Sensemaking of sustainability in business education:
The case of PRME in Swedish business schools and universities

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Abstract
In this paper we explore what role business schools play when it comes to shifting the paradigm towards sustainability and generating responsible decision-makers. It has been suggested that certain mainstream management models and theories has had some significant and negative influence on the conduct of business or even at times contradict sustainable development. Thus the aim of the paper is to explore the views and experiences of academics as well as the challenges they face when working with integrating sustainability into the education. Seven business schools and universities in Sweden have recently signed the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) initiative and therefore made a commitment to implement sustainability into their education as well as engage in a platform for responsible management education. This study is based on semi-structured interviews with people responsible for working with the schools’ commitment. Our main findings are that signing PRME is a logic of legitimacy and that most schools are in the beginning of implementing sustainability. The main challenges that the schools face in the process are related to the complexity of bringing a new concept into an academic organisation initially from the top management in a bottom up environment. In addition to this, there seem to be a detachment of how the respondents express the role of business education and the more general role of business in society, in relation to responsibility.
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1. Introduction

Universities play a vital role in the development of social transformation and in educating new generations of citizens and leaders. They are organisations that form values and generate knowledge (Andersson, 2016; Ghoshal, 2006; Kurucz et al., 2014; Stephens & Graham, 2010, p.612; Tilbury et al., 2004). The growing awareness on sustainability issues in the twenty-first century has created motives for organisations and institutions to explore and implement sustainable practices. The debates surrounding sustainability has largely been fuelled by the business sector’s growth and the direct impact that it has had on people’s lives and the environment (Meyer, 2004). The business sector has even been criticised to counteract sustainable development, where the sector is in a dominant position in global trade and hence a major driver in both economical and social development (Oetzel & Doh, 2009, p.108; Meyer, 2004, p.260). Thus, managers are in a very powerful position and can be considered a strong force in working towards sustainable development objectives (Rondinelli & Berry, 2000, p.82; Oetzel & Doh, 2009, p.115-117). This has in turn put a focus on the important role of business education (Christensen et al., 2007; Cornuel, 2005; Gardiner & Lacy, 2005; Stephens & Graham, 2010). International movements and organisations promoting sustainable development i.e. the United Nations (UN) have been working on shaping the business and institutional environment, through initiatives such as the Global Compact (UN, 2016) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015). The UN has also been putting more emphasis on the role of business education in promoting sustainability. This is because business schools and universities are one of the main carriers of management knowledge (Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002). Business schools are thus in a position of providing more responsible management education that can facilitate the shift towards a more sustainable future (Fisher & Bonn, 2011; Lozano et al., 2013; Tilbury et al., 2004). Doppelt (2010, p.209) states that “[s]ustainability presents a new mental model for decision-making” and that insufficient education can cause substantial problems if people use old perspectives and understandings that are inconsistent with sustainability.

Universities and business schools across the world are starting to explore the means to integrate sustainability into their practices (Rusinko, 2010, p.250; Holt, 2003; Kopnina, 2014). In Sweden, sustainability has been included in The Swedish Higher Education Act (1992:1434) since 2006, stating that Swedish universities and higher education should in
their operations “promote sustainable development that ensures present and future generations a healthy and good environment, economic and social welfare and justice.” (SFS 2006:173). However, this law does not specify in what way sustainable development should be promoted. This is also one of the reasons why the Swedish government in March 2016, ordered Universitetskanslersämbetet (UKÄ) to evaluate the Swedish universities. The government is hoping that this evaluation will give them an overall picture of how the universities’ work with sustainability and what has been achieved so far. Furthermore, the universities’ are among other things expected to have implemented a sustainability perspective in all of their programs (Delin, 2016).

1.1 Problem and aim
Despite extensive debates about what the sustainability concept is about, for whom and when; Gray (2010) states that there seems to be a “widespread agreement that: whatever sustainable development is, it is a ‘good thing’” (p.53) and it should be dealt with. Even though the concept has been around for several decades, the ambiguity still leaves room for many different interpretations. This is because sustainability is abstract like love or jealousy, which means that individuals tend to make sense of it in their own context. Dixon and Fallon (1989) have pointed out that the vagueness and ambiguity of sustainability might compromise or limit its implementation.

When a new concept or idea has travelled into an organisation, individuals within the organisation usually try to make sense of it (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). This is also what Weick’s (1995) sensemaking theory focus on, how individuals make sense of ambiguous concepts or ideas within organisations. Meyer and Rowan (1977) has pointed out that when organisations adopt ideas they tend to translate them into formal structures for their organisational practices. However, what has been said or decided may not automatically translate into action. A central theme in both sensemaking and organising is that individuals try to organise themselves, so they are able to understand the ambiguous inputs and adopt this meaning to make things more orderly (Weick, 1995). A widely adopted way of doing so is to sign initiatives and commitments that the organisation then works to fulfil. Yet, what is unclear is whether this commitment to sustainability and change, is translated into actual change?
In Sweden, seven business schools and universities have signed UN’s initiative called Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME). This initiative is “credited with encouraging business schools to strengthen their engagement with sustainability” (Perry & Win, 2013, p.48). The aim of the principles is to create “[...] sustainable value for business and society and to work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy” (PRME, 2008, p.6). However, the reasons for signing these kinds of initiatives are not always clear and have become a target for criticism. It has been suggested that when corporations and organisations sign UN initiatives, for example the Global Compact, which is the world’s largest corporate sustainability initiative (UN, 2016), they “get a chance to ‘bluewash’ their image by wrapping themselves in the flag of the United Nations” (Ruggie, 2001, p.371). Nevertheless, by signing this initiative, the school in question is committing to PRME’s (2016) principles (see Appendix I), where they agree to participate in a continuous process of improvement in terms of sustainability and social responsibility; linked to business education and research (PRME, 2008).

Some scholars have suggested that embedding sustainability issues across the entire curriculum is “more important” in business schools than having it as separate courses (Gardiner & Lacy, 2005; Godemann et al., 2011; Holt, 2003). This is because sustainability can be thought of as a critical lens. Gardiner and Lacy (2005, p.176) argue that if sustainability is going to have a long-term impact, the concept needs to be integrated into the mainstream of theory and practice in business schools. There has been a lot of research on sustainability in business education that explore various and new teaching approaches (Rusinsko, 2010; Gough & Scott, 2003; Holt, 2003). However, it seems to be a knowledge gap in the literature when it comes to empirical studies on how universities actually make sense of the process of implementing sustainability into their business education (Cullen, 2015; Holt, 2003; Kopnina, 2014).

As sustainability is included the Swedish Higher Education act, it means that Swedish universities are expected to work with it. Furthermore, because seven business schools and universities have taken it one step further and signed the PRME initiative, they make a good sample to explore how business schools and universities in Sweden make sense of sustainability. This study therefore aims to explore why these business schools and universities have signed the PRME initiative and how academics that works with the school's commitment to PRME make sense of sustainability in business education. By using
the term ‘academics’, we mean professors, researchers, and people working in management positions within the academic organisation. When we refer to ‘business schools and universities’ in this thesis, it concerns business schools and business departments/business schools within the universities, both private and state owned.

Our research question is: *How do academics in Swedish business schools and universities make sense of sustainability in business education in relation to signing the PRME initiative?*

2. Theoretical background

In this chapter we will begin by explaining the roots and the ambiguity of sustainability as a concept. Then we will explore, from an institutional perspective, how new ideas travel and circulate within and between organisations. We touch upon well-known concepts in organisational and institutional theory such as isomorphism, rational myth and decoupling, to name a few. We do this in order to understand why and how organisations adopt new ideas. After that we will discuss the role of academic organisations in society, such as universities and business schools. In relation to this, touch upon the debate about whether or not business schools and universities are teaching management theories that can have negative influence on the conduct of business and sustainable development. Lastly, this chapter will end with a theory of how individuals within organisations make sense of new ideas and finally, outline previous studies about the organisational use of the PRME initiative.

2.1 The sustainability concept

The ideas behind the sustainability concept can be traced back several decades. It draws upon the idea that the environmental, economic and social aspects should be combined. The economic aspects have generally played a much more dominant role in society than the social and environmental aspects. Over the years the concept of sustainability has changed and been defined in many different ways. Nowadays it is used in various contexts, everything from individual lifestyles, to government and corporate strategies (Caradonna, 2014).

The word sustainability or the term sustainable development is commonly cited as an ambiguous concept, where some conflate the terms and others do not (Gray, 2010; Gough &
Scott, 2003). Hamm and Muttagi (cited in Gough & Scott, 2003, p.1) define the goal of sustainability as being a “[...] capacity of human beings to continuously adapt to non-human environments by means of social organisation.” Perhaps the most frequently cited definition of sustainable development is the one by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) (1987) commonly referred to as the Brundtland definition. They define sustainable development as a development that “meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (p.8). According to Kearins and Springett (2003) the main feature of the Brundtland definition is the potential seen by its proponents to incorporate “environmental and economic concerns, along with a concern for the well-being of all.”(p.189) Hence sustainable development could be interpreted as greater equity and continued growth, but where environmental and social aspects are taken into account (Kearins & Springett, 2003). The question that arises is whether this is possible in the current capitalistic system that business and society interact in.

The Brundtland definition has generally been challenged and criticized a lot (Barkemeyer et al., 2014; O’Riordan, 1991; Pearce et al., 1989; Redclift, 2005). Some argue that there is a business case and some argue that sustainable development is an ‘oxymoron’ (Daly & Townsend, 1996; Redclift, 2005). “The term ‘sustainable growth’ when applied to the economy is a bad oxymoron - self-contradictory as prose, and unevocative as poetry.” (Daly & Townsend, 1996). Welford (1998) stress that corporation are actively engaged in defining sustainability-related concepts for themselves despite being the major polluters. They do it “in a way which at best gives a weak definition of sustainable development” (p.5). Turner (cited in Kearins & Springett, 2003) has acknowledged weak sustainability and identified it as “a form wherein limits are set on natural capital usage and where the precautionary principle of safe or minimum standards does apply but still involves trade-offs” (p.190).

The term Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is sometimes used in context when talking about sustainability. CSR as a concept was originally defined as the duty of managers to take responsibility for their business’ activities and its impacts (Bowen, 1953). This was later extended to include the business as a whole, rather than the single business owner (Davis, 1960). The environmental aspect was underrepresented in the CSR literature for a long time, however, as environmental discussion opened up in society, environmental issues also became an important part of CSR (Carroll, 1979; 1999). Another, alternative term is
Corporate Sustainability (CS) proposed to have evolved through other more established concepts and borrowed elements from sustainable development, stakeholder theory, corporate accountability theory as well as CSR (Wilson, 2003). Montiel (2008, p.246) stresses that these concepts share the same visions, even though having emerged from different backgrounds. They are both pushing towards a common future that intends to balance the economic responsibilities with the social and environmental ones. Still, when reviewing literature on CSR, CS, or sustainability, it seems that all of these terms have their limitations. Which may very well be the origin of the debate and the confusion surrounding this concept. Because even though the subject is established and recognized, some scholars have acknowledged that managers and corporations still may be confused about the meanings and therefore do not act upon it (Van den Brink & Van der Woerd, 2004; Bansal, 2005; Long, 2008).

In this thesis, sustainability will not be defined in a specific way considering the ambiguity of the concept. Since the study’s aim is to explore how sustainability as an idea, is interpreted by decision makers in business schools and universities rather than trying to explain the concept itself. This is because sustainability in education is not only about the combination of economic, social and environmental aspects but also about considering different kinds of perspectives in various contexts in order to develop critical thinking (Grey 2004; Kearins & Springett, 2003; Gough and Scott 2003; Kurucz et al., 2013).

2.2 When new ideas travel into an organisation

New ideas are constantly travelling into organisations, such as universities. They are not “diffuse in a vacuum but are actively transferred and translated in a context of other ideas, actors, traditions and institutions” (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008, p.219). Research has paid special attention to where these ideas come from, who is imitating whom, and how organisations make use of them in regards to their identity and fields. The ideas become powerful as they flow (Røvik, 2002; Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002) and studies have shown that these ideas do not remain unchanged as they flow but become a “subject to translation” (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008, p.219) and adapted according to actors and interests. As diffused ideas are translated throughout their circulation they may lead to disparity and stratification. In other words, ideas change as they flow; organisations tend to formulate them into models and organisational practices. Thus, the ideas are translated in order to be adapted, but this means that they can also be reshaped and take on new meanings and forms as “they flow within and
Organisations tend to edit the ideas according to the “logic of appropriateness [which] is a perspective that sees human action as driven by rules of appropriate or exemplary behavior, organized into institutions” (March & Olsen, 2004, p.2).

Meyer and Rowan (1977) emphasised on the ceremonial adoption of new and diffused ideas. They described how many of them become rational myths within the organisation. Rational myths are reflected in rationalised institutional rules that are incorporated inside organisations, mainly to gain legitimacy and enhance survival prospects. Meyer and Rowan (1977, p.341) argue that organisations in modern societies work more on reflecting on the myths of their institutional environments instead of focusing on the demands of their working activities. According to Selznick (1957) institutionalization is a process as ideas flow over time, where new values are installed and form a structure. Before those ideas get institutionalised they only have instrumental utility. When institutional rules are rationalised it is the risk of them being taken for granted, where they become normalised and involve normative obligations - without a question. Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson (2006) point out that institutional forces generally get taken for granted as the “natural way of being and doing” (p.23). In addition, rationalised formal structures tend to develop, to increase efficiency and competitive advantage, and in time can have consequential effects on day-to-day organisational practices and organisational culture (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Ceremonially adopted ideas can result in organisational and institutional change as they circulate within the organisation (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008, p.220). However, these diffused ideas also have the risk of decoupling from actual practice (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The rules that are formed and adapted based on the ideas can often be “[...] violated, decisions [...] often unimplemented, or if implemented have uncertain consequences” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p.343). Power (2004) talks about the black box of those formal structures and states that the “[d]reams of accuracy” (p.780) motivates organisations to put ambiguous ideas and different values into some kind of a formal structure or a measurement system. He raises his concern that such systems involve a loss of complexity and “provide transitory managerial rationalities, myths of control, for an essentially unmanageable world” (Power, 2004, p.778). Power (2004) asks, that if this is the case, where can the formal structures of everything be taking us? Research has shown that this depends on who transports those ideas, how they are packaged, formulated and timed. Some ideas simply become a ‘fashion’
or ‘a trend’ and disappear in time while others become institutionalised (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008).

2.2.1 Management - one of the flowing ideas
Sustainability is not the only diffuse idea that has travelled into organisations. Management as a concept was also one of those ideas and emerged in the wake of the nineteenth century’s economic development. Engwall (2007) explains how, in the wake of industrialization, extensive hierarchies emerged and created a need for coordination. It is suggested that management as an idea was a response to this need for coordination and quest for efficiency to effectively manage production and distribution chains (Engwall, 2007; Chandler, 1990). Engwall (2007) states that because economic development and growth created a lot of new management problems it “provided the building blocks of management education” (p.7).

Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall (2002) mention that in the late twentieth century intensive expansion and rapid flow of management knowledge has been seen through different sectors across continents. In line with this expansion, a widespread variety of contributors and promoters of management knowledge have occurred and also increased over the years (Kipping & Bjarnar, 1998; Jackson, 2001). This can be seen in everything from business schools to management consultancies, and scientific management journals to business press (Abrahamson & Eisenman, 2001; Morris & Lancaster, 2012). In addition to this, management researchers and management ‘gurus’ have played an essential part in creating and spreading ideas of management (Clark & Salaman, 1998; Sturdy, 2004). Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall (2002, p.5) state that according to dictionaries it seems that management by definition is both a matter of control and administration in the present but also to actively change and lead the organisation into the future. The concept of management, however, is not particularly detailed in terms of its content and meaning, making it a diffuse concept. This means that the flow of management models and ideas do not occur mechanically. It is suggested that management recipes gain power as they flow, and as they gain popularity they become even more powerful and will continue to flow (Røvik, 2002). In other words, the extensive circulation of management ideas has made them powerful and institutionalised.

2.2.2 The ‘trendy’ organisation
It has been discussed in research that organisations are becoming more and more similar to each other in terms of how they are governed and presented. Institutional and cultural frames
that create formal structures in organisational governance have a tendency to become homogenised (Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006, p.16). This process of homogenisation is called isomorphism. According to Hawley (cited in DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p.150) isomorphism is a process of constraining. This means that as organisations face the same set of environmental conditions, they are forced into becoming more alike. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) have expanded the concept and call it institutional isomorphism. They suggest that there are three mechanisms of institutional isomorphic change; "1) coercive isomorphism that stems from political influence and the problem of legitimacy; 2) mimetic isomorphism resulting from standard responses to uncertainty; and 3) normative isomorphism, associated with professionalization" (p.150). It has been emphasised that since organisations are expected to behave rationally, they are structured according to a set of rationalised myths that seem appropriate and logic in order to gain legitimacy (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005; March & Olsen, 2004; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). It has also been argued that institutional isomorphism promotes the success and survival of organisations (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p.349). Furthermore, one partial reason why organisations become more similar is due to the pressure of becoming more management oriented, either to seem modern or to gain their legitimacy (Baron et al., 1986; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Sahlin-Andersson, 2006; Scott et al., 2000).

CSR has, in some cases been considered a management trend (Castelló & Lozano, 2011; Sahlin-Andersson, 2006), meaning that it is more related to legitimacy building and presentation rather than actual change. Meyer and Rowan (1977, p.355) name two common problems that organisation face if its success depends mainly on isomorphism with institutionalised rules. First, practical activities and focus on efficiency can create conflicts and inconsistencies in an institutionalised organisation’s efforts to conform to the ceremonial rules adopted. Second, because these ceremonial rules are transmitted by myths they may arise from different parts of the environment and cause conflict with one another. In other words, institutional environments often become pluralistic (Udy cited in Meyer & Rowan, 1977), since organisations have to deal with many different ideas. Organisations in search of legitimacy and stability incorporate all sorts of incompatible structural elements that can create inconsistent myths (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p.356). When new ‘trends’ travel into an organisation, individuals within the organisation will have to try to fit it with pre-rationalised ideas (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008) that are externally fixed in order to maintain stability (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). As a result, enormous uncertainties might arise in
organisations’ day-to-day activities that are concerned about being efficient. Organisations must then struggle to link the requirements of ceremonial ideas and standards to practical activities as well as linking inconsistent ceremonial ideas to each other, for example when the concept sustainability meets the management idea. It can be difficult for individuals within an organisation to merge these different and incompatible ideas and might in fact result in “a great deal of decoupling to occur” (Sahlin-Andersson, 2006, p.19; Meyer & Rowan, 1997; Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005). Decoupling enables organisations to maintain legitimacy and formal structures even though their activities can vary and are not always reflected in their practical activities and complex circumstances (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

2.2.3 The academic organisation

A university is a type of organisation. Clark (1983, p.133) describes the academic authority structures as “extreme in its complexity”. Making changes within universities is associated with bottom-up nature and is subject to much diffusion of influence and decision accretion. Adomssent et al. (2007) agree and state that one of the main barriers in integrating sustainability into the education is how academic leadership is based on scientific freedom, where “individual faculty members decide how best to achieve research and educational goals” (Adomssent et al., 2007, p.297). Other barriers that Adomssent et al, (2007) mention is resistance from faculty members and lack of encouragement, lack of desire to change and poor pressure from society. Freeland (cited in Stephens & Graham, 2010) stresses that measures to promote change in universities are successful "when the change is incentivized and internalized into the distinctive culture and reward system of higher education institutions.” (p.216)

When it comes to achieving organisational and institutional changes through management processes, several researchers have stressed the importance of visionary leadership (Adomssent et al., 2007; Almog-Bareket, 2012; Lee et al., 2013; Schaltegger & Grünberg-Bochard, 2010). It has been proposed that an organisation’s engagement in sustainability mainly depends on key decision-makers attitudes towards the subject (Flannery & May, 1994). Business schools and business professors have strong influence on values and behaviours on business students and future decision-makers (Shiel and Jones; Datar et al. cited in Schaltegger & Lee, 2013, p.453). Wright (2002, p.207) has emphasised “the major challenges and barriers to the implementation of sustainability are listed as a lack of
leadership, and a lack of accountability mechanisms”. Sustainability must be given strategic priority in order to be institutionalised. Thomas and Thomas (2011) suggest that leadership in university organisations is in general significant in increasing motivation and knowledge for change as well as empowering new initiatives.

The investigation made by Statens Offentliga Utredningar (2015), known as ‘Bremers utredning’ in Sweden suggested, among other things, a more hierarchical structure for decision-making but emphasises that the decisions should still be based on collegial influence. The governance that applies to higher education institutions is flexible and allows a high degree of autonomy and freedom in education and research. Collegiality is deeply rooted in the organisational culture and structure as well as being an essential component in the management of universities and higher education in Sweden (Clark, 2001). The Swedish government's new autonomy reform that went through in 2011, has given Swedish universities even more freedom to shape their internal organisational structure and governance (Statens Offentliga Utredningar, 2015). In May 2014, the Swedish government appointed a special investigation to identify and analyse leadership and management structures in higher education and proposed development measures. The investigation was formed because it is evident that the collegial bodies have showed difficulties in deciding many of these issues. A large majority of respondents in the study answered that the collegial decision-making body is conservative and difficult in making changes in priorities, new initiatives and liquidation (Statens Offentliga Utredningar, 2015).

2.2.4 The role of business education

Universities are often referred to as “change agents” where they have the vital role to be “[...] active, contributing, influential, responsive entities in society” (Stephens & Graham, 2010, p.612). The urgency of promoting sustainable development thus puts the universities in a very important position. This means that they need to teach students and perpetuate through research, which also need to be “re-oriented or expanded to contribute more explicitly to societal needs and challenges.” (Stephens & Graham, 2010, p.612). The crucial role of business schools and universities in society makes them a key stakeholder group in achieving a sustainable future (Cortese cited in Adomssent et al., 2007, p.296). By providing their communities with future decision makers “who have the knowledge and skills necessary to help transform their workplaces and live as responsible global citizens” (Adomssent et al., 2007, p.296).
As mentioned earlier, business schools are one of the major carriers of management knowledge. In terms of which one of the carriers that has the most impact or influence on management knowledge, it seems that advisory firms and consultancies have “become a particular class of secondary carriers through their direct contact with practice, whereas the contacts of business schools and media companies are more indirect.” (Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall 2002, p.18). This view is contradicting the conventional idea, that business schools and universities generate the knowledge that is used in practice. However, according to Barley et al. and Strange (cited in Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002, p.18) business schools and universities tend to be “followers rather than leaders, […] reporters and analysts rather than trendsetters”. This can not only be questioned but also seen as threatening if business practice is not criticised in the classrooms. If this is the case, business schools are not carrying their role properly as being critical and advocates of change. This is what Cornuel (2005) also suggests and states that business schools should prepare their students to become innovators, leaders, and creators, in order to “avoid participating in the identical reproduction of our societies” (p.820). He states that business schools and management faculties appear to be too busy ‘miming’ reality and argues that responsibility education should not be based on a servile observation of what is going on in a company. Since “the narrative process leading to the drafting of a case study tends to squeeze the observed situation into the framework of educational intentions and learning objectives.” (p.827) In other words, a case study is not the whole truth, but rather a story from a certain point of view. In addition, how a case study is approached or explored in the classroom depends on the perspective and the learning objectives.

2.2.5 When sustainability meets the management idea

It is especially interesting to explore how sustainability as an idea fits with pre-rationalised ideas in business and management where the business sector has notably been criticised to counteract sustainable development (Williams, 2000; Oetzel & Doh, 2009, p.108; Meyer, 2004, p.260). It is suggested that in order to develop sustainability, serious changes needs to be made in existing power structures, where cultural values need to be redefined, institutions reformed and the social role of economic growth reconsidered (Williams, 2000, p.65).

Some management, business and economic ideas have already been rationalised, normalised and fixed within organisations. When sustainability then travels into organisations as a new
concept, it could be hard for individuals within the organisations to adapt them with the pre-rationalised elements that already ‘live’ there. The risk could be that sustainability would only be translated where it ‘fits’, and adapted around the already fixed and codified ideas. Meyer and Rowan (1977) explain how dominant ideas are codified in institutionalised environments, professions, or techniques. They take an example of prostitution as a profession. “As the prerational profession of prostitution is rationalized along medical lines, bureaucratized organizations [such as] sex-therapy clinics, massage parlors, and the like - spring up more easily” (p.344). Thus, instead of going to the core and tackle the ‘taken for granted’ profession of prostitution, the solutions are added around the ‘rationalised’ problem.

It is suggested that sustainability issues provide the current assumptions in business with a major challenge and implementing sustainability can create huge obstacles to vested economic and political interests (Kurucz et al., 2003, p.37).

2.3 The good or the bad theories for business

In the recent decades there has been an academic debate about whether business schools have been too focused on teaching management theories that can result in unethical behaviour and damage business practice. Mitroff (2004, p.185) argues that business educators are at best, “guilty of having provided an environment where the Enrons […] of the world could take root and flourish”. Ghoshal (2005, pp.76-77) argues that academic research related to business and management practices has had some very significant and negative influences on the conduct of business. He claims that certain dominant theories and ideologies in management education are more superior and detached from moral and human intentionality. It is argued that business schools, in particular, have freed their students from any sense of moral responsibility (Donaldson, 2005; Gapper; 2005; Gladwin et al., 1995; Ghoshal, 2005; Kopnina, 2014; Mitroff, 2004; Nelson, 2006; Pheffer, 2005). Nelson (2006, p.6) explains how economics as an academic subject requires the student to have threefold personality split between the economists self, the feminist self and moral self, where economic life tries to depersonalise people. Banerjee (2003, p.169) argues that “[c]urrent management theories rarely question whose norms are used; rather they tend to normalize conflicting criteria for development and progress.” Gladwin et al. (1995, p.874) also argue that “[m]odern management theory is constricted by a fractured epistemology, which
separates humanity from nature and truth from morality.” Grey (2004), argues that the traditional management and business models are “out for its lack of relevance to the real world” (p.184). Similarly, Adler et al. (2007, p.7) argue that the modern firms and organisations’ management are guided by one narrow goal: to maximise profits. Furthermore, an influential quote by Milton Friedman (1970) states that social responsibility of business is to increase its profits but to follow the basic rules of society.

Another theory or model that is taught in most business schools is Porter’s (1980) 'five forces framework’, which can be considered mainstream in most strategy courses. Ghoshal (2005, p.75) implies that this framework “that companies must compete not only with their competitors but also with their suppliers, customers, employees, and regulators” can lead to opportunistic behaviour in decision making. Models like this teaches students in business schools to compete with everyone at every level, which arguably leads to impact the overall mind-set of the leaders of tomorrow. Ghoshal (2005) states that in order for business schools to "help prevent future Enrons", it is not only about adding new courses into the education. He argues that business schools simply need to stop teaching certain old management models. Moreover, he also stresses that before doing so "we—as business school faculty—need to own up to our own role in creating Enrons" (p.75). Ghoshal (2005) also proposes that many of the worst exaggerations of recent management practices "have their roots in a set of ideas that have emerged from business school academics over the last 30 years" (p.75). Moreover, Grey (2004) states that business schools’ should make an effort to rethink the traditional theories instead of seeking effective techniques and solutions, which often decouples management from values. When Ghoshal’s (2005) article was published it triggered quite a few scholars to enter the debate about the effects of these management theories and models, that they can be harmful and bad for practice (Donaldson, 2005; Gapper, 2005; Hambrick, 2005; Pheffer, 2005). Pheffer (2005) goes one step further to state that Ghoshal might even underestimate the rational myth and “acceptance of economic language, assumptions, and theory.” (p.96) Pheffer also expressed his concern of where the discussion is heading and argues that business schools need to take collective action to do something about “the growing dominance of theoretical perspectives that are harmful for practice” (p.96) or nothing will change.

Human beings—even chief executives—are influenced by the ethical codes of the communities in which they live. If we treat managers as financially self-interested automatons who must be
lured by the carrot of stock options and beaten with the stick of corporate governance, that attitude will become self-fulfilling (Gapper, 2005, p.101).

The behaviour of firms and managers, has also been heavily debated after the financial crisis of 2008 (Dallas, 2011; Colander et al., 2009; Lewis et al., 2010; Lupuleac et al., 2012)

Critical Management Studies (CMS) can be seen as one response to the dogmatic area of business and management studies. It is a multidisciplinary movement incorporating a range of perspectives by using a critical lens on management education. It aims to radically transform management practice and questions the authority and relevance of mainstream thinking. For example, one of the common mainstream assumptions in management is that someone has to be in charge. It is assumed that those managers are experts because of their education and training and so it is ‘rational’ for them to make the important decisions (Alvesson et al., 2009). CMS problematise the search for control in management studies and thus try to avoid dealing with complexity. It stresses that management studies are not nearly complex enough to be anywhere near the complex societal reality business work in (Grey, 2004, p.184).

CMS are rooted in older, humanistic critiques of corporate capitalism and bureaucracy. The motivating concern of CMS is that the focus primarily lies in economic activity rather than serving the environment and society as a whole with ecological balance, justice and human development (Adler et al., 2007, p.3; Kurucz et al., 2013, p.438). “The dominant approaches to wealth creation degrade the ecological systems and social relationships upon which their very survival depends” (Kurucz et al., 2013, p.438).

2.4 Sensemaking in organisations
As has been discussed, organisations take on ideas for various reasons and have the tendency to become more similar to each other. When making sense of something, an idea, event or a concept, it is usually associated with common sense or logics. However, Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005, p.409) state that the process of sensemaking is easily taken for granted. Sensemaking is said to fill important gaps in organisational theory (Basu & Palazzzo, 2008; Shamiyeh, 2014; Weick et al., 2005) and it “is a way to deal with ambiguity and interpret meaning in an organization” (Karsten, 2006, p.224). It is a dynamic, retrospective and social development of reasoning that rationalise what individuals are doing. To focus on meaning is to describe and organise experience, which is also reflected in identity and social context (Weick et al., 2005). In order to overcome this ambiguity
individuals tend to search for knowledge or tools, which will eventually lead them to consider strategic responses (Hahn et al., 2014). Sensemaking in organisations is according to Weick (1995, pp.17-62) a process that he describes with several features. *Grounded in identity construction* is about how individuals make sense of events or ideas depending on their own lens and own context, which also can reflect in how the ideas are adopted. He illustrates this with a sentence: “How can I know who I am until I see what I say?” (p.181) Another feature is the *Retrospective*, where individuals try to make sense of something looking back at their experiences, since they cannot make sense of something that has not happened yet (i.e. the future) (Weber & Glynn, 2008). *Enactive of sensible environments* is about the importance of action as we cannot just command and expect the environment to automatically obey. The individuals are also co-constructing the environment with fellow sensemakers (Pondy & Mitroff, 1979). Weick also emphasises on the *Social* factor of sensemaking and that “the social context is crucial […] because it binds people to actions that they then must justify” (Weick, 1995, p.53). He also stresses that as individuals are constantly making new ‘sense’ of their situations new ideas or problems arise in an *Ongoing* process. As the circumstances change, the individual will look for clues in its surrounding context to solve the problematic situation. Finally, he mentions that when looking for clues individuals are usually confronted with more than they might be capable of noticing due to their own filter. The clues that the individual will focus on are also shaped by their own interests, and determined by situational factors and context. Sensemaking binds people to actions that they then must defend with explanations.

### 2.5 Previous PRME studies

Signing initiatives like UN Global Compact and PRME has also been used as an example of when organisations and corporations only motive is to seek legitimacy (Kell & Ruggie, 1999; Rache, 2009). This is sometimes problematised and called blue-washing. The problem of ‘blue-washing’ (comparable to ‘green-washing’) also seems to be a concern in relation to the PRME initiative (e.g. Waddock et al., 2011). In addition, Rache (2013) also suggests that schools seek the prestige of affiliation to the UN more than committing to substantive action. This is also evident in an extensive study by Perry and Win (2013, pp.61-62) on PRME, which suggests that “PRME is gaining support because it reinforces existing trends” and that there is limited evidence of PRME in itself being the driving change. This finding is also mirrored in the schools’ motives to sign PRME where there seems to be an overlap with that and the business schools’ involvement with accreditation bodies (e.g. AACSB, AMBA,
EFMD and EQUIS). For example, in the process of applying for EQUIS it is required that
the schools list formal commitments to ethics, responsibility and sustainability, where
PRME is used as an example (EQUIS, 2015, p.69). However, their findings do not stretch as
far as implying that PRME is failing. They state that “[PRME] are more likely to influence
people who wish to act in the manner encouraged by the code than people who are not
predisposed to so do”. Another quantitative study conducted by Godemann et al. (2011)
collected data from 100 PRME Sharing Information on Progress (SIP) reports. SIP reports
are reports that member schools have to write every second year in order to be listed as a
communicating member on PRME’s website (Godemann et al., 2011). The study found that
the vast majority of business schools aim to embed sustainability within research, teaching,
and operations, where the most weight is placed on teaching. Furthermore, the business
schools emphasise on different goals of sustainable business education. Some of them focus
more on the necessity of innovation whereas others stress the importance of critical thinking
in order to deal with societal problems. In addition, the reports showed that some
emphasised on the value of traditional management and that business schools have a
tendency of developing new programmes or courses to sustainability ”or critically revise the
syllabus of individual modules”. However, ”few business schools try to embed sustainability
issues across the entire curriculum” (Godemann et al, 2011, p.7).

In this theoretical background we have discussed how and why organisations adopt and
circulate new ideas. In this study we look at seven business school and university
organisations that are expected to have adopted the idea - sustainability. In addition to being
an organisation, they also have a crucial role in society where they educate future decision-
makers. We wonder why and how they make sense of sustainability in business education
and how they fit it with their existing theories and institutional practices.

3. Methodology
In order to explore how academics make sense of sustainability in business education we
chose to study the case of seven business schools and universities in Sweden that have
signed the PRME initiative. We interviewed one employee of each school that is in charge
of, or responsible for the schools’ cooperation with the initiative. Robson (2002, p.178)
defines case study as “[...] a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical
investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, using
multiple sources of evidence”. From an institutional perspective we explore why these business schools and universities commit to work with sustainability and how they make sense of it. A fundamental consideration when studying a particular phenomenon is selecting a suitable research approach. Researchers generally decide between a deductive or an inductive approach, based on the rationale of the study and theory (Wilson, 2010). However, a combination of these two can be used as an alternative, which is called abduction (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012, p.147). During the study we have moved back and forth between reading literature and generating data through interviews with academics. The study can therefore be considered to be abductive (Walton, 2012).

3.1 Research philosophy

In this study we depart from a philosophical stance of interpretivism. Which is according to Saunders et al. (2009) essentially about exploring the subjective meanings that motivates the actions of social actors in order to understand their behaviour. Individuals interpret their social roles through their own set of meanings and in relation to others as well as the world around them. Saunders et al. (2009, p.116) states “[c]rucial to the interpretivist philosophy is that the researcher has to adopt an empathetic stance.” In other words, the main challenge in taking this stance is that we, as researchers, have to enter the social world of our research subjects i.e. the academics, in order to understand the world from their point of view. Even though this is difficult, it has been argued that this stance is “highly appropriate in the case of business and management research, particularly in such fields as organisational behaviour [...]” (Saunders et al., 2009, p.116). This is because business situations are not only complex; they are also unique in their set of circumstances where individuals come together at a specific time (Saunders et al., 2009). Thus, by interviewing seven academics working within business schools and universities. In this study we attempt to understand how they make sense of sustainability, how the schools translate it into their business education. Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.105) argue that “[q]uestions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm, which [they] define as the basic belief system or world view that guides the investigation.”

3.2 Data sources

This study has been conducted through seven qualitative in-depth interviews that explore the views and experiences of academics as well as the challenges they face when working with
integrating sustainability in Swedish universities and business schools. The samples were chosen based on their recent decision to sign the PRME initiative. The seven Swedish schools that qualified has therefore made a commitment to implement sustainability into their education, as well as engage in a platform for responsible management education. The specific location was chosen due to the fact that it makes it easier to compare the schools because they operate in the similar environments with the same legal standards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participating School</th>
<th>Type of Organisation</th>
<th>Est.</th>
<th>Type of Education</th>
<th>Signed PRME</th>
<th>Position of Respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department of Business Administration and Work Science -</td>
<td>University Business</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Undergraduate Post Graduate</td>
<td>4 Mar 2016</td>
<td>Vice Chancellor of the University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristianstad University (KU)</td>
<td>Department</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership Form: State</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jönköping International Business School (JIBS)</td>
<td>Business School</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Undergraduate Post Graduate, Doctoral, Executive</td>
<td>26 Mar 2013</td>
<td>Assistant Professor Business Administration and PRME Project Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership Form: Private</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lund University - School of Economics and Management (LUSEM)</td>
<td>Faculty of Lund University</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Undergraduate Post Graduate Doctoral Executive</td>
<td>28 Mar 2012</td>
<td>Associate professor in Economics and responsible for PRME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership Form: State</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockholm Business School (SBS) - Stockholm University</td>
<td>Business department part of University</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Undergraduate Post Graduate Doctoral Executive</td>
<td>2 Jul 2015</td>
<td>Dean of the business department and Professor in Management and Organisation Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership Form: State</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockholm School of Economics (SSE)</td>
<td>Business School</td>
<td>1909</td>
<td>Undergraduate Post Graduate Doctoral Executive</td>
<td>5 Jul 2013</td>
<td>Associate Professor in the school’s ‘Sustainability Research Group’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership Form: Private</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Gothenburg; School of Business, Economics and Law (GSBEL)</td>
<td>Faculty of the University of Gothenburg</td>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Undergraduate Post Graduate Doctoral Executive</td>
<td>22 Oct 2010</td>
<td>Sustainability Coordinator and responsible for PRME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership Form: State</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umeå School of Business and Economics (USBE)</td>
<td>Business School part of Umeå University</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Undergraduate Post Graduate Doctoral</td>
<td>2 Dec 2013</td>
<td>Dean</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table: The sample of the study, the seven business schools and universities that have signed PRME.

The study is categorised into three different themes and the aim of the research is to explore how Swedish business schools and universities make sense of integrating sustainability into their business education. The three different themes are:
1. Purpose: Explore why they signed PRME and why they decided to implement sustainability into their education.

2. Strategy: Explore how the schools adopt sustainability as an idea and how they integrate it into their education.


The interviews were semi-structured and based on the theoretical background and previous studies which have been discussed in this thesis. The questions asked in the interviews are available in Appendix 2, but it is important to have in mind that these interviews were both open-ended and semi-structured which gives room for exploration (Saunders et al., 2012). Thus we in some cases changed or re-phrased some questions in particular interviews, due to various answers to the questions and specific organisational context (Saunders et al., 2012, p.320). However, we followed the three themes in all cases. Five of seven interviews were held at the respondents’ location, the remaining two interviews were conducted via Skype.

3.3 Data analysis

After the data had been collected, approximately, seven hours were transcribed in full and read through many times before they were compared and analysed. We chose to do a content analysis of our transcriptions and in doing so, Silverman (cited in Grafström & Windell, 2011, p.223) states, “the researchers establish a set of categories and then count the number of instances that fall into each category.” We are well aware that the data is compiled data, meaning that we selected what was relevant for the study (Kervin, 1999). This was done mainly to search for meaning through interpreting the views and expressed experiences of the participants.

The data was categorised into three themes: purpose, strategy and views. We did this because even though the questions were asked in this order, the respondents sometimes went back and forth in their answers. When this had been done, the empirical findings were analysed with the literature on sustainability, organisational and institutional theory as well as the role of business education. Czarniawska (1996, p.4) states that “[i]t is impossible to understand human conduct by ignoring its intentions, and it is impossible to understand human intentions by ignoring the setting in which they make sense”. These settings can be institutions, organisations, practices or “some other contexts created by humans and nonhumans - contexts that have a history, that have been organised as narratives
themselves.” (p.4) As previously mentioned, we also adopt Weick’s (1995) sensemaking features to help us analyse how the individuals (academics) within the organisations (business schools) make sense of sustainability in their business education.

Sensemaking has been used before in looking at how organisations make sense of CSR. For example, Basu and Palazzo (2008) suggests that what firms think, what firms say, and how firms tend to behave, have an impact on the firm’s CSR character. They state that understanding this and what they tend to do in relation to others (i.e., its sensemaking process) “is likely to strengthen CSR analysis” (Basu & Palazzo, 2008, p.133).

3.4 Limitations
This is a sample of seven people in various roles within seven different organisations in terms of size and structure. We are aware that one individual's opinion and point of view is one among many others. In addition, what the respondents say may not necessarily be reflected in practice, this is something that we cannot be sure of, however, this study is exploratory and the aim is not find out the truth but rather provide new insights on how academics make sense of sustainability in business education.

4. Empirics
4.1 Purpose of signing PRME and adopting sustainability
The overall impression after interviewing the seven respondents is that there is no clear reasoning behind why their schools signed the PRME initiative. According to some, it motivates members within the organisation to start reporting and measure implementation of sustainability in education and research. Others mentioned PRME being a rather small commitment and more about building legitimacy.

JIBS signed the PRME initiative after adding responsibility as one of the three core values of the school. The respondent from JIBS stated that PRME helps to work with sustainability in a systematic matter. The LUSEM respondent stated that PRME definitely contributing by saying that “what it makes us do is to think through what we are doing and how we are doing it.” He also said that they use it as a framework “[…] I think [PRME] is a very good tool to reflect.” In addition, the KU respondent expressed how it “gives [them] important sense of belonging to others in the world sharing the same interest.” He explained how being part of PRME makes them feel that they are “part of a bigger community.”
Some of the other respondents had another take on the commitment and portrayed it as something that was done in conjunction with their schools’ engagement with accreditations. “I think in a lot of ways it was driven by the EQUIS accreditation [...]. From 2013 they included sustainability so it became very natural that we needed to take charge of this part” said the SSE respondent when asked about why they signed it. The respondent of SBS also explained how PRME is a part of their process in applying for accreditations such as EQUIS and relates it to legitimacy. “Legitimacy is the reason that we applied for it and I think that is a normal starting point for most organisations that apply for it.” He also mentions that legitimacy may not be the only outcome, it could also potentially, motivate them to work with implementing sustainability into their education systematically. “But I don’t think that we have come very far, not just yet” and adds that “I would say that as long as there are no real evaluations, then the possibility of doing nothing is very high.” The USBE respondent talked about the importance of not joining PRME and similar initiatives just for the stamp. “That is a sugar trap”, she and continued explaining how they have planned to visit the conferences that PRME are providing as well as staying connected in the networks.

Even though the KU respondent expressed the sense of belonging, he also mentioned that “if you collect good examples of how you work on sustainability and you write about that in a chapter for EQUIS, then you can also use it for presenting a report in the PRME secretariat”. He added that the UN initiatives are easy to work with. Others also mentioned that PRME was an easy commitment to make. The USBE said that “since the PRME exists and since it actually fits really well to what we are already doing, well why not take it”. This is something that the SSE respondent talked about as well and mentioned that the commitment does not cost anything. “It does not have a whole lot of impact but it is more of a greenwashing, nice club to be a member of. You have some companies who are very active, but the great majority are not”. However, she started by saying that it can be a good framework to use to understand your operations, however, she does not feel that PRME provides them with any clear guidelines. “It does not say how to do it. It is just six principles that [...] we will promise to bring into the education. So it is more a nice thing to have”. She compared PRME with the UN Global Compact and said that they are very similar “You sign on to a commitment and then you make a report every two years and that is it”. She later added “Two things with these types of principles with PRME and the UNGC, their criticisms are 1. That it’s ‘bluewashing’ because of the UN, called bluewashing instead of
greenwashing. Furthermore, she spoke of how there is no pressure on them going to meetings and work on development with others “you cannot really fail”. The SBS stressed that “it should not be easy” and talked about how he fears that they will be “part of a brick game, signing up for organisations [...] and then there is no penalty involved if we mess up”. He also exemplified this with the Global Compact; “they have many many big organisations, most of them are totally devastating for the environment. So I am a little bit worried about us being part of this.”

4.1.1 The driving forces

When asked about the purpose of integrating sustainability into the business education, all of the respondents refer to sustainability as being just something that is “happening in the society” rather than wanting to point the finger at a particular driving force. “There is a discussion now that comes from the financial crisis, that we should have seen it coming and so on.” said the LUSEM respondent when explaining his opinion about the importance of implementing sustainability into the business sector and how it is thought to be so important at this point in time. Other respondents also go back to the year 2008. “After the financial crisis and all that. This is just something that has to be done” said the respondent of GSBEL. Some of the respondents expressed that implementing sustainability into the business education is something that comes natural to them because it is what is a general trend in society and ‘politically a hot topic’. The LUSEM respondent talked about how he does not sense any specific pressure from the outside and stated that it is “natural for us [the business schools and universities] to take part in this”. The USBE respondent also said that to have a “sustainability profile [...] is very much in time” and added that “it was a very natural step for [them] to take”. In addition, she stated that they have sensed that the labour market is more asking for students that have an understanding of ethics and sustainability issues, when they arrive at the labour market. The GSBEL respondent said similar things and thinks that “everyone sees that sustainability is becoming more and more important for all kinds of businesses, [...] that it is something everyone has to relate to.” He has, however, a hard time pointing at where the main pressure comes from. “I think that businesses and organisations on different levels are also pushing the agenda [...] but mainstreaming it into the education has been a slower process”. The SBS respondent suggested that “academia is not always the institutions who takes things the furthest and fastest, we are sort of lagging behind”. He describes this further in relation to sustainable development with:
That is the point with intellectual activity and universities, we try to sort of change the world – yes, but we also need to find out what is going on and then we as an institution say ‘this is what is going on’ and the students say ‘what is the answer?’ But we do not know because this is a tricky thing, sustainable development, there are several, numerous versions of it.

Most of the respondents expressed very clearly that they do not feel pressure from the students to incorporate sustainability into their education. “The students are in general not that interested in [sustainability]” said the respondent of LUSEM. The respondent of SSE also mentions the students’ part in the process. She mentioned that many of their mainly focus on their grade and what is going to be on the exam.

This is not driven by [the students], at all! I think it is more important to have a leader who actually believes in [sustainable development], by giving the support and resources that are needed. Then it comes down to practical issues, we do not have a whole lot of resources, people are very time pressed and so on.

She illustrated her opinion and said that it was really challenging to go into a classroom with students studying finance, as more than 50% of them do not think sustainability is relevant. She talked about having to convince students about the importance of sustainability.

I think we need to raise the level of intellectual curiosity. [...] We [for example] have a predominance in students that come from a very small area of Stockholm. They come from you know, upper middle class families where all the parents have university education, and they are a very small homogeneous group. This is something the school is working really hard to widen.

4.2 Strategy for adopting sustainability

4.2.1 Source of signing

When asked why they decided to sign the PRME initiative, the respondent from LUSEM answered "I can feel that this is a strategic priority in the school". All of the respondents except for SSE stated that the initiative of signing PRME came from the top management. The respondent of GSBEL talked about the importance of management and that implementing sustainability into their education was a top down decision. He demonstrates how the leadership is crucial to drive this initiative. “If you don’t have any support and resources you are not really able to do something”. For JIBS, signing the initiative was originally a top down approach but the decision of starting to work more with sustainability
came from the bottom of the organisation when their values were re-assessed. “We had bottom up exercise with all the faculties to try to get them to understand our core values”. She mentioned how it is fundamental to work from the bottom and up in regards to implementing sustainability in their education: “[the researchers] are with us in this but we have never lifted them up”. JIBS faculties decided together to embed sustainability on a program level. She talked about the importance of having a dialogue with the program directors both to avoid resistance and repetition. They started by collecting data from the faculties and the staff to understand better where they stand in this. The USBE respondent talked about the resistance also and how the individuals did not feel included in the decision-making.

In relation to creating a strategy, the respondent of SSE also spoke about how it is important to have a dialogue “we can support the program-director first, and ask if they want to have a separate program or if they want to work with the faculty so they can integrate it into all the courses. But we are not going top down saying, ‘you have to do it this way’. We want to have the dialogue.”

According to the SSE respondent the initiative was bottom up in terms of wanting to implement sustainability and signing the initiative as well as to create a strategy. They had been looking into different rounds of where they could get the support from for a long time. She described that even though the initiative came from the bottom up, the top down approach was important in making sure that everyone were on board: “having the dean positive, helps a lot in getting these decisions through”. She also stressed the importance of leadership and how the individual interest matters since having a new dean changed a lot. “I think it is about two years ago [the current dean] came on board and he believes in this so it has become a strategic importance to the school but that is also very connected to what he believes.” She explained how the previous deans did not see it as a priority. “We were just a bunch of girls doing research in a group on our own and we brought in our own money so we could do what we wanted, it wasn’t a school wide, which [the current dean] has helped to make, in a sense”.

All of the respondents said that sustainability has in fact been in their business education in various forms for a long time. Many of them, however, do not yet have a formal strategy and
overview on exactly how sustainability is fitted into their programs, in order to go forward with it.

SBS respondent was not aware of how SBS works with PRME nor did he know who is currently responsible for working with the initiative and exactly how they are integrating sustainability into their education. “I do not know right now what we are doing systematically for sustainable development in the curriculum” he revealed that we triggered him to start thinking about who he should assign this to. “Do not get me wrong, we are doing things but not systematically.” This was also the case with LUSEM and KU. Neither of them had a strategic approach when it came to integrating sustainability in their education. LUSEM signed the PRME initiative in 2013 and even though they wrote a PRME report in 2014, they still have no clear strategy when it comes to implementing it. “We bring guest lecturers and so on but we are not using any measurements yet. [...] Now I am hoping that we will take a new fresh approach to it”. KU signed the initiative only a few months ago, in March 2016, so they have not had time to reflect upon it yet. He said that they have approached the teachers and asked them how they work with sustainability “but the funny thing is that the concept of sustainability is very broadly defined so many of our teachers have defined their subjects as sustainability in some way or the other”.

Some schools had however worked on creating strategies. When asked if PRME provides them with any guidance or framework, the SSE respondent said “to be honest I think, maybe a little arrogantly, that we know it better [...] because some of us have been doing research in the area for a long time”. The highest governing board of the school decided on the new strategy, which is launching in 2016. “It will be mandatory for all program directors to come to our workshops to learn and understand and get support on this. Then they have to show how they will integrate it into their programs”. She also stated that the courses in the programs cannot be elective because then only the people that already seek the knowledge and are interested will come. She emphasise that this is a big challenge: “for many years we have had sustainability and CSR courses as electives but now, every program will have a mandatory part”. She mentioned that in order to be able to do that, they have been redesigning the programs.

Many of the other respondents also emphasised that a strong research team in the field is crucial for the implementation process. JIBS respondent explained that since there are no specific frameworks on how to implement sustainability into the education they had to spend
a lot of time figuring out how to go about with researchers in the field. “We had to create our own understanding, see through what is done already and how to built upon, how the faculties can develop and encourage the researchers to use sustainability in their research”. The USBE respondent also talks about that it is crucial to have good researchers in the field, and said that the main reason for why they have stronger focus on the environmental aspects of sustainability in their strategy is because they have so many researchers in that field. JIBS respondent also highlighted an example. “We have a professor in our economic department that is very interested in environmental economics, and that makes a difference.” The respondent of LUSEM also said that “it depends upon who is the teacher.”, when asked where they put their focus. This is very much in line with GSBEL strategic approach where they created a task force group that consisted of different researchers in sustainability from various departments. “The research is fundamental to this. Here we have a very strong research team in the field that is really pushing this agenda.”

Other respondents also felt that PRME was not necessarily bringing anything new to the table and already feel that they have been working with sustainability in their education long before signing the initiative. The GSBEL respondent stated that PRME is a small commitment; “we are not very focused on PRME or very involved in the PRME community [...] and we have sort of felt that we are ahead of most [schools] [and thus] do not get so much inspired by others”. The LUSEM respondent talked about sustainability already being a part of the education “it is already there but used in another language”. This is also something that all respondent indicated. However, they still emphasised on the importance of creating a strategy, but did not link it directly to PRME. JIBS respondent explained how they have been working with sustainability for a long time and doing research in the field. However, but it did not become a strategic approach until they “lifted it up as a value for the organisation”.

4.2.2 Creating an interdisciplinary environment and the resistance
All of the schools that were interviewed talked about the challenge of creating an interdisciplinary environment. They explain how different subjects have different focuses and how most people in the academia get stuck in their own subjects. The SBS respondent points out how sustainability is usually an ‘add on’ in the education, instead of being implemented into existing courses. He pointed out that this would be the easy way out by saying “Ideally it would be present on every course [...] but we should have a problem as an
academic institution to integrate sustainable development, because if you take it seriously, we seriously [have to] reconsider our own concept”. However, GSBEL respondent talked about a ‘crazy idea’ to implement sustainability in all courses, but that was their first intention. “The biggest challenge is to make it something more than just something extra [...] but is not possible to have [sustainability] as a learning outcome in every course”. He explained how they felt a lot of resistance from the faculties concerning the original idea on putting sustainability as a learning outcome in every course. “Now we have it on program level and it is very much up to the person responsible for the program to sort of make this process happen.”

JIBS respondent also mentioned this challenge in the academic system, how it is not possible to tell researchers what to teach and how to teach it. "They work in silo" she said, explaining how they try to encourage program directors to have “specific seminars and lectures on the topic” and stressed the importance of contextualisation. Which was something that the SSE respondent also spoke about; the importance of having an interdisciplinary approach and focusing on partnerships with departments from different disciplines such as natural science, engineering, political science and sociology. She mentioned the complexity and diversity of the sustainability perspective and how it concerns many different aspects. “We cannot be sitting in our own departments and just be looking at the world in one way, in a sense. If we are going to solve these [sustainability] challenges”. She talked about how they try to educate the teachers in workshops but then it is up to them how they bring it into their programs. Her concern about ‘stand alone’ courses in sustainability was expressed and she mentioned the risk that it will result in ‘just something extra’. Which the respondents of GSBEL and SBS also talked about. “Well that is the easiest way of doing it, because then you just bring in someone that knows the area to teach it. [However] that is then the same thing as when sustainability units in companies have no relevance to the operation”. Still, she expressed scepticism regarding the possibility of implementing sustainability into every existing course.

“I’m not sure because there are a lot of things that are important.” In addition, the LUSEM respondent do not believe that the best way of implementing sustainability into the education is to put it in every single course, and expressed his opinion about how sustainability do not fit with every subject in business. He explained how other fields are also important. “If you have a statistical course, where you learn statistical methods, then maybe that is not the type
of course that should be talking about climate change [...] every department cannot cover every aspects” and adds that their approach will be to include sustainability where it is relevant.” The UBSE talked about how she has noticed that business studies used various methods to “sneak it in”. “You should have it where it fits otherwise it will not serve its purpose [...] it should be a natural part of the course. It could be guest lecturers, it could be the teacher him or herself having it as a theme in the course, or it could be a course on the topic itself”. Most of the respondents talked about the limited space in the curriculum and how they need to prioritise. KU respondent said that “it is important to think about how it is possible to implement [sustainability] into your course, and if you increase the part connected to sustainability then you have to take away something else”. The SBS respondent also talked about there being “too many trade-offs”

All of the schools have various methods and vision when it comes to the integration process. They all mention the nature of the academic environment being the main reason why it is difficult to decide on one way to do it. SSE respondent explains the challenge with getting everyone on board.

We brought our things to the dean and were able to get that through and now we are dealing with making it happen, which isn’t so easy because there is a lot of people, a lot of faculties who do not agree [...] the biggest commitment is to support and train the trainers, capacity build all the program directors so they are able to show how it [is implemented] into their programs.

She came back to the importance of the top down approach and the bottom up approach having to be complimentary, explaining that if the management starts to force the researchers and professors to do it in a specific way it will create a strong resistance. “Number one, they will just get pissed off if we push something against them that they don’t know and number two, we think they are the ones who have the competence to actually identify the sustainability challenges and ethical challenges within their fields.”

JIBS also stated this, “The key element in working with PRME or with sustainability [in business education] is that you champion champions”. She is on the other hand positive about the success of this approach and does not feel resistance from the faculties anymore. “They see that it is becoming more and more important, it is not a trend, it is not a
fashion, so it is here to stay”. She added that even though it can be challenging working with voluntary system like PRME she believes that there is evidence of progress.

This is a process of change, people have to start changing and when they do, people start to find areas and opportunities within their subjects [...] You have to find a way to see through that these champions feel that they can act upon whatever that is in their courses and in research so they can go naturally into these changes. [...] But this is not a work that you can do in one day. You can not go into the faculty and say - You have to do this!.

Many of the respondents are not as positive about being able to encourage their teachers to rethink their courses or programs. “It is very difficult to change teachers that are very much believing in their subjects [...] especially, economics is in a dogmatic area” the respondent of KU said. He adds that it can be very difficult to dictate when dealing with faculty. He spoke about his experience when he worked with PRME for Lund University and said that “the problem was that not that many came because faculties are doing their thing and are not that easy to give orders to.”

The SSE and SBS respondent were both pessimistic about finding a solution to the problem of getting researchers and professors to rethink the way they work. They both mentioned that the most effective way to address this is by recruitment. “I cannot control my employees, what we could do is when we recruit, we could recruit specifically people that are good at sustainable development, having it as part of the strategy of the school so the recruitment of scholars is the most important way [...] to target people that are interested in sustainable development”, said the respondent of SBS and points out that if the researchers are interested in sustainable development they will have courses in sustainable development, but not otherwise. The respondent of SSE talked as well about how integrating sustainability into the education depends on each and every teachers but adds that she feels less and less resistance if it is only made relevant to them.

[...] the ones that are really old and have been teaching for so many years tend to want to re-run their old courses again and again, most of the teachers here are here because they are researchers [...] but [most of the teachers] like learning new things [...] I think some will come to the other side and if you take just any course in sustainability, some will hate it and some will love it.
The KU respondent also talked about how it is necessary to make the individual teachers involved in the subject and said that this process depend “very much on the teachers and how they approach the material."

The main problem I think is that teachers are very much into their different subjects and they might have problems to understand how sustainability has an impact on their subjects [...] I mean there is this resistance when it comes to change and development

All of the other respondents more or less agree that implementing sustainability into the education will always be up to the teacher in the end and referred to the academic freedom. The SBS respondent underlines how the top down approach can create a pavilion or an arena that is fertile for initiatives like sustainable development. “In academia, we can never control people, they are professionals and they are driven by research and so on.”

4.3 Views on sustainability

4.3.1 The challenge of the ambiguity

The LUSEM respondent talked about the ambiguity of the concept being one of the greatest challenges. “I asked the directors of studies what they thought [working with integrating sustainability in the education] and they said that they had a difficulty working with this because they did not fully understand what it meant.” GSBEL also described the challenge of sustainability and it being a new concept. “Introducing something new always takes time and teachers are not very well educated in this topic”. KU also mentions the challenge of the teachers putting different meanings to the concept.

Well if we ask our teachers they will probably say that they [have already integrated sustainability into their education] but it is also a question of what they mean by sustainability. So if I would ask all our teachers if they have aspects concerning sustainability? Most of them would probably say yes in some way but if you are a hard-core person in economics they would say that sustainability was about creating wealth and business exchanges.

The respondent of KU feels that they have been working with sustainable development for a long time, even though they have not used the word sustainability. As mentioned earlier, almost all of the respondents expressed the same opinion.
4.3.2 On how sustainability fits with business and economics

The respondents have different views when it comes to how sustainability fits with business and economics. The respondent of SBS expressed his opinion about how the mainstream theories in economics and business administration that are taught in every business school can often simply contradict sustainable development.

I am very critical towards how business administration as a subject uses sustainability in their courses, without changing the very parameters that the subject is driven by. For instance, we have not changed the concept and notion of efficiency. We might have to change this to speak of sustainable development. [...] What version of sustainable development have we if we can easily integrate it into our previous courses, our course syllabus. My guess, my experience is that we weaken sustainable development so we can talk about growth, efficiency, profit, capitalism and sustainable development in the same sentence, for me that is an oxymoron.

He illustrated this with an example about the mining industry in Sweden and how they use the term ‘sustainable mining’, “for me that is an oxymoron”. He emphasised that this was his own opinion, since he is a researcher in the field. Throughout the interview the SBS respondent was sceptical about how sustainability is used and overused, and expressed his concern of standardising sustainability. “If you have a standardisation then we might have the same version [of sustainability] and it turns into a dogma, an axiom, something that is true and I’m not so sure that we can actually say that we have true or false when it comes to sustainability”. Throughout the interview the SBS respondent wanted to distinguish his personal self from his role as a dean of the department, and explained how difficult it is to align his personal belief with what he is actually able to do for the faculty.

The LUSEM respondent however does not agree that business and sustainability does not fit together and emphasised how times are rapidly changing and that more people starts to see how it fits better together. He gave us an example. “Recently, the steel industry came together with Vattenfall and said, well now we are going to develop new techniques to produce steel carbon free. Five years ago, that would not have been possible.” He explained how it is getting more and more crucial for the companies to think about these issues and illustrated his thoughts with another example. “You have Marc Carney from the Bank of England saying that it is crucial to think about carbon assets because they might be worthless in the future. And then [the businesses] are going to have a big problem.” He adds an example about energy companies and how they are increasingly investing in renewable energy.
The GSBEL also shifted to the discussion about how companies can benefit from sustainability reporting. “I think when we think about competitive advantage, then sustainability becomes more and more important, I think they do it for the sake of being better.” The KU respondent thinks that sustainability fits “perfectly well” with business education. He explained his view by saying that business education is about “the life of people and the society” and that it should reflect the challenges of the life. “Sustainability is, to me, very much about an umbrella concept, covering important challenges for societies.” He continues:

People say that capitalism is not good and that we should take away the capitalistic system. Well that is for me the nirvana fantasy [...] [which] is when you take something that is not functioning and you throw it away, but the problem is that the alternative is not functioning either and the alternative might be worse than the original alternative [...] there is no perfect solution to anything [however] your solution has to be found in some kind of theory or some kind of idea that works.

The USBE respondent also said that it fits very well, “but I am not objective here perhaps” and expressed her view that teachers have all the analytical tools to prepare the students and to handle the sustainability challenges they may face in the future. The respondent of SSE was more sceptical about how well sustainability currently fits with business. She talked about how some companies are working very hard to green their current operations and even taking the lead in trying to go past the policymakers to get the minimum wages up in certain nations. These companies get a lot of PR for this, yet their whole business model may not be sustainable. “We try to make [sustainability and business] fit within the existing system to make it as good as possible but it will never be perfect, the whole business models are based on something wrong here, like the race to bottom and all of that.”

4.3.3 The role of business education
The respondent of SBS recalled a debate in the 90s about whether business schools mattered or not. He explained how it was splitted between two sides “On the one hand there were people saying that business schools do not have that power to change people. But on the other side they said ‘yes, we can change, it is important what we do’ and so on”. In spite of this, all of the respondents seem to agree that the role of business education being extremely crucial for generating responsible decision-makers.
The LUSEM respondent said:

[...] obviously the students need to know about boundaries, if you talk about economic development, what kind of boundaries and environmental boundaries are there for constant growing economy [...] we will like our students to understand the impacts of their decisions [and] have a strong scientific foundation to be able to make good decisions for the future. [...] students are going to be in very powerful situations, in business or in administration, where they will make very important decisions, that will affect society. So for them to understand sustainability and how the decisions affect sustainability. That is very very important.

The JIBS respondent also made a strong link between business education and practice and explained their awareness of generating future leaders that have to be responsible and have moral values so they can be able to lead and to create sustainable businesses “so we cannot [integrate sustainability into the education] just for the sake of doing it. We want to be somehow change-agents”.

The respondent at SSE used the word “enormously important” when she explained her opinion on the role of business schools. “I mean, 23% of CEOs stock listed companies come from this school [and] we have the most popular programs [in Sweden] across all subjects. Every other year we are more popular than medical studies or law”. The GBG respondent recognised this as well and explained why the roles of business schools are so important. “If you do not have [business] students that understand the global sustainability challenges, then we do not have businesses and organisations that are ready to cope with it”. The SBS respondent also believes that business schools and universities can form students. “We are research based institutions who teach young people in Sweden to be critical, so of course we influence students, so what we do on every course matters.”

All respondents agreed that business schools and universities have a vital role to play in educating the future leaders of the business sector. However, on the role of business as a wider advocate of sustainability overall, most respondents felt that the government should be the one to take the responsibility. “Government structures in the society are the structures that should take the real responsibility” said the respondent of KU. The LUSEM explained his personal opinion about the role of business in promoting sustainable development. “It definitely plays a role [...] but business is also a profit maximiser. Right? The role of business, is to be a viable and make profits”. He explains how it will always come down to the government if we want to be able to have a “truly sustainable society”. “We have to
[...] change the structures, with laws and regulations. [...] Because that changes how we consume, it changes what is profitable for firm to invest in and so on.” The GBG respondent also shifts the discussion from the business to the government. “Businesses are extremely important when it comes to sustainability, by showing that they want regulations”. The USBE respondent also expressed her view on this by saying that the main problem was “weak politicians”, and added. “Sometimes I think that the debate we have today [about sustainability issues] is too strongly focused on that it is the economy that causes the problems” She takes an example about a polluting and profitable firm “Talking to the firm will not help much. [...] and it is not like it does not know that polluting is dangerous.” She adds that there are only two ways to affect the firm.

To make the firm change its behaviour you can either hope the consumer, like the demand side, will be of such nature that everybody turns away from that firm. The other one is to make it very very expensive for the firm to continue to pollute.

She also emphasised that the main role of business is to make profit. She continued by expressing her opinion about the debate being too focused on blaming the economy for causing all sustainability issues. She added that “you can also make profit by being green firm”. The SEE respondent also noted that adapting to sustainable advances is also important for the survival of businesses long term. “I don’t think it is their [business] role to promote it but I think that it has become a survival for companies to work with sustainability challenges”.

Many of them talked about the importance of giving their students hope in terms of solutions and other alternative ways of doing things. The respondent of JIBS talked about the need to give students some alternatives and solutions and referred sceptically to the literature saying that business schools teach students bad management theories.

Even though it is important to not take the theories for granted we need to create opportunities for students. If we just criticise, criticise, criticise, then at the end the students will say; ok so what? What are the options? How do we go about? How do we think?

She stressed the need to teach students how to think and how to create frameworks so they will be able to create alternative paths to action. “I mean since in education we are to provide students with new approaches and new perspectives, the first barrier that we need to
break is the lead that sustainability hinders business development”. She talked about the importance of giving students hope. “So one is the attitude and the other one is showing how you can create sustainable businesses, I believe that we can make a contribution to society”. The respondent of KU believes that the mainstream theories and models that are already taught in every business school are relevant and should be worked with rather than only criticised.

Well, I think while we teach these theories we should always do it with a critical eye [but] I do not think that we should throw them out, because these are strong models and they have been surviving for a long time. What are the alternatives to theses models? That is the question.

But he adds “of course if we had better models of humanity, economics and business, [...] that were more coherent with sustainable views, well then it would be nice [...] but since we do not have these coercive structured set of models [...]. You usually have models to answer a problem”.

5. Analysis

5.1 Top down decision in a bottom up environment

One of our main findings is that because sustainability is now “all around in society”, it has become ‘natural’ for the schools to engage with it. Thus, sustainability has become a subject for translation (Sahlin-Andersson & Wedlin, 2008). Some of the respondents went back to 2008 and mentioned the financial crisis and how sustainability has become a ‘politically hot topic’. It is now something that everyone feels that they have to relate to in one way or the other. However, most respondents had a hard time to trace where the pressure of engaging in sustainability came from. This could somewhat be related to what Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson (2006) stated about how institutionalised forces often get taken for granted and become ‘the natural way of being and doing’. Research have shown that organisations have a tendency of imitating each other and how it is often very hard to trace who is imitating whom, and then how it becomes normalised and natural (Røvik, 2002). When institutional rules are imitated from one organisation to another, as being the ‘right thing to do’ for the organisation, it often loses its instrumental utility (Selznick, 1957).

Even though the driving forces of how sustainability travelled into the schools seemed rather unclear, it was evident that the students have not been the ones pushing the agenda forward.
“Not at all”, said one respondent when asked about the students’ part in the process. Many talked about how they were not able to sense any particular interest from the students, and that the students mainly focused on their personal performance.

The source of signing however was quite clear, where all of the respondents except for one said that signing the PRME initiative was a top down approach i.e. top management decision. When organisations want to take on new and diffused ideas they tend to ceremonially adapt them into formal structures in order to make sense of them (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Signing PRME can be considered as a ceremonial act. It became clear when reading and comparing the empirics that all of the schools were in the process of applying for accreditations or already had it but needed to fulfil new requirements related to sustainability. This is also evident in a previous study about PRME. One of Perry and Win’s (2013) findings was that the schools’ motives to sign PRME seemed to be in direct relation to the business schools’ involvement with accreditation bodies.

One respondent in our study said straight out that legitimacy might be the reason for signing PRME. As Meyer & Rowan (1977) described, ceremonial ideas have the tendency to become rational myths within the organisation where institutional rules are incorporated within the organisations, mainly to gain legitimacy. Some respondents talked about this and were a bit sceptical about signing the PRME initiative in the first place. One mentioned that it could easily turn into a case of bluewashing. “There is no teeth in it” but it is “a nice thing to have”. Another respondent pointed out the risk of falling “into the sugar trap”. If the schools’ main motives are to gain legitimacy from this commitment there is a great risk of “decoupling to occur” (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005; Meyer & Rowan, 1997; Sahlin-Andersson, 2006, p.19). However, many of the respondents sounded like they are in control in this process of integrating sustainability into education. Some mentioned that PRME was an easy commitment to make, since they are already doing things. “Well why not take it”. Some also stated that PRME did not really provide them with anything and believed that they ‘knew it better’ or are that they are ‘ahead of most’. In other words some sounded like they were in control of the process. Management by its definition is in most cases a matter of control and administration, however it could be a problem trying to be in control over a concept that is diffused in an unmanageable and ongoing world (Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall, 2002; Power, 2004; Weick, 1995). Grey (2004) problematises this need in management of being in control, where the complexity is often ignored and avoided to be dealt with.
Some of the respondents talked about sustainability being a new concept and that they had a hard time defining it properly. Others did not want to go as far and said that they have been working with it for a long time. Even though it was not always called sustainability before. One of the respondents stated that one of the challenges with integrating sustainability is because it is a new concept and “introducing something new always takes time” since the teachers do not have experience and knowledge in relation to the concept. Similarly, Weick (1995) and Weber and Glynn (2008) point out that individuals tend to have a hard time making sense of something new without previous experience.

Many the respondents mentioned that PRME could, although, motivate the schools to start working with sustainability systematically and it being a good tool, because it makes them report and reflect upon what they are doing. The respondent that directly linked legitimacy to signing PRME emphasised though, that it might not be the only outcome and that it could motivate them to work with implementing sustainability into their education systematically. This is in line with what Sahlin and Wedlin (2008) explain about ceremonially adopted ideas. Even though there is a risk that organisations do not reflecting enough on rationalised and institutionalised rules without realising the real purpose of it (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), it can result in organisational and institutional change as the ideas circulate within the organisation (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008, p.220).

5.1.1 Individual interest within the schools
One of our main findings of the study is how essential the people within the organisations are to the process of integration. All of the respondents mentioned that one of their main challenges in the process was that most of the teachers do not really understand what sustainability means and thus have a hard time to identify with it. Weick (1995) suggests that when the individual have to put a focus on a meaning they have to describe and organise their experience, which is reflected in the individual's own identity constructed by interest and unconsciousness. To overcome ambiguity of a concept the teachers may have to search in their existing knowledge, which leads them to consider strategic responses (Hahn et al., 2014).

The personal interest of the leadership seems crucial in the integration process as the SSE respondent mentioned. For ten years “a bunch of girls” were doing research on sustainability in business and did not receive much attention until a new dean shifted the focus on to the
subject due to a personal interest. This was also evident in our findings, where things usually started to happen with new leadership. A leadership that believes that sustainability should be a value of priority. However, having positive leadership is not enough to make changes happen. One of the schools are now launching a new strategy that makes it mandatory for students to encounter the sustainability perspective on at least program level to begin with. However, the schools respondent pointed out that it will always be up to each and every program director and teacher how sustainability will be translated into the programs.

Many of the respondents talked about the difficulty in creating an interdisciplinary environment and fitting sustainability into the schools’ work and research. This is partly due to the problem of how researchers and professors work in silo, with their own background, research and fields. Most of the respondents spoke about how it is important to keep a dialogue with the faculty and with the individual teachers and researchers since it is hard to dictate and outline the work for them. Sahlin & Wedlin (2008) mention how new ideas become adapted according to actors and interest. What was evident in our findings was that the schools had a hard time translating the ideas, mainly because of how many actors are usually involved in the decision-making in the academic environment. Many of them talked about how much time it took to come to consensus due to the importance of the dialogue in academic institutions. This is related to the complexity of the academic organisation and the bottom up environment. The governance body is deeply rooted in collegiality and consensus (Clark, 2001). Even though having a top down approach helps in integrating sustainability, some of the respondents talked about how it is not possible to ‘command’ because of the academic freedom. People in academia do not automatically obey because they are given orders (Weick, 1995) and it takes time to encourage and convince, as most respondents expressed. Hence, the bottom up approach is just as crucial as the top down. Some of the respondents stressed that the top down approach is important to create an ‘arena’ to facilitate and encourage but the bottom up is fundamental in order to make the real changes happen. One respondent spoke about how it could never work to force professors and researchers to do their job in a certain way and that it would just ‘piss them off’. In the academic organisation there is a great need for consensus.

5.1.2 Conflict of Interest
As Meyer and Rowan (1977) point out, organisations are constantly dealing with new and different kind of ideas to develop and be modern. This can however create inconsistency in
their operations where individuals inside the organisation have to try to fit it in with their pre-rationalised ideas (Sahlin-Andersson & Wedlin, 2008). One respondent talked about it not being easy to ‘deal with the faculties’, and how a lot of faculties and individuals within the school do not agree that sustainability should be a priority for them. Some of the respondents emphasised that there were many other important things to deal with and that they sometimes sensed resistance from the departments when too much focus is put on sustainability. Most of them talked about there being too many ‘trade offs’ and that there are so many other things to pay attention to as well. If sustainability is taken in, something else has to be taken out.

One of the respondents said for example that if they have sustainability as a separate course that is not mandatory, only people that are already into the subject will apply for the course, and the others will keep on doing ‘business as usual’. The same respondent talked about how common it was to have teachers that just want to re-run their old courses over and over. What was interesting in our findings is that two of the respondents talked about how they believed that the real way of solving the sustainability issues in business education is through recruitment. Where they felt the need to wait for the “old professors” to step aside and let fresh minds in.

As Sahlin & Wedlin (2008) state that new ideas travelling into an organisation are often reshaped and can take on new meanings and forms as “they flow within and between context.” All of the respondents expressed various ways of how they ‘tackle’ the sustainability challenges with specific seminars, guest lecturers, or different kinds of ‘sustainability courses’. However, one respondent mentioned the school's strategy of ‘mainstreaming’ sustainability into the education. Another respondent said that sustainability, ideally, should be implemented into all courses, but added that it would be very challenging since sustainability does not always fit with existing theories. Others talked about it being a ‘crazy idea’ to implement sustainability into all courses and that the right way is to put it “where it fits” i.e where it is ‘logical’ and ‘appropriate’ (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005; March & Olsen, 2004; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Nelson (2006, p.6) explains how economics as an academic subject requires you to have a personality split where the moral self is detached from the economic self. This is the reason why some scholars talk about it being problematic to implement sustainability as a specific course or an add on (Rusinsko,
When individuals within an organisation try to merge different and incompatible ideas it can result in “a great deal of decoupling to occur” (Sahlin-Andersson, 2006, p.19; Meyer & Rowan, 1997; Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005). As Meyer and Rowan (1977) mention decoupling enables organisation to maintain legitimacy even though it doesn’t always reflect in actual practice. One of the respondents spoke about the risk of standardising sustainability, where the concept might risk turning into an axiom or dogma, in a world that is constantly changing its shape and parameters. Power (2004) calls it ‘the black box’, where you can get lost in your ‘dreams of accuracy’ that gives motives to put ambiguous ideas and different values into some kind of a formal structure or a measurement system, and thus could be taken out of context. In an ongoing (Weick, 1995), complex and continuously changing environment (Clark, 1983; Grey, 2004; Kopnina, 2014; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Power, 2004), the problems might change and thus it is hard to standardise solutions to the problems, and could have the risk of decoupling. Being in this process in an ever changing world means that people will face problems, and will have to make new sense of their situation or actions as circumstances in their environment change (Weick, 1995). Most respondents talked about how good it was to put sustainability in some kind of a formal structure but one could ask if sustainability would then fall into ‘the black box.’, where sustainability has been ‘packaged’ in a ‘meet in the middle’ kind of way by various actors and interests (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008).

5.2 Power of old ideas - the legacy of the past

Some of the respondents stated that sustainability fits ‘perfectly fine’ with existing theories taught in business schools and universities, whereas one respondent in particular expressed his concern of how business administration as a subject is using sustainability in courses “without changing the very parameters that the subject is driven by”. For example, rethinking the notion of efficiency. The same respondent added that his experience was that “we weaken sustainable development so we can talk about growth, efficiency, profit, capitalism and sustainable development in the same sentence, for me that is an oxymoron.” This is also in line with the discussed literature about how the sustainable development becomes self-contradictory when the term ‘sustainable growth’ is applied to the economy.
(Daly & Townsend, 1996; Redclift, 2008) that can weaken the concept (Turner cited in Kearins & Springett, 2003; Welford, 1998).

When the discussion turned to the existing models and theories in business education, one respondent said that they should not be thrown out, but perhaps taught with a critical eye. However, the same respondent also asked “but what is the alternative?” and argued that the mainstream models, taught in business schools in general, are strong models that have been surviving for a long time. This reasoning relates to the past of what has been done and said before (Weick, 1995), as well as to how management ideas have gained power as they have been circulating for decades (Ghoshal, 2005; Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002; Røvik, 2002). However, it has been argued that management theories do not question whose norms are being used (Banerjee, 2003). In order to ”help prevent future Enrons”, Ghoshal (2005) argued that it is not about adding new courses but rather stop teaching certain old management models. Another respondent talked about the ‘nirvana fantasy’, which is about changing the capitalistic system without having an alternative or an alternative that might be worse. This respondent said that solutions have to be grounded in theory or ideas that work. “And what is the alternative?” he asked. Another respondent also said “you usually have models to answer a problem”. This again, is the strive for accuracy and putting ideas like management into formal structures (Power, 2004).

5.2.1 The detachment the role of business education

All of the respondents expressed moral considerations in regards to educating and shaping tomorrow's decision-makers. However, their enthusiasm and belief concerning their role was often detached from how they expressed their opinion on the general role of business in society. Where the role of the government became heavy in the discussion. Most of them pointed at the government's purpose to establish rules and regulation and the ‘real role’ of business as a profit maximiser. This made the discussion about sustainability, in most cases; go from moral values to matters of survival. When it came to the role of business and engaging with sustainability many of them sort of implied that the students will face a market that is immortal and unchangeable when going out to the real world. By this, they detached their ‘crucial’ academic role of being ‘change agents’ and generate responsible decision-makers, as mentioned by Stephens & Graham (2010) Adomssent et al. (2007), from the decision-makers’ role in practice.
One of the respondents stated how important it is to create incentive structures in business and exemplified it by saying that it rarely works to talk to companies that pollute. She added that polluting firms are fully aware that polluting is dangerous but they do it anyway because it is so profitable. She mentioned two ways to change this, either the consumers stop to buy from these companies, or strong regulations are needed to make it expensive to pollute. She also expressed her opinion about how the debate today is too focused on blaming the economic system and talked about how the problem lies mainly with weak politicians. Many of the respondents expressed similar views, that the only way to solve the sustainability issues is to make it expensive for companies to operate irresponsibly. This has also, as mentioned in the literature, been argued by several scholars (Nelson, 2006; Gapper, 2005; Ghoshal, 2005; Donaldson, 2005; Pheffer, 2005; Kopnina, 2014) and could be considered to be a rather passive attitude towards sustainability, where they seem to be passing the responsibility of business, and their negative effects, somewhere else. What was also evident in respondents’ sensemaking is how they feel that they have to give their students some motive other than moral responsibility when they convince them that sustainability is important. Shifting the focus from morality to survival of the business. Many of the respondent talked about how crucial it is to teach sustainability simply because it was becoming so important for the companies. Several respondents took example of how financially risky it is for companies to ignore their carbon assets. Most of them emphasised that, in the end, the role of a business is always to maximise profits. This is exactly the narrow goal that management of modern firms and organisations are guided with in general and can be seen as a mainstream and general opinion in business (Adler et al., 2007).

“Business definitely plays a role in sustainable development but businesses are also a profit maximiser, right?” said one respondent. A third one said that it was the government that should take the real responsibility, while the fourth mentioned that the main role of businesses was “to show that they want regulations”.

As mentioned in the literature, moral values and moral thinking are important in the process and motives of integrating sustainability into business education (Gapper, 2005; Ghoshal, 2005; Gladwin et al., 1995; Grey, 2004; Midroff, 2004; Pheffer, 2005). It can be common that instead of business schools’ reinventing themselves and making an effort to rethink the traditional theories, the response is to seek effective techniques and solutions, which often decouple management from values. Weick (1995) says “how can I know who I am until I see what I say.” when he explains how individuals are grounded in their own identity. When
looking for clues individuals are usually confronted with more than they might be capable of noticing due to their own filter.

5.3 Discussion
The reason why the seven business schools signed the PRME initiative is in line with how organisations in general adopt new ideas. It was perhaps not because they wanted to turn their educational system around or that they had to stop teaching the ‘bad’ management theories. It was clear that sustainability is something that they thought was ‘natural’ for them to engage in, because it was something that was ‘happening’ in society. In this study we found that the decision of signing PRME came from the top and like any other organisation, the schools want to be modern and legitimate, and thus one of our findings is that they signed PRME because of legitimacy.

Nevertheless, there is this great risk of decoupling if the motives are mainly to be legitimate. This means that what the top management actually says and communicates may not translate into action and change. If 'responsible education' is treated as a 'trend' and only incorporated where it is 'appropriate by academics, there's a risk things don't change long term. Signing PRME is a formal and strategic decision. It is an easy commitment to make for the schools, but whether it has a real impact on the implementation of sustainability in their education is debatable.

We identified three main challenges in the process of implementing and making sense of sustainability in business education from our interviews with the schools' respondents. First it is the top down decision in a bottom up environment. There are many actors involved in the decision-making all the way from the top management, down to the classrooms. All of the respondents mentioned how time consuming it is to keep the dialogue and conversation with each faculty, each department and each teacher. Management cannot dictate in the academic environment and thus the last piece of the puzzle is usually up to the individual teacher. This is problematic because it means that sustainability and moral thinking has to be of the teachers’ personal interest and if not then it might hinder the integration process. Our respondents talked about resistance from faculty and individual teachers, where they did not fully understand how to incorporate this idea into their education. Sustainability in business education seems to be more about guest lecturers or courses as ‘add-ons’ to the curriculum, instead of having it as a lens throughout the whole education. Lastly, our most interesting
finding is this detachment between our respondents’ views on the role of business education and the more general role of business in society.

All of them spoke about the importance of generating responsible decision-makers, at the same time, most of them did not emphasise as much on morality in business practice. That they needed to give their students financial motives for considering sustainability rather than moral motives, when entering the business environment. It seems that it is the government's role to somehow ‘naturally’ have the business beast under control, since the corporations’ main goal is to maximise profits. We question the respondents’ awareness of the role of business schools, while placing the ‘real’ responsibility elsewhere. What kind of responsibility are they teaching their students? If profit maximisation, competition and efficiency has been rationalised as the main goal of business, and if the ‘new’ idea i.e. sustainability, is about taking responsibility for the future, we can see a disconnect here. Some of the respondents seem unable to detach themselves from the old parameters of business (Banerjee, 2003; Nelson, 2016). It is important to keep in mind that business is not only guided by the goal of making profit but to maximise it. How much is maximising and on the cost of what? The business sector has direct impacts on people’s lives and the environment but why is it that other value and purposes are not as important in business as maximising profit? These are questions that should be reflected upon. Implementing sustainability into the education should not only be about committing to some standards but also about changing how we think and reflect on what is already taken for granted. If the schools commit and make sense because of outside ideas in society, and think it is of importance now because ‘the labour market is requesting it’, then we wonder if the business schools are followers rather than initiators and using their opportunity to be advocates of change? (Barley et al. & Strange cited in Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002, p.18).

We clearly sensed that the respondents were striving to makes sense of the concept by explaining their thoughts on ‘solving’ this issue and trying to “fit it in”. With this ambiguity and uncertainty the individuals within the organisation are open to more than one interpretation, which could be good if they use it to contextualise and create an interdisciplinary environment. However, if they continue to ‘work in silos’, they will hardly make sense of the concept for it to generate responsible and moral decision makers - which is after all the main goal.
6 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore how academics in Swedish business schools and universities make sense of sustainability in business education in relation to signing the PRME initiative. The study has shown that sustainability has travelled into the schools as an idea that has been translated into formal structures. According to the respondents, PRME was an easy commitment, where the schools are members of a ‘nice club’ and it is difficult to ‘fail’. Signing PRME was also, in most cases, part of an accreditation process and thus we conclude that signing PRME was mainly done to gain legitimacy. Although PRME can change the organisations appearance in terms of external legitimacy, it may not translate into real change internally when it comes to integrating sustainability. However, what has been interesting to see is how the schools have understood the complications with integrating sustainability into the organisation and how some have also come up with a strategy to make sure this integration reaches the whole organisation. The schools are in different places in this process, some have a clear strategy while others are not working systematically with sustainability yet.

The schools’ reasons to incorporate sustainability in their organisation was primarily because they felt it is something that it is ‘happening’ in society and are less focused on their own role as potential drivers and trendsetters as they educate management leaders of tomorrow. This study has identified that the individual and individual interests within the academic organisation is extremely important in the integration process of sustainability because of the governance structure and academic freedom. Since the individual professors, researchers and teachers are so crucial in this process, to make things happen, it is important to identify what perspectives and values are taught in the classrooms of business schools. To really answer how business schools are incorporating sustainability in business education, will require future research to look into the curriculums as well as doing observation studies in the classrooms of business schools and universities.

However, this study has contributed with more insights of how individuals, that have been signed to work with integrating sustainability into education in an academic organisation, make sense of the integration process. We also believe that this study contributes to institutional theory, where many of our findings are in line with institutional perspectives. Moreover, we would like to see more research on how individuals within business, both in
practice and academia connect morality to business, where we found that our respondents focused a lot on providing their students with financial benefits and motives, rather than moral, to prepare them for the practice.

To conclude, we ask ourselves - just like one of the respondents in this study - what version of sustainability do the schools have if they can easily incorporate it into business courses without rethinking what business as a subject is mainly driven by. Do the schools weaken the meaning of sustainability so they are able to continue to talk about growth, efficiency and profit in the same sentence. There will continue to be issues and conflicts integrating sustainability into business education if business schools and universities keep teaching 'business as usual', where the motives are solely financial.
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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Questions for the empirical study

Purpose

1. Why did you sign PRME initiative? Why was it established?
2. Was it a bottom up approach or top down?
3. Where did the idea come from in the beginning? (Did you feel any pressure from outside, and from where?)
4. What is the school’s goal with integrating sustainability into the education?
6. If so, what is your understanding of the law?
7. What role do you think education plays in promoting sustainability and responsible decision makers?
8. What role do you think business plays in promoting sustainability?

Strategy

1. Do you have any specific strategy?
2. How are you creating an interdisciplinary environment?
3. Are you integrating sustainability into all courses?
4. Do you think that there are management ideas and theories that are taught that are contradicting sustainability?
5. Are you using any measurements?
6. What are the main challenges for the school to implement sustainability into the education?
7. What are the main challenges concerning sustainability issues?

Views

1. How would you define sustainability?
2. Why is sustainability important for business education?
3. How do you think sustainability fits with business?
4. Is sustainability one of the school’s values and priorities?
5. Why is integrating ESD important from the school perspective?
6. And why is ESD important for the society?
7. We can see that you put a lot of emphasis on innovation in your report. What about critical thinking? (Matter of science? Mind-set?)

To conclude:

1. Do you feel that you will have to change something in your approach, and if so why?
2. Would you like to add something in the end?
Appendix 2 - The six principles of PRME

1. **Purpose:** We will develop the capabilities of students to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society at large and to work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy.

2. **Values:** We will incorporate into our academic activities and curricula the values of global social responsibility as portrayed in international initiatives such as the United Nations Global Compact.

3. **Method:** We will create educational frameworks, materials, processes and environments that enable effective learning experiences for responsible leadership.

4. **Research:** We will engage in conceptual and empirical research that advances our understanding about the role, dynamics, and impact of corporations in the creation of sustainable social, environmental and economic value.

5. **Partnership:** We will interact with managers of business corporations to extend our knowledge of their challenges in meeting social and environmental responsibilities and to explore jointly effective approaches to meeting these challenges.

6. **Dialogue:** We will facilitate and support dialog and debate among educators, students, business, government, consumers, media, civil society organisations and other interested groups and stakeholders on critical issues related to global social responsibility and sustainability.