Responsible Leadership Behaviours among Human Resource Managers in the South African Hybrid Work Context

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Abstract

This study explored the responsible behaviours among human resource managers in South Africa in the hybrid context with particular focus on their weaknesses and their areas of development. The study adopted the interview method of data collection following the need to have in-depth understanding of responsible leadership. Evidence from the study supports the literature findings that while leaders may have various strengths, they can benefit from more training and training as well as coaching sessions offered by their organisations. Areas of development included improving cultural intelligence. ICT skills training as well as strategies for applying the various concept of the Competency Assessment for Responsible Leadership (CARL) framework. Organisations are recommended to increase initiatives to improve responsible leadership in their organisations.

Keywords: *leadership, HRM, Responsible leadership, Hybrid work, technology.*

Introduction

Workplaces have transformed and many principles of human resource management are taking new dimensions. The traditional on-site work system is transforming and hybrid work arrangements are becoming more common (Sbalzer, Shetty & Kirchner, 2024). Scholarly work on hybrid work is increasing as organisations and HRM is also shifting. In the hybrid work context, the notion of Responsible Leadership is also getting traction. In fact, any social interaction in both organisations and communities, leadership and followership scenarios are indispensable. The purpose of this study is to explore the strengths and areas of development towards becoming a Responsible Leader among HRM managers in various entities in South Africa. This is vital for organizational leadership to effectively take advantage of the responsible leadership as well as hybrid work phenomena to become by giving new management frontiers for the future. Responsive leadership, as a new concept in management discourse, complements and enrich present leadership concepts such as transformational, visionary and ethical leadership perceptions (Jonck, 2024; Grobler & Koen, 2024). This study sought to reflect and provide an integrated literature account of responsible leader in the hybrid work context. Responsible leadership is a vital notion of analysis in the global context given the leadership challenges of the 21st century (Grobler & Koen, 2024). These challenges include getting the most associated with the evolving technological dimensions. Additionally, mismanagement and various maladministration challenges demand the need for a leadership approach that appropriate and that has particular concern for long term environmental and societal sustainability (Kempster &Jackson, 2021; Jonck, 2024; Grobler & Koen, 2024. The recognition that leadership forms a key component in the 21st society is argued in such works as that of Kempster and Jackson (2021) as well as Maak (2022).

Responsible Leadership and the HRM Function

The construct of responsible leadership is rooted in the principles of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) which is founded from the field of sustainable and business (Grobler & Koen, 2024, Makalima, 2024). The concept deviates from the profit focus and motive of business organisations and emphasises environmenta, social and economic considerations in the management of entities (Makalima, 2024). Responsible leadership is appreciated as a concept at personal, relationships, organizational and societal levels. It is based on sustainable practices across these levels. For the HRM function it has serious implications given the position of HRM leaders in the welfare of people, organisations and societies (Grobler & Koen, 2024). This is

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through such roles as employee recruitment and selection, performance management, compensation, training and development and job terminations. In a country with high unemployment, poverty and socio-economic inequalities such as South Africa, the HRM function in organisations is looked upon to sustainable aid address these challenges through responsible actions (Sbalzer et al., 2024; Jonck, 2024). Responsible leadership emphasises on the development of the responsible self as well as enhancing pathways for the development of responsible leaders and teams in organisations (Jonck, 2024). Key concepts of values-based leadership, morality and ethics as well as ethical leadership and decision making are central to responsible leadership. Responsible leadership in organisations focuses on culture in organisations with a focus on a workplace culture that goes beyond words, structures and organisational cultures, promotions and measurements but is concerned with wider societal and environment welfare. De Klerk and Swart (2023) explained the complex nature of leadership and provides that successful leadership should be able to deal with complexity. In this study Responsible leadership is advanced as a possible way of addressing the complex organisations of the 21st century (Jonck, 2024).

Responsible Leadership in the Hybrid Work Context

While studies have found some relationship between hybrid work arrangements, the role of leadership in strengthening the system is significant (Toscano, Gonzalez-Roma & Zappala, 2024). In Toscano's (2024) study, it was found that leadership significantly mediates the the relationship between hybrid work arrangements and employee performance. Leadership behaviours that motivate the employee and that is supportive tend to be crucial in addressing challenges associated with work from in the hybrid work system. These challenges include daily isolation, tension, stress, burnout and limited support (Sbalzer et al., 2024). Rather than satisfying stakeholders, Responsible Leadership in HRM should seek to make the world better by placing regard to shareholders, the environment, the society, ecological system and the general global space. These arguments inform a new type of leader who is responsible, morally and ethically upright, considerable and who is conscious of the need to develop a better world for people and the ecological system. The responsible leader is conceptualized from a role that seeks to solve societal problems rather than to multiply these problems (Jonck, 2024). It is not only struggling people that make the world difficult to live but also well paid and high-ranking officials in organisations who are ignorant to societal needs. This argument is well explained and supported in the work of Kempster and Jackson (2021) who impressed that in the 21st century there are various emerging challenges that requires the emergence of responsible leadership. Responsive leadership can be described as the cultivation of sustainable and trustful stakeholder relationships (Grobler & Koen, 2024). Such leaders are considered to derive their power and position form stakeholders and they possess emotional and ethical qualities based on togetherness and cooperation (Jonck, 2024). Given the essence of stakeholders to responsible leaders, it is important to specify these stakeholders. Stakeholders include employees, clients or customers, business partners, environment as well as shareholders. Employees include teams and individuals from different cultures while clients are those who expect an enterprise's products and services to meet their needs. Responsible leaders also have business partners and there is need to ensure adherence to ethical, moral, environmental and ethical standards. Responsible leaders were also deemed to respect the impact of their decisions and activities on the social and natural environment. There is also need to meet the investment of shareholders. As explained in Maak and Pless' (2006) role model of responsible leadership which include character, operational roles and normative roles. Operational roles of Responsible Leaders include coaching, change agent, architect as well as story teller and meaning enabler that enhances normative leadership roles such as servant and stewardship characters of responsible leadership. In this view responsible leaders possess various other leadership behaviours such as ethical leadership, authentic leadership, transformationa, servant and values-based leadership (Jonck, 2024). These are performed with integrity (accountability, citizenship and stewardship) within macro, micro and meso domains.

Theoretical Framework

Leadership as an act of influence whereby any person who has an influence on someone is a leader while any person who accept influence is a follower (Jonck, 2024). In this way everyone, everyone is likely to act as a follower in some contexts and as a leader in other contexts. Responsible leadership challenges the

traditional view that businesses are meant to serve their shareholders through profit maximisation was challenged. The profit motive can result in untenable exploitation of resources and unsustainable damage to the society or the community. Challenges of income disparities, exploitation of labour , poverty, disregard for rights of the underprivileged in society, the abuse of power, secret dealings, bribery, corruption and other unethical business practices that continue to ravage the world can be attributed to the profit motive. In this context, the Responsible leader has a responsibility to make the world better.

The study adopted the Competency Assessment for Responsible Leadership (CARL) to make an assessment of strengths and areas of development in Responsible leadership for leaders in the hybrid work context. Muff, Delacoste and Dyllick (2022) informs that the CARL framework for the assessment of responsible leadership was developed by Muff et al (2020) as a way to assess responsible leadership competencies of an individual. This framework provides a foundation for the identification of competency development areas in the development of competence leadership. The CARL model appreciates that responsible leadership can be viewed from the personal level. Consequently, the study explored the strengths and areas of development in terms leader personal orientation and mastery, personal identity, reflection and authenticity in being a responsible leader. The responsible leader in HRM is expected to appreciate the value stakeholder interest as well as conflict in the execution of various HRM functions (Maak, 2022). The CARL model was used to assess concepts of Responsible Leadership such as development of a stakeholder mindset, handling stakeholder conflicts through trade-offs as well as nurturing and building moral imagination and resilience among responsible leaders (Maak, 2022. The responsible HRM leader is expected to possess capabilities and practices that are appropriate to deal with contextual complexity as well as stakeholder-inclusive problem solving.

A responsible leadership manifesto has been compiled to include a leader who serve all stakeholders, protects and promotes society welfare and creates systemic implications to the society, the socio-economic environment as well society and ecological components of the planet (Maak, 2022; Grobler & Koen, 2024). Such a leader actively collaborates and engages, shares dreams, is committed, has integrity, is accountable, responsible, is respectful, compassionate and values inclusivity as well as empowerment. In view of these qualities a Competency Assessment of Responsible Leadership (CARL) has been developed and describes a leader who values stakeholder engagement, is ethical, without good values, has self-awareness, has systemic thinking and embraces change and innovation. Stakeholder relations involve identifying and integrating stakeholder groups, dealing with conflicting interests and find consensus as well as appreciating the positive in diversity (Kempster & Jackson, 2021. Ethics and values include   knowing your values and what's right and wrong and acting according to ethics and values (Jonck, 2024). This also include being honest, fair, and responsible. Self-awareness include knowing and understanding the importance of reflection, learning from mistakes and sharing development challenges. A holistic appreciation of situations forms the systems understanding component while change and innovation is the appreciation of change drivers, being open, curious, courage and adaptable.

Methodology

The study was qualitative and informed from the constructivist philosophy. Constructivism is based on the assumption that reality is created by the people and how they experience it (Ugwu, Ekere& Onoh, 2021). In this way responsible leadership was considered to be perceived by leaders who can identify their own strengths and weaknesses. As a result the qualitative approach was adopted. Data was collected through the interview method of data collection which is based on asking respondents to respond to a matter of interest to a study (Uwamusi & Ajisebiyawo, 2023). Telephone interviews were conducted with HRM Directors of three large multinational enterprises and two HRM managers from the South African Department of Public Service and Administration. These HRM Directors were senior persons with experience of more than fifteen (15) years of service in the HRM field and were deemed capable of providing vital information to inform this study. Two of the interviewees were females while the other three were males. There was also a racial composition involving 1 White, three blacks and 1 Indian participant.

Results and Discussion

In view of the CARL theory, participants in this study identified strengths and leadership development areas. The CARL framework which is a tool for assessing one's position as a responsible leader and was used in this study to analysis the data collected.

Interview excerpts for the strengths and areas of development provided by participants

Interviewee	Strengths	Areas for development	Action plan
1	Stakeholder engagement is a dimension that requires social skills which I possess. I have worked in teams and have such team work skills like emotional intelligence, communication as well as social interaction capabilities. I believe these skills strengthen my interactive capabilities for the stakeholder engagement component of responsible leadership. I also value cultural diversity and have worked with people from different backgrounds making it easy from me to easily engage, collaborate, consult and simply interact from people across cultures and backgrounds.	I believe I need to develop my capacity to influence others within social engagement. This is an important skill for all success leaders. While I have cultural and diversity competencies within the South African contexts. I believe that I need to develop on diversity interaction skills from an international perspective given the growth of globalization and international businesses. I may also need to develop more digital communication competencies that are important for effective stakeholder engagement in the present digital era	In order to fully equip myself for increased stakeholder engagement, I may have to embark on a course on stakeholder engagement or perhaps attend relevant workshops that may help me attain the necessary competencies to increase my strengths. I also see it relevant to practice engagement in my present relationships with family, friends and workmates to increase my capacity for relevant future roles that I may undertake in professional life. I also see it important to master my present course as it has relevant content for stakeholder engagement in public systems in the present context
2	Ethics is a broad field which is based on what is wrong and what is right. It is manly based on societal as well as fundamental human perceptions of what is good and what is right. This involves being adequately immersed in the society to understand what people values. As a black African person in South Africa, I possess some important ethical background associated with the Ubuntu philosophy which values collectivity, dignity and doing things for the goodness of the people and their society. I believe this forms a foundation for responsible leadership. I have	South Africa is a diverse society that is composed of various tribes and people across nationalities. I may lack cultural richness and adequate knowledge or appreciation of other cultures and their values. This becomes a weakness. So I need to develop better knowledge of the ethical dimensions and values of various cultural groups as well as people from other nationalities in South Africa. To attain this there is need to develop a positive mind that seeks and appreciate other people in their diversity. South Africa is a country that values inclusivity as a rainbow and I	To understand and appreciate ethics and values across cultures, I need to be involved in research on ethics and values of other cultures and compare them with those of my own. I may also need to increase my social interactions with other cultures and allow these interactions to be the basis for getting knowledge on the ethics and values of these other cultures. The responsible leadership module and the various sessions conducted in this course has set the basis for appreciating culture in the development of societies, individuals as well as business

	grown in an ethically sensitive society where everyone is expected to value what is good and to make a contribution to societal wellness	nation and I believe this can be the starting point to appreciate other ethical orientations and values.	enterprises. I will also increase my focus in learning this module as it promotes ethical behaviour and values.
3	While it is difficult to identify your own strengths, there are some personal attributes that I describe to be associated with my character and general way of performing tasks and behaving as a member of the community and as a member of some organisation. I am someone who values personal development, who possess mental and psychological strengths in difficult circumstances and who values success. I also tend to enjoy learning from others and I value personal interactions and social relationships. I believe these can be strengths in responsible leadership. Over the years I have been successful in team work and various roles of leadership that I have been involved in various situations	I believe there are various areas of development that I need to address in order to become a good responsible leader. These include accountability, responsibility taking, leadership values as well as general confidence among others. I also need to develop the capacity to value and consider the ecological dimension in social phenomena given that true responsible leadership has a value for both human and non-human elements in various interactions. There are more self development areas that I also need to develop such as avoiding unearthing baviours and the ability to influence people to shun corruption and to value societal goodness	The identification of my individual weaknesses is the beginning point for my own development. This involves taking an introspection of my own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, capabilities and capacities as a basis for further development. I may have to engage life coaching, character development, ethical and moral guidance as well as wellness coaching from professionals to promote my own self awareness. This will begin with putting more focus on my responsible leadership module which introduced responsible leadership to me as a new concept and through which I have learnt widely for individual development. I also believe I must always practice the essential self-awareness individual analysis to promote personal development. At the end, I need to develop a personal development plan that focuses on the responsible leadership competencies that I have leant in this source. This is necessary given that need to practice and apply for better learning.
4	I understand systems thinking as it aligns with the systems theory which I learnt in my earlier studies. Having learned the systems theory as it underpins many social phenomena I easily understand it withing responsible leadership. I see this as a strengths as it means I can understand its principles in both personal, community and organizational contexts. I	Having learnt the basic theoretical framework of systems think, I like strengths and application of this theory in real life contexts. Additionally fitting the ecological component within social settings may be an area of development given my strong links to social and economic science studies. The module provided that the holistic notion of systems	To enhance my capacite in systems thinks I may need to identify a responsible leader who can be a coach to me. This responsible leader coach can introduce me to the practical side of applying systems thinking in organizational contexts. It may also benefit me to conduct wide reading about leadership in general as well as to make specific research

	have applied it as underpinning theory to some researches that I have undertaken and I believe I can learn to apply it within the model of responsible leadership. I believe I hold the capacity and skill to conceptualise it in responsible leadership	thinking means the integration of ecological, social and economic phenomena in various contexts. I believe, I may need to develop strengths in these key areas of responsible leadership. I am more biased to the people side of managerial and leadership side and need more skills in the application of the systems theory	on systems thinking as a key component of responsible leadership. This may have searching for relevant case studies of responsible leadership and make a detailed analysis. This may broaden my appreciation and view of the application of responsible leadership for the success of organisations. This also emphasizes the need to ensure that I fully comprehend the responsible leadership module that I am presently undertaking.
5	The situation in many organisations, as I have observed, is one that needs change. It appears that leaders in many organisations have ignored the need to be responsible and to align more to the needs of society at large. I believe that there is an existing need to change and innovate to adopt new systems and news of doing things for the good of society. Responsible leaders are needed to change the present situation and create a better South Africa. Corruption, bribery, self-focus and disregard for societal welfare in favour of money has been dominant and there is need to change. I also believe I have been in positions where I have failed to initiate and promote change. Additionally innovation is weak in me as change requires innovation.	In the technological era that we are now in, innovation and creativity have become areas for development for everyone including me. Technological use and effective use of it to inspire change in the society has become my area of development. This is important for responsible leaders in their desired to develop the society. Innovativeness to promote responsible leadership dimensions such as stakeholder engagement have become essential and central in the present day contexts. Additionally, transforming and changing the society requires innovativeness practices and actions. I may need this to increase my capacity in responsible leadership in this technological revolution environment	To ensure that technological innovation is strong to me, I will register for an Information and technology (ICT) course to learn the use of technology to foster innovativeness skills. I may register for online and physical courses. Innovation also require thinking outside the box and to be forthcoming in searching for innovativeness ways to solve the problems of this world using technological systems. I also need to adopt various technological gadgets and systems for use in the various activities in my personal and professional life to strengthen my capacity to use ICT systems. Joining technology innovation hubs that seek to develop the capacity of individuals will be a right action to strengthen my innovativeness capacity. Innovativeness require an appropriate mindset which one can willfully develop. I will make a personal effort to simply promote being innovative in whatever that I do.

The responses provided in Table 1 shows categories of strengths and areas of development related to components of the CARL framework and involving stakeholder engagement, ethics and values, systems understanding, self-awareness and change or innovation capability. Some respondents mentioned their strengths in team work skills like emotional intelligence, communication as well as social interaction capabilities. It was also mentioned that the technological revolution supports stakeholder engagements through various platforms such as social media. To fully enhance the stakeholder capabilities, the need for

relevant course, training and workshops was identified as important. Change management in the technological context and in light of the significant leadership challenges in south Africa was a critical area mentioned in the study. Participants felt that the technological era requires innovation and creativity which are now areas for development for everyone including. Technological use and effective use of it to inspire change in the society has become a key area of development. The need for training in ICT skills was mentioned as critical for the development of Responsible leadership capacity. These results support earlier research positions. Sbalzer et al. (2024) provided that there is need to effectively work on the needs of present day HRM managers. In particular the need to promote technological systems through several forms of workshops, coaching and on the job engagement has increased. Additionally, Grobler and Koen (2024) provided that Responsible Leadership requires that systems be developed to capacitate HRM leaders to develop cultural intelligence and to be proficient in respecting cultural values across different groups in organisations. Pless, Sengupta, Wheeler and Maak (2022) supported the need for adequate appreciation of factors for effective stakeholder engagement. In this way this study found that it is important to have developmental mechanisms to promote Responsible leadership in the HRM managers.

Conclusion

The study has explored the strengths and areas of development for responsible leadership. In this way, It was established that, while various forms of strengths in terms of personal attitudes and team capabilities, there is need for training and leadership development initiatives. These should especially be associated with the technological contexts and the ability to put components of the CARL framework into practice.

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