What were the four or five takeaways from the 2023 Responsible Research Summit hosted by INSEAD at its Europe Campus, Fontainebleau?

How can we mark this unique event, which brought together exceptional researchers from within the business and management community? More to the point, what is responsible research and why is it essential?

The 2023 Responsible Research Summit was this year’s annual event organized by RRBM (Responsible Research for Business and Management). RRBM is a non-profit, mission-driven organization initially developed by a group of 24 leading scholars at 23 business schools in 10 countries. Inclusive and collaborative, RRBM has the support from many partners, such as AACSB, EFMD, PRME, the Aspen Institute Business and Society Program, GRLI, and top business schools including INSEAD.

Sponsored by INSEAD and the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania in collaboration with RRBM, the Summit was aimed at all members of the research ecosystem interested in promoting the agenda of responsible research. This can be summed up in three words: rigorous, relevant and socially impactful.
Let’s face it. Business schools like INSEAD are home to some of the most brilliant and well-supported scholars in all of the social sciences. Research feeds knowledge to business education. But as it stands now, research is often disconnected from real-world challenges. Who can fix this disconnect?

1. Journal Editors and Publishers: They should encourage and publish more frequently problem-centered research oriented toward critical social and business questions that are complex and span disciplinary boundaries.

2. Scholarly Association Leaders: They should identify and share with members the enormous challenges facing business and society as opportunities for research having societal impact.

3. Business School Leaders: Develop a vision and a strategy to encourage faculty to work on research that provides informed solutions to the pressing business or social issues of our time and offer best practices that generate prosperity. Design promotion and tenure criteria that value innovative, groundbreaking research with the potential for scholarly, business, and societal impact. Expand the metrics for assessing research contributions beyond esoteric topics in elite journals that are often inaccessible to practitioners. Stop the exaggerated emphasis on citation-based metrics as the gold standard for research quality.

4. Accrediting Agencies and Ranking Publishers: Include political, cultural, business, societal and pedagogic impact of research in assessment standards. Adopt the principles of responsible research in assessing the educational and research contributions of the schools.

5. Funding Agencies: Broaden the criteria for funding decisions to include business and societal impact in addition to intellectual merit. Expand the criteria for assessing a candidate’s research accomplishments by including the criterion of societal impact.

At the 2023 Summit, attendees heard from a wide variety of business and management scholars whose timely and cutting-edge research have produced well-grounded knowledge on pressing problems.

Business and management schools are being widely called upon for the role and responsibility they must play in contributing to solving today’s societal challenges.

But far more needs to be done and time is running out. Business leaders and decision-makers need to be equipped with well-researched tools and frameworks that deliver positive outcomes for businesses, communities, people and the planet in line with the globally agreed sustainability goals.

Both the relevance and quality of research in business schools have been under attack for more than two decades. These attacks can be summarized in terms of two deeply
rooted issues. The first issue has been the widening gap between research and practice, with business research in many domains having been increasingly divorced from the real-world practices for far too long. The second concern has been the quality and integrity of research. Academic evaluation systems have promoted bad research practices by encouraging quantity over quality and novelty over replicability, resulting in little cumulative progress in knowledge.

Adding to these legacy issues is the realization that research in business schools has become very expensive while the funding for research has been shrinking. Aware of the financial and legacy hurdles facing responsible researchers, RRBM has called for a substantive rethinking of business and management research.

In its Vision 2030, RRBM remains confident that a responsible research ecosystem will emerge when business and management research become a recognized force for change toward a better world.

Read the detailed report from the 2023 Responsible Research Summit here

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