

Interplay Among Responsible Leadership, Corporate Social Responsibility Perspective and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour Towards Environment: A Study of the Indian IT Sector

FIIB Business Review

1–14

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International Business

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DOI: 10.1177/23197145231220428

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Abstract

The environmental degradation and consequent scarcity of resources have compelled organizations to implement strategies and policies that prioritize the attainment of a sustainable environment. The significance of employees' pro-environment behaviour is increasingly recognized and is being promoted by organizations that focus on preserving the environment. Considering the importance of pro-environment behaviour, this study investigates the relationship among responsible leadership, corporate social responsibility (CSR) perspective and organizational citizenship behaviour towards environment (OCBE). This employee-level study adopted social cognitive theory to examine the context–behaviour framework. The data are collected from information technology (IT) professionals using a stratified sampling technique. The analysis of 503 respondents using PLS-SEM concludes that responsible leadership and CSR perspective have a positive relationship with OCBE. The study also confirms the partial mediating role of the CSR perspective in the relationship between responsible leadership and OCBE. The study identifies organizational-level contextual factors such as responsible leadership and CSR perspective that promote an environment-friendly behaviour among employees, i.e., OCBE. The paper extends the context–behaviour framework literature and highlights the benefits of OCBE in the organization.

Keywords

Responsible leadership, corporate social responsibility perspective, organizational citizenship behaviour towards environment, IT professionals, social cognitive theory

Introduction

The pro-environment behaviour of employees is gaining enormous importance and is encouraged in many organizations that are inclined to preserve the environment (Baldassari et al., 2023). The environment's deterioration and resource crisis have forced organizations to adopt strategies and policies focused on a sustainable environment (Biswas et al., 2023; Cheema et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2021; Li et al., 2022). Pro-environmental strategies must be adopted in industries that have high carbon footprints,

such as the information technology (IT) industry. The IT industry uses a large amount of energy and disposes of large amounts of e-waste as IT-enabled systems have a short life span, making it crucial to implement pro-environment policies in such an industry (Muñoz-Pascual et al., 2021; Ojo, 2022; Ojo et al., 2019). Big IT giants have shown their commitment to protect the environment by adopting systems that are aimed at waste management, conservation and recycling. The adoption of these sustainable initiatives is highlighted in their annual reports, such as the 'Dow Jones Sustainability World

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Index', the 'Sustainability Report' and the 'Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Report'. For the successful implementation of such sustainable strategies, the role of employees is crucial. Thus, the need for promoting employees' pro-environment behaviour has attracted researchers' attention from both an academic and industry perspective (Robertson & Barling, 2013, 2017).

The pro-environment behaviour of employees is dependent on one's values, attitudes, beliefs and life orientation (Baldassari et al., 2023; Norton et al., 2015; Unsworth et al., 2013). This pro-environment behaviour demonstrated at the workplace is termed organizational citizenship behaviour towards environment (OCBE). 'OCBE refers to the individual and discretionary social actions that are not directly acknowledged by the formal reward system and that lead to more effective environmental management by organizations' (Boiral and Paille 2012; Daily et al., 2009). Previous research has focused on finding the antecedents of OCBE, which primarily focuses on individual differences (Islam et al., 2021; Molla et al., 2014). Apart from individual differences, OCBE is also affected by organizational factors (Amrutha & Geetha, 2020; Paul et al., 2019). Researchers argued that the CSR perspective plays a crucial role in motivating employees to adopt OCBE (Cheema et al., 2020; He et al., 2021). The CSR perspective refers to the employees' perspective regarding the organization's policies and principles aimed at achieving its sustainable goals (Székely & Knirsch, 2005). Existing studies emphasized the independent effect of the CSR perspective on the OCBE of employees (Tian & Robertson, 2019). In practice, CSR's effect is amplified when organizations adopt environment-friendly strategies that focus on embracing an environment to facilitate OCBE (Sahar et al., 2023). Javed et al. (2021) said that responsible leadership has a positive relationship with CSR. 'Responsible leadership is defined as a form of leadership that requires a leader to behave morally conscious towards the stakeholders inside and outside of the corporation, manifesting appropriate decision-making, trust building, sustainable development and green action choices' (Zhao & Zhou, 2019). For developing an environment-friendly environment, leadership plays a very crucial role in an organization (Deb et al., 2022). The literature emphasized the role of responsible leadership as an antecedent of OCBE (Han & Wang, 2019). Although the role of responsible leadership in promoting OCBE is examined, the literature lacks the explanation of how responsible leadership influences OCBE (Tian & Suo, 2021). Thus, there is a need to investigate the underlining mechanism of the CSR perspective that strengthens the impact of responsible leadership on employees' green behaviour, i.e., OCBE in the present case (He et al., 2021).

There is a need to examine the effect of responsible leadership on OCBE. That is because, first, it will add to the current knowledge on the outcomes of responsible leadership and provide insights for organizations to

foster responsible leaders (Zhang et al., 2023). Second, examining the antecedents of OCBE has important practical implications, especially in service industries (Han & Wang, 2019; He et al. 2021; Renwick et al., 2013; Tian & Suo, 2021). Third, the examination of the underlying mechanism of how the relationship among responsible leadership, CSR perspective (contextual factors) and OCBE (behaviour) works in the context-behaviour framework, is limited in developing nations as compared to developed ones (He et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2023). Therefore, in such a context, it is important to examine the interplay between responsible leadership, CSR perspective and OCBE.

In order to fill these gaps, the study develops a mediation model that will examine what and how OCBE is influenced in an organization. The model uses the social cognitive theory that focuses on the interactional effects among external environmental factors, individual's cognition and behaviour (Bandura, 1986). According to Bandura (1986), the central proposition in social cognitive theory states that an external environment factor (responsible behaviour) may exert a direct effect on an individual's cognitive (CSR perspective), which could shape employees' behaviour (OCBE). Hence, the study argues that responsible leadership may influence employees' cognition and behaviours (Han et al., 2019; He et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2023). Given that leaders' behaviour may affect their followers through daily interaction if these followers are led by a responsible leader, employees' CSR perspective will be enhanced, which in turn, embraces OCBE. This focuses on investigating what factors impact the behaviour of an employee in an organization. Besides these, the study further explores the boundary condition that has the potential to modify the effect of responsible leadership on OCBE via the CSR perspective as a mediator using a context-behaviour framework in the IT sector. The social cognitive theory emphasizes that individual characteristics may impact the mechanism of how environmental factors (responsible leadership in this case) affect an individual's behaviour (OCBE) via cognitive process (CSR perspective) (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Therefore, the study investigates how individual perception (CSR perspective) in the organizational context may act as a mediator in the relationship between responsible leadership and OCBE (employees' behaviour).

The study has several contributions and enhances the current body of knowledge on responsible leadership and OCBE. First, the study extends the literature on responsible leadership by investigating the relationship of responsible leadership with OCBE. We add to this literature using social cognitive mechanisms. When environment-friendly practices are supported by informal relations between employees and managers, it may strengthen the influence of responsible leadership on OCBE. It is useful in extending the knowledge of the antecedents of OCBE. Second, the study extends the literature on the relationship of the CSR perspective with OCBE. The study examines what

employees' perspectives have to offer in building green behaviour among fellow employees. It will examine how one's cognitive process affects the other employee's behaviour and how employees learn from each other. Third, based on social cognitive theory, the study builds a mediation model that elucidates the underlying mechanism of how responsible leadership may influence OCBE via the CSR perspective. According to social cognitive theory, if organizational contextual factors (responsible leadership) and individual cognitive (CSR perspective) are present in an organization, employees may learn pro-environment behaviour (OCBE) from their supervisors and colleagues. It will increase employees' inclination to participate in pro-environment initiatives (Han et al. 2019; He et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2023). Therefore, the study identifies the CSR perspective as a potential mediator that strengthens the relationship between responsible leadership and OCBE. This helps in understanding how informal relationships in an organization affect the complexity of policy implementation and organizational formal strategies (Channa et al., 2021; Cheema et al., 2020). Fourth, the study adds to the current body of knowledge by investigating the boundary constraint that responsible leadership may have on one's behaviour (OCBE) via the CSR perspective using a context-behaviour framework and offers the applicability of the framework beyond developed nations and a few specific sectors.

Thus, the study investigates the interplay among CSR perspective, responsible leadership and OCBE; and the CSR perspective as a mediator on the relationship between responsible leadership and OCBE using a context-behaviour framework. The study tests the framework in an emerging IT sector that remains elusive. The remainder of the paper includes theoretical perspective, literature, methods, analysis and discussion.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Theoretical Perspective

Social cognitive theory, proposed by Albert Bandura, is a comprehensive framework for understanding, predicting and changing human behaviour. The theory postulates that the process of learning takes place within a social framework, characterized by a dynamic and mutually influential interplay between the individual, environment and behaviours (Bandura, 1986). It is based on the idea that individuals learn by observing others in their social environment. This theoretical framework places significant emphasis on the notion of observational learning, whereby individuals acquire knowledge and skills through seeing the behaviours of others and the subsequent consequences of those behaviours. According to this theory, individuals learn behaviours by observing others. The theory emphasizes the importance of observing and modelling the

behaviours, attitudes and emotional reactions of others. This observational learning is not a purely imitative process but involves active cognitive processing (Bandura, 2001).

The theory assumes that behaviour, cognitive factors (such as knowledge, perception, expectations and attitudes) and environmental influences have a bidirectional impact on one another (Bandura, 1986). It also assumes that people can adopt behaviour by observing others. It also assumes that the individual's behaviour is dependent on the consequences that one expects as a result of their behaviour. It also assumes that self-regulation and self-efficacy also play a role in influencing one's behaviour in the context of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1991). In an organizational context, employees observe the behaviours of their leaders and peers, and these observations influence their behaviours. When leaders and peers demonstrate behaviours that support environmental sustainability, employees are likely to learn and imitate these behaviours, leading to increased OCBE.

Moreover, the theory suggests that the social environment plays a critical role in influencing behaviour. In an organization, the social environment is shaped by factors such as leadership style, organizational culture and policies. When the social environment is supportive of environmental sustainability (e.g., through responsible leadership and a strong CSR perspective), it can encourage employees to engage in OCBE. In conclusion, the theory provides a useful framework for understanding OCBE (Yadav et al., 2016). It suggests that by shaping the social environment and serving as role models (responsible leaders), it will impact the cognitive process of employees (CSR perspective). This will influence employees to exhibit pro-environment behaviour that supports environmental sustainability.

According to this theory, responsible leaders fulfil their role as exemplars (an external effect) whose behaviours exert an influence on the behaviour of their followers. Individuals who follow leaders tend to observe their actions and subsequently imitate their behaviour (Zhang et al., 2023). The daily interaction of leaders with their followers and their behaviour while making decisions directly affect followers' perception and behaviour. This suggests that employees acquire knowledge not only through formal communication but also through informal encounters with their colleagues. The influence of responsible leadership extends to an individual's cognitive processes, hence affecting their CSR perspective (Channa et al., 2021; Javed et al., 2021).

Research also suggests that responsible leadership not only promotes the implementation of environmentally friendly policies but also exerts an informal personal influence on colleagues to demonstrate OCBE (behaviour) (He et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2023). The study uses social cognitive theory to support the context-behaviour framework as leadership may be viewed as a vital external environmental factor, that influences

followers' behaviour (He et al., 2021). Therefore, it may be argued that the CSR perspective acts as a mediator in the relationship between responsible behaviour and OCBE.

CSR Perspective and OCBE

CSR perspective refers to the employees' perspective on policies and principles that an organization adopts in order to achieve its sustainable goals (Székely & Knirsch, 2005). The adoption of CSR policies within an organization reflects the belief that it is focused on attaining sustainable development targets with regard to social, economic and environmental aspects (Afsar et al., 2020; Deb et al., 2022). The CSR initiatives of an organization depict its commitment and values towards the environment and society as a whole. The CSR perspective reflects how an organization perceives its role in society beyond its business operations and profit-making objectives from an employee's perspective.

To attain sustainable goals, organizations require employees to behave in an environment-friendly way, i.e., OCBE (Su & Swanson, 2019). When organizations implement their comprehensive CSR policies, they demonstrate their strong environmental values and employees' perspectives of CSR increase. This increased CSR perspective will motivate employees to embrace OCBE more efficiently and effectively. As CSR perspective acts as a benchmark for perceptions of organizational ethics and environmental conservation policy, thus creating an atmosphere that encourages employees to depict OCBE behaviour (Su & Swanson, 2019). As per the social cognitive theory, this CSR perspective will act as a cognitive process that will change the behaviour of employees. It is believed that organizations with high levels of CSR commitment take actions that help conserve the environment, reduce waste and benefit society as a whole (Kim et al., 2019). This commitment of organizations fosters employees to behave in a more sustainable and environment-friendly manner, embracing OCBE within employees (Afsar et al., 2020; Tian & Robertson, 2019). The CSR perspective will act as a context factor in the context-behaviour framework, which will lead to OCBE (behaviour). The CSR perspective can be both positive and negative. A positive CSR perspective implies that an organization actively participates in activities oriented towards society and the environment. The positive activities can be the adoption of sustainable business practices or promoting diversity and inclusion in the workforce. On the other hand, a negative CSR perspective implies that an organization is not fulfilling its social and environmental responsibilities. Few researchers argue that CSR may have a negative effect on OCBE, as it may lead to mental and emotional stress by increasing workload. As per the literature on green behaviour, the CSR perspective is considered to have a positive relationship as it is stimulated by responsible leadership (He et al., 2021).

Thus, it is crucial to investigate the relationship between CSR perspective and OCBE.

H_1 : CSR perspective has a positive relationship with OCBE.

Responsible Leadership and OCBE

OCBE refers to the discretionary behaviour of employees, which is not explicitly part of the formal reward system. To encourage such behaviour, organizations must adopt the responsible leadership style, as employees with high individualism need intrinsic motivators rather than extrinsic motivators, such as the relationship with their managers or supervisors (Luu, 2019). Responsible leadership assumes that leaders have strong beliefs and values that motivate them to achieve sustainable development goals by taking social responsibility for waste reduction, pollution control and resource management (Han et al., 2019; Tian & Suo, 2021; Xiao et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2023; Zhao & Zhou, 2019). As per the social cognitive theory, responsible leadership will act as an environmental factor that will have a direct influence on the behaviour of employees within an organization, if followers observe their supervisors to behave responsibly.

Responsible leadership utilizes the informal manager-employee relationship to increase OCBE among employees (Han et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2023; Zhao & Zhou, 2019). Responsible leaders can use their power to motivate employees to participate in environment-friendly actions (Robertson & Barling, 2013). The study examines responsible leadership as an organizational context factor that will impact the pro-environment behaviour of employees. Responsible leaders align organizational goals with sustainable goals, which depicts their commitment not only to financial goals but also to environmental goals. This environmentally conscious behaviour of leaders compels followers to follow the same path and values (Graves et al., 2019; Priyankara et al., 2018).

H_2 : Responsible leadership has a positive relationship with OCBE.

Responsible Leadership and CSR Perspective

Responsible leadership plays a crucial role in effectively embracing CSR guidelines and strategies within an enterprise (Dong & Zhong, 2022). The establishment of a social consciousness environment and the practice of responsible leadership are conducive to enhancing productivity. This environment will help in increasing the business's active engagement by considering the genuine interests of its stakeholders, including employees and customers. Responsible leaders will set examples by behaving in an environment-friendly manner. As per the social cognitive

theory, responsible leadership will act as an external environment factor that will build the cognitive process of employees (CSR perspective) through observation. Responsible leaders are known to establish unambiguous guidelines and ethical principles for their subordinates and encourage socially responsible conduct by incentivizing pro-environmental actions (Afsar et al., 2016).

According to existing literature, a company is more inclined to participate in CSR activities when it has a strong leadership foundation. This is due to the fact that leaders who are committed to such practices are more likely to implement them with conviction and endorse initiatives that improve the CSR perspective and the company's overall performance (He et al., 2021). Therefore, organizations must ensure that their leaders are responsible for improving the CSR perspective.

H₃: Responsible leadership has a positive relationship with the CSR perspective.

CSR Perspective as a Mediator Between Responsible Leadership and OCBE

CSR outlines policies for sustainable growth and shows commitment to the various stakeholders' interests. As per the social cognitive theory, when such commitment is portrayed, this will affect the behaviour of employees. According to Cheema et al. (2020), social identity could be a way to understand how the CSR perspective affects people. However, social identity research has mostly focused on how people see themselves and their identities. Kim et al. (2019) found that there is a strong link between behaviour and organizational strategies. Moreover, the CSR perspective also has an indirect effect on how well workers do their jobs (Robertson & Barling, 2013). So, it is important to understand how the CSR perspective affects the environment-friendly behaviour of employees with regard to the context-behaviour framework.

Responsible leaders care about protecting the environment and take steps to do so. According to Kim et al. (2019), organizations and their leaders play a crucial role in promoting environmentally responsible behaviour among employees by serving as exemplars and role models. People think that these organizational settings have a big effect on green behaviour and, in turn, help employees do their jobs better. According to Afsar et al. (2016), responsible leadership offers a framework for fostering environmental-friendly behaviour that is beneficial for the planet. By fulfilling social responsibilities, leaders enhance employees' CSR perspective. This is supported by Voegtlin et al. (2012), who found that responsible leadership inspires employees to actively engage in CSR activities. As the CSR perspective promotes 'pro-environmental norms, values and attitudes among employees' that are endorsed and anticipated by the organization, it has a profound effect on one's behaviour (Sahar et al., 2023). This perspective inspires employees to actively participate in socially responsible activities, thereby enhancing their OCBEs. Consequently, this fosters a culture of sustainability and motivates employees to participate in environmentally responsible behaviours that are socially acceptable (Norton et al., 2015; Székely & Knirsch, 2005). Thus, the impact of responsible leadership on OCBE via the CSR perspective needs deeper understanding (Han et al., 2019).

The theory states that organizational factors have a direct and indirect effect on the behaviour of employees by providing a controlled environment. This environment is developed by adopting organizational-level strategies and policies that will motivate employees to behaviour in an expected manner. The present discourse is grounded in the context-behaviour theory, which posits that organizational contexts, including the CSR perspective and responsible leadership, exert an influence on the green behaviour of individual employees. Leroy et al. (2018) explained that factors such as CSR perspective and responsible leadership can directly improve how green employees behave at work. Figure 1 represents the conceptual model of the study.

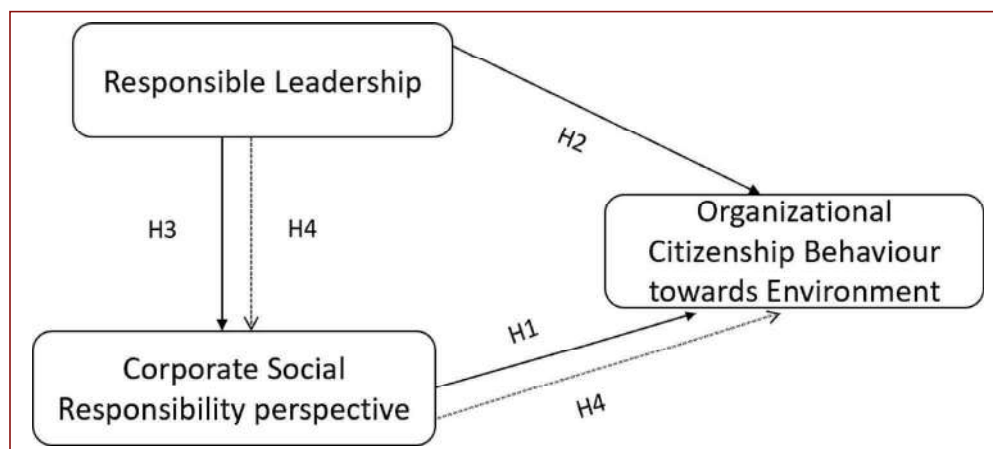


Figure 1. Conceptual Model.

Note: —, direct relationship; - - - - -, mediation relationship.

H_4 : The CSR perspective mediates the relationship between responsible leadership and OCBE.

Methodology

The data were collected using a survey questionnaire. The study uses structured measures with high levels of reliability and validity. The questionnaire was distributed between November 2021 and January 2023 among 700 employees working in Hyderabad, Mumbai, Pune, Bangalore and Delhi NCR. The study adopted multistage sampling to collect the data from the representative sample. In stage 1, the stratified sampling technique (Ahmed et al., 2020) was used where employees working in major five IT hubs of India from 'India's Top Tech Cities' were considered (Data Quest, 2020). The employees who are working in IT companies that have employed more than 500 employees and a turnover of more than 50 crore were considered for further selection as these organizations will have the bandwidth to adopt sustainable practices. Names of companies were extracted using prowess and financial reports. The number of companies selected from Hyderabad, Mumbai, Pune, Bangalore and Delhi NCR were 17, 22, 9, 33 and 24, respectively. In stage 2, the purposive sampling technique is used to reach the sample of the study. The HR managers and respondents were contacted through LinkedIn, E-mail and personal connections. The study gathered a total of 540 responses, with 37 of them being excluded due to incomplete responses. This resulted in a final sample size of 503 valid questionnaires.

The IT employees were selected for three reasons. First, the IT sector is among the top organizations to be ranked in the Dow Jones Sustainability Index. The IT sector consumes a huge amount of resources; so this sector holds a large amount of scope for implementing green initiatives. These organizations have invested a huge amount in terms of CSR or sustainable practices, and act as responsible entities in society. Second, the IT sector is expanding at an exponential level, providing employment to a large workforce (Sun, 2022). If this workforce embraces green behaviour, it can lead to an enhanced awareness level regarding the crucial urgency of embracing pro-environment behaviour among individuals. In the long run, the implementation of such pro-environmental practices is expected to yield mutually beneficial outcomes for both the workforce and the company. Third, IT companies, being a part of society, will act as role models for other industries in embracing environment-friendly behaviour.

The study sample consisted of 67% male participants and 33% female participants. The study found that the participants had a mean age of 27 years, an average job tenure of 3 years, and the majority of them, specifically 455 individuals (90.5%), held a graduation or master's degree. The sample population consisted of 503 respondents,

out of whom 139 (27.6%) lived in Mumbai, 141 (28%) in Delhi NCR, 109 (21.7%) in Bangalore, 69 (13.7%) in Hyderabad and 45 (8.9%) in Pune. More than 50% (65%) of participants were working at the junior level followed by 27.6% at the middle and 7.3% at the senior level. We consider demographic factors such as gender, age, location and tenure as control variables (Singh & Bamel, 2020; Su & Swanson, 2019).

Study Measures

Responsible Leadership

Responsible leadership is measured using the Voegtlin et al. (2012) scale. The items are 'My direct supervisor demonstrates awareness of the relevant stakeholder claims', 'My direct supervisor considers the consequences of decisions for the affected stakeholders', and 'My direct supervisor involves the affected stakeholders in the decision-making process'. Participants' responses were recorded on a seven-point Likert scale.

CSR Perspective

The CSR perspective was measured using the Turker (2009) scale. The sample items are 'Our company makes investment to create a better life for future generations', 'Our company implements special programs to minimize its negative impact on the natural environment' and 'Our company policies encourage the employees to develop their skills and careers'. Participants' responses were recorded on a seven-point Likert scale.

OCBE

OCBE was measured using Boiral and Paille (2012) scale. The items are 'During work, I weigh my actions before doing something that could affect the environment', 'I voluntarily conduct environmental actions and initiatives in my daily activities at work', and 'I stay informed about my environmental initiatives of the organization'. Participants' responses were recorded on a seven-point Likert scale.

Common Method Bias (CBM)

CMB, also known as common method bias, is a significant issue that researchers need to address in survey-based studies (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Schwarz et al., 2017). The concept of CMB pertains to the extent of covariance observed among the measured items in a study, which can be attributed to the fact that the data were obtained from a single source (Hair et al., 2014; Podsakoff et al., 2003). Efforts were implemented to ensure the identity and confidentiality of the participants. The participants were given explicit and comprehensive guidance to assist them

in successfully completing the survey (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Reio, 2010; Schwarz et al., 2017). Furthermore, the single-factor test of Harman (1976) was conducted in order to determine CMB. The exploratory phase encompassed the inclusion of all 14 things. The study employed factor analysis, specifically utilizing principal component analysis with varimax rotation, to examine the data. The exploratory endeavour factor analysis procedure yielded three factors, with the first factor explaining 32% of the variance, which is lower than the cut-off of 40% (Babin et al., 2016). Additionally, the variance inflation factor (VIF) test was employed to assess the presence of multicollinearity among the components. According to Hair et al. (2019), a VIF score exceeding 5 may potentially indicate the presence of CBM. Nevertheless, all constructs in our dataset exhibited VIF values below the threshold of 5 (Table 2). Thus, we infer that there were no significant concerns regarding CBM in our dataset.

Data Analysis

The proposed model is analysed in PLS-SEM software as it offers a more comprehensive and accurate measurement of the paths of a model (Hair et al., 2019; Legate et al., 2023). Figure 2 represents the model that is empirically tested.

Table 1 represents the values of ‘Cronbach alpha (α), composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE)’ that are in an acceptable range (Hair et al., 2017) along with the mean, standard deviation and correlation (r). Also, the loading values of all items in Table 2 are above 0.6 (Hair et al., 2019). Thus, the model fulfils the reliability and convergent validity criteria. As the VIF values are below 5, the sample does not have a multicollinearity issue (Hair et al., 2019). To measure the discriminant validity, Fornell–Larcker (FL) criterion is found to be more accurate than HTMT, so the paper has considered FL criteria (Henseler et al., 2015). Table 3 represents that the model fulfils the FL criteria as the highlighted values are maximum in their respective rows and columns. Hence, the measurement model is reliable and validated (Hair et al., 2019).

The structural model measures the model fit and performs path coefficient analysis. The model is bootstrapped using 5,000 resamples to measure the coefficient of determination (R^2) and effect sizes (f^2) from Table 4 (Hair et al., 2019). Table 3 represents the model fit where the SRMR value is close to 0.07 (<0.08) (Hair et al., 2019), the goodness-of-fit (GOF) value is more than 0.68 (>0.36) (Tenenhaus et al., 2004; Wetzels et al., 2009), NFI values lie between 0 and 1 (0.78), RMSEA <0.05 (Browne & Cudeck, 1992), CMIN/

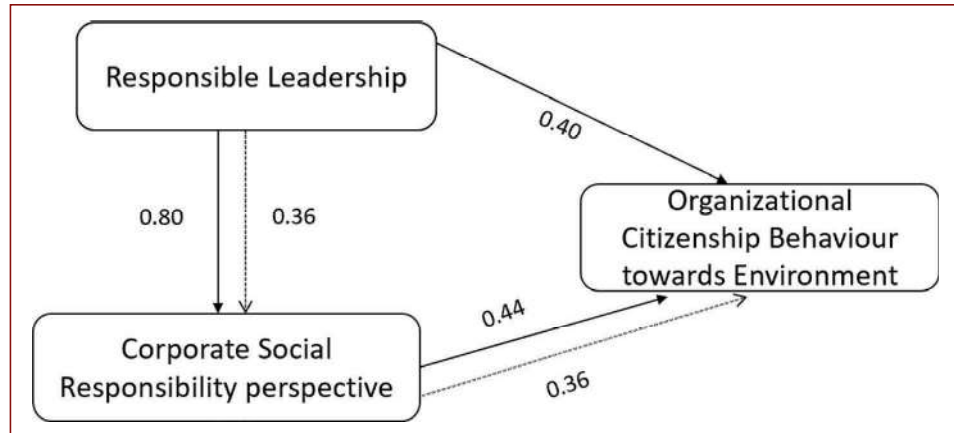


Figure 2 Empirical Results of the Model Tested.

Source: Survey data.

Note: —, direct relationship, ----- mediation relationship.

Table 1. Construct Reliability, Validity, Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation.

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	CR (rho_a)	CR (rho_c)	AVE	Mean	SD® CSR Perspecti®(r) OCBE		
CSR perspective	0.80	0.80	0.82	0.67	5.32	1.37		
OCBE	0.80	0.80	0.83	0.72	5.16	1.40	0.78**	
RL	0.84	0.84	0.86	0.76	5.01	1.48	0.82**	0.76**

Source: Survey data.

Note: RL: responsible leadership, CSR: corporate social responsibility, OCBE: organizational citizenship behaviour towards environment (OCBE), r : Pearson correlation. ** significant at the 99% confidence level.

$df < 3$ (Hair et al., 2010), thus concluding that the model is highly fit. The formula for GOF indices is: $GOF = \sqrt{AVE * R^2}$; $RMSEA = \sqrt{(\text{Chi-square} / df - 1) / (N - 1)}$ and $CMIN/df = \text{Chi-square} / \text{degree of freedom}$. As PLS-SEM does not emphasize GOF as compared to CB-SEM (Hair et al., 2019),

Table 2. Loading and VIF Values for Each Item.

Items	Loading	VIF
CSR perspective 1	0.82	2.45
CSR perspective 2	0.81	2.32
CSR perspective 3	0.81	2.21
CSR perspective 4	0.81	2.61
CSR perspective 5	0.83	2.90
CSR perspective 6	0.82	2.25
OCBE1	0.82	2.27
OCBE2	0.87	2.77
OCBE3	0.86	2.58
OCBE4	0.86	2.90
OCBE5	0.84	2.54
RL1	0.89	2.12
RL2	0.89	2.30
RL3	0.85	1.81

Source: Survey data.

Table 3. Fornell–Larcker Criterion and Model Fit Indicator.

Variable	CSR Perspective	OCBE	RL
CSR perspective	0.82		
OCBE	0.77	0.85	
RL	0.81	0.76	0.87
Model fit indicator			
Indices	Model	Cut-off	
SRMR	0.07	<0.08	
GOF	0.68	>0.36	
RMSEA	0.02	<0.05	
CMIN/df	1.3	<3	

Source: Survey data.

Notes: The bold values satisfy the Fornell-Larcker criteria.

the study has added a few other popular GOF indices for the model.

Table 4 represents that the R-square (R^2) of the CSR perspective is 0.65, i.e., 65% of CSR is explained by responsible leadership. It is inferred that responsible leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the CSR perspective within an organization. Leaders who demonstrate responsible and ethical behaviour and prioritize stakeholder interests can foster a strong CSR perspective by stimulating the cognitive process among employees.

Similarly, the R^2 of OCBE is 0.64, representing that 64% of OCBE is explained by CSR perspective and responsible leadership together. This infers that both responsible leadership and a strong CSR perspective play a crucial role in promoting pro-environmental behaviours among employees. Leaders who act responsibly and foster a strong CSR perspective among their followers can significantly enhance employees' engagement in discretionary behaviours that support environmental sustainability.

Table 4 represents the effect size of dependent variables. The effect size of responsible leadership on the CSR perspective is highest and very large (>0.35). In addition, the effect size of the CSR perspective and responsible leadership on OCBE is moderate as it lies between 0.15 and 0.35. It is inferred that responsible leadership (environmental factors) has a larger effect on the CSR perspective (cognitive process) when compared to the OCBE (behaviour).

Table 4 demonstrates the path coefficients for direct and specific indirect effects. It is concluded that the CSR perspective has a positive relationship with OCBE ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < 0.05$), responsible leadership has a positive relationship with the CSR perspective ($\beta = 0.80$, $p < 0.05$), and responsible leadership has a positive relationship with OCBE ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.05$), therefore supporting H_1 , H_2 and H_3 . These results highlight the critical role of responsible leadership in fostering a strong CSR

Table 4. Direct, Indirect Effects, PLS Predict, R-square and F-square.

Path	Beta	SD	P Values	Findings
CSR perspective → OCBE	0.44	0.06	0.00	H_1 Supported
RL → OCBE	0.40	0.06	0.00	H_2 Supported
RL → CSR perspective	0.80	0.02	0.00	H_3 Supported
Mediating effect				
	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	P Values
RL → CSR perspective → OCBE	0.40	0.36	0.758	0.00
	H_4 Supported (partially)			
PLS predict Q^2 predict	0.57			
R-square	CSR perspective: 0.65; OCBE: 0.64			
Adjusted R-square	CSR perspective: 0.65; OCBE: 0.64			
F-square	RL-CSR perspective: 1.84; CSR perspective-OCBE: 0.20; RL-OCBE: 0.16			

Source: Survey data.

perspective. Also, it can be inferred that both responsible leadership and the CSR perspective have a positive influence on OCBE.

In addition, to measure the mediating effect of the CSR perspective on the relationship between responsible leadership and OCBE, the conditions of mediation are studied. The conditions of mediation include a significant relationship between the independent variable (responsible leadership) and dependent variable (OCBE) ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.05$), a significant relationship between the responsible leadership and mediating variable (CSR perspective) ($\beta = 0.80$, $p < 0.05$), a significant relationship between the CSR perspective and dependent variable (OCBE) ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < 0.05$) and a significant indirect effect of responsible leadership on OCBE via the CSR perspective ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, since our study fulfils all the conditions of mediation, we may conclude that the CSR perspective partially mediates the relationship between responsible leadership and OCBE. It is inferred that the effect of responsible leadership on OCBE is via the CSR perspective. This explains how the environmental factor–cognitive process–behaviour is linked with responsible leadership–CSR perspective–OCBE. When the CSR perspective acts as a mediator, the total effect of responsible leadership on OCBE is around 0.76 (addition of direct and indirect effects). It can be inferred that the impact of responsible leadership on OCBE is stronger in the presence of the CSR perspective as a mediator than in responsible leadership alone.

The Q^2 reflects the predictive relevance of a particular construct. The blindfolding procedure provides the construct's cross-validated redundancy values that are used as a measure of Q^2 . 'The value of Q^2 larger than zero for a particular reflective endogenous construct indicates the path model's predictive relevance for the particular construct' (Hair et al., 2014, p. 178). The Q^2 of the OCBE is 0.57, which shows an acceptable degree of predictive relevance for responsible leadership and the CSR perspective on OCBE (Table 4). Thus, it can be concluded that responsible leadership and the CSR perspective are significant contributors to OCBE and enable pro-environment behaviour among employees in an organization.

Discussion and Implications

The study examines the relationship between responsible leadership and the CSR perspective with OCBE within context–behaviour framework and social cognitive theory. This framework suggests that the context (responsible leadership and the CSR perspective) of an organization has a direct effect on the behaviour (OCBE) of an employee. Responsible leadership is important for building an organizational context that promotes OCBE. Similarly, CSR policies and their awareness among employees also play a crucial role in encouraging pro-environment

behaviour among employees. The result confirms De Roeck and Farooq's (2018) findings, i.e., the CSR perspective and leadership have a positive interactive effect on employee socially responsible behaviour (Channa et al., 2021; Han et al., 2019; He et al., 2021; Javed et al., 2021).

In addition, the study adds to the social cognitive theory literature by highlighting the underlining mechanism of how the CSR perspective acts as a mediator in the relationship between responsible leadership and OCBE using a context–behaviour framework. This partial mediation may be a result of the linkage of social cognitive theory, i.e., the environment factor–cognitive process–behaviour with context–behaviour framework. When a responsible environment builds a strong cognitive CSR perspective of employees, it will lead to green behaviour among employees through observation and learning from their surroundings. The CSR perspective does not operate alone; it also requires support and commitment from top management, which can be viewed in the form of responsible leadership. So, both responsible leadership and the CSR perspective are found to be significant contributors to the green behaviour of IT professionals. The social cognitive theory explains that individuals learn from one another, and if a leader portrays responsible behaviour, the followers are more inclined to learn from their respective leaders through observation depict pro-environmental behaviour. Similarly, a team member with a high CSR perspective communicates with other team members, eventually exerting an effect on other team members' CSR perspective. In this situation, responsible leaders will stimulate and synergize the influence of the CSR perspective on the other team members, and the whole team will be more inclined to embrace OCBE. Thus, the study highlights the combined and synergistic effect of both responsible leadership and the CSR perspective on OCBE, i.e., the relationship between responsible leadership and OCBE strengthens in the presence of the CSR perspective as a mediator. Our results confirm partial mediation that may occur due to organizational context factors such as shared green vision, employees' green attitude or social green norms that may influence the OCBE in an organization.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study have the potential for both theory and practice. First, the study examined the relationship between responsible leadership and OCBE. This relationship confirms that responsible leadership (organizational factor) is one of the major antecedents of OCBE (behaviour). This shows that the interaction between the manager and follower plays a crucial role in building the behaviour of followers. According to the social cognitive theory, followers tend to imitate their supervisor's behaviour through observation, i.e., if a supervisor tends to

behave in a responsible manner, the follower's inclination to depict responsible behaviour is high. Second, the CSR perspective (cognitive process) influences OCBE (behaviour). If employees' mindset is trained for a pro-environment attitude or perception, it has a high probability that these employees will happily adopt environment-friendly behaviour. As per the social cognitive theory, the cognitive process has a direct influence on behaviour. The impact of aforementioned organizational context has a direct impact on the behaviour of employees. As the study explores the interrelation between CSR perspective, responsible leadership and OCBE, the analysis investigates the combined effect of key organizational contexts (the CSR perspective and responsible leadership) on OCBE (employees' green behaviour). As per the social cognitive theory, the environmental factor (responsible leadership in this case) influences the cognitive process of employees by building strong perspective towards organizational CSR policies. This ultimately impacts the behaviour of employees and stimulates pro-environment behaviour among them (OCBE). The study concludes that there is a significant relationship between environmental factors and cognitive process; cognitive process and behaviour. The relationship of the CSR perspective with the environmentally conscious behaviour of employees was found to be contingent upon the presence of responsible leadership practices within the organization. The results offer a thorough comprehension of how intricate organizational contexts facilitate the adoption of environment-friendly behaviours among employees. This adds to the body of knowledge by validating the social cognitive theory in context-behaviour framework, especially in the IT sector of a developing nation. The results are consistent with prior research indicating positive outcomes with CSR (Ahmed et al., 2020; Sahar et al., 2023; Tian & Robertson, 2019) and responsible leadership (Afsar et al., 2016; Robertson & Barling, 2013) on OCBE. The combined effect of CSR perspective and responsible leadership has a synergistic effect on promoting OCBE, i.e., environmentally responsible behaviour among employees. The study adds to the existing literature on what contextual factors influence the behaviour of employees in organizations.

Third, this study delved into the fundamental 'psychological mechanisms' of how organizational contexts influence OCBE (green behaviour), drawing on 'social cognitive theory'. The finding adds to the advancement of the context-behaviour framework. The proposal posits the role of responsible leadership on OCBE in the presence of the CSR perspective as a partial mediator, especially in the IT sector. The followers are expected to learn from their leaders and imitate them in the workplace. The study highlights the role of cognitive process in the linkage between environmental factors and behaviour, which explain how these factors may influence the behaviour of an employee. Numerous prior researchers

have examined the effect of individual and organizational variables on green behaviour through the lens of other theories like 'social identification theory and social exchange theory' (Amrutha & Geetha, 2020; Cheema et al., 2020; Su & Swanson, 2019). This underlying mechanism of how cognitive process facilitates the relationship remained elusive. Thus, the study adds to the social cognitive theory literature by validating the linkage between the environmental factors, cognitive process and behaviour of an individual for embracing OCBE in an organization. Fourth, the study extends the boundary condition of social cognitive theory by applying the context-behaviour framework in a developing nation and emerging IT industry. This enlightens that there is a direct influence of various contextual factors (leadership, policies, perception) of an organization on the behaviour of the workforce in the service and consulting industry. As there is a linkage between these environmental factors, cognitive process and behaviour, further research is required to explore other contextual factors that may help in a deeper understanding of the cognitive mechanism that stimulates the change in behaviour of employees working in the IT industry. Thus, the study adds to the literature on how organizational contexts influence the behaviour of employees using the social cognitive theory in the IT industry with respect to the context-behaviour framework.

Managerial Implications

It is recommended that organizations allocate resources towards the CSR perspective and responsible leadership in order to motivate employees to adopt environmentally sustainable practices. The CSR perspective encompasses the employees' perspective towards the policies and practices adopted by corporations to advance environmental protection and resource conservation (Székely & Knirsch, 2005). The CSR perspective also has a direct influence on the green behaviour of employees. For example, organizations may run campaigns that exhibit a strong responsible orientation towards the environment, thus strengthening a high CSR perspective. On the other side, informal interpersonal connections between leaders and followers have a positive effect on employees' conduct. When followers observe their leaders as responsible, their perspective towards CSR is influenced, ultimately modifying employees' behaviour. For instance, organizations can train their leaders to depict responsible behaviour within and outside organization while interacting with their followers. This external factor (responsible leadership) will stimulate the cognitive process of employees, developing their strong CSR perspective. Thereafter, this will promote green behaviour among employees (OCBE) which helps in achieving sustainable development goals. Thus, the effective implementation of CSR initiatives is contingent upon the endorsement of responsible leadership. Encouraging environmentally friendly behaviours among employees is a crucial objective

for managers. The implementation of pro-environmental actions holds significant importance for both organizational advancement and the development of society in the long run.

Improving the eco-friendly conduct of employees has the potential to serve as a significant resource-efficient and cost-effective approach. Furthermore, this study proposes that adopting environment-friendly practices will result in green behaviour among employees, which eventually will help in attaining the environmental targets of the organization. For example, organizations may include verbal recognition of employees that display green behaviour by their responsible leaders, which will motivate employees to attain organizational environmental goals. This verbal recognition is cost-effective and resource-efficient. The CSR perspective may be seen as a means by which organizations communicate their commitment to their employees, society and sustainable development. According to Cheema et al. (2020), there is potential for the enhancement of organizational and individual transformation through the promotion of certain norms and values. Upon effective implementation, a high CSR perspective incentivizes employees to internalize the pro-environmental values and norms of an enterprise, leading to the effective embracement of OCBE. Consequently, it is imperative for enterprises to wholeheartedly embrace their responsibility towards the environment and society, and promote elevated levels of environmentally conscious conduct.

Limitations and Future Research

The present study acknowledges the existence of various limitations. Initially, the study focused on the perception of CSR and responsible leadership among employees at a specific moment in time and within particular cities in India. As a result, the research employed a cross-sectional design, which has limitations in elucidating causal relationships. Further investigation through longitudinal research is necessary to delve deeper into the causal relationships between contextual factors within organizations and environmentally friendly behaviours.

Second, the data utilized in this study were obtained solely from IT professionals, which unavoidably results in common variance. To mitigate the impact of common variance bias, the questionnaire items were randomized and subsequently evaluated to determine if the common variance bias was within acceptable limits.

The present study focused on examining the relationship of responsible leadership and the CSR perspective with OCBE. While CSR perspective research is valuable, it is imperative to develop a more comprehensive model that encompasses both organizational and individual outcomes. This will serve as a crucial step towards bridging the research gap on responsible leadership and negative aspects of the CSR perspective and should be considered a significant direction for future research. Further exploration of these mediating effects is necessary.

Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to examine the interplay between organizational contextual factors, namely, CSR perspective and responsible leadership and their relationship with OCBE (green behaviours) among IT professionals. Drawing upon social cognitive theory, it was suggested that the combination of CSR perspective and responsible leadership would collectively and synergistically affect employee green behaviour.

The present study investigated the mechanism of the context–behaviour framework, with a specific focus on the interactive influence of these two organizational contextual factors. This study concludes that responsible leadership and the CSR perspective (context) have a positive relationship with OCBE (behaviour). This part answers what influences the behaviour of an employee in the context–behaviour framework. Furthermore, the study concludes that the effect of responsible leadership on OCBE is enhanced via the CSR perspective (mediator). The model demonstrates the underlying mechanism of how responsible leadership encourages employees to depict green behaviour in the presence of the CSR perspective as a mediator. This is particularly evident when the CSR perspective is combined with responsible leadership, it has the ability to gain a competitive edge in the IT industry, particularly by developing employees' green behaviour. In other words, the linkage between environmental factors, cognitive process and behaviour is evident under the lens of social cognitive theory for this underlying mechanism. Additionally, antecedents of employee green behaviour include both organizational environmental factors and cognitive factors. Further research is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of other organizational contexts that may influence OCBE and help organizations achieve their environmental goals.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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A bibliometric analysis of business character (1991-2025): implications for leaders

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To cite this article: Meenakshi Bisla & Umesh Bamel (2026) A bibliometric analysis of business character (1991-2025): implications for leaders, *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 56:3, 225-243, DOI: [10.1080/00208825.2026.2642243](https://doi.org/10.1080/00208825.2026.2642243)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00208825.2026.2642243>



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A bibliometric analysis of business character (1991–2025): implications for leaders

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ABSTRACT

Business character has become a pivotal determinant of organizational success and sustainable competitive advantage, attracting significant scholarly attention. This study undertakes a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of research on business character spanning the period 1991–2025. Drawing on 978 publications retrieved from the Web of Science database, the analysis employs performance metrics, science mapping techniques, and network visualization to examine publication trends, leading authors, influential journals, keyword co-occurrence patterns, and conceptual frameworks for leadership. Findings indicate exponential growth in the field, particularly after 2010, with virtue ethics, business ethics, and leadership emerging as dominant themes. The Journal of Business Ethics is identified as the primary outlet for this research, while Mary Crossan and Gerard Seijts rank among the most influential contributors. Keyword co-occurrence analysis underscores the strong theoretical grounding in virtue ethics, alongside increasing integration of sustainability and innovation. The study proposes frameworks for cultivating character in organizational leadership and highlights the evolution of the field from philosophical foundations to applied business contexts, offering a roadmap for future research and practice.

KEYWORDS

Business character; virtue ethics; leadership; business ethics; science mapping; research trends; bibliometric analysis

Introduction

The concept of character in business contexts has emerged as a critical area of scholarly inquiry, bridging the disciplines of ethics, management, and organizational behavior (Crossan et al. 2013; Moore 2005). Character, traditionally rooted in philosophical and theological traditions, has gained renewed attention in contemporary business research as organizations grapple with ethical challenges and the need for authentic leadership (Solomon 2003; Arjoon 2000). The evolution of character research in business has progressed from theoretical foundations to practical applications. Moore (2005) introduced the concept of corporate character, integrating modern virtue ethics with organizational theory to create a framework for understanding virtuous corporations. This work laid the groundwork for subsequent research examining how character manifests within organizational environments. The concept of business character encompasses the integration of virtue ethics, moral character, and leadership principles within organizational contexts (Fowers 2008; Morales-Sánchez and Cabello-Medina 2015). Business character research has emerged as a critical field of study, addressing the growing need for ethical leadership and moral decision-making in organizational contexts (Wright and Goodstein 2007).

The concept of business character has emerged as a critical determinant of organizational success and sustainable competitive advantage (Xiao and Yu 2020). Business character—encompassing the

moral, ethical, and virtue-based dimensions that define how individuals and organizations conduct themselves—has proven to be far more than a philosophical consideration; it is a measurable driver of business performance and stakeholder trust. The integration of character-based approaches in business education and practice has gained significant momentum, particularly in response to corporate scandals and the increasing emphasis on sustainable business practices (Wright, 2015). In addition, business character extends beyond traditional notions of ethics to encompass dimensions such as integrity, courage, empathy, humility, and resilience—traits that collectively shape organizational culture and competitive positioning. Organizations are increasingly recognized as having unique organizational characters that serve as sources of competitive differentiation, like how individuals possess distinct personalities. This organizational character directly influences stakeholder perceptions, employee engagement, customer loyalty, and ultimately, organizational performance.

Despite its growing importance, the literature lacks a comprehensive bibliometric analysis that maps its intellectual structure and evolutionary patterns (Crossan et al. 2013). The reason behind this gap may be due to the interdisciplinary nature of the business character research, which draws from philosophy, psychology, management studies, and organizational behavior (Moore 2005, 2015). The fragmented understanding of how these diverse streams of research intersect and evolve limits our ability to identify emerging trends, research gaps, and future opportunities in the field. Moreover, without a comprehensive bibliometric foundation, researchers and practitioners lack a systematic understanding of the most influential works, key contributors, and theoretical developments that have shaped business character scholarship.

Therefore, this paper provides crucial insights into business character traits through a comprehensive bibliometric analysis, offering comprehensive systematic analysis of the intellectual landscape of business character research. This analysis not only fills a critical gap in the literature but also provides researchers, educators, and practitioners with a robust foundation for understanding the current state and future directions of business character research, ultimately contributing to the development of more effective, ethical, and sustainable business practices. To achieve this aim, the study adopts a relational approach for bibliometric analysis, which establishes connections among publications in the research domain through various analytical methods, predominantly co-citation analysis, bibliographic coupling, and co-word occurrence analysis. Bibliometric analysis combined with science mapping represents the most effective approach for illustrating the scholarly landscape of a research area, whether at local or international levels (Doulani 2020). The investigation employed this methodology to synthesize publications on business character spanning multiple decades. Bibliographic connections within these studies were examined using visualization of similarities VOSviewer software and Bibliometrix through RStudio to construct a comprehensive map of business character knowledge domains. This systematic review approach enabled synthesis of a more extensive dataset compared to traditional review methods that employ critical or narrative synthesis techniques. The study aims to achieve the following research objective:

1. To provide a comprehensive overview of existing scholarly publications focused on business character research.
2. To examine scholarly contributions through analysis of authorship prominent researchers based on their citation impact and citation metrics.
3. To examine the evolution of the business character research field.

By addressing these objectives, present paper would add to both theory and practice in multiple way. This study advances the theoretical foundations of business character research in four key ways. First, it establishes virtue ethics as the central framework, demonstrating its successful application from classical philosophy to contemporary organizational contexts. Second, it

reconceptualizes character as a developable trait rather than a fixed attribute, introducing the Five-Phase Character Development Framework to guide systematic cultivation through structured interventions. Third, it strengthens integrative leadership theory by illustrating the synergistic interaction of character dimensions. Finally, it links character-based leadership to stakeholder theory and sustainable business practices, showing how leadership character drives shared value creation and long-term organizational performance through the Character–Performance Relationship Framework. This research provides actionable insights for organizations seeking sustainable competitive advantage through character-based leadership.

Methodology

This study employs a comprehensive bibliometric analysis approach using data retrieved from the Web of Science Core Collection database. This practice is crucial for ensuring the selection of relevant high-quality articles which may be missed in another database (Hassanei and Mostafa 2023; Argoubi, Ammari, and Masri 2021). The utilization of the WoS Core Collection database is advantageous due to its comprehensive citation search capabilities and its inclusion of many databases that encompass interdisciplinary study. This facilitates a comprehensive exploration of certain subfields within the realms of academia and science (Li et al. 2010). Bibliometric analysis provides a quantitative approach to understanding research fields through statistical analysis of publications, citations, and scholarly networks. This methodology enables researchers to identify influential works, emerging trends, and collaboration patterns that shape the intellectual landscape of academic disciplines. Compared with a conventional narrative or state-of-the-art review, this approach offers several advantages, as it can capture a wider range of relevant themes and adds an additional, objective reference point for evaluating a field (Argoubi, Ammari, and Masri 2021; Hassanei and Mostafa 2023). Previous bibliometric studies have successfully mapped various management and business ethics domains, yet business character research remains underexplored from this perspective (Aria and Cuccurullo 2017; Donthu et al. 2021; Guleria and Kaur 2021; Moore 2015).

Data collection

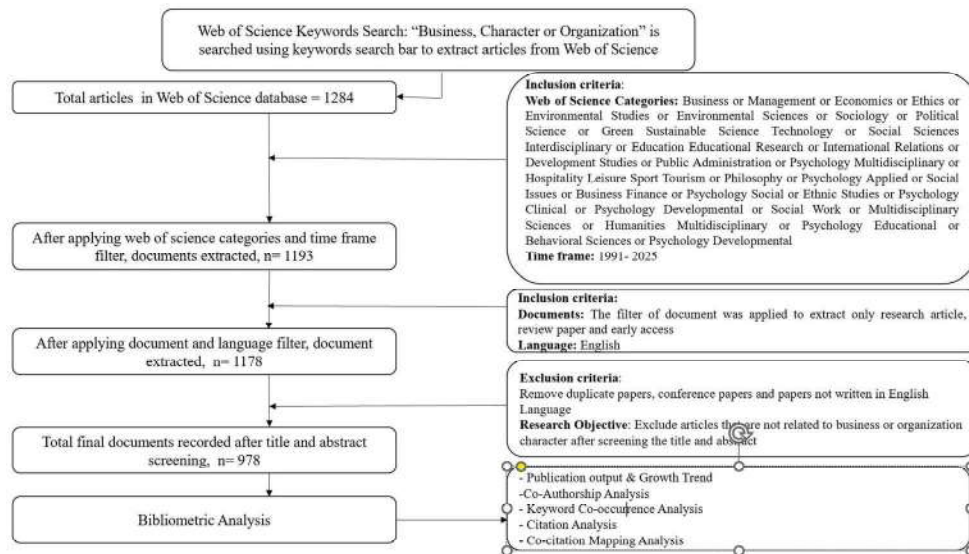
The search strategy utilized combinations of terms and filters. The Boolean used to collect data from web of science is ““character” (Topic) and “business” (Topic) and Business or Management or Ethics or Economics or Environmental Studies or Sociology or Political Science or Green Sustainable Science Technology or Social Sciences Interdisciplinary or Education Educational Research or International Relations or Development Studies or Public Administration or Psychology Multidisciplinary or Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism or Philosophy or Psychology Applied or Social Issues or Business Finance or Operations Research Management Science or Humanities Multidisciplinary or Psychology Social or Psychology Educational or Behavioral Sciences or Psychology Developmental (Web of Science Categories) and Article or Review Article or Early Access (Document Types)”. In simple words, the study collected data using business and character as main keywords that are used in various research fields. The results were further narrowed down to research articles as per the research objectives of the study by screening title and abstract. The final dataset comprises 978 publications spanning from 1991 to 2025, representing articles, reviews, and early access articles in English (Table 1). Figure 1 represents the PRISMA diagram that specifies the inclusion and exclusion criteria used to collect the final data.

Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using (VOSviewer) software and Bibliometrix through RStudio. Performance analysis was conducted to examine publication trends, author productivity, journal

Table 1. The data collection steps.

Stage	Process	Details
Stage 1	Data Collection	Database: Web of Science Timeframe: 1991–2025 Search Terms: "Character" AND "Business " OR "Organi*" Web of Science Categories: Business or Management or Economics or Ethics or Environmental Studies or Environmental Sciences or Sociology or Political Science or Green Sustainable Science Technology or Social Sciences Interdisciplinary or Education Educational Research or International Relations or Development Studies or Public Administration or Psychology Multidisciplinary or Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism or Philosophy or Psychology Applied or Social Issues or Business Finance or Psychology Social or Ethnic Studies or Psychology Clinical or Psychology Developmental or Social Work or Multidisciplinary Sciences or Humanities Multidisciplinary or Psychology Educational (Web of Science Categories) and Business or Management or Ethics or Economics or Environmental Studies or Sociology or Political Science or Green Sustainable Science Technology or Social Sciences Interdisciplinary or Education Educational Research or International Relations or Development Studies or Public Administration or Psychology Multidisciplinary or Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism or Philosophy or Psychology Applied or Social Issues or Business Finance or Operations Research Management Science or Humanities Multidisciplinary or Psychology Social or Psychology Educational or Behavioral Sciences or Psychology Developmental (Web of Science Categories) Document type: Article or Review Article or Early Access Language: English Total Documents: 978
Stage 2	Analysis & Visualization	- Publication output & Growth Trend - Coauthorship Analysis - Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis - Citation Analysis - Co-citation Mapping Analysis
Stage 3	Discussion & Conclusion	Analysis of publication trends, major contributors and their linkages with other authors, documents and proposed framework in context of leadership.

**Figure 1.** PRISMA diagram.

distribution, and citation patterns. Science mapping techniques were applied to analyze keyword co-occurrence networks, thematic evolution, and research collaboration patterns. Visualization tools were employed to create network diagrams, trend analyses, and distribution charts to illustrate the findings comprehensively.

Analysis

Citation analysis

Publication trends and growth patterns

The analysis reveals remarkable growth in business character research over the past three decades, with total publications increasing from single-digit annual outputs in the 1990s to peaks exceeding seventy publications in 2021. The field demonstrates an exponential growth pattern, with a 98.2% increase in publication volume post-2010 compared to earlier periods (Figure 2).

The initial period (1991–2010) established foundational theoretical frameworks, accounting for 33.5% of total publications, while the recent period (2011–2025) reflects rapid expansion and practical application, representing 66.5%. This growth pattern suggests increasing recognition of character-based approaches in business research and practice.

Citation impact and influential works

The most cited work in the corpus is “Implicit and explicit CSR: A conceptual framework for a comparative understanding of corporate social responsibility” by Matten and Moon (2008) with 2,663 citations, highlighting the connection between character research and corporate social responsibility, followed by organizational citizenship behavior and character research (Table 2). CSR and OCB can be seen as two levels of expression of business character that work together. CSR and OCB describe two levels through which business character is expressed. At the macro level, CSR captures how the firm, as a collective actor, assumes responsibility toward society and stakeholders through its strategies, policies, and public commitments. At the micro level, OCB reflects employees’ voluntary, prosocial actions that go beyond formal roles. When responsible CSR structures align with widespread OCB, organizational values and everyday behavior reinforce each other, forming a coherent and credible business character. Other highly cited works include foundational studies on customer loyalty, and transformational leadership.

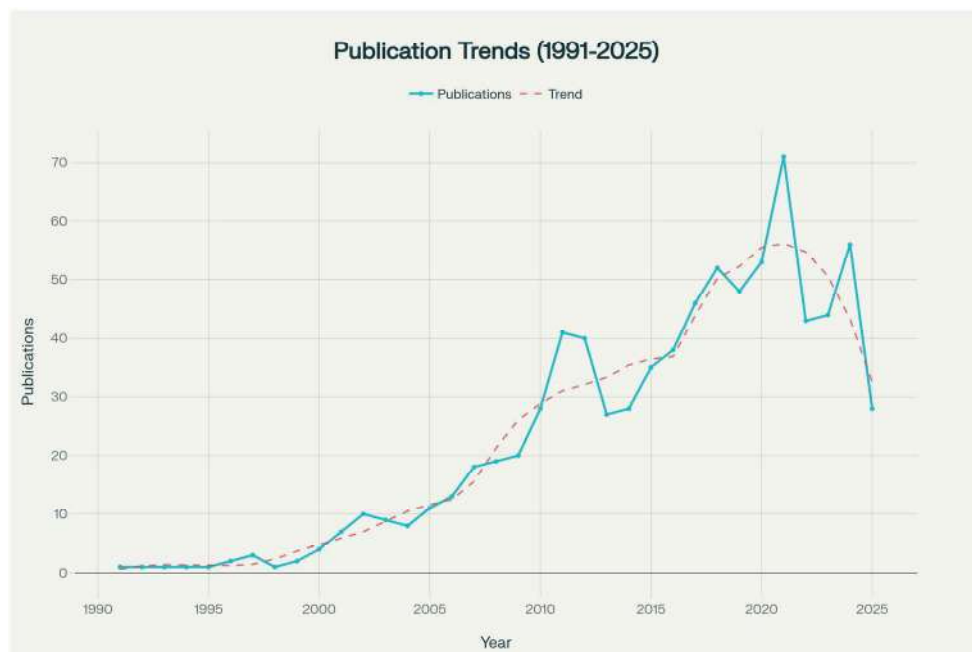


Figure 2. Annual publication trends showing steady growth in business character research, with notable acceleration after 2010 and peak in 2021.

Table 2. Highly cited research articles.

Title	Authors	Source title	Publication year	Total citations	Average per year
Implicit and explicit CSR: A conceptual framework for a comparative understanding of corporate social responsibility	Matten, Dirk; Moon, Jeremy	Academy Of Management Review	2008	2665	148.06
Organizational citizenship behavior: It's construct clean-up time	Organ, DW	Human Performance	1997	1539	53.07
Customer loyalty in e-commerce: an exploration of its antecedents and consequences	Srinivasan, SS; Anderson, R; Ponnnavolu, K	Journal Of Retailing	2002	1235	51.46
Ethics, character, and authentic transformational leadership behavior	Bass, BM; Steidlmeier, P	Leadership Quarterly	1999	1162	43.04
Contextual Influences on the Corporate Entrepreneurship Performance Relationship - A Longitudinal Analysis	ZAHRA, SA; COVIN, JG	Journal Of Business Venturing	1995	1075	34.68
Culture and entrepreneurial potential: A nine-country study of locus of control and innovativeness	Mueller, SL; Thomas, AS	Journal Of Business Venturing	2001	934	37.36
Corporate social responsibility: A process model of sensemaking	Basu, Kunal; Palazzo, Guido	Academy Of Management Review	2008	789	43.83
An evolutionary approach to understanding international business activity: The co-evolution of MNEs and the institutional environment	Cantwell, John; Dunning, John H.; Lundan, Sarianna M.	Journal Of International Business Studies	2010	597	37.31
Knowledge management strategies: Toward a taxonomy	Earl, M	Journal Of Management Information Systems	2001	581	23.24
The Rationalization of Charity: The Influences of Professionalism in the Nonprofit Sector	Hwang, Hoky; Powell, Walter W.	Administrative Science Quarterly	2009	567	33.35
A customer-dominant logic of service	Heimonen, Kristina; Strandvik, Tore; Mickelsson, Karl-Jacob; Edvardsson, Bo; Sundstrom, Erik; Andersson, Per	Journal Of Service Management	2010	444	27.75
Hofstede's dimensions of culture in international marketing studies	Soares, Ana Maria; Farhangmehr, Minoo; Shoham, Aviv	Journal Of Business Research	2007	426	22.42
The Influence of Personality Traits and Demographic Factors on Social Entrepreneurship Start Up Intentions	Nga, Joyce Koe Hwee;	Journal Of Business Ethics	2010	423	26.44
'Entrepreneur' as a conceptual attractor? A review of process theories in 20 years of entrepreneurship studies	Shamuganathan, Gomathi Sreyaert, Chris	Entrepreneurship And Regional Development	2007	407	21.42
The entrepreneurial university: Examining the underlying academic tensions	Philpott, Kevin; Dooley, Lawrence; O'Reilly, Caroline; Lupton, Gary	Technovation	2011	338	22.53

The citation analysis reveals peak impact in 2008 (5,408 total citations), with subsequent years showing steady but lower citation accumulation. This pattern reflects the establishment of foundational works that continue to influence current research, while newer publications are still building their citation impact (Figure 3).

Author productivity networks

The bibliometric analysis identifies key contributors to business character research, with Mary Crossan and Gerard Seijts emerging as the most productive authors with five publications each, followed by Jeffrey Gandz with four publications (Figure 4). These authors demonstrate high citation impact, with h-indices ranging from 4 to 5 and average citations per paper exceeding sixty.

The top authors exhibit strong collaborative relationships, particularly among researchers affiliated with the Ivey Business School at Western University, indicating the presence of research clusters and institutional specialization in character-based leadership studies. This collaboration pattern suggests the emergence of a scholarly community focused on developing practical applications of virtue ethics in business contexts (Fowers 2008).

Publication outlets

The *Journal of Business Ethics* dominates the publication landscape with 119 publications (12.2% of total corpus), establishing itself as the premier outlet for business character research. Other significant journals include *Sustainability* (29 publications), *Business Ethics-A European Review* (17 publications), and *Business Ethics Quarterly* (16 publications) (Figure 5).

The journal distribution reveals the multidisciplinary nature of business character research, spanning ethics, management, psychology, and sustainability science. The presence of specialized ethics journals alongside general management and psychology outlets indicates the field's broad appeal and relevance across multiple disciplines.

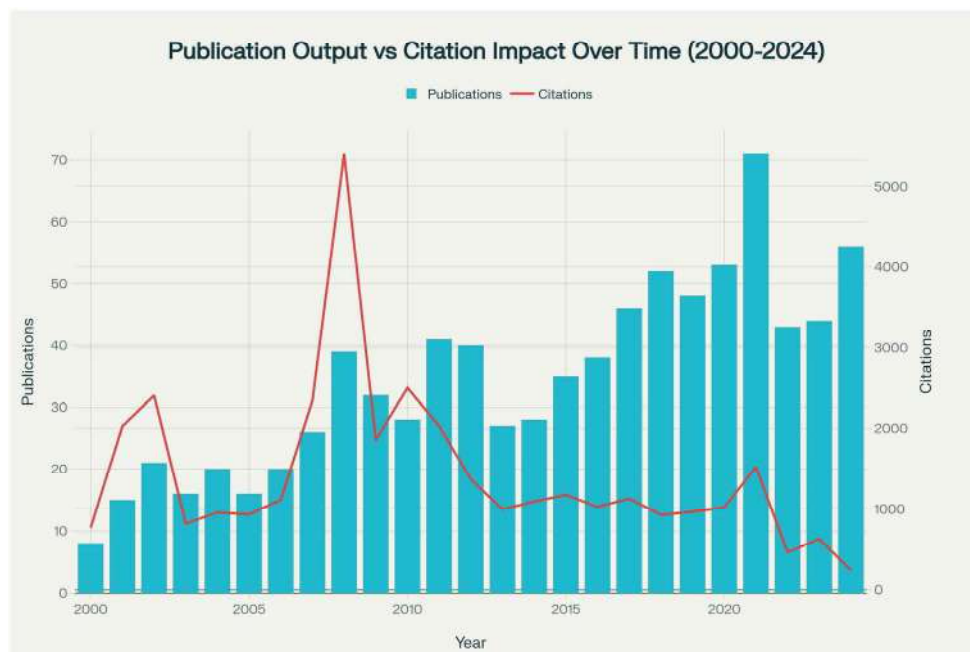


Figure 3. The relationship between publication output and citation impact, with peak citation impact in 2008 and steady publication growth.



Figure 4. Top 15 most productive authors showing publication output and citation impact in business character research.



Figure 5. Top 10 journals by publication count, with *Journal of Business Ethics* being the dominant outlet for business character research.

Scientific mapping

Coauthorship network analysis

The coauthorship network visualization reveals the collaborative structure among researchers in the business character domain. The network demonstrates a complex web of scholarly relationships characterized by distinct clusters of researchers who frequently collaborate on business character studies. Each node in the network represents an individual author, with node sizes proportional to their publication output and collaborative activity. The color-coded clusters indicate different research communities or schools of thought within the business character field, suggesting thematic or methodological alignments among coauthors. There are two clusters of authors depicted in Figure 10 with minimum of four authors in a cluster. The authors: mary crossan; daina mazutis belongs to cluster 1 and Jeffrey gandz; lucas monzani belongs to cluster 2 (Figure 6). The coauthorship network shows two main groups. Cluster 1, centered on Mary Crossan and Daina Mazutis, forms a dense network around leadership character development, indicating a tightly coordinated research agenda. Cluster 2, led by Jeffrey Gandz and Lucas Monzani, is looser and more rooted in business ethics. Together, they reveal a shared focus on character but different theoretical emphases.

Institutional affiliation network analysis

The institutional affiliation network reveals the organizational landscape of business character research. The visualization shows how different universities and research institutes contribute to and collaborate within this field. Figure 11 represents 7 clusters containing minimum of three affiliations connected. For example, university of Manchester; university California belong to cluster 1, and Harvard university; university Birmingham, university of California Berkeley belong to cluster 2 (Figure 7).

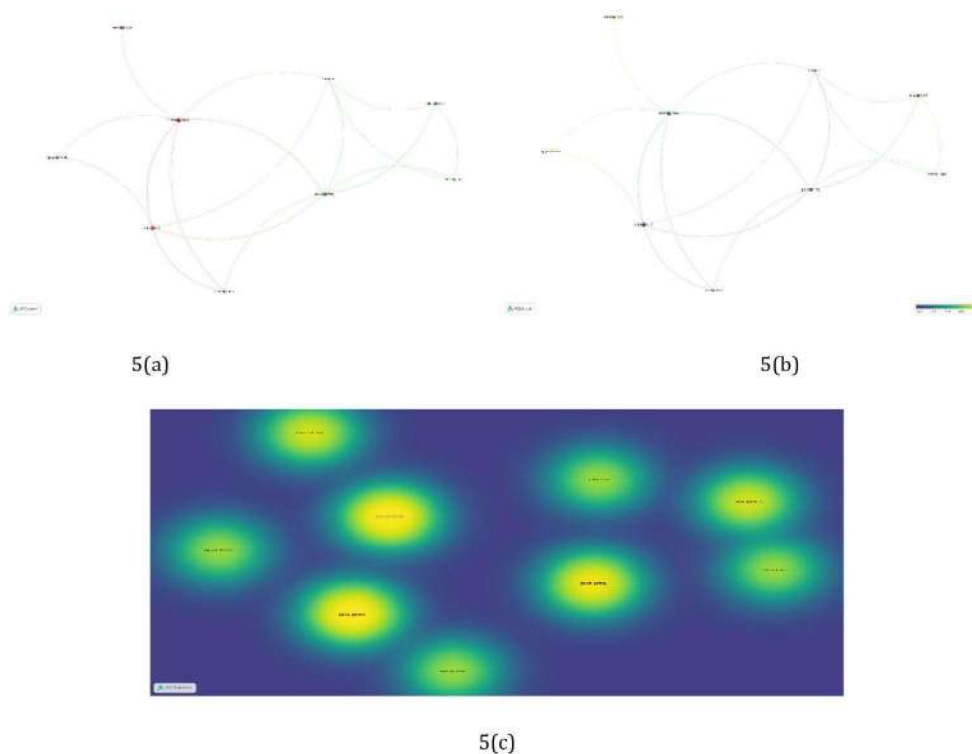


Figure 6. Coauthorship network.

Note: (a) network visualization based on document weights; (b) overlay visualization based on document-weights and average publishing year (c) density visualization of clusters

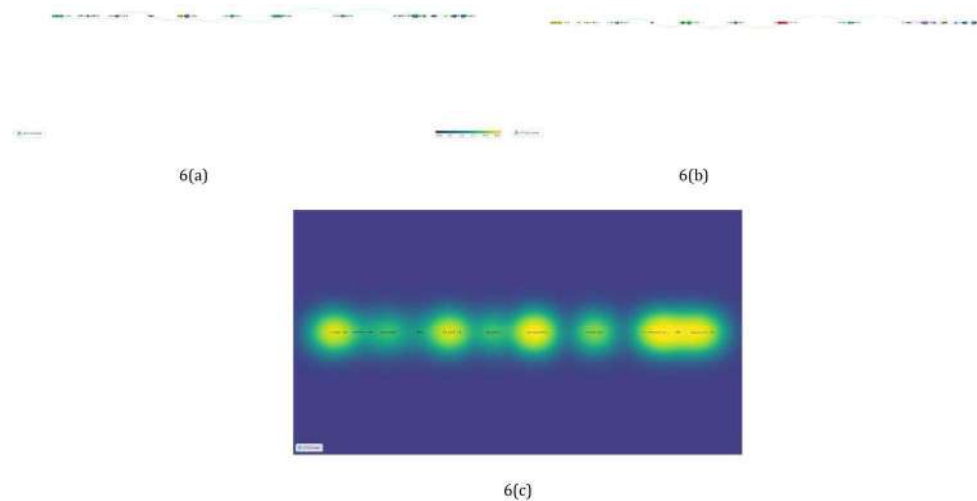


Figure 7. Affiliation network.

Note: (a) network visualization based on document weights; (b) overlay visualization based on document-weights and average publishing year (c) density visualization of clusters

Country collaboration network analysis

The country-level analysis demonstrates the international dimension of business character research collaboration. The network visualization shows how different nations contribute to and collaborate within this research domain, with node sizes reflecting the volume of publications from each country. The analysis distinguishes between single-country publications (SCP) and multi-country partnerships (MCP), providing insights into the international orientation of business character research. Countries with higher MCP ratios demonstrate greater international collaborative engagement, while those with SCP may represent either strong domestic research capacity or limited international research networks. Fire eleven represents the country collaboration network with six clusters with five minimum thresholds. For example, Belgium, Chile, Italy, Ireland belong to cluster one and Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia belong to cluster 2 (Figure 8). The country network suggests an uneven geography of business character research. Belgium, Chile, Italy and Ireland (Cluster 1) form a loose cluster with relatively weak internal links, pointing to parallel national efforts rather than a tightly coordinated program. Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia (Cluster 2) show a similar, still-fragmented pattern, indicating emerging but isolated work. By contrast, the USA, UK, Canada and Australia (Cluster 3) occupy the center of the network with strong ties, driving collaboration and shaping widely used frameworks that now need testing and adaptation in non-Western contexts. In conclusion, business character research is heavily concentrated in Western countries, with most publications and leading institutions based in North America, Western Europe and Australasia, so Western theories and methods largely define the field. By contrast, Latin America, Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia contribute only a small, weakly connected share of studies, meaning Global South perspectives, ethical traditions and practical realities are underrepresented and existing character frameworks may need adaptation before they fit these contexts.

Thematic evolution and keyword analysis

Keyword co-occurrence

The keyword analysis reveals virtue ethics (37 occurrences) as the dominant theme, followed by business ethics (25), leadership (24), virtue (23), and ethics (23). This thematic structure reflects the field's philosophical foundations and practical applications in organizational leadership. The

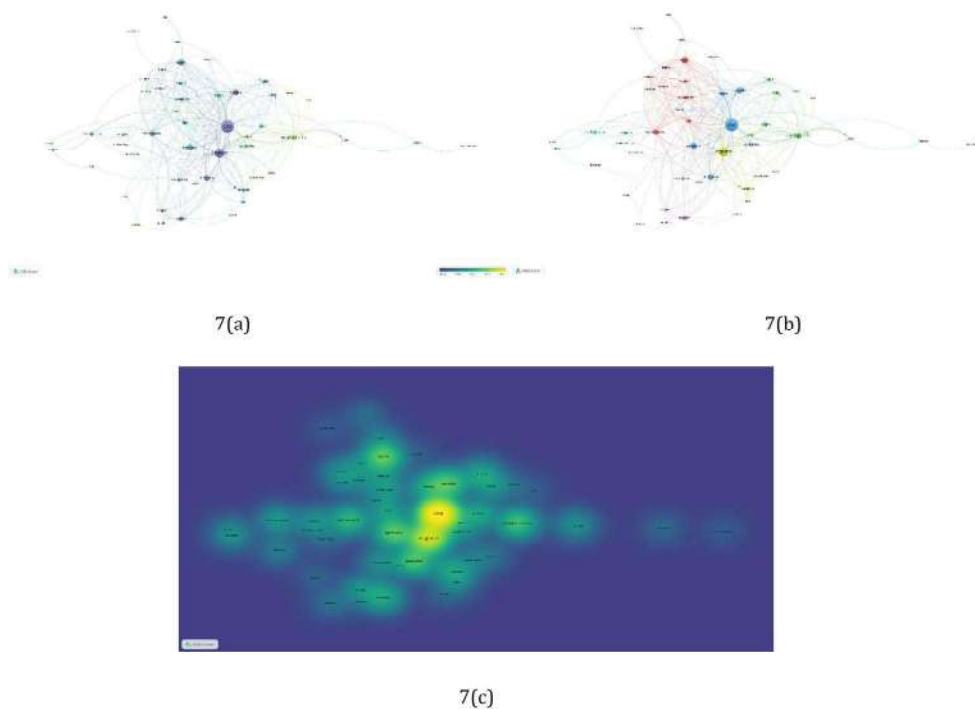


Figure 8. Country collaboration network.

Note: (a) network visualization based on document weights; (b) overlay visualization based on document-weights and average publishing year (c) density visualization of cluster

Figure 9 depicts that there is a strong relationship between the business, character, ethical, virtue, leaders, and performance. For in-depth analysis, the study undertakes various frameworks based on the highly connected keywords.

Network visualization

The co-occurrence network analysis demonstrates strong thematic connections between character and virtue (7 co-occurrences), business ethics and virtue ethics (5 co-occurrences), and leadership and virtue (5 co-occurrences). These patterns indicate the theoretical coherence of the field while highlighting opportunities for further integration of emerging themes such as sustainability and innovation (Yu and Yan 2021) (Figure 10).

Research areas and interdisciplinary character

The research area analysis confirms the multidisciplinary nature of business character studies, with Business & Economics representing the dominant field (654 publications, 66.9%), followed by Social Sciences (242 publications, 24.7%) and Environmental Sciences & Ecology (91 publications, 9.3%) (Figure 11).

This distribution reflects the field's evolution from purely philosophical discussions to practical business applications, with growing integration of sustainability and environmental considerations. The interdisciplinary character suggests opportunities for cross-fertilization of ideas and methodologies across traditional academic boundaries.

Discussion and proposed framework in context of business character

Based on character-driven leadership research and co-occurrence networks, the study proposes four comprehensive thematic models that illustrate the critical importance of character in

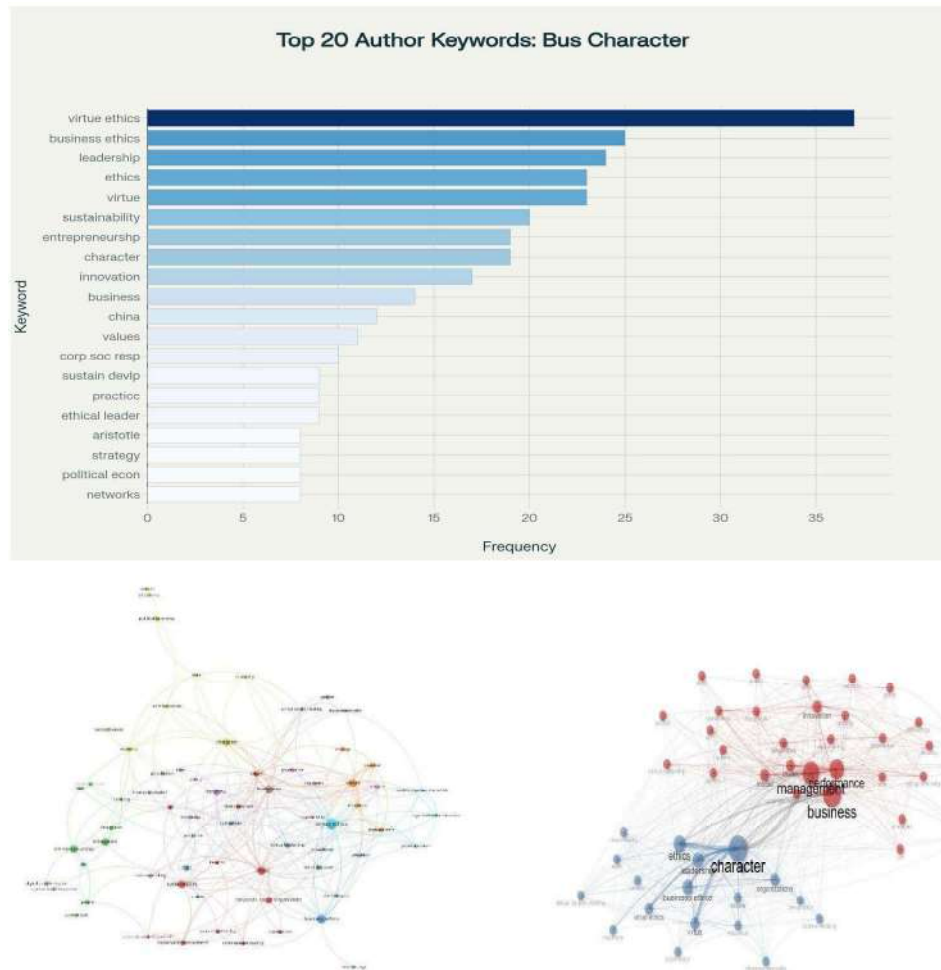


Figure 9. Top 20 author keywords showing virtue ethics, business ethics, and leadership as the most prominent research themes.

leadership contexts. These frameworks demonstrate how character serves as the foundational element that shapes leadership effectiveness and organizational outcomes.

The Ivey Leadership Character Framework centers around the concept of Judgment, which acts as the key moderating force influencing all other dimensions of character (Figure 12). The model groups eleven traits into logical clusters. Integrity and Justice form the moral core, setting the standard for fair, principled decisions (Crossan, Seijts, and Gandz 2015; Gandz et al. 2013). Temperance and Accountability shape self-regulation, helping leaders stay disciplined and own outcomes (Crossan, Seijts, and Gandz 2015). Drive and Courage power achievement and resilience, enabling ambition without losing nerve when challenges arise (Gandz et al. 2013). Humility, Humanity, and Collaboration build the interpersonal foundation for authentic connection and effective teams (Crossan, Seijts, and Gandz 2015). Transcendence adds a sense of purpose and vision that lifts thinking beyond the immediate (Gandz et al. 2013). Keeping Judgment at the core reflects a simple truth from virtue ethics: practical wisdom is the guide that helps leaders balance and apply all the other dimensions in context (Hartman 2013).

The bibliometric results show virtue ethics as the dominant theoretical anchor, so the Ivey Leadership Character Framework and its four cardinal virtues offer a natural basis for designing character-focused assessment and development in organizations. Keyword trends also support

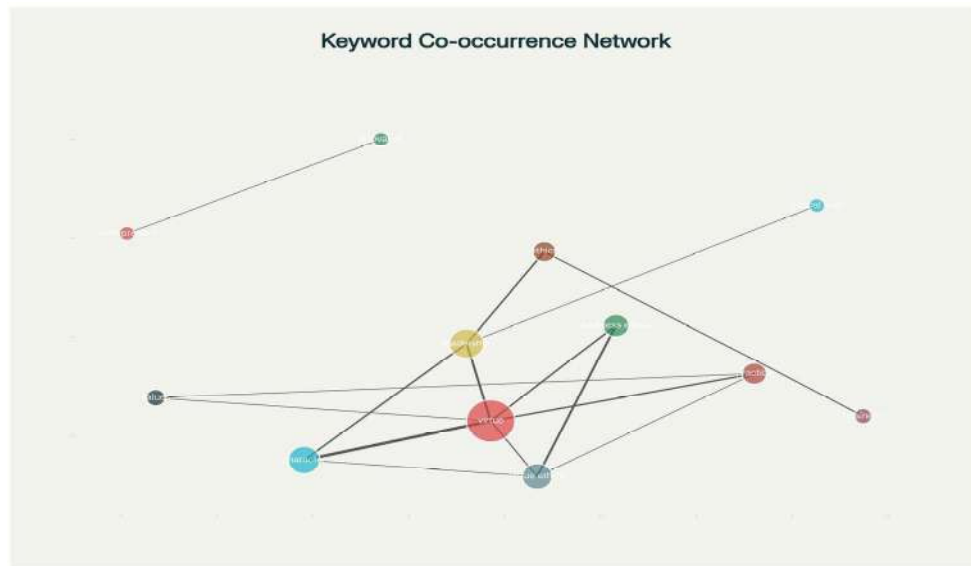


Figure 10. Network visualization showing strong connections between character-virtue, business ethics-virtue ethics, and leadership-virtue themes.

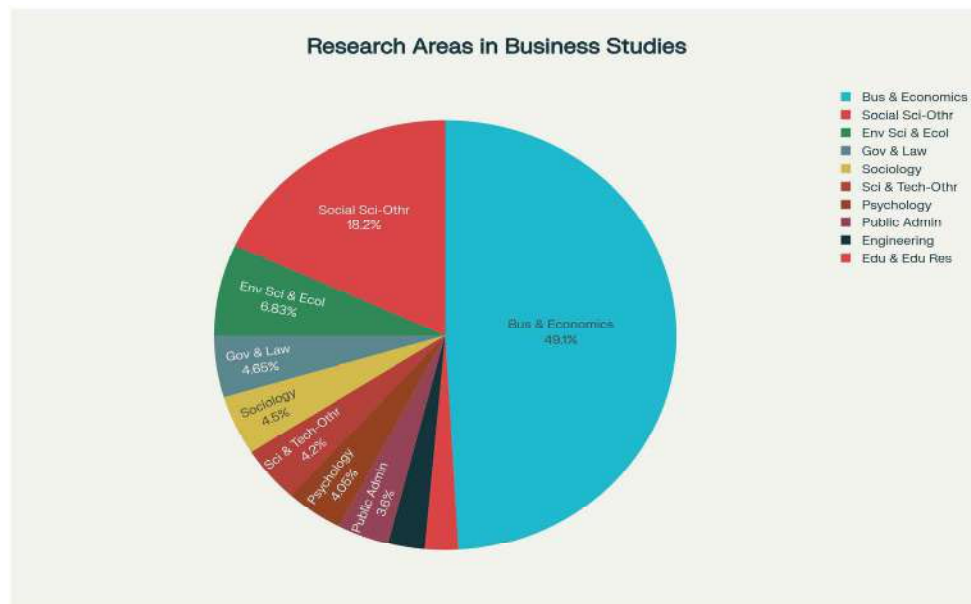


Figure 11. Research area distribution showing Business & Economics as the dominant field, followed by Social Sciences and Environmental Studies.

treating character as developable, which aligns with a staged, multi-phase development journey rather than a one-off intervention. In addition, links between character, leadership behavior and outcomes such as performance, innovation and stakeholder trust justify integrating character metrics into selection, appraisal and leadership programs, while tailoring interventions to organizational context and stakeholder expectations.

Character also develops over time. The Five-Phase Character Development Framework treats it as a journey rather than a fixed trait (Figure 13). Leaders begin with Discover, building self-

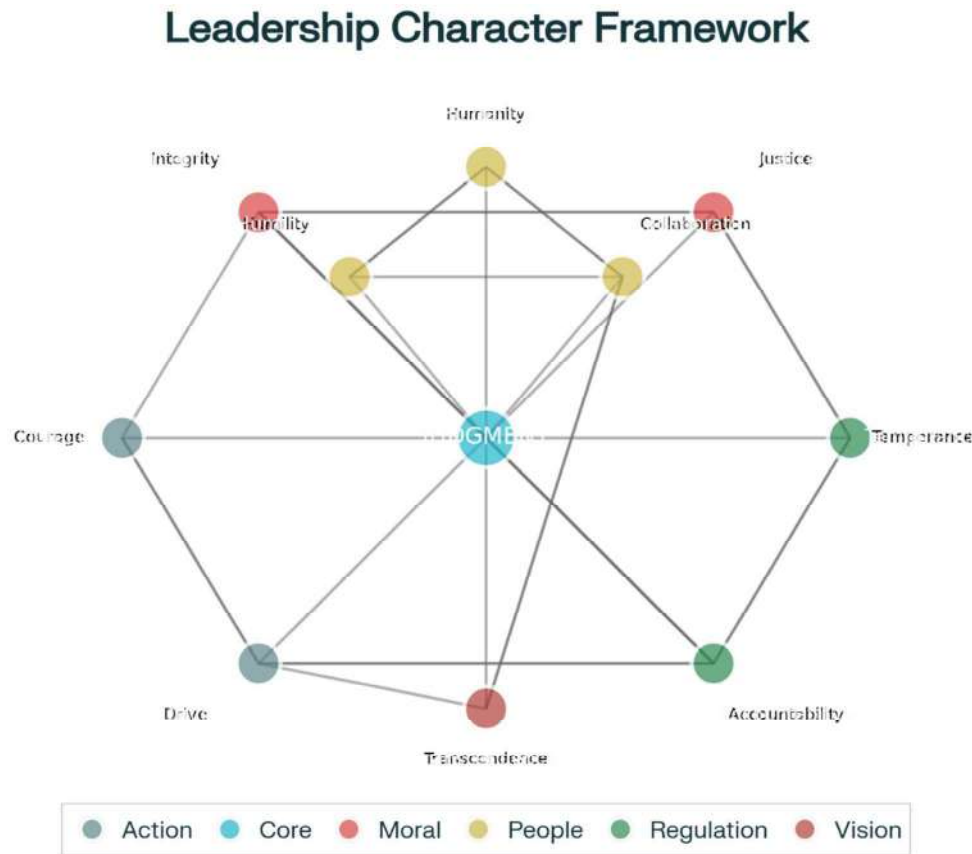


Figure 12. Framework 1: The Ivey Leadership Character Framework.

awareness by taking stock of strengths and growth areas. Those who engage in disciplined reflection tend to progress faster. In Activate, they put character into practice with guidance and feedback, echoing the idea that habits form virtues. Strengthen comes next, as consistent practice across different situations builds resilience and integrates character more deeply. Connect emphasize relationship leaders who express character authentically earn trust, deepen stakeholder ties, and see greater commitment across the organization (Ribeiro, Duarte, and Gomes 2025). Sustain is the real stress test: maintaining character when the pressure is high. Exemplars like Nelson Mandela show what that looks like over decades. The process is cyclical, feedback fuels continual learning and growth.

Strong leadership character is not just a nice idea; it shows results. The Virtue-Based Leadership Performance Model explains how classical virtues translate into day-to-day actions and business outcomes. It starts with the four cardinal virtues—prudence, justice, temperance, and courage—which anchor a leader’s choices and conduct (Figure 14). Grounded in Aristotelian thinking, these qualities become visible through behaviors like making ethical decisions, communicating honestly, leading inclusively, and staying resilient under pressure. When leaders act this way consistently, organizations tend to see higher trust and stronger performance (Fowers 2008; Ribeiro, Duarte, and Gomes 2025). That behavior builds momentum: trust deepens, culture strengthens, results improve, and performance becomes more sustainable over time. Evidence even suggests that teams led by character-driven leaders can deliver higher returns on assets than their peers (Ribeiro, Duarte, and Gomes 2025; Yu, Xiao, and Bo 2018). In short, this model closes the gap between virtue in theory and performance in practice.

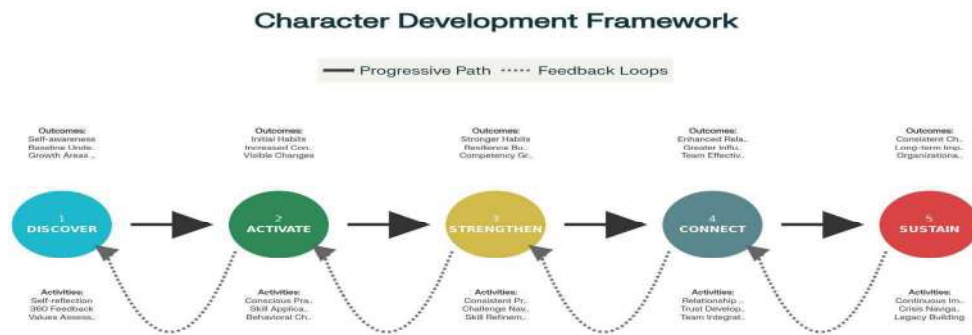


Figure 13. Framework 2: Five-Phase Character Development Framework.

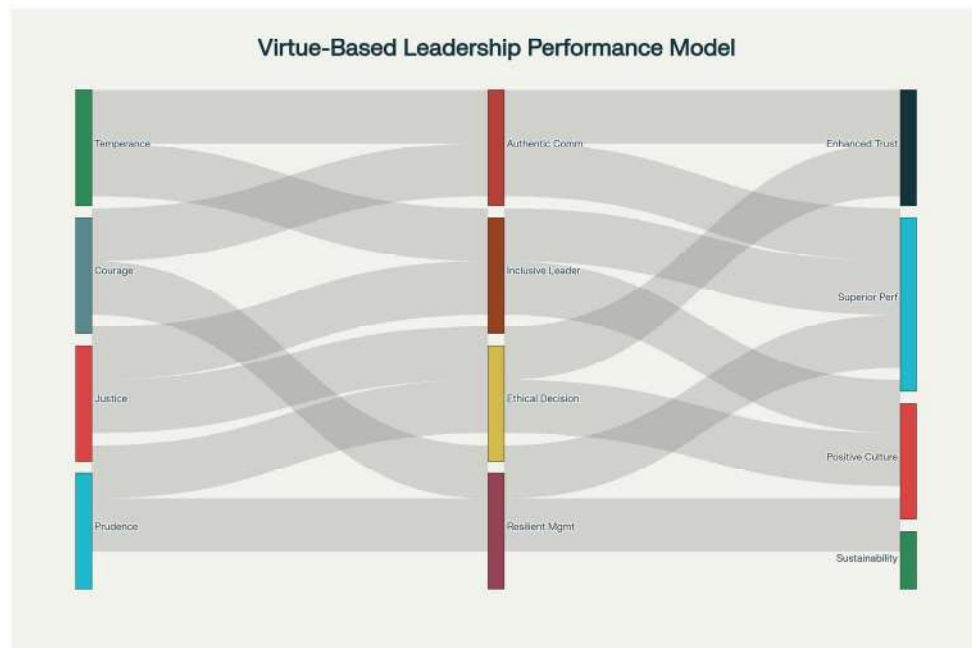


Figure 14. Framework 3: Virtue-Based Leadership Performance Model.

Character shapes result in very practical ways. The Character–Performance Relationship framework traces that path from the inside out, starting with core traits—integrity, humility, courage, empathy, and wisdom—that give leadership its tone and direction (Belcher 2024) (Figure 15). When a leader’s natural character aligns with how they lead—whether that’s authentic, servant, transformational, compassionate, or strategic—people tend to lean in more, and performance follows (Lasu and Biaggi 2021; Ribeiro, Duarte, and Gomes 2025). The alignment shows up inside teams as higher trust, stronger engagement, more collaboration, and a willingness to innovate. It also builds psychological safety—the confidence to speak up, try new things, and learn from mistakes—which is a symbol of effective teams (Ribeiro, Duarte, and Gomes 2025). Those team conditions then translate into hard outcomes: better financials and operations, more innovation, higher stakeholder satisfaction, and stronger sustainability performance (Benameur et al. 2024; Ribeiro, Duarte, and Gomes 2025; Yu, Xiao, and Bo 2018). The framework also acknowledges reality: context matters. Culture, industry pressures, specific situations, and stakeholder expectations all shape how character plays out day to day. The task for leaders is to adapt wisely to those conditions without losing hold of core values (Yu, Xiao, and Bo 2018).

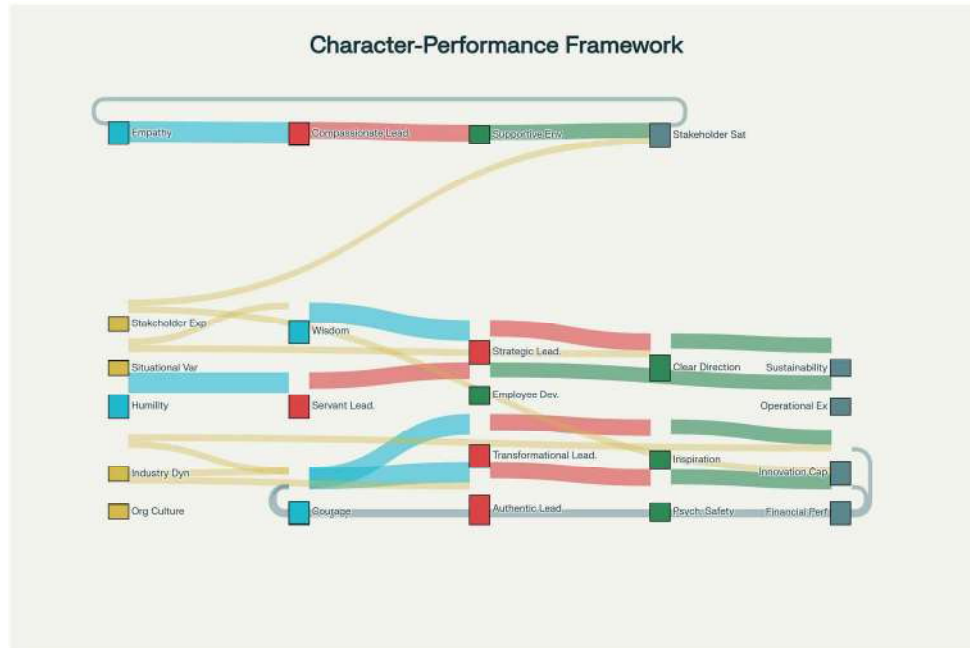


Figure 15. Framework 4: Character-Performance Relationship Framework.

Implications

Theoretical implications

The bibliometric analysis reveals several significant theoretical contributions that advance our understanding of business character research. First, the study establishes virtue ethics as the theoretical cornerstone of business character research, with virtue ethics emerging as the most dominant theme in the keyword analysis. This finding validates the philosophical foundations of character-based approaches and demonstrates how classical Aristotelian virtue ethics has been successfully translated into contemporary organizational contexts. The strong co-occurrence networks between character-virtue, business ethics-virtue ethics, and leadership-virtue themes provide empirical evidence of theoretical coherence within the field. Second, the analysis contributes to character development theory by revealing character as a developable rather than fixed trait. The proposed Five-Phase Character Development Framework (Discover, Activate, Strengthen, Connect, Sustain) challenges traditional personality-based leadership theories by demonstrating that character can be systematically cultivated through structured interventions. This developmental perspective represents a significant theoretical shift from essentialist views of leadership traits to constructivist approaches that emphasize growth and adaptation. Third, the study advances integrative leadership theory by demonstrating how character dimensions interact synergistically rather than operating independently. Fourth, the research contributes to stakeholder theory and sustainable business practices by establishing character-based leadership as a mechanism for creating shared value across multiple stakeholder groups. The Character-Performance Relationship Framework demonstrates theoretical linkages between individual character, leadership behaviors, team dynamics, and organizational outcomes, providing empirical support for stakeholder-centric business models that prioritize long-term value creation over short-term profits.

Practical implications

Leadership character frameworks offer profound insights that are reshaping how organizations think about competitive advantage in today's business environment. As companies increasingly

focus on sustainability and innovation, character-based leadership approaches are proving valuable for tackling modern challenges like ethical technology deployment, developing sustainable business models, and implementing stakeholder capitalism principles (Li and Yu 2018). The character-driven leadership frameworks make particularly compelling moves that goes beyond conventional performance indicators to create deeper organizational change (Stokes and Harris 2012). When organizations embrace these approaches, they often discover that developing virtues like justice, humility, and humanity in their leaders creates a ripple effect throughout the company. This translates into real benefits: employees become more engaged, customers develop stronger loyalty, and shareholders see improved returns over time. Rather than viewing character development as a soft skill initiative, forward-thinking organizations are recognizing it as a strategic investment that strengthens multiple aspects of business performance simultaneously. The developmental nature of character, contradicting fixed-trait assumptions, provides organizations with actionable pathways for leadership cultivation through structured assessment, targeted coaching, and progressive skill-building initiatives.

Furthermore, the frameworks establish contextual adaptation as a critical success factor, where leaders must demonstrate practical wisdom in applying character principles across diverse situational demands. One such leader behavior can be demonstrated in terms of micro-moments (Stokes et al. 2019). This adaptive capability enables organizations to maintain ethical consistency while responding effectively to evolving business challenges. The research reveals that character-based leadership creates a sustainable competitive moat, as virtue-driven decision-making processes, stakeholder-centric value propositions, and authentic organizational cultures prove difficult for competitors to replicate, positioning character development as a strategic imperative for long-term organizational success and societal contribution.

Conclusion, limitations & future research directions

Business character research has evolved into a rapidly growing, multidisciplinary field with strong theoretical foundations and increasing practical relevance. Its exponential growth since 2010 reflects rising recognition of character-based approaches in business education and practice. The field demonstrates thematic coherence around virtue ethics, business ethics, and leadership, while integrating emerging themes such as sustainability and innovation. Key authors, influential works, and collaborative networks provide a clear intellectual roadmap for future scholarships. Future research should focus on validating theoretical models, developing robust measurement instruments, and exploring character-based solutions to contemporary challenges. Priority areas include creating psychometrically sound tools for assessing character across industries and cultures, conducting cross-cultural studies to examine contextual influences, and undertaking longitudinal research on character development. Additionally, the integration of character with sustainability, digital transformation, and AI ethics offers promising directions. The field's evolution from philosophical roots to applied context positions it to make significant contributions to ethical business practices and sustainable organizational development. Opportunities also exist for expanding character-based approaches into organizational psychology, human resource management, and strategic management.

The study is based exclusively on the Web of Science database and focuses only on peer-reviewed journal articles related to business character, which may limit the breadth of the evidence base considered. Future work could broaden this scope by incorporating additional databases such as Scopus, EBSCO, or IEEE Xplore to capture a wider range of relevant publications and perspectives. In addition, only published journal articles were analyzed, while conference proceedings, industry white papers, and technical reports were omitted, even though these sources often report innovative or exploratory findings that could enrich the understanding of the field. The analysis also does not explicitly control the effects of self-citation, which may exaggerate the apparent impact of certain authors or studies within citation networks. Finally, this research does not

undertake a meta-analysis or an in-depth critical appraisal of study designs, which could have provided deeper insight into methodological strengths, weaknesses, and gaps. Future studies may address these limitations by undertaking research that has a wider range of data sources and adopting systematic or meta-analytic review methods for deeper investigation in the field of business character.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

No funding was obtained for the purpose of the study

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Data availability

The data extracted from web of science will be available on request.

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Certificate of Presentation

Paper: An empirical study on Organizational Citizenship Behaviour towards Environment: Ability, Motivation and Opportunity”

Track: T09_09 Sustainability at Work: HRM Practices and their Impact on Employees and Firm Outcomes

Authors: Meenakshi Bisla, Ms., Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Deepti Prakash, Dr, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Twinkle Arora, Ms., Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University.

Date & Time: Thursday 15 June, 2023, at 11:00 am

June 2023

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Professor Andrew Burke
Conference Chair