

Exploring Sustainable Leadership

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ABSTRACT: It is widely believed that leadership is a fundamental element in transforming any organization into a sustainable organization and that the sustainable leadership allows a firmer and resilient solution to attain sustainability that is acceptable to all the key stakeholders in any organization. It is believed that organizations should discontinue to consider leadership as a tool to control employees. Although, sustainability, sustainable practices and sustainable leadership are the topics that have been discussed by many scholars and researchers, but the available literature suggests that for the effective implementation, more theoretical and practical study of the topic is required. The aim of this study is to investigate and analyze the notion of sustainable leadership to offer a conceptual framework encompassing sustainable leadership. This contemporary study reexamined the present structures, theories, and fine points of sustainable leadership conceptually and offer a combined conceptualized framework. The conceptualized blend of the literature encompassing the sustainable leadership theories in various perspectives prescribed by Hargreaves and Fink (2004), Davies (2007), Casserley and Critchley (2010), Avery and Bergsteiner (2011), and Steve Lambert (2011). These pivotal propositions are represented with the aim of unifying the core theories of sustainable leadership and organizing them for undemanding access for the future researchers.

KEYWORDS: Sustainability, Leadership, Sustainable leadership, Sustainable Practices

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the scholars, researchers and academicians are discussing provocative issues such as inadequate resources, political unpredictability, climate change, cultural divergences, mass migration-based disturbance, globalization, and extreme poverty (Caffaro et al., 2019; Iqbal et al., 2020). In order to deal with such challenges, in 2015 the United Nations' general assembly presented "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs), which was an initiative comprising a set goals, targets and markers. This initiative was aimed to aid prevalent economic growth, abolition of poverty at the international level, care for the global climate change, otherwise known as global warming and its effects and the reassurance of social trust among key stakeholders of the society (Holden et al., 2017; Sachs, 2016). The three conjointly strengthening pillars of different aspects of sustainable development are believed to be social and economic growth, protection of the environment and dynamic and meaningful interaction among wide-ranging stakeholders (Halisçelik & Soytaş, 2019).

Any organization's sustainable practices yield enduring, long-term, and rewarding outcomes (Iqbal et al., 2020; Rehman et al., 2017; Syed & Dong, 2017). Leaders' leadership styles and traits meaningfully effects financial stability and sustainable functioning (Burawat, 2019) by offering a roadmap, sharing best practices to shape the leadership approach (Mohanty, 2019), and by leveraging longstanding standpoint to engage different stakeholders (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). For this reason, an inclination in the leadership literature towards the acceptance of person-centered and resource-based approaches of leadership are perceptible. Together with this framework several researchers have acknowledged the inevitability of enduring leadership practices (Suriyankietkaew & C. Avery, 2014). As the result of global financial calamities, numerous organizations are looking for a better, more secure, and steady progression through long-standing approaches to leaders and their followers' development (Kantabutra, S. and Saratun, 2013).

There have been various discussions on the need of a leadership development models within organizations (T Casserley & Critchley, 2010; Crews, 2010; Hewison, A. and Griffiths, 2014). However, many organizations are lacking in appreciation of the possibilities to improve their perception on leadership and to embrace efficacious opportunities for leadership development (Crews, 2010). Modern studies suggest that organizations, rather than allowing leadership as a "control function" (T Casserley &

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Critchley, 2010; Crews, 2010) should emphasize more on effective and transparent communication and the notion of interdependence between leaders and their subordinates (Barr & Dowing, 2012; Bulmer et al., 2021).

The present study examines the evolving literature and theories on sustainable leadership and formative assessment derived from the frameworks to acquire a conceptual framework. The idea of sustainable leadership is yet in initial stages of development (Steve Lambert, 2011), however, a few guiding models and limited empirical studies on sustainable leadership are there to aid overpowering the resistance to adopt sustainable leadership (Crews, 2010).

SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP

Due to the global crisis such as, economic instability, political uncertainty, pandemic and poverty, the notion of sustainable leadership has become a core solution of general calamities and gained interest and importance by researchers worldwide. Avery and Bergsteiner (2011) defined sustainable leadership as follows:

“Sustainable Leadership requires taking a long-term perspective in making decisions; fostering systematic innovation aimed at increasing customer value; developing a skilled, loyal and highly engaged workforce; and offering quality products, services and solutions.”

The above definition of sustainable leadership adds focus on this leadership style's ability to ensure moral and upright management, lower overheads, with augmenting reputation and brand (Kantabutra, S. and Saratun, 2013). Avery and Bergsteiner developed this theory in an organizational perspective. Whereas the other authors gave the distinctive individualistic explanation of the concept and emphasized on emerging particularized personal leaders' sustainably (T Casserley & Critchley, 2010). Several other researchers and scholars consider contrasting perspectives while examining the idea of “sustainability” and proved it to be a fundamental consideration in determining how organizations perceive and practice the concept. Consequently, it has been discussed that sustainable leadership permit a firm, speedy and resilient reaction, which is viable and interesting to stakeholders (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). The notion of Sustainability is the original concept that led to the idea of sustainable leadership and the objectives of the notions align.

Although in the business perspective, the sustainable leadership suggests various benefits of implementing the concept, Avery and Bergsteiner (2011) signal that some researchers imply it as an idealistic and humanist approach that has been overlooked and avoided in the past. Despite that, it is clear that the existing postulations all-encompassing leadership must be expanded further than its core focus of profit making (Bulmer et al., 2021; T Casserley & Critchley, 2010; Tuan, 2012). Thus, establishing proposals, such as, the triple bottom line has indicated a modification to accustomed business philosophy. One of the goals of sustainable leadership is to ultimately ensure that every organization should build on its present state of affairs towards a practicable efficacious future that includes emphasizing on the long-lasting, enduring accomplishments and not just financial success (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004b). The definitions of sustainable leadership given by different scholars feature a number of characteristics and qualities underpinning the construct. Hence, one singular definition cannot be employed, rather key resemblances are explored within the conceptual framework.

Frameworks of sustainable leadership

Sustainable leadership has been employed in several distinct settings and situations. Davies (2007), Hargreaves and Fink (2004) and Lambert (2011) examined sustainable leadership in the education sector in the USA and UK by adopting the organizational level of analysis. Avery and Bergsteiner (2011), however, adopted an organizational standpoint in various contexts. Casserley and Critchley (2010) emphasized on the development of individuals as sustainable leaders. In spite of the divergent structures in sustainable theories, a number of reappearing themes are evident and call for consideration. These arguments can be alienated into individual and organizational processes, such as, professional development prospects both for leaders and employees through an effective succession planning. Moreover, inclusion and depth are two important elements for considerations. Every organization should embed sustainable leadership as a policy matter whereas developing individuals and resourcefulness should be at every level of an organization. This incorporates professional development at individual level, balancing out objectives of the organizations while augmenting the organization's future.

The following table summarizes common sustainable leadership frameworks. It distinguishes some key features, practices and attributes of sustainable leadership as prescribed by well-known researchers and scholars who appraised the notion. The present paper uses these to strengthen and support a conceptual model of sustainable leadership, investigates the influential themes and review their implications.

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Hargreaves and Fink (2006)			
<i>Focused on UK & US's Education Sector with an emphasis on principal leadership in organizational perspective.</i>			
Definition - "The image of the future places different and more challenging demands on leadership. It now becomes leadership for learning, leadership by learning, and leadership as learning." (Hargreaves and Fink, 2011, p.19)			
Framework –	Depth Justice Conservation	Length Diversity	Breadth Resourcefulness
Davies (2007)			
<i>Focused on UK & US's Education Sector in organizational perspective.</i>			
Definition - "Sustainable leadership can be considered to be made up of the key factors that underpin the longer-term development of the school. It builds a leadership culture based on moral purpose which provides success that is accessible to all" (p. 11)			
Framework –	Outcomes rather than output Passion Capacity Building and involvement	Short-term and long-term objectives balancing Personal humility and professional will Development of strategic measures for success	Processes rather than plans Strategic timing and abandonment Building in Sustainability
Casserley and Critchley (2010)			
<i>Focused on private Sector with an emphasis on developing sustainable leaders in individual perspective.</i>			
Definition - "Performance derives from an integration of three core processes: reflection on action; psychological intelligence; and physiological well-being...it is the integration of these three core processes, followed by their engagement with the culture of the organization, which constitutes effective leadership development, generates sustainable leaders, and is more likely to create sustainable organizations" (p. 290)			
Framework –	Reflection on Action Engagement of core processes with the organization's culture	Psychological Intelligence	Psychological well-being
Lambert (2011)			
<i>Focused on UK & US's Education Sector with an emphasis on sustainable leadership development in organizational perspective.</i>			
Definition - "If sustainable leadership is to have any measurable impact on the organization, it needs commitment from all levels of the organization to create a culture in which leadership skills can be developed" (p. 145)			
Framework –	Capacity building of staff Builds long-term objectives from short-term goals	Strategic distribution Diversity	Consolidates Conservation

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Avery and Bergsteiner (2011)			
<i>Focused on Private Sector to explore “honeybee” and “locust” organizations in organizational perspective.</i>			
Definition - “Sustainable leadership helps an organization endure over time and weather the inevitable storms that best an enterprise” (p. 7) “Sustainable leadership emerges from the interplay of many factors there is no one “right” way within the overall sustainable leadership paradigm” (p. 5)			
Framework –	People’s development Succession Planning Ethical Behaviour Financial Market Orientation Stakeholder Consideration Self-management Knowledge-sharing Staff Engagement	Labour Relation Valuing Staff Long & Short-term perspectives Responsibility for Environment Role of Vision in higher level business practices Team Orientation Trust KP drivers Quality	Staff Retention CEO & Top Team Organizational Change Social Responsibility Decision making Culture Innovation

Table: Sustainable Leadership Models’ Comparison

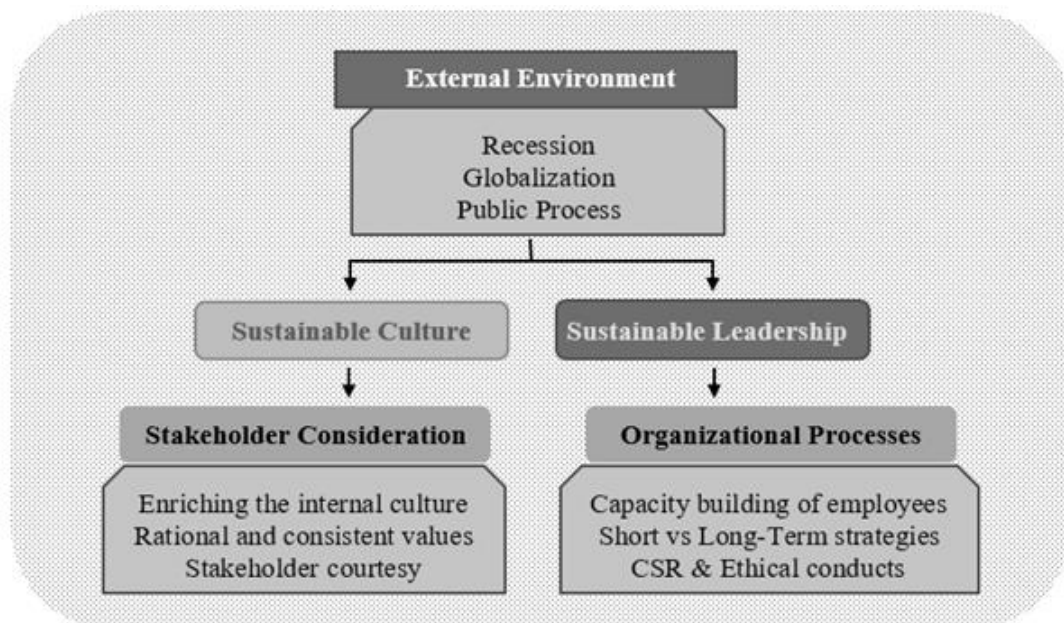


Figure: Conceptual Framework of Sustainable Leadership

Influencing Sustainable Leadership

The comparison and synthesis of sustainable leadership models prescribed by various scholars lead to the revelation of some internal and external elements that (may) influence sustainable culture of an organization and its leadership. The sustainable leadership model developed in this study can be beneficial in drawing comparisons and linking the possible inferences of sustainable leadership with the available literature. The figure above, illustrates the main factors and the subfactors that are vital in order to attain sustainable culture within an organization and sustainable leadership for individuals and organizations. The present study will examine “External Environment”, “Stakeholder Consideration”, and “Organizational Processes” in detail to outline the focus of every component within these main factors.

External Environment

In the process of developing sustainable leadership, it is imperative to consider the linkage and interdependency of external environment, corporate domination, and ethical trustworthiness. The present study touched upon the areas of context, the individuals and practices that effect sustainable leadership. Garavan, Gubbins, Hogan, and Woodlock (2007) suggest that context

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plays an important role in determinant the effectiveness of strategic human resource development. Hence, not only the context of sustainable leadership's implementation is significant, but the consideration of external context is also important.

Steinmann, Annika and Gunter (2016) refer to Hargreaves and Fink's (2003, 2006) theory of sustainable leadership to underline that due to the focus on the improvement of individuals by distribution of responsibilities, care for the environment, and enduring approach, the interest in the study of sustainable leadership is on the rise. (Oketcho et al., 2020) emphasize on leaders' responsibility to perform beyond their egocentricities. Hammad and Shah (2018) draw attention to the previous studies that have demonstrated the positive effects of ethical leadership on leader-employee relationship. It is valuable to note that the understanding of context is vital when theorizing sustainable leadership. Lambert (2011) suggested that sustainable leadership should be observant, continually "scanning" the surrounding environment to safeguard it from depreciation in the working conditions of an organization.

The processes of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and corporate management maybe employed to guarantee the safety and the sustainability of an organization, whilst ensuring avoidance of any risks. However, the available literature on sustainable leadership focuses more on a culture of sustainable leadership that should also ensure that employed work conditions, and services provided to individuals are of the highest level possible. The mainstream literature discussed the swing from the "shareholders' interpretation of organizations" to a sensitivity and understanding of stakeholders. This also takes in the argument about short-term and long-term goals and outcomes that should be of primary concern. As a leadership style, sustainable leadership can be seen as a "humanistic" attitude to leadership. Sustainable leadership emphasis on the need for the developmental of culture and suggests that succession planning should be taken as an inevitable and essential practice, and coherent and cohesive values should be embedded to any organizations or individuals' work environment for their efficient functionality. Although sustainable leadership is relatively a "new approach" to leadership, but it encompasses historical elements and practices that can result in a significant progress and development for organizations and individuals. However, the shift to this new style should be a crucial suggestion of the concept.

Due to the economic downturn, many organizations have adopted a short-term approach rather than long-term goals and strategies. Avery and Bergsteiner (2011) and Zhang et al. (2014) referred to this as a "locust" attitude. On the other hand, the sustainable leadership emphasis on a stability and equilibrium between the short-term and long-term policies and business strategies of an organizations. Davies (2007), on the other hand, suggests that short-term and long-term elements work towards each other, hence, should not be viewed as contradicting components as attaining short-term goals can be a predictor or forward planner for attaining long-term and enduring success. Lambert (2011) agrees to the fact that sustainable leadership does not provide temporary or immediate solutions but a long-standing route of success for the organization. However, he does not seem to have agreed with the claim that short-term and long-term goals are conflicting or unable to coexist, rather they supplement one another, and their nexus can be achieved through sustainable leadership (S Lambert, 2020).

Avery and Bergsteiner (2011) suggested that implementing a long-term approach is essential to sustainable leadership. Accordingly, it can be presumed that sustainable leadership focusses more on establishing a sustainable and enduring future for the organization. With that in mind, short-term objectives can possibly lead to sustainable future. Moreover, the shift to a focus on all key stakeholders of the organization is essential and should be viewed as an important component of sustainable leadership, especially in case of the psychological agreements between the organization and employees. Since the social sides of leadership within any organization cannot be a risk, therefore sustainable leadership does put a great emphasis on it as it can only aid to attain successful results. However, "public processes" can bother many organizations, particularly those that work in the public sector and raise many queries, such as, how can long-term policies be made if the rules and regulations change at the governmental level. While bearing in mind the standards of public sector companies, the whole idea of modifying policies is decisive due to the impact this may have on the procedures and standards of the organization. Certainly, further investigation in this area is needed to explore how these modifications in the peripheral environment effect the intramural environment of an organization and hence, the leadership style and the culture of the organization.

Stakeholder considerations

For effective and successful organizational functioning, according to Barr and Dowing (2012), Fullan (2001), Jaap (2009) it is essential to appreciate the varied interests of stakeholders at the same time as ensuring sustainable employment relationship. Francis (2012) underlines that although the focus must be on all stakeholders, nonetheless, those organization accomplish sustainable results more frequently where workers are involved, inspired and in fine fettle while organization's functioning is a main consideration. Considering all stakeholders depends on the cohesion that is experienced all over the organization. Internal environment of an organization must be efficient and evolving for sustainable leadership to establish (Hargreaves, 2002).

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Sustainable leadership emphasizes on giving priority to the stakeholders and the relationship as it is built on a fundamental concept of the "leader-member exchange" theory. Both consideration of stakeholder and building a positive rapport are considered to be essential elements in the application and accomplishment of sustainable leadership, Bennis and Nanus (2007) emphasize on the importance of relationship building and suggest that leaders positive rapport play a dynamical role in the success of his/her leadership in any organization. Although, rather than considering leaders and their followers as complex entities, the philosophy of focusing on the connections among stakeholders appears to represent the leaders and subordinates as different components in the system but many researchers suggest it to be considered in today's organizational culture (Crews, 2010; K.S. & M.A., 2011). For that very reason, Ewen, Wihler, Blickle, Oerder and others (2013) stressed on widening the significance of "social connections" and claim that the social relationships have a great impact.

Within any organization, the connection among all stakeholders is crucial as it influences organization's efficacy and achievements (Yulk, 2013). Sustainable leadership promotes inclusion (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006) and focuses more on the social aspects of relationships rather than its outcomes.

In addition to inclusion, Davies (2007) and Hargreaves and Fink (2006) instead of focusing just on capacity building, concentrated on including employees in discussion encompassing building a positive future and guaranteeing that social inclusion is attained (Steve Lambert, 2011). Logan Mary (2010) suggested that collegiality, reliance, and barrier-less interaction are fundamental components of warranted and profitable teamwork. Moreover, the connection between leaders and employees can be seen vital for heightened leadership (Barr & Dowing, 2012) and organizational operations. The stakeholder understanding of sustainable leadership includes this as stakeholders play a pivotal role in decision making within an organization (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). Confidence and trust both have greater influence on organizational progressions and play a vital role in sustainable leadership; especially relative to the unambiguous relationship with stakeholders (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014).

The morals of any organization play an important and significant role in nurturing sustainable leadership, and these are in line with every act of the organization. Moreover, in order to be effectual and operational, the organization's standards should be met by workers in that organization who live those values and attain the organization's goals and objectives. Hence, leaders have to make sure that they show these ethics in their everyday leadership practices. Even though it is important that individuals, as leaders, should adopt the sustainable leadership strategies (Davies, 2007; Hargreaves & Fink, 2004b), however, it is also important that these strategies and practices go above and beyond just the individuals (Steve Lambert, 2011). Furthermore, Hargreaves and Fink (2004) and Steve Lambert (2011) also recommend that sustainable leadership should be considered as "a meal and not a menu" and establishments must fully adopt the notion and anticipate the wide-range of rewards and compensations from applying the idea completely. Therefore, the acknowledgement of the significance of values and ethics and their combination is essential all through the sustainable leadership literature. Hargreaves and Fink (2004) and Steve Lambert (2011) also claimed that sustainable leadership honors the past and present for developing the future. Consequently, organizations should use examples from the past to outline future which possibly designs sustainable environment within the organization. These processes lead to the organizational development processes along with the growth of stakeholder.

ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES

Numerous sustainable leadership theories and models show that learning and growth should be wide-ranging and should have opportunities for every employee in the organisation. This idea of flexibility is highlighted by the notion of skills development. This assumption highlights the idea that everyone at a workplace should have equal opportunities to grow professionally (Davies, 2007; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003; S Lambert, 2020). As a result, sustainable leadership promotes the development of both individuals and leaders at every level (Fadlelmula & Koc, 2016). In modern organizations, the employees and leaders' refinement has been proved to be of immense importance. In the sustainable leadership philosophy, succession planning is important for recognizing and nurturing amateurs professionals (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011; T Casserley & Critchley, 2010; Davies, 2007; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003; S Lambert, 2020). As stated by Garavan, Gubbins, Hogan and Woodlock (2007), for employees training and development is of utmost significance. Strategic human resource development includes involvement, engagement, encouragement, and communication (Rasheed et al., 2016), in accordance with sustainable leadership's commitment to stakeholders. Contrasting conventional leadership, sustainable leadership allows diverse development by applying sustainability principles to everyone.

Hargreaves and Fink (2006) advocated strongly for conservation by revitalizing leaders' energy rather than burnout (Tim Casserley & Megginson, 2008). This recommendation is in line with Casserley and Critchley (2010)'s viewpoint on developing sustainable leaders. Sustainable leadership application includes supplementary factors, for instance, providing stimulating and uplifting work environment for individuals for sustainability and employee growth. Sustainable leadership is perceived as "humanistic" (Zhang et al., 2014), that values leaders' roles over particular skills (Davies, 2007; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003). It spread

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over to all leadership roles and demands organizational incorporation. Steve Lambert (2011) stressed on organization-level leadership development for parity and fairness as for sustainable initiatives, inclusivity and fairness are vital.

Trust building among leaders, followers and stakeholders is essential. Successful Corporate Social Responsibility programs depend on employees, management, and leadership enlightenment Gubbins, Hogan and Woodlock (2007), which is similar to CIPD's standpoint. Moral responsibilities are welcomed by individuals and organization together (Bratton, 2020). Corporate Social Responsibility's strong association with the triple bottom line is backed by business cases, which develops traditional business success KPIs to incorporate organizations' contributions to social well-being of their employees. Combination of concepts matters, as unconnected management steers towards unsuccessful results (Henriques and Richardson, 2004). Bratton and Gold (2017) propose a quadruple bottom line, that balances economic, environmental, social, and cultural objectives. The mutuality of objectives, underlined by Bratton and Gold (2017) and Elkington (1997, 2004) is vital for Sustainable Leadership.

IMPLICATIONS

The conceptual framework presented in this study offers many implications for both future researches and practical uses. The factors presented from within and outside the organization that influence sustainable leadership, a comprehensive understanding of the complex features organizations need to account for becomes attainable. This understanding then leads to a discussion of the repercussions for research and practice. Effectively implementing sustainable leadership is arguably contingent on cultivating a sustainable organizational culture, influenced by external circumstances. A proposition has been made that "leadership is interwoven with culture formation" (Barr & Dowing, 2012), underscoring how an organization's leadership can significantly mold its culture. A central contention here revolves around the role and growth of employees and leaders, a pivotal factor in an organization's journey toward sustainable success. Any organization without a strong emphasis on growth and preservation, lacks sustainable leadership. Although numerous components of sustainable leadership are presented and discussed in various research studies, the main goal of the conceptual framework presented in this study is to offer a comprehensive and logical framework that organizations can take in and apply. Even though the framework presented in this paper encompasses the consideration for organizations to think about, it doesn't precisely explicate how to put this concept into action.

The challenges of implementing sustainable leadership vary among different organizations, depending upon their ability to clearly define and determine the specific implications of the concept within their own unique conditions and circumstances. Avery and Bergsteiner (2011) introduced the sustainable leadership pyramid, an instrument that can be utilized by organizations to examine their current leadership practices and the ones that are deficient. However, as presented in this study, there are other frameworks for sustainable leadership that present supplementary factors of the notion. This focuses on the importance of taking into consideration the context when an organization intends to put the concept into play. Once again, although this paper aimed to enhance the understanding of sustainable leadership, it does not aim to suggest a solution suitable for all situations. Therefore, implementation of sustainable leadership to various settings becomes a possible area for future research, including the public sector.

Another aspect to ponder is how the practical implementation of sustainable leadership will vary considerably. Just as the context, organization's decision-making and the quality of leadership can also influence the implementation of sustainable leadership. While the basic elements of sustainable leadership remain unchanged, the approaches and results can vary remarkably. For example, an organization's values might be strong and motivational for employees, yet not incorporated with their daily routines may potentially lead to a cut off. As a result, if an organization's values are deeply woven into its practices, it can have a considerable impact. Therefore, these components can set further challenges as in spite of their role in sustainable leadership, the process is not only a checklist exercise, but it needs constant support throughout the organization.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the theoretical frameworks of sustainable leadership. It has combined and exhibited repeatedly cited features of sustainable leadership, by take into consideration both internal and external factors that impact it. This allows a logical depiction of the theory's several considerations for analysis. Implications to think about include putting sustainable leadership into practical manners. Despite the fact that the theoretical dimension is addressed, different ways in which different businesses embrace sustainable leadership practices require further exploration. On the other hand, it can have overwhelming impact on organizational culture and leadership approach's transformation. In spite of substantial advantages of sustainable leadership, it's important to recognize it as an enduring strategy that requires gradual employment of it. Consequently, organizations need to take steps to transform organizational culture into sustainable culture, and sustainable leadership can expedite this process by incorporating a number of effective sustainable practices.

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