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# Readiness of the Public Elementary School Heads on the Principles of Sustainable Leadership: Basis for Capacity Training

**Risalita C. Nalla, MAE**


[risalita.nalla@deped.gov.ph](mailto:risalita.nalla@deped.gov.ph)

School Head, Bungahan Elementary School  
SDO City of Malolos, Bulacan, Philippines

**Cynthia C. Briones, Ph.D.**

[cynthia.briones@deped.gov.ph](mailto:cynthia.briones@deped.gov.ph)

SGOD Chief, SDO City of Malolos  
Bulacan, Philippines

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## READINESS OF THE PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HEADS ON THE PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP: BASIS FOR CAPACITY TRAINING

Risalita C. Nalla, MAE<sup>1</sup>, Cynthia C. Briones, Ph.D.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School Head, Bungahan Elementary School, SDO City of Malolos, Bulacan, Philippines

<sup>2</sup>SGOD Chief, SDO City of Malolos, Bulacan, Philippines



### ABSTRACT

This study is intended to measure the readiness of the public elementary school heads on the principles of sustainable leadership. This study utilized the mixed-method design. Creswell & Clark (2017), defined mixed methods research as a research approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a research question or topic. This approach allows researchers to leverage the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The following major findings on the quantitative aspect are: the school heads are slightly ready on the worldview principle while moderately ready to influence and complexity. However, they are highly ready to network, self-leadership, and work across boundaries. Positive themes emerged for the qualitative part with the results as: improved communication, increased motivation, and enhanced creativity. It can be concluded that the school heads are slightly ready when it comes to worldview principles. The SDO should create capacity training that could increase the readiness of the school heads on this principle of sustainable leadership.

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### INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in shaping the future of individuals and societies, and effective school leadership is essential for ensuring quality education. In recent years, the concept of sustainable leadership has gained prominence in educational research and practice. Sustainable leadership encompasses a multifaceted approach that emphasizes long-term strategies, collaboration, and the development of a positive school culture to achieve continuous improvement and sustainability. The role of school heads in sustainable leadership is paramount, as they are responsible for providing direction, fostering a supportive environment, and promoting the professional growth of teachers and staff.

Many countries have already practiced this kind of leadership among school heads. To fully understand the concept of this term, several studies defined this as a response to the dynamic world as it examines sustainability in the economic aspects, and human, social, and ecological perspectives (Kasvio & Raikkonen, 2010). (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, 693-697) explained that sustainable leadership is a joint responsibility, which does not deplete human or financial resources, and gives emphasis on nurturing and caring for the environment for sustainable educational surroundings and community environment. Furthermore, this kind of leadership builds an educational environment that fosters organizational diversity as well as promotes practices that encourage collaboration of ideas and practices for shared learning development.



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The main purpose of this paper is to evaluate the readiness of the public elementary school heads in the Division of City Schools of Malolos in the principles of sustainable leadership. It focuses mainly on the six principles namely worldview, network, boundaries, influence, complexity, and self-leadership. The results of the study pave the way for the development of capacity training to address the gaps in sustainable leadership.

## Research Questions

1. How may the level of readiness of the public elementary school heads be described in terms of:
  - 1.1 Worldviews;
  - 1.2 Networks;
  - 1.3 Boundaries;
  - 1.4 Influence;
  - 1.5 Complexity;
  - 1.6 Self-leadership?
2. What are the benefits of sustainable leadership principles to the school heads?
3. What possible challenges are experienced by the school heads in the context of sustainable leadership principles?
4. What capacity training can be drawn from the results of the study?

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Sustainable Leadership

Notable researchers and leaders defined sustainable leadership as a process that influences and delivers direction, alignment, and commitment. More so, it aims to address the social, environmental, and economic issues to create a better world (McCauley, 2014,). With this explanation, it becomes a reminder that leadership is not always a position. It deals more with the passion and commitment to govern and be the catalyst for change. In a very complex organization, the commitment to work together and share a common vision with the subordinates makes a successful leader. Also, it gives people a reminder that sustainable leadership seeks to deliver outcomes that maximize value across the organization to ensure that the future generation could receive equal opportunities the same as the experiences today (Taylor, 2020).

According to Armani et al., (2020), the context of sustainable leadership ensures the attainment of projected performance and results in relation to the demands of the organization along with opportunities and challenges. Another idea emerged from the study of Cook (2014) this researcher emphasized that sustainable leadership is a context of creating an educational environment where diversity is welcomed and enables cross-pollination of the great views of the organization.

Finally, Sulasmi et al., (2020) believed that the employees under this kind of leadership most likely felt satisfaction and excellence in terms of sharing their efforts within the organization. Thus, from the perspective of different researchers, sustainable leadership poses a positive influence in strengthening the relationship and maintaining long-lasting relationships to achieve the desired goals of the school.



## Principles of Sustainable Leadership

### 1. Worldview of Sustainable Leadership as Eco-centric, Systematic, and Long-term

The idea of sustainable leadership in the context of how worldview is expressed is through understanding the role of the global ecosystem as part of attaining a sustainable school. Gerard et al., (2017) discovered the significant contribution of understanding the ecological worldview to sustainable leadership. This context emphasized the role of human beings as part of the ecosystem. The totality of nature has intrinsic value that must be given high regard in order to minimize human impact on natural systems. Part of being a sustainable leader is to think systematically and rationally about long-term plans and actions to be able to preserve and sustain the natural environment. The value of the people sustaining ecological awareness leads to comprehending why and how people should act especially sustainable leaders. In terms of effect, worldviews powerfully mold specific choices to contribute to sustainability. explained that short-term dialogue leads only to shorter attainment of the visions. It should be cascaded as a bigger environment where everybody can share ideas, and collectively develop concrete plans for the future.

### 2. Establishing Networks as Principle in Sustainable Leadership

According to Smith (2022), establishing networks for sustainable leadership is crucial for long-term organizational success (p. 45). At the organizational level, sustainable leadership is viewed as a leadership activity that is integrated throughout building networks. Avery and Bergsteiner (2011)b, sustainable leadership is the primary driver of an organizational and building networks improved the cultural understanding and empowerment of the school leaders.

Sustainable leadership emphasizes the importance of engaging stakeholders in decision-making processes and building trust. Effective sustainable leaders recognize the importance of knowledge sharing and continuous learning within their networks. Through networking, leaders can connect with professionals from various backgrounds, industries, and sectors, thus gaining access to a wealth of expertise and perspectives (Kakabadse, Kakabadse, & Kouzmin, 2021). This exposure to diverse knowledge promotes learning, enables the adoption of best practices, and fosters innovation within organizations.

Networks provide leaders with a mechanism to connect and communicate with stakeholders, fostering meaningful relationships (Yukl, 2020). By actively engaging stakeholders in networked settings, leaders gain valuable insights into their concerns, needs, and expectations, enabling them to make informed decisions and build trust-based relationships. Building networks opens avenues for innovation and adaptability by promoting the cross-pollination of ideas. Leaders who actively engage in network-building activities create opportunities for serendipitous encounters and unexpected connections, which often spark creative thinking and novel solutions (Örtenblad, 2018). These networks serve as platforms for exchanging insights, exploring emerging trends, and collaborating on sustainable initiatives, ultimately driving organizational innovation and adaptability.

### 3. Sustainable Leaders Working Across Boundaries

Sustainable leaders who work across boundaries recognize the value of collaboration and collective action in addressing sustainability challenges. By engaging stakeholders from different sectors, such as government, business, academia, and civil society, they create synergistic relationships that promote innovative solutions and shared responsibility (Kolk, 2016). Collaboration across boundaries enables leaders to leverage diverse expertise, resources, and perspectives, leading to more effective and



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sustainable outcomes. Working across boundaries necessitates adopting a systems thinking perspective, considering the interconnectedness of social, environmental, and economic factors. Sustainable leaders who can navigate and understand complex systems are better equipped to identify root causes, leverage points, and develop holistic strategies (Kurucz, Colbert, & Lüdeke-Freund, 2020). They can break down silos and promote integrated approaches that address interrelated sustainability challenges.

Working across boundaries requires building trust and establishing meaningful relationships with stakeholders. Sustainable leaders who demonstrate openness, inclusivity, and authenticity in their interactions foster trust and credibility (Waddock & Lozano, 2013). Trust enables effective collaboration, enhances communication, and facilitates collective decision-making, all of which are essential for driving sustainable change across boundaries.

#### 4. Sustainable Leadership Exercise Influence Without Authority

Sustainable leaders often operate within complex systems involving multiple stakeholders. Exercising influence without formal authority allows leaders to mobilize stakeholders toward a shared vision of sustainability. By effectively communicating the importance of sustainability, building relationships, and engaging in dialogue, leaders can inspire and motivate stakeholders to take action (Senge et al., 2012). This inclusive approach fosters collaboration and empowers stakeholders to contribute to sustainable initiatives. Exercising influence without authority enables sustainable leaders to build coalitions and partnerships with diverse stakeholders. By identifying common goals, aligning interests, and creating win-win situations, leaders can forge alliances to advance sustainable initiatives (Ferraro, Etzion, & Gehman, 2015). Collaborative partnerships amplify the impact of sustainable leadership by leveraging the resources, expertise, and networks of different stakeholders, leading to more comprehensive and sustainable outcomes. Influence without authority plays a vital role in shaping organizational culture to support sustainability. Sustainable leaders can influence norms, values, and behaviors by promoting sustainable practices, recognizing and rewarding sustainability efforts, and creating a supportive environment (Ferraro et al., 2015). Through consistent communication and role modeling, leaders establish a culture of sustainability that becomes embedded in the organization's DNA, driving long-term sustainable performance. Influence without Authority empowers sustainable leaders to inspire and drive change within their organizations or communities. By showcasing personal commitment, expertise, and credibility, leaders can gain the respect and trust of others, encouraging them to adopt sustainable practices voluntarily (Senge et al., 2012). Sustainable leaders who model sustainable behaviors and champion sustainability initiatives become powerful agents of change, fostering a culture of sustainability.

#### 5. Sustainable Leadership is Comfortable Working with Complexity

Sustainable leaders comfortable with complexity possess systems thinking skills, which enable them to understand the interconnectedness and interdependencies of social, economic, and environmental factors. Systems thinking allows leaders to recognize the complexity of sustainability challenges and identify leverage points for intervention (Sterman, 2012). By viewing issues holistically and considering long-term implications, leaders can develop strategies that address systemic problems and create sustainable outcomes. Complexity often brings uncertainty and unpredictability. Sustainable leaders who are comfortable with complexity are more adaptable and resilient in the face of changing circumstances (Rockström et al., 2018). They can navigate through ambiguity, embrace diverse perspectives, and adjust their strategies accordingly. By acknowledging and embracing complexity, leaders foster a culture of agility, enabling organizations to respond effectively to emerging sustainability challenges.



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Complex sustainability challenges require collaborative efforts involving diverse stakeholders. Sustainable leaders comfortable with complexity create spaces for collaboration and co-creation, recognizing that diverse perspectives and expertise are essential for developing comprehensive and effective solutions (Fullan, 2011). They facilitate dialogue, encourage cross-sector partnerships, and promote inclusive decision-making processes that enable stakeholders to collectively address complex issues. Leaders comfortable with complexity possess anticipatory thinking skills, allowing them to identify potential future challenges and opportunities. They understand that sustainability issues are dynamic and that proactive measures are necessary to address emerging complexities (Rockström et al., 2018). By considering multiple scenarios, anticipating risks, and planning for resilience, leaders can navigate uncertainties and take informed actions to promote long-term sustainability.

## 6. Sustainable Leadership Knows the Importance of Leading Themselves

Sustainable leaders recognize that taking care of themselves is essential for long-term success and resilience. They understand that their well-being directly influences their ability to lead and make sound decisions. Self-care practices such as exercise, mindfulness, and work-life balance contribute to physical and mental well-being. A study by Greenberg and Maymin (2017) highlights the positive impact of self-care practices on leaders' emotional intelligence, stress management, and overall job satisfaction. Self-awareness is a fundamental aspect of sustainable leadership. Leaders who possess self-awareness understand their strengths, weaknesses, values, and emotions. They have a clear understanding of how their behavior and decisions impact themselves, their teams, and the overall organization. Self-aware leaders can better align their actions with their values, make informed decisions, and exhibit authenticity. Research conducted by Goleman et al. (2017) has shown that self-awareness is positively correlated with effective leadership, employee engagement, and organizational performance. Numerous case studies highlight the importance of leading oneself in sustainable leadership. One such example is the leadership style of Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla and SpaceX. Musk not only demonstrates visionary leadership but also practices self-leadership by engaging in regular self-reflection and personal growth. His commitment to learning and self-improvement has contributed to his ability to lead sustainable ventures in the electric vehicle and space exploration industries.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a mixed method approach to determine the level of readiness of the public elementary school heads on the principles of sustainable leadership. Moreover, the qualitative aspect of this study focuses on the insights of the school heads, particularly on the positive and negative effects of sustainable leadership principles on their responsibilities as school leaders.

### Research Respondents

The respondents of this study were the forty-one elementary school heads of the Schools Division of City of Malolos, Bulacan. They were given a modified and validated questionnaire based on the principles of sustainable leadership developed by Andre Taylor.

The qualitative part of the study employed 10 elementary schools heads which represent the ten districts of the entire division.

### Research Instrument

The researcher adapted and modified a questionnaire from Andre Taylor and Avery & Bergsteiner. The five-point Likert Scale instrument was validated by three experts who were very knowledgeable in the



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field of leadership and education. It was then pilot tested to the elementary school heads on the private sector. Cronbachs alpha was computed using the SPSS software.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics was used to determine the readiness of the elementary school heads specifically with the mean and its verbal interpretation. However on the qualitative part, the responses from the ten participants were arranged according to the themes using the Thematic Analysis.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1. Level of Readiness of the School Heads on the Principles of Sustainable Leadership**

Principle	Summary Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Worldview	2.18	Slightly ready
Networks	3.49	Highly ready
Across Boundaries	3.54	Highly ready
Influence	2.73	Moderately ready
Complexity	3.14	Moderately ready
Self Leadership	3.69	Highly ready

Table 1 presents the level of readiness of the elementary school heads on the principles of sustainable leadership. As reflected here, it can be seen that the school heads have a very low summary mean to world view principle which is only 2.18 with a verbal interpretation of slightly ready. Moreover, they are also moderately ready on the sustainable leadership principles on influence and complexity with 2.74 and 3.14 respectively. However, the school heads are highly ready on building networks, work across boundaries, and self-leadership with 3.49, 3.54, and 3.69 respectively.

**Table 2. Responses of the Elementary School Heads on the Benefits of Sustainable Leadership**

Theme	Codes
Improved Communication	Sustainable leadership enhances communication (2)  Through sustainable leadership, school heads are capable of improving the way how they communicate with others regardless of race and gender (1)
Greater Engagement	It creates avenues for engagements whether private or public. (2)



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Increase Motivation	Sustainable leadership increased motivation and passion for progress. (1)  There is a chance of increased motivation to collaborate with other leaders to attain sustainability. (3)
Enhance Creativity	Through sustainable leadership, school heads increased creativity to so many dimensions of sustainability. (1)

The participant replies to the open-ended question about the advantages or benefits of sustainable leadership are shown in Table 2. The answers are grouped by topics and coded based on how many synonyms there are in each response. Two people had the same concept when looking at this, which is improved communication. Despite their divergent points of view, the setting is the same. Greater engagement is another new trend. The group came to the consensus that more interest and participation in diverse activities could be fostered by sustainable leadership.

Motivation is a second theme that is starting to emerge. The motivational strategy that sustainable leadership may provide was directly targeted by the three participants' common responses. That drive typically results in advancement and sustainability, which is what this study aims to achieve. The final theme is that it fosters innovation. The sustainable leadership principles provide up opportunities for the school leaders to explore and use ideas to develop plans to reach that degree of sustainability.

**Table 3. Responses of the Elementary School Heads on the Challenges of Sustainable Leadership**

Theme	Codes
Change of mentality	There is a strong chance of a change of mentality when this principle of leadership is imposed. (2)  School Heads tend to adopt the mentality of foreign leaders which could be an indication that there is a loss in having an authentic mentality. (1)
Fragile commitment	Because of so many tasks as leaders, there is a very fragile commitment towards attaining sustainability (1)
Leads to unemployment	Sustainable leadership could lead to the possible massive unemployment of people (4)





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Idealistic

The principles of sustainability leadership become too idealistic and impractical. (2)

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The replies from the participants to the question concerning the drawbacks of sustainable leadership are manifested in Table 3 as emergent themes and codes. As can be observed, this study has four emerging topics. Participants initially saw it as a means of altering their mindset. They place more emphasis on assimilating foreign cultures and adopting foreign leaders' policies. Since school administrators are imitating the procedure, there is concern that people may stop paying attention to local laws. Second, the responses also revealed brittle commitment. Because school leaders have so many duties in addition to leading their schools, fragility in sustaining is viewed as one of the drawbacks. Being a leader involves a variety of responsibilities. Unemployment is a further theme. They were concerned that one of the negative effects of sustainable leadership would be to advance society to the point where they would no longer require labor to do the task. They thought that human intervention would be useless by that time due to advancements in science and technology. Therefore, less employment for people could be offered in favor of those for machines and technologies. Participants then discuss if achieving sustainable leadership is too idealistic. Furthermore, it is not practicable. They interpreted it that way most likely because of the settings, which place the ideas outside of what is typically done. Perhaps affluent and industrialized nations could use this, but those in the third world believed it was too ambitious to implement.

## CONCLUSION

The public elementary school heads of SDO-City of Malolos are slightly ready in terms of the utilization of sustainable leadership principles especially in the context of the world view setting. Meanwhile, the school heads have moderate readiness to the other two principles namely influence and complexity while the other three are all highly ready. As to the challenges that they might experience on the sustainable leadership principles, themes emerged as a change of mentality, fragile commitment, leading to unemployment, and too idealistic. However, on the benefits, the participants viewed it as it helps improve communication, greater engagement, increase motivation, and enhance creativity.

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations are summarized: The division of City Schools of Malolos must modify the programs and activities within the organization in order to address sustainable leadership principles. Capacity training as to the development of these principles is highly encore encouraged especially in the worldview context. They must invite credible resource speakers from other countries who are school leaders also so that they could share their best practices and sustainable leadership practices with the local leaders in the SDO.



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