

CASE STUDY

Reflection on the implementation of the United Nations' Principles for Responsible Management Education in academia: case of the Almaty Management University in Kazakhstan [version 1; peer review: 1 approved, 1 not approved]

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Abstract



The article gives an overview of responsible management in education using an example of the Almaty Management University (AlmaU) in Kazakhstan. At AlmaU, social responsibility is considered as a core model both from the perspective of managing education and teaching. Several projects and initiatives for staff and students reflect this model in action. The United Nations' Principles for Responsible Management Education initiatives and concepts serve as guiding principles and help benchmark initiatives on the global scale.

Keywords

Social Responsibility, Impact, Engagement, University, Responsible Management, Education

Open Peer Review

Approval Status  

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1. Dusan Kucera , University of Economics, Prague, Prague, Czech Republic 2. Kejing Zhang , Donghua University, Shanghai, Peoples Republic Of China		
Any reports and responses or comments on the article can be found at the end of the article.		



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Introduction

The United Nations' Principles for Responsible Management Education (UN PRME) initiative is an inspiring tool for educators around the globe to comprehend, analyze, expose and promote social responsibility in managing education. PRME, based on six principles (Purpose, Values, Method, Research, Partnership and Dialogue), provides a framework for academia to broadcast its social responsibility. UN PRME has become well-known in Central Asia thanks to local signatories, including Almaty Management University (AlmaU), Almaty, Kazakhstan.

AlmaU was established in 1988 as Alma-Ata School of Management. In a time of uncertainty, when the country has been transformed from part of the Soviet Union to a sovereign independent state, it saw the need for educating traders and commercial workers. The social mission was to bring together business and education, leading it to be later transformed to the International Academy of Business (IAB), a strong business school with significant international presence. In 2012, IAB became a signatory of UN PRME and published its [first Progress Report](#). In 2014 IAB was re-branded into AlmaU. This institution continued its commitment to PRME, and in 2014 produced its [second Progress Report](#).

PRME: Values

In its aspiration to share knowledge and promote social responsibility, AlmaU is guided by five main values:

1. *Partnership for the benefit of society* - implementation of the "Win-Win-Win" principle. This means mutually beneficial cooperation between two parties (Win-Win) should be beneficial, and affect the synergy of the third party - the society (Win).
2. *Leadership* - the proactive worldview "I am the Leader" of every student, employee, teacher and partner of AlmaU. This allows these actors to be agents of change, demonstrating entrepreneurial thinking and culture, managing themselves, their emotions and development, showing individuality, having dignity and honor, and respecting themselves and others
3. *Freedom* - promoting the philosophy of freedom of the spirit, thoughts and words, and the value of a balance between work and life. AlmaU highly regards the foundations of academic, research and entrepreneurial freedom.
4. *Responsibility* - being responsible for its results to partners, customers, colleagues and society, anticipating the needs of society, while working ahead of schedule.
5. *Team spirit and synergy* - the success of the university depends on a team of people, its composition, professionalism, efficiency, solidarity, focus on results and synergy.

Through these values, the AlmaU team is implementing its mission of shaping a new generation of leaders with entrepreneurial

mindsets, who make an impact for development of knowledge economy in dynamic societies.

PRME: Partnership

Following the fifth PRME principle "Partnership", AlmaU is active in the international arena; more than 150 universities and 20 associations from more than 40 countries partner with AlmaU for academic exchange, double degree diplomas, joint research and other activities. AlmaU is a place of inspiration and an open platform for exchanging ideas and knowledge. It is guided by the [UN Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), [UN Academic Impact](#) and UN PRME. Social responsibility is in fact one of the main pillars of AlmaU activity, along with [development of entrepreneurial education](#), [building knowledge management systems](#), and [contribution](#) to the development of business, government, [society and education](#).

PRME: Dialogue

On December 12, 2019, for its 31st anniversary, AlmaU presented its first Open Report to the public of Almaty, based on the sixth PRME principle "Dialogue". Today, a university's traditional functions, such as education and research, are no longer enough to remain a global social institution in modern society. The third mission of universities is key to the agenda of higher education in the world, and is social orientation, service to society, contribution to the development of regions, cities, communities, and the formation of civic activism and responsibility. In this regard, the focus of the Open Report is a reflection of the third mission of AlmaU, which is a contribution to the development of society and impact on the academic ecosystem. During the [Open Report event](#), AlmaU partners and colleagues shared the results of joint projects based on real-life cases, spoke about how to jointly influence the formation of values, build a civic position, and develop a culture of social responsibility in the society. The Open Report 'AlmaU 4 You: University for you, the city, the business and the country' is represented by four clusters:

- AlmaU 4 Community - University for the community
- AlmaU 4 Entrepreneurship - University for entrepreneurship
- AlmaU 4 Almaty - University for the city
- AlmaU 4 Education - Together we develop education

We welcomed the concerned residents of the city, a wider community of leaders and employees of the public sector, parliamentarians, representatives of international organizations and diplomatic missions, academia, science, art, culture and sports, as well as educators, opinion leaders, representatives of non-governmental organizations, youth associations, entrepreneurs, businessmen, media and university partners.

AlmaU is internationally recognized for its attitude towards social responsibility. In 2018 AlmaU was ranked as 301+ in the Times Higher Education Impact Ranking. In total, 462 universities from 76 countries took part in the ranking. Kazakhstan was the only Central Asian country in the ranking and was represented by two universities: AlmaU and Gumilev ENU.

In 2014 the President of the University received the CEEMAN Champion Award in the [Institutional Management category](#), and in 2017 two members of the team received the CEEMAN Champion Awards in the [Responsible Management category](#) – Dr. Aigerim Kaumenova, Senior Advisor to the Rector and Dr. Zhuldyz Yelubayeva (now ex-) Dean of the Foundation Department. To date, these individuals continue to lead the movement of socially responsible management.

PRME: Purpose

The ‘[Service Learning](#)’ Discipline at AlmaU (innovative for the region) is growing in its capacity: in two academic years, 833 students had been trained, and more than 45 student social projects were implemented in various spheres, including:

- Helping elderly and single people, low-income families, disabled people;
- Environmental projects;
- Training and communicating with children from orphanages and refugee children;
- Monitoring socially significant problems of society;
- Organizing charity events.

The course is aimed at nurturing a strong sense of civic responsibility among students. Following the first PRME principle “Purpose”, during the course, students learn to serve society and apply their theoretical knowledge on practice. AlmaU has partnered with 18 nonprofit organizations and state-run institutions where students volunteer throughout the semester. AlmaU is the first university in Kazakhstan to teach such a course. Along with that, the Student Government actively develops the [student charity organization](#). One of the latest projects is the collection of warm clothes for the charity organization called “Adele”, which is a charity that supports women going through difficult situations. It is also remarkable how students motivate university staff to actively participate, for example at a [Charity Ball](#) and [Charity Fair!](#)

PRME: Method

Not only do young undergraduate students learn about empathy and responsibility. Implementing the third PRME principle “Method”, MBA programs include courses that are oriented to the implementation of the UN SDGs, including: Corporate Responsibility and Ethics; Managing Cultural Diversity; Cross-cultural Management; Digitalization of Business; Lean Technologies / Kaizen; Leadership and Social Responsibility; Conflict Management and Mediation.

Under the auspice of the UN SDGs, as well as PRME, AlmaU positions itself as a green university. Taking into account the congestion of the city of Almaty by private transport in the morning and in the evening and considering the location of the University, AlmaU runs two corporate shuttle buses with the most popular city-routes that take students from different parts of the city to the University every morning and back home

in the evening. In order to decrease paper document circulation within the inner structures of the University, AlmaU uses EDM system [Documenotolog](#), a product of a national IT company. In addition, the University is implementing Alma Union system, a knowledge management portal for all faculty and staff. In Kazakhstan, [11.5% of household waste recycled](#), and the percentage of citizens who consciously collect waste paper and plastic for recycling is still small. Nine special eco-boxes for wastepaper and plastic are installed on campus at AlmaU. All collected wastepaper and plastic from eco-boxes are sent to the sorting shop of the company “Kazakhstan Waste Recycling”.

For many years AlmaU consistently and systematically supports a healthy lifestyle for its employees, teachers and students. The AlmaU team participates annually in the Almaty Marathon, and staff and students are active in sports, dance, creativity and, of course, go to the mountains with the AlmaU Mountain Club. Heads of structural departments tend to organize healthy teambuildings, e.g. rock-climbing day. [AlmaU has launched another healthy lifestyle project outside Almaty in 2019](#) – the ice transition through the Lake Balkhash. The organizers aimed to draw public attention to the lake’s ecology problem and to stimulate domestic tourism. Today, there are several threats, which may lead to Lake Balkhash [drying up](#), including: steady water decline in the lake since 1970, desertification, dust storms, and non-ecological use of the waters of transboundary rivers by nearby countries. The AlmaU trip became a kind of leadership training for all participants; among 50 people who took part in the campaign, there were businessmen, journalists, athletes and public figures and students. Consequently, an announcement has been made [for another event](#) in mid-February. It is estimated that more than 150 participants will attend to camp and network along with guest lecturers.

Every summer doctoral programs at the Department of Graduate School of Business organizes [Silk Road Doctoral Academies](#) (SRDA) that aim to improve the quality of doctoral research. These Academies are based in different popular health resorts. In 2018, a SRDA was held in Burabay, North Kazakhstan. SRDA traditionally comprises of teambuilding activities, sport events, nature excursions, and local sightseeing.

PRME: Research

AlmaU is also focused on establishing a framework for social entrepreneurship. For that reason, in 2014, AlmaU established the Laboratory of Social Entrepreneurship. The idea of a Laboratory has emerged from [research made by young scientists of AlmaU on social entrepreneurship in 2014](#). The exploratory research was financed by AlmaU and presented in [Kazakhstan, Ireland, Malaysia and South Africa](#). Today social entrepreneurship is a broad process that includes a combination of resources and tools to enable acceleration of social change and meeting social needs of society. The main objective of the Laboratory is to study the main approaches of social entrepreneurship in market economy and evaluation of the practical implementation of social entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan to develop recommendations for the further development

of this institution. Several conferences¹, meetings and workshops were organized to promote social entrepreneurship concept in the society.

Other current projects of Almaty Management University are aimed at capacity building of young people:

1. **Creative Spark** (financed by the British Council) - 400+ participants;
2. **Yessenov BigDataLab** - annual summer school oriented to increase capacity of Kazakhstani youth in Machine Learning and Big Data, launched in 2018 - 40+ participants;
3. **Zeren Summer Camp** - entrepreneurial courses for young StartUpers, financed by the Ministry of information and social development of the Republic of Kazakhstan - 600 participants aged between 18–29 year, from all regions of Kazakhstan;
4. **Big Ideas Camp** – 80+ start-uppers;
5. **Ybyrai Summer Camp** – 50+ young entrepreneurs upgrading their skills;
6. **Start-up night students contest** – at least 50 participants every contest intake;
7. **Joint Humanitarian Entrepreneurship Summer Academy** held together in partnership with the Lingnan University (Hong Kong) and KazNU – 30 participants;

¹Examples of conferences:

https://www.almau.edu.kz/en/news/in_almaty_were_discussed_possibilities_and_problems_of-11068;

https://www.almau.edu.kz/en/news/almau_hosted_a_forum_of_social_entrepreneurs-11671;

https://www.almau.edu.kz/news/sotcialnoe_predprinimatelstvo_idei_cherez_novatorstvo-11584;

https://www.almau.edu.kz/news/laboratoriia_sotcialnogo_predprinimatelstva_invamade_v_al-11443;

<https://and.kz/vse-zhdut-peremen>

8. **Green Economy Forum** - 150 participants, including non-governmental organizations and public authorities;

9. **School of Responsible Business** (in partnership with Youth Information Service of Kazakhstan, Embassy of the Netherlands in Kazakhstan) - 200+ participants in three tracks: faculty, business and students.

All projects are aimed at promoting social responsibility, building the common understanding of this concept – implementing the third mission of the university.

It is important to emphasize the following research works that had an impact on decision-making at governmental level (under the “Value” and “Partnership” PRME principles):

- Ecosystem of entrepreneurship: risks related to loss of trust in stability of economic environment in Kazakhstan.
- Strategy of foreign investment for Almaty city.

Conclusions

AlmaU is not a traditional university, it is very dynamic, flexible, and offers a mix of teaching, research and consulting. That mix is complimented with the active social position of the university and its service to society. AlmaU is an impact and engaged university that follows the **CEEMAN Manifesto** – the new social concept for decreasing the gap between academia and society/economy. It is crucial for universities to deliver benefits not only to internal stakeholders, but to society, by taking driving and creating new and advanced solutions for societies. The team of responsible leaders and like-minded experts work collaboratively to ensure the highest level of contribution to the society, promotion of UN initiatives and principles of responsible management in education.

Data availability

No data is associated with this work.

Acknowledgements

The information used in this article has been derived from AlmaU internal sources, as well as information published on its webpage www.almau.edu.kz; with the permission of the AlmaU team.

Open Peer Review

Current Peer Review Status:  

Version 1

Reviewer Report 21 August 2020

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Kejing Zhang

Glorious Sun School of Business and Management, Donghua University, Shanghai, Peoples Republic Of China

1. There should be references.
2. It would be better if the author could include more information about how students value or benefit from the PRME practice of your university.
3. It would be better to have a big structure of PRME practice or a theme.
4. Could you please add info about how the faculty and staff are involved in PRME practice?

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?

Yes

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?

Yes

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?

No

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?

No

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?

Not applicable

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?

Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?

Yes

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?

Yes

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?

Yes

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for other practitioners?

Partly

Is the argument information presented in such a way that it can be understood by a non-academic audience?

Partly

Does the piece present solutions to actual real world challenges?

Partly

Is real-world evidence provided to support any conclusions made?

Partly

Could any solutions being offered be effectively implemented in practice?

Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: decision analysis; CSR

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Reviewer Report 13 May 2020

<https://doi.org/10.21956/emeraldopenres.14519.r26770>

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**Dusan Kucera**

University of Economics, Prague, Prague, Czech Republic

The article gives an overview of responsible management in education using an example of the Almaty Management University (AlmaU) in Kazakhstan. According the Abstract is at AlmaU, social responsibility considered as a core model both from the perspective of managing education and teaching. thinking, some (good) application, of course. However, we do not find any analyses, development in the time and sections (what was the previous status, what happens now, why). There is no research, no discussion, no interpretation, no argumentation, no scientific contribution. The article provides us with basic information about the school activity according the accepted PRME philosophy, but the scientific validation is very limited. Maybe it could be an introduction to the next scientific article. When the author planned to write a case study – yes, it could be, but with all necessary parts of scientific analysis and recommendations.

E.G.

1. Description of the school philosophy/strategy before PRME, reasons, description, consequences
2. Description of the school strategy today with PRME, concrete, what does it mean in concrete fields – you mention. All the points should be identified (in key factors), analyzed according the situation, described, interpreted, evaluated, approved with practical application. Was there any inner discussion about what sources you have used for the defense of your statements. PRME is only a basic ideological framework, not exhaustive source for each situation.
3. Application needs again all the previous steps: Analysis (why this choice of activity), changes, consequences, discussion with management, limits, sources from literature, comparison with other schools, other methods. What are the results from practice (expected, realized), valuation according special criteria = shortly the article should be elaborated in more details and steps.

There is absolutely no regard the rich professional discussion in journals, books about how to change the school strategy, why, what philosophical reasons – pedagogical – management reasons you have etc. And at the end the recommendations (with argumentation and sources). E.g. how to prepare the administration, teachers, students, what seminars, lectures, literature, case studies in already suggested areas. The sources should be discussed, as a part of the article not only links to additional sources. The article cannot be only the own "marketing" publication or news. Good mentor can help.

Questions:

Why should the reader open your article and read?

What should be the goal, methodology, results, limits, discussion, comparison, argumentation of PRME application in the concrete situation in your country?

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?

No

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Partly

Is real-world evidence provided to support any conclusions made?

Partly

Could any solutions being offered be effectively implemented in practice?

Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to state that I do not consider it to be of an acceptable scientific standard, for reasons outlined above.
