

Contesting Social Responsibilities of Business: Experiences in Context

DEADLINE: 28 February 2022

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INTRODUCTION

The last decade has been marked by massive *contestations* related to the social responsibilities of business, in both the global South and global North (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019). This Special Issue aims to explore the *local and contextualized experiences of social responsibilities* (Karam & Jamali, 2017; Matten & Moon, 2020) and how they are contested (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; McCarthy, Soundararajan & Taylor, 2020; Soundararajan, Spence & Rees, 2018). These include interpersonal, inter-organizational, institutional, ideological, and discursive contestations, among others (e.g. Gutierrez-Huerter et al., 2020; Hamann et al., 2020; Whelan et al., 2009), while emphasizing elements such as the micro-level dynamics of relational work (Girschik, Svystunova & Lysova 2020; Glavas, 2016; Gond & Moser, 2021; Noronha, D’Cruz & Banday, 2020;), conflict (Brand, Blok & Verweij, 2020), tensions (Mitra & Buzzanell, 2017; Nyberg & Wright, 2013), unintended consequences (Banerjee & Jackson, 2017) and power (Shamir, 2005). Our objectives are three-fold. First, we want to re-conceptualize the social responsibilities of business organizations by advancing research using a relational perspective. Second, we seek to explore and bring to the fore experiences of different forms of contestation of these social responsibilities. Third, we aim to highlight the role of context of the social responsibilities of business (Pisani et al., 2017), focusing especially on contestation in overlooked geographic settings and sites of marginalization.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES: EXPERIENCES IN CONTEXT

Social responsibilities are *highly contextualized*. They are governed through a range of traditional institutions (such as states, markets, corporations, professions, families, religions, and communities, see Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury, 2012) (Amaeshi & Idemudia, 2015; Motsei & Nkomo, 2016) and ‘new’ institutions such as multi-stakeholder initiatives and public-private partnerships (de Bakker, Rasche & Ponte, 2019). They are shared by a variety of organizations/workplaces within society, through negotiation and power struggles. As

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social responsibilities of business interact with wider systems of governance, the respective institutions and practices may experience contestation, re-shaping and resistance, but we lack insight into when, where, how, why and by whom. In this Special Issue, we give full consideration to geographic and geo-political contexts and to the role various local actors play in shaping and contesting such responsibilities (Idemudia, 2011). We wish to bring together often disparate and opaque critical perspectives on the impacts and reception of new institutions of social responsibilities which, whilst designed ostensibly to address questions of irresponsibility from perspectives of the global North (e.g. liberal, universal, secular, consensual), also raise questions of responsibility and irresponsibility from counter perspectives (e.g. radical, anti/post-colonial, feminist, intersectional, traditional, alienated, subaltern) (Billo, 2020; Delannon & Raufflet, 2017; Grosser & Moon, 2019; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019). The Special Issue aims to act as an antidote to the bifurcation of these two types of perspectives.

By using the term *social responsibilities of business* we emphasize a relational view of negotiating, organizing and implementing responsibilities towards economic, social, technological and environmental issues across organizations/workplaces, groups and individuals. Thus we see social responsibilities as being in flux, determined by negotiated roles and associated expectations that individuals, groups and organizations/workplaces construct and adopt in relation to other actors. We frame social responsibilities as the division of labour and accountability between and among actors in a particular context embedded within the associated structural conditions, when aiming at some wider societal good. *Corporate* social responsibilities have, to date, dominated the discussions of our topics, with some adjustments according to *small business* social responsibilities (Soundararajan, Jamali & Spence, 2018), *consumer* social responsibilities (Caruana & Chatzidakis, 2014), *employee* social responsibility (Babu, Roeck & Raineri, 2020) as well as the roles of national governments (Kourula et al., 2019; On & Ilieş, 2012), NGOs and grassroots organizations (Chowdhury, Kourula & Siltaoja, 2018) and hybrid organizations (Haigh et al., 2015). Whilst there are distinctions *between* social responsibilities, in this Special Issue, we draw across organizational forms and disciplinary boundaries to capture the concept of social responsibilities in a more useful and cross-cutting way, as well as clarifying distinctive social responsibilities at multiple levels. We draw our boundary around settings where business organizations and practices play a role. We are interested in individuals, organizations and workplaces of all sizes, and more or less formalized groups, including those on the margins, thereby acknowledging perspectives which have been overlooked in management scholarship and have strong potential for theory development.

We focus on *how individuals and groups experience contestations* related to social responsibilities of business in different localities. Conceptions of what social responsibilities are, and who the responsibility bearers are or should be, will also vary among contexts. So we are not prescriptive here other than to signal that we include environmental responsibilities and are otherwise open to propositions and claims reflected in the respective contexts. We incorporate both the public and private sphere in our understanding of social responsibilities, moving beyond the gaze of corporations and beyond the 9-5 and into homes and communities in which businesses operate (Grosser, McCarthy & Kilgour, 2017). Particular attention is given to historically marginalized voices and groups as they engage in the contestation of social responsibilities based on broad

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societal demands (e.g. social justice; gender, caste, ethnic and racial equality; re-centring of hidden history) (McCarthy, 2017). More needs to be known about their experiences and the dynamics of social responsibilities governance in which their action is situated (Roberts & Mir Zulfiqar, 2019). This is an opportunity to shed light on the underexplored roles and perspectives in regards to social relations and social welfare and on the social responsibilities thereby taken or obfuscated (Chrispal, Bapuji & Zietsma, 2020; Hussain & Moriarty, 2018; Muthuri, Moon & Chapple, 2008). This is in contradistinction to many recent governance institutions, notably multi-stakeholder initiatives, which have ostensibly been designed to address social responsibilities globally but have been dominated by corporate organizations (Bair & Palpacuer, 2015; Tornhill, 2019). To date, a largely missing issue has been a concerted examination of the contestation fuelled by the development of social responsibilities institutions (and the organizations, policies, strategies and practices that make up and reflect these) (Banerjee, 2018). In particular, how social responsibilities are deconstructed, evaded, subverted and resisted from different geo-political contextual perspectives has been passed over by much of the mainstream literature.

INDICATIVE QUESTIONS:

- How do individuals, groups and communities from various geographic and geo-political contexts experience the imposition of social responsibilities and practices from businesses of all forms?
- How are social responsibilities and their related institutions and practices transformed, subverted and/or resisted within, across and outside of organizations and workplaces?
- How do intersections of race, ethnicity, class, age, gender, (dis)ability, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, caste, migrant status and so forth reflect and inform social responsibility contestation?
- How are social responsibilities organized and experienced in rarely studied settings, such as informal economies, marginalized or overlooked groups and communities such as First Nations peoples, emerging work settings such as platform/gig work and vis-à-vis technological advance and adoption?
- How can perspectives from representatives of small and medium sized enterprises, social enterprises, national governments, NGOs and grassroots or other types of organizations enhance our understanding of the social responsibilities of business?
- Which theoretical contributions from global South contexts, including outside the field of organization studies, can enhance or challenge theorizing on the social responsibilities of business developed in the global North?
- Under which conditions can theoretical perspectives be useful across contextual boundaries when examining social responsibilities of business?

POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTORS SHOULD NOTE:

This Special Issue is in line with, and strongly supportive of, the [mission and focus](#) of *Human Relations*. Potential contributors are strongly advised to familiarize themselves with the

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Journal's scope and expectations. In line with [Human Relations policy](#) and the objectives of the Special Issue, please note:

- 1) We are committed to pluralism in terms of perspectives and theoretical grounding. We are particularly interested in receiving submissions from and about marginalized voices and contexts.
- 2) We are seeking papers which address the social relations in and around work and workplaces – across the levels of immediate personal relationships, organizations and their processes, and wider political and economic systems.
- 3) We are keen to receive submissions from a critical social science perspective which challenge orthodoxy, engage critically across disciplines where relevant, and engage critically with practical and policy implications.
- 4) We invite papers which address the interstices and linkages between work and the 'micro' (immediate relationships between people), the 'meso' (organizations and workplaces and their rules, processes and structures) and the 'macro' (the wider economy and society).
- 5) Conceptual or empirical papers are equally welcome.
 - a. Rigorously executed research following any social science method is welcome in empirical papers, not least multi-level or longitudinal studies. Papers using all kinds of qualitative methods are encouraged.
 - b. Conceptual or theoretical papers which make a novel contribution are encouraged but should be in line with the Call for Papers' focus on contextual understanding.
- 6) The guest editors will select a number of papers to be included in the Special Issue, but other papers submitted in this process may be considered for publication in a regular issue of *Human Relations* if the rejection is owing to fit with the Special Issue.

DEADLINES AND PAPER DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP:

Special Issue workshop: We will hold a paper development workshop to allow interested contributors to receive feedback on an early version of their manuscript. The workshop will be held virtually on Thursday 16th September 2021. Participation in the workshop is no guarantee of acceptance of the paper for the special issue, neither is it a requirement for consideration of a paper. Application to the workshop: please send an extended abstract of 2000 to 3000 words (including references and appendices) by Monday 21st June 2021 to contestingSR@gmail.com.

To be considered for this special issue, submissions must fit with the aim and scope of Human Relations. Papers should be prepared in accordance with the journal's [submission guidelines](#). Full-length papers should be submitted through the journal's online submission system: <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/hr> between February 1st and 28th 2022. Please make sure to tick the box "Special Issue" when submitted, and also to indicate in your cover letter that the submission is intended for this Special Issue. Please direct questions about

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the submission process, or any administrative matter, to the Editorial Office: humanrelationsjournal@tavinstitute.org. Questions about expectations, requirements, and the appropriateness of a topic should be directed to the guest editors of the special issue. The Guest Editors are also open to discussing initial ideas for papers, and can be contacted by email:

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