

## The Role of Higher Education in Creating Sustainable Leaders

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### Abstract

*Universities are one of the most important trend setters for the modern society, transcending from their role: they educate, they train, are also important partners in public governance, both local and national level. In our paper we try to study why sustainable development is the way to follow for a public entity – namely a university. We focused on identifying the evolution and the state of the art for sustainability assessment tools in higher education institutions and leadership. As methodology we utilized chronological literature review, taking into consideration mostly the English written published research, including also the Romanian linguistic space. The main results consist in presenting the evolution of sustainability assessment tools and leadership in higher education institutions. Future's leaders need to see organizations as complex systems and understand how individual actions have a global impact.*

**Key words:** sustainable development, assessment tools, sustainability, higher education institutions, leadership

**J.E.L. classification:** A20,I20, M12, M14, Q56

### 1. Introduction

In a constantly changing world, where schools are more resilient for their own development, and also to encourage teachers to become leaders with the ability to shape educational processes. And in today's global dynamic economy, centered on the development of knowledge and information, those individuals who are fluent in some disciplines and feel comfortable moving between them thrive. Creativity, adaptability, critical thinking and collaboration are highly valued abilities. When it comes to developing these skills in class, integrated studies are an extremely effective approach, helping students develop a multi-faceted expertise and understand the important role that inter-relationship plays in the real world. Thus, we can have the opportunity, through existing technologies, to bring the necessary innovation into the strategies and modalities of education, while addressing the issue of sustainability from the pre-university classes by introducing issues related to this topic in education formal, especially in addressing science and non-formal subjects, especially in cross-curricular development programs. It is precisely for these reasons that higher education institutions need to be able to create sustainable leaders for the ever-changing future subject to accelerated development from all points of view.

### 2. Theoretical background

Before tackling more about sustainable development within higher education institutions, it is necessary to define the key terms for this study.

History shows that leadership has been a worthy matter to be scrutinized since the earliest times of mankind, and has also been a scientific attraction for over 100 years (Aysegul Ertugrul Azanci, Evren Ayranci, 2015).

In order to define leadership, first of all, we used the explanatory dictionary of the Romanian language, where we found a definition of the concept of "leader" that is explained as being the person who leads a party or an organization, a dominant personality in a group .

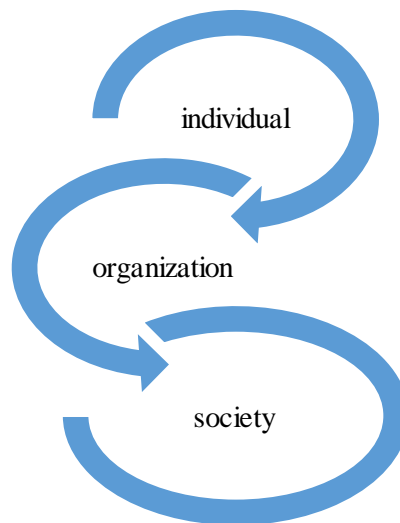
From an etymological point of view, leadership and leadership terms come from English to Verb to lead, which means to straighten, to determine, to lead, to lead, to accompany, to show the way. Another definition given by T. Peters and N. Austin is that leadership means enthusiasm, vision, trust, love, obsession, verva, use of symbols, consistency, the creation of heroes at all levels, managing to manage concerns and many other things (T. Petters, N. Austin, 1985, p. 56). Also, with regard to the leader, is the person who has a vision of the organization and who shows the direction the organization is heading for. The leader focuses on setting a strategy on the goal of the organization, on vision and less on concrete goals.

As far as the term of sustainability is concerned, it can be said that it represents development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, this being the most accepted definition of sustainability in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Report, 1987: 41).

In a world where organizations adopt sustainable development practices will be different from our current world where competitiveness and profitability have been inextricably linked to ever diminishing environmental diminution and damage (Benn et al., 2014).

Sustainability comprises three levels, as can be seen in the figure below:

*Figure no.1. Sustainability levels*



*Source:* Docherty, P, Forslin, J, Shani, AB and King, M (2002) „Emerging work systems: from intensive to sustainable” In P Docherty, J Forslin, AB Shani and M King (eds): *Creating Sustainable Work Systems: Emerging perspectives and practices*. Routledge: London.

According to the figure, sustainability at a level can not be built on the exploitation of others. These levels are closely linked to the organization's main stakeholders: staff, customers, owners and society. Thus, sustainability has a valuable basis in considering and balancing the legitimate needs and objectives of different stakeholders. Leadership has begun to be increasingly defined in terms of complex socio-economic and environmental risks and opportunities and in terms of progress towards sustainable development. Also, in order to achieve these concepts, there is a need for an education system that increasingly focuses on these two concepts just to create sustainable leaders.

The concept of sustainable development (or sustainability) is widely used and nowadays almost everything is under the sign of sustainable development: society is developing through sustainable development, so education must become sustainable; industry or agriculture is developing sustainably; research must support sustainable development, and so on.

The concept of sustainable development must be implemented at the level of society as a whole, and the role of education - in general - and of higher education - in particular - being decisive. For a society to become sustainable, it is necessary first and foremost to become universities sustainable.

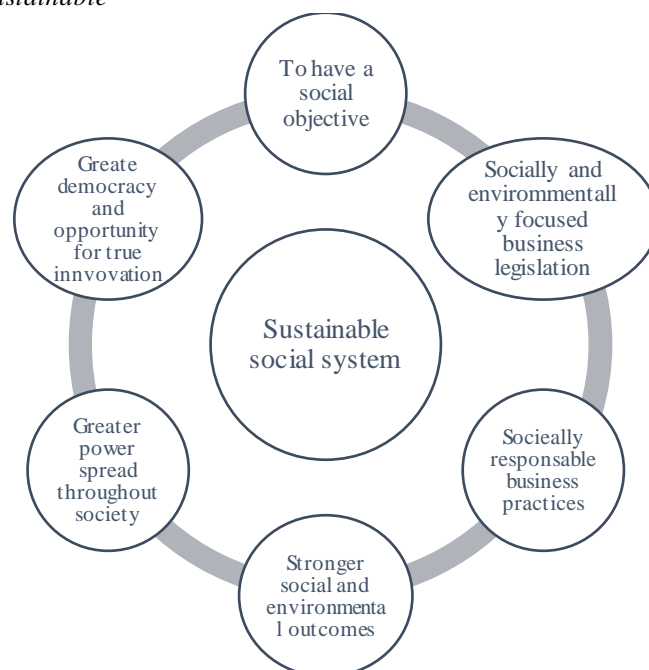
Sustainability challenges universities around the world to rethink their mission and to restructure their university curricula, research programs and campus lives. Graduates are increasingly exposed to concepts of sustainability that are emotionally, politically, ethically and scientifically loaded. They must be able to cope with conflicting norms and values, with uncertain results and ideas, as well as changing general knowledge (Corcoran and Wals, 2004).

Sustainability in education aims to help learners understand their relationships with life, become creative and active citizens, and engage personally and intellectually in the tensions caused by social, environmental, economic, and political pressures.

In sustainable education, pupils need to learn information about what is necessary and useful to meet their needs and society, present and future. Students must also acquire these skills at full, sustainable levels (Dilafuz R. Williams, H. L, 2014).

A system that is truly sustainable should focus on the needs and rights of all members of society. They need to start building a system that does not focus on corporate sustainability, but focus on social sustainability. This system must ensure that everyone's needs and human rights are met. A sustainable social system should include the following elements:

Figure no 2. Social System Sustainable



Source: Carbo, J., Langella, I. M., Dao, V. T., & Haase, S. J. (2014). „Breaking the Ties That Bind: From Corporate Sustainability to Socially Sustainable Systems”. *Business and Society Review*, 119(2), 175–206. doi:10.1111/basr.1202, pp.201

We need a sustainability education that places education at the heart of the problem-solving mission that threatens the future. Education, in all its forms and at all levels, is seen not only as an objective in itself but also as the most powerful tool to bring about the changes required to achieve sustainable development. Teacher leaders are highly effective teachers who accept responsibilities that go beyond the classroom delivery within a task or function that enhances quality in school. These professors are brand-name professionals who appeal to both their own and their outside knowledge to continuously improve their work with an emphasis on equity and learning. They are true sources of inspiration for colleagues and ambassadors of the schools in which they work. For

most organizations, and even for higher education institutions, pursuing global sustainability will therefore require a fundamental change in their values and leadership priorities to balance profitability with viability (Benn et al, 2014, Lombardo et al. , 2013, Piasecki, 2012).

In essence, this means - as Stiglitz (Martin, 2016) claims - that these organizations will be driven by a new set of values based on sustainability. This need for a fundamental change in values offers reason to rethink organizational leadership and one based on a sustainability paradigm (Burnes et al., 2016, Carbol et al., 2014). Sustainable leadership highlights the fact that everyone in the school will be successful in their learning process. At the same time, sustainable leadership is made up of the key factors behind school, namely, long-term success and development.

On the other hand, sustainability sees success both as sustainable and accessible to everyone. Thus the successful of sustainability plays an important role in the survival and success of any organization or systems in today's environment, which are extremely competitive and continually evolving (Oncioiu, I., Căpușeanu, S., Türkeş, M., Topor, D., Constantin, D.-M., Marin-Pantelescu, A., & Ștefan Hint, M., 2018).

### 3. Research methodology

Based on a report published in 2014 by Deloitte Consulting LTD, "Global Human Capital Trends - Engaging the 21st Century Workforce", a survey conducted over several years involving HR leaders and executives from 2532 companies of 94 countries, covering all sectors of activity, resulted in the fact that most companies face similar needs and difficulties in employing the competent workforce (J. Schwartz, J. Bersin, B. Pelster, 2014, P.7, 8) .

### 4. Findings

As a result of this study, it has been shown that all interviewed companies face similar needs and difficulties in employing a human resource prepared to meet current demands, a workforce capable of providing the development that all companies need. Companies primarily need leaders at all levels of activity and human resources with different skills than previous periods. And despite the fact that there is a large mass of unemployed waiting to enter the labor market, companies struggle with each other to attract the people they need because they do not find enough people trained to the required technical and professional skills. And many companies admit that they are not ready / able or have the resources / time to train their graduate schools and faculty (J. Schwartz, J. Bersin, B. Pelster, P.7, 2014, p.8).

### 5. Conclusions

Due to the fact that we live in a society based on rapid and complex knowledge that is constantly changing, in order to be able to meet the new challenges around us, it is necessary that education is always in step with the evolution and changes that occur, for that this can be achieved requires a well-thought-out leadership system that generates a sustainable education system. Education is sustainable when it is effective over time, when it integrates well with social, economic, political, technological changes, and can adapt to these changes. A system that is truly sustainable should focus on the needs and rights of all members of society. They need to start building a system that does not focus on corporate sustainability, but focus on social sustainability. This system must ensure that everyone's needs and human rights are met.

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