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## Socially Responsible Leadership: A Drive to Uganda's Institutions of Higher Learning Performance.

BY

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### Abstract

*The relationship between socially responsible leadership, the key driver of corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices, and organizational performance is a salient issue in the global context for both CSR scholars and practitioners. The purpose of this paper is to provide insights into the interplay of responsible leadership, CSR practices, and organizational outcomes. It analyses 241 staff's behaviors and their performance in institutions of higher learning in Uganda. It thereby enriches understanding of how leaders' socially responsible decisions impact upon CSR engagement and institution's performance. The results found out that socially responsible leaders are positively related with organizational performance. The aspects of morality, social responsibility, and capability aspects of responsible leadership are closely related to CSR. Our research has clear limitations. First, most selected institutions are renowned large institutions of higher learning. Private and Foreign-owned institutions of higher learning are excluded. Based on the data analysis, this study provides in-depth discussion of CSR situation in Uganda and its relationship with organization performance, which is one of the first studies to examine responsible leadership in Ugandan context and investigate the relationship between responsible leadership and organizational performance.*

**Keywords:** Corporate social responsibility, Socially Responsible leadership, Morality, Organizational performance, Institutions of Higher Learning, Uganda

### 1.0.Introduction

Continuous social challenges in the world today, demand for socially responsible leaders. Social challenges are a crisis phenomenon that covers spheres of human life and communities and therefore these challenges demand for leaders with social and inclusive values (Luu, T. T., 2023) who are socially responsible. Socially responsible leaders are those leaders with inclusive values and aim at attaining organizational or societal goals with ethical manners (Sánchez F., *at el*, 2020). On the other hand, socially responsible leadership (SRL) as a process is viewed in a

perspective of inclusivity, ethical, responsibility, capability among others (Yasin, 2021). SRL helps the organizations to engage with the real-life concerns of its employees, customers, and other stakeholders. Following the global financial crisis, which threatened economic collapse for many organizations, stakeholders joined a worldwide call and renewal toward implementing ethical practices. The result led to holding organization leaders responsible for pursuing a global "common good," one that would force organizations to look at their role in alleviating poverty and promoting human rights (Pless *et al.*, 2012). When social issues are addressed,



not only is the rapport with stakeholders and the public maintained, but the organizations in turn contribute to the sustainable development of their organizations; thus, in the interests of promoting these ends, practitioners and researchers alike have a significant motivation to explore the key drivers and outcomes of responsible leadership in the organization world.

In the context of Institutions of Higher Learning in Uganda especially in Makerere University and Kyambogo University, staff attached to both Universities have shown a lot of social issues with staff laying down their tools over poor working conditions relating to delays in salary payments for May 2023 where over 3000 staffs were affected (URN, 2023) and Part-time lecturers in kyambogo have recently threatened to withhold students examinations results due to delayed payments with one anonymous lecturer stating that he has taken 10 months without receiving his allowances (Serugo P, 2023) leading to work stress hindering staffs work like setting examinations, invigilation of examinations and mostly attending to students in classrooms. Further evidence has shown Makerere University top administrators have been involved in fraud, abuse of office, nepotism, corruption, conflict of interest, bribery in the recruitment processes, among other things (Daily Monitor, 2021) and Criminal Investigations Directorate (CID) interrogated the head of Human Resources at Kyambogo University, Richard Manana, over allegations that some middle-level staff at the university are holding two government jobs (Katungulu A, 2021) which also shows a lack of Socially Responsible Leadership.

Recent studies have shown that for organizations to successfully practice corporate social responsibility (CSR), they need leaders who embrace these “goodwill” values to effectively engage ethical organization practices (Lazzini, A., *et al.*, 2023). Well-formulated CSR policies and practices can play a key role in improving organizations’ corporate reputation, environmental management, financial performance (Kabir, M. A., & Chowdhury, S. S., 2023), and sustainable development (Taneja, A., *et al.*, 2023). CSR activities can also promote customer loyalty and strengthen stakeholder-organizations relations in general (Narayanan, S., *et al.*, 2023). Despite the benefits of practicing CSR, limited empirical research is available regarding the relationship between responsible leadership, corporate social performance (CSP), and organizational performance. A majority of existing literature focuses primarily on the concept of responsible leaders and the institutional, moral, and relational structures associated with them (Maak and Pless, 2006), but fails to examine the associated outcomes, such as organizations’ CSR practices and performance. Further, Uganda’s lack of progress in promoting moral conduct in organization affairs (Karyeija, G. K. (2010) highlight the importance of responsible leadership. Even so, with the growing theoretical and empirical literature on CSR in Uganda, especially in recent years, no reports exist on the role of leadership in CSR engagement, nor its impact on CSP and corporate financial performance (CFP) specifically in Uganda. The findings improve our understanding of how

socially responsible leaders influence an organization’s responsible behavior and financial performance. Hence, they have significant implications for strategic decision-making concerning CSR on the part of organization leaders in Uganda.

## 2.0. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

The concept of responsible leadership combines the distinct areas of CSR and leadership. Adherents of CSR devote much attention to the relationship between CSR and organization performance but have paid insufficient attention to the effects organization leaders have on the personal values of CSR-related decisions. Researchers on leadership have prioritized the study of internal, one-on-one relationships between leaders and followers, as well as team-oriented leadership, but have focused less on issues pertaining to leadership at the higher levels of organizations (McClellan, J., 2023). Recently, scholars have increasingly noted the importance of integrating the concept of CSR with that of leadership as a means of understanding responsible leadership (Haque, A., 2023).

Ethical leadership is similar to socially responsible leadership in that ethical leadership can induce positive effects on individual and organizational performance. Park, J. G., *et al.*, (2023) proposed that ethical leadership is associated positively with follower satisfaction, motivation, and commitment to the organization. Drawing on an analysis of data collected from major educational organizations in China, Guo, F., *et al.*, (2023) suggested that ethical leadership is related positively and significantly to employee performance, as rated by their immediate supervisors. We may conclude that being a socially responsible leader involves being an ethical leader, one with a team of employees at the peak of output and performance. According to the normative stakeholder approach, responsible leadership is defined as being “in line with both integrative and ethical theories of CSR (Waldman, 2011, p. 77), meaning that socially responsible leaders, in order to be effective, should balance the needs of a broad set of stakeholders and act as moral person with a focus on altruism. The key task of a responsible leader then is to “weave a web of inclusion, where the leader engages himself among equals” (Hurtienne, L. E., & Hurtienne, M., 2023).

## 3.0. Socially Responsible Leadership and Organization’s Engagement in CSR

Leadership has been viewed as a key driver in ethical organization practices because it successfully contributes to the organization’s overall CSP. Wang, Z., *et al.*, (2023) suggest that CEOs play a key role in determining the extent of how organizations engage in CSR. Equally, a significant link exists between leaders’ CSR values, and the propensity of organizations to engage in “strategic” CSR, or more precisely, those CSR activities that are most likely to underpin the organization’s corporate and organization-level strategies. In particular, CEOs’ personal values and attitudes to CSR activities influence their organizations’ CSR strategies

directly (Wang, Z., *et al.*, 2023). This suggests that leadership, when made the driving force of ethical organization practices, will improve organization's CSP.

When considering socially responsible leadership, the importance of linking a group of stakeholders, inside and outside of the organization, demonstrates how important it is to social-relational and ethical phenomenon. In theory, the relationship with salient stakeholders is invariably associated with a CSR program and corporate performance, whereby the stakeholder environment determines the scope and depth of corporate CSR activities, and the strategic decision-making of socially responsible leaders (Hambrick, D.C., 2007). Responsible leaders can also raise employees' awareness of the organization's CSR character and values and influence positively employees' perception of the importance of CSR. Accordingly, employees will engage themselves in CSR-related actions (Voegtlin, *et al.*, 2012), thereby fostering a formidable relationship between ethical leaders. In light of the foregoing, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

*H1. There is a positive relationship between socially responsible leaders and CSP. CSP and CFP*

At present, since a consensus does not exist between the relationship of CSP and organization financial performance CFP, even when empirical evidence has been considered, organizations leaders don't have the supporting data with which to use CSP effectively in decision-making practices, nor do stakeholders. Jones (1995) argues that organizations that base their interactions with stakeholders on ethical principles will have a competitive advantage over organizations that do not. The findings of a recent empirical study by Ozdemir, O., *et al.*, (2023), explains that an organization's CSR strength directly correlates and impacts financial performance positively.

Some researchers argue that the relationship between CSP and CFP is one of reciprocal causality, in that high-performance organizations can afford more CSR activities, and thus achieve better CSR outcomes. This approach views the positive relationship between CSP and CFP as artificial, due to halo effects (Wood and Jones, 1995). However, the only significant halo linkage is from CFP to CSR outcomes, which means that organizations with higher CFP will receive higher CSR rankings, regardless of the underlying CSR activities. Arian, A., *et al.* (2023) suggest that CSR outcomes have a positive relationship with CFP across all industries and within all corporate contexts. Thus, the benefits of leaders trying to incorporate CSR outcomes will also increase CSP and CFP. In light of the foregoing, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

*H2a. CSP is related positively to CFP (ROA).*

*H2b. CSP is related positively to CFP return on equity (ROE).*

#### ***Socially responsible leaders and CFP***

In global markets, for an organization to develop an image of social responsibility, and ultimately build and sustain a positive corporate reputation, leaders need to consider how to communicate with stakeholders. Both stakeholder theory and CSP are about relationships between corporations and their

stakeholders. In particular, some scholars indicate that awareness of CSR among stakeholders has a positive effect on organization's sales income, as well as investment and employment (Lu, H., *et al.*, 2023). Hasan, I., *et al.*, (2023) provide evidence that a high level of CSR stakeholder awareness facilitates organization's capacity to both sustain a beneficial financial performance and to recover from a substandard performance more quickly. Sanchez-Famoso, V., *et al.*, (2023) assume that responsible leadership has additional, indirect, positive effects on the social and financial performance of an organization, mediated by honest relationships, social capital, social innovation, and follower attitudes. As discussed earlier, socially responsible leadership may correlate with improved CSP. This means CSP may be associated with improved organizational financial performance, and the presence of socially responsible leaders may be linked with improved CFP. Thus, it might be possible to determine the relationship between socially responsible leaders, while at the same time; CFP may be mediated by evaluating CSP. To investigate these matters, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

*H3a. The more socially responsible the leader is, the better the CFP (ROA)*

*H3b. The more socially responsible the leader is, the better the CFP (ROE)*

*H4a. The relationship between the level of socially responsible leaders and CFP (ROA) is mediated by CSP.*

*H4b. The relationship between the level of socially responsible leaders and CFP (ROE) is mediated by CSP.*

## **4.0. Methodology**

The study was drawn from several sources, including an initial sample, which consisted of evaluating socially responsible leaders in institutions of higher learning in Uganda. The study includes individuals from leading organizations and academic institutions in Uganda and represents a multitude of opinions producing strong research in institutions of higher learning and mostly in management areas. Sampling was conducted randomly and included 241 staffs from selected Ugandan institutions of higher learning that's to say Makerere University, Makerere University Business School, and Kyambogo University. Data were collected using questionnaires. The questionnaires' respondents therefore included key stakeholders of the relevant institutions. With regards to the CSP data, it was procured from the Uganda Chapter for Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives (UCCSRI), a national, not-for-profit organization that promotes the development of socially responsible investing. It examines the CSP of institutions in Uganda by examining their annual CSR reports.

### ***Measures***

#### ***CFP***

The study tested for the effects of socially responsible leaders on financial performance, leading to the dependent variable: CFP. Accounting-based indicators, such as ROA and ROE were selected, because they offer the ability to capture the

organizations' internal efficiency (Agle *et al.*, 1999; Cochran and Wood, 1984). CFP accounting-based measures can also be found to correlate more significantly with CSP, than other financial indicators, such as market-based indicators, or corporate reputation (Orlitzky *et al.*, 2003). It is our opinion then that socially responsible leaders have a direct impact on CFP.

**Socially responsible leaders**

When conducting our study, we took into account that, to date, no universally accepted concept of socially responsible leadership in the Ugandan context exists. Transitional Care Model's (TCM)'s measurement of socially responsible leadership and used five weighted factors in their assessment of socially responsible leaders that's morality (13.75 percent), job performance (26.5 percent), reputation (15.45 percent), social responsibility (32.80 percent), and capability (11.5 percent). Breaking each assessment down further, morality was determined based on whether the CEO was a moral person, one well-respected by others; job performance was measured by the CEO's charisma, capacity to innovate, and to possess effective communication skills; reputation was based on whether the CEO was respected within his or her industry, and therefore influences the development the organizations; social responsibility was measured by whether the CEO pursued CSR activities to benefit society and the community, and whether CEOs believed that their organizations should act as a corporate citizen when undertaking strategic decision making; and lastly, capability was measured by whether CEOs were able to ensure the organization had a comprehensive corporate governance structure and a strong, long-term competitive advantage. The value of TCM's tool for evaluating the social responsibility of leaders has been recognized by many researchers on leadership (Iqbal, S., *et al.*, 2023). However, for our study, we are only focusing on molarity, social responsibility, and capability.

**CSP**

In our research, many scholars studying CSP have noted the difficulty in measuring CSP despite the availability of various methods, including surveys, content analysis of annual CSR reports, and expert evaluation. Recently, one method adopted by Western scholars, with an interest in CSP, was to use the database developed by Kinder, Lydenberg, Domini, and companies (KLD) in order to measure, in some capacity CSP (Erhemjamts *et al.*, 2013).

**Control variables**

As already noted, the dependent variable captures CFP through CSR practices; hence, the factors that could exert a systematic influence on financial performance should be controlled. To achieve this control, we included variables that were previously identified as likely to affect the financial performance of leadership and CSR. The control variables were: industry, organization size, organization age, and an annual dummy variable.

**5.0.Results**

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations for the variables that were used to test the hypotheses. The results

showed that CSP significantly correlated with ROA; socially responsible leadership was significantly associated with ROE; and CSR practices correlated positively with the level of socially responsible leadership. Ordinary least squares (OLS) were used with a panel-corrected standard errors (PCSEs) method of STATA to test the hypothesized model. OLS estimates of the time series models may not be optimal, but they often perform well in practical research studies. To avoid under or over-estimating the OLS in standard errors, it is suggested that the OLS parameter estimators should be retained, but that the OLS standard errors should be replaced with the PCSEs that "take into account the contemporaneous correlation of the errors and performance (Podestà, 2002, p. 17). Reasons behind using OLS with PCSEs relate to investigating the relationship between management practices and organization performance: the OLS technique has an economically and statistically significant effect on both of the dependent variables in the OLS-pooled cross-sectional model, whereas the random and fixed effect modes provide an empirical bias (Huselid and Becker, 1996).

**Table 1: Means, standard deviations, and correlations among variables**

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. ROA	5.96	5.45	-			
2. ROE	15.41	9.13	0.75***	-		
3. Leaders	781.66	92.10	-0.12	0.10*	-	
4. CSR	43.73	16.23	-0.30**	-0.04	0.21	
5. Institutions Age	16.78	5.12	-0.17	0.10	0.15	0.16

Notes:  $n = 241$ . \* $p < 0.10$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

Table 2 shows the relationship between the level of socially responsible leaders, the evaluation of CSR practices, and CFP. A significant positive association was observed between socially responsible leadership and CSR practices. This confirms *H1*, explaining 33 percent of the variance. Particular attention should be given to the parameter estimates of the remaining columns: first, notable result was the significant negative impact of CSR on ROA and ROE, consequently resulting in the rejection of *H2a-2b*. The link between socially responsible leadership and ROA was not significant; in conclusion, *H3a* was also rejected. As could be expected from the factor structure, the strongest correlation surfaced between the evaluation of socially responsible leadership and ROE. This result supports *H3b*, explaining 23 percent of the variance. In regard to the relationship between socially responsible leadership and ROA, the evaluation of socially responsible leadership became insignificant when the assessment of CSR practices was added into the equation. The result concludes the rejection of *H4a*. The mediation analysis results showed that the relationship between the level of socially responsible leadership and ROE was insignificant when CSR practices were added into the model. As a result, *H4b* was also rejected. Taken together, the control variables

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explained 28 percent of the total variance in ROA and 23 percent of the total variance in ROE.

Table 2: Socially responsible leaders, CSR practices, and corporate financial performance

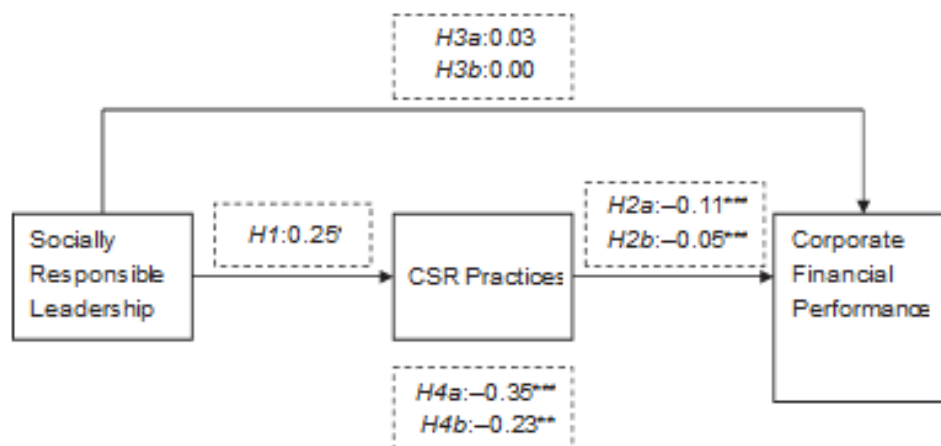
	ROA	ROE	H1 CSR	H2a ROA	H2b ROE	H3a ROA	H3b ROE	H4a ROA	H4b ROE
<i>Control variables</i>									
Institution size	0.08***	0.11***	0.13***	0.05***	0.07***	0.09***	0.08***	0.14***	0.11***
Institution age	-0.03	0.28***	0.14*	0.02**	0.17***	0.00	0.24***	0.04*	0.27***
Year (2023)	-0.07***	-0.08***	0.05	-0.01***	-0.04***	-0.04	-0.12***	0.02***	-0.11***
<i>Main effects</i>									
Responsible leadership			0.25*			0.03	0.18**	0.09	0.23**
CSR practices				-0.11**	-0.05**		0.00	-0.35**	-0.23**
Wald chi2	1.12e+15***	1.37e+15***	520.13***	2048.39***	406.82***	28.88***	234.16***	640.24***	167.22***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.28	0.23	0.33	0.37	0.23	0.25	0.29	0.34	0.32

Notes: n = 485. \*p < 0.10; \*\*p < 0.05; \*\*\*p < 0.01

### 6.0. Discussions

The findings support the hypothesis that the evaluation of socially responsible leadership correlates positively with the evaluation of CSP, and equally support the hypothesis that the evaluation of socially responsible leadership correlates positively with ROE. However, we did not find evidence that the exchange relationship between socially responsible leadership and CFP is mediated by CSP.

Control Variables: firm size, firm age, and year. \*p < 0.10; \*\*p < 0.05; \*\*\*p < 0.01.



The findings show that socially responsible leadership were key drivers of CSR activities in Ugandan institutions and is consistent with Pollach, I., *et al.*, (2023) case study of 16 Chinese organizations, suggesting that CSR behaviors rely more on the exercise of managerial ethics, than external regulation, or civil mobilization, because these latter factors still lack in force. The Western literature shows that charismatic leadership by the CEO related positively to the propensity of the organization to engage with CSR (Waldman *et al.*, 2006). If CEOs act morally, and consider the needs and claims of stakeholder groups, as well as the benefits of their actions to society, as a whole, employees may feel proud to work for organizations with a positive organizational image, and be inspired to work in tandem toward the realization of CSR (Waldman *et al.*, 2006).

Overall, our research showed that responsible leadership has positive influences on ROE, and essentially confirmed the hypothesis of Voegtlin *et al.* (2012) that states responsible leadership contributes directly to organizational performance. In theory, socially responsible leaders can meet the three requirements proposed by Yukl (2008) to improve organizational performance. First, socially responsible leaders are intended to ensure that organizational systems and processes operate in a manner that facilitates efficacy and moral action. Second, socially responsible leaders are committed to cultivating a work environment, one where diverse employees “have fun and feel mobilized” and are “enabled to contribute to their highest potential, both in an organization and a moral sense” (Ismail, S. S. M., & Hilal, O. A., 2023). Third, socially responsible leaders are visionaries and care about the social and natural environments; this

compels the organizations, on a whole, to respond to external changes quickly and pursue sustainable development by balancing the various needs of different stakeholder groups.

Our research did not find a statistically significant positive relationship between CSP and CFP (i.e. ROA and ROE). This can be attributed to leaders' strategic decisions and the lack of a stakeholder environment. First, the CEOs performed CSR without holistic strategic planning; although the CEOs were chosen from among the top institutions of higher learning in Uganda, their institutions may still be at the preliminary stages of CSR activities. Second, with a lack of positive peer pressure in Uganda, the stakeholder environment is not conducive to CSR policies. Social screening is also minimal. Crucially, there is little reward for CSR from either the government or consumers (Wang, S., *et al.*, 2023). In the long term, the positive effects of CSR initiatives on CFP may be visible within a more supportive stakeholder environment. One solution would be to implement a social audit, one needed to prevent a decoupling strategy, where CSR is adopted symbolically rather than implemented substantively, a practice observed widely among Ugandan organizations today (Wang, S., *et al.*, 2023). Our preliminary conclusion is that the positive effects of CSP on CFP will be limited until CSR is implemented substantively and stakeholder awareness develops.

With regard to the institution world, our research has practical implications that can better inform institutions on the benefits of implementing CSR practices. First, CSR practices in Uganda should be conducted strategically. At present, the CSR practices of Ugandan organizations are largely oriented around government policies (Wang, S., *et al.*, 2023). If CSR activities fail to generate economic returns, it may undermine institution's willingness to undertake them. CSR activities performed by Ugandan organizations should be linked directly to day-to-day, core operations. Equally, institutions should adopt a holistic approach to CSR as part of their strategic planning, ensuring that institutions CSR actions are integrated into core operations, leading to institutions managed in the interests of a broad set of stakeholders, which are ultimately set on achieving maximum economic and social value, over the medium to the long term (Chandler and Werther, 2014). The substantive implementation of CSR, rather than its symbolic adoption, is a prerequisite to generating a positive relationship between CSR and CFP.

Our research has clear limitations. First, most of the institutions selected for consideration are large state-owned institutions (private enterprises and foreign-owned enterprises were excluded). Second, the evaluation of CSP is based on content analysis of institution's annual CSR reports, which might only show what activities organizations care to report, as opposed to what they are actually carrying out. Institutions with poor CSR activities may also promote the institutions image by exaggerating CSR achievements in these reports; however, despite its limitations, this is the standard way of collecting data on the CSR activities of Ugandan institutions (Alinda, K., *et al.*, 2023). Finally, our data set spans only one year, which speaks against the generalizability of the results. On the other hand, our data set is unique in that we combine

two databases CSP and CFP. The limitations of the data set are due to CSR being a relatively new concept in Uganda (Tuhaise, I., 2023). That said, as time passes, databases of CSR-related data will come to form a richer source of tangible and critical information for practitioners and researchers.

## 7.0. Conclusion

One of the significant values our study provides is that it combines two databases. By providing empirical support for, and new insights into, the role of socially responsible leadership, and the impact they have on organization performance, it contributes to CSR theory, in general, and responsible leadership theory, in particular. On the one hand, the study finds that the level of socially responsible leadership is related positively to the organizational performance of ROE. Our analysis focused on key aspects of responsible leadership integrity, morality, and the stakeholder relationship which are closely related to CSR. On the other hand, we found a strong profile of CSR practices was related negatively to ROA and ROE, indicating that CSR activities in Uganda have not been able to improve organizational performance in the short term. However, through a substantive implementation of CSR, and an increasing level of stakeholder awareness, it may be that CSR practices will come to affect ROA and ROE positively in the future. While many studies have examined the development of CSR and CSP in the world, the study reported, herein, is unique due to the fact that it examines the relationship between the presence of socially responsible leadership and CFP.

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