

Sustainable Leadership in Global Context

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Abstract. The aim of this research is to develop a conceptual framework of sustainable leadership in organizations in a global context. The conceptual study provides a theoretical framework for this newly defined approach, emphasizing that the concept is still newly defined and in its early stages concerning the global academic debate. The study presents an overview of classical, contemporary, and sustainable approaches to leadership, developing a comparison between traditional and sustainable approaches to leadership in organizations. Furthermore, this study develops a conceptual framework on sustainable leadership in a global context, examining six dimensions of sustainable leadership, including capacity building, diversity, equity, conservation resourcefulness, and strategic directions. Future studies could further examine robust and innovative research methodologies to explore and measure the construct of sustainable leadership. Future studies could also explore geographical samples across the globe, focusing on the South Mediterranean region and contributing to academic debate and research.

Keywords: sustainable leadership, classical approaches, contemporary approaches, new paradigm, sustainability

1. Introduction

The current study presents a conceptual model of sustainable leadership in organizations emphasizing new trends reflecting a new organizational and global era. This study provides a theoretical overview of different approaches to managerial leadership in organizations. Since the mid-20th century, different theories of managerial leadership have examined critical approaches to leadership including traits, behavior, contingencies, and relationships theories on managerial leadership in organizations.

Furthermore, since the beginning of the 21st century, a contemporary approach to leadership, specifically sustainable, has emerged. For example, different studies on sustainable leadership have been examined critically and thoroughly during the first 20 years in the 21st century.

This study aims to provide such an overview examining previous and current theories on managerial leadership. The new approach has been emphasized, particularly in the 21st century. It is possible to argue that sustainable leadership is a newly defined approach in behavioral and managerial leadership (Lambert 2012). Sustainable leadership has been undoubtedly emphasized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2023).

The concept of sustainable leadership has clarified different types of leadership most fundamentally associated with social environmental and economical sustainability (Dalati 2021). Sustainable leadership requires a holistic and systematic approach, which would comprise social environmental and economical sustainability (Dalati 2021). The overall performance of molding and sustainable organizations depends critically on the effectiveness of managers and leaders within this organization (Hargreaves and Fink 2012).

2. Leadership: Classical Approaches

By presenting classical approaches, this study presents several ranges and theories of leadership. Defining leadership involves the psychological, familial, cultural, social, and political impacts that surround this phenomenon. One cannot simply say the story of leadership is about the human ability to dominate, influence, and direct others to achieve a certain purpose or goal - end of story. The context and culture are extremely focal points in making leadership experience. Leadership in Western culture is different from other experiences in Eastern ones. For example, women are viewed differently in these two cultures as we compare Western and Eastern cultures. Gender, as a matter of fact, is an essential issue while studying leadership. Cultural, religious, ethical, and social values are also vital issues when approaching the leadership phenomenon. The objective and outcome of this experience are also important, and the ethical side of leadership must also be taken into consideration. It is quite interesting to see how many different dimensions could be presented in the context of leadership.

By reflecting on traditional and conventional approaches to leadership in the mid-20th century, it is interesting to highlight the leadership experience and priorities which focused on the individual leader in terms of their traits, qualities, and behaviors (Stogdill and Coons 1957, Blake et al. 1962, Blake and Mouton 1985). Consequently, as the business and industry environment progressed, leadership priorities developed into further complicated contexts, including contingency approaches, follower readiness, and situational contexts (Fielder, 1964; Hersey and Blanchard, 1982). Further theories of leadership reflect a shift from contingency to influence theories, highlighting the importance of charismatic and visionary leaders (Cogner and Kanungo 1998; Cogner 1999). Thus, the twenty-first century observed a shift from an old paradigm to a new paradigm of leadership in organizations (Daft 2018).

3. Leadership: Contemporary Approaches

Theories examined in the 1990s reflect this shift toward influence theories (Boal and Brynson 1988; Bass 1990; Cogner and Kanungo 1998; Cogner 1999; Kouses and Posner 1995; Ergeneli et al. 2007; Kouses and Pssner 2017; Kotter 1996; Northouse 2019). Various schools and approaches in the quest for clarifying leadership have been presented at individual, group, and organizational levels. The term

has been examined from different angles where leadership can be examined in terms of personality and its influence, inducing compliance among followers, and exercising influence among followers and in organizational scope. It is arguably useless to alienate the previous different definitions of leadership. The quest for a definition of leadership requires a collaborative approach incorporating the prior theories with contemporary ones (Dalati 2015).

Methodology applied by the previous authors to explore and observe leadership phenomenon in this context could be classified as the following: leadership is explored according to tools fundamental principles that support these leadership practices two leadership is explored under the light of actual case study examples of real people and leaders three leadership is explored through survey questionnaires interviews focus groups and data collection of a single best practice leadership case in the business and organizational context for leadership is studied through the focus on a group context and the relation between the leader and the group members. A study by Kouzes and Posner (2015, 2017) illustrates five main factors in organizational leadership. The methodology applied in this study includes performing case study analysis, focus groups, and reviews in the context of leadership in organizations. These findings were analyzed and summarized into five fundamental practices of exemplary leadership. These aspects that characterize the effective leader are being honest, forward-looking, inspiring, and competent.

4. Sustainable Leadership Approaches

Sustainable leadership aspects in organizations are becoming a very significant research topic of investigation that requires comprehensive examination. The need for institution leaders is increasingly growing in the business and organizational environment, which is becoming transnational, global, virtual, and boundary-less. There is a strong argument in the current literature of studies about the South Mediterranean region that the management mindset is still operating under traditional and bureaucratic approaches (Dalati, Raudeliūnienė, and Davidavičienė 2017, Dalati 2021 a, Dalati 2021 b). Compared with the traditional mind set of management, a contemporary management mindset emerges, reflecting the new era of management paradigm (Daft 2018). The new mindset of management, which reflects this new era, emphasizes the need for new approaches that would stress horizontal, collaborative, socially responsible, and sustainable management practices (Dalati 2021b). This new mindset of the 21st century reflects the needs of this era, mainly the emphasis on ethical, social, and responsible management developed for the emergence of sustainable leadership in organizations in the global context (Dalati 2021 a, Dalati 2021b). The concept of sustainable leadership is in its very early beginning, and some scientists argue it is in its infancy (Lambert 2012).

Sustainable leadership integrates leadership and management practices and values such as competitive and motivated staff and team orientation, trust, strategic planning, vision, ethical behavior, financial independence, environmental and social responsibility, ethical behavior, culture, knowledge management aspects such as knowledge sharing, innovation, quality (Suriyankietkaew and Avery 2016).

Hargreaves and Fink (2004), in their research "The Seven Principles of Sustainable Leadership," developed seven principles. The study encompassed aspects, including length, depth, justice, breadth, resourcefulness, diversity, conservation, and sustainable leadership matters. Sustainable leadership conserves, defends, and endorses responsible and ethical practices that aim to sustain social, economic, and organizational environments, with the commitment to and remaining care for others. Sustainable leadership lasts. Sustainable leadership conserves and advances appreciated aspects of life over time, from one leader to the next. The argument in this context is that no matter how charismatic or influential the leader is, they will eventually perish. The challenges of leadership succession, of leading across and beyond individual leaders over time, are at the very heart of sustainable leadership and educational change. Sustainable leadership spreads. It sustains and depends on the leadership of others. In a new management paradigm, no leader or institution can govern everything without collaborating with other partners. Sustainable leadership is distributed as an ambition for what leadership would be. Sustainable

leadership adopts fair and just values and principles, and it does not harm the surrounding environment of the organization at its different types. Sustainable leadership works to improve the environment by protecting resources and does not create a negative influence on its stakeholders from neighboring institutions. Sustainable university leadership does not prosper at other organizations' expense. Sustainable leadership develops ways to share knowledge and resources with peer institutions. In that sense, sustainable leadership is collaborative rather than competitive. Sustainable leadership promotes diversity. Sustainable universities encourage diversity and avoid standardization, which weakens learning and resilience in dealing with problems at different levels, including local, national, regional, and international. Sustainable leadership learns from diversity in teaching and learning and develops by generating consistency and networking. Sustainable leadership develops and does not deplete material and human resources. Sustainable leadership provides rewarding mechanisms for talented personnel at their early career stages. It does not drain personnel energy through innovation overwork or unrealistic timelines for change. Sustainable leadership honors and learns from the best of the past to create an even better future. Sustainable leadership preserves and renews its long-lasting core existence and sense of purpose. Sustainable leadership advocates change with lasting memories honoring the achievements of previous individuals.

A significant study by Steve Lambert (2012) also developed an understating of sustainable leadership, highlighting six factors: building human capacity, strategy, and partnership, developing long-term goals from short-term objectives, building a diversified workplace, and the learned lessons. Sustainable leadership establishes capacity building in staff and develops opportunities for staff to develop their capacity and best practices in leadership and management. Sustainable leadership empowers individuals at all levels of the organization and operates leadership activities. Sustainable leadership collaborates with its partners and stakeholders to ensure the work process meets the needs of the locality. Sustainable leadership collaborates and balances between the long-term objectives of the organization and the short-term targets. Sustainable leadership learns from diversity, creating social inclusion and cohesion. Sustainable leadership honors and learns from the past to create a better future.

5. Sustainable Versus None Sustainable Leadership

The reality of sustainable leadership is characterized by a critical shift driven by the 21st-century volatile global environment. This is a strong argument regarding a new reality characterized by contemporary trends, including a shift towards social media, a global environment mixing local with global, mobile technology, renewable energy smart technologies, and geopolitical wars. The 21st century is characterized by a volatile social, economic, technological, geopolitical, and global environment. Climate change, resource scarcity, telecommunication, and the shift towards a virtual environment in education institutions and business organizations are critical. New concerns regarding cyber security are also critical trends currently. The redistribution of economic power among nations is also precarious. Therefore, a serious need emerges for a new leadership approach on organizational, national, and even global bases. Although many organizations are still operating based on traditional approaches, they are proving to be lacking effectiveness and efficiency. Therefore, it is beneficial to compare between a traditional approach to leadership, which is not sustainable, and contemporary approaches of leadership, which is sustainable (Daft 2018).

A study by Avery (2011) identified 19 leadership dimensions and practices comparing between sustainable and not sustainable leadership practices.

Table 1: Sustainable Versus Not Sustainable Leadership: Foundation Practices (source: based on Avery et al. 2011)

Leadership elements	Sustainable leadership	Not sustainable leadership
Developing people	Continuously	Selectively
Labor relations	Cooperation	Acts antagonistically

Retaining staff	Values long tenure at all levels	Accepts high staff turnover
Valuing staff	Is concerned about employees' welfare	Treats people as interchangeable and a cost
CEO and top team	CEO works as a top team member	CEO is a decision-maker
Ethical behavior	Doing the right thing is an explicit core value	Ambivalent, negotiable, and assessable risk
Long-or short-term perspective	Prefers the long term over the short term	Short-term profits and growth
Organizational change	Change is an evolving and considered process	Change is a fast adjustment, volatile
Financial markets orientation	Seeks maximum independence from others	Follows its masters' will
Responsibility for environment	Environment protection	Environment exploitation
Social responsibility	Values people and community	Exploitation of people and community
Stakeholders	Every individual matter	Shareholders matter
Business vision	Shared future view	The future does not necessarily drive the business

Avery (2011) expanded the dimension to 23 and added several elements.

Table 2: Sustainable Versus Not Sustainable Leadership: Higher-level Practices (source: based on Avery et al. 2011)

Leadership elements	Sustainable leadership	Not sustainable leadership
Decision making	Consensual and devolved	Manager-centered
Self-management	Staff	Managers
Team orientation	Extensive and empowered	Manager-centered
Culture	Enabling, widely-shared culture	Weak
Knowledge sharing and retention	Spreads throughout the organization	Limits knowledge
Trust	High trust	Low trust

These dimensions are illustrated in Tables 1, 2, and 3. A comparison between sustainable and not sustainable leadership behaviors is drawn across three levels.

Table 3: Sustainable Versus Not Sustainable Leadership: Key Performance Drivers (source: based on Avery et al. 2011)

Leadership elements	Sustainable leadership	Not sustainable leadership
Innovation	Strong, systematic	Selective and limited
Staff engagement	Emotionally-committed	Financial rewards
Quality	Embedded in the culture	Control

These levels are foundation practices, higher-level practices, and key performance drivers. For example, whereas sustainable leadership emphasizes developing employees continuously, including all

levels, not sustainable leadership develops people selectively.

6. Conceptual Framework of Sustainable Leadership in Global Context

The present research overviews the prior and current literature on managerial leadership in organizations with the aim of presenting a theory of sustainable leadership. Historically, leadership theories range from early theories of traits, behaviors, contingencies, and relationships (Dalati 2015). With the rise of the 21st century, new concepts have emerged in the research arena concerning leadership studies. Sustainable leadership is one of the contemporary approaches to leadership and management of organizations. The new era of the 21st century can be characterized by a shift from traditional approaches to new leadership approaches (Daft 2018). In the new reality of leading and managing organizations, sustainable leadership is a critical approach and tendency toward contemporary management. This current research on sustainable leadership presents contemporary concepts associated with sustainable leadership, including a shift towards capacity building, diversity, protecting the environment, emphasizing sustainable behaviors within the organization, and balancing the emphasis between short-term and long-term. The following dimensions are examined in this research.

6.1. Capacity Building

The first dimension of sustainable leadership encompasses capacity building as a quality and characteristic of the sustainable leader. Sustainable leadership emphasizes building capacity in various aspects, including human, technical, organizational, economical, national, and global. Capacity building comprises the following subscales: (a) staff motivator, (b) provides training, (c) provides opportunities for staff, (d) mentors, and (e) provision of job shadowing.

6.2. Diversity

The second dimension of sustainable leadership encompasses diversity. Sustainable leadership emphasizes diversity as a critical component among its internal and external stakeholders. Diversity comprises the following subscales: (a) social inclusion, (b) engaging with stakeholders, (c) creating a social environment, (d) inclusive staff for opportunities, and (e) monitoring for work mechanisms.

6.3. Equity and Justice

The third dimension of sustainable leadership emphasizes equity and justice. The sustainable leader promotes fairness, justice, and equity, strongly emphasizing fairness among stakeholders. Fairness includes the distribution of resources and a fair and equitable approach. Equity and justice comprise the following subscales: (a) promotes equity, (b) provides equal opportunities, (c) fair distribution of resources, (d) does not harm the surrounding environment, (e) collaborative rather than competitive.

6.4. Conservation

The fourth dimension of sustainable leadership emphasizes conservation. Sustainable leadership and the sustainable leader protect, preserve, and promote sustaining the environment, protecting various aspects of the organization and the environment, including organizational, social and economic aspects. Sustainable leadership conserves and advances appreciated aspects of life from one leader to the next. Conservation encompasses the following subscales: (a) learns from the past to create a better future, (b) protects the environment, (c) improves workflow, (d) promotes the sustaining environment, and (e) solicits ideas from all levels of the organization.

6.5. Resourcefulness

The fifth aspect of sustainable leadership is resourcefulness. The sustainable leader and the sustainable organization are resourceful. Sustainable leadership develops various approaches to sharing knowledge and resources with the environment.

The sustainable leader does not deplete material and human resources but instead promotes

preserves and develops ways to capitalize on the resources within the environment. Sustainable leadership preserves and renews its long-lasting core existence and a sense of purpose; it does not drain personnel energy through innovation overwork or unrealistic timelines for change. Resourcefulness encompasses the following subscales: (a) does not deplete material and human resources, (b) does not create a negative influence on the environment, (c) develops ways to share knowledge, (d) develops ways to share resources, (e) does not prosper at other organizations expenses.

6.6. Strategic Direction

The final aspect of sustainable leadership is strategic direction. Sustainable leadership emphasizes strategic direction. Sustainable leadership emphasizes strategic distribution in the sense that sustainable leader is associated with developing a long-term perspective, balancing between long-term and short-term perspectives.

Strategic direction encompasses the following subscale: (a) creating a balance between long and short term, (b) finding practical solutions, (c) engaging employees for inputs and ideas, (d) thinking outside the box, (e) resilience dealing with problems at different levels including local, national, regional and international. Figure 1 illustrates the components of sustainable leadership globally, drawing attention to the importance of the abovementioned dimensions.

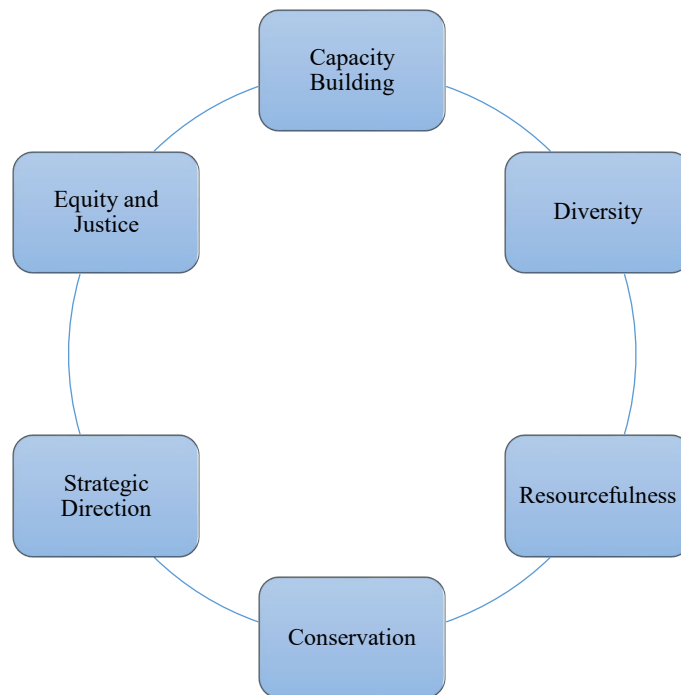


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework of Sustainable Leadership in Global Context

7. Discussion and Future Studies

The previous research on sustainable leadership shows similar results to this current study (Avery 2011; Hargreaves and Fink 2012; Lambert 2012). In the study entitled "The Seven Principles of Sustainable Leadership," Hargreaves and Fink (2012) emphasize similar dimensions, including conservation resourcefulness, diversity justice, and strategic orientation. Lambert (2012) also develops a sustainable leadership framework highlighting the importance of capacity building, strategic orientation, diversity, consolidation, and conservation. Avery et al. (2011) developed research on sustainable leadership encompassing similar dimensions, including ethical behavior, social responsibility, staff development, long-term perspective innovation, and organizational culture.

The current study contributes to the body of academic and theoretical knowledge and understanding of sustainable leadership, consistent with the previous research. The conceptual framework reinforces

that further work is required in this domain. Future research is highly recommended to investigate the concept's conceptualization more profoundly and develop robust methodologies exploring the concept. Quantitative and qualitative approaches are recommended to be applied in scientific research in this domain. Interviews, survey questionnaires, and case study approaches are suitable methodological approaches. Designing a robust data collection tool is critical for the application of this study, selecting samples from business and education organizations.

8. Conclusions

This research has provided a conceptual framework of sustainable leadership in the global context, emphasizing dimensions associated with contemporary and sustainable leadership. The study contributes to academic knowledge by elaborating on prior research and integrating new dimensions of sustainable leadership (leading with equity and justice). The paper contributes to the knowledge and academic debate by emphasizing the new mindset of contemporary and sustainable leadership in organizations characterized by transformation from bureaucratic, vertical, and mechanistic to empowering horizontal and organic management mindsets.

The current research highlights the importance of the new era of global management, emphasizing collaboration and soft power as a practical substitute for direct and aggressive competition and conflict in organizational, economical, and geopolitical contexts. Developing further examination of methodologies to explore the concept is critical. Quantitative and qualitative approaches could include employing interviews and case study analyses of sustainable organizations and business leaders across the globe and the South Mediterranean region. Future studies could investigate samples from business organizations exploring business cases and samples from different sectors, including private and public sectors. Further studies could also develop new models initiating inquiries for sustainable leadership best practices, discovering new themes, envisioning preferred sustainable future, and designing and delivering ways to create this future.

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