Responsible leadership on the way to sustainable development: environmental education and volunteering as practice fields

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Abstract. This article focuses on the idea of responsible leadership and the ways to promote and implement sustainable development through education systems and volunteer practices. The main idea of this research is to describe key characteristics of several leadership types and emphasize specific ideas of responsible leadership. One of the main assumptions relies on the possibilities of responsible leaders to foster sustainable changes in different areas. Therefore, this article, first, analyzes how responsible leaders can define, distribute and support sustainable initiatives, innovations and ideas at the levels of school, university and business education. Secondly, the article concentrates on the ways of responsible leaders in business to include sustainable agendas in organizational processes. Thirdly, the article explains the importance of responsible leadership in volunteering which is usually connected to social and environmental challenges. Thus, special attention is given to the responsible leaders' characteristics to deal with sustainable challenges and solutions. Keywords: responsible leadership, sustainability, sustainable development, environmental education, volunteering, corporate social responsibility, corporate volunteering

1 Introduction

In a time of growing uncertainty, great technological achievements and post-COVID reflection, the discussion on sustainable development still plays a significant role. In businesses and production, the number of ecological innovations and sustainable solutions is growing; more and more attention is given to corporate social responsibility and sustainable performance. In the education sector, the content of various subjects and disciplines embraces environmental problems, students learn to develop their sustainable initiatives. In the NGO sector and volunteering itself, there are certain ways to collaborate between different parties and promote sustainable solutions.

However, these actions are insufficient themselves to implement necessary sustainable changes in the long-term perspective. Global challenges such as climate change, gender

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inequality, poverty and migration emphasize the need for efficient instruments and human leading power to proceed with changes. In order to encourage businesses, educational sector and volunteers, there is a need for appropriate leaders. These leaders should be able to deal with various challenges and complexity, encourage individuals and social groups, and operate with emotional intelligence, problem-solving skills and adaptability to new social, economic or environmental conditions. Furthermore, as in businesses as well as in the education system and volunteering there are constantly dynamic changes, a variety of demands, attitudes and regulations; it requires new approaches to leadership and responsibility.

Therefore, responsible leadership means a social-relational and ethical phenomenon that creates value-based relationships and concerns inside and outside processes in an organization or a social group [1]. On the one hand, responsible leadership is connected to the idea of social sustainability; various businesses experience global pressure to be socially responsible which requires adequate, responsible leaders to manage sustainable changes, and foster and implement social responsibility policies [2]. Corporate social responsibility reflects the company’s aim to perform the advancement of certain sustainable policies, and social or environmental positive changes. On the other hand, it also concerns efficient communication, on the one hand, inside the company regarding common rules, corporate values, and goal alignment; on the other hand, outside the company with different stakeholders such as customers, partners, investors, suppliers, local community etc.

This article, firstly, explains the idea of responsible leadership through the variety of leadership styles. Secondly, it describes how responsible leadership can be used in education, business and volunteering to promote and incorporate sustainable development values. Finally, it summarizes the leadership styles and their possible connection to education, businesses and volunteering concerning the chances to adequately implement sustainable ideas.

2 Methods

In management, different leadership styles reflect a leader’s behaviour, experience, system of values, methods, characteristics and motivation. Each style explains a leader’s professional strategy, communication with a team and stakeholders as well as an approach to changes and global challenges. Apart from more traditional leadership styles - transactional and transformational - that focus on the manner of managing the team, some reflect more ideological and value-based aspects such as ethical, pragmatic, authentic or spiritual styles [3].

Transformational leadership is focused on changes and transformation and aims to create a shared vision. Leaders inspire their followers to achieve their goals by using their potential, individual strengths and abilities [4]. This style has an orientation on the future, analyses current trends, understands the need for changes and adapts a comfortable and efficient strategy to apply for organizational success [5]. Delegative leadership as the least intrusive form offers the initiative to team members and avoids providing proper feedback or guidance in management [6]. On the one hand, this style allows competent team members to use their creativity, responsibility and experience to accomplish the company’s goals. On the other hand, it can lead to misunderstandings and disagreements if team members are newcomers or cannot work without strong guidance.

Authoritative leadership apply mentorship as a guide and encourages team members to follow the pre-defined strategy. This style provides detailed guidance, feedback and motivation for team members; it is also characterized by working on a personalized level and communicating with individuals on the ways to achieve common goals [7; 8]. Transactional, or managerial, leadership is based on punishments and rewards, with a clear structure, goals
and tasks for the whole team [9]. This style fosters the achievements of mainly routine tasks, not a global company’s transformation; it means the possibility of a lack of team members' motivation and the focus on the efficiency of team members and their working activities [10].

Participative, or democratic leadership emphasizes the need to involve team members in the decision-making process. It is characterized by applying collective efforts to define a problem and create a possible solution, collaborating through accountability and shared responsibility [11]. Moreover, it is based on inclusivity and trust between a leader and team members [12]. Servant leadership is focused on the team members' needs by understanding their potential and personal goals. The main characteristics of this style are creativity, problem-solving and ethical decision-making [13]. Improved communication - that accepts different opinions - between different parties can prevent conflicts and create a positive and well-balanced work environment [14].

The focus of this paper is based on the responsible leadership type. The idea of responsibility is biased toward the control of one’s behaviour through a range of internal mechanisms [15]; in comparison with ethical regulations, responsibility is more strategically oriented to provide positive returns [16]. In this way, responsible leaders, firstly, have to take into account the interests of possible stakeholders (e.g., shareholders, employees, customers, local community) and create an inclusive environment [17]. Secondly, responsible leaders need to provide definite monitoring and reward systems that will control the correspondence of executed decisions and defined goals and values. Among different actions and attitudes, responsible leaders can apply several instruments that can foster positive changes and support their leading position [18]. For example, it is necessary to lead by example to demonstrate responsible commitment and greater involvement in the process; to incorporate shared values that represent basic stakeholders’ needs and attitudes; to apply intellectual stimulation for balancing stakeholders’ interests; and to demonstrate employee empowerment.

Furthermore, responsible leaders have to obtain such skills and competencies as the ability to make ethical judgments [19], aspire to positive changes, problem-solving, critical thinking and decision-making skills as well as efficient communication skills. By advancing common goals and applying creativity, it is possible to define an appropriate solution and facilitate necessary transformation.

3 Results

The main goal of this paper is to consider the role of responsible leadership in the areas of businesses, education and volunteering to implement and promote sustainable ideas, values and solutions. The main concepts of responsible leadership belong to the business and management areas; however, it is possible to apply these concepts to the educational system and volunteer activities.

Some scholars denote that how a company adapt and applies sustainable ideas depends on the leader’s skills and competencies to explain and promote such ideas [20]. Others emphasize the ability of a responsible leader to influence employees' pro-environmental behaviour through a green shared vision and the impact of high internal environmental locus of control [21]. Additionally, the significant role of top management values and the strong impact of stakeholder engagement advance the company’s environmental commitment [22]. In the same way, responsible leadership can positively affect corporate reputation [23] and firm financial performance [24; 25]. Moreover, regular sustainability reports and corporate governance initiated by responsible leaders can define and structure the implementation of the entire responsible business strategy [26].
3.1 Leadership in Education

Talking about leadership and sustainability, it is necessary to differentiate various areas where it can be relevant and efficient. In the education system, responsible leaders have three major goals connected to sustainable ideas. Firstly, they need to ensure inclusive and non-discriminatory quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for everyone [27]. It follows the Goal 4 “Quality Education” of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and supports the ideas of inclusion and diversity [28]. In these conditions, responsibility in leadership can be interpreted through promoting inclusive practices and creating different ways for lifelong studies.

Secondly, responsible leaders have to incorporate basic values, attitudes and ideas of sustainability into a regular educational context. It can include, for instance, theoretical concepts about ecology, environment and human interactions; practical cases on sustainable solutions; discussion about global challenges in sustainable development; and educational project development concerned with sustainable solutions for local problems. It is significant to mention the necessity to implement sustainable ideas at different educational levels, for instance, at primary and secondary schools as well as bachelor, master and post-degree levels [29].

Thus, at the level of primary (or even pre-primary) education, it is possible to talk about the relation between nature and human beings stressing the ideas of care, respect and attention to natural processes. At the secondary school level, it is relevant to explain the factual situation with the environment and the negative impact of human activities and teach some eco-friendly practices such as sorting the garbage, responsible water and energy consumption, and recycling options. Therefore, at the university level, apart from bachelor's and master's programs connected to sustainability issues, students will be prepared to talk about sustainability inside and outside the university context. Furthermore, at the university level, there is a need for integrating sustainability principles into management education; besides, it is a necessity to create a better motivation for universities themselves to talk more about sustainability and better implement sustainable initiatives into the educational process [30].

Thirdly, education for sustainable development relates to various disciplines, for instance, biology, medicine, nutrition, geography, engineering, architecture, citizenship, sociology, psychology, political science, history, law or economics. Moreover, to advance education for sustainability and increase the ability to understand complex global challenges, it is relevant to include various interdisciplinary practices, for instance, different perspectives of sustainability and corporate social responsibility [31]. Interdisciplinarity in education helps to split a complex issue into small particles for a better understanding and create a solution that comprises ideas from different sectors or disciplines.

Regarding business education, it is worthwhile to emphasize the necessity of various branches to talk about sustainability, too. Educating responsible leaders and promoting sustainable changes through responsible leadership means critically reconsidering the educational priorities, challenges and basic tasks. The role of business schools today can be also criticized regarding their fundamental questions, role and contributions towards sustainable development [32].

The summary of these ideas is presented in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main sustainable goals</th>
<th>Main instruments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to ensure inclusive and non-discriminatory quality education and promote lifelong learning</td>
<td>inclusive practices and creating different ways for lifelong studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
opportunities for everyone

| 2 | to incorporate basic values, attitudes and ideas of sustainability into regular educational context | theoretical concepts about ecology, environment and human interactions; practical cases on sustainable solutions; discussion about global challenges in sustainable development; educational project development concerned sustainable solutions for local problems etc. |

| 3 | to include interdisciplinarity of theories and practices | different perspectives of sustainability and corporate social responsibility from biology, medicine, nutrition, geography, engineering, architecture, citizenship, sociology, psychology, political science, history, law or economics |

3.2 Leadership in Business

Talking about leadership, businesses and sustainability, it is necessary to define some significant areas of discussion. Firstly, there is a question on the possibilities of responsible leaders to influence organizational processes and outcomes regarding sustainable challenges and ideas [33]. Top managers, heads of departments or initiative employees have to obtain such power and authority to promote, lead and coordinate necessary changes at different company levels. Furthermore, the influence through behaviour and actions can be challenged by individual, situational, organizational, institutional, and supranational factors [34]. Various regulations, corporate culture, stakeholders or other outside factors can hinder or even prohibit progress on the way to sustainability. However, the decision-making process can be managed through different sustainable attitudes and behavioural models. Therefore, responsible leaders have to train their negotiation skills in communication, persuasion and problem-solving.

Secondly, responsible leaders have to deal with sustainable management, contribution to environmental challenges and circular economy [35]. Sustainable management can include responsible resource consumption such as water or energy use; as, the creation of social or environmental positive impact by setting fewer priorities for economic growth. According to the principles of circular economy, the production process should be designed as a closed-loop system with minimization or avoidance of waste and implementation of reuse, repair and recycle principles. Moreover, the task of a responsible leader can include delivery of functionality and experience, work experience reward and creativity support. By contributing to environmental challenges, it is worthwhile to more collaborate and less compete. Businesses with sustainable management can foster social and technological innovations by defining changes at the system level.

Thirdly, it is about the respectful performance of sustainable actions [36]. Questions of efficiency, reliability and transparency have to be explained and articulated through various eco-initiatives, eco-friendly solutions and corporate social responsibility [37]. The duties of responsible leaders in business include the work of policy-making and increasing accountability to all stakeholders.

Furthermore, sustainable performance is about values to propose, create and capture. Among different interpretations of responsible leaders in business and value maintenance, it is possible to denote the following [38]. Firstly, the highly rational and analytic type of a traditional economist creates short-term economic value that is targeted towards shareholders. This leader is oriented on compliance with industry norms and determines sustainable initiatives through a strict cost-benefit basis. Secondly, an opportunity seeker who creates values in the long-term perspective aims to realize competitive advantages. Any sustainable initiatives are considered a good PR strategy for business. Thirdly, an integrator
who exceeds economic, legal or PR concerns determines a broader perspective on business responsibilities for the or company’s success. This type aims to respond to the demands of various stakeholders, extending the perspective of only economic profits. Finally, an idealist type as a social entrepreneur follows strong ethical intentions and deals with solving social or environmental challenges. Sometimes, this type even prioritizes the success of such a challenge rather than business needs.

Table 2 below presents the summary of the above-mentioned ideas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Main sustainable goals</th>
<th>Main instruments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>to influence organizational processes and outcomes regarding sustainable challenges and ideas</td>
<td>decision-making process through different sustainable attitudes and behavioral models; training of negotiation skills as communication, persuasion and problem-solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>to deal with sustainable management, contribution to environmental challenges and circular economy</td>
<td>including responsible resource consumption, creation of social or environmental positive impact; delivery of functionality and experience, work experience reward and creativity support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>to create respectful performance of sustainable actions</td>
<td>various eco-initiatives, eco-friendly solutions and corporate social responsibility; different types of responsible leaders to work on business performance and PR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Leadership in Volunteering

Responsible leadership in volunteering have a particular focus on sustainability. Volunteer practices mainly deal with social or environmental problems to solve, and the role of responsible leaders is crucial in such activities. To support, motivate, coordinate, and distribute needed inspiration or information requires responsible power and charisma, especially in non-working, non-paid practices.

There are some suggestions related to the individual’s motivation to participate in volunteer projects. Personal attachment to local environmental problems leads to civic engagement; the need to be a part of a global community defines one’s environmental identity; individual pro-environmental behaviour determines environmental-friendly habits and activities [39]. It is interesting that leadership, including responsibility, can be volunteer, too. In this way, leaders by making generous contributions aim to strategically distil personal gains, or lead even at a personal cost, or build a positive social image [40].

One of the practices is employee volunteerism a practice of corporate social responsibility or an activity beyond a company’s core task that helps to build a positive corporate reputation and support employees’ satisfaction and retention [41]. Usually volunteering is based on free will to benefit other people, groups, or organizations. Employees can develop their social competencies, and adaptability to unfamiliar situations as well as improve work performance through mastering soft skills and leadership competencies. In these circumstances, companies have to develop an effective system of stimulation and rewards that will be enough attractive for different employees and their demands. Furthermore, a company itself through corporate volunteering can build useful networks, improve the company’s reputation and professional image and increase stakeholder engagement. However, there is also a need for a responsible leader whose example in volunteering can be sufficient to repeat and extend
volunteer practices. Additionally, responsible leaders can strategically organize the volunteer practices to efficiently apply volunteers’ time, skills and efforts.

Corporate volunteering stimulates intensive communication between employees who partake in societally beneficial activities, non-governmental organizations and/or beneficiaries [42]. It has to be properly regulated and controlled by responsible leaders who take care of the tasks and operations, social impact, non-material profits and the company’s reputation. In particular, social impact is understood as any kind of positive change; it can influence individuals or social groups, caused by various actions, activities, and processes and articulated by individuals, companies, NGOs, or governments. Therefore, social impact expressed in, for instance, improved job quality, social inclusion, protection of minority groups; gender equality; and access to public health or educational systems, can play a significant role by building employees’ motivation to participate in corporate volunteering.

The Table 3 below summarizes the above-mentioned ideas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Main sustainable goals</th>
<th>Main instruments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>to support, motivate, coordinate, distribute needed inspiration or information</td>
<td>responsible power and charisma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>to build a positive corporate reputation and support employees’ satisfaction and retention</td>
<td>corporate volunteering, corporate social responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>to better cooperate and communicate with stakeholders</td>
<td>take care about the tasks and operations, social impact, non-material profits and company’s reputation</td>
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</table>

### 4 Discussion

On the one hand, it is possible to assume that any kind of leader can deal with sustainable development and promotion of sustainable ideas. Due to leadership competencies, communication and organizational skills, leaders have the resources to elaborate sustainable challenges into positive solutions and impact. On the other hand, only special types of leaders can initiate changes, motivate others and support sustainable transformation. It depends on education level, creative thinking, social engagement activities and involvement in sustainable agenda at the different levels of human activities (personal life, education, job, social life etc.).

In Table 4 there is a comparison of leadership types presented; the rate of possibility to incorporate and distribute sustainable initiatives and ideas is mentioned accordingly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of leadership:</th>
<th>Main characteristics:</th>
<th>Possibility to promote and/or implement sustainable ideas, solutions, technologies:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational</td>
<td>Focused on changes and shared vision creation</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegative</td>
<td>Initiative to team members, less feedback or guidance</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>Detailed guidance, feedback and motivation</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Style</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transactional</strong></td>
<td>Based on punishments and rewards; with a clear structure and goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participative</strong></td>
<td>Based on team members involvement in decision-making process; collaborating through accountability and shared responsibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Servant</strong></td>
<td>Focused on the team members needs by understanding their potential and personal goals; based on creativity, problem-solving and ethical decision-making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsible</strong></td>
<td>Control of one’s behavior through the range of internal mechanisms; more strategically oriented to provide positive return</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

### 5 Conclusions

This article aimed to analyze the concept of responsible leadership through comparison with other leadership types. The main focus was given to the areas of education, business and volunteering as practice fields for implementing sustainable solutions. Additionally, different leadership characteristics were discussed regarding the idea of responsibility and a sustainable agenda.

It is significant today to discuss the importance of responsible leaders in different areas of human lives. Starting from the education sector where students receive knowledge about the world, the relationship between human beings and nature, and the responsibility to treat the environment positively. Moreover, different levels of education systems as primary schools, colleges, universities, post-degree or specifically, business education should be in particular oriented on a sustainable agenda. Therefore, responsible leaders can be such motivators and innovators to introduce students to the key sustainable challenges and environmental problems.

In the same way, modern businesses today deal with sustainable development and have to adapt, incorporate and perform sustainable actions. Circular economy principles, corporate social responsibility, and eco-friendly technologies can become necessary instruments for sustainable business performance. Responsible leaders in businesses use mentoring or consulting roles to navigate sustainable changes; besides, they can apply the principles of sustainable management as well as reward practices for extra employee motivation.

Finally, various volunteer practices that deal with social and environmental problems require deeper implementation of a sustainable agenda in their activities. It can help to increase the motivation and self-esteem of volunteers as well as maintain the positive image or reputation of various stakeholders. Responsible leaders have to apply their creativity and influential power to lead the volunteer movement, support newcomers and reward old members, including the demands of various stakeholders.

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