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# The Responsible Leadership for Performance framework

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# The Responsible Leadership for Performance framework

## **Abstract**

A leader is assumed to be someone entrusted by his/her followers to lead, behave responsibly and be accountable for his actions. He/she would be someone righteous, with a high level of moral judgement and a good reputation, and thus, be held to a higher moral standard.

## **Keywords**

leadership, performance, responsible, framework

## **Disciplines**

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## **The Responsible Leadership for Performance Framework**

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### **Introduction**

A leader is assumed to be someone entrusted by his/her followers to lead, behave responsibly and be accountable for his actions. He/she would be someone righteous, with a high level of moral judgement and a good reputation, and thus, be held to a higher moral standard.

However, in recent times, there has been an increase in irresponsible behaviour committed by leaders that were regarded as credible. The 2007 global financial crisis demonstrated how ethical violations can be committed by leaders who are thought to have high moral standards and good reputations, but who became complacent and incapable of managing the power and privileges that accompanies their success (Velsor & Ascalon 2008). This is especially imminent in high-achieving nations where leaders are pushed to create wealth for their shareholders at all costs. This tension between wealth management and being ethical and responsible often poses a dilemma for leaders.

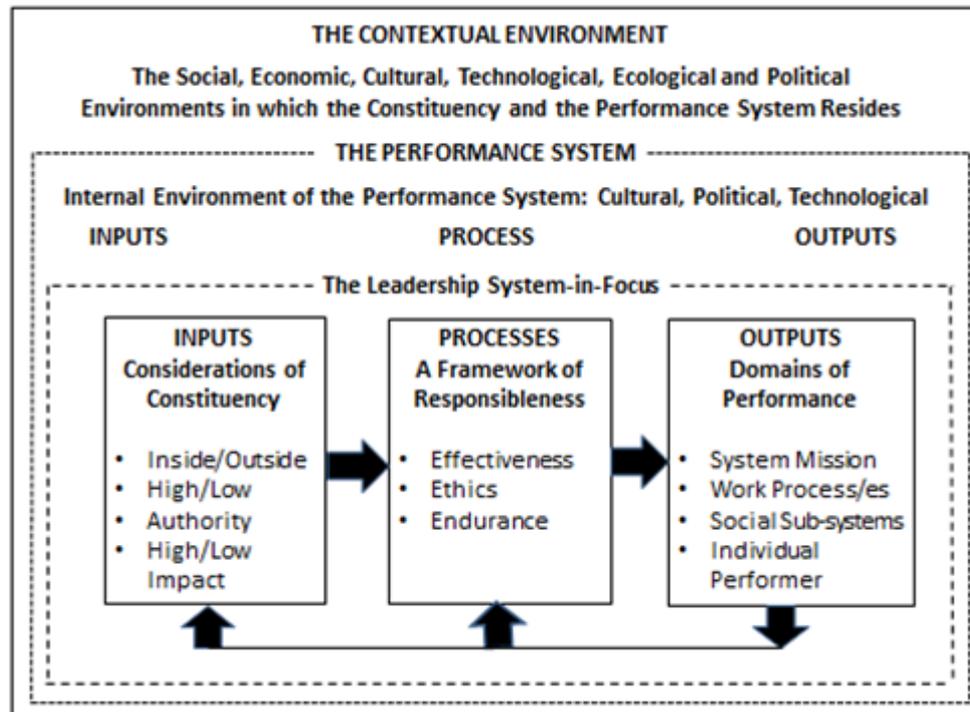
In the ethics literature, Immanuel Kant reminds us that as human beings, we have the ability to reason, self-reflect and develop and hence we should instinctively know right from wrong (Paton 2009). Yet, our moral weaknesses often leave us vulnerable, causing us to ignore our sense of reasoning and virtues. Greed, the desire for lavishness and the illusion of infallibility makes a leader lose touch with his/her responsibility to make the right decisions (Cuilla 2001; Maak & Pless 2006).

The individual leader, however, should not be fully blamed, as much of the blame has to also be apportioned to the lack of understanding of the complexities of the system within which a business society functions (Senge 2006). These complexities place leaders in powerful positions and if leaders lack self-knowledge and self-control, they could trample on their voice of rationale for sense-making, abuse their power, ignore the need for accountability and choose to indulge in their material and personal desires (Cuilla 2001).

### ***The Responsible Leadership for Performance (RLP) Framework (Lynham & Chermack 2006)***

Responsible leadership is not simply about the attributes of the individual leader, but must also take into consideration the entire system, which includes factors such as the contextual environment, the internal environment and the process system.

The theory of Responsible Leadership for Performance (RLP) proposed by Lynham and Chermack (2006) offers an appropriate framework that addresses leadership that focuses on both performance as well as responsibility. It frames leadership as a performance system of interacting inputs, processes, outputs, feedback and boundaries where each variable has an impact on the others. In the literature by Lynham and Chermack (2006), leadership is described as a system practised in reciprocity to its constituency with the ultimate objective being to achieve the goals set by stakeholders.



**Figure 1.** The Theoretical Framework Model of RLP, adapted from Lynham et al. (2010)

There are three units in the RLP model by Lynham and Chermack (2006), as illustrated in Figure 1:

***Unit 1 – The input: Consideration of constituency***

In order for leadership to exist, there must be a constituency for it to serve. The constituency is a group of followers or stakeholders who could reside inside or outside the performance system, have a high or low authority over it and have either high or low potential impact on it. These elements will determine whose needs should be served first, how and to what end (Lynham et al. 2010).

***Unit 2 – The process: Framework of Responsibleness***

Responsibleness according to Lynham et al. (2010, p.83) is a, ‘professional action based on careful and reflective thought about which response is right in a particular situation’. Apart from being effective and ethical, a responsible leader must have endurance in order to ensure sustainability. There are, hence, three attributes in the framework of responsibleness, which are ethics, effectiveness and endurance (Lynham & Chermack 2006).

***Unit 3 – The outputs: Domains of performance***

The key dependent variable of leadership is performance, which is an essential focus and outcome of leadership lacking in most theories on responsible leadership. Performance takes place within the context of the performance system as determined by the constituents (Lynham et al. 2010). Four dimensions of performance form the third unit in the framework and these are

identified as: the system mission and purpose, the work processes, the social sub-systems and the individual performer (Lynham & Chermack 2006).

### **How the system works**

Since the framework operates as a system, it adopts Senge's (2006) explanation that systems function as a whole, and in this situation, all three units are interlinked and a change in one unit will incite a change in at least one other unit. Unit 1 – Considerations of Constituency is appointed as the catalyst unit and interacts between Unit 2, which is attributive and relational and Unit 3, which is associative, hence, outcome focused (Lynham et al. 2010).

Performance takes place within the leadership sub-system boundary, the performance system boundary and the contextual environment boundary. All three are open boundaries of the system and are in constant interaction exchanging feedback and resources. These boundaries suggest that the performance takes place within this space (Lynham & Chermack 2006), which reinforces the systems theory behind the model.

Feedback in systems takes on a broader meaning and signifies, 'any reciprocal flow of influence' (Senge 2006, p.75). When ethical issues about responsibility arises, the assumption of placing the blame on an individual when things go wrong is replaced with the understanding, from a feedback perspective, that everyone shares responsibility for failure as these are generated by the system not a single individual (Senge 2006).

### **Conclusion**

The RLP framework addresses responsible leadership from the performance perspective and thus can be applied to the dilemmas leaders face in today's fast moving and demanding economy where the tension to perform can derail leaders off the virtuous track. The realisation that businesses function as systems enables the understanding that the individual leader is not fully to blame when failure occurs. However, the individual leader is still accountable for his/her decisions and, hence, must uphold a set of good moral values that will guide him/her through the decision-making process.

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