

### **Sustainable Leadership for Sustainable Corporations**

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#### ABSTRACT

Today, when sustainability is important for all companies, sustainable leaders are needed to provide sustainability at the firm. As a concept, sustainability contains themes of economic development, social development, and protection of the environment. Corporate sustainability states that it executes economic, social and environmental responsibilities of enterprises in an integrated manner; establishes a balance between these areas of responsibility and to be sustainable in these dimensions. It emphasizes that institutions should focus on long-term gains rather than short-term.

A sustainable leader is someone who shares responsibility for the prevention of unnecessary consumption of human and financial resources and prevention of negative damage to the social environment (Hargreaves and Fink, 2003, p.3). Sustainable leaders acknowledge that individuals will create future together by seeing, understanding and interacting (Ferdig, 2007, p. 32). "A sustainability leader is someone who inspires and supports action towards a better world." The Sustainability Leadership Institute's (2011) offers another definition, suggesting that sustainability leaders are "individuals who are compelled to make a difference by deepening their awareness of themselves with the world around them. In doing so, they adopt new ways of seeing, thinking and interacting that result in innovative, sustainable solutions." For sustainable leadership, not only is discourse necessary, but it also requires harmonious behavior. Sustainable leadership is more than what a leader does; it is about how they are understood by others. Leaders should both demonstrate personal intention, and behave in an observable way (Ulrich ve Smallwood, 2011, p.3-4). Sustainability of Corporation enables the growth of corporations, attracts capital, positions the brand, and makes the brand preferred, increasing loyalty of existing customers. To achieve this, the sustainable leader is needed. The purpose of this research is to examine the Sustainability Leadership Model as identified by the Cambridge Sustainability Leadership Institute, on managers working at NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) in Izmir/Turkey. Research data will be analyzed to identify characteristics of managers who seek corporate sustainability and identify those which are absent.

Data collection will occur using a survey form among indispensable conditions of "Sustainable Leadership"; the external and internal context for leadership traits, styles, skills and knowledge of the individual leader; and leadership action. Business owners are required to indicate characteristics that they think they have. Survey results, applied to 50 business people, will be evaluated by computer and interpreted as statistical data.

The results show that it is quite a remarkable study, regarding how "sustainable leader" are perceived based on the characteristics identified within the sampling group throughout Izmir. This research also provides indicators as to what kind of leadership qualities need to be present or developed to lead companies towards "sustainable corporations".

## **INTRODUCTION**

Sustainability has become one of the dominant narratives of the 21st century. The most popular definition of sustainability can be traced to a 1987 UN report in which sustainable development is defined as “meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs”. Sustainability requires views of human needs and well-being that incorporate such non-economic variables as education and health enjoyed for their own sake, clean air and water, and the protection of natural beauty (Imperatives, 2016:49).

In scientific literature, sustainable development has been analyzed in different qualitative aspects, such as economic, social, ecologic, institutional, ethical, political, etc. The variety of the applied research techniques further confirms the problematic nature of the concept of sustainable development and its evaluation (Simanskiene and Zuperkiene, 2014:82).

Globalization and increasing competition is making life more and more complicated every day, creating pressure on the system and creating an environment where leaders almost forget themselves in the hustle and bustle. In such an environment, in addition to the existing knowledge, skills and competencies, leaders need different ideas, creative thinking, and most importantly behaviorally more different and effective approaches. At this point, there is a need for sustainable leaders for sustainable corporations.

Sustainable leadership is more than what a leader does; it is about how they are understood by others. Leaders should both demonstrate personal intention, and behave in an observable way (Ulrich ve Smallwood, 2011:3-4). Sustainability of Corporation enables the growth of corporations, attracts capital, positions the brand, and makes the brand preferred, increasing loyalty of existing customers. To achieve this, the sustainable leader is needed. The purpose of this research is to examine the Sustainability Leadership Model as identified by the Cambridge Sustainability Leadership Institute, on managers working at NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) in Izmir/Turkey. Research data will be analyzed to identify characteristics of managers who seek corporate sustainability and identify those which are absent.

### **1. Literature Review**

#### **1.1. Sustainable Corporations**

Since the second half of the 20th century, many scholars have suggested that the economy-environment partnership capacity is no longer sufficient and that this capacity should be protected and increased. From this point of view, sustainability is maintaining the capacity of the joint economy-environment system to continue to satisfy the needs and desires of humans for a long time into the future. If the joint economy-environment system is operating as required for sustainability, it is in a sustainable mode of operation, otherwise it is unsustainable. On the one hand, many judge that the current scale of global economic activity threatens sustainability: threatens to reduce the future capacity to satisfy human needs and desires. On the other hand, many argue that it is necessary to increase the scale of economic activity to alleviate poverty. Dealing with poverty now, it seems, is going to create future economic problems, via the environmental impacts arising from increasing the scale of current economic activity (Common and Stagl, 2005:8). In this century, when this dilemma is happening and environmental and social problems have increased, the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development have strengthened their position on the agenda by attracting larger segments (Pisani, 2006:83).

Corporate sustainability essentially refers to companies' efforts to reduce the negative effects they have on people, the environment, and on the economies where they operate. The three components - economic, environmental and social are commonly referred to as the triple bottom line (TBL) framework and are interlinked. The idea is that companies have an effect on the people where they do business, on the local environment, as well as the economy and so companies should take action and commit to reducing negative effects (Anna, 2013). When business activities are accepted that one of the effective factors in shaping the economic, social and environmental opportunities and resources of the present and future, it

is clear that corporate sustainability is needed to ensure economic, social and environmental development in long-term (Caliskan, 2012:137).

The concept of corporate sustainability has a very important role in creating sustainability around the world (Bansal, 2002:124). For this reason, many researchers have dealt with the concept of sustainability, under the name of corporate sustainability. Dyllick and Hockerts (2002) stated that corporate sustainability is a mix of environmental and social sustainability, corporations need to run long term returns, rather than short-term gains (Kusat, 2012:236). The principles of sustainability can be count as; leaving natural resources for future generations, minimizing and conserving natural resources, not harm other users while using natural resources, and to provide integration from environmental and economic aspects (Saltaji, 2013:134).

Corporate sustainability is imperative for business today essential to long-term corporate success and for ensuring that markets deliver value across society. To be sustainable, companies must do five things: Foremost, they must operate responsibly in alignment with universal principles and take actions that support the society around them. Then, to push sustainability deep into the corporate DNA, companies must commit at the highest level, report annually on their efforts, and engage locally where they have a presence (UNGC, 2014:7).

Nowadays, as society consciousness is increasing, businesses are expected to bring creative and radical solutions to emerging problems. These expectations, which have led to the importance of the concept of corporate sustainability, require businesses to adopt a sustainable approach in economic, environmental and social dimensions (Hardjono and Klein, 2004: 100). The main aim of businesses is maximizing their profits and by increasing their economic performance, provide the highest return to their shareholders. But, as an open and social enterprise, businesses are also responsible for many stakeholder groups other than shareholders. Therefore, corporate sustainability requires that environmental and social performance are sustainable, as well as economic performance (Hui, 2008: 452).

In order to be sustainable, businesses must have skill and capacity to increase profits and reduce risk by preventing environmental pollution, creative capacity to achieve a new position through clean technology, a vision to develop a shared roadmap for the future and should be in dialogue with multiple stakeholders (Benn and etc., 2006: 13). These elements are crucial for successfully achieving sustainability of businesses. The concept of corporate sustainability extends these elements further and provides a more effective and feasible management understanding by considering them in three dimensions as economic, environmental and social.

It is known that corporate sustainability at company level, associate to competition, innovation and marketing components at the top level. When viewed from this aspect, any company can gain competitive advantage with corporate sustainability (Diaz-Balteiro, Voces, and Romero, 2011: 765). Successful implementation of corporate sustainability based on businesses, is possible with leaders who have the qualities and characteristics to manage this process. This situation brings up the concept of sustainable leader.

## **1.2. Sustainable Leadership**

Sustainable leadership is defined as make the system in the domain permanent, constantly improve and in order to make a difference system try to produce sustainable solutions through innovative ways.

Sustainable leaders consists of people who are enjoying working together and around a common goal, have common values, defining the common vision in a long or even infinite manner, constantly asking the question "What is happening here and in this system?", adapt to change quickly, while enjoying the process achieve long-term success rather than short-term success.

A sustainable leader is someone who shares responsibility for the prevention of unnecessary consumption of human and financial resources and prevention of negative damage to the

social environment. Sustainable leadership has an activist engagement with the forces that affect it, and builds an educational environment of organizational diversity that promotes cross-fertilization of good ideas and successful practices in communities of shared learning and development (Hargreaves and Fink, 2003:3).

Among the qualities mentioned by Andy Hargreaves and Dean Fink's book, "7 Principles of Sustainable Leadership" important that depth and true success of learning rather than superficial performance of the leader, duration of success providing together with individuals under active management, width of the domain with its widespread responsibility, fairness to others and the decisions taken by everyone to look after the common interest, diversity and harmony instead of standardization and uniformity, skills for protection of employees energy and even renew, protect the benefits of past to create a better future.

Sustainable leaders acknowledge that individuals will create future together by seeing, understanding and interacting (Ferdig, 2007, p. 32). The sustainable leader includes leadership who have qualities that a certain vision and values for sustainability in an organization. Sustainable leadership, starting with individual characteristics, expresses an understanding that these traits extend to organizations and society at large levels (Middlebrooks, vd, 2009, p. 32). In other words, sustainable leaders are those who manage the relationship between economic, social and environmental relations (Pelinescu and Rădulescu, 2011, p.85).

"A sustainability leader is someone who inspires and supports action towards a better world." The Sustainability Leadership Institute's (2011) offers another definition, suggesting that sustainability leaders are "individuals who are compelled to make a difference by deepening their awareness of themselves with the world around them. In doing so, they adopt new ways of seeing, thinking and interacting that result in innovative, sustainable solutions." For sustainable leadership, not only is discourse necessary, but it also requires harmonious behavior.

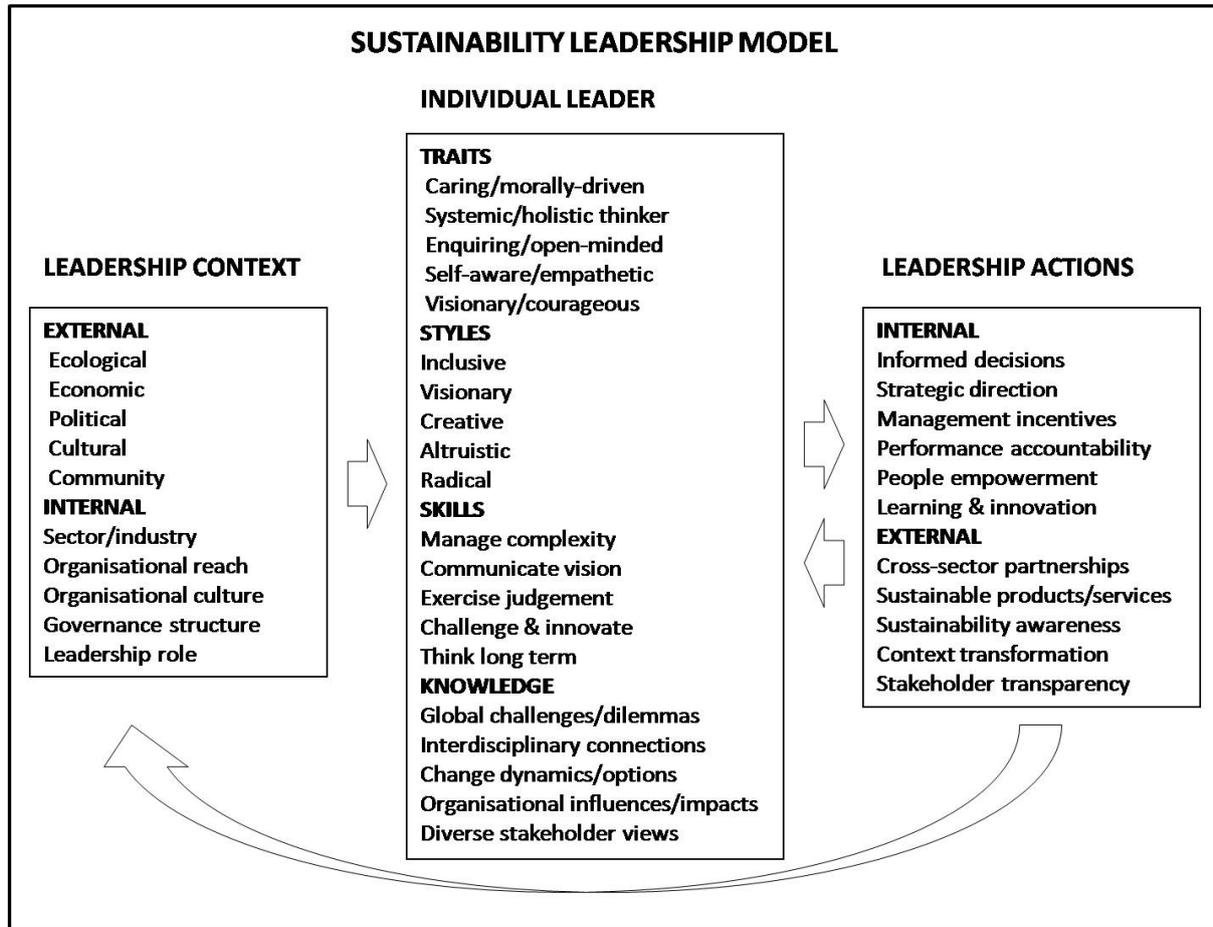
According to (Šimanskiene, Župerkiene 2013), sustainable leadership means a kind of leadership undertaken with responsibility to individual people, groups, and organizations by assessing ecological, social, and economic principles of sustainability in the context of a group, organization, and community and by encouraging successful mastering of the ideas of sustainability, cooperation with the environment, successful learning and teaching based on the principles of sustainability, as well as people's self-expression.

Sustainable leaders are the person seeing, understanding the social, cultural, economic and environmental problems of their time and who determine a vision to people his around, also organizing them. Sustainable leaders are individuals who are equipped with strong values and have exceptional talents. These person are individuals who are able to read complex problems correctly, solve these problems, and predict the future effects. Therefore, they have an interdisciplinary understanding and a long-term innovative perspective. They are aware of the individual's ability to achieve on their own so that they support teamwork, multiplier effect of differences, and thus upbringing individuals. And, while doing these things, his/her main goal is to build a sustainable world (Yangil, 2016:140).

### **1.2.1. Sustainability Leadership Model**

Drawing on both the theory of leadership and the practice of sustainability by leaders, Institute for Sustainability Leadership in the University of Cambridge designed and tested a Sustainability Leadership Model which has three components: the external and internal context for leadership; the traits, styles, skills and knowledge of the individual leader; and leadership actions. None of these elements is unique to sustainability leaders, but collectively they encapsulate a distinctive set of characteristics and actions in response to sustainability challenges (Visser and Courtice, 2011:3).

**Tablo 1: The Cambridge Sustainability Leadership Model**



**Resource:** Wayne Visser & Polly Courtice, “Sustainability Leadership Linking Theory and Practice”, SSRN Working Paper Series, 21 October 2011.

### 3.Data, Methodology and Analysis

#### 3.1. The Data and Methodology

##### 3.1.1. Objective of the study

There are two main objectives of the research. First, how "sustainable leader" are perceived based on the characteristics identified within the sampling group throughout İzmir. Second, what kind of leadership qualities need to be present or developed to lead companies towards "sustainable corporations".

##### 3.1.2. Sample of the Study

The sample of the research consists of fifty (50) senior managers working in various companies operating in İzmir.

##### 3.1.3. Research Method

Data collection was occurred using a survey form among indispensable conditions of "Sustainable Leadership"; the external and internal context for leadership traits, styles, skills and knowledge of the individual leader; and leadership action. Business owners were required to indicate characteristics that they think they have.

The "Sustainable Leadership Model" questions were sent via e-mail to the participant. It consists of 29 questions and three parts in total. Survey results, applied to 50 business people, was evaluated by computer and interpreted as statistical data.

### 3.2. Analysis

To ensure sustainability, there is a need for sustainable leaders. The concept of sustainability is used to explain the level of development of countries. But nowadays, this concept is being used more for businesses, especially for "family businesses". More importantly, the social and environmental responsibilities of businesses have begun to make it mandatory. Enterprises that take long-term earnings into account instead of short-term earnings, will have to put the concept of "sustainable leadership" into the current literature.

From this point of view, "Sustainable Leadership";

- (i) S/he understands information societies' (compatible with Industry 4.0) social, cultural, economic and environmental problems,
- (ii) S/he has a type of leadership that draws people's vision and organizes them,
- (iii) S/he should be a role model for building the future.

In this pilot research study; the "Sustainable Leadership Model" survey, developed by the Cambridge Sustainable Leadership Institute, was sent via e-mail to the participant. An assessment has been made in with responses from the people. The questionnaire consists of 29 questions and 3 sections. The first nineteen questions address the "personality traits" of the participants. Among the questions from 20 to 24 dealing with the extent to which the business manager / owner has given importance to "managerial practices" within the enterprise. Among the 25th and 29th questions, it is aimed to determine the extent to which the business supports the concept of "sustainability" or what they plan to do.

70% of the respondents were male, 30% were female, 20% were single, and 80% were married. 50% of survey respondents between the ages of 30-39, will be very important in terms of understanding what kind of approach is being implemented in adopting sustainable leadership type in enterprises. In addition, 60% of the interviewees received "post-graduate training". This shows that the new generation will become specialized, conscious managers. Lastly, we can say 30% of the sample group is "General Manager", 20% is "Assistant General Manager", 30% is "Board Member" and 10% is "Business Owner".

Today, "sustainability" is a broad concept covering the environment, human, social, political and economic climates. Sustainable development, on the other hand, requires a long-term perspective. This is because the formation of this structure has to focus on actions and activities at the macro level and on the other hand there are ethical, restructuring, social responsibility and competition issues. The concept of corporate sustainability is also part of sustainable development for this reason. Therefore, the only obligation of current businesses to fulfill is not their economic obligations to shareholders. In addition, businesses must fulfill the expectations and wishes of their employees, customers or society, taking into account their value judgments and future. Sustainable leader to fulfill this; develop and implement actions in cooperation with other individuals. The leader needs to explore, learn, design and solve actions for sustainability issues, bring people together and create opportunities for them to plan adaptation and change, and to foresight (a new concept far beyond the vision).

Sustainable leaders acknowledge that individuals will create the future together by seeing, understanding and interacting. If individuals with these traits are thought to be "sustainable leaders," it will be interesting to observe what kind of personality and leadership traits they have in the survey participants. Participants in the survey were asked to rate their options "from 1 to 7". This scaling is preferred because of the identify the subject more precisely.

As a seven (7) point likert scale; A large majority (70%) of those who say they care about ethical values, Those who think that they have systematic / holistic thinking (60%) 5.Selection; 30% chose the third option. This result show that the managers do not look particularly *systematic / planned especially for the present situation and the future*.

According to the answers given in the "enquiring / open-minded"; Participants preferred 50% -50%, 4th and 5th scale. This shows that managers have selected for more participatory-democratic management styles instead of "bureaucratic-authoritarian governance

conception" which has been adopted more often in the past. However, this is not a desirable rating. It is necessary to show greater efforts.

According to the answers given in the "Self-aware/empathetic" Participants preferred 50% - 50%, 4th and 5th scale. This suggests that managers have deficiencies in better self-development, especially in personal development.

There are differences in the preferences of respondents in terms of being "visionary/courageous". A large majority (50%) preferred the 5th option and 20% preferred the 2nd option. This has led us to believe that business executives have not done serious work on the future and have not prepared this change much. In addition to the question "how do you see yourself as a visionary among the questions" in response to similar questions given, this is a confirmation of our opinion.

Managers are expected to be "Inclusive and Altruistic" on their employees in the creation of a revolutionary and revolutionary model to be experienced in enterprises. It is seen that 50% of the participants in this question prefer the 5th option. Although this is not enough, it is still a remarkable result in terms of a positive attitude. Sustainable Leadership is a difficult "leadership type". It is not only a short process, it also requires a long-term structure. In this respect, it is very important that the leader is "Inclusive and Altruistic".

We live in an era in which innovation and technology have forced businesses. To keep up with this, managers need to be innovative and challenger. When respondents in the questionnaire were asked how creative and challenging they were, 50% of participants are "4th option" for being creative; and 40% of them chose "4th option" for challenging. Unfortunately, this situation shows that managers will be less challengers in the future and they will not be able to use their creativity. This has not been a desirable finding.

Being able to manage complexity and be influential in the decisions to be made is an important leadership feature. 50% of the respondents have marked the 5th option (generally they can manage the complex) and 40% of them (for exercise judgement) said that they can be effective.

Being prepared for global challenges and dilemmas and thinking long-term is an important leadership feature. Respondents have often shown that they can think long term and cope with global challenges by choosing the 5th option.

Understanding the change dynamics and options requires to act both within the organization and by foreseeing its impact on different stakeholders. Of the respondents in the survey, 60% said they have information about the " change dynamics and options ".

There are six questions in the section organized as the second part of the research. It is expected that a person with the type of "Sustainable Leadership" to be those who give strategic direction and management incentives, account the performance of employees, and empower their competencies and support learning&innovation. Half of responded to the questions have marked the 4th and 5th option. This means that they generally value the employees or team work in the decisions made by the current administrators,

In terms of research, these results are not sufficient but they are a positive result. The third part of the research consists of questions about how to measure the knowledge of the managers about the concept of "sustainability". There are five questions in total. Sustainability is not just about the development of their own products. At the same time, stakeholders need to take the industry into account. The leader is expected to investigate the changing environment and create a consciousness. The answers are usually given average answers, but occasionally the third choice is preferred. This suggests that our managers are not equipped with detailed information about sustainability. This is an important implication for our research. It is important to understand and apply well-understood concepts related to the generally accepted "Sustainable Leadership Model".

## **CONCLUSION**

The sustainability, the only business success strategy of the future. The awareness of the sustainability in business has increased in the last two decades. The need of sustainability in the future. Each generation has the same goals which are the technologic, economic and social growth and development which means a better life. The achievement of these goals has brought the humankind at the present state of development.

Sustainable leadership matters, spreads and lasts. It is a shared responsibility, that does not unduly deplete human or financial resources, and that cares for and avoids exerting negative damage on the surrounding educational and community environment. Sustainable leadership has an activist engagement with the forces that affect it, and builds an educational environment of organizational diversity that promotes cross-fertilization of good ideas and successful practices in communities of shared learning and development (Hargreaves and Fink, 2003, p.3).

From this definition, Hargreaves and Fink specifically cited seven critical principles of sustained leadership:

- (i) Sustainable leadership creates and preserves sustaining learning.
- (ii) Sustainable leadership secures success over time.
- (iii) Sustainable leadership sustains the leadership of others.
- (iv) Sustainable leadership addresses issues of social justice.
- (v) Sustainable leadership develops rather than depletes human and material resources.
- (vi) Sustainable leadership develops environmental diversity and capacity.
- (vii) Sustainable leadership undertakes activist engagement with the environment(pp.3-10).

Companies everywhere need to look deeper into their own operations and value chain to uphold labour standards. By promoting decent work and inclusive employment opportunities, business also plays a role in advancing societal priorities, including by partnering with workers to improve industrial relations and building more resilient economies and communities.

Among the factors that make up the model for "Sustainable Leadership" developed by Simonkiene and Zuperkiene (2014: 9); Organization, society, individual and team.

- (i) Among the basic values that make up the organization; organizational culture and loyalty,
- (ii) Among the values that make up the team; Staff skills, sustainable relationships and teamwork,
- (iii) Among the values that make up the individual; Creativity and leadership characteristics of people are important,
- (iv) Among the values that make up the group; Social responsibility and the image of the business are.

For this reason, sustainable leaders must have characteristics features to manage these basic values / variables. So,

- (i) Business Vision; It should be associated with corporate sustainability.
- (ii) Goals; It is necessary to plan long-term goals of the business.
- (iii) Responsibilities: It is necessary to design this subject in the form of individual, group, organization and community sensitivity.

- (iv) Organizational culture: Strong and It should be directed towards sustainable development.
- (v) Solidarity: It must be collaborative and mutual cooperation.
- (vi) Trust; Goodwill and high level of trust must be created.
- (vii) Operating results: Activity should be assessed by creating a common synergy between the group members.
- (viii) Alteration: Sometimes evolutionary, sometimes revolutionary, radical decisions must be made.
- (ix) Cooperation: Must be in constant collaboration
- (x) Team-based management: Team work should be increased and encouraged.
- (xi) Quality: Creating Sustainable-oriented organizational culture will also affect quality.
- (xii) Loyalty: Meeting the requirements of employees, increasing job security will increase loyalty.
- (xiii) Staff development: This can only be achieved through training.
- (xiv) Innovation / creativity: It should be constantly continue.

Sustainable Leader; S/he can manage differences, have a knowledge of strategy and personality, and will be able to grow and develop its future operations. The small pilot study has shown that the people in the active business world in İzmir are not very successful in being "sustainable leadership and sustainable business". Sustainable corporations with sustainable development can only be achieved with sustainable leaders. Managers who wish to be Sustainable Leaders should consider the features discussed in the research. They should develop themselves the issues that they feel insufficient. For this reason, it is estimated that the research made will be a guide for future researches.

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