BUSINESS & SOCIETY

Business & Society
Special Issue Call for Papers

"Responsible Leadership Action for Business and Society: Addressing the Grand Societal Challenges of Our Time"

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In the light of grand societal challenges (GSCs) (George et al., 2016), such as those highlighted in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, the call for responsible leadership in and through business has been increasing. As a case in point, the United Nations has proclaimed this to be the Decade of Action (UN, 2021) and the World Economic Forum has put responsible leadership at center stage (WEF, 2021). Even typically traditional business associations like the Business Roundtable now focus on "Leadership in Action" and "Business with Purpose", declaring that companies and their leaders should deliver long-term value to all of their stakeholders (Business Roundtable, 2021).

Despite this urgent need from a phenomenological perspective for organizations to pro-actively steer societal sustainable development, the theoretical, conceptual, and empirical understanding of leader actions, roles, and related issues at the intersection of business and society is still underdeveloped. This leaves us with limited knowledge of how business leadership and society interact to address the GSCs of our time; how they might interfere with as well as reinforce each other in a rapidly changing and complex world.

Business leaders, on one hand, are fraught with VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) environments (Miska et al., 2020) that constantly challenge their values, skill- and mindsets, and motivational drivers to engage in responsible leadership, which Marques and Miska (2020) defined as leadership "that through stakeholder and systems orientation caters for the needs of constituencies directly and indirectly impacted by organizations" (p. 1). This requires reconceptualization of the leadership phenomenon to align with societal shifts. It suggests fostering a broader understanding of which antecedents affect responsible leadership in this context, how responsible leaders can be developed, and how organizations need to be transformed and governed to enable responsible leadership. On the other hand, societies are continually subjected to transformation resulting from economic and institutional changes as

in the case of emerging economies, or shifts from market-based regulatory to state or authoritarian forms of capitalism (Sallai & Schnyder, 2021). Correspondingly, responsible leadership needs to be understood as a dynamic process in relation to how societies encourage, demand, enable or hinder business leaders to strive for sustainable development, while societies or relevant stakeholders (e.g., NGOs, governments, policy makers, and regulators) might indeed be those to assume leadership addressing GSCs.

Traditionally, leadership studies tend to investigate leadership in relation to organizational outcomes, dominated by strategy research and firm performance considerations. However, based on the above discussion, we see an opportunity to elevate leadership studies to the societal level. Various and largely disconnected areas of scholarship have been established that focus on leadership at the intersection of business and society: responsible leadership (Maak & Pless, 2006), collective leadership (Eva et al., 2021), micro-foundations of corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Gond et al., 2017), and the emerging area of CEO activism (Hambrick & Wowak, 2021), among others.

While most of these approaches acknowledge that leadership plays a role beyond traditional business boundaries, substantive research on responsible leadership antecedents, actions, processes, mindsets, and attendant impacts on stakeholders and society at large remains limited. This applies similarly for research at the societal level. Little is known about the latitude and leverage that societies might provide to facilitate responsible leadership on the part of companies, or even the extent to which these societies engage in leadership for sustainable development. Consequently, these various perspectives merit reconsideration, reevaluation, and perhaps revision to reflect the societal dynamics of a changing world.

The Special Issue (SI) we envision, therefore, seeks (1) to revisit the study of leadership at the intersection of business and society, both conceptually and empirically, and (2) to advance knowledge about how and under what conditions organizational leaders address selected GSCs' impact on society, which then affects their responsibility as change agents, activists, stewards and through other roles. Leadership research touches upon multiple disciplines, theories, and perspectives, especially when focusing beyond organizational boundaries and within the context of a broader set of stakeholders. Consequently, the possible questions to address as part of this SI are broad and inclusive. The aim of our SI is to align leadership studies with a business and society perspective. In the sections that follow, we provide further direction.

Scholarship on responsible leadership has burgeoned in recent years (e.g., Doh & Quigley, 2014; Maak et al., 2016; Miska & Mendenhall, 2018; Stahl & Sully de Luque, 2014; Tsui, 2021; Waldman & Siegel, 2008). Although variously defined, it tends to draw from a foundation in stakeholder theory with an ethical lens (Freeman et al., 2004), which makes responsible leadership distinctive from other contemporary approaches. Concomitantly, it shares the assumption with other approaches that argue leadership action extends beyond organizational boundaries. For example, under the umbrella concept of 'collective leadership' Contractor et al. (2012) identified liaison leadership roles that develop productive relationships with external stakeholders. These could be NGOs, governments, policy makers, activists, and other stakeholders with expertise beyond the traditional core business, assisting companies in establishing partnerships to collaborate on GSCs. Many such research opportunities exist around similar yet dispersed concerns, shifting the focus more deliberately to the linkages between leadership, stakeholder engagement, and societal impact (see e.g., Thorgren & Omorede, 2018). In this way, unique contextual configurations and associated

leadership characteristics provide contrasting avenues for research; thus, observed in comparisons of social enterprises versus established companies in advanced versus developing economies.

Similarly, emerging research centering on top-management leadership advances our understanding of CEO activism and the implications of taking a stance in public debates (e.g., Branicki et al., 2021; Chatterji & Toffel, 2019; Hambrick & Wowak, 2021; Neville, 2020). From a societal perspective, this leads to questions such as if it is appropriate for CEOs to take activist positions, whether CEOs and/or boards should take action, and what the most effective ways are for CEOs to promote social and environmental issues through business leadership. Examining how activist CEOs, as persons of public interest, can have a profound impact beyond their companies' borders may provide deeper insight into the subsequent effects on stakeholders, industry, and the wider society. At the same time, this requires examination of the societal context in which this leadership activism occurs, to extrapolate stakeholder leadership expectations of CEOs as activists as well as other social movements that might assume this role. Scholars and practitioners would benefit from a more precise discernment of the processes through which CEO sustainability activism in relation to societal setups evolves, leading to transformation that embeds business into society and the environment.

Finally, research on the micro-foundations of CSR highlights the relevance of individual behavior and the processes associated with their actions that have a positive impact on an organization's sustainability agendas (e.g., Gond et al., 2017; Hafenbrädl & Waeger, 2017; Jones et al., 2019; Shea & Hawn, 2019). Through this SI, we encourage research that both extends widely and explores acutely the micro-foundations of societal impact through the lens of leadership.

Overall, we believe that additional theoretical frameworks and more comprehensive conceptualizations of leadership are needed to move toward facilitating the conditions for societal sustainable development. Consequently, the aim of our SI is to advance theory, through both empirical and conceptual work, on the role of leadership in a phenomenological, positional, and processual sense. Viewing business and society through a leadership lens, we also envision SI contributions from the political sciences, sociology, and cultural studies.

Derived from the above, the following six topic areas and associated questions illustrate some suggested directions and research themes:

1. *Micro-foundations and development of responsible leadership*

    -   What are the skill-, competency-, and mind-sets as well as values, motivational drivers, and identities that support business leaders to accommodate societal demands? How can theory on the micro-foundations of CSR be extended and advanced to reflect leadership influence on societal sustainable development?
    -   What are ways to develop responsible leaders that look beyond organizational outcomes and address societal targets? What is the role of HR in shaping responsible leadership along these lines? Which organizational support systems are needed to develop responsible leaders, and how may they need to be adjusted and transformed in the light of sustainable development?

2. Responsible leadership for sustainable development

- How does leadership in business organizations contribute to societal sustainable development? Who are those undertaking leadership to develop sustainable societies and ecosystems, and why? What is their measured impact on society? What role does innovation play in this?
- With the 'Decade of Action' underway, what constitutes responsible leadership in business organizations engaging in United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) action? How do organizational leaders incorporate the SDGs into their businesses? What is the impact of their actions on society?

3. Societal influences on responsible leadership

- Under what conditions do institutional, political, and cultural systems, contexts, and states of development (e.g., emerging versus advanced economies) enable or hinder business leaders' engagement for/with society?
- How does responsible leadership accommodate societal expectations that reflect societies' institutional and cultural characteristics, especially when these facilitate or inhibit GSCs? What role do attendant cross-cultural and cross-societal differences play?

4. Responsible leadership, stakeholder relations, and cross-sector partnerships

- In the light of GSCs, how do business leaders establish productive stakeholder relationships, specifically with groups such as NGOs and governments?
- What role does responsible leadership play in cross-sector partnerships? Which types of action and impacts do these collaborations generate for society? How might stakeholder and relational theories be expanded or advanced through associated leadership issues?

5. Responsible leadership and political engagement

- How do responsible business leaders influence societal discourse and public opinion about GSCs? How do they impact political agendas, navigating trade-offs and synergies between their businesses and society?
- Which roles might business leader activism play in supporting societies that seek to address GSCs?

6. Contexts, paradigms, and paradoxes around responsible leadership

- How do societal (e.g., institutional systems, regimes, culture, etc.) and organizational settings (e.g., MNCs, SMEs, social enterprises, NGOs, and various approaches to governance) jointly determine and influence leadership? How do contextual configurations explain responsible leadership?
- How do specific leadership challenges (e.g., digital economy, ethics, diversity and inclusion, green/environmental targets, philanthropy, etc.) and shifting paradigms relate to societal-focused leadership? What are associated tensions and paradoxes, and how does embracing them from a leadership point of view help advance societies?

SI Workshops

Pre-submission: October 2022 before the SI submission deadline, the guest editors will organize a virtual workshop designed to provide developmental guidance to prospective submissions. Participation in this workshop is not a precondition for submission to, nor does it guarantee acceptance in the SI. The workshop will be organized in the form of a virtual plenary followed by virtual paper development roundtables that bring together paper authors with senior scholars for in-depth feedback and advice. To be considered for the workshop, please send a proposal or extended abstract (up to 3,000 words) to Christof Miska (Christof.Miska@wu.ac.at) by 1 September 2022. Further details will be forthcoming.

Post-submission: The guest editors will organize a SI revision workshop in 2023 (exact dates, times, and place TBA). Authors who receive a "revise and resubmit" (R&R) decision on their manuscript will be invited to attend this workshop. Participation in the workshop does not guarantee acceptance of the paper in the SI and attendance is not a prerequisite for publication.

Submission process

- Note that the deadline for submissions is March 1, 2023
- Upload all manuscripts to Scholar One Manuscripts (https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bas) between February 1 and March 1, 2023.
- Specify in the cover letter that the manuscript is for the SI on "Responsible Leadership Action for Business and Society: Addressing the Grand Societal Challenges of Our Time".
- Follow author guidelines for the *Business & Society* journal (https://journals.sagepub.com/author-instructions/BAS).
- Bear in mind that all submissions will be double-blind peer-reviewed by multiple reviewers.
- Contact the guest editors with informal inquires related to the SI, proposed topics and potential fit, and information on the workshops below

About the journal

Business & Society is one of the leading, peer-reviewed outlets for scholarly work dealing with the intersection of business and society. The journal publishes research that develops, tests, and refines theory, and it enhances our understanding of important societal issues and their relation to business. *Business & Society*'s current two-year impact factor is 7.389, ranked 29 out of 153 journals in the business category. For further details on the journal, see https://journals.sagepub.com/home/bas

About the Guest Editors

Mary Sully de Luque is an Associate Dean of Graduate Programs and Research, Professor of Global Management, ASU Senior Global Futures Scientist and Academic Director of Women Entrepreneur Programs in Rising Economies in the Thunderbird School at Arizona State University. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska, followed by a Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Wharton School of Business. Along with her research and teaching in the areas of global leadership and corporate social sustainability, Mary has published in dozens of journals such as *Administrative Science Quarterly, Academy of Management Review, Journal of International Business Studies, Journal of Organizational*

Behavior, Journal of Management Studies, Journal of World Business as well as many book chapters. Currently, she serves as a Section Editor at the *Journal of Business Ethics* and on editorial boards of several top journals. Among her non-profit board positions, she is CEO and Chair of the Board of Directors for the Global Leadership in Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) Foundation.

Christof Miska is Associate Professor at WU Vienna University of Economics and Business in Austria. He is also a fellow of the WU Competence Center for Sustainability Transformation and Responsibility (STaR), and was a visiting scholar at Bentley University and INSEAD Singapore. His research focuses on the intersection of responsible leadership and cross-cultural/institutional differences, aiming to connect micro, meso, and macro approaches. It was published in journals such as *Business Ethics Quarterly*, *Journal of World Business*, the *Journal of Business Ethics*, and the *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, among others. For his responsible leadership research he has obtained funding from the Austrian Science Fund FWF. He recurrently organizes PDWs and workshops at major conferences, and frequently serves as conference track chair (e.g., EIBA, EURAM, AIB).

Christian Voegtlin is Professor of Managerial Responsibility at Audencia Business School. He received his Habilitation and his PhD in Business Administration from the University of Zurich. His main research interests are in responsible leadership and innovation, business ethics and neuroscience, and corporate social responsibility. His research has appeared in outlets such as the *Academy of Management Perspectives, Business Ethics Quarterly, Journal of Management Studies* and the *Journal of Business Ethics*. He currently serves as associate editor for *Business & Society* and is an editorial board member of the *Journal of Business Ethics.* He has co-edited several special issues.

Alexander Newman is Professor of Management and the Head of the Department of Management at Deakin Business School. He is also Director of the Centre for Refugee Employment, Advocacy, Training and Education (CREATE). His main research interests are leadership, creativity and innovation, organizational psychology, business ethics, careers and entrepreneurship. His research has appeared in outlets such as *Leadership Quarterly,* the *Journal of Organizational Behavior, Journal of Applied Psychology, Business Ethics Quarterly* and the *Journal of Business Ethics.* He is associate editor of the *International Journal of Management Reviews* and *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, and has edited special issues in journals such as *Business and Society*, the *Journal of Business Ethics* and the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*.

Jill A. Brown is Professor of Management and the Hieken Professor of Business Ethics at Bentley University in Waltham, MA, USA. Brown's research and teaching interests include corporate governance, strategic leadership, ethics, and corporate social responsibility. Brown is co-editor of the *Business & Society* journal as well as an associate editor *for Corporate Governance: An International Review (CGIR).* Her work has been published in *Organization Science*, the *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Business Ethics Quarterly*, *Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice*, *California Management Review*, and CGIR, among others. Brown recently served as Division Chair of the Social Issues in Management (SIM) Division of the Academy of Management. She is co-author, with Archie Carroll, of the forthcoming 11th edition of the textbook Business & Society: Ethics, Sustainability and Stakeholder Management (Cengage).

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