
Guest editorial: Navigating global challenges: Asian perspectives of globally responsible business leadership

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In an era characterised by unprecedented global interconnectedness, the role of business leadership extends far beyond traditional boundaries. As businesses operate globally, the need for responsible leadership has become paramount. This special issue explores the theme of “Globally Responsible Business Leadership”, focusing on Asian perspectives, shedding light on unique approaches, challenges and successes in fostering responsible business practices in this region.

Asian values and global responsibility

Asian values play a pivotal role in shaping the unique perspective of business leaders in the context of globally responsible leadership (Tan, 2023). Deeply rooted in cultural and philosophical traditions, these values influence how Asian leaders approach the intricate balance between economic growth, social responsibility and environmental stewardship (Dillon and Tan, 2023). The principle of harmony, inherent in many Asian cultures, extends to the business landscape, where leaders seek equilibrium within their organisations and globally.

According to Le *et al.* (2020), this principle underscores the importance of collectivism, emphasising the interconnectedness of individuals within a community. Asian business leaders perceive their companies as integral components of a larger global community, reflecting a comprehensive understanding that fosters collaborative efforts aligning business success with the well-being of the global community (Kitayama *et al.*, 2022). This perspective resonates well with another cultural trait of long-term orientation that supports championing sustainable practices that prioritise the well-being of future generations over short-term gains (Das *et al.*, 2020).

Putting these together, the deep-rootedness of these cultures influences business leaders in Asia to champion environmentally sustainable practices. The interconnectedness between humans and nature guides leaders to actively seek ways to reduce their environmental footprint and contribute sustainability practices for future generations. Ethical considerations, integral to many Asian value systems, further contribute to the foundation of globally responsible business leadership. Stakeholders expect leaders to uphold moral principles and act with integrity personally and professionally (Pless *et al.*, 2021). This commitment to leadership extends to interactions on the global stage, where Asian leaders champion transparent and responsible business practices that align with global standards.

Responsible business practices in Asian businesses

From renewable energy initiatives to waste reduction programs, Asian leaders showcase how business success can align with ecological responsibility. Some of the successful examples include sustainability efforts in the Gardens By the Bay in Singapore (Tan, 2023), waste classification behaviour in China (Ao *et al.*, 2022), usage of green fertiliser by farmers in Malaysia (Adnan *et al.*, 2017), green coffee houses in Vietnam (Le *et al.*, 2021) and Mount



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Rinjani National Park in Indonesia (Muntasib and Rachmawati, 2023). Yet, the dynamic landscape in Asia unveils a set of distinctive challenges that leaders in the region grapple with.

First, *maintaining a delicate balance*. The paradox of economic growth and upholding environmental and social responsibility has always been a primary challenge for many organisations (Quang *et al.*, 2023). Within Asia, it is more evident. As Asian economies continue to surge forward, leaders are tasked with aligning robust economic development with sustainable practices (James and Priyadarshini, 2021). This challenge demands innovative approaches beyond traditional business models, encouraging leaders to explore avenues prioritising environmental conservation, social welfare and economic prosperity.

Second, *diversity in culture*. The diverse array of languages, traditions and customs across Asian countries necessitates a nuanced understanding of local contexts (Mary, 2023). For instance, in India, the celebration of Diwali involves rituals such as lighting lamps, exchanging gifts and holding cultural and religious significance (Fontaine and Richardson, 2005). Meanwhile, in China, the linguistic landscape is marked by Mandarin as the official language, yet regional dialects abound, demanding sensitivity to linguistic variations (Weaver *et al.*, 2017). Cultural symbols, like the dragon in Vietnam or the significance of colours across Asia, necessitate tailored approaches in branding and communication. Hence, leaders' abilities in effectively navigating this diversity require them to craft strategies that are not only globally applicable but also adaptable to the specific cultural nuances of each market. It calls for a heightened awareness of the social and cultural intricacies that shape consumer behaviour and stakeholder expectations in diverse Asian communities.

Third, *regulatory complexities*. Leaders face the challenge of addressing regulatory complexities that vary widely within Asia (Mary, 2023). The diverse regulatory frameworks and standards in different Asian countries demand a sophisticated understanding of local legal landscapes. Leaders must navigate this intricate web of regulations to ensure their business practices align with global standards and local requirements. This challenge underscores the need for a flexible and responsive approach to compliance, where businesses can navigate the regulatory landscape with agility and integrity.

Finally, *expectations of Asian leaders*. In trying to be a responsible business leader within the unique context of Asia's climate, leaders face distinct challenges intricately tied to the region's diverse and dynamic environmental considerations. Throughout various organisational levels, a solid political will becomes imperative for fostering collaboration and effective partnerships (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2020). Internally, leaders grapple with encouraging diverse individuals and units to actively communicate and align their strategies, considering the specific environmental nuances of the Asian climate. Externally, the challenge extends to forming strategic alliances that navigate the varied climate conditions and geographical intricacies present across the continent. Hence, communication that bridges divides is essential (Ting *et al.*, 2022). Asian leaders are expected to craft communication that seamlessly unite stakeholders within organisations and across diverse climates in Asia. Additionally, they are expected to establish platforms where individuals, regardless of their positions, understand their roles, take proactive steps and assume responsibilities for a sustainable future shaped by the unique challenges of the Asian context.

However, these challenges should not be viewed solely as impediments. Instead, they are opportunities for innovation and developing new, sustainable business models. Leaders who successfully address the challenges of balancing economic growth with environmental and social responsibility, navigating cultural diversity and managing regulatory complexities can position their organisations as trailblazers in globally responsible business leadership.

Specific topics addressed in this special issue

Against this backdrop, this special issue on “Globally Responsible Business Leadership – Asian Perspectives” discusses the challenges, showcases successes and highlights cultural influences in this region. Ten papers across seven countries of China, India, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Pakistan and the Philippines comprehensively examine the intricacies of globally responsible business leadership in Asia. These contributions focus into diverse topics, ranging from sustainable practices to the impact of cultural nuances on corporate strategies. Each paper offers valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between globally responsible business leadership, contributing to a nuanced understanding of how leaders navigate the multifaceted landscape of Asian business.

China

The study by Alice Tan and her co-authors focuses on understanding if the role of a globally responsible business leadership could influence the relationship between psychological contract breach and two types of voice behaviour (aggressive and constructive) among Chinese full-time employees. Drawing from the social exchange theory, they found that globally responsible business leadership weakens the negative association between psychological contract breach and constructive voice behaviour while strengthening the positive association between psychological contract breach and aggressive voice behaviour. Another study by Miao He explores how companies respond to local government environmental initiatives by analysing government work reports (GWRs). The study uses a textual analysis of GWRs from Chinese provinces, measuring environmental keywords’ frequency and change rate as indicators of government environmental initiatives. The findings reveal that environmental disclosure scores in environmental, social and governance reports increase with the frequency or change rate of environmental keywords in provincial GWRs, particularly for non-state-owned enterprises, firms in highly marketised provinces or those listed in a single capital market.

India

Bhat Basit’s team examined the relationship between corporate board structure and environmental, social and governance performance for Indian companies. Using the Hensen statistics over ten years and utilising panel data fixed effect estimations, this study contributes to understanding the relevance of stakeholder theory within corporate governance, asserting that corporate governance is accountable for safeguarding stakeholders’ interests. Using secondary data from various sources, Bhat Prathima’s team addresses the relationship between public sector companies’ contribution to sustainable development goals and responsible business leadership. This study addresses the dearth of research in this area and provides a valuable framework for other developing countries to adopt. Finally, Sarkar Shulagna and the team further expanded the concept of responsible leadership by studying the characteristics, qualities and competencies of sustainable leadership at individual, team and organisational levels.

Malaysia

In Malaysia, Chin Chee Hua and his co-researchers’ study addresses gaps in the existing literature within Malaysia’s service sector by examining the impact of responsible leadership traits of relationship building, relational governance and sharing orientation on employees’ sustainable performance. The findings indicate that relationship building and relational governance significantly influence employees’ sustainable performance in the service industry.

Myanmar

The paper by Zin Mie Sharr investigates the traits and challenges of women leaders across different fields in Myanmar. This study is timely considering the recent political challenges the country is facing. In her paper, she reveals that women-responsible leaders exhibit character traits similar to their male counterparts but encounter distinct challenges at both the organisational and societal levels in Myanmar, which include gender bias.

Singapore

The study by Abraham K. Thomas from Singapore underscores the significance of responsible leadership and triple-bottom-line performance in promoting corporate sustainability. In his paper, he highlighted that responsible leadership is identified as having a substantial influence on both businesses and society, contributing to the attainment of long-term corporate sustainability goals. His work introduces a conceptual model illustrating the connection between responsible leadership, the triple bottom line (economic, social and environmental aspects), and the overall achievement of corporate sustainability.

Pakistan

On the other hand, Cham Tat-Huei and his team's research investigates the relationship between globally responsible leadership (GRL) and pro-environmental behaviour (PEB) in Pakistan's manufacturing sector. Their findings suggest that businesses can foster PEB by embracing GRL and implementing green management initiatives (GMI), demonstrating a commitment to sustainability and enhancing credibility and competitiveness. Their research contributes new insights to sustainable leadership literature, providing empirical evidence of interrelations between GRL, GMI and PEB and highlighting the mediating role of GMI in this dynamic.

Philippines

Finally, Carmelita's team examines the impact of lodging infrastructure development on the environmental quality and natural resource management within the Cordillera Administrative Region and its implications for globally responsible leadership. Their findings of the study open an avenue for globally responsible leadership in sustaining environmental quality and preservation of natural resources.

In sum, the ten articles in this special issue, from different Asian countries, aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of the influence of Asian, globally responsible leadership on businesses within this region. Through this issue, the guest editors hope to inspire future dialogue and reflection on the role of Asian businesses in shaping a more sustainable and socially responsible global economy.

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