Sustainable Organizational Leadership: Forming a Sustainable Education System

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Abstract: This is a bibliographic research study that looks into the topics of management and leadership in relation to sustainable development with a special reference to education. First, there is reference to the, not so straightforward, definition of sustainable development as well as to the prerequisites for its realization with an emphasis on the role of organizational infrastructure and leadership. Then, the organization theory as well as the management and leadership literature especially in relation to change are analyzed. Next, there is a focus on the changing face of leadership in the 21st century and more particularly the ways certain leadership theorists describe leadership that fosters sustainable development. Finally, it is discussed how sustainable development principles can apply to educational leadership contexts.

Keywords: sustainable development, management, leadership, change, education

1. Introduction

In the 21st century there is a continuous debate regarding how different types of organizations can successfully adapt to change, creating the conditions that can lead to sustainable development. This has direct implications to the ways organizations are managed and led since different kinds of management and, especially leadership, seem to be conducive to a sustainable development practices that involve several aspects and stakeholders within the organizations. This means that the cultivation of sustainability requires leaders with certain and qualities and features who adopt practices shaped by specific principles. Nowadays, educational organizations do not seem to be different from other types of organizations as far as the need for sustainable leadership is concerned since they are progressively face environmental sustainability challenges that require the demonstration of environmentally sound practices and the support of the integration of sustainability into management practices and curriculum.

2. Sustainable development and its realization

The term sustainable development literally refers to maintaining development over time (Elliot, 1994). There are plenty definitions of sustainable development in circulation and a quite commonly used one is that offered by Brutland that describes sustainable development as 'development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (Blewitt, 2005).

However, sustainable development is not only about economic growth, industrial modernization and market imperatives as the above definition was criticized for implying, but it is about reconciling development and the environmental resources on which society depends (Elliot, 1995). According to Blewitt (2005), sustainable development involves two major concepts:

➢ the concept of needs and, particularly, the crucial needs of the world's poor who should be given priority;
➢ the idea of limitations imposed by technology and social organization on the ability of the environment to meet present and future needs.

Also, its realization has the following requirements:

➢ a political system that secures effective citizen participation in decision making;
➢ an economic system that is able to generate surpluses and technical knowledge on a self reliant basis;
➢ a social system that provides for solutions for the tensions arising from disharmonious development;
➢ a production system that respects the obligations to preserve the ecological base for development;
➢ a technological system that can constantly look for new solutions;
➢ an international system that fosters sustainable patterns of trade and finance;
➢ an administrative system that is flexible and has the capacity for self-correction. (ibid:13);

In order the above requirements to be pursued in the best possible way, decisions that foster sustainability have to be made and action has to be taken within each of the above systems; this has implications for both organizational infrastructure and leadership style. However, this is far more than a simple process since the

behaviour of each of the above systems is a result of interactions of the elements within each system as well as of the interaction of every system with the environment. A significant unit in each of the above systems is the organization.

3. Organizations

3.1 Defining organizations

Dawson defines organizations as 'collections of people joining together in some formal association in order to achieve group or individual objectives' (Dawson, 1996: xxii). Every organization has a *mission statement* which is its global objective or core mission; all organizations are realized through a network of relationships among people having status and roles by which organizational goals are achieved. Although the organization and its structure can be conveniently conceptualized and typically represented in the form of an organigram, neither of them has a tangible form, even if they may be realized through 'rules, departments and sections, job descriptions, hierarchical level, titles, specialization of functions and lines of control as well as forms of reporting accountability' (White and Phillips 1998: G25).

When attempting to analyze organizations, Tayeb (1988) distinguishes between *structure* and *process*. *Organizational structure* defines how job tasks are 'formally divided, grouped and coordinated (Robins, 1998:478)', while *process* has to do with the actions and values underlying structure and how these values reflect and are influenced by the culture of the society within which an organization operates, the kind and quality of the members' relationships as well as the way they are managed by the organization at various levels. Below, the ways two organizational theorists classify organizations according to their structure are briefly described.

3.2 Types of organizations

Mintzberg (1983) and Robbins (1998) propose their own classification of organizational types based on characteristics of hierarchical structure, types of chain of command, as well as degree of centralization (or decentralization) and formalization.

Mintzberg (1983) proposes five types of organizations:
> ➢ simple structure;
> ➢ machine bureaucracy;
> ➢ professional bureaucracy;
> ➢ divisionalized form;
> ➢ adhocracy.

Robbins (1998) provides a more contemporary and simplified set of three organizational structures:
> ➢ simple structure;
> ➢ bureaucratic structure;
> ➢ matrix structure;

to which he adds three more options:
> ➢ team structure;
> ➢ virtual organization;
> ➢ boundaryless organization.

Although it would be very convenient to think of an organization in structural terms, it would also be very simplistic as organizations consist of various elements, of which the structure is only one, and are described below.

3.3 Organizational elements

Everard and Morris (1990) state the following four interactive and interdependent elements which can differentiate organizations (Dawson, 1996).
> ➢ The *people* who are associated with it, their attitudes and values, their aspirations and experience of different types of work.
> ➢ The *technology*, which refers to the processes of an organization. Technology includes hardware, production process, materials, products and information technology.
> ➢ The *structure* of roles and relationships, job descriptions, the content and form of control systems as well as administrative procedures. Structure is a means of securing the ends of coordination, control and

communication. In some cases, these ends can be more easily achieved through the operation of a market or the creation of a network rather than through a hierarchy.

➢ The *culture* of the organization which comprises the shared values and beliefs which create distinctive patterns of thinking and feeling within organizations.

To the above elements, Dawson (1996) adds the following two:

➢ The *strategies* and tactics which together constitute the plans and policies for such areas as product range, price structure, personnel as well as technical innovation and change.

➢ Finally, the *environment* to which an organization's goods and services are supplied, from which its resources are obtained and which also provides the source of attempts to regulate its activities. The environment consists of individuals, groups as well as other organizations, which have their own internal complexities of stress and strength.

All the above elements influence and are influenced by the way an organization is led and managed.

4. Managing organizations

4.1 Defining management

Since the term management is used in the literature with a wide range of meanings, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by management in this paper. I will use the definition proposed by Mullins (1993) who sees 'management as taking place within a structured organization with prescribed roles. It involves the exercise of formal authority over the work of other people. For [these] purposes', he adds, 'we can regard management as being: within a structured organizational setting; directed towards aims and objectives; through the efforts of other people; and using systems and procedures' (ibid.: 380). Management operates in different ways and at different levels within an organization.

4.2 Levels of management

White and Phillips (1998) point out that it is customary to distinguish three types of management that have different time spans and tend to match levels in a management hierarchy.

Strategic management is usually among the responsibilities of senior or executive level; it has a long timescale and is concerned with applying policy that will have an effect on the way an organization evolves over such a period. It is responsible for making decisions in advance of events; having predicted what will probably happen and plan a course of action to take.

Tactical management is the responsibility of middle managers; it has a shorter time scale and is concerned with translating strategic management decisions into the routine work of the organization. It is responsible for translating plans into action, reacting to changing events by staying on course. White and Philips (1998) point out that most of the managerial work undertaken by directors is tactical and is concerned with implementing plans within the broader framework of the mission statement and the more specific guidelines of organizational policy. Within this framework, their task is to organize and control resources (financial, human and physical) in order to reach objectives.

Operational management is the concern of people at the operations level, i.e. the level that makes the products or delivers the services which the organization exists to provide. Operational management has a short time scale and is concerned with decisions that relate to the present or the near future.

In most organizations, there are different levels of management. White and Phillips (1998), mention three of them:

➢ senior;
➢ middle;
➢ junior.

Each level is mainly concerned with managing the level 'below'. Where the lines of management are clear, we talk about *line management* (White and Phillips, 1998: B6). However, there can be return lines as well, which are sometimes called *reporting lines* (ibid.: B6), transmitting information up to more senior management where it can be used in decision-making. One of the tasks that managers often have to perform is dealing with change. Bolden (2004) argues that in contemporary times where change is a prevalent characteristic management and leadership are viewed as key factors to organizational success.

5. Managing change

5.1 Defining change

'No-one can step twice into the same river nor touch mortal substance in the same condition' (Heraclitus, B19). Since ancient times change has been synonymous with life. But nowadays we are riding on an 'accelerating roller coaster of change' (Hooper and Potter, 2000: 23) due to such factors as technology, politics, social expectations and legislation.

The character of change used to be different from today. Change tended to be measured and to occur less rapidly than nowadays. There is now increasing uncertainty and instability because the pace of change is so turbulent that it is difficult for organizations to keep up with it Hooper and Potter (2000), Fullan (2001) and Morisson (2001) define the following key drivers of organizational change:

- ➢ people
- ➢ information
- ➢ an increased ability to communicate
- ➢ technology
- ➢ globalization

Fullan (1999) argues that although theories of change can guide thinking and action, none of them can be prescriptive because change, in itself, is an extremely changing process. Moreover, every change situation has 'degrees of uniqueness in its history and make up which will cause unpredictable differences to emerge' (ibid.: 21). He also moves further when he points out that the way change is managed cannot and should not be restricted to the notion of management in the 'narrow' sense of the term and he supports the creation of the 'learning organization' where the notion of change is embedded. In order for this to be realized, the contemporary change theorists emphasize the need for *leadership* rather than *management* to take place.

6. Leadership

6.1 From management to leadership

Some writers argue that 'good management controls complexity' whereas 'effective leadership produces useful change' (Kotter, 1990); others (Hooper and Potter, 2000; West-Burham, 1997) have outlined the key orientations of the former as being about control and the latter as 'liberation' (Tampoe in Day et al., 2000).

Table 1 Comparison of management and leadership

MANAGING	LEADING
Concerned with:	Concerned with:
• planning and budgeting	• establishing direction
• organizing and staffing	• aligning people
controlling, monitoring and problem- solving	motivating and inspiring
doing the right things	doing things right

Sources: Hooper and Potter (2000); West-Burham (1997).

Many writers make the distinction between *transactional*, *transformational* and *transcendental* leadership which Hooper and Potter (2000) summarize as follows:

- ➢ In the *transactional leadership type,* followers simply comply with either their leader's explicit or implicit orders and, as a result, meet pre-specified standards of behavior through a contractual agreement.
- ➢ In *transformational leadership*, followers are inspired by the leader to reach standards of achievement that otherwise would not have been attained. Here the leader is an effectual and sometimes charismatic figure who is able to transform his/her followers' behavior. In literature, the notion of *transactional leadership* is equated with that of *management* whereas *transformational leadership* is equated with the notion of leadership *per se*.
- ➢ Finally, in *transcendental leadership* the charismatic figure of the leader engages his/her followers emotionally to the point where their performance levels are transcended.

Leadership, just like management, operates at different levels, which I will examine in the next section.

6.2 Levels of leadership

Hooper and Potter (2000) talk about three levels of leadership activity within a learning organization in terms of their function:

- ➢ *Strategic leadership* is about 'vision, purpose values and communication' (ibid.: 152).

> *Operational leadership* deals mainly with implementing strategy, making the most of the human potential on a daily basis. Issues such as managing style, the amount of training that takes place and the environment in an organization are important at this level.
> *Front-line* or *team leadership* operates when groups of individuals are organized as teams in either a production or service context with clearly defined boundaries.

They also outline the following aspects which they consider important at all levels of leadership in the context of a learning organization:

> creating direction;
> acting as an example;
> communicating effectively, at all stages and in all forms;
> getting the best out of people beyond their conceptual obligation;
> acting as change agent;
> handling crises (adapted from Hooper and Potter, 2000).

However, according to Bolden (2004), even though the main qualities of leaders may remain constant over time, the way and the combination in which they are exhibited need to become more flexible and context bound in the 21st century. Next I will discuss how leadership styles can be transformed in order to meet the requirements the contemporary era sets for a more sustainable present and future.

6.3 Leadership for Sustainable Development: The Changing face of Leadership

Dopplet (2003) argues that since the '80s a plethora of 'sustainable development' initiatives have blossomed in organizations across the globe. However, they have not been particularly successful in adopting sustainability measures. It is not an easy process as leaders have to deal with both complexity and change. Bolden and Gosling outline the following leadership dilemmas for the 21st century:

> Can outcomes justify the means by which they are achieved?
> When values clash how do we choose which takes priority?
> What should be done when the interests of organization/shareholders are in conflict with the interests of society?
> Can you lead if you don't subscribe to the core values of the organization?
> How can we achieve consensus without negating minority views?

Dopplet (2003) also identifies seven 'sustainability blunders' suggesting, at the same time, ways in which organizations can be led in order to overcome them and improve their environmental as well as socio-economic issues (Table 2)

Table 2: Sustainability Blunders and Solutions

SUSTAINABILITY BLUNDERS AND SOLUTIONS	
Blunder	**Solution**
patriarchical thinking that leads to a false sense of security	change the dominant mindset through the imperative of achieving sustainability
a "Silo" approach to environmental and socio-economic issues.	rearrange the parts by organizing sustainability transition teams
no clear vision of sustainability	change the goals by crafting an ideal vision and guiding sustainability principles
confusion over cause and effect	restructuring the rules of engagement by adopting new strategies
lack of information	shift information flows by tirelessly communicating the need, vision and strategies for achieving sustainability
insufficient mechanisms for learning	correct feedback loops by encouraging and rewarding learning and innovation
failure to institutionalize sustainability	adjust the parameters by aligning systems and structures with sustainability

Source: Dopplet (2003)

A model of organizational infrastructure and leadership style that is believed can foster sustainability is the cultivation of communities of practice. Communities of practice are 'groups of people informally bound

together by shred expertise and passion for a joint enterprise' (Wenger and Snyder, 2000: 139) and they communicate through informal meetings or by online networks. The features are that the members select themselves and are linked by passion, commitment and identification with the groups' experience. This model is believed to foster sustainable learning in various parts of the organization as within the community of practice the members' capabilities are developed, knowledge is exchanged and new knowledge is developed (Nonaka, 2000; McDermott, 1998; Wenger and Snyder, 2000).

Such a model has also implications for the leadership style of the organization. It implies, what Bolden suggest, leaders who 'stay away from the heroic notion of the leader out in the front to a more collective concept of the leadership process where leadership is a shared responsibility to which everyone makes a contribution' (Bolden, 2004: 29).

In such a context, Bolden and Gosling define the following qualities that a leader needs to have:
  ➢ integrity and moral courage;
  ➢ self-awareness and humility;
  ➢ empathy and emotional encouragement;
  ➢ transparency and openness;
  ➢ clarity of vision;
  ➢ adaptability and flexibility;
  ➢ energy and resilience;
  ➢ decisiveness in the face of uncertainty;
  ➢ judgment, consistency and fairness;
  ➢ ability to inspire, motivate and listen;
  ➢ respect and trust;
  ➢ knowledge and expertise;
  ➢ delivering results (in Bolden, 2004: 29)

To the above I will add cultural intelligence and cultural awareness. As Earley and Mosakowski (2004: 140) argue 'a person with high cultural intelligence can somehow tease out of a person's or groups, those peculiar to this group, and those that are neither universal nor idiosyncratic. The vast role that lies between those two poles is culture.' In a globalized world where countries are increasingly become multinational it is important to common ground to be found within multicultural groups.

In the 21st century, educational organizations do not seem to differ from other organizations as far as the need for sustainable leadership is concerned.

7. Sustainable Leadership in Education

Education organizations increasingly deal with environmental sustainability challenges by demonstrating environmentally sound practices and encouraging the integration of sustainability into management practices and curriculum. With internal and external stakeholders scrutinizing learning and teaching activities, ensuring the quality of learning and teaching necessitates addressing concerns of long-term leadership. However, according to Melinkova (2022), it seems that if both education institutions and institutes are more actively engaged in sustainable leadership practices surrounding learning and teaching, there could be long term benefits. In the words of Fink and Hargreaves: 'Sustainable educational leadership and improvement preserves and develops deep learning for all that spreads and lasts, in ways that do no harm to and indeed create positive benefit for others around us, now and in the future' (Hargreaves, 2007: 224).

All educational leaders have a primary obligation to build a learning system that engages students academically, emotionally, and socially. As a result, long-term, substantial changes in learning processes are achieved through sustainable leadership, which goes beyond momentary gains focused on success ratings. According to Hargreaves and Fink (2005) there are seven specific principles which form the core of sustainable sustainable leadership in education:

Sustainable leadership is long lasting

One of the most important qualities of sustainable leadership is that it entails succession planning and preparation from the first day of the school leader's appointment. Leaders must pay close attention to succession planning in order to maintain long-term leadership. This may be accomplished through preparing successors to go on with changes and retaining effective leaders in schools for extended periods of time, particularly if they are making significant progress in encouraging learning. It also entails rejecting the temptation to seek out

school saviors, including succession into all district and school improvement programs, and limiting headteacher turnover.

Sustainable leadership favors dissemination

A good strategy for education institute leaders to leave a lasting impact in their institutes is to communicate and develop their vision with other education institute stakeholders. In this context, leadership succession entails more than simply grooming one's successor. It truly entails dispersing leadership throughout the institute through its professional community, so that if the present headteacher leaves, others can continue to carry the endeavor of school growth. It is impossible for a single individual to be responsible for long-term leadership. The school is a complicated organization, and no single leader can manage everything without help. In conclusion, if successful sustainable leadership is to be achieved, it must be a shared duty.

Sustainable leadership is characterized by social justice

Another feature of sustainable leadership is that it is intended to help all students and education institutes. Sustainable leadership acknowledges that education institutes affect each other through interconnected webs of reciprocal effect. Therefore, preserving progress in one's own institution cannot be the primary objective. Education institute leaders that are sincerely concerned about sustainability should take responsibility for their schools and children and understand that their actions have consequences. This means that they do not thrive at the cost of other institutions in terms of resources. Instead they actively seek for opportunities to exchange information and expertise sharing resources with other schools and the community.

Sustainable leadership is creative

Sustainable leadership systems give internal benefits while also providing external incentives to recruit, motivate, and retain the best and brightest in the leadership pool. These methods give education institute leaders the time and space to network, support, and learn from one another while also coaching and mentoring their successors. Instead of lavishing incentives on selected established leaders, sustainable leadership carefully uses its resources to develop the abilities of its instructors. Sustainable leadership systems look after leaders while also encouraging them to look for themselves. Leadership is only viable in the long run if it is also sustainable for the leaders.

Sustainable leadership encourages diversity

Leaders that support sustainability build and recreate conditions that encourage broad-based continual improvement. They help individuals adapt and thrive in increasingly complicated circumstances by allowing them to learn from one another's unique approaches. The most forward-thinking education institutes cultivate and promote this variety. Community-wide uniform templates are not imposed by sustainable leadership.

Sustainable leadership brings about activism

In certain contexts, education institute difficulties have deteriorated as a result of standardization and formerly creative institutions have lost their competitive advantage. In such an unfriendly environment sustainable leadership must incorporate some form of activism. Even if it means being perceived as tough, school leaders must be prepared to pursue growth for their schools.

Sustainable leadership is system supported

The most inspiring education institute leaders go beyond managing change to actively pursue and demonstrate a sort of long-term leadership. The commitment to and safeguarding of deep learning in any education institute as a measure of establishing sustainability involves striving to guarantee that improvements continue over time, especially when charismatic leaders have departed. Leaders establish sustainability through spreading leadership and responsibility, assessing their leadership's influence on education institutes and communities in their area, avoiding stress and burnout, supporting and bringing about varied approaches to school reform, and activism.

While most education leaders desire to accomplish important goals and inspire others in order to leave a lasting legacy, they are frequently not to blame for not successful endeavors. The systems in which they lead bear the brunt of the responsibility. This means that the structures in which leaders operate should prioritize sustainability in order to implement change that matters, spreads, and lasts.

The above principles take leaders through a variety of long lasting aspects that go into developing high-quality learning environments for all children. We observe similarities between environmental sustainability and

sustainable business practices, as well as activities that are common in education, to debate what path school leadership should take in order to achieve long-term, positive change in leadership practices.

8. Conclusion

Sustainable development is a multidimensional, complex and not always straightforward process which aims to reconcile economic and social development without compromising the environmental resources on which society depends. Just an aim needs to be pursued at all systems of the society namely, political, economic, social, production, technological, administrative, locally, nationally and internationally and at all the levels of each system including education. In order this to be achieved the need for appropriate leadership is obvious. What is needed is a leadership style that can deal with complexity and be adaptable to change. Although certain features of good leaders remain unchangeable, there is an increased emphasis towards social and ethical responsibilities of the leaders. However, one thing is certain; that there is no panacea answer as there is no such thing as the perfect leader. As Ciulla (in Bolden, 2004) argues, leadership is less about individuals and positions but more about moral relationships among individuals rooted in trust, obligation, commitment, emotion and a shared vision of the good.

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