

## **Erabaddage Ayoma Gayathri Sumanasiri: An examination of business leadership in Sri Lanka: Cultural modelling of sustainability leadership (2016)**

Sustainability leadership at the organisational level has attracted much attention in recent years, as an essential element in enhancing national development. Yet much of the relevant research has been qualitative and focused on developed economies – little is known about sustainability leadership among managers in developing economies. Therefore, the main objective of this thesis was to test and develop an integrated cultural model to explain what constitutes sustainability leadership among Sri Lankan managers. This model that is unique to the cultural environment will provide a framework to identify specific managerial skills, behaviours and capacities that encourage sustainability leadership in other developing economies.

This study defined sustainability leadership as managers with excellent leadership qualities, including minimising negative impacts on society, the environment and the organisation's financial performance. Stakeholder relationships, long-term orientation and employee engagement were identified as the main drivers positively influencing the sustainability leadership dimension.

A deductive and quantitative research approach was employed using a paper-based questionnaire that was administered to managers in Sri Lankan organisations. Responses from 821 managers were subsequently analysed using factor analyses and structural equation modelling.

The findings confirmed that Sri Lankan manager's prioritisation of stakeholder relationships and employee engagement are the main drivers influencing perceptions of sustainability leadership, particularly stakeholder relationships. Given Sri Lanka's socioenvironmental and cultural context, managers' long-term orientation was found to have no impact on perceptions of sustainability leadership, only influencing perceptions of organisational change leadership. This raised the question of whether the traditionally long-term oriented Sri Lankan culture has shifted to short-term orientation due to the rapid changes and corresponding uncertainties in Sri Lankan society. In addition, it is the conclusion of this research that what constitutes excellence in leadership in the management context does not necessarily constitute an excellent leader in the sustainability context in Sri Lankan organisations. The study's respondents in general had clearly differentiated managerial leadership roles in support of the day-to-day management and the longer-term sustainability prospects.

This study adds to the literature on sustainability leadership in developing economies by providing a unique integrated cultural model to explain managerial perceptions of sustainability leadership in Sri Lankan organisations. The most unique facet in Sri Lanka organisations is that sustainability leadership is perceived to have both a management face and a sustainability face. Hence, this study further contributes to knowledge in the field of leadership research and sustainable development in developing economies. These findings could be used by management trainers, human resource managers and designers of tertiary level management education

programs to develop managerial behaviours that support sustainability leadership in developing economies. Keywords: sustainability leadership, excellent leadership, leadership behaviours, cultural modelling, developing economies, complex markets.