

CALL FOR PAPERS

We look back on 16 years of research on responsible leadership. South Africa has played an important role in driving the topic with the first International Conference on Responsible Leadership being held in 2010 at the University of Pretoria in Johannesburg (Pless, Maak, De Jongh, 2011). Nine years later the Academy of Management held a specialized conference on Responsible Leadership in Bled Slovenia. The next international conference will again be hosted in Africa at the Stellenbosch University.

Responsible leadership research has soared over the past ten years and entered corporate boardrooms (see Pless & Wuffli 2021, GRLI CEO interview). This is not only due to recurring corporate scandals, aggravation of global warming, and the COVID-19 pandemic but also to business leaders growing awareness and recognition of their co-responsibility in resolving societal issues.

However, responsible leadership is not the same in the mind of all (Waldman & Galvin, 2008) and differs depending on individual opinion, industry mindset, ownership structure, and country culture and history.

In particular, further collaboration, imagination and development is needed to specify responsible leadership for the African context, to make sense of the concept and to co-create meaning with stakeholders and leaders from different sectors to shape a better and more sustainable future.

WHERE DO WE STAND ACADEMICALLY?

Responsible leadership is understood as a leadership approach that addresses responsibilities and accountabilities of business leaders vis-à-vis different stakeholders insides and outside the organization, is driven by purpose and positive social impact, and promotes a relational, inclusive, and caring approach in leader-stakeholder relationships (e.g. Maak & Pless, 2006, 2009).

Over the past 16 years the body of research on responsible leadership has steadily grown. Some researchers study responsible leadership from an individual-level perspective (e.g. Pless, 2007; Cameron, 2011; Freeman & Auster, 2011), others focus on roles and responsibilities (e.g. Maak & Pless, 2006; Castillo Sánchez & Dueñas & Ocampo, 2020; Voegtlin, Frisch, Walther & Schwab, 2020); and lately we also find a growing number of multi-level approaches - both conceptual (e.g. Voegtlin, Patzer, & Scherer 2012; Doh & Quigley, 2014; Pless, Maak & Waldman, 2012; Maak et al., 2016) and empirical ones (e.g. Javed, Ali, Asrar-ul-Haq, & Kirmani, 2020; Varma, 2020).

We also find studies on responsible leaders and leadership from all parts of the world: e.g. Africa (e.g. Mária & Lozano 2010; Maritz, Pretorius, Plant, 2011; Coldwell, Joosub, & Papageorgiou, 2012), Asia (e.g. Doh et al., 2011; Huang et al., 2020; Pingali, 2016; Witt & Stahl, 2016), Europe (e.g. Pless, 2007; Antunes & Franco, 2016; Lämsä & Keränen, 2020), North America (e.g. Varma, 2020), South America (Maak & Stoetter, 2012; Castillo, Sánchez, & Dueñas & Ocampo, 2020).

Despite a growing body of literature coming from African scholars, we still have a limited understanding of the meaning and scope of the concept in the African context: What are the particular stakeholder expectations of a responsible leader in the Africa countries? What is the scope of a leader's responsibility and accountability, and how is this influenced by the cultural context? What are the challenges that leaders in business and society are facing? And what are the challenges of behaving ethically and responsibly?

THE CONFERENCE AIM AND TOPICS

The conference seeks to address these questions and encourage further research and academic-practitioner dialogue to advance the discussion on responsible leadership in Africa.

The aim is to move towards a common understanding of what responsible leadership is and what it can achieve on the African continent. We seek contributions that theoretically and empirically assess responsible leadership and its relation to individual ethical decision-making, best responsible business practice (in for-profit, non-profit, hybrid, international organizations and government), stakeholder engagement, community partnerships, and cross-sector collaboration.

We thereby address aspects connected to responsible leadership at the individual level (e.g., leader decision-making), the group level (e.g., role of shared leadership in corporate responsibility), the relational level (e.g., the leader-stakeholder interaction), the organizational level (e.g., responsible leader behaviour and ethical climate), and societal level (e.g., the impact of responsible leadership on triple-bottom-line performance, social value creation, Sustainable Development Goals).

We encourage contributions that address (but are not restricted to) the following topics:

Conceptual and theoretical issues

- How do we make sense of the concept of responsible leadership globally as well as in the African context?
- What is important now? What are the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for the responsible leadership discourse? What are the emerging topics relevant for responsible leadership in Africa? What is the vision for the future?
- What does responsible leadership mean in different professional contexts (e.g. government, non-governmental organizations, small and medium sized companies, family business, multinational corporations) and different country contexts (developing countries, emerging countries, developed countries) as well as cultural contexts?
- What is the link between responsible leadership and Sustainable Development Goals?
- What are best practice examples of responsible leadership, also in light of the current Covid-19 pandemic?
- What are the best approaches for our continent to approach the SDGs through responsible leadership?
- What are the boundary conditions and contingency factors for responsible leadership?

Building on and following up on a research stream on Responsible Leadership at the EGOS conference in 2015 (convened by Pless, Stahl, Voegtlin with Maak and Sully de Luque), we also like to encourage continued empirical research in the following areas.

Empirical research

- How can responsible leadership be modelled and measured at multiple levels of analysis?
- What is the role of individual leaders in the formulation of CSR and sustainability strategies, the creation of ethical norms, and their gradual integration within the company?
- How do responsible leaders cope with conflict of interests among stakeholders and reconcile dilemmas?
- What is the relative importance of individual, organizational, and societal influences on responsible leadership, and how do these factors combine and interact to influence leader behaviour and ethical choices?
- What is the role of responsible followership in processes of responsible leadership and in jointly achieving objectives?
- What is the relationship between responsible leadership and social innovation?
- How do responsible leaders and followers interact and work in cross-sector partnerships?
- How do they build positive cultures, responsible businesses and supporting systems and processes?
- Little attention has been given to cross-national variations in leaders' responsibility orientations. How does the wider cultural and institutional context within which global corporations and their leaders operate affect the nature and enactment of responsible leadership?

THE CONFERENCE AIM AND TOPICS

Practical implications

- Finally, an overarching goal of our conference is to develop recommendations of how organizations can effectively prevent managerial misconduct and promote responsible leadership. What approaches, practices or tools can be utilized to minimize the risk of irresponsible leader behaviour, and what approaches can be utilized to foster the emergence of responsible leadership? Other questions that could be explored are:
- How do responsible leaders engage with stakeholders inside and outside the organization and the broader social eco-system?
- How can responsible leadership contribute to the humanization of the workplace (dignity, fairness, equality)?
- How do responsible leaders safeguard trust and positive impact to foster an inclusive environment where diverse individuals have a voice and feel heard?
- How do responsible leaders go beyond profit to create a sustainable future with shared benefits for business and society by pursuing profitable growth in tandem with positive and equitable social and environmental impact?
- How can organizations develop and nurture responsible leaders internally (e.g. through service-learning programmes)?
- What are leaders in business, government and society already doing in regard to SDG and where do we see a void?
- What does responsible leadership mean in the digital age and in managing big data and artificial intelligence?
- What is the role of academia in building bridges? What are best and most inspiring approaches to develop the current and future generation of responsible leaders? What is the role of universities and business schools?
- How can we establish a dialogue between sectors and co-create best practices and shape pathways and actions towards responsible leadership?

Submissions

Paper and proposal submissions must be sent to RLRConference@usb.ac.za

The following deadlines apply:

Scholarly paper abstract submissions: 31 October 2021.

Practitioner presentation submissions: 31 October 2021.

Notification of review results of abstract/presentation submissions: 30 November 2021.

Final paper submissions: 31 January 2022.

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