

Call for Papers

Special Issue on
**‘Responsible Leadership in China and Beyond:
A Responsible Research Approach’**

Submission Deadline: December 1, 2021

Guest Editors

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Special Issue Background

Larry Fink, the CEO of Blackrock whose firm manages nearly \$7 trillion of assets has argued, in an open letter to CEOs, that business leaders may be compelled by their consumers, and by society in general, to behave differently. Fundamental economic changes and government failure to provide new solutions are increasingly directing attention to companies, both public and private, for profit and non-profit, to address pressing social and economic issues (Fink, 2019).^[1]

The New Enlightenment Conference (Edinburgh, July 1–2, 2019) on re-inventing capitalism issued the First Declaration of Panmure House, which urged international leaders to base their policies and decision-making on a set of common principles, as espoused and formulated by Adam Smith, which cherish the required values of an ethically-based liberal democratic system, a moral commitment to the well-being of our communities, and affirm responsibility to protect economic, political, and social freedoms, use resources wisely, avoid unintentional consequences, follow the rule of law, favour markets and prices as guides to resource allocation, and take a long-term view of private and public investments, to support inclusive economic growth and prosperity for all.

It is not altogether clear how The Panmure House declaration or Fink’s strong words will translate into redefining corporate performance beyond financial returns. But such important statements of intent highlight the growing awareness among leaders of major corporations that something must be done differently to realign business with the rapidly changing global economic context. This new realization is evident in the redefinition of ‘Corporate Purpose’ by the Business Roundtable (members are CEOs of leading US companies) on April 19, 2019.^[2] The signatories of this statement, 181 CEOs, ‘commit to lead their companies for the benefit of all stakeholders—customers, employees, suppliers, communities, and shareholders’. This declaration directs attention to an expanded set of stakeholders of the firm and offers insight into the idea of responsible leadership, a term used more and more often in the communities of both research and practice.

In China, the state council has issued in 2007, ‘Guiding Opinions about Central SOEs’ Fulfillment of Social Responsibilities’, urging all SOEs (State-Owned Enterprises) controlled by the central government to adopt corporate governance practices to fulfill their CSR and to issue CSR reports. In 2018, the media representative

of the State Asset Management Committee restated that fulfilling social responsibilities is the ‘born attribute’ of SOEs.^[3]

Many leaders of Privately-Owned Enterprises (POEs) also believe in making contributions to society, beyond benefiting shareholders. For example, POEs have contributed the majority of charitable donations in China. The Li and Liang (2015) study on Chinese leaders’ prosocial motivation provides systematic evidence on their desires to serve the greater good. Majority owners of POEs often emphasize their orientation towards serving employees, customers, and the broader community (see examples of such CEOs in Tsui, Zhang, & Chen, 2017). Jack Ma from Alibaba, for instance, is known for his philosophy of serving ‘customers first, employees second, and shareholders third’.

However, why are some enterprise leaders of SOEs or POEs more attentive than others to the interests of their stakeholders, even though they all face the same expectations from government and from society to behave responsibly? As China enters its next stage of global development, manifestations of understanding the meaning of responsible leadership and different approaches leaders use to lead responsibly is an important research agenda for the development of the next generation of leaders, both in China and beyond.

This special issue of *Management and Organization Review* seeks research that identifies various forms of responsible leadership, including theory development, qualitative studies, as well as hypotheses testing using quantitative, qualitative, or experimental methods. The former may include well-grounded cases of responsible leadership that describe corporate or governmental experiments (on addressing pressing social and economic issues). The latter may be the testing of hypotheses on responsible actions by leaders at different levels in the organization. Our goal is to discover Responsible Leadership at any level of the firm that addresses pressing social and economic issues. This special issue aims to contribute to both theory development and the practice of responsible leadership at different levels and in different contexts, especially in China.

A Responsible Research Approach to Studying Responsible Leadership

Leadership research has a long tradition, but the literature on ‘responsible leadership’ is fairly recent and is mostly conceptual or normative, with some case studies, focusing on the leader’s role in corporate social responsibility (e.g., Waldman & Balven, 2014), or on addressing stakeholder needs beyond shareholder returns (e.g., Maak & Pless, 2006). There is a wide-open opportunity for systematic empirical studies on responsible leaders using actual experiments or taking real actions addressing specific social consequences beyond high level declarations and redefinitions of corporate purpose. We treat ‘responsible leadership’ as an umbrella term that covers various leadership approaches, which address legitimate concerns and needs of relevant stakeholders at multiple levels and in different domains, e.g., individual, group, organization, sociocultural, environmental, and so forth. We hope the empirical projects to be reported in this special issue will help both the academic field and corporate practice by clarifying the definition and scope of responsible leadership from a multi-disciplinary perspective.

This special issue on responsible leadership departs from traditional leadership studies in its focus on leadership practices (e.g., policies, actions, or actual experiments) that aim to address specific issues and deliver specific value to the different stakeholders of the firm or of government agencies. Hence, we de-emphasize leadership style studies and give priority to broader actions and practices of leaders.

Responsible leadership research is also reflected in a movement calling for business research to focus on both rigor and relevance. The former refers to researchers’ responsibility to science in producing reliable and replicable findings, while the latter refers to their responsibility to society by developing actionable knowledge that can contribute to business, organization, and management practices for a better world. We encourage research proposals and papers that follow or exemplify the seven principles of responsible research (cRRBM, 2017; Tsui, 2019).

Core Research Question and Extensions

The core question to be explored in this special issue is ‘How and why do Chinese organizational leaders and their firms conceive and implement socially or societally oriented policies and practices that address the range of distributive justice issues’? Distributive justice issues include balancing attention to different external stakeholders (such as employees, customers, suppliers, and community) beyond owners or shareholders. But also the role of government to address distributive justice issues such as migrants, income, and wealth inequalities.

Possible extensions of the core research question include but are not limited to the following:

- Why are some Chinese leaders and their firms more societally oriented, i.e., they give balanced attention to different external stakeholders (such as customers, suppliers, community, and not only shareholders) than other leaders?
- How is such societally oriented responsible leadership manifested at the lower, middle, and strategic levels?
- What might be some cultural, economic, political, or psychological reasons explaining the differences in societally oriented responsible leadership?
- Why do some leaders of Chinese firms treat employees with dignity and respect their rights to decent compensation, benefits, working conditions, well-being, voice in decision making, or a high investment in the employment relationship?
- Does responsible leadership differ across types of enterprises in China (e.g., state-owned, privately listed, family owned, non-governmental organizations, social enterprises) or different industries (e.g., manufacturing, service, financial, e-commerce, high technology)? How is responsible leadership manifested in the different types of firms?
- How are social innovations created and developed in for-profit or non-profit firms? What is the role of responsible leadership in social innovation within and between organizations or between levels within an organization?
- How is responsible leadership of some Chinese MNCs manifested in their foreign operations? How does the local context impact the reactions to or outcomes of the Chinese MNCs’ socially responsible practices? Does societally oriented responsible leadership offer a better or worse explanation than other leadership or institutional factors, such as the nation, industry, social networks, in understanding the Chinese MNC’s reputation and success abroad?
- How do culture and economic systems shape the definition and practice of responsible leadership? What are the similarities and differences in responsible leadership practices between Chinese and other economies, emerging and developed? What might explain the similarities or differences?

Submissions must be empirical studies and we encourage research designs involving multidisciplinary lenses, different levels of analyses, creative methodologies, and replications.

Submission deadline is December 1, 2021. We expect editorial decisions within 90 days after submission (end of February, 2022) Authors of papers that have received a revise and resubmit will be invited to an MOR

Special Issue Paper Development Workshop (most likely a virtual workshop). Date and location to be determined (around March/April 2022).

Following the practices of MOR Paper Development Workshops, each paper author will receive detailed reviews and editorial guidelines as well as a specific editorial decision within two months of the Workshop (before the end of June, 2022). We expect to publish the special issue in December 2022 or early 2023.

We welcome the submission of papers that report longitudinal experiments, or constructive replications of these projects, or examination of the consequences of responsible leadership practices, policies, or field experiments. The tentative deadline for submission of the follow-up longitudinal studies is January 31, 2023.

Inquiries about this special issue may be directed to any of the guest editors by emailing MORmanagingeditor@cambridge.org

Submission information:

Please submit full papers by December 1, 2021 via the MOR submission website by selecting the 'Responsible Leadership in China and Beyond' special issue designation: <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/mor>

NOTES

[1] <https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/investor-relations/2019-larry-fink-ceo-letter>

[2] <https://www.businessroundtable.org/business-roundtable-redefines-the-purpose-of-a-corporation-to-promote-an-economy-that-serves-all-americans>

[3] <http://gongyi.people.com.cn/n1/2018/1217/c151132-30471937.html>

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