

SHORT REPORT

Responsible leadership styles and promotion of stakeholders' health

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Abstract

The aim of this short report is to stimulate a conversation on the potential role to be played by responsible leadership in promoting the health and well-being of stakeholders (employees and society at large).

The report first describes responsible leadership styles and then briefly discusses the potential connection with health promotion within the lens of the wider determinants of health and intersectorial collaboration.

Integrative responsible leadership and health promotion share a common vision: to alter the economic, environmental, and social contexts in which decisions relating to health and well-being are made, thus affecting health equity.

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Responsible leadership

Responsible leadership (RL) is a relational process between leaders and stakeholders aimed at establishing accountability in matters pertaining to organizational value creation (1). Pless et al. define leadership style as an observable behaviour that reflects different degrees of such accountability in executive actions and discussions (2), and argue that this behaviour could be evaluated by other people like subordinates (who are classical followers, peers, and external constituencies) (2).

This short report looks at RL styles and examines how they can influence health promotion through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies and processes in the organization. This approach to RL is supported by Doh and Quigley's understanding of RL behaviour, which they see as going beyond "doing no harm" to contributing to value creation in relation to multiple bottom lines (3).

According to Maak et al. (1) there are two RL behaviours with two distinct leadership styles: instrumental and integrative. Instrumental RL is centred on driving business, with a strategic focus on business performance (1) and less attention paid to non-core business issues (2). This style entails a personalized vision based on the achievement of organizational goals such as maximization of profits, growth, and dominance over the competition (1). Instrumental RL is also associated with weaker interactions with stakeholders, mostly based on key business stakeholders, employees, governments, and investors.

Regarding relations with internal stakeholders (employees), instrumental RL is suggested to lead by objectives, setting high performance goals as well as focusing on managing employees' performance and excellence to meet the defined goals (2). Relations with external stakeholders are suggested to come through economic means-end relationships (4) or beneficial in

terms of power, or through relations with governments, legislation or media (for urgency issues). Instrumental leaders are rational, as they search for information about selected societal issues that they see as providing business benefits (2,4).

In contrast to this, an integrative RL style is characterised by a balanced approach towards value creation, leading the business towards societal as well as business objectives (the so-called "double-bottom-line") (1). Integrative responsible leaders use communication and vision statements as an active leadership tool to convey positive messages regarding societal impact, taking boundary-spanning roles and connecting with a large range of stakeholders (1,4). These leaders are connected to external constituencies, governments, and investors as well as being facilitators of collaboration between stakeholders from different sectors and industries. They can also facilitate inclusive processes in decision making, use moral reasoning and often make pro-social choices (1). The two leadership styles are summarised in Table 1.

Can responsible leaders contribute to public health promotion?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over and improve their health (5). Health promotion moves beyond the focus on individual behaviours towards a wide range of social, economic, and environmental interventions. It is strictly linked to the determinants of health and well-being which are known to be the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. These conditions determine people's chances for good health, and are sometimes called "the causes of the causes" (6). There is now a broader consensus that health is linked not only to behaviour or risk exposure, but also to how social and economic structures shape the health of the populations globally.

Table 1. Responsible leadership styles

Behavioural characteristics	Instrumental leader	Integrative leader
Vision	Personalized	Socialized
Focus of business leadership/Value creation	Leading business with a focus on the financial bottom-line	Leading business with a focus on dual-bottom-line
Approach to leading	Leading by objective setting	Leading by mobilizing stakeholders
Stakeholders relations/Scope of interaction	Low degree of interconnectedness Boundary setting Reactive Narrow focus on powerful and urgent stakeholders	High degree of interconnectedness Boundary spanning Proactive Broader focus on all legitimate stakeholders
Decision making process/ Applied logic/Justification of choices	Exclusive Economic cost – benefit logic Business case justification	Inclusive Pro-social cost logic Logic of appropriateness

Source: Adapted from Maak et al 2016 (1).

I argue that responsible leaders, especially those with an integrative behaviour style, will be more likely to advance CSR strategies and processes that are inclusive and that involve collaboration with other stakeholders, in order to improve people's health beyond the workplace. This inclusiveness and collaboration, which is a common feature of integrative responsible leaders, is very important in health promotion and is referred to as "intersectorial collaboration" (7).

Since its conception, health promotion was always thought to advance intersectorial collaboration beyond the health sector in pursuit of improving human health (5). This view was that by creating partnerships with sectors beyond the health sector, countries could better address the underlying causes of the conditions that create ill health, and especially health inequalities (7).

Business organizations, through their integrative responsible leaders, can help improve population health by collaborating in addressing the social determinants of health (e.g., tackling environmental,

economic, social and health challenges) between and within countries in the era of sustainable development goals (SDGs). For instance, Macassa and colleagues viewed responsible leaders as posited to achieve mutually shared objectives (for internal and external stakeholders) based on a vision of business as a force of good for the many, and not only for shareholders and managers (8).

It is argued that health promotion offers a great opportunity and means to achieve the SDGs by equipping and empowering individuals and communities and by promoting inclusive models of governance via advocating health policies and environments (9,10). The SDGs are the foundation for supporting global health and international development work in the years to come.

CSR strategies promoted throughout integrative RL and health promotion share a common vision; that is, to alter the economic, environmental, and social contexts in which decisions relating to health and well-being are made, thus affecting health equity.

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