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# Misrecognition and Responsibilisation in Extreme Events: Towards Recognition-based Accountability in Academia

Milena Tekeste [1] and Mustafa F. Özbilgin[2]
[1]Dunning Centre, Henley Business School, University of Reading, Reading, United Kingdom [2]Brunel Business School, Brunel University, London, UK
Corresponding author email: (drmilenatekeste@gmail.com)

**This essay interrogates how extreme events including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate disasters, and political conflict, amplify structural inequalities in academia. Drawing on critical autoethnographic material from an Early Career Researcher with intersecting marginalisations, we show how crises expose and intensify two mutually reinforcing dynamics: *misrecognition* (institutional neglect of care responsibilities, political vulnerability, and embodied identity) and *responsibilisation* (the shifting of crisis management onto individuals). We demonstrate how these processes operate through institutional silence and performativity mechanisms that simultaneously erase vulnerability and demand uninterrupted performance, making individual adaptability appear both natural and necessary. By situating these lived experiences within Honneth's theory of recognition and Foucault's concept of responsibilisation, we theorise how their interaction deepens disadvantage for vulnerable groups during and after crises. In response, we propose *Recognition-based Accountability* (RbA) as a framework for institutional reform. RbA shifts the emphasis from individual resilience to structural responsibility, outlining actionable, care-oriented pathways for embedding equity and recognition into crisis governance in management education. This essay thus contributes to debates on academic inequality and the future of work by revealing the embodied costs of institutional neglect and offering a model for reorienting crisis response toward justice, care, and accountability.**

## Introduction

Over the past decade, scholarship on extreme contexts has surged in the management literature (Hällgren, Rouleau and De Rond, 2018; Wright *et al.*, 2024). Extreme contexts refer to events 'that may exceed the organisation's capacity to prevent and result in an extensive and intolerable magnitude of physical, psychological, or material consequences to, or in close physical or psychosocial proximity to, organisation members' (Hannah *et al.*, 2009, p. 898). Such events may disrupt organisations in unexpected, unprecedented or even uncategorizable ways (Christianson *et al.*, 2009; Hällgren, Rouleau and De Rond, 2018). Examples include earthquakes in Morocco, Syria and Turkey (Özbilgin, 2024), acts of terrorism (Kent, 2019), climate disasters (Dentoni, 2024) and the COVID-19 pandemic (Wright *et al.*, 2024). Although scholars have acknowledged the fragility of our world (Hällgren, Rouleau and De Rond, 2018; Wright *et al.*, 2024), management education research has paid limited attention to the frontline risks faced by classroom teaching during extreme events (Wright *et al.*, 2024).

The COVID-19 literature shows that the pandemic intensified pre-existing inequalities among academics with multiple intersectional vulnerabilities. Within academia, scholars have documented the heightened inequalities experienced along gendered (Yilidrim and Eslen-Ziya, 2021), racial (Cho and Brassfield, 2023; Davis *et al.*, 2022), parental (Abdellatif and Gatto, 2020; Cho and Brassfield, 2023; Edwards *et al.*, 2024; Tekeste *et al.*, 2025), marital (Utoft, 2020), as well as disability (Wagner *et al.*, 2022) lines. Within post-neoliberal governmentality (Amsler and Shore, 2019), minoritized groups not only faced heightened risks (Larsson, 2020) but were also responsibilized to manage these inequalities themselves as institutional and state-level responsibilities were transferred to individuals (Vincent *et al.*, 2024).

This essay builds on and extends the theorization of two interrelated mechanisms of misrecognition and responsibilization (Vincent *et al.*, 2024). Drawing on Honneth's (1996) theory of recognition and Foucault's (1991) theory of responsibilization, we argue that extreme events amplify existing inequalities, thereby simultaneously misrecognizing and responsibilizing individuals during post-crisis recovery.

We contribute to current conversations in the *British Journal of Management* about management education during extreme events (Hällgren, Rouleau and De Rond, 2018; Wright *et al.*, 2024), marginalization, gender and the COVID-19 pandemic (Edwards *et al.*, 2024) by theorizing how the intersection of responsibilization and misrecognition disproportionately burdens academics, particularly minoritized academics. We propose a Recognition-based Accountability (RbA) framework that shifts the focus from individualized survival strategies (Śliwa and Prasad, 2025) towards institutional accountability. We conclude by illustrating how misrecognition manifests across extreme events beyond COVID-19 and offer actionable institutional strategies to mitigate these inequities.

This essay is co-authored by two academics at different career stages: one an early career researcher (ECR) navigating intersecting marginalizations during overlapping crises, and a senior academic who has witnessed the institutional evolution of crisis governance over time. This article is a conceptual essay, motivated by experience and illustrated by autoethnographic material. We present vignettes (see Appendix in the Supporting Information) as theoretically driven provocations that illustrate our central conceptual claims, rather than as conventional data. While authored by the first author, the second author's role was to offer a reflexive reading of these vignettes, enriching their interpretation and situating them within a broader institutional and historical perspective. This collaborative stance foregrounds both experiential immediacy and structural critique, drawing on shared insights and overlapping solidarities with academics who face compounded crises under diminished institutional protections.

## Misrecognition and responsibilization in neoliberal academia

The ideal worker norms in academia mirror those of professional service firms, demanding long hours, constant availability and performance metrics (Sang *et al.*, 2015). These expectations, deeply gendered and shaped by neoliberal logic (Rhodes and Pullen, 2018), have transformed business schools into managerialized spaces resembling private enterprises, complete with hierarchies and relentless output targets (Fleming, 2020). Within this model, those who conform are rewarded with upward mobility, while others risk marginalization, stagnation or exit (Śliwa and Prasad, 2025).

This performance-driven environment alienates academics from the values and identities that once defined academic life (Fleming, 2020) and entrenches the misrecognition of lived experience and (in)visible labour, especially among women, caregivers and minoritized academics (Edwards *et al.*, 2024). During the COVID-19 pandemic, this became particularly stark. Academic mothers, for example, shouldered intensified caregiving responsibilities amidst institutional silence, receiving scant support to navigate closed schools, suspended childcare and shifting work expectations (Darmody, Smyth and Russell, 2020; Power, 2020; Zanhour and Sumpter, 2024).

These pandemic experiences laid bare a dual problem: misrecognition of care work and the downward displacement of responsibility. To address this, we further expand on Honneth's (1996) theory of recognition and Foucault's (1991) theory of responsibilization.

Honneth's (1996) theory of recognition posits that individuals require acknowledgement through love, rights and solidarity to develop a sense of self-worth and belonging (Fraser and Honneth, 2003; Honneth, 1996). When such recognition is denied or distorted, misrecognition engenders alienation, humiliation and social exclusion (Honneth and Margalit, 2001; Visser, 2019). These harms are often structural: they stem from institutional failures to see or respond to lived realities rather than individual malice. Therefore, by intentionally embedding practices of mutual recognition, organizations can mitigate the harmful effects of misrecognition, fostering solidarity and collective resilience – an imperative for institutions committed to diversity, equity and inclusion.

Complementing this lens, the concept of responsibilization (Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1999) clarifies how neoliberal regimes reassign responsibility from institutions to individuals. Under this logic, workers are expected to self-manage risk, well-being and productivity, even when systemic barriers constrain their capacity. In academia, this translates into an expectation that scholars absorb the emotional and practical fallout of institutional neglect while still meeting metrics that discount the context of their labour (Hibbert, 2025; Rollock, 2021; Shymko *et al.*, 2024).

When extreme events such as pandemics, climate disasters or political conflict strike, the individualized burden of responsibilization is placed under a magnifying glass that makes every fissure in the system more visible and more punitive. Such crises destabilize organizational routines, expose systemic fragilities and reconfigure work (Jetha *et al.*, 2021; Manyika *et al.*, 2017; Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development [OECD], 2019). Organizations often respond with remote or hybrid models, praised for their

flexibility, yet this 'new normal' overlooks the intensified burden shouldered by individuals who must negotiate blurred work–life boundaries, caregiving demands and emotional distress under crisis conditions (Costas, 2013; Zanhour and Sumpter, 2024). As Dentoni (2024) observes, we have entered an era of 'organizational melting', where structures become increasingly fluid, unstable and reactive amid escalating hazards and climate disruption.

To further deepen our analysis of recognition, we engage in the philosophical lineage from Hegel through Honneth. In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel (1977) posits recognition as a precondition for self-consciousness, achieved through mutuality. Benjamin (2013) extends this insight, introducing the concept of the 'third', a shared space that allows both self and other to exist through mutual vulnerability and co-presence. Neoliberal academic responsibilization erodes this mutuality by rendering the self solely accountable beneath institutional neglect. In contrast, a Hegelian–Benjaminian conception of recognition demands reciprocal acknowledgment of situated vulnerability. It is not merely the right to be recognized, but the right to exist in relational interdependence, something that is systematically denied in neoliberal academia.

While responsibilization illuminates how burdens are institutionally displaced to individuals, it cannot explain why certain burdens become invisible or illegitimate. However, misrecognition of how care and vulnerability become obscured and how the identities and embodied experiences through which these responsibilities are enacted becomes structurally devalued. Without misrecognition, responsibilization risks being theorized as neutral or procedural; with it, we see how academics are responsibilized precisely because their claims to care, risk and recognition are not institutionally validated. Together, these processes co-produce institutional neglect. We therefore treat misrecognition and responsibilization as mutually reinforcing dynamics that intensify during crises. Responsibilization displaces responsibility onto individuals; misrecognition erases the intersectional realities that render this displacement inequitable. For academics occupying precarious positions, these twin forces are acutely felt.

### *Embodied experiences of responsibilization across crisis contexts*

To advance our understanding of how responsibilization is embodied and operationalized in extreme contexts, we argue that it can take effect through institutional silence and managerial demands for uninterrupted performance.

Responsibilization, as theorized by Foucault (1991) and Rose (1999), functions through the displacement of systemic responsibility onto the individual under the guise of autonomy, resilience and self-management. In the neoliberal academy, this displacement is not accidental but structurally embedded. Two of the most salient and recurrent mechanisms are institutional silence and managerial demands for uninterrupted performance. These are neither anomalous nor ad hoc responses; they are consistent with the epistemic, cultural and managerial architectures of the contemporary university.

Institutional silence is not merely the absence of speech; it is an active governance strategy (Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Shymko *et al.*, 2024) that enables risk to be privatized. In extreme contexts, silence allows senior management to avoid making explicit commitments, thereby reducing potential institutional liability while leaving individual academics to navigate the moral and political hazards of action. This silence is amplified in contexts where speech is politically charged. For example, during wars or social unrest, the risks to reputation, funding and political relationships create incentives for institutional actors to remain non-committal. The result is a system of governance through ambiguity that forces educators to internalize the decision-making calculus about whether, when and how to address contentious issues, thus responsibilizing them for both the pedagogical and political consequences. This is particularly acute for those at the intersection of precarity and minoritization, for whom the personal cost of misjudging the institutional appetite for dissent can be career-ending. In this way, silence functions as a mode of responsibilization by outsourcing the governance of speech and care to the individual.

Managerial demands for uninterrupted performance constitute the second predictable mechanism. These demands are rooted in the ideal-worker norm (Acker, 1990; Sang *et al.*, 2015), which is fundamentally incompatible with disruption. In extreme contexts, managerial discourse often reframes continuity of output as evidence of institutional resilience. Yet the actual means of achieving this continuity is through rapid pivots to online teaching, the erasure of care responsibilities from workload calculations, the normalization of out-of-hours availability. These processes rely on individuals absorbing additional labour without structural support. As Pereira (2021) and Edwards *et al.* (2024) observe, the emergency flexibility lauded during the pandemic was not dismantled afterwards; it calcified into a standing expectation that academics should be able to 'work from anywhere' and 'carry on regardless'. This endurance of emergency norms reconfigures crisis response from an exceptional deviation into an ongoing condition of labour, thereby embedding responsibilization into the everyday.

The conjunction of silence and performance imperatives is not accidental but mutually reinforcing. Silence erases the legitimacy of expressing vulnerability or

seeking accommodation, while uninterrupted performance normalizes the suppression of those needs. Misrecognition makes the transfer of responsibility appear reasonable: if caregiving burdens, political risks and emotional tolls are not institutionally acknowledged, then their management defaults to the individual by omission. This co-production of misrecognition and responsibilization ensures that the institution's operational continuity is preserved without disrupting its managerial metrics or reputational posture.

Moreover, these mechanisms are reinforced by the discursive framing of crises as tests of personal resilience. In neoliberal risk governance, resilience is not about collective capacity but about individual adaptability, thereby masking the asymmetrical impacts of crisis conditions. As Igwe *et al.* (2020) note, responsibilization is particularly pernicious when social safety nets are thin: without robust institutional infrastructure, the capacity to manage disruption becomes a function of personal resources, which are themselves unequally distributed along lines of gender, race, class and contract status.

Thus, institutional silence and uninterrupted performance imperatives are not simply reactive managerial choices in the face of disruption; they are structurally embedded expressions of neoliberal governance that become most visible under duress.

We illustrate these points with summary vignettes, with full vignettes presented in the Appendix in the Supporting Information. While distinct in scale and manifestation, the pandemic, political conflict and climate disaster share a common institutional logic. Each blurs the boundary between systemic and personal crisis, demonstrating how responsibilization and misrecognition operate across levels of experience. The COVID-19 vignette highlights how caregiving during lockdown became a test of uninterrupted performance; the flooding episode reveals how environmental shocks reproduce the same managerial demand to 'carry on'; and the Gaza vignette exposes how political unrest transforms classrooms into sites of institutional silence. What links them is not their context but their mechanism: the preservation of operational continuity through the privatization of disruption. By reading these crises together, we show that so-called 'personal' struggles, such as parenting while teaching during COVID-19, are not isolated events but expressions of systemic governance under conditions of crisis. Consistent with critical autoethnographic practice (Abdellatif and Prasad, 2024; Boncori and Smith, 2019), the vignettes are not presented as conventional data but as theoretically animated provocations that illuminate our argument that responsibilization is enacted through institutional silence, managerial demands for uninterrupted performance and the absence of structural support. They also illustrate how crises – whether health-related, environmental or political – can intensify pre-existing inequalities, placing disproportionate burdens on those positioned at the intersection of gender, race and caregiving. By foregrounding embodied accounts of academic labour, we move beyond abstract conceptions to reveal their affective, material and ethical consequences.

> *Institutional silence, epistemic violence and the classroom double bind.* As the war in Gaza escalated, global tensions seeped into the classroom. What began as an open, critical space suddenly felt fragile and volatile. At the start of the semester, I had encouraged students to be vocal, reflective, and politically engaged. But when conversations about Gaza surfaced, I became silent.
>
> I was afraid.

In recent discussions, various scholars in organization studies have called upon academics to engage in academic activism to contribute to struggles for social justice (Costas *et al.*, 2025; Shoman *et al.*, 2025). Studies illustrate the frictions between academia and activism (Costas *et al.*, 2025) but fail to illustrate the frictions between academia, the self and management education.

Academic silence (Shoman *et al.*, 2025), in particular feminist silence, as well as academic activism (Costas *et al.*, 2025) during times of war have been recent topics of debate within management literature. Here, scholars argue whether silence is revealing a deeper systemic ethical and institutional failures, selective academic freedom and epistemic violence (ultimately going against business schools decolonial commitments) or reveals the bifurcation of people's 'political-academic life' (Blomley, 1994, p. 383). Indeed, unmuting, solidarity and activism can be 'a potentially high cost for individuals' (Rhodes, Wright and Pullen, 2018, p. 144) related to their academic career in particular for those who are in precarious employment contracts.

Silence for management educators can therefore be a double bind. On the one hand, through silence, educators protect their careers and reputation (Pirie, 2016) within the academy, yet on the other hand through this silence, management educators hamper/erase the knowledge production and inclusion of oppressed experiences in the classroom. Ultimately, these spirals of silence restrict open and honest discussions which are pivotal for organizational improvement (Bowen and Blackmon, 2003).

While management educators are fully aware of their positionalities, they conceal these due to both increased institutional as well as state violence towards our profession. To protect our career and self, Author 1 therefore found themselves uncomfortably silent in the classroom. With no clear direction and being put into the 'grey zone' and being sold the illusion of academic freedom, we simultaneously address students' concerns, viewpoints and discussion on critical topics such as war,

yet equally we have experienced our colleagues being detained, deported and dismissed for crossing the unspoken boundaries of this illusion. While academic freedom is sold to us as a legal right, we have become well aware during extreme contexts, that the level of freedom is negotiated by institutions and wider society. Under such uneven governance, ourselves and many of our academic colleagues internalize risk calculations, opting for self–censorship that exemplifies neoliberal responsibilization.

With the lack of institutional support, scant protection declaring decolonial stance in class and unmuting/expressing our positionalities can have adverse consequences. When dissent is implicitly discouraged, responsibility for challenging structural violence is displaced onto the lone academic who must decide if, when and how to speak (Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Rhodes et al., 2018). Recent debates around Gaza and Ukraine expose this logic: scholars weigh reputational, legal and even personal safety against a perceived 'higher' political end, often concluding that strategic silence is the least damaging option (Aldossari, 2025; Costas *et al.*, 2025;Shoman *et al.*, 2025). Yet what emerges is a pedagogy of strategic neutrality that contradicts hooks' (1994) call for transgressive teaching and Giroux's (2016) vision of the public intellectual. Silence, then, does not merely avoid conflict; it actively extends institutional misrecognition into the very site designed for critical inquiry.

The classroom repercussions unfold on three fronts. First, invisible emotional labour multiplies as management educators hold space for students' fear, grief and anger while managing their own vulnerability (hooks, 1994). Second, each discussion becomes a potential career–limiting event, especially for precariously employed or minoritized staff who lack tenure shields (Rhodes et al., 2018). Third, responsibility for contesting structural violence shifts from the organization to the lone educator, masking differential burdens across race, gender and caregiving lines (Morrison and Milliken, 2000).

In sum, institutional silence during extreme contexts, epistemic violence and classroom precarity coalesce to render responsibilized quietism a rational, if corrosive, choice.

*Managerial demands for uninterrupted performance.* Midway through the term, my son and the many pupils in his class tested positive for COVID-19. Following public health guidance, I informed my department that I would need to isolate and care for him.

The response was swift and clinical: 'Just schedule a Zoom with your students and teach online'. There was no offer of support, no conversation about whether this was feasible. The expectation was clear that the teaching must go on, and no one could replace me.

During extreme events, organizations routinely responsibilize individuals to absorb the shock. The first COVID–19 lockdown, for example, closed schools and nurseries overnight, leaving families to improvise childcare while maintaining output (Carnevale and Hatak, 2020). The academy's almost–instant migration online was quickly framed as proof of resilience and commitment, rather than as a provisional workaround (Pereira, 2021). Once the immediate emergency receded, that expectation of anywhere, anytime productivity did not dissolve; it calcified, welding long–standing performance metrics to the newly normalized capacity to 'work from everywhere' (Edwards *et al.*, 2024).

Pandemic scholarship underscored the uphill struggle faced by women and other carers (Ashman et al., 2022; Carnevale and Hatak 2020), a tension exacerbated by the absence of institutional childcare. Intensified domestic and professional demands, heightened managerial surveillance, social isolation and blurred boundaries all diminished working lives by negating opportunities for agentic invisibility (Edwards *et al.*, 2024) – the deliberate hiding of caregiving to sustain credibility.

In the years since COVID-19, discussion of the work–life interface has remained largely private. Edwards *et al.* (2024) take the pandemic as an opening for better recognition of scholars' embodied lives; we argue instead that crisis–era responsibilization simply rolled forward for example through return to office mandates. Conversations about employment during COVID–19 abound, but analyses of the transition 'back to normal' are scarce – perhaps because normal never returned. The familiar neoliberal expectations on productivity outputs now sits alongside uninterrupted availability (Plotnikof and Utoft, 2022).

For colleagues already situated at the margins, mothering academics, carers, staff as *other* (Edwards et al., 2025) the consequences are amplified. The ideal worker (Acker, 1990) is now expected to be permanently present and to solve every clash between work and life. Agentic invisibility tactics (Edwards *et al.*, 2024) therefore persist. What was once a legitimate absence such as cancelling class or meetings for a sick child – has been reframed as a lapse in dedication and sign of credibility. However, it is also important to acknowledge emerging counter-narratives. Movements such as 'Parenting Out Loud' have begun to challenge these norms by encouraging academics to make care responsibilities visible rather than hidden, reframing caregiving not as a personal weakness but as a legitimate and collective dimension of academic life (see, e.g., Parenting Out Loud, 2025).

An academy that folded emergency workarounds into a standing architecture of toxic productivity (Plotnikof and Utoft 2022) now markets boundary–free *flexibility* while deepening neoliberal responsibilization. Individual stamina is applauded even as structural levers such as childcare subsidies, workload caps, protected offline time, remain absent. Success and failure are reframed as private feats rather than collective matters of resource and policy, intensifying the double bind for those already on the margins.

## Responsibilization for extreme events

The full vignettes presented in the Appendix in the Supporting Information illustrate responsibilization in the lived realities of an ECR academic navigating multiple extreme events such as COVID-19, political conflict and climate disaster while embedded within higher education systems marked by inequality, precarity and institutional inertia. Such events can disrupt professional routines, blur the boundaries between personal and academic life and expose the limits of institutional care (Plotnikof and Utoft, 2022). Yet, despite their seeming uniqueness, what unites these illustrations is how responsibility can quietly but forcefully transfer responsibility to the individual academic. Responsibilization is enabled and compounded by institutional misrecognition (Honneth, 1996): A structural blindness to the caregiving roles, political vulnerabilities and embodied realities of academics which renders their experiences invisible while holding them accountable. They are examples of responsibilization in action, where institutional and state actors failed to respond meaningfully, shifting the burden of 'business as usual' onto individuals (Igwe *et al.*, 2020; Tekeste *et al.*, 2025; Wright *et al.*, 2024). These moments also reveal persistent forms of misrecognition, as the psychological toll, caregiving responsibilities, political fear and embodied vulnerabilities of academics are rendered invisible, downplayed or ignored.

The arguments move beyond how educators evaluate risk or legitimacy (Wright *et al.*, 2024) to consider how academics are expected to absorb crisis shocks without adequate support or recognition. The impact is not merely logistical but existential, affecting legitimacy, safety and belonging.

For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the shift to remote work was framed as a flexible and future-forward solution. But for the first author, however, this shift meant being solely responsible for facilitating student learning while simultaneously caring for a sick child, all with no institutional backup. Similarly, during the climate disaster online classes continued, assignments remained due, and the burden of coping fell on individual educators and parents (Edwards *et al.*, 2024). During the recent political tensions around the war on Gaza, the classroom became a space of grief, fear and silence. Yet, institutions offered no guidance or protection for educators caught in politicized discourse.

Such experiences confirm that extreme events are not great equalizers. Instead, they deepen existing inequalities. Even well-resourced academics encounter a form of 'double responsibilization', as they are held accountable for their professional obligations while managing the emotional logistical and moral consequences of neglect. Misrecognition compounds this burden by erasing the complexity of their positionality, rendering caregiving, political vulnerabilities and racialized embodiment invisible within institutional responses.

While we do not seek to generalize these experiences to all educators, our contribution is to centre the embodied, emotional and intersectional costs of teaching in extreme contexts, costs that are frequently omitted from dominant discourses on resilience, flexibility or digital transformation in management education. As Mauss (1925/2002) reminds us, extreme events are total social facts; they penetrate every sphere of life, yet institutions often continue as if nothing has changed.

Our arguments offer a grounded critique of the current 'new normal' in management education, where continuity rhetoric masks a profound lack of institutional accountability.

### *Moving towards Recognition-based Accountability*

The preceding discussion of institutional silence and uninterrupted performance imperatives shows how misrecognition and responsibilization operate not as isolated incidents, but as mutually reinforcing, structurally embedded mechanisms. Silence erases the legitimacy of expressing vulnerability, while uninterrupted performance normalizes the suppression of those needs. Together, they preserve institutional continuity at the expense of those already bearing disproportionate burdens during extreme events. Extreme contexts reveal them not as anomalies but as predictable, even rationalized, enactments of responsibilization. Recognizing this predictability is essential to designing what we propose as Recognition-based Accountability (RbA), which demands not only that institutions speak in times of crisis but that they embed structural accommodations that dismantle the expectation of uninterrupted individual performance as the default crisis response. This framework counters responsibilization by reactivating the institution's capacity to *see, affirm and co-own* responsibility for care, labour and survival during crisis. Recognizing this patterned transfer of responsibility is essential for designing alternative institutional responses. Without such reform, future crises will simply reproduce the same patterned transfer of burden from institution to individual, further entrenching

the inequities that extreme events make impossible to ignore.

Integrating the theory of responsibilization (Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1999) and Honneth's (1996) recognition theory offers a promising framework for revealing dual marginalization and for designing more socially equitable responses to extreme events. Responsibilization, as commonly applied in disaster policy, often shifts the responsibility for preparedness and recovery onto individuals. In contexts where social safety nets are weak or fragmented, this approach risks leaving individuals and communities to navigate crises without adequate institutional support. Honneth's (1996) recognition theory provides a counterbalance by emphasizing the importance of recognition through love, rights and solidarity as a foundation for individual dignity and social inclusion. Applied to extreme events a recognition-based approach does not negate individual agency; instead, it ensures that individuals are seen, valued and supported within a system that protects their rights and affirms their humanity. By merging recognition and responsibilization, institutions and policymakers can develop crisis strategies that combine individual preparedness with structural support, ensuring that people are not simply left to 'cope' but are equipped with the resources, protections and recognition they need to withstand disruption. A recognition-based model of responsibilization would acknowledge the real constraints individuals face and promote conditions that enable meaningful participation in crisis preparedness and response.

For example, business schools can support frontline educators by investing in training, communication protocols and pedagogical resources tailored to extreme contexts (Wright *et al.*, 2024). At the institutional level, recognition-based policies may include teaching relief during and after crises, expanded caregiver leave and inclusive Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programming that prepares staff and students to navigate the differential impacts of disruption. Importantly, such policies should be designed not just to address the immediate crisis but to mitigate the long-term effects of misrecognition.

By theorizing misrecognition and responsibilization as processual and collusive mechanisms, we shift the conversation from individual coping strategies to institutional accountability, from personal resilience to structural reform. RbA re-locates responsibility for safeguarding the well-being of individuals back to institutions and the state, with context-specific adaptations aligned to particular identities and extreme events. It is not an appeal to personal empathy but a demand for institutional reckoning with entrenched harms.

While management scholarship has begun to theorize extreme contexts (e.g. Wright *et al.*, 2024), most of this work centres managerial responses. Our contribution extends this conversation by offering an embodied, relational and accountability-oriented account that foregrounds the lived consequences of neglect and prescribes institutional repair.

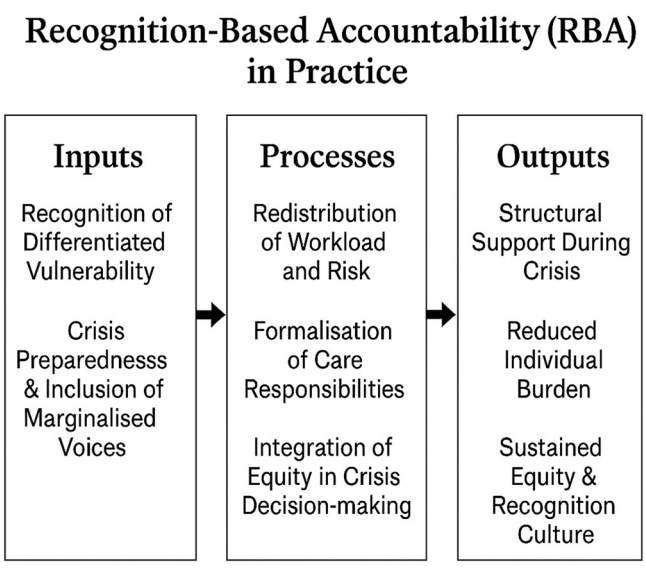


*Figure 1. Operationalizing Recognition-based Accountability (RbA) in academic institutions*

To synthesize our argument, we present a model of RbA that outlines how academic institutions can respond to extreme events by embedding recognition structurally. RbA is not simply a matter of compassion but of institutional obligation. It demands proactive identification of who is most likely to be impacted, formalized care mechanisms, equitable redistribution of labour and policies that recognize the emotional, logistical and political burdens carried disproportionately by academics.

Figure 1 presents a visual synthesis of RbA's core elements as developed throughout this paper. The categories of inputs, processes and outputs reflect the institutional stages through which RbA may be enacted:

- Inputs: anticipatory recognition of vulnerability and inclusive crisis preparedness.
- Processes: redistribution of workload, formalization of care roles and decision-making protocols that account for intersectional inequalities.
- Outputs: reduced individual burden, sustained structural equity and a culture of embedded recognition.

This framework is grounded in the conceptual link between responsibilization and misrecognition and proposes RbA not as an abstract principle but as a pathway for embedding institutional accountability through crisis-responsive action. The model visually represents the institutional pathways through which recognition and responsibilization interact during extreme events. It is not intended as a predictive tool but as a heuristic that organizes our argument around three dimensions:

anticipatory inputs, procedural responses and institutional outcomes.

We include this figure not to simplify complexity but to offer a scaffold for institutional reflection and reform. Readers are encouraged to engage with it alongside the preceding discussion of misrecognition, responsibilization and the vignettes that illustrate how both forces operate in lived academic contexts. While necessarily schematic, the figure is intended as an opening for further discussion and refinement rather than a definitive or exhaustive representation of crisis-responsive accountability.

## Implications and future directions

Aligned with the aims of the *British Journal of Management*'s *Educator articles*, this essay offers both conceptual insights and practical strategies for how academic institutions can respond to the ongoing realities of extreme events. While scholars have challenged the ideal worker norms that govern academic life (Sang *et al.*, 2015), and critical scholarship has shown how deeply gendered, racialized and classed forms of misrecognition persist within the neoliberal academy (Abdellatif and Prasad, 2024), institutional responses remain largely inadequate. Misrecognition is often acknowledged rhetorically yet seldom addressed through structural or redistributive measures. .

A central implication of our analysis is the need for institutions to accept the inevitability of future extreme events and prepare for them proactively, not through ad hoc fixes, but embedding RbA into organizational structures. Rather than identifying 'at-risk' groups – a practice that risks reproducing the same forms of categorization and misrecognition we critique – RbA calls for institutions to build reflexive systems capable of recognizing and responding to vulnerability as it emerges thus sees it as situational and relational. Vulnerability is not a fixed attribute attached to certain populations but a situational and relational condition that any academic may inhabit at different times – during caregiving, political unrest, illness or environmental disruption. Thus, instead of mapping risk onto specific identities, universities must develop adaptive infrastructures that allow needs to surface dynamically and be addressed without stigma or penalty. RbA reframes crisis governance by requiring institutions to (i) anticipate which groups are most at risk; (ii) make their needs visible through systematic recognition; and (iii) share responsibility for care, workload and recovery rather than transferring it to individuals.

Preparation should include integrating inclusive crisis pedagogy and organizational responsiveness into professional development pathways, particularly within postgraduate teaching certifications and higher education leadership programmes. Training on 'teaching and managing during extreme events' must become a foundational part of academic development rather than ancillary, equipping staff with the tools to navigate crises while addressing the inequities they amplify.

Beyond preparedness, institutions must adopt recognition-based responses that extend support throughout and beyond the duration of a crisis. This includes the provision of additional teaching relief, flexible leave arrangements and targeted support for caregivers and staff in precarious roles. National or sector-wide guidelines should mandate equitable support systems that interrupt patterns of responsibilization, ensuring that the burden of institutional continuity does not fall disproportionately on those already navigating structural disadvantage.

Universities may embed RbA structurally through reforms to governance, funding and evaluation systems. Specifically, universities can protect academic freedom by (i) replacing narrow performance metrics with collegial, peer-reviewed assessments that value care, collaboration and critical inquiry; (ii) ring-fencing research time and funding from market logics; and (iii) creating independent academic senates with decision-making authority over knowledge production and crisis pedagogy. These structural safeguards address precarity not as an individual failing but as an institutional design issue, aligning academic freedom with collective well-being and institutional legitimacy.

We also recognize that the call for RbA is not merely organizational but political. By shifting responsibility for well-being and equity from individuals to institutions and the state, RbA explicitly contests the neoliberal logic of responsibilization that has come to dominate higher education. It reframes care and recognition as collective obligations rather than private virtues. Making this politics explicit is essential: RbA is not a neutral management tool but a normative commitment to justice, solidarity and redistribution. Acknowledging this political grounding clarifies that what is at stake is not only how universities manage crises, but whose values guide that management.

We acknowledge that the implementing RbA is complex. Structural approaches that adequately recognize individual circumstances pose significant logistical and cultural challenges. For example, redistributing workload equitably requires detailed knowledge of each employee's unique situation, which may not always be transparent due to fears of negative repercussions from disclosure. Achieving genuine equity thus depends significantly on fostering a culture of trust, openness and confidence in institutional responses – an admittedly substantial cultural shift. RbA can only succeed if institutions develop transparent, collectively negotiated mechanisms for redistributing responsibilities during and after crises. This includes workload mapping,

contingency pools or peer-based task-sharing systems that prevent the concentration of unpaid labour on those already burdened. Although such measures require careful governance and trust, they represent the tangible infrastructure through which RbA becomes actionable. Moreover, equitably ranking differing care or other personal responsibilities adds another layer of complexity, highlighting the need for nuanced, context-sensitive approaches rather than one-size-fits-all solutions.

Furthermore, existing DEI frameworks must be reimagined to include what we call 'crisis equity'. DEI programmes should move beyond symbolic gestures and generalized training to explicitly address how crisis conditions affect individuals differently depending on their positionality. Inclusive crisis response must be built into departmental practices and institutional planning, recognizing that expectations around availability, performance and resilience during extreme events are not experienced equally across the academic staff. This means moving beyond symbolic gestures or generic training to embed inclusive crisis response into departmental practices and institutional planning. Under RbA, resilience is not an individual performance metric but a collective capacity sustained by structural safeguards.

While recent studies have begun to examine institutional responses to COVID-19 (Wright *et al.*, 2024) and other extreme events (Dentoni, 2024), there is still limited understanding of how misrecognition and responsibilization operate in everyday academic spaces, particularly the classroom. Future research should explore how extreme contexts reshape pedagogical relationships, emotional labour and care responsibilities and investigate how formal policies and informal support systems can be designed to foster equity and recognition in times of crisis.

Implementing RbA entails cultural as much as technical change. Equitable redistribution depends on trust and disclosure without penalty; ranking heterogeneous care or safety needs is inherently contextual. Our proposal therefore privileges transparent triggers and collegial discretion over one-size-fits-all formulas, trading false precision for durable fairness.

## Conclusion

'… we can burst change into existence'. (Korica, 2022, p. 2)

This essay has offered a theoretical synthesis and an embodied critique of how misrecognition and responsibilization operate during extreme events. We reveal how institutions often fail to account for the differential burdens crises impose, especially on ECRs, leaving them individually accountable for navigating risk, maintaining performance and managing emotional fallout. As Korica (2022, p. 2) reminds us, 'we can burst change into existence'. This essay is not only an act of theorizing but a call to remember, to resist erasure and to work towards structural reparation. Through a recognition-based lens, institutions can move beyond rhetoric and towards a more just and humane response to crises. In recognizing the embodied realities of academic life, we do not ask for exceptional treatment but for structures that see, support and sustain those who teach in the storm.

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**Milena Tekeste** is a scholar of international human resource management. Her research explores work and careers through an intersectional and critical lens, with a focus on gender. She conducts qualitative flexible work and the lived experiences of minoritised workers in transnational contexts. Her work is empirically grounded and informed by feminist and critical management perspectives, and she is committed to advancing equity, recognition, and care in organisations. Her research has been published in journals such as Human Resource Management Journal, the International Journal of Human Resource Management, Organization and Gender,Work & Organization.

**Mustafa F. Özbilgin** is a Professor of Organisational Behaviour at Brunel Business School, London, UK. His research focuses on equality, diversity and inclusion at work from comparative and relational perspectives. He has conducted field studies in the UK and internationally, and his work is empirically grounded. International as well as national scientific bodies support his research. He is an engaged scholar, driven by the values of workplace democracy, equality for all and humanization of work.

## Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.