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Social innovation through responsible leadership

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Abstract
This paper examines how responsible leadership and social innovation can generate ethical outcomes for the individual, organisation and society. By integrating the responsible leadership and social innovation literature, the paper identifies four types of socially innovative responsible outcomes; virtuous, ethical, professional and instrumental.

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Social Innovation through Responsible Leadership

Summary
This paper examines how responsible leadership and social innovation can generate ethical outcomes for the individual, organisation and society. By integrating the responsible leadership and social innovation literature, the paper identifies four types of socially innovative responsible outcomes; virtuous, ethical, professional and instrumental.

Key words
Social innovation, responsible leadership, ethical, social change

This paper examines how responsible leadership and social innovation can generate ethical outcomes for the individual, organisation and society. Responsible leadership has been described as a “values-based and thorough ethical principles-driven relationship” between leaders and stakeholders (Pless 2007, p. 438). Using two prominent theories of responsible leadership, this paper presents a framework to better understand how responsible leadership can lead to socially innovative outcomes. This line of inquiry warrants such an examination because unlike other prominent leadership styles, responsible leadership includes external stakeholders, and sustainable value creation leading to social change is a critical element of responsible leadership (Maak and Pless, 2006; Pless, 2007).

One of the first contributions to responsible leadership has been that of Lynham and Chermack (2006). They propose a framework to better understand how leadership can be both effective as well as responsible. Ethics, effectiveness and endurance are three key elements in their thesis. They argue that the constituents play a critical role in determining the leader behaviour involving these three elements. The responsible leadership advocated by Lynham and Chermack links performance to responsibility. On the other hand, Maak and Pless (2006) focus on relationships that the leader is able to build both internally and externally to the organization as critical to developing responsible leadership. Their approach to responsible leadership has social change as a critical element in the process. Thus with both these approaches to responsible leadership, the social element is key to enacting responsible leadership. Both approaches contend that responsible leaders need to form relationships with internal and external stakeholders that are values-based and ethical, and lead to social change. Within this context, there is great potential for responsible leaders to generate social innovation outcomes.

Several typologies have been presented to explain how social innovation works, and the value of social innovation (e.g. Moulaert et al., 2005). Social innovation has been characterized as an outcome of sociological reflection and social action (Hochgerner, 2009). It has been described as “the development of new concepts, strategies and tools that support groups in achieving the objective of improved well-being” (Dawson and Daniel, 2010, p. 10). Mumford (2002) defines it as “the generation and
implementation of new ideas about how people should organize interpersonal activities, or social interactions, to meet one or more common goals” (p. 253). Although recognised with the potential to create better societies, within the social sciences the topic is yet to be fully explored (Mulgan et al. 2007; Dawson and Daniel 2010; Howaldt and Schwarz 2010). Certainly from a responsible leadership perspective, how social innovation can be of value has been explored only in few contributions (e.g. Maak and Stoetter, 2012).

By integrating the responsible leadership and social innovation literature, the paper will propose four types of socially innovative responsible outcomes; virtuous, ethical, professional and instrumental.

References


