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# EDUCATIONAL SOCIAL INNOVATION: RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP MOOC IN CHINA

## 教育领域的社会创新 - 中国的责任领导力慕课

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### ABSTRACT

It is widely acknowledged that the public perception of responsible leaders and their social enterprises requires that emerging entrepreneurs not only operate a financially sound business, but also take responsibility for the environment and community. In order to promote responsible entrepreneurship a “Massive Open Online Course” (or simply “MOOC” for short) to include responsible leadership was launched as an innovative tool to guide both undergraduates and business people who intend to start their own businesses. However, establishing a sense of responsibility is a challenge. The challenge is heightened by new demands raised by both government and society for responsible business behaviour and the Chinese traditional thinking that a person should be responsible for his words and behaviours with a view to benefit the community and the common good.

### THE PRESENT SITUATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN CHINA

According to a report issued by the Ministry of Education, there were 7.49 million graduates in 2015, a more than fivefold increase over the past 15 years, with 1.3 percent determined to start up their own businesses. In light of this, more graduates believe that the degree certificate is no longer a master key to society and life assurance.

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They are eager for more practical advice to explore the way to create wealth, than dogmatism and earning credits.

In this context, Premier Li Keqiang pointed out at the Annual Meeting of World Economic Forum of Davos that “there are 1.3 billion Chinese people with a 900-million workforce, over 70 million enterprises and self-employed businesses” (Li, 2015). In order to promote growth in employment and new businesses, the government would fully support and encourage “mass entrepreneurship and innovation, which was recognised as a key role for job creation

of China in 1978, the reforms aimed for the emancipation and development of social productive force and improvement for China. Following Deng Xiaoping (1985), the reform was summarised as “letting some people get rich first”, which guided the whole reform process towards the aim of common prosperity. Deng’s reform plans did facilitate and encourage a group of business people to prosper quickly. However, the potential risks were ignored such as the impact of negative externalities, or taking responsibility towards immediate stakeholders beyond customers.

Responsible leadership requires a diligence of duty, accountability for a sustainable business, legal compliance and integrity management by working effectively with a committed team, reliable partners whilst building loyal customers.

can provide constant source of creativity and wealth” (Li, 2015). Following his speech, the Chinese central government published the *Implementation Opinions on Deepening Reform of Innovative Entrepreneurship Education at Higher Institution* in May 2015 which aimed to motivate college graduates to start up their own businesses and took the first step in allowing students to enrol in entrepreneurship by granting a one-year absence from college or university.

The ultimate goal of the Chinese government is to seek effective ways to foster innovative skills which will enable graduates to earn money to support their families and to contribute significantly to economic growth. What’s more, the emerging generation is seen as the mainstay of China’s future and, despite media characterisation of their maverick behaviours and unrealistic expectations, the new generation is ready to explore a totally different life and career journey than their parents did.

#### RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP IN CHINA

When the concept of Chinese Economic Reform was initiated by the Communist Party

The GRLI’s 2005 founding report, *Globally Responsible Leadership: A Call for Engagement* (EFMD, 2005), called for responsible leadership worldwide and increased public awareness of the need for responsible leadership. “Global responsible leaders” were described in the Report as a “leader who commits to real engagement and takes ownership of the consequences of their behaviours, not only economically, but socially and environmentally as well in business operation” (EFMD, 2005, p.5).

The “Chinese Dream” was proposed by President Xi Jinping for the first time in 2012 with a purpose for “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (Xi, 2012). At the same time, anti-corruption campaigns and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) requirements were repeatedly emphasised from the top to the bottom level of government to demonstrate the government’s determination against unethical and illegal business behaviours. As one of the chief driving forces of social progress, explained by the central government, innovative ideas would not only promote coordinated and steady development, but would also contribute to the operation of a healthy market economy.

Business leaders today face more severe challenges than ever before: ecological and environmental degradation, financial crisis, poverty, famine and business fraud. However, an increasing number of business leaders have successfully explored innovative solutions to social problems and many have established social enterprises to run their businesses with a social mission. In the *White Book of Chinese CSR Reports 2015*, 1703 corporate social responsibility reports were published covering 47 industries.

Jack Ma, the Chairman of Alibaba Group, has said that the responsibility of an entrepreneur or business leader is connected with personal morality, values and a sense of ownership, rather

in developing enterprise as well as seeking to alleviate social problems such as human rights, gender equality, working conditions and poverty.

The concept of moral leadership is frequently mentioned when the actions and decision making of a business leader are adjudged against a sense of right and wrong. Confucianism promotes five moral principles: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and integrity and business leaders may be viewed as being irresponsible or immoral when they are judged to have failed to follow these principles. One common claim of moral failure relates to a business which takes advantage of an unregulated externality - a cost or benefit that affects the

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than just earning money. “Because money will become a kind of social resource someday and entrepreneurs are chosen to contribute to a better society and the leadership is the consciousness and ability of the leader who has not only the quality of professional manager, but also a sense of responsibility” (Ma, 2015).

Song Zhang works as the Managing Director of ThoughtWorks China, an international software company that has a tri-pillar corporate culture, including: 1) sustainable business; 2) software excellence and 3) social justice. Zhang believes that “leadership” encompasses a “servant spirit” that “a business leader has to empower and encourage employees to behave on their own behalf, meanwhile, take responsibility for risk control” (Zhang, 2016).

Responsible leadership requires a diligence of duty, accountability for a sustainable business, legal compliance and integrity management by working effectively with a committed team, reliable partners whilst building loyal customers. Responsible leadership thus refers to a broader scope of responsibility that business leaders have

natural environment or the community – which results from its activities, such as pollution. By contrast, a responsible leader does care about these traditional virtues and constantly tries to work and live in a way to minimise negative impacts.

#### MOOC INNOVATION IN CHINA

Universities and colleges are increasingly providing the skills and knowledge to becoming a successful leader that meet the needs and interests of undergraduates. However, a recent report showed that only 12 Chinese university business schools were certified by The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business in May 2015 which requires that a business ethics course be taught to students. For instance, the University of International Business and Economics, one of the key universities with economics and management as its core academic areas of expertise, only offers business ethics as an elective course to undergraduates during their third and fourth year.

Many educational institutions have turned their attention to an innovative learning mode as an alternative to classroom teaching and the “Massive Open Online Course” (MOOC) has been chosen for its high flexibility in participations and study time. Following the popularisation of MOOCs, which were first recognised by China in 2012, a booming number of MOOCs in natural science, art, information technology and business administration were developed by distinguished universities which empowered thousands of participants to select and develop their own learning preferences without geographical restriction.

MOOCs have the advantage of flexibility and diversity of topics to encourage audiences to learn from difficulties and work through problems by promoting innovative thinking and active questioning both of interviewees and directly to MOOC participants.

The *Responsible Leadership* MOOC series was created with the aim to impart professional skills and knowledge to audiences and to guide them to understand the specific role and responsibility of being business leaders in practice. Compared with traditional disciplines, the *Responsible Leadership* MOOC series not only focuses on the development of both skills and interests, but also emphasises practical teaching. For instance, an increasing number of MOOC producers have begun to carry out contests, to enable students with strong performance to stand a better chance of securing an internship or a job in well-known businesses. Other producers attempt to engage more entrepreneurs and business leaders in the teaching plan and offer online and offline forum to communicate with them directly. With constant learning, audiences are expected to put what they have learnt into practice, respond to challenges in day-to-day

operations, and learn lessons from successes and failures.

As one of the pioneer MOOCs in China, the *Responsible Entrepreneurship* MOOC was co-produced by Beijing Rothlin International Management Consulting Co. Ltd. (Rothlin Ltd.) and School of Distance Education of the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing (EUIBE) in 2015. There are now four MOOCs in the series which are accessible on the UIBE Online platform with a fifth MOOC to be launched later in 2017. The series is designed to increase awareness of the need for responsible leadership in support of sustainability, financial transparency, responsibility and integrity, rather than to win competition and market share “by hook or by crook”.

In the first MOOC of the series, *Responsible Entrepreneurship*, the audience is shown how to start their business by turning a business idea into a business plan. The second MOOC helps participants to reflect on how best to address a variety of ethical dilemmas, such as anti-corruption, environmental challenges and the model of “green construction”. The third MOOC is about the purpose and vocation of the business and explores the relationship how business success can be combined with a vision for the common good, a purposeful role in the world through finding fulfilment in one’s work. The fourth MOOC focuses on a number of management challenges based on big company crises in Asia dealing with how management should best respond to rebuild stakeholder trust after a crisis. The fifth MOOC is focussed on cross cultural negotiation and will be available in late 2017. The aim of this MOOC is to engage participants in the dynamics of a negotiation with a greater understanding and respect for cultural differences in negotiation. Audiences are encouraged to explore and develop their own leadership style through learning and acquiring skills and special abilities to become good business leaders.

A distinctive theme of the *Responsible Leadership* MOOCs include face-to-face interviews with outstanding business leaders and entrepreneurs, senior professionals in corporate

social responsibility and business ethicists to share their experience, advice and insight on leadership and best business practice. The aim has been to include a variety of different opinions from people with different business and cultural backgrounds to demonstrate that responsible leadership is a realistic and admirable business practice. The audience is provoked to reflect on what they have learnt and to further consider different possible styles and responses to challenging situations.

The Rothlin MOOC team still have a long way to become a significant influence in educational social innovation and to develop the *Responsible Leadership* MOOC series to better attract participants. Questions for future development include: How might the *Responsible Leadership* MOOCs reach out to more business people? How might the links be made to address practice? What aspects do the producers need to improve in order to maximise the learning outcomes and to offer a clear advantage to audiences?

## SUMMARY

Despite the potential risks and challenges that MOOCs face, MOOCs can play a supporting role that facilitate classroom teaching. Traditional teaching methods may help to cultivate thinking ability and lay the foundation for students, especially junior students, while MOOCs have the advantage of flexibility and diversity of topics to encourage audiences to learn from difficulties and work through problems by promoting innovative thinking and active questioning both of interviewees and directly to MOOC participants.

The *Responsible Leadership* MOOC series aims to set out responsible business policies and practices in a way that shows the benefits of responsible leadership practice to leaders and their organisations. The possibility for MOOCs that advance responsible leadership is that they can promote innovation and entrepreneurship and play a leading role in business education.

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