

THE ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION OF SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY WORK ENVIRONMENTS

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Dologlou Maria

Post Doc Researcher, Harokopio University, School of Environment Geography and Applied Economics

mdologlou@hotmail.com

Abstract

In our world, the environmental and social challenges that are constantly arising have led to the need for new leadership models that go beyond existing traditional leadership patterns. Modern leaders have a critical role to play in creating a sustainable society. They are not only called upon to manage challenges, but also to see beyond them and contribute to the design and implementation of long-term, sustainable strategies. Sustainable leadership promotes cooperation and participation of all stakeholders, transparency and accountability in decision-making and highlights its key role in balancing the triple bottom line of economy, society, and environment.

The aim of this article is to highlight the multi-faceted role and contribution of sustainable leadership in today's complex work environments. Furthermore, it will seek to introduce the emergence of this leadership approach not just as an option but as a necessity for contemporary leaders. After analyzing the relevant literature and attempting to define and distinguish the term "sustainable leadership" from traditional leadership models, it is observed that sustainable leadership transcends traditional leadership approaches. Its key characteristics include an emphasis on long-term sustainability, ethical decision making and a strong commitment to environmental and social responsibility.

In today's ever-evolving world, where the challenges of environmental and social sustainability persistently unfold, sustainable leadership emerges as the guiding light that can navigate us towards a more balanced and harmonious future. Modern leaders are bestowed with the responsibility not only to adapt to changes but to proactively shape a resilient society by fostering collaboration, ethical conduct, and ecological and societal stewardship. Hence, as this article delineates, sustainable leadership is no longer a choice but an indispensable cornerstone of leadership in our contemporary era.

Key words: *Sustainable development, sustainable leadership, leadership approaches*

Introduction

As we navigate through the complexities of the 21st century, we find ourselves facing unprecedented environmental and social challenges. These challenges demand a departure from traditional leadership patterns, necessitating the emergence of new models that extend beyond merely managing obstacles but actively contribute to the design and implementation of long-term, sustainable strategies. (Boeske, 2023)

In our pursuit of a sustainable society, leaders play a pivotal role. They are not merely captains steering their ships through stormy waters; they are visionaries entrusted with the responsibility of looking beyond immediate challenges and working towards a future characterized by balance and harmony. (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) This brings us to the essence of sustainable leadership—a leadership approach that promotes cooperation, transparency,

and accountability, while emphasizing the delicate equilibrium of the triple bottom line: economy, society, and environment. (Metcalf and Benn, 2012)

The aim of this paper is to shed light on the multi-faceted role and contribution of sustainable leadership in the contemporary workplace. We will explore the emergence of this leadership approach not as an optional strategy but as an indispensable necessity for leaders in our ever-evolving world. Also, we will try to define and distinguish the term "sustainable leadership" from other similar leadership styles, we will uncover its transformative characteristics, including a focus on long-term sustainability, ethical decision-making, and a profound commitment to environmental and social responsibility.

The Conceptual Framework

At its core, sustainable leadership transcends traditional models. It is not merely about responding to immediate challenges; it is about envisioning and creating a future that stands on the pillars of ethical decision-making and environmental and social responsibility. (Iqbal & Ahmad, 2020),(Gerard et al 2017)

Sustainable leadership goes beyond managing day-to-day operations; it involves the design and implementation of strategies that stand the test of time. It is about instilling a sense of purpose and direction that aligns with the long-term well-being of the organization, its stakeholders, and the world at large. (Liao, 2022)

Sustainable leadership is characterized by its proactive approach to environmental and social challenges. (Burns et al., 2015) Leaders who embrace sustainability take on the responsibility of minimizing their organization's negative impact on the environment. This includes reducing carbon footprints, minimizing waste, and implementing eco-friendly practices. Such efforts not only benefit the environment but also contribute to cost savings and enhanced reputation, aligning with the growing demand for environmentally responsible businesses.

Moreover, sustainable leaders foster a corporate culture that prioritizes ethical decision-making and social responsibility. (McCann & Sweet, 2013) They consider the welfare of all stakeholders, including employees, customers, and the communities in which they operate. This ethical orientation creates a positive work environment, leading to higher employee morale, increased job satisfaction, and improved retention rates. (Tushar, 2017) Sustainable leadership also acknowledges the importance of diversity and inclusivity, recognizing that a diverse workforce fosters innovation and adaptability. (Cherkowski, 2010)

Sustainable leadership is a key driver of innovation and adaptability in contemporary work environments. Leaders who encourage their teams to think creatively and proactively address challenges contribute to the development of cutting-edge products and services. They empower employees to embrace change and adapt to market shifts, enhancing the organization's competitive edge in a rapidly changing world. (Haroon et al., 2019) (Javed et al., 2020)

Which are the key principles of sustainable leadership?

Key principles of sustainable leadership include sustaining resilience, sustaining exhilarating leadership, sustaining leadership in complex times, and sustaining leadership for system change. (Davies, 2007) also according to the research of (Fry & Egel, 2021) include self-transcendence, interconnectedness, a Global Mindset for Sustainability, and ethical principles like remote moral responsibility and care and compassion.

Sustainable leadership involves balancing the triple goals of economy, society, and environment, with a focus on economic benefits, social responsibility, and environmental

protection. (Liao, 2022) also promotes dialogue and mutual interdependency between leaders and their followers, shifting focus from finances to environmental and social factors. (Gerard et al 2017)

Leadership, interpersonal skills, sustainability, change orientation, alignment with corporate culture, values, moral principles, and business vision are the seven pillars of sustainable leadership. Organizations can become more sustainable by utilizing the interdependent and connected sustainable leadership traits (leadership, interpersonal skills, focus on sustainability, change orientation, alignment with culture, values, moral principles, and corporate vision). (Borgert Armani et al., 2020)

Finally Global Leadership for Sustainability model emphasizes spirituality, a Global Mindset for Sustainability, and sustainability education to develop leaders who adopt a triple-bottom-line, balanced approach and address social and environmental challenges. According to that model sustainable leadership include a balanced stakeholder approach, spirituality, ethical principles, and a triple-bottom-line, balanced approach. (Sbircea, 2023)

The Multi-faceted Role of Sustainable Leadership

Leaders face several hurdles in today's dynamic work environments, ranging from social issues and environmental concerns to economic uncertainties. In order to practice sustainable leadership, leaders must actively participate in resolving these issues as well as navigating them.

All stakeholders are encouraged to collaborate and participate by sustainable leaders. They are aware that group activities produce long-lasting effects. A climate of trust and openness is fostered by sustainable leaders through encouraging accountability and transparency in decision-making. This leads to increased organizational effectiveness as well as the development of a flexible and resilient workplace culture. (Iqbal & Piwowar-Sulej, 2022)

Sustainable leaders use the triple bottom line as a compass to guide them: economic prosperity, social well-being, and environmental sustainability. In order to balance these three aspects, a comprehensive strategy that looks beyond immediate benefits is needed. Sustainable CEOs understand that societal well-being and environmental stewardship are essential to a healthy economy. Sustainable success is defined by the careful interaction of these variables. (Liao, 2022)

The Necessity of Sustainable Leadership in Contemporary Work Environments

As we consider the necessity of sustainable leadership in contemporary work environments, we turn to the wealth of literature that underscores its emergence as a guiding principle. No longer is sustainable leadership an option; it is a necessity dictated by the realities of our world. The call for sustainability is not just an ethical stance but a strategic.

Sustainable leadership is necessary for modern working environments as it helps maintain resilience, exhilarating leadership, and system change in various complex times. (Davies, 2007), also sustainable leadership is necessary for modern working environments too as it requires systems thinking and coordinated efforts from different sectors and disciplines to achieve sustainable societies. (Broman et al., 2014)

Global Leadership for Sustainability (GLfS) incorporates spirituality, self-transcendence, and interconnectedness, promoting a balanced approach to social and environmental challenges. (Fry & Egel, 2021). Also Sustainable leadership requires a new model of collective leadership that embraces critical reflection, inclusivity, and care for people and the planet. Leadership collectives in academia can support a shift from metrics to merits, career focus to

care, and inter- and trans-disciplinary research, fostering a new model of collective leadership for sustainability transformations. (Care et al., 2021)

Sustainable leadership is about proactive engagement with the challenges of our time. It is a commitment to shaping a resilient society that can withstand and adapt to the unforeseen. In a world where environmental and social sustainability persistently unfold as critical issues, sustainable leadership emerges as the guiding light that can navigate us towards a more balanced and harmonious future. Sustainable leadership requires addressing environmental issues as a crucial aspect of business operations, involving top management and strategic principles and theories of leadership. (Woo & Kang, 2020)

Contributions of Sustainable Leadership

Sustainable leaders leverage their teams' collective intellect by promoting cooperation and teamwork. They understand how to effectively solve complex situations, inclusive decision-making and a diversity of opinions are necessary. By doing this, they improve society well-being in addition to organizational performance.

Sustainable leadership is fundamentally based on ethical behavior. Leaders who place a high value on moral decision-making foster an environment of honesty and confidence. This enhances the internal workings of companies and adds to the general public's confidence in business and leadership. Long-term success is harmed by temporary benefits attained by immoral means, as sustainable leaders are aware of. (Hasan et al., 2023)

One of the main characteristics of sustainable leadership is environmental and social stewardship. Adopting this strategy means that leaders are thinking about the wider effects of their choices in addition to the bottom line. They actively look for methods to reduce their impact on the environment, encourage social responsibility, and improve the areas in which they operate. Essentially, sustainable leaders recognize that their success is determined not just by their financial achievements but also by the enduring and constructive effects they have on society. (Redekop, 2010)

Finally Sustainable leadership is essential for the success of a company and its collaborative working environment, promoting continuous development of team members and coworkers. Sustainable leadership requires shared responsibility, shared learning, success, diversity, capacity, and continuous development of team members and coworkers. (Amar, 2018)

How leadership can encourage innovation and change in a more sustainable direction.

By adopting transformational and dual innovation leadership styles, fostering psychological empowerment, organizational learning, and a culture of innovation, and integrating sustainability into business strategies and supply chain management, leadership can promote innovation and change towards sustainability.

According to the study of Begum et al ,2020 transformational leadership in Chinese small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)leads to sustainable organizational innovation through the mediation of psychological empowerment and organizational learning. Also, Startup virtual corporations can successfully integrate environmental and sustainability considerations into business strategy, transforming technology, products, and markets. Entrepreneurs can create sustainable innovation through the cultivation and leadership of a network of players, integrating environmental and sustainability considerations into business strategy. (Larson, A. 2000)

The study of Toseef et al 2022 which was about Inspiring leadership and innovative communication, mediated by mutual trust, significantly predict employee engagement and

commitment in socially sustainable organizations, with mutual trust acting as a mediator. Also, another research that shows the significance of leadership is the study of Haroon et al 2019, which shows us that sustainable leadership enhances innovation by producing better results, reducing turnover, and absenteeism, and hastening inventions and new creations in industries.

From all the above we can realize how leadership can encourage innovation and change in a more sustainable direction. Finally, leadership can encourage innovation by creating a culture of innovation that fosters creativity, experimentation, collaboration, and knowledge sharing, while building diverse and inclusive teams. (Menon et al 2023).

Conclusion

In conclusion, as we reflect on the role and contribution of sustainable leadership in contemporary work environments, we recognize that it is no longer a choice but an indispensable cornerstone of leadership in our era. The challenges of our time demand leaders who can navigate complexity, foster collaboration, and uphold ethical conduct while actively contributing to the well-being of society and the environment.

Sustainable leadership is characterized by a balance of economic, social, and environmental goals, ethical principles, interconnectedness, a focus on change and resilience, and the importance of dialogue and stakeholder engagement.

The ethical principles of sustainable leadership encompass a care-focused relational stance, global mindset with moral responsibility and compassion, trust-building, vision and understanding for sustainable practices, integrity, honesty, responsibility, and mindful actions that drive positive environmental and social change. (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019) (Lashley, 2016)

In contemporary work environments, sustainable leadership promotes ethical decision-making, environmental responsibility, and a culture of inclusivity. It drives innovation and adaptability, which are essential for an organization's long-term success and resilience in the face of uncertainty. As the business landscape continues to evolve, embracing sustainable leadership is not merely an option but a necessity for organizations aspiring to thrive and make a positive impact on society and the planet.

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