

Responsible education, managerial behaviour and corporate social responsibility: perspectives from businesses and higher education providers

COVID-19 has changed our world in unprecedented ways. It comes as no surprise that this includes changes in the structure and *modus operandi* of many industries in most countries worldwide. Phenomena such as self-isolation, panic buying, limited transportation and working from home have dramatically changed the way people behave as consumers and as employees (Kim, 2020). To address these drastic changes, both the business and the higher education (HE) sectors will need to adjust to a new environment full of immense challenges and uncertainties, as well as to meet the increased needs of a variety of stakeholders (He and Harris, 2020; Crawford *et al.*, 2020). First and the foremost, universities and businesses will need to address new or amplified existing societal issues, such as poverty, unemployment, isolation, mental health problems, a lack of digital literacy and many others and re-invent their institutional roles in society. This demand comes on the top of an already colossal pressure for organisations to place emphasis on societal impact and commitment to the common good, and a shift in consumer preferences to favour companies that acknowledge this and act accordingly (Öberseder *et al.*, 2013).

Even before the rise of COVID-19, businesses and universities had been shifting from the narrow view of business purpose linked to profit and shareholder value to a broader view, which is more socially responsible. The demand for corporate social responsibility (CSR) shows that the world is changing and the requirement for companies and organisations to do more than make profit – rather, to be part of a greater social solution. Furthermore, businesses and universities need to collaborate to develop responsible management practices and to embed CSR in their policies and strategies. Similarly, the world demands a new leadership style which prioritises achieving a substantial social impact based on sustainable business decisions and responsible managerial behaviours. For organisations to embrace ethically and socially responsible thinking, the provision of social responsibility education is essential (Cornelius *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, education providers and particularly business schools have a duty to embrace their responsibility not only by implementing ethical processes but also by providing responsible education, which would ideally act as a catalyst to stimulate socially and ethically managed business organisations (Cornelius *et al.*, 2007). Ethical leadership and responsible decision-making need to be integrated in any theory explaining how corporate responsibility can contribute to creating value and how irresponsibility destroys value (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012; Christensen *et al.*, 2014). Although some studies have examined the role of responsible leadership in CSR (Pless *et al.*, 2012; Waldman *et al.*, 2006), these studies have generally not considered the role of leadership in CSR beyond that of the CEO. Moreover, only a very limited number of studies explore this issue in a HE context. At the same time, business ethics and social responsibility have been extensively researched, but there has been limited attention in the pedagogical literature about how they can be integrated into education (Giacalone and Thompson, 2017) and how business schools can co-operate with industrial stakeholders to develop educational programmes on responsible leadership and ethics.

In this special issue, we attempt to fill these important gaps in the literature and generate scientific knowledge on the complicated relationships between responsible leadership, CSR and business ethics in the business and HE sectors. We present a collection of six papers from academics and practitioners – following a wide range of research methodologies – that



explain how ethics and social responsibility are perceived, implemented and taught in businesses and universities. Among others, the themes addressed in the special issue include *responsible education*, *ethics in business*, *responsible leadership* and *CSR*.

Specific topics addressed in the special issue

Audra Diers-Lawson, Kerry Coope and Ralph Tench evaluate factors influencing the authenticity and persuasiveness of social responsibility as a contributor to an organisation's value proposition to better develop leadership and learning around social responsibility. In doing so, they analyse some of the challenges and contradictions in relationships between CSR and stakeholder attitudes by comparing consumer and practitioner perspectives on social responsibility, its role in organisations, and its influence on consumer attitudes towards companies.

Ihuoma Ikemba-Efughi and Razaq Raj follow a mixed-methods approach in their paper to examine the managerial behaviour and CSR commitments of private education providers in Nigeria. Their research contributes to the pertinent literature by concluding that socially responsible managerial behaviour has been found to be a deliberate choice which business managers make and use to gain competitive advantage and secure their businesses.

Paul Agu Igwe, Mahfuzur Rahman, Paschal Ohalehi, Amarachi Amaugo and Julian Amalachukwu Anigbo follow an ethnographic approach in their research and engage in the discourse of the intersection of psychosociology of learning and student engagement, connected to the sense of belonging and the theory of planned behaviour (TPB). By interviewing 45 international students from three UK business schools they explore the factors which enable international students' integration, engagement and sense of belonging in HE institutes.

Aftab Dean, Moade Shubita and Julia Claxton in their quantitative study generate original knowledge on the type of learning journey that satisfies students most in their experience in HE and what they want from their learning. They offer useful recommendations to HE organisations on how to responsibly make decisions that will increase student satisfaction and well-being.

Mohammad Ali Ashraf, in his paper, examines the direct and indirect effects of demographic factors on employee compensation, job satisfaction and organisational commitment in private HE institutes in Bangladesh. To do so, he develops a theoretical framework using theories on employee retention which is then empirically tested through a quantitative study based on a sample of 515 faculty members from private universities.

Dr Solon Magrivos in his quantitative study examines the complexities of teaching Business Ethics in HE considering recent technological advances and well-established pedagogical practices. Through the employment of an experimental design, the paper contributes to the current literature by examining the effect of active (versus passive) and presence (versus absence) of digital devices in the learning experience of 192 US students.

In summary, the six papers of this special issue contribute to the literature on CSR, responsible leadership and responsible education by offering insights on how businesses and HE organisation can operate sustainably by embracing, implementing and teaching the main principles of social responsibility, and contribute to "the greater good" of society. In spite of the contextual and methodological limitations of the studies included in this special issue, such as the relatively narrow range of ethical issues addressed and the small number of countries where the primary studies of the papers were carried out, it offers an interesting view on how the interplay of the HE and the business sectors can offer education and guidance to leaders and managers on how they can develop responsible behaviours that lead to responsible strategic management practices and CSR.

Future research should expand the findings and recommendations of the papers included in this special issue both methodologically and thematically. First, the studies could and should be replicated in other national, cultural and industry contexts and their conclusions be validated

through the employment of different methodologies. Moreover, other relevant themes should be explored, such as ethical consumption, green marketing, ethical and servant leadership and responsible and inclusive education; to develop a holistic view on the role of HE, universities and businesses in relation to responsibility and sustainability in the modern post-pandemic society.

George Lodorfos

Department of Business, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK

Anastasia Konstadopoulou

Edge Hill University, Ormskirk, UK

Ioannis Kostopoulos

Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, UK

Ioannis Rizomyliotis

University of Brighton, Brighton, UK, and

Junjie Wu

Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK

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