum to the targets of the various sustainable development goals (Biswas,

2024). There are also guidelines around corporate social responsibility, which make it integral to the business school curriculum.

The interview analysis also identified obstacles to providing RME to student communities. Industry experts observed the inadequacy of the curriculum as a significant roadblock because, despite its relevance, sustainability is not systematically integrated into the business school syllabus. As regulatory bodies insist on incorporating environmental studies and other aspects related to responsible management in the programs being taught, it is offered as a separate module that covers only peripheral aspects with an overemphasis on corporate social responsibility. This results in students obtaining only perfunctory awareness levels, which may not meet the industry job requirements.

Lack of practical learning and engagement among students at business schools, such as working on projects and internships related to responsible management practices, was identified as another education-related barrier in the interview data. According to a senior recruiter from the manufacturing sector (P17), "*Having one or two modules in the curriculum might not help; introduce workshops/projects where students can get more ideas."*

Another impediment identified is inadequate funding for research in sustainability-related sectors by HEIs. Recruiters indicated that, in business schools, faculty upskilling is highly encouraged in technology and data-related fields, leaving little for those who work on social responsibility and natural resources management. Thus, faculty members are deprived of adequate training and exposure to up-to-date information, rendering them ineffective in teaching the latest concepts in response to market needs.

Discussion

This study highlights the role of institutional pressures in changing the frames of reference of faculty through association with RME. Using DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) framework of categorising these pressures as coercive, mimetic, and normative, the results of the study demonstrate how the three kinds of pressures nudge faculty and HEIs to adhere to rules, regulations, and norms. The research indicates that an array of institutional pressures (Table 2) related to sustainable practices on green campuses, sustainability reporting benchmarking, collaboration, and cross-cultural exchanges create a compelling justification for faculty to embark on their own transformation, which also concurs with the findings of Andrades et al. (2025).

One of the key findings of this study is the strength of mimetic pressure, which is the highest (path coefficient, $\beta = 0.335$) among all the other institutional pressures investigated. This result contradicts the general trend in studies conducted in different countries and contexts where coercive pressures (which are more compliance-based and externally applied) often dominate (Alziady & Enayah, 2019). Comparatively, normative pressures, which encourage reflexive teaching, tend to flourish in collaborative and receptive scenarios (Hinostroza-Paredes, 2021). The finding that mimetic pressures dominate the space in HEIs may be explained by the high number of HEIs – 1350 universities - in India (Rana et al., 2022) and the intense competition that arises from this context. Moreover, mimetic pressure tends to lead in situations where the options are abstruse, the goals of HEIs are equivocal, a general air of uncertainty prevails, and the best strategy for similar or smaller organisations is to follow the more experienced institutions or early movers (Cardona Mejía et al., 2020).

Another interesting result is the statistical insignificance found concerning hypothesis H2, which tested the potential relationships between Habits of Mind, Reflexivity and Transformation. The relationships between these three factors only become significant through the mediation of self-motivation, underscoring the importance of individual faculty mindsets and how their zeal to stretch beyond their existing and conventional learning and worldviews can bring about a tangible change in conviction and outlook. When motivated, faculty become catalysts of change and on-the-ground champions of RME. This has also been highlighted by Klassen et al. (2012) in the context of relatedness, which can encourage faculty to make profound changes in the curriculum and inspire students to immerse themselves in a truly transformative experience related to sustainability. Thus, RQ1 is answered by considering the impact of various institutional pressures, the mediating role of self-motivation, and the pathways through which faculty transformation occurs.

The analysis of interviews with recruiters from various sectors also suggests that faculty transformation leads to improved student outcomes (RQ2). The interviews revealed that recruiters perceive student awareness and willingness to adopt sustainable practices as high, which aligns with the findings of Haski-Leventhal and Haertle (2018) and Aleixo et al. (2021). However, the data also indicates that this cannot be attributed exclusively to classroom learning alone, as alternative sources of sustainability information have an impact on student behaviour. The results also suggest the influence of social media and online platforms on students, a finding supported by other studies, such as Al-Mulla et al. (2022). Analysis of the interviews also revealed dissatisfaction among recruiters, particularly regarding students' preparedness for jobs related to sustainability. They conveyed that HEIs have not provided the level of attention and training necessary for students to be ready for such jobs, citing issues in terms of both curriculum design and practical engagement. This may be due to the characteristics of Indian academia, where, historically, the emphasis has been on exam readiness and rote learning rather than on application and hands-on training (Srivastava et al., 2024).

Theoretical Implications

The study juxtaposes the institutional isomorphism framework (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) with the theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997) to develop a conceptual model for understanding the role of faculty transformation in student performance in the context of RME (Figure 1). This contributes to a body of earlier studies, which have explored the efficacy and challenges surrounding RME using theories related to pro-environmental action (Steg & Vlek, 2009), institutionalism (Crawford & Ostrom, 1995), transformative learning from a student's perspective (Mezirow, 1978), and social learning theory (Zepke, 2005), among others. Therefore, this study employs a novel approach by bringing attention to faculty perspectives and factors that contribute to appreciable faculty transformation.

By highlighting the direct impact of mimetic, coercive, and normative pressures on faculty's frames of reference, which in turn leads to improved classroom instruction, the results also offer unique insights into the pathways through which institutional pressures can play a decisive role in influencing the HoM of faculty during RME. Results on mimetic isomorphism especially support the views of new institutional theorists such as DiMaggio and Powell (1983; 1991) who argue that institutions are generally characterised by persistence, inertia, and stability as opposed to

traditional theories of institutionalism that emphasise adaptation, rationality, and competitive forces that cause organisational change (Thompson, 1967). At the same time, as indicated by the results of this study, the growing acceptance of RME in HEIs lends credence to Selznick's (1948) formulation of old institutionalism, where organisations adapt based on external stimuli from market forces. Thus, we find that institutional isomorphism dominates among HEIs; HEIs that display a sense of superior environmental consciousness and the propensity to respond swiftly to the rising demand for industry to be at the forefront of environmental action serve as the role models for isomorphic mapping (Table 2). While this study focuses on India as a representative emerging market, the insights have broader relevance for other countries with similar socioeconomic and institutional contexts. The influence of mimetic, coercive, and normative pressures on faculty transformation aligns with global patterns of HEIs adapting to sustainability directives and stakeholder expectations.

Faculty play a prominent role in learning and become a conduit to better student outcomes through their transformation. Although this study did not explicitly deploy or explore social learning theories, the results accentuate the vicarious nature of learning and emphasise how the social contexts and frames of reference of faculty influence students (Chuang & Ting, 2021). Interviews with recruiters revealed a new perspective on the now widely observed phenomenon related to the role of social media in creating student transformation in learning (Mao, 2014). Pedagogical innovations must be encouraged to balance the inherent dichotomy between the benefits of social media usage for students and the need to sensitise them to their communities and encourage connection with their environments. To reconcile this, a delicate balance between faculty and students' experiences is required. The results of this research, which highlight the role of new agencies in transformative learning in the age of social media and their impact on RME, thus extend current understanding of how learning occurs in this domain.

Managerial Implications

The key outcome of this study indicates that motivation has a positive impact on faculty transcending their comfort zones and delving into the realm of neoteric and possibly ambiguous topics and courses, such as those related to RME. Self-motivation, which emerges as a mediating variable, is the difference that propels faculty from being a mere recipient of various kinds of institutional and other pressures to someone who has undergone an immersive experience, becoming more knowledgeable and receptive.

However, in emerging economies such as India, courses and research related to RME are considered non-mainstream and not inextricably allied to core businesses (Mishra & Awasthi, 2016). In these scenarios, for a faculty member to invest their time and effort in learning new concepts and unlearning others in the process, they need tremendous willpower, which can be derived from very high motivation. Faculty development, structured incentives for research avenues, incentives for promotion, and access to networking and collaboration forums are persuasive ways through which HEIs can motivate faculty (Al-Aamri et al., 2024). Since the transformation requires significant conviction and effort from faculty, individual predispositions are crucial and need to be factored in during the hiring process by HEIs.

In a rapidly changing world, HEIs need to keep pace with the current and prospective demands for skills and knowledge from stakeholder industries. This will require an enabling atmosphere by

HEIs on multiple grounds. As the interviews reveal, the curriculum itself needs to be reviewed to create scope for experiential and on-the-field learning as well as in evaluations. A crucial element here is industry collaboration with HEIs, which can provide a platform for sharing knowledge where students can gain insights from real-world intricacies, obstacles, and ways to manage them. Students need exposure to the processes and application of crucial ideas related to environmental sustainability, social responsibility, governance, environmental issues, and regulatory compliance, among others, which such partnerships provide.

The United Nations Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME) is one pathway for students, faculty, and HEIs to familiarise themselves with RME. However, this study found that faculty members' recollection of PRME was somewhat unclear, and the objectives of PRME in India were not well-defined. This has also been demonstrated internationally, where institutional support is mandatory for 'authentically embedding' PRME in curricula (Russo et al., 2023). One such experiment has been to incorporate PRME as part of the hidden curriculum of HEIs rather than explicitly incorporating it into formal business education (Borges et al., 2017). Familiarising all stakeholders with the diverse facets of PRME and fully comprehending its scope and values could become a major apparatus through which these stakeholders could be introduced to an advanced conception of RME. In forums such as PRME chapter meetings, both faculty and students can interact with like-minded peers, which can provide impetus for them to scrutinise their ideas on sustainability and encourage them to acquire knowledge of its many dimensions. Business schools should actively align themselves with PRME, which should be further encouraged by governmental and other multilateral agencies. This study augments the current understanding of how institutional and motivational factors interact in embedding RME, contributing to the global discourse on advancing the SDGs through management education.

The results of this study lead to the recommendation that faculty training programs should emphasise value creation through RME in management education, which, in the process, can lead to better outcomes for faculty. In this context, faculty forums and networking events can play a crucial role in facilitating interaction and peer learning. These forums should be interdisciplinary to enable cross-disciplinary collaboration and learning (Martins et al., 2023). HEIs should encourage these networking forums and provide the necessary support and encouragement to their faculty.

The conceptual model of this study is constructed around the role of institutional pressures as prompts that cause a shift in faculty's frames of reference. There is also scope to explore other types of triggers and their strengths in facilitating faculty transformation. While this research focused on the transformation and the role of faculty, future studies can investigate the roles of other stakeholders who may participate in this process. This study was conducted in India, and its findings may be specific to the country's geography, although the same analysis could be replicated in other contexts. Similarly, the analysis was restricted to RME in business schools or departments and needs to be extended to other disciplines to demonstrate how the nature of RME itself will mutate in different schools. Although the ethical dimensions of sustainability education in business schools have not been explicitly examined, most of the responses were collected with that implicit assumption. This overlooks the business ethics component, which is equally vital and warrants further research.

Conclusion

RME is one of the channels through which students can grasp sustainability concepts and become change-makers in combating the cataclysm of environmental, social, and governance turmoil in current global communities. The results of this study highlight that those who impart RME, i.e. the faculty members, also undergo a transformation that ultimately brings about a difference to their worldviews and that of their students. By adopting both a quantitative and qualitative approach, this research was able to tease out the channels through which faculty transformation emerges (RQ1) and examine whether faculty and HEIs have been able to make an impact on student learning and consciousness through RME (RQ2). The results reveal the vital role of institutional isomorphism and how self-motivation mediates faculty transformation, as well as the overall inclination of students to be sustainability-oriented, which has universal application in the higher education sector.

In the Anthropocene era, students are surrounded by a deluge of voices on climate change, disaster management, and how humans can combat these ever-expanding lists of catastrophes. The need for an innate understanding of the planet, its contexts, and its societal considerations is acute and urgent. This research contributes to the necessity of acknowledging faculty as principal agents of change in emerging economies such as India, where engagement with RME might be decisive in ushering in a new era of coexistence, cohesion, and ethical compliance.

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