University of Groningen

Reflecting on Responsible Leadership in the Context of Higher Education

Cavagnaro, Elena; van der Zande, Indira S. E.

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Elena Cavagnaro
University of Groningen & NHL
Stenden University of Applied
Sciences

Indira S.E. van der Zande
University of Groningen

REFLECTING ON RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Abstract

In the last decades, the notion that leadership comprises responsible leadership has gained support and the academic debate has shed some light on the antecedents, processes, and multi-level outcomes of responsible leadership. Being at the intersection of the leadership and sustainability discourses, responsible leadership has benefitted from the increasing interests that both fields of study have received. Nevertheless, the debate has left several questions around the nature and development of responsible leadership unanswered. Among these questions we reckon an understanding of "responsible" in the definition of "responsible leadership," the width of leaders' responsibility and the depth of their impact including the role of personal alongside formal leadership, and the distinction between "responsible" and "non responsible" leaders. The aim of this theoretical paper is to further the academic discussion on leadership in the context of sustainability and its integration in higher education settings. We review the literature and explore the academic debate while step-by-step building a description of responsible leadership that could form the basis for leadership programmes in higher education. Then, borrowing insights from pro-environmental psychology, we share a tripartite description of responsible leadership, which centres around identity, behaviour and responsiveness. As a final step, we share our experience in building an undergraduate programme based on this tripartite description of responsible leadership. Here, we illustrate how the leadership description can be visualised in a figure and used to develop an undergraduate Liberal Arts and Sciences curriculum centred on the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Reflecting on Responsible Leadership in the Context of Higher Education

Ever since academics and educators agree that leadership can be taught and learned, formal leadership programmes have been developed in the context of higher education, and leadership represents an ever-growing academic field both in terms of number and quality of leadership-related programmes (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Keating et al., 2014; Parks, 2005; Sowcik & Komives, 2020). Some learning environments, such as Liberal Arts and Sciences, are considered to be particularly apt to enhance the development of leadership abilities by actively exposing students to critical thinking and providing a broad educational experience (Brungardt et al., 1997; Gardner, 1990; Klenke, 1993; Riggio et al., 2003; Spitzberg, 1987). Notwithstanding, leadership has been taught in all kinds of learning environments and programmes, both at graduate as well as undergraduate levels and across different academic disciplines (Komives & Sowcik, 2020). In fact, it is estimated that various types of leadership programmes are offered by more than a thousand

higher education institutions worldwide (Riggio et al., 2003). This is not surprising, as leadership is frequently mentioned in the context of essential 21st century skills for future employability (Bourn, 2018) and as an important goal of higher education (Brungardt, 1996; Komives & Sowcik, 2020; Seemiller, 2016).

Despite the fact that leadership has been mentioned in mission statements and learning outcomes of institutions, there appears to be a programmatic gap between mentioning the term and intentional academic leadership education (Chunoo & Osteen, 2016; Komives & Sowcik, 2020; Meacham & Gaff, 2006). The latter was, until recently, mainly aimed at preparing students to take on leading roles in society, either by offering leadership trainings that draw on aspects of management and business studies, or, in liberal arts courses, by providing leadership courses in the context of the humanities and social sciences (Spitzberg, 1987). However, as a response to corporate wrongdoing such as the Enron debacle and worldwide challenges like global warming, there has been a shift in leadership education in the last decade. A common feature across different disciplines is the increased recognition that students have to be made aware of the ethical elements of leadership, and that leadership development programmes should take ethical reflection and personal development into consideration (Bourn, 2018; Sowcik & Komives, 2020). Therefore, courses on the ethical treatment of employees, considerate use of natural resources, and moral duties of citizenship were added to curricular and extra-curricular programmes in order to train socially responsible leaders (Eich, 2008; Keating et al., 2014; Spralls et al., 2010). However, adding such isolated courses to existing leadership programmes proved insufficient, and the notion that responsible leadership is not an additional component of leadership, but is, instead, fundamentally part of it and should, as such, be an intentional learning outcome, has gained support (Komives & Sowcik,

2020; Skalicky et al., 2020; Stahl & De Luque, 2014). If leadership comprises responsible leadership, then leadership development programmes should be centred on it in full.

Being at the intersection of the leadership and sustainability discourses, responsible leadership has benefitted from the increasing interests that both fields of study have received in the last decade. Moreover, research in the field of responsible leadership has been encouraged because it addresses a neglected topic in sustainability studies, i.e. the role of high echelon managers in designing and implementing Corporate Socially Responsible (CSR) initiatives (Siegel, 2014; Waldman et al., 2020). While the academic debate has undoubtedly shed some light on the antecedents, processes, and multi-level outcomes of responsible leadership, it has left unanswered several questions around the nature and development of responsible leadership (Waldman & Balven, 2014). Main open-ended questions include the meaning of "responsible" in the definition of "responsible leadership," the width of leaders' responsibility and the depth of their impact including the role of personal alongside formal leadership, and the distinction between "responsible" and "non responsible" leaders (Stahl & De Luque, 2014; Waldman & Siegel, 2008). The point that we are making is that, while we welcome the engagement of higher education with responsible leadership, if we are unable to reach at least a basic consensus on the definition of "responsible leadership," it is impossible to develop responsible leadership through education. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to contribute to the academic discussion on responsible leadership by addressing the open-ended questions highlighted above and by sharing our experience in the integration of responsible leadership in higher education.

This theoretical paper is composed as follows. We first review the literature on responsible leadership and address the questions that are still left unanswered.

All the while, we are step-by-step building toward a description of responsible leadership by gathering provisional points that follow from the theoretical background. Then, borrowing insights from literature on pro-environmental psychology, we share a description of responsible leadership that, in our opinion, offers a new perspective on these issues and could be applied in the context of higher education. As a last step, we show how we visualised responsible leadership in a figure and share our experience in building an undergraduate programme based on this description of responsible leadership.

Theoretical Background

In this part, we critically review the existing literature on responsible leadership in order to gather provisional points on which a description of responsible leadership applicable to higher education settings could be built. We start with a discussion on the meaning of the word "responsible" in "responsible leadership." Subsequently, we take a closer look at leadership as a process of influence and discuss formal versus personal leadership. Then, we look at the width of leadership, i.e. to whom a leader is responsible. Lastly, we discuss the limits to a leader's influence and the role of personal values.

A Closer Look at "Responsible" in "Responsible Leadership"

In 1974, Stogdill observed that "there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept" (Stogdill, 1974). Since the 1970s, the debate has not stood still, and not only have new definitions of leadership been proposed, but different forms of leadership have also been distinguished, such as transformational leadership (Bass et al., 2003; Burns, 2003; Burns, 1978; Rhee & Sigler, 2020), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977), and responsible leadership as one of the newest additions. Notwithstanding this variety, nowadays, there is a growing scholarly consensus that leadership should be defined as a process of influence and

that a responsible leader is an individual exerting influence in a "responsible" way (Angus-Leppan et al., 2010). Though clear at face value, this definition of "responsible leadership" shows a major deficiency at closer inspection: it uses as part of the definition one of the terms ("responsible") that it should define. It is therefore circular. In other words, the definition assumes that we all understand or agree upon the meaning of the term "responsible." Yet, scholars disagree on the nature and extent of leaders' responsibilities. Most disagreement concerns the nature of responsibilities that, going beyond the economic and legal ones, have been labelled by Carroll as ethical responsibilities (Carroll, 1991) and that are, as Stahl and Sully Du Luque observe, "at the heart of responsible leadership" (Stahl & De Luque, 2014, pg. 238).

Ethical studies distinguish between two typologies of moral responsibilities: to refrain from harming others and to promote the well-being of others. These two forms are known as the "do not harm" and the "do good" principles. "Do not harm" is considered as the basic ethical responsibility, and a negative duty, because it only requires that one does not leave others less well off than before engaging with them. It is best summarised in the so-called golden rule, an admonition shared by most cultures worldwide: you should not do unto others what you do not want others to do unto you. The second principle, "do good," is a positive duty and therefore implies a proactive effort to increase the wellbeing of others. It thus extends the scope of ethical responsibilities much further.

Both principles were initially developed to guide societal interaction among people, but they can also be applied to the interaction between human beings and the natural environment (Cavagnaro, 2009). Moreover, they mirror the two major themes in the literature on CSR, namely the concern for the negative impacts of businesses on society (do not harm) and the call to businesses to positively contribute to the sustainable development of our society (do good) (Cavagnaro & Curiel, 2012; Stahl & De Luque, 2014). Therefore, we propose as a first provisional

building block toward our description of responsible leadership that responsible leadership concerns individuals exerting influence who do not harm and do good. Evidently, this description requires a further clarification of leadership as a process of influence and an answer to the challenging question of the extent of the obligation to do no harm and do good (i.e. to whom a leader is responsible).

A Closer Look at Leadership as a Process of Influence: Formal versus Personal Leadership

Looking at leadership as a process of influence has a number of merits. The first merit is that it circumvents the weaknesses of definitions where traits or skills are listed. When leadership is defined as a trait or a skill, then one has to identify those traits and skills that distinguish a leader from a person who is not a leader. Scholars have individuated a quite endless list of traits and skills of a leader. Even when one restricts the search to a specific type of leadership, the list is daunting. Kurucz and colleagues, for example, identify five overreaching capabilities of leadership for strategic sustainability, including almost 20 different skills (Kurucz et al., 2017). At the same time, Mazutis and Zintel's 2015 overview article lists 13 personal values, six leaderships styles, four personality traits, three beliefs and four behaviours that have been empirically proven to influence corporate responsibility (Mazutis & Zintel, 2015). These results raise the question whether such a leader actually exists (Seemiller & Whitney, 2020). Scholars on responsible leadership have indeed called for leaders with "extraordinary abilities" (Metcalf & Benn, 2013), for a "master manager" (Du et al., 2013; Frost et al., 1989) or (in a dystopic version) an "ecological dictator" (Radcliffe, 2000). To prevent restricting the capacity to lead to few exceptional individuals, we side with the literature that understands leadership as a process of influence rather than linking it to certain traits.

A second merit of the definition of leadership as a process of influence is that it requires us to consider individual behaviour in framing responsible leadership (Waldman & Balven, 2014). In other words, leadership as influence includes formal, informal, and personal leadership. Here, formal leadership refers to people in formal positions of power; informal leadership refers to people who without formal authority conferred on them by an organisational structure do influence the behaviour of others; personal leadership refers to leadership of the self, the ability to exercise influence for the betterment of the self. Most literature on leadership in general and responsible leadership in particular is concerned with people in a formal position of power inside organisations, such as high echelon managers (Chin et al., 2013; Kurucz et al., 2017; Metcalf & Benn, 2013; Waldman et al., 2020). The focus on high echelon management is understandable taking into consideration that the connection between CSR and responsible leadership studies has led scholars to focus on the organisational level of sustainability (Siegel, 2014). If anyone might be supposed to exercise some influence inside organisations, the reasoning goes, it would be in the person of a high echelon manager.

Although the focus on high echelon managers has helped us better understand the antecedents, processes and outcomes of top managers' impact on the social corporate stance of their organisation, it has left personal and informal leadership rather unexplored. This is particularly problematic in relation to the field of higher education because, excluding executive courses, leadership programmes are designed for people who are not yet in a formal position of power inside organisations (Rhee & Sigler, 2020). By bringing the individual to the front of the stage, the definition of leadership as a process of influence is inclusive in essence, as it embraces formal and informal, organisational and personal leadership. In other words, the definition recognises that a person may exercise influence inside an organisation even if she is not in a formal position of power (Pielstick, 2000). Moreover, it recognises as leaders also those people who exert influence outside organisations, such as citizens in society or, even more interesting from an educational perspective, those people who use their influence to improve themselves. So while

leadership as a process of influence happens in the relationships among people, the first influence of a leader is exercised on the self within the personal context in which the individual operates.

In short, we propose that a second provisional building block towards a description of responsible leadership holds that leadership as a process of influence includes elements of formal, informal, and personal leadership. In combination with the first building block, which demonstrated that a wider set of ethical responsibilities is at the core of responsible leadership, it leads us to the next challenge: to clarify to whom a leader is responsible.

To Whom is a Leader Responsible?

The adjective "responsible" implies the opportunity or ability to act independently and, most importantly, it signifies that the person who is acting is accountable for the action taken. Although feeling the responsibility to act can theoretically be distinguished from being accountable to others about the outcomes of a specific action, responsibility without accountability to the other(s) is meaningless (Waldman et al., 2020). It is therefore understandable that the most controversial aspect of the debate on responsible leadership concerns the extent of the leader's responsibility (Waldman & Siegel, 2008). It is important to note that, in reviewing the discussion on the boundaries of a leaders' influence, we refer back to the literature on CSR in organisational contexts because that is where the debate has largely taken place up until this moment. As stated above, this literature's stream is concerned with people in a formal position of power, usually high echelon managers. Within this context, it is agreed upon by the proponents of a shareholders' view of the firm (Friedman, 1970; Waldman & Siegel, 2008; Waldman et al., 2020) as well as the defenders of a stakeholders' view of the firm (Carroll, 1991; Waldman & Siegel, 2008; Waldman et al., 2020) that business leaders have an economic and a legal responsibility. Yet there is still no consensus on how much further the extent of responsibility goes (Stahl & De Luque, 2014; Waldman et al., 2020).

The proposed explanations vary from a narrow interpretation where corporate leaders are only considered responsible towards shareholders (Friedman, 1970; Waldman & Siegel, 2008; Waldman et al., 2020), to a broad one where they are asked to avoid harmful consequences for and enhance the welfare of the involved stakeholders (Carroll, 1991; Stahl & De Luque, 2014; Waldman et al., 2020). The narrow interpretation means, in its strictest sense, that leaders should keep maximising shareholders' wealth even when other stakeholders are harmed, provided that they conform to the existing laws. The broad interpretation firmly rejects this possibility and demands that all stakeholders be considered even at the expense of the company's short-term profitability. Arguably, the debate on the width of leaders' responsibility has become a re-enactment of the Friedman-Freeman dispute on shareholders' versus stakeholders' management. To close the gap between these two seemingly incompatible positions, some authors propose to assume that, in the end, shareholders' and other stakeholders' interests converge (Waldman & Balven, 2014). Yet, the view that shareholders' and stakeholders' interests will converge in the long run has been criticised as naïve for at least two reasons. First, it ignores the normative character of stakeholders' theory. This means that a stakeholders' approach acknowledges intrinsic value to the interest of all stakeholders, and does not use this as means to enhance the interest of specific stakeholders such as shareholders (Cavagnaro & Curiel, 2012). Second, it downplays the role of a responsible leader as accepted by most scholars, and that is exactly to look for a balance among or a solution that simultaneously enhances different stakeholders' interests (Doh & Quigley, 2014; Stahl & De Luque, 2014; Waldman et al., 2020).

Noticeably, even one of the most virulent proponents of the shareholders' view, Milton Friedman, recognises that profit-maximisation should stay within the limits of both the law and the ethical custom of society (Friedman, 1970). Ethical customs by definition change over time, and it is evident that we are on the brink of a major shift in what is considered ethically

acceptable. Highly publicised instances of corporate wrongdoing by self-serving executives, increased public scrutiny of company actions, and a growing understanding of the impact of businesses on major global issues, such as climate change and extreme poverty, all contribute in shifting society's view on what is ethically acceptable from businesses and their leaders (Stahl & De Luque, 2014). To illustrate: in the 1970s, it was still possible to draw a line between economic and legal responsibilities on the one side and ethical responsibilities on the other, because the first two were required from business by society, while the third was only expected (Carroll, 1991). Nowadays, in contrast, all three forms of responsibility are considered equally necessary for businesses and societies to thrive. They should therefore be simultaneously considered by leaders (Stahl & De Luque, 2014) and have come to constitute the triple bottom line of the 21st century of people, planet and profit (Elkington, 1997). Moreover, some shifting ethical norms have currently become recognised in law (e.g. consumer protection) and international treaties (e.g. the Paris Agreement on Climate Change), further demonstrating that ethical customs change over time and that, in this case, the direction of the shift is clear: society requires that the boundaries of leaders' responsibility move from an exclusive focus on shareholders to concern for a broader set of stakeholders including clients, employees, the surrounding community and the natural environment.

The "do not harm" and "do good" component of the responsible leadership description thus applies to a wide set of human (people) and non-human (planet) stakeholders, while in an organisational context also recognises the need for sound financial gain (profit). This requires, to begin with, an understanding of the interrelationships between the individuals and the environment they may live in, including the organisations they work for and the global and local communities they may be part of, as well as an understanding of the interrelationship with the natural and physical world. In short, our third provisional building block entails that responsible leaders are individuals who exert their formal, informal, or personal influence to avoid harm and do good towards both human and non-human stakeholders. This description of responsible leadership is, however, open to the criticism that it extends the leaders' responsibility to such a degree that it may become a burden with no end in sight. The last theoretical issue we will therefore discuss concerns the limits to a leader's influence.

Limits to a Leader's Influence and the Role of Personal Values

The limits of an individual leader's influence is a highly contested issue in the business leadership literature. While it is by and large acknowledged that business leaders do not act in a vacuum but are partly shaped by the organisational culture, the organisational field and the national business system (Angus-Leppan et al., 2010; Chin et al., 2013), the argument about what influence they actually have differs. Some schools, such as neoclassical economics and new institutional theory, argue that contextual factors and pressure of regulatory bodies nullify the influence of managerial personal values on an organisation. High echelon and agency theory, however, observe that there are differences in the way organisations and individuals within these organisations respond to institutional pressure, and that this difference is best explained by reference to managerial characteristics such as personal values, character traits, and, important in our case of higher education, training (Aguilera et al., 2008).

Following a similar line of reasoning, one may argue that personal leadership is also shaped by one's position in a social structure, such as one's national culture and family background (Stern et al., 1995). Yet, here too, it could be observed that individuals react differently to these pressures, and that how they act can therefore not fully be explained by external institutional or cultural factors. Subsequently, it seems reasonable to admit that leaders' influence is constrained but not fully determined by contextual factors. Individual factors, such as values or character, also play an important role (Steg, et al., 2014).

Moreover, individuals have the competency to build up their resilience in the face of external influences, for example by coping with significant challenges and further developing their capacity to deal with difficult situations (Seligman, 1994; Seligman et al., 2013).

Referring back to the provisional building blocks on the way to describing responsible leadership, we established that a description should encompass that responsible leaders are individuals who exert their formal, informal, or personal influence to avoid harm and do good towards both human and non-human stakeholders. It is important to acknowledge that in our view, as stakeholders are both human and non-human, responsible leadership automatically includes sustainable leadership. As such, we follow the line set-out in Our Common Future, which already included the socio-economic and environmental dimension (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). In addition, based on the above discussion on the limits of a leader's influence, we should also recognise that leaders are formed and even constrained by both contextual as well as individual factors. The next step in gathering the building blocks for the description of responsible leadership is to establish how, notwithstanding contextual constraints, individuals may be capable of developing into responsible leaders and, finally, what role education could play in this process. In order to answer this question, we borrow insights from environmental psychology and value-theory.

Environmental Psychology

Environmental psychology is concerned with the mutual influences that humans and the natural or built environment exercise on each other. It addresses questions such as the effects of physical and social settings on individual behaviour and well-being, and the impact of individual core beliefs on pro-social and pro-environmental behaviour at individual, organisational, and societal levels. The main level of analysis, though, is the individual, i.e. (the antecedent and consequences of) individual behaviour, including decision-making processes

(Waldman & Balven, 2014). Considering antecedents, the impact of personal values on responsible leadership is well-established in the academic and professional literature, although organisations are often reluctant to address root causes underlying individuals' behaviour such as personal values (Gurdjian et al., 2014). Interestingly, personal values are seldom discussed in the responsible leadership literature (Waldman et al., 2020). By bringing values to the forefront of the responsible leadership debate, the focus on individual behaviour already present in the description of leadership as a process of influence is strengthened. Moreover, as we will see below, the environmental psychology approach to personal values can be leveraged to explain how individuals are capable of becoming responsible leaders. Likewise, it helps explain inconsistencies in responsible leaders' behaviour, such as behaving in a responsible way toward one stakeholder and in a non-responsible way toward another stakeholder. For these reasons, we think that insights from environmental psychology should be considered in the debate on responsible leadership.

The theory of basic human values upholds that human beings are guided by universal values (Schwartz, 1994). Among these values, environmental psychologists singled out two clusters that are particularly relevant to understand pro-social and pro-environmental behaviour: self-enhancement and self-transcendence values. Self-enhancement values are concerned with the interest for the self, and encompass values such as social power, wealth and pleasure. Being strongly related with individual survival, these values are easily accessible to individuals and relatively stronger than other values (Steg et al., 2014b). Self-transcendence values, on the other hand, are concerned with the welfare of others and encompass values such as helpfulness, social justice, and unity with nature. Self-transcendence values are normative and, needing support from the social and institutional surrounding of the individual to be acted upon, are less accessible and weaker than self-enhancement ones (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007; Steg et al., 2014b).

In addition, for each individual, the importance of self-enhancement and self-transcendence values varies. Different people consider different values as most important or salient to them, and even the same individual may prioritise values differently depending on situational factors (Steg et al., 2014a). Our claim is that this characteristic of values may be called upon to explain why leaders have been observed to act responsibly towards one stakeholder and non-responsibly towards another. They are then acting on the basis of a different prioritisation of values. It also follows that, while values are quite stable over time, their salience to the individual may change (Schwartz, 1994; Steg et al., 2014a).

Finally, it should be noted that two value sub-sets have been distinguished within self-transcendence values: one sub-set focuses on costs and benefits for other human beings, the other on costs and benefits for nature (de Groot & Steg, 2008). This in fact leaves us with three main value sets, summarised in Table 1.

Table 1.

Value Sets and Care Dimensions.

Value set	Decision based upon	Label
Self-enhancement	Costs and benefits for the self	Care for me
Self-transcendent, human	Costs and benefits for others	Care for me and you
Self-transcendent, non-human	Costs and benefits for nature	Care for all

While all value sets can lead to pro-social and pro-environmental behaviour, studies have consistently shown that self-enhancement values are a weak basis to promote sustainable behaviour and that self-enhancement considerations will generally prevail (Steg et al., 2014a; Steg et al., 2014b). In order to change this situation, ways have to be found to strengthen self-transcendence values and make them more salient to individuals (Steg et al., 2014a). Education is such a way. Education can, for example, strengthen self-transcendence values by creating conditions where students are made aware of possible situations in which their self-enhancement values may prevail and showcasing how they may be supported in strengthening their self-transcendence values instead (Gardner & Stern, 2002; Ignell et al., 2019).

By connecting the theory of basic human values and its use by environmental psychologists to our description of responsible leadership and adopting the terminology developed by Cavagnaro and Curiel in 2012, we wish to claim that individuals have the capacity to become responsible leaders by developing their "care for me and you" and "care for all" dimensions alongside their "care for me."

Becoming a responsible leader starts with a personal development challenge that continues throughout time.

Summing up, responsible leaders are individuals in formal or informal positions (depth and role) who, shaped by contextual and individual factors, are exerting their influence (behaviour) in order to do no harm and do good to both human and non-human stakeholders (width). If we subsequently combine these building blocks with the insights borrowed from basic human value theory and environmental psychology, we come to a tripartite description of responsible leadership.

Responsible leadership is:

1. The continuum through which individuals are able to develop an integrated identity with an understanding of the self as capable to create value on a care for me, care for me and you, and care for all dimension (identity).

2. The continuum through which individuals exert their influence by acting on all three care dimensions to

do no harm and do good (behaviour).

3. The continuum through which individuals develop a systemic understanding of the interrelationships among the self, the society they live in including the natural and physical world, and the ability to respond to it (responsiveness).

The benefit of this tripartite description is on the one hand that it addresses individuals as persons able to develop the competencies for responsible leadership, and, on the other hand, that it recognises that individuals can exert influence through personal leadership. Both benefits are particularly relevant in relation to students in higher education.

The Tripartite Description of Responsible Leadership in Higher Education

Responsible leadership as described above is not a given, but it can be trained and developed as a competency. As competency development, i.e. the development of the collection of knowledge skills and attitudes (Mulder et al., 2009), is an essential component of higher education, it offers a suitable context to train responsible leadership. Moreover, leadership has always at least been an indirect goal of higher education (Brungardt, 1996; Komives & Sowcik, 2020; Meacham & Gaff, 2006), and some even suggest that higher education institutions have a unique role and obligation to ensure that college graduates are society's next leaders (Chunoo & Osteen, 2016; Seemiller, 2016). Historically, liberal education in particular has always aimed at preparing its graduates to take responsibility to be leaders in different realms of society. It is furthermore argued that a liberal education is essential to leadership development and the preparation of potential leaders, because of the broad educational experience the curriculum offers (Brungardt, 1996; Gardner, 1990). The outcomes of liberal education competencies, i.e. the desired knowledge, skills and attitudes, appear to be aligned with the preferred learning outcomes of successful leadership and

provide an opportunity for developing students to effectuate the role of responsible leadership (Colvin, 2003). While the Developing and Supporting Student Leadership Framework as developed by Skalicky and colleagues focuses on leadership in the broadest sense (not specified to responsible leadership), we do recognise the need to explicitly state the intention of leadership development in a programme in order to fully anchor it in a curriculum (Komives & Sowcik, 2020; Skalicky et al., 2020). Our example below further illustrates this point of intentional integration of leadership education.

In the following, we share our experience in building an undergraduate programme based on the tripartite description of responsible leadership in order to illustrate how personal leadership development in the context of sustainability could be of relevance in a higher education context. In sharing this experience, we by no means pretend to say that this curriculum is the best possible implementation of personal leadership development. We only wish to show that the tripartite definition of responsible leadership that has been theoretically constructed in the first part of this article can be implemented in the practice of an education setting. In particular, we used the tripartite description as the foundation of the curriculum of the recently developed Bachelor of Science in Global Responsibility & Leadership (GRL) of the University of Groningen. The GRL programme is a three-year undergraduate programme, aspiring to educate responsible leaders who can contribute to sustainable social change by addressing global challenges through local solutions. The curriculum is inspired by the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development and as such consists of input from human and social sciences, natural sciences and information technology. In addition, the programme is taught in a liberal education environment and is fundamentally inter- and transdisciplinary. Finally, the GRL environment provides an ideal environment to testcase the description, as the curriculum has a strong focus on personal development and reflection on one's values and responsibilities throughout the three years.

Within the GRL programme, we have chosen to operationalise responsible leadership by illustrating responsible leadership in a figure, which connects the earlier explained "care-model" of Cavagnaro and Curiel to the SDGs (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). The figure is aligned with the tripartite description of responsible leadership, as explained below.
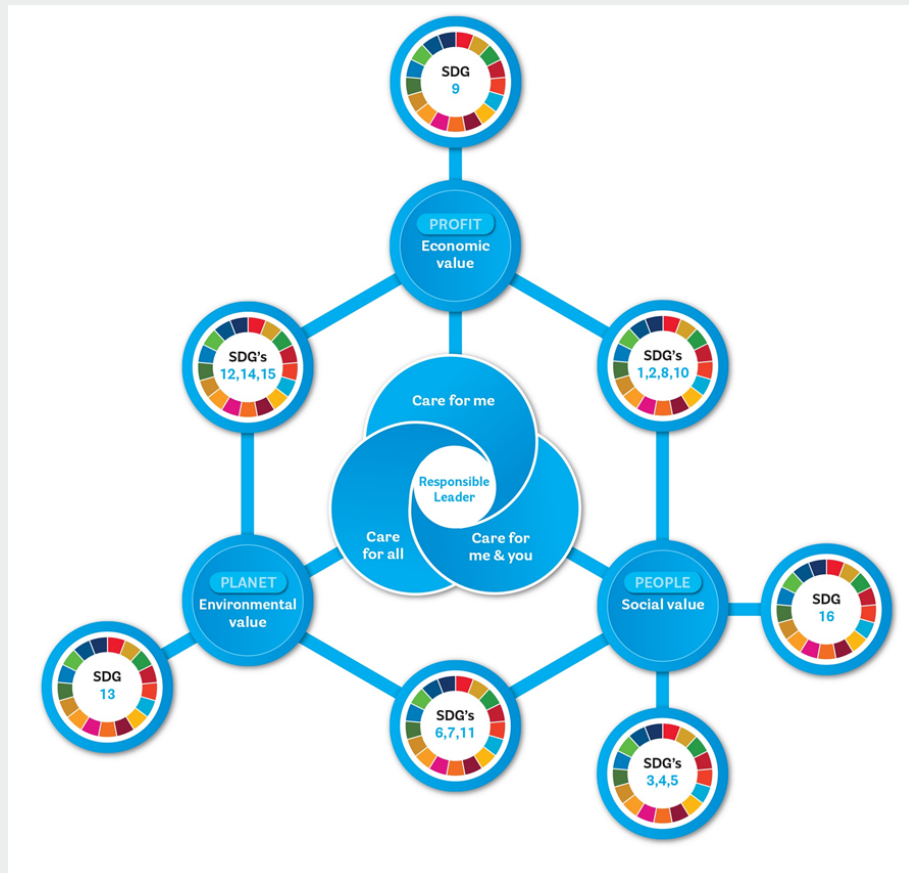

Figure 1. Responsible Leadership Model

Figure 2. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The first part of the tripartite description of responsible leadership is: the continuum through which individuals are able to develop an integrated identity with an understanding of the self as capable to create value on a care for me, care for me & you, and care for all dimension (identity).

The first part of the description corresponds to the first layer of the figure (triangle 1, borrowed from Cavagnaro & Curiel, 2012): at the centre of the model, we place the individual responsible leader. This is the student who continues to develop the ability to think and act from a "care for me," "care for me and you," and a "care for all" perspective. Students can develop and understand their identity by practising skills such as the ability to critically reflect upon their own values. In addition, illustrating various examples and dilemmas can support students in understanding their self-transcendent values and making these salient to them. Dunbar and colleagues demonstrated that students' social self-efficacy, or their belief in their own competence, improved over time for those students whom self-identified as capable leaders (Dunbar et al., 2018). Similarly, we presume that self-identification as a responsible human who is able to create value on different dimensions is a necessary step to realise this value. In the GRL curriculum, the dedicated Personal Leadership Lab course challenges students to demonstrate how they would exercise their leadership skills in different scenarios. In addition, through specific assignments in the Portfolio, students, with the help of their academic advisors, continuously reflect on pivotal experiences, challenges and achievements related to their development throughout the three-year programme.

The second part of the tripartite description of responsible leadership is: the continuum through which individuals exert their influence by acting on all three care dimensions to do no harm and do good (behaviour).

The second part of the description is addressed in the figure by adding the second layer (triangle 2, based on Cavagnaro and Curiel, 2012): around the individual responsible leader, we place the three main domains on which value should simultaneously be created to achieve sustainable development. This includes economic value (in line with "care for me"), social value (in line with "care for me and you"), and environmental value (in line with "care for all"). These three domains constitute the "do no harm" and "do good" elements that individuals should act on. Even though students may not necessarily have a role of formal leadership, they can build their competence to not only know the different care dimensions, but also start acting from them, in line with the previously explicated notion that the first influence of a leader is exercised on the self. In the GRL curriculum, this development is concretely practised by providing input from different academic disciplines that address the main value dimensions, as characterised by the three majors in the programme: Responsible Governance, Responsible Humanity and Responsible Planet.

The third part of the tripartite description of responsible leadership is: the continuum through which individuals develop a systemic understanding of the interrelationships among the self, the society they live in and the natural and physical world and the ability to respond to it (responsiveness).

Finally, the third part of the description is illustrated by adding the SDGs to the figure: they are placed around the two triangles and can be categorised according to their main focus. With this step of the model, we showcase the linkages and interdependencies amongst the goals and the individual student as responsible leader. This does not only require the ability to see the coherence among the different academic disciplines, it also concerns how students respond when they are confronted with different situational, organisational or institutional influences or peer pressure. In the GRL curriculum, student practise responsiveness in amongst others the Living Lab research internship where they take the lead in collaborating with non-academic partners in solving societal issues. Students are also encouraged to participate in a study abroad semester in the third year, where they can further practice their responsiveness with regard to different cultures and

situations.

With the above described operationalisation of our tripartite description, we aim to share our experience in building this undergraduate programme and, in doing so, hope to provide guidance for students and teachers in achieving the learning outcome of responsible leadership. We carefully designed our educational programme so that the tripartite description comes back throughout the three years, starting from the introduction week where we explicate our vision on responsible leadership, to multiple occasions and courses where we revisit the model and determine students' development. While liberal education provides an advantageous educational setting, and we have now made a first attempt to incorporate responsible leadership in a liberal education setting, future research and application could extend to other educational environments as well.

Critical Reflection and Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to start an academic discussion on the topic of responsible leadership and share our experience in the integration of responsible leadership in higher education. As such, we are fully aware that the scope of our paper is limited and that there are several topics that warrant further reflection. One topic that could be included in a further discussion is the ongoing debate on the (non) normative character of leadership. Nowadays, some scholars reckon that a definition of leadership would benefit from being non-normative (Waldman, 2011). A non-normative definition would be acceptable also to those who consider business leaders only responsible for the economic success of their company. Evidently, our description of leadership cannot be categorised as being non-normative; on the contrary, by making responsibility synonymous with sustainability and by connecting the description to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, we do the opposite and actually make a claim that leaders ought to take broad responsibility. We do not think, however, that our description alienates business

leaders, as they show an increased concern with issues beyond economic success.

Another issue that could benefit from further reflection is the influence of role models, specifically with regard to education. Before we can teach responsible leadership to students, leaders in education are needed. This means that an extra step might be required before responsible leadership can be successfully taught in higher education, namely training teachers to enhance their educational leadership skills and providing them with the tools to transfer their knowledge to a new generation of students. This could include awareness and instructions about leadership skills in specific teacher training programmes, as well as assisting all educators in aiding students to critically reflect on themselves as part of responsible leadership development (Densten & Gray, 2001; Karnes & Stephens, 1999).

In conclusion, in this paper we have attempted to provide a comprehensive description of responsible leadership to start an academic discussion on the integration of responsible leadership in higher education settings. We first reflected on the state of the debate and examined a number of unanswered questions. Following, we added insights from pro-environmental psychology and value theory in order to propose a tripartite description of responsible leadership. Finally, we shared our experience in building an undergraduate programme which operationalised the description of responsible leadership, specifically in the context of a Liberal Arts and Sciences curriculum. Although there are surely other issues that require further reflection, we hope that our reflection on responsible leadership can help advance the academic discussion on responsible leadership and its integration in higher education.

References

Aguilera, R. V., Filatotchev, I., Gospel, H., & Jackson, G. (2008). An organizational approach to comparative corporate governance: Costs, contingencies, and complementarities. Organization Science, 19(3), 381-495. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1070.0322

Angus-Leppan, T., Metcalf, L., & Benn, S. (2010). Leadership styles and CSR practice: An examination of sensemaking, institutional drivers and CSR leadership. Journal of Business Ethics, 93(2), 189-213. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-009-0221-y

Bass, B. M., Avolio, B. J., Jung, D. I., & Berson, Y. (2003). Predicting unit performance by assessing transformational and transactional leadership. Journal of Applied Psychology, 88(2), 207-218. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.2.207

Bourn, D. (2018). Understanding Global Skills for 21st Century Professions. Understanding Global Skills for 21st Century Professions. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97655-6

Brungardt, C. (1996). The Making of Leaders: A Review of the Research in Leadership Development and Education. Journal of Leadership Studies, 3(3), 81-95. https://doi.org/10.1177/107179199700300309

Brungardt, C. L., Gould, L. V., Moore, R., & Potts, J. (1997). The Emergence of Leadership Studies: Linking the Traditional Outcomes of Liberal Education with Leadership Development. Journal of Leadership Studies, 4(3), 53-67. https://doi.org/10.1177/107179199800400306

Burns, J. M. (2003). Transforming leadership: A new pursuit of happiness. Atlantic Monthly Press.

Burns, J. M. (1978). Leadership (1st Ed.). Harper & Row.

Carroll, A. B. (1991). The pyramid of corporate social responsibility: Toward the moral management of organizational stakeholders. Business Horizons, 34(4), 39-48. https://doi.org/10.1016/0007-6813(91)90005-G

Cavagnaro, E. & Curiel, G. (2012). The Three Levels of Sustainability. Greenleaf Publishing

Cavagnaro, E. (2009). Difficile est deponere longum amorem, On Ethics and Sustainable Development. In S. Hertmans (Ed.), Grenzen aan de ethiek? Studium Generale 2008–2009. Academia Press.

Chin, M. K., Hambrick, D. C., & Treviño, L. K. (2013). Political Ideologies of CEOs: The Influence of Executives' Values on Corporate Social Responsibility. Administrative Science Quarterly, 58(2), 197-232. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839213486984

Chunoo, V., & Osteen, L. (2016). Purpose, Mission, and Context: The Call for Educating Future Leaders. New Directions for Higher Education, 2016(174), 9-20. https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20185

Colvin, R. E. (2003). Leadership Studies and Liberal Education. Journal of Leadership Education, 2(2), 28–36. https://doi.org/10.12806/V2/I2/AB1

de Groot, J. I. M., & Steg, L. (2008). Value orientations to explain beliefs related to environmental significant behavior: How to measure egoistic, altruistic, and biospheric value orientations. Environment and Behavior, 40(3), 330-354. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916506297831

References

Densten, I. L., & Gray, J. H. (2001). Leadership development and reflection: What is the connection? International Journal of Educational Management, 15(3), 119-124. https://doi.org/10.1108/09513540110384466

Doh, J. P., & Quigley, N. R. (2014). Responsible leadership and stakeholder management: Influence pathways and organizational outcomes. Academy of Management Perspectives, 28(3), 255-274. https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2014.0013

Du, S., Swaen, V., Lindgreen, A., & Sen, S. (2013). The Roles of Leadership Styles in Corporate Social Responsibility. Journal of Business Ethics, 114(1), 155-169. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-012-1333-3

Dugan, J. P., & Komives, S. R. (2007). Developing leadership capacity in college students: Findings from a national study (A report from the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership). National Clearinghouse for Leadership programs.

Dunbar, R. L., Dingel, M. J., Dame, L. F., Winchip, J., & Petzold, A. M. (2018). Student social self-efficacy, leadership status, and academic performance in collaborative learning environments. Studies in Higher Education, 43(9), 1507-1523. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2016.1265496

Eich, D. (2008). A Grounded Theory of High-Quality Leadership Programs. Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 15(2), 176-187. https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051808324099

Elkington, J. (1997). Cannibals with Forks: The triple bottom line of 21st century. Alternative Management Observatory. https://doi.org/http://doi.wiley.com/10.1002/tqem.3310080106

Friedman, M. (1970). The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits. In W. C. Zimmerli, M. Holzinger, & K. Richter (Eds.), Corporate Ethics and Corporate Governance. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-70818-6_14

Frost, P. J., Kaiser, E. F., & Quinn, R. E. (1989). Beyond Rational Management: Mastering the Paradoxes and Competing Demands of High Performance. The Academy of Management Review, 14(3), 462-465. https://doi.org/10.2307/258181

Gardner, G. T. & Stern, P. C. (2002). Environmental problems and human behavior (2nd ed.). Pearson Custom Pub.

Gardner, J. W. (1990). On Leadership. The Free Press.

Greenleaf, R. K. (1977). Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness. Paulist Press.

Gurdjian, P., Halbeisen, T., & Lane, K. (2014). Why leadership-development programs fail. McKinsey Quarterly, 1, 121.

Ignell, C., Davies, P., & Lundholm, C. (2019). A longitudinal study of upper secondary school students' values and beliefs regarding policy responses to climate change. Environmental Education Research, 25(5), 615-632. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2018.1523369

References

Karnes, F. A., & Stephens, K. R. (1999). Lead the way to leadership education. Education Digest, 64(8), 62.

Keating, K., Rosch, D., & Burgoon, L. (2014). Developmental Readiness for Leadership: The Differential Effects of Leadership Courses on Creating "Ready, Willing, and Able" Leaders. Journal of Leadership Education, 13(3), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.12806/V13/I3/RF1

Klenke, K. (1993). Leadership Education at the Great Divide: Crossing into the Twenty-First Century. Journal of Leadership Studies, 1(1), 111-127. https://doi.org/10.1177/107179199300100110

Komives, S. R., & Sowcik, M. (2020). The Role of Academic Disciplines in Leadership Education. New Directions for Student Leadership, 2020(165), 11-21. https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20365

Kurucz, E. C., Colbert, B. A., Lüdeke-Freund, F., Upward, A., & Willard, B. (2017). Relational leadership for strategic sustainability: practices and capabilities to advance the design and assessment of sustainable business models. Journal of Cleaner Production, 140(1), 189-204. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2016.03.087

Lindenberg, S., & Steg, L. (2007). Normative, gain and hedonic goal frames guiding environmental behavior. Journal of Social Issues, 63(1), 117-137. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2007.00499.x

Mazutis, D., & Zintel, C. (2015). Leadership and corporate responsibility: a review of the empirical evidence. Annals in Social Responsibility, 1(1), 76-107. https://doi.org/10.1108/asr-12-2014-0001

Meacham, J., & Gaff, J. G. (2006). Learning goals in mission statements: Implications for educational leadership. Liberal Education, 92(1), 6.

Metcalf, L., & Benn, S. (2013). Leadership for Sustainability: An Evolution of Leadership Ability. Journal of Business Ethics, 112(3), 369-384. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-012-1278-6

Mulder, M., Gulikers, J., Biemans, H., & Wesselink, R. (2009). The new competence concept in higher education: error or enrichment? Journal of European Industrial Training, 33(8/9), 755-770. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090590910993616

Parks, S. D. (2005). Leadership Can Be Taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World. Harvard Business Review Press.

Pielstick, C. D. (2000). Formal vs. Informal Leading: A Comparative Analysis. Journal of Leadership Studies, 7(3), 99-114. https://doi.org/10.1177/107179190000700307

Radcliffe, J. (2000). Green Politics. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780333981696

Rhee, K. S., & Sigler, T. H. (2020). Transforming Graduate Education: Developing Leaders for the 21st Century. Journal of Leadership Education, 19(2), 105. https://doi.org/10.12806/V19/I2/A3

Riggio, R. E., Ciulla, J. B., & Sorenson, G. J. (2003). Leadership education at the undergraduate level: A liberal arts approach to leadership development. In S. E. Murphy & R. E. Riggio (Eds.), The Future of Leadership Development. Psychology Press. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410608895

References

Schwartz, S. H. (1994). Are There Universal Aspects in the Structure and Contents of Human Values? Journal of Social Issues, 50(4), 19-45. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1994.tb01196.x

Seemiller, C., & Whitney, R. (2020). Creating a Taxonomy of Leadership Competency Development. Journal of Leadership Education, 19(1), 119. https://doi.org/10.12806/V19/I1/R5

Seemiller, C. (2016). Leadership Competency Development: A Higher Education Responsibility. New Directions for Higher Education, 2016(174), 93-104. https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20192

Seligman, M.E.P. (1994). What You Can Change & What You Can't: The Complete Guide to Successful Self-Improvement. Vintage.

Seligman, M. E. P., Railton, P., Baumeister, R. F., & Sripada, C. (2013). Navigating Into the Future or Driven by the Past. Perspectives on Psychological Science, 8(2), 119-141. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691612474317

Siegel, D. S. (2014). Responsible leadership. Academy of Management Perspectives, 28(3), 221-223. https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2014.0081

Skalicky, J., Warr Pedersen, K., van der Meer, J., Fuglsang, S., Dawson, P., & Stewart, S. (2020). A framework for developing and supporting student leadership in higher education. Studies in Higher Education, 45(1), 100-116. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1522624

Sowcik, M., & Komives, S. R. (2020). Emerging Themes in Disciplinary Based Leadership Education. New Directions for Student Leadership, 2020(165), 163-181. https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20377

Spitzberg, I. J. (1987). Paths of Inquiry into Leadership. Liberal Education, 73(2), 24-34.

Spralls, S. A., Garver, M. S., Divine, R. L., & Trotz, H. (2010). Needs assessment of university leadership programs. Journal of Leadership Studies, 4(1), 20-35. https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.20152

Stahl, G. K., & De Luque, M. S. (2014). Antecedents of responsible leader behavior: A research synthesis, conceptual framework, and agenda for future research. Academy of Management Perspectives, 28(3), 235-254. https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2013.0126

Steg, L., Bolderdijk, J. W., Keizer, K., & Perlaviciute, G. (2014a). An Integrated Framework for Encouraging Pro-environmental Behaviour: The role of values, situational factors and goals. Journal of Environmental Psychology, 38, 104-115. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2014.01.002

Steg, L., Perlaviciute, G., van der Werff, E., & Lurvink, J. (2014b). The Significance of Hedonic Values for Environmentally Relevant Attitudes, Preferences, and Actions. Environment and Behavior, 46(2), 163-192. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916512454730

Stern, P. C., Dietz, T., & Guagnano, G. A. (1995). The New Ecological Paradigm in Social-Psychological Context. Environment and Behavior, 27(6), 723-743. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916595276001

Stogdill, R. M. (1974). Handbook of Leadership: A Survey of Theory and Research. The Free Press.

Waldman, D. A. (2011). Moving Forward with the Concept of Responsible Leadership: Three Caveats to Guide Theory and Research. Journal of Business Ethics 98(S1), 75-83. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-1021-8

References

Waldman, D. A., & Balven, R. M. (2014). Responsible leadership: Theoretical issues and research directions. Academy of Management Perspectives, 28(3). 224-234. https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2014.0016

Waldman, D. A., & Siegel, D. (2008). Defining the socially responsible leader. Leadership Quarterly, 14(1), 117-131. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.12.008

Waldman, D. A., Siegel, D. S., & Stahl, G. K. (2020). Defining the Socially Responsible Leader: Revisiting Issues in Responsible Leadership. Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies, 27(1), 5-20. https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051819872201

World Commission on Environment and Development. (1987). Brundtland Report: Our Common Future. United Nations.