

Foreword to Special Issue on ‘Responsible Leadership’

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This Special Issue on ‘Responsible Leadership’ represents the distilled outcome of both an open call for papers on the topic and a call for papers related to the 1st international conference on responsible leadership which took place from the 18th to the 20th of May 2010 in Pretoria, South Africa. Given the many contributions to a topic of increasing interest in both business practice and academia the selection of papers was not easy. At the end of the reviewing process, eight papers were selected: seven from the submissions received through the open call for papers and one from the conference.

The conference, organised by the Albert Luthuli Centre for Responsible Leadership at the University of Pretoria, in partnership with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), attracted a diverse international group of practitioners, business leaders and scholars from the fields of business education, business ethics, corporate social responsibility and leadership.

What this conference highlighted, was the many challenges that still remain when it comes to establishing responsible leadership both in theory and practice. Whilst offering conceptualisations for the improvement of leadership is a first and perhaps easier response, what is more difficult is to facilitate the actual change to happen. Against the common backdrop of contemporary ‘irresponsible’ leadership cases, one of the most highlighted challenges delegates discussed to facilitating

improved, more responsible leadership, is to bring about the change within the current generation, in the face of dominant business-as-usual market, policy and paradigmatic forces. There was also common sense that educators, schools and companies need to focus more on developing the next generation of responsible global leaders.

As it turned out, whilst many good stories were being shared from the practices of business leaders and practitioners, there was a need for a coordinated approach towards creating the right conditions, and overcoming the resistance towards change for responsible leadership to emerge. Discussions highlighted that (1) on an individual level, it requires questioning the contemporary moral and social order, as well as moving beyond the skills and attributes dimensions, towards investing in the ethical and values dimensions of leadership; (2) on a business level, it requires reframing the rules (the social contract with stakeholders) that guide business practices, which implies also critically engaging with approaches and paradigms of business education; and (3) on a societal level, facilitating global citizenship and collaboration—moving from the ‘me’ to the ‘we’ to the ‘us’.

We hope that this Special Issue will not only generate interest in the emerging domain of studies on responsible leadership, but also will pave the way for future research in this area in the years to come.

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