

# Exploring Socially Responsible Leadership: A Comprehensive Review of Literature

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## **ABSTRACT**

Modern leaders in any field are under high scrutiny levels of society, thereby level of trust has to be paramount, keeping in view a new form of leadership is now discussed as Socially Responsible Leadership. This type being into its nascent stage of research requires scholarly attention.

This literature review paper is a genuine effort to collect the literature related to socially responsible leadership. Also it aims to find a strong connect of such leader with corporate social responsibility of the organization.

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**Keywords:** Socially Responsible Leadership, Corporate Social Responsibility, Stakeholders

## **Methodology**

According to Hart (1998) literature review can be defined as the selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed. The basic characteristic of such article should be a well written, rational narrative which is up-to-date advanced knowledge. **Sample** Data was collected from google scholar uptill page 16. The keyword used for the search was 'socially responsible leadership'. The journals used for it were highly reputed and indexed.

## **Introduction**

In this comprehensive literature review, we delve into the realm of socially responsible leadership to gain a deeper understanding of its various dimensions and implications. By examining the existing body of knowledge, we aim to shed light on the critical role that socially responsible leadership plays in fostering positive social change and sustainable development.

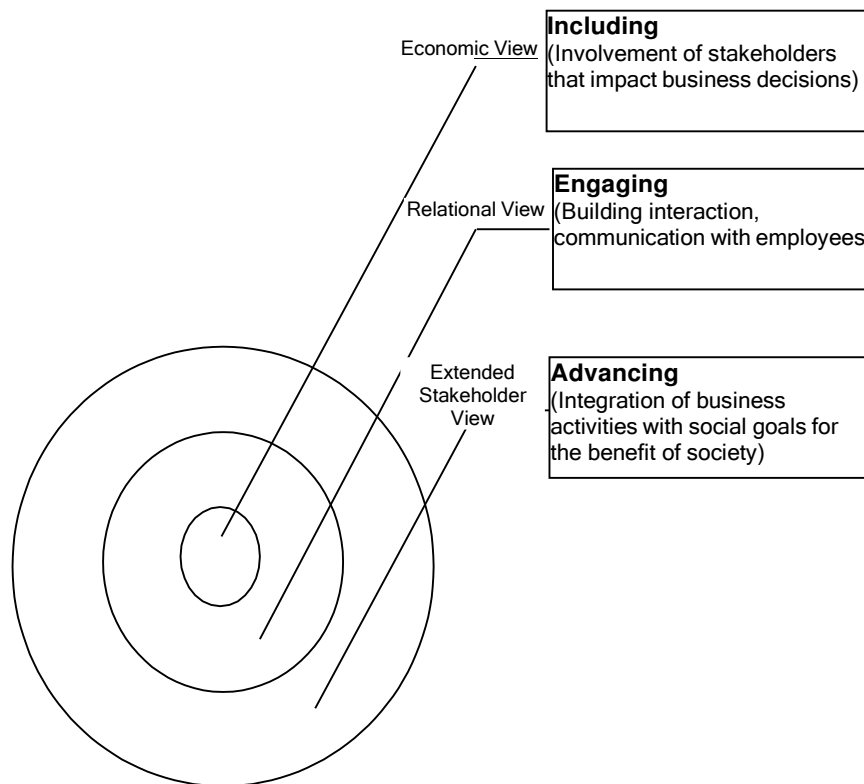
Paul Polman, Former CEO Unilever once defined leadership as, “Leadership is helping people succeed, inspiring and uniting people behind a common purpose and then being accountable”.

Nowadays leaders are under scrutiny owing to public awareness, NGOs institutions, financial crisis, environmental issues, corporate scandals etc. Henceforth, mounting leader’s responsibility for society.

Also now business variables not only include factors like financial-economic capabilities, power, economies of scale but it also includes variables like talent retention, intangible assets and societal interactions.

Henceforth, the carcass of leadership should also include active societal interaction and act responsibly and create a good reputation after the economic slowdown. One of the modern definitions is as follows.

Flocy J (2017) define, “Leaders who includes, engages and advances the interests of all stakeholders”



So, a recent concept called the socially responsible leadership came into advent since the early 2000. Up till now the existing literature is not sufficient to explain key ideas, concepts and theoretical approaches.

The knowledge is restricted to the work of few researchers like:

- ✓ Maak and Pless
- ✓ Waldman and Galvin
- ✓ Voegtlin
- ✓ Posner
- ✓ Karp etc.

### **Defining Socially Responsible Leader**

Waldman et al., (2019) in collaboration with Siegel through a dialogue gave the following definition of Socially Responsible Leadership.

“Responsible leadership is an orientation or mind-set taken by people in executive level positions toward meeting the needs of a firm’s stakeholder(s). As such, it deals with defining

those stakeholder(s), assessing the legitimacy of their claims, and determining how those needs, expectations, or interests can and should best be served”.

They defined “responsibility” as manager’s fiduciary responsibility to maximize profit and shareholder wealth.

Among the list of stakeholders two are basically the non-financial holders viz., employees and customers. The aforesaid augment the firm’s performance if they perceive the firm as responsible.

Waldman, Siegel Stahl argues that Socially Responsible Leader is not a behavioural construct but a mind set. This mind set has following antecedents:

1. Educational background
2. Personal values
3. Organizational neuroscience

### **Forces Pressing for Socially Responsible Leadership**

According to the study by Karp following are the two types of stakeholders that pave the way or rather press for Socially Responsible Leadership:

1. Primary Stakeholders: Owners, consumers, employees and suppliers. According to a recent study by Environics International Ltd. (1999) of 25000 people in 23 countries, majority i.e. 60% of the people judged a company as positive if they behave responsibly. Also 90% of the respondents want the companies to focus on things other than profitability.
2. Secondary Stakeholders: Non-government Organizations, activists, communities and governments. When a firm crosses its boundaries then there is a need of an active dialogue between government, local bodies so as to establish the company and get indigenous raw material and also human resources.
3. Institutional Expectations: Rankings, principles, standards. Society is now getting more transparent way of the firms through ‘rankings’ or ‘best work’. Socially responsible behaviour generates trust between stakeholders and company and thereby not only increasing the profitability but also sustainability

Corporate scandals like that of Enron, Volkswagen etc paved way for new form of leadership like that of Socially Responsible Leadership replacing the leader-follower theory to stakeholder theory.

The thoughts of Socially Responsible Leadership cropped well from the 'Societal Change Model' (SCM) as proposed by Heri 1996. According to this model leadership model of Social Change actually stresses on three areas:

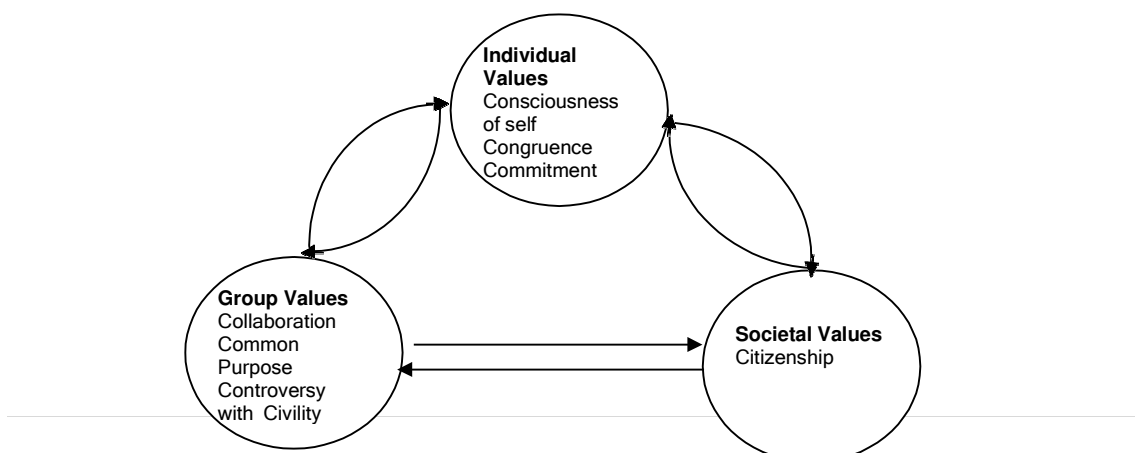
1. **Individual Level:** it includes all the personal qualities that are compatible for group working and also contribute to the society.
2. **Group Level:** this includes a collaborative quality that facilitates individual qualities.
3. **Societal Level:** these are the activities that aid the group and also facilitate group as well as personal qualities.

This model is not about just leaders rather it is a process that includes equity, social justice, self-knowledge, personal empowerment, collaboration, citizenship, and service

Now the exact model deals with collaboration on three levels of Individual, Group and Society, henceforth the seven qualities are distributed under these three heads:

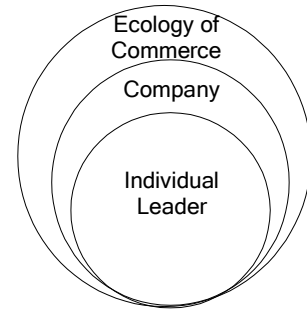
1. Individual Values
  - Consciousness of self
  - Congruence
  - Commitment
2. Group Process Values
  - Collaboration
  - Common Purpose
  - Controversy with Civility
3. Community/Societal Values
  - Citizenship
  - CHANGE

Change is the main reason of rest of the Cs. It is the objective of the total leadership process so as to make world a better place for oneself and for others.



Thesis of Mirvis gives an overall vision of responsible leadership including the congruence of Me, We and Us and getting into fair competition with no compromise with responsibility in trade.

Ketola defined that responsible leadership exists best at the coincidence of high levels of individual, organisational and societal responsibility.



Thomas Maak and Nicola Pless describe the relational aspect of responsible leadership and its implementation in firms. They posit that responsible leader builds, cultivates and maintains trustful relationships to all stakeholders (both inside and outside the company) and coordinates responsible actions to achieve common goals of the firm.

**Fig: Holistic View of Responsible Leadership (I, Me, We)**

There is a value based ethical principle driven relationship between all stakeholders and responsible leaders who share a common sense of responsibility and they raise each other to higher levels of commitment so as to achieve social change with sustainable value creation.

Definition of stakeholders was first given by Caux roundtable

“A responsible business acknowledges its duty to contribute value to society through wealth and employment it creates and the products and services it provides to consumers”.

A responsible business maintains its economic health and viability not just for stakeholders but also for other stakeholders

According to Collins (2001), responsible leadership generates stakeholder's value so as to create impeccable reputation for the firm. And the reverse is also true that company's ability to maintain good reputation is directly related to its capability to retain stakeholders.

This reputation is exhibited as reputational capital that is defined as an intangible asset that is a set of positive reviews, word of mouth, brand identity, and stakeholder trust. This asset proves its worth at the times of crises and financial needs.

## **Outcomes of Responsible Leadership**

Antunes and Franco, 2016 argued that socially responsible leadership leads to positive organizations.

Charbel Greige Frangieh, Hala Khayr Yaacoub, (2017) classified the outcomes of socially responsible leadership under three heads (they mentioned that the results produced are not proved empirically but through analysis of literature review):

### **I. Economic Gain-related Outcomes**

According to a study done by Wang et al. (2015) on Chinese companies both private and state owned of the behaviour of 85 CEOs and the corresponding financial performance. Presence of responsible leadership can reduce business costs like costs of Government fine, audit fees, investigative costs etc.

Waldman and Galvin (2008) argued that the corporations practising responsible leadership are able to charge premium prices for their products.

Also employees of a socially responsible organizations feel privileged and stay for a longer faithful times so the attrition costs is reduced heavily also the output per unit time is more as compared to irresponsible organizations.

### **II. Internal Stakeholder-Related Outcomes**

Employees are the internal stakeholders and are affected by leadership actions. Various researches from the literature show the major impacts:

1. Increases employee retention and reduces turnover (Doh and Quigley, 2014)
2. Increases job satisfaction (Cameron, 2011, Voegtlin et al., 2012),
3. Improves employee commitment (Voegtlin et al., 2012),
4. Increases motivation (Doh and Quigley, 2014),
5. Enhances employee morale and well-being (Cameron, 2011; Waldman and Galvin, 2008),
6. Boosts employee attraction and recruitment (Albinger, Freeman, 2000, Miska et al., 2014),
7. Improves organizational citizenship (Doh and Quigley, 2014; Groves and LaRocca, 2011),
8. Increases productivity (Cameron, 2011)

9. Enhances psychological safety in the presence of inclusiveness (Doh and Quigley, 2014).

### **III. Reputation and External Stakeholders-Related Outcomes**

In this case external stakeholders refer to customers, suppliers, distributors, government, NGOs.

The presence of responsible leaders in a company positively affects the social performance of the company and relationship with the external stakeholders as argued by Voegtlin et al., 2012.

Socially responsible leadership also creates goodwill and trust among the external stakeholders (Maak, 2007).

It also helps to create social capital which aids to connect different stakeholders and is the outcome of trust as generated by the leaders.

One of the most interesting outcome created by the responsible leaders is that they ensure the product delivered by the company are safe and are not harmful for the customers which in turn enhances customer loyalty and satisfaction (Maak and Pless, 2006, p. 100; Cameron, 2011; Wang et al., 2015). Henceforth the 'word of mouth' is always positively spread (Rodriguez Cano et al., 2008).

As per Paraschiv et al., 2012 socially responsible leaders also reinforce responsible practices among suppliers and distributors.

### **Challenges faced by Responsible Leaders**

SRL faces numerous challenges that disturb their ability to discharge their duties. These challenges can be classified into three:

#### **I. Balancing stakeholder needs**

Responsible leaders deal with a set of stakeholders that are diverse by virtue of culture as well as background that can create communication problems. In addition to this relationship and needs of stakeholders even becomes complex when the set involved is of an MNC.

Maak, (2007), have dealt with a completely different set of laws, environmental issues, and employment etc.



Leaders who are responsible should stand to mobilize stakeholders and create – sustain commitment among followers through sensible activities and reducing complexities in the whole process (Maak and Pless, 2006, p. 112).

All the sets of stakeholders have contradictory needs and hence even more complicate the process of responsible leadership. Henceforth meeting the needs of all stakeholders almost infeasible at all times (Waldman and Balven, 2014).

## **II. Personal values**

Personal factors also influence the relationship between the stakeholders and the leaders. The seven trait theory of Social Change Model clearly states that 'consciousness of self' is one of the most important characteristic of a responsible leader. In addition to this the responsible leader should be emotionally intelligent so as to manage, sustain and behave responsibly.

## **III. Characteristics and organizational structures**

Traditional bureaucratic organizations do not give much space for the leaders to be responsible and engage with the stakeholders but the less bureaucratic structure although increases flexibility but increases other challenges like that of diffused decision making and rise in ambiguity thereby difficulty in decision making arises. Responsible leadership also requires a flexible structure so as to work for the society also; henceforth there is a proportional rise in the challenges.

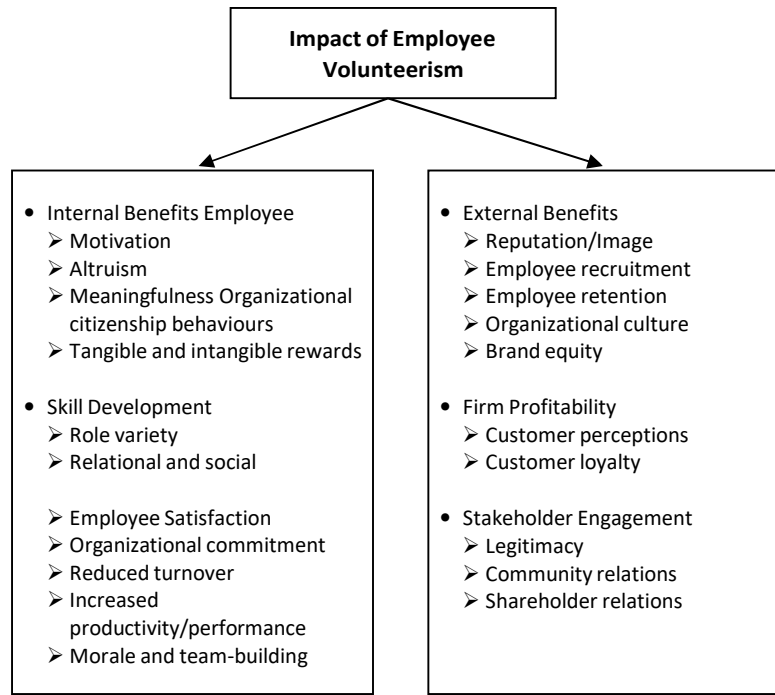
## **Employee Volunteerism and Socially Responsible Leadership**

Most of the Fortune 500 companies stick to employee volunteerism program for increasing the stakeholder engagement.

Employee volunteerism is a deliberate effort of firms to help in the issues of the society and work for the interests of the community and henceforth, augment employee engagement and loyalty. It also provides environment for leaders of the organisation to induce social responsibility in the the employees and also create all the variables of the organizational climate in the favour of the same. (Clarke & Butcher, 2006)

According to Cocyota et. al., volunteerism plays an important role in CSR strategy of responsible companies.

They extend a model for contributions of volunteerism represented in the following figure. This model includes internal and external benefits of employee volunteerism.



**Figure:** Model of Contributions of Employee Volunteerism to a Firm CSR Strategy

## **Role of Leadership in Employee Volunteerism for Corporate Social Responsibility**

Most of the thinkers and philosophers think that the environment is effected by business activities by enterprises. So, it is the responsibility of financial muscles of the world, i.e. the enterprises to reduce this effect (Hart (1997)).

In the same direction Hawken (1993) suggests that the leaders should weave profitability and sustainability principles into the same fabric of organization. They must reform, redesign, restructure in the direction of organizational sustainability.

Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996 argue that leadership makes a significant impact on all actions relating to an enterprise including motives and actions relating to sustainability. The need for modern organization is 'leading for sustainability'.

The phenomenon of responsible leadership gripped roots in early 2000s. The contribution by Maak and Pless(2006) and then by David A Waldman & Siegel, 2008b paved the way for further research regarding Socially Responsible Leadership and implement CSR practices as a part of all business decision making. Also other scholars like Doh, Stumpf, & Tymon, 2011; Freeman & Auster, 2011; Gond, Igalens, Swaen, & El Akremi, 2011; Maritz et al., 2011; Siegel, 2014; Voegtlin et al., 2011 contributed researches regarding Socially Responsible leadership and their dialogue with CSR activities. Flocy, J (2017) propagated 11 items that can demonstrate the behaviour of Socially Responsible Leaders which are further categorized under three dimensions Stakeholders, Relational aspects and External Community.

### **Stakeholders**

1. The leader strives to work with different stakeholders on issues that impact the business.
2. The leader demonstrates awareness of the relevant stakeholder claims
3. The leader balances stakeholder interests

### **Relational Approach**

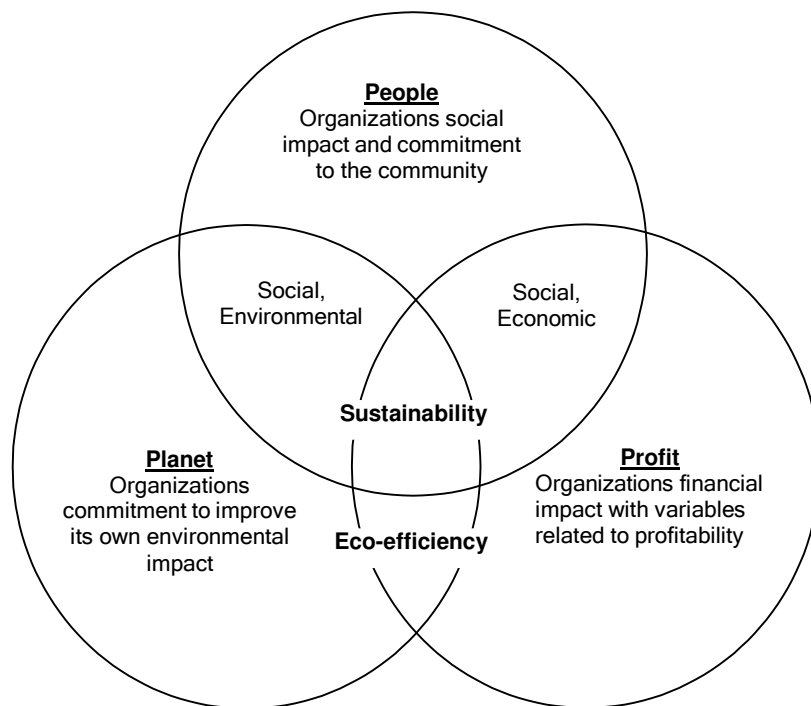
4. The leader leads by personal example
5. The leader models behaviours to inspire the people around them
6. The leader gives due credit to the people
7. The leader takes pride in the people in the organisation
8. The leader takes charge and guides the organisation during bad times
9. The leader considers the impact when breaking a bad news

### **External Community**

10. The leader strives to advance the quality of life in the country the organization operates in along with its business interests
11. The leader explores with various stakeholders on social actions that can be done collectively to advance the community at large

## **Role of Leadership in CSR**

According to United Nations Industrial Development Organization, “Corporate Social Responsibility is an organizational phenomenon in which it integrates social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in stakeholder management. It is weaving act of three Ps viz., people, planet and profit into their corporate genes and at the same time engaging and satiating the expectation of all stakeholders.”



**Figure:** Triple Bottom-line Approach of CSR

According to Bennis, W. (2007), leadership can be understood as tripod viz., Leader, followers and the common goal they want to pursue.

Traditionally the leader is thought of as creator of strategies and hence positively affecting the organizational goals. The impact of a leader can be categorized into three:

1. **Individual as leader:** traits, personality, skills, abilities, individual differences, and charisma of an individual. According to the authors more conscientious individual shows higher level of integrity and hence is more responsible.
2. **Processes:** Interactions between leaders and followers, observed in leader behaviours. LMX theory i.e. Leader-Member Exchange theory states that communication frequency, communication patterns, reciprocity norms, value agreement, role-taking, and certain interaction tactics between leader and member leads to high mutual trust and hence is advantageous for the organization. LMX theory gives explanation for certain leader behaviour which can induct some behaviour or can help reciprocate same behaviour in the followers (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975).

The extensions of LMX theory are ethical leadership and socially responsible leadership Yukl (2001).

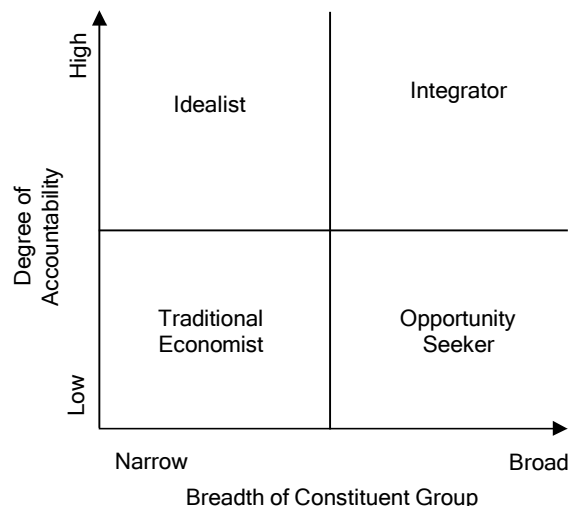
3. **Shared or distributed leadership:** Leader behaviours and influence emerge from any level within the organization. “Pearce & Conger, 2003, p. 1 argue shared leadership is an interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both”.

### **Socially Responsible Leadership and CSR**

Although the concept of Socially Responsible Leader is in nascent stage but Waldman & Galvin (2008) suggest that such leaders have think responsibility at two different orientations viz., limited economic and extended stakeholder view. This view is closely related to dichotomy of CSR also which includes instrumental and altruistic views.

Pless, Maak, & Waldman (2012), through a survey of 25 business leaders and entrepreneurs found four orientations that a responsible leader may demonstrate for implementing CSR.

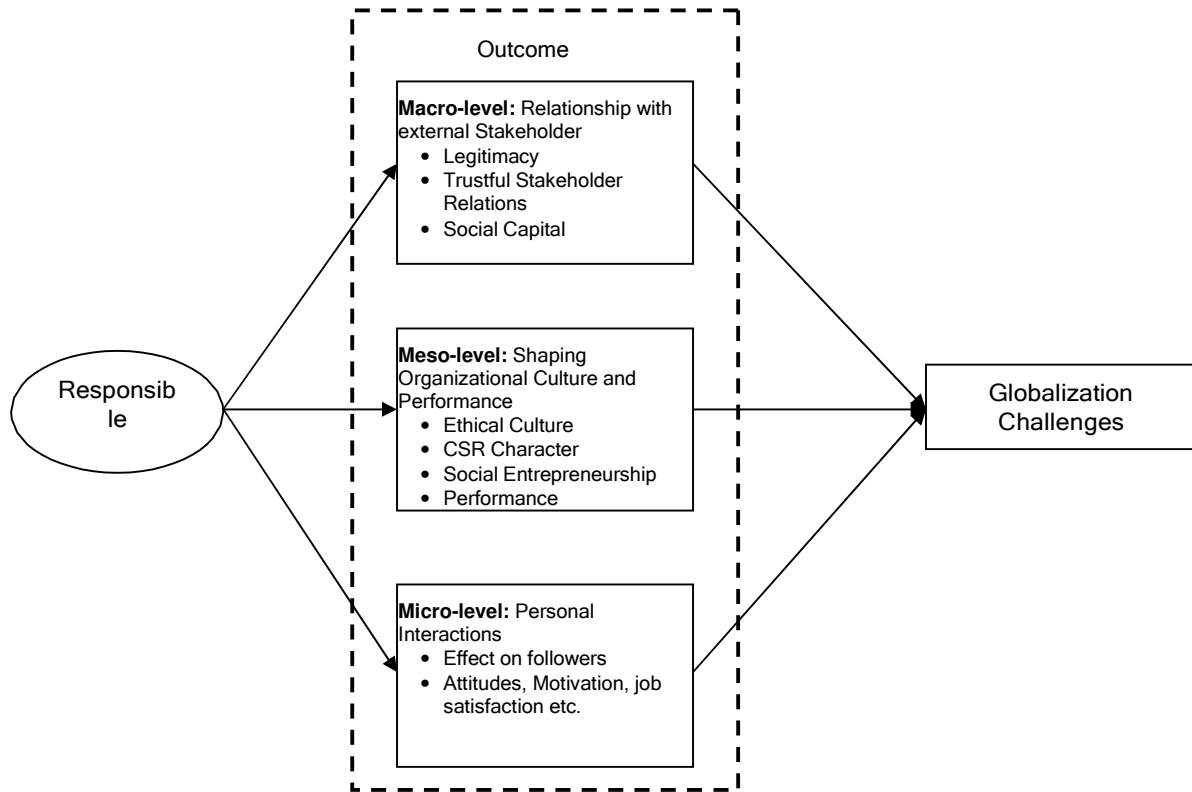
1. **Traditional economist:** this orientation is related to short term economic gains. This type of leader is immensely interested in cost-benefit analysis and is compliance conversant.
2. **Opportunity seeker:** This orientation includes the performance of CSR for long term value creation for competitive advantage.
3. **Integrator:** they consider running a purposeful and responsible business for which profit is just an outcome. According to them rationality can be weaved with emotions also.
4. **Idealist:** They subside analytical thinking and are highly emotional. They consider sustainability as more imperative rather than curating financial muscles. Idealist is likely to be strongly emotional in his or her appeal, perhaps even sacrificing rational and analytic thinking.



**Figure:** Matrix of Responsible Leadership Orientation

## Outcomes of Socially Responsible Leadership

Voegtlin et al., 2011 projected a model that highlights the impact of socially responsible leadership on organizational outcomes



**Conclusion** Figure: Outcomes of Socially Responsible Leadership across different Levels of Analysis

After the economic slowdown the trust of society on enterprises was shattered because of scandals and slumps. So the only saviour for the same was an organizational leader which owning the responsibility of the society as a part of organizational DNA. Usually a leader with personal characteristics like that of authenticity, consistency etc., play such role in this regard. This leader is a socially responsible leader and it can positively affect corporate social responsibility and also induce employee volunteerism. The continuum of leader overlaps the continuum of corporate social responsibility starting from a Traditional Economist to Opportunity Seeker to Integrator to an Idealist.

Socially responsible leader can have various outcomes starting from economic gains, internal outcomes like job satisfaction, employee engagement, reputation in the society and positive outcomes relating to external stakeholders.

There is an immediate need of research in the direction of socially responsible leadership and its impact on corporate social responsibility and employee volunteerism.

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