

## Theoretical Leadership for Sustainability: Theoretical Underpinnings and Pedagogical Strategies that Promote Change in Addition to Theoretical Underpinnings and Teaching Strategies

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### Abstract

Sustainability education is crucial to changing the way that leadership is thought about and developing leaders who can work together to find solutions to challenging sustainability issues. A fresh and broad interpretation of leadership is known as "leadership for sustainability," which includes acting with sustainability principles in mind, leading from the perspective of living processes, and developing a leadership process that is open, cooperative, and reflective. This research examines and incorporates literature on leadership, sustainability education, and leadership development to offer best practices in leadership development. Several suggested pedagogical approaches that facilitate the development of leaders encompass self-awareness and observation, self-reflection, examining diverse and ecological perspectives, as well as experiential and group instruction. oaches are recommended which enhance students' interest and motivation towards schooling.

**Keywords:** Leadership, pedagogy, Strategy, Sustainability

### Introduction

Global society is confronted with intricate issues such as social injustice and climate change, which call for proactive citizen leaders to tackle the underlying causes. Multidisciplinary leadership theory and practice with an emphasis on sustainability is needed to address these problems. An interdisciplinary approach to teaching sustainability is making its way into adult education and higher education. Its objectives are to help students think critically about unsustainable systems, to help them become creative problem solvers, and to get them involved in the conflicts that result from urgent social, environmentally conscious, political, and economic challenges. Through transformational learning, this curriculum aims to give

students the skills, values, and mindsets they need to transition to a sustainable society. (Leicht et al., 2018).

A crucial component of sustainability education is leadership development, and a new paradigm for leadership is emerging that has the potential to raise awareness and encourage sustainable action. (Binagwaho et al., 2022).

### Literature Review

#### Sustainability Leadership

A novel idea in leadership circles, "leadership for sustainability" entails common leaders from many backgrounds collaborating to create long-lasting improvements in communities and organisations. It transcends transformative leadership and focuses on understanding the social, financial, cultural, and ecological

impacts of their work. Similar to the Interpersonal and Social Change models, this paradigm emphasises collaboration, inclusivity, and common objectives. Developing a manner of being anchored in a living processes paradigm, infused with sustainability ideals, and embodying inclusiveness, collaboration, and reflection are essential components of this leadership. (Hull et al., 2020).

### **Adopting a Value-Based Approach to Action**

Sustainability leaders are committed change agents who embody an increasingly prevalent way of being that is founded on links, connectivity, and awareness. To heal the planet and human societies, we must acknowledge our innate interconnectedness with other living things and the world. It takes purposeful decision-making to behave and live in a way that reflects this way people operate in leadership. Leaders are committed to creating the world they see fit and encouraging others to do the same. Their deeply held beliefs in justice, equity, love, equilibrium, creativity, connections, learning, adaptability, openness, diversity, modesty and community are the driving forces behind their behaviour. Leadership job requires defining one's ideals and coordinating actions with them. (Education & Unesco, 2021).

### **Founded in the Paradigm of Living Processes**

Sustainable leadership is built upon a worldview of living processes rather than a mechanical one derived from Newtonian physics. Complex biological systems exhibit patterns and qualities that are sustainable, indicating crucial leadership tactics. Living

processes have the following characteristics: relationships, resilience, adaptability, awareness, and creativity. The world is dynamic, uncertain, and emergent under a post-industrial, postmodernism paradigm, necessitating adaptive, flexible, self-renewing, flexible, learning, and intellectual leadership. (Van Der Leeuw, 2020).

Human organisations are usually assumed to be dependable, manageable entities with internal regulations by conventional leadership theories. Leaders can gain a deeper understanding of how intricate processes of interacting give rise to innovative answers by examining biological activities. The ideas of complexity science present a potent perspective on human dynamics and leadership that has the potential to fundamentally alter the way we perceive and interact with the environment. (Chin & Trimble, 2014).

Organisations are now recognised as dynamic, complex living entities that can respond sensibly, sustain themselves, and change as necessary. Embracing dynamic relationships and complex organisational reaction mechanisms, this perspective casts doubt on the idea that future occurrences can be predicted and controlled. Team members as well as people within an organisation need to be able to demonstrate leadership through responsive procedures, which makes a dynamic leadership strategy essential. (Fernandez, 2021).

### **A Reflective, Collaborative, and Inclusive Approach**

Traditional leadership approaches, which frequently concentrate on characteristics, actions, and circumstances, are not the same as leadership for sustainability.

Conventional leadership studies frequently presume that a leader plays a specific position and ignore other important aspects of leadership. This idea, which is primarily relevant to the industrial era, is based on the non-systematic, individualistic belief that there's only one correct way to solve an issue. Conversely, leadership for sustainability fosters robust, healthy, sustainable, and equitable development by identifying and enhancing each person's intrinsic leadership potential through creative and collaborative approaches. (Detels et al., 2017).

It recognises that all people are capable of being leaders while recognising that a leader's job is to lead alongside others rather than over them. Leaders foster a climate of ambiguity, turmoil, and emergence by allowing others to collaborate and come up with their own solutions. They also encourage creative engagement.

Reflection on both an individual and a group level is necessary for effective leadership. To collaborate with people to bring about change, leaders must first have a relational perspective of the world and a solid awareness of who they are. Leadership is an inclusive, cooperative, and reflective process based on values and a living systems paradigm because reflection enables feedback processes and cycles of development and transformation. Based on this perspective, pedagogical solutions are provided for promoting the development of leadership in adult learning and higher education contexts. (Chin & Trimble, 2014).

### **Developing Sustainability Leadership through Pedagogical Approaches**

Through a transformative process, leadership development enables students to perceive themselves as leaders with the power to effect change and have a good impact on the world. Integrating ecological, systemic, tissue-based, and holistic ways of thinking and learning is what sustainability education, at its foundation, aims to teach. Transformational learning symbolises a major cultural revolution that radically alters our understanding of ourselves, our relationships to the environment, our power dynamics, our bodies, our visions of equitable society, how we live in various ways, and how joyous we may be. (Künkel et al., 2022).

The following are important pedagogical tactics for developing leaders: experience, dialogue, critical reflection, holistic orientation, comprehension of context, and genuine relationships. Fostering sustainable methods of being through perception, self-awareness, and reflection; the existence processes worldview through ecological and diversified viewpoints; and inclusive collaborative managers through learning by doing in the community are important tactics that are grounded on experience and research. These tactics seek to promote inclusive collaborative leaders, a living operations paradigm, and a sustainable way of being. (Oecd, 2020).

### **Self-Awareness and Observation**

Establishing observational time can help students gain a deeper understanding of their identities, beliefs, and the major issues influencing their communities and everyday lives. Slowing down, practicing seeing and paying attention, and honing their observational skills will help emerging

leaders learn more from other people and ecological structures. It is possible for both learners and leaders to become more effective change agents in their environment by considering how to make the most change with the least amount of change.

Sustainability problems in industrialised cultures are often the result of intentional design errors. By taking the time to observe, leaders and learners can behave in a more genuine, sustainable, and effective manner. Students could find it helpful to slow down and observe by participating in activities like resource mapping, personal essays, meditative writing, or sit spots. (Cantor & Osher, 2021).

A more comprehensive understanding of leadership identity, encompassing strengths, interests, and other significant parts of identity, can result from observation and self-awareness. Learners must develop a stronger sense of self-awareness in order to develop a leadership identity. This awareness should go from a more general or scattered sense to one that more clearly identifies strengths, interests, and other significant components of identity like ethnic background, sexual orientation, or ethnicity. (Sax, 2021).

Creating one's own particular set of leadership values necessitates that these values not just be taken from others but also be grounded in one's own lived experience. Gaining an awareness of how our environment is interrelated and interdependent helps students develop their sense of self. It should be a top priority to integrate embodied and outdoor experiences in order to respect and impart connection. One method of incorporating this ecological

consciousness could be to offer conferences or activities that centre on strengthening ecological comprehending oneself through connection to place. In order to be effective as sustainability leaders, students must have the capacity to observe, understand who they are, identify their own principles, and draw connections with the environment. (Heifetz & Linsky, 2014).

### Discussion

Reflective practices are crucial for developing leaders because they make students critically assess their experiences, integrate them with existing knowledge, and identify how they connect with the experience. Students should first examine their attitudes or ideas about leadership before they are asked to analyse why things are exactly how they are, what has led to specific attitudes or patterns of thought, and whether or not these tendencies are useful to them in their everyday lives. Many pedagogies, such as experiential education, transformational learning, and service learning, depend heavily on reflection to help students make sense of their experiences. (Conrad & Openo, 2018).

Journaling, conversation, painting, meditation, and one-on-one or group discussions are just a few examples of reflective practices. By encouraging students to examine, assess, and analyse various aspects of their individuality, values, beliefs, and relationships with others, critical self-reflection helps students develop their leadership and self-understanding. In order to facilitate critical self-reflection that is both successful and respectful, educators must make sure that reflection exercises incorporate personal experiences, emotional

factors, and spiritual space. (Zakrzewski, 2014).

Educators and leaders can consider reflections that have four qualities: continuous, demanding, connected, and contextualised, as a way to go beyond the basic cognitive capacities implied by normal reflective exercises. Since self-understanding develops gradually over time and is not the result of a single, critical act of self-reflection, continuous reflection necessitates a longitudinal approach. Building a reflection portfolio documents the developing process of self-understanding and acts as a living history of students' interaction. Students should be encouraged to think and express themselves in novel ways through challenging reflections. (Unesco, 2020).

Connected reflections ought to link students' dreams for the future, interpersonal relationships, and prior experiences. Contextualised reflections require activities that place their observations inside the specific moment, time, and place in which they arose. Instructors can provide students the opportunity to begin considering how they might lead lives in which they are able to take the initiative to effect positive change. Opportunities for reflective practice support the growth of self-awareness and collaborative skills. With the aid of instructional strategies that promote observation, self-awareness, and reflection, learners can identify and cultivate a sustainable style of leadership. (Kern, 2021).

### **Examining Ecological and Multidisciplinary Views**

Learning from a variety of viewpoints, including ecological ones, can help aspiring

leaders gain a living dynamics paradigm understanding of leadership. Permaculture and other ecological practices exhibit sustainable qualities and patterns. Learners can broaden their perspective on leadership and develop an inclusive vision by challenging and considering prevailing worldviews. (Rieckmann, 2017).

Presenting diverse perspectives on leadership enables students to broaden their definitions of the term and discover an inclusive vision. Diverse viewpoints and leadership examples, for instance, can be incorporated into an assignment where students interview a leader or organisation that exemplifies leadership for sustainability. Similar to this, a project that tracks a good or service from the source to the consumer might draw attention to prevalent but unsustainable economic and ecological practices, opening up possibilities for further study and the development of viable alternatives. (Hargreaves & Fink, 2012).

Studying various viewpoints can also draw attention to forms of knowledge that originate from disadvantaged social situations, including anthropocentrism, racism, sexism, prejudice, heterosexist, power and privilege, and sexism. Through an understanding of oppressive institutions and power dynamics, students can gain insight into how cultural and historical factors shape their own perspectives on sustainability issues, including conflict and hopelessness. By bringing new viewpoints into a learning community, students can improve their comprehension of leadership while exercising understanding of and compassion for difference. By having people



in an educational group contribute their knowledge and points of view, several viewpoints can be blended into the learning process. (Wegner, 2021).

Last but not least, exposing students to positive viewpoints is essential for their leadership development since it helps them to avoid being hopeless and instead identify methods to contribute to long-term solutions. (Ehren & Baxter, 2020).

### **Learning Through Experience and in the Community**

Building more community and a stronger sense of belonging among students is essential to producing inclusive, cooperative leaders. Understanding our interconnectedness and connection is essential to understanding our mission and existence. To develop their leadership abilities, learners need chances to create cooperative settings rather than competing ones. Developing a sincere, reliable learning community is one way to strengthen bonds and encourage collaboration. In this community, students ought to be able to voice their opinions, form bonds with others, and improve their communication abilities. (Gisbert & Bullen, 2015).

It is crucial for learners to establish trust in the community of learning before they may feel free to express themselves honestly. It might be difficult to foster self-authorship and the development of leadership in traditional settings because they frequently place an emphasis on freedom and individual achievement. Teachers' ought to encourage more group collaboration and introspection on viewpoints and beliefs. Trust can be developed through mindfulness exercises,

storytelling, personal support, and the establishment of collective standards. (Amabile & Kramer, 2011).

Leadership growth requires acting with sincerity and practicing leading. Through meaningful context-based leadership practice, students can grow personally and assist others. An atmosphere that is more favourable and open to mental changes will be produced by facilitating interesting experiences that are pertinent to the lives of the learners. Assisting students in discovering areas of interest or areas that require improvement can empower them to take responsibility for their experiences and establish a stronger connection with the notion that they are leaders. By giving students the chance to investigate and engage in meaningful interactions with nearby people and ecosystems, experiencing leadership development can help improve their sense of place. (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

### **Conclusion**

The process of developing leadership is intricate and calls for a change in perspective as well as an emphasis on ideals. It comprises recognising and upholding moral principles, fostering a shift in viewpoint so that one views the outer world as a living environment, and creating opportunities for hands-on and group learning. A more sustainable future is already being worked towards by thousands of people, organisations, and communities through non-hierarchical, decentralised leadership that prioritises innovation and creativity. It is the duty of educational establishments to enable leaders to perceive themselves as integral to a larger, lasting transformation. There are many leadership

programmes centred around sustainability that emphasise practical learning, community building, and systems thinking. A move away from a transmissive, financial paradigm of education is necessary in order to create opportunities for growth in leadership through intentional pedagogical design. Understanding should be co-created, as learning is a transformative, reflective process that encourages participation and cooperation, examines personal beliefs, and fosters a diversity of viewpoints. This approach strengthens students' feeling of place and belonging, inspiring them to live by their values and collaborate with one another to bring about lasting change. Prioritising leadership development will enable all students to become transformative learners with the capacity to lead for sustainability.

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