Sustainable Leadership

Olena de Andres Gonzalez, Ph.D. (econ.&manag.)

olena.de.andres.gonzalez@samk.fi

Riga - 18.8.2025

samk
Satakunnan ammattikorkeakoulu
Satakunta University of Applied Sciences

Sustainability

the most commonly used definition was written in **1987** by the United Nation's Brundtland Commission

"Meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The definition of sustainability denotes that although current **populations may use what** they **need** regarding the earth's capital, this must be done in a manner which leaves **enough resources for others**, with minimal waste.
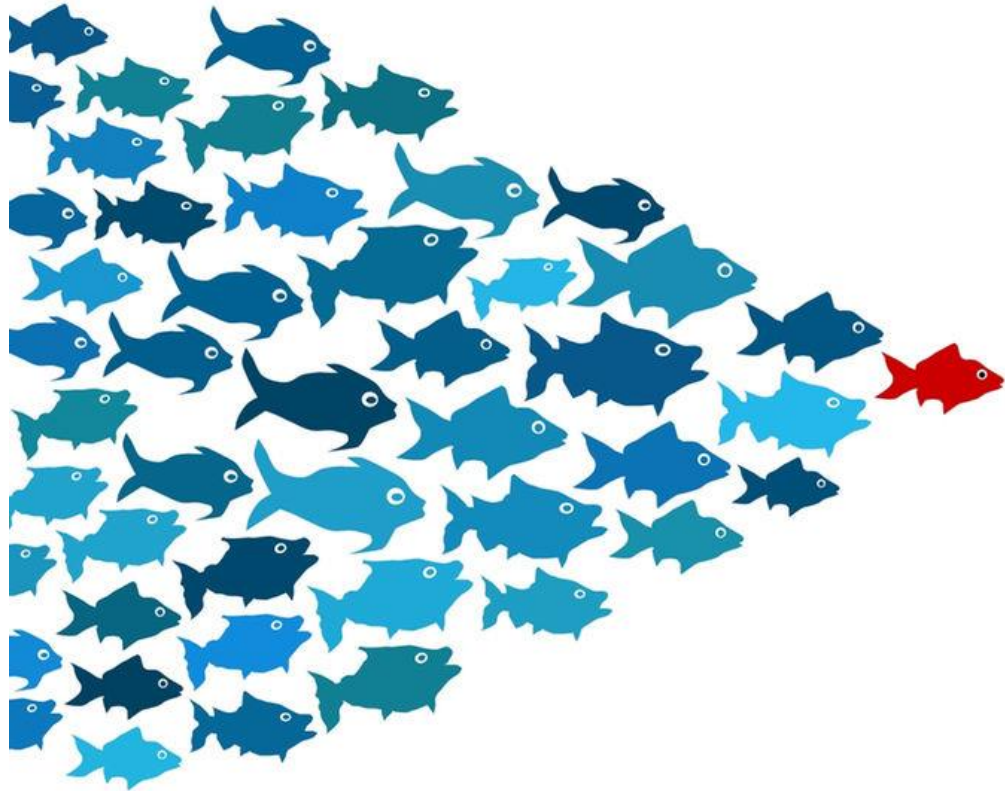
Leadership is the art of motivating a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal.

This leadership definition captures the essentials of being able to **inspire** others and being prepared to do so. Effective leadership is based upon **ideas** (whether original or borrowed). Still, it won't happen unless those ideas can be **communicated** to others in a way that **engages** them enough to **act** as the leader wants them to act.

Sustainable Leadership

"A Sustainable Leader must have a set of personal characters and managerial traits that enable him/her to lead with empathy inside a multitask-holder environment.
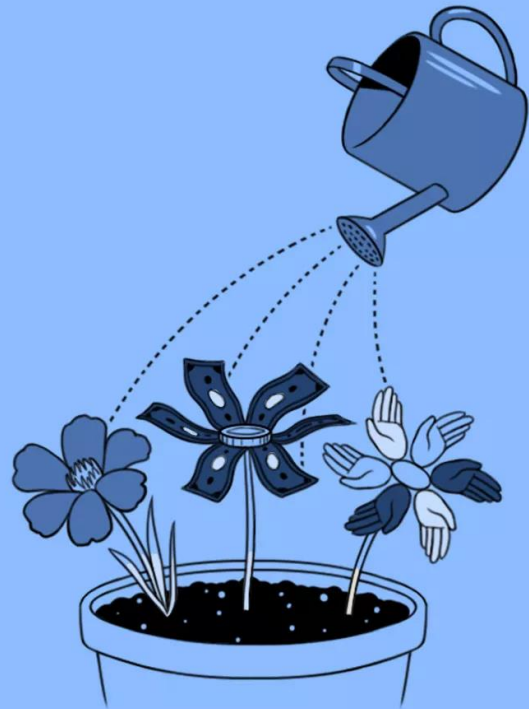
A Sustainable Leader is someone who **inspires** and **supports action** towards a **better world**."

Dr., Prof. Alberto Pastore 2020, Università degli Studi di Roma "La Sapienza"

What Is Sustainability in Leadership?
By Cynthia Way

The Triple Bottom Line of **People, Planet, and Profit** was introduced by John Elkington in 1994.

According to John Elkington's triple bottom line, the People, the Planet , and Profits are interrelated: "**Society** depends on the economy, and the **economy** depends on the global **ecosystem**, whose health represents the ultimate bottom line."

Developing sustainable leadership means **implementing sustainable practices** and the triple-bottom-line concept.

Sustainable leadership involves mindful actions and behaviours that cover a global worldview to recognise the connection between the planet and humanity.

By making **positive personal** and **organisational choices**, sustainable leadership **effects positive environmental** and **social change**.

Differences between leader and manager

| Leader	Manager
Creates and communicates a vision for the future.	Develops a plan and allocates resources.
Encourages others to commit to the vision.	Sets objectives and organises a schedule.
Motivates and inspires workers to overcome barriers. Encourages innovation.	Monitors situations.
Helps the organisation to develop by adapting to changing circumstances.	Focuses on order and efficiency. Ensures standards are met.

Comparison of the Management, Leadership and Sustainable Leadership

Aspect	Management	Leadership	Sustainable Leadership
Core role	Organise & control	Inspire & guide	Inspire & guide *with sustainability*
Focus	Efficiency & results	Vision & people	Vision & long-term sustainability
Time horizon	Short- to medium-term	Medium- to long-term	Long-term & intergenerational
Orientation	Tasks, processes, structures	Change, vision, innovation	Triple bottom line: people, planet, profit
Responsibility	Deliver on plans & budgets	Motivate, align, achieve goals	Ensure resilience, ethics, future well-being

Management keeps the system running.
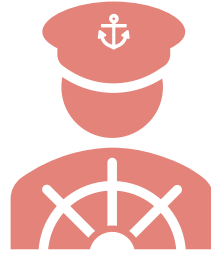
Leadership creates direction and inspires people.

Sustainable leadership does all that **with a responsibility** towards **society, the environment, and future generations**.

Leadership Styles by *Daniel Goleman*

The Coercive leader

demands immediate compliance. If this style were summed up in one phrase, it would be **"Do what I tell you."** The coercive style is most effective in times of **crisis**, such as in a company turnaround or a takeover attempt, or during an actual emergency like a **tornado** or a fire. This style can also help control a **problem teammate** when everything else has failed. However, it should be avoided in almost every other case because it can alienate people and stifle flexibility and inventiveness.

By exerting control through fear and punishment, this leadership style creates a negative work environment. Employees may feel disengaged, as their opinions and ideas are not taken into account. This ultimately leads to reduced motivation, creativity, and innovation within the team.

The Pacesetting leader

expects and models excellence and self-direction. If this style were summed up in one phrase, it would be **"Do as I do, now."** The pacesetting style works best when the team is already motivated and skilled, and the leader needs quick results.

By setting a fast pace and demanding high standards, they create a **sense** of **urgency** and challenge their team members to **improve** continuously. Used extensively, however, this style can overwhelm team members and hold back innovation.

To mitigate the negative impact of the pacesetting leadership style, it is important for leaders to **provide support**, guidance, and resources to their team members. Additionally, leaders should be mindful of balancing high expectations with **recognition** and **appreciation** for their team's efforts.

The Authoritative leader

mobilizes the team toward a common vision and focuses on end goals, leaving the means up to each individual. If this style were summed up in one phrase, it would be **"Come with me."**

The authoritative style is most effective when the team requires a new vision due to changed circumstances or when explicit guidance is not necessary.

Authoritative leaders **inspire** an **entrepreneurial spirit** and vibrant **enthusiasm** for the mission.

It is not the best fit when the leader is working with a team of experts who know more than him/her.

The Affiliative leader

works to create emotional bonds that bring a feeling of bonding and belonging to the organisation, creating a positive work environment. If this style were summed up in one phrase, it would be **"People come first."**

The affiliative style works best in times of stress, when teammates need to heal from a trauma, or when the **team needs to rebuild trust**.

It's fine to use this style sometimes, but relying only on encouragement can end up with unclear goals and just average performance.

The Democratic leader

builds consensus through participation. If this style were summed up in one phrase, it would be **"What do you think?"**

In a democratic leadership setting, leaders actively seek and consider **input from** their **team** before making decisions. They **encourage** employees to share their **perspectives**, insights, and **expertise**, fostering a culture of inclusivity and empowerment. By **involving** employees **in** the **decision-making** process, democratic leaders not only tap into their knowledge and creativity but also make them feel **valued** and **appreciated**.

As employees feel comfortable expressing themselves and sharing their ideas, they are more likely to **communicate openly** and honestly. This **improves** collaboration, **problem-solving**, and overall team performance.

It is not the best choice in an emergency situation, when time is of the essence for another reason or when teammates are not informed enough to offer sufficient guidance to the leader.

The Coaching leader

develops people for the future. If this style were summed up in one phrase, it would be **"Try this."**

This leadership style emphasises the **personal development** of team members through **one-on-one interactions**, feedback, and **guidance**.

The coaching style works best when the leader wants to unlock the full potential of each employee by leveraging their strengths and addressing areas of improvement.

It is least effective when teammates are provocative and unwilling to change or learn, or if the leader lacks proficiency.

Top 10 Leadership Skills *by [Alison Doyle](#)*

Alison Doyle is a Job Search and Career Expert, Included on the Job Search Bible's list of 25 Best Career Websites and listed on Career Sherpa's Best Websites for 2020 Job Search.

1. Communication

As a leader, you need to be able to **clearly** and **briefly** explain to your employees everything from **organisational goals** to specific **tasks**.

Leaders must master all forms of communication, including one-on-one, departmental, and full-staff conversations, as well as communication via the phone, email, and social media.

A large part of communication involves **listening**. Therefore, leaders should establish a steady flow of communication between themselves and their staff or team members, either through an open-door policy or regular conversations with workers.

Leaders should make themselves regularly available to discuss issues and concerns with employees.

2. Motivation

Leaders need to inspire their workers to go the **extra mile** for their organisation; just paying a fair salary to employees is typically not enough inspiration (although it is important too).

There are a number of ways to motivate your workers: you may build employee self-esteem through **recognition** and **rewards**, or by giving employees new **responsibilities** to increase their investment in the company.

You must learn what motivators work best for your employees or team members to encourage productivity and passion.

3. Delegating

Leaders who try to take on too many tasks by themselves will struggle to get anything done. These leaders often fear that delegating tasks is a sign of weakness, when in fact it is a **sign of a strong leader**.

Therefore, you need to identify the skills of each of your employees and assign duties to each employee based on his or her skill set. By delegating tasks to staff members, you can focus on **other important tasks.**

4. Positivity

A positive attitude can go a long way in an office. You should be able to **laugh at yourself** when something doesn't go quite as planned; this helps create a happy and healthy work environment, even during busy, stressful periods.

Simple acts like asking employees about their vacation plans will develop a positive atmosphere in the office and raise morale among staff members.

If employees feel that they **work in a positive environment**, they will be more likely to want to be at work and will therefore be more willing to put in the long hours when needed.

5. Trustworthiness

Employees need to be able to feel comfortable **coming to their manager** or leader with questions and concerns.

It is important for you to demonstrate your integrity, because **employees** will **only trust leaders they respect**. By being open and honest, you will encourage the same sort of honesty in your employees.

6. Creativity

As a leader, you have to make a number of decisions that do not have a clear answer; you therefore need to be able to **think outside the box.**

Learning to try **nontraditional solutions**, or approaching problems in nontraditional ways, will help you solve an otherwise unsolvable problem.

Most **employees** will also be **impressed** and **inspired** by a leader who doesn't always choose the safe, conventional path.

7. Feedback

Leaders should constantly look for opportunities to deliver **useful information** to team members **about** their **performance**.

However, there is a fine **line** between offering employees **advice** and assistance, and **micromanaging**.

By teaching employees how to improve their work and make their own decisions, you will feel more confident delegating tasks to your staff.
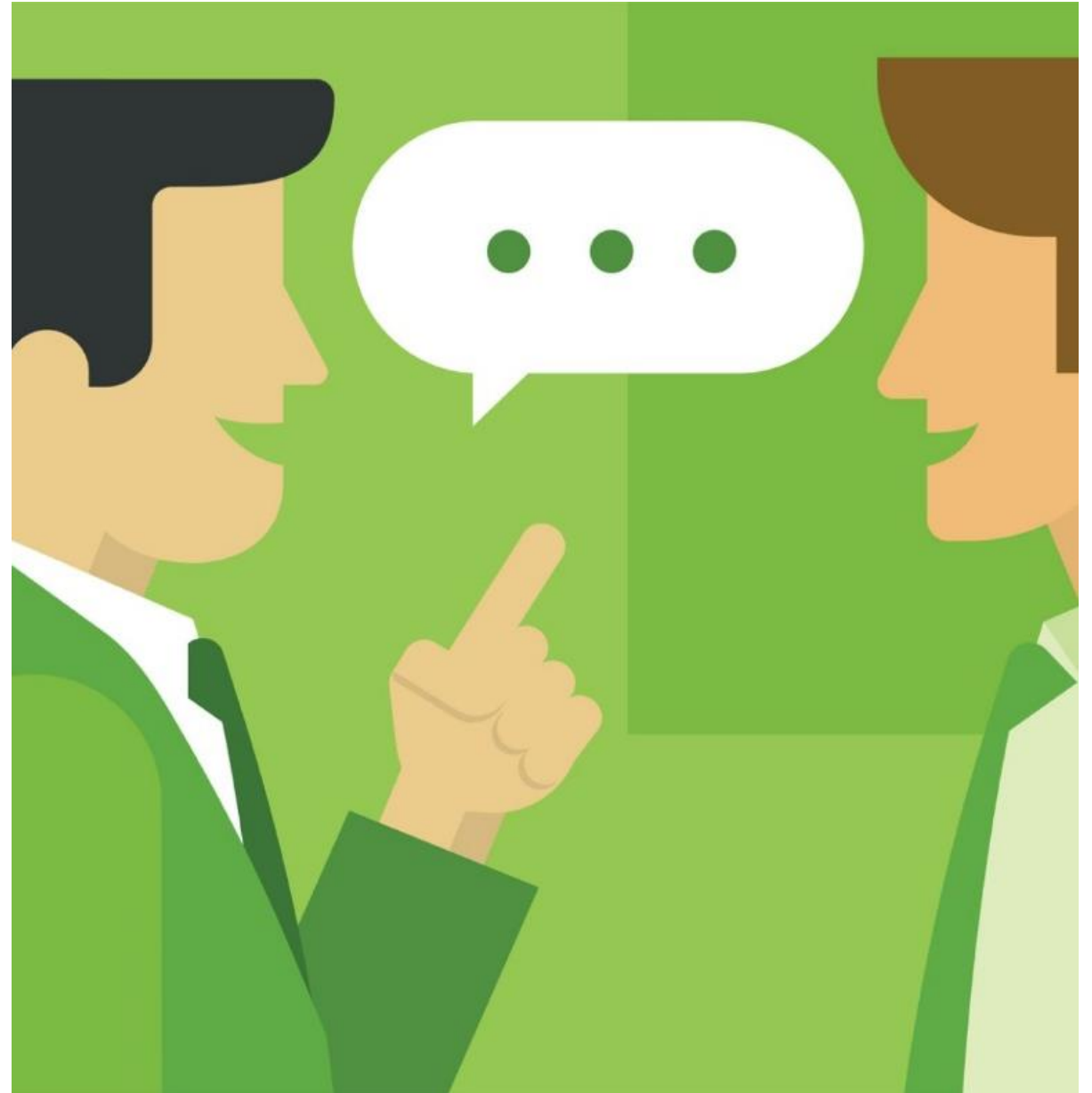
8. Responsibility

A leader is **responsible** for both the **successes** and **failures** of his or her team. Therefore, you need to be willing to accept blame when something does not go correctly.

If your employees see their leader pointing fingers and blaming others, they will lose respect for you.

Accept mistakes and failures and then devise clear solutions for **improvement**.

9. Commitment

It is important for leaders to follow through with what they agree to do. You should be willing **to put in the extra hours** to complete an assignment; employees will see this commitment and follow your example.

Similarly, when you **promise** your staff a reward, such as an office party, you should **always follow** through.

A leader cannot expect employees to commit to their job and their tasks if he or she cannot **do the same**.

10. Flexibility

Mishaps and last-minute changes always occur at work. Leaders need to **be flexible**, accepting whatever changes come their way. Employees will appreciate your ability to accept changes in stride and creatively problem-solve.

Similarly, leaders must be **open to suggestions** and **feedback**. If your staff is dissatisfied with an aspect of the office environment, listen to their concern and be open to making necessary changes. Employees will appreciate a leader's ability to accept appropriate feedback.

Six principles of sustainability leadership by André Taylor

André Taylor, PhD, Business School of University in Kensington, Australia Adjunct Faculty Member, Leadership Specialist with the International Water Centre

This established **theoretical framework** has been created to help leaders **understand** the **nature** of sustainability **leadership** and manage their growth.

These principles represent all aspects of leadership and have practical outcomes for everyone who aspires to be effective at driving positive change and building healthy communities to reduce our impact on the natural environment.

The six-principle framework can be used as a **tool for leaders** to reflect on their sustainability development.

1. Sustainability leaders have a worldview that is characterised by being ecocentric, systemic and long-term

The significance of an 'ecocentric (or ecological) worldview' is to understand that **humans are part of a global ecosystem**, not separate from it. To minimise our impact on this natural system, leaders need to think systemically for **long-term** gain and encourage other emerging leaders to build this awareness into their worldview.

2. Sustainability leaders work in cross-boundary networks consisting of leaders playing different leadership roles

Case studies of successful sustainability leadership that work on complex challenges highlight the **importance** of having **a cross-sectoral network of leaders** who work together to build a shared vision for change. These networks may include authorising leaders with significant position power (**CEOs** and **politicians**) as well as project **executives**, thought leaders, subject matter **experts** and trusted **advisors**.

Sustainability leaders who are able to communicate across all types of sectoral, organisational, disciplinary and/or geographic boundaries play an important role in building a shared vision to achieve change by coordinating action points, creating connections and translating key **messages** into forms that **resonate** with **different stakeholder groups**. When working on complex challenges with leaders from all departments of an organisation, sustainability leaders need to adopt the mindset of creating **safe spaces for stakeholders** to come together to better understand the nature of the problem, suggest innovative ideas and experiment with possible solutions.

3. Sustainability leaders spend their time working across boundaries

Sustainability challenges are **complex and cross-boundary** in nature. Boundaries can relate to either professional discipline, industry sectors, levels of government, organisational units, culture, geography, political jurisdictions and/or different demographics. As a result, sustainability leaders need a broad **general knowledge** of the issues they are addressing, as well as their institutional environment, which means becoming **'T-shaped professionals'.**

T-shaped professionals are leaders that develop both **deep knowledge** in a small number of areas (represented by the vertical bar in the 'T') and **broad general knowledge** (represented by the horizontal bar in the 'T'). In this context, sustainability leaders need the skills to engage in different forms of social networking, emotional intelligence, a broad range of communication skills and the ability to adapt their own leadership style to suit any situation.
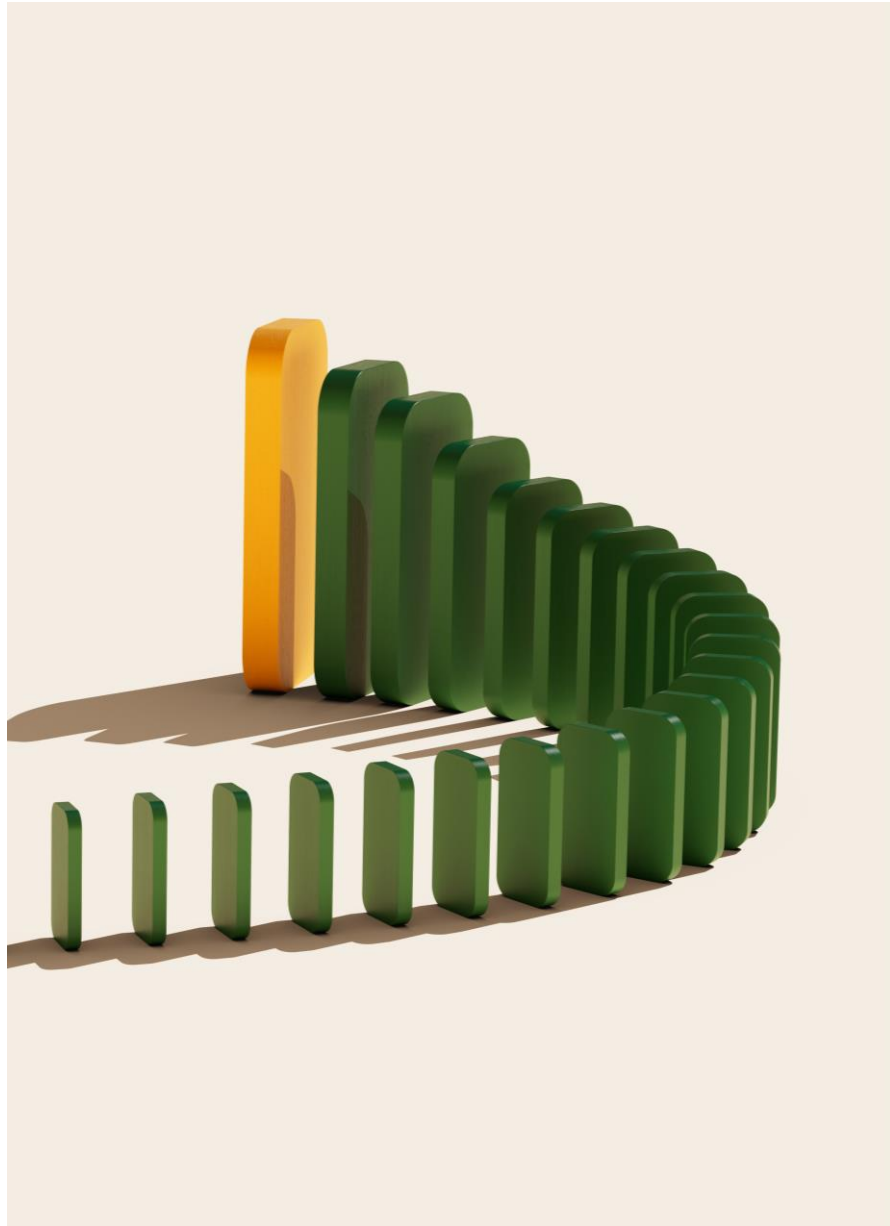
4. Sustainability leaders can exercise influence without authority

The **key to successful leadership** is **influence**, not authority. Sustainability leaders need to exercise their influence **across boundaries and large groups of diverse people** where they often have no authority. Being able to exert influence without authority requires sustainability leaders to build a form of credible power by **strategically engaging in social networking** to build this type of relationship before it is needed.

Two complementary **forms of leadership** that are relevant to this context are authentic and transformational leadership:

Authentic leadership places an emphasis on acting in accordance with a person's purpose and values, demonstrating relational transparency, honesty and integrity, serving others by putting the needs of the group before their own which builds trust and enables collaboration.

Transformational leadership emphasises the use of frequent behaviours associated with modelling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, encouraging others to engage their colleagues in a shared vision and inspiring them to help deliver the same vision.

# 5. Sustainability leaders are comfortable working with complexity

A core skill for leaders is to distinguish between different types of leadership challenges and **choose appropriate leadership styles** to address them. Sustainability leaders spend most of their time **working on complex problems** that involve **many stakeholders**, politics, competing interests, natural systems and **ecosystems**.

There is rarely a consensus on **how to address these problems** and sometimes not even a consensus on the nature of the problem. For some complex problems, organisational management **can't rely** solely **on a technical expert** to direct them on how to solve the problem.

Instead, they will need sustainability leaders to use adaptive leadership **to create places and opportunities** for all stakeholders to **share** their understanding of the problem, learn, innovate, conduct trials, and where such trials are successful, scale up their application.

6. Sustainability leaders recognise the importance of leading themselves
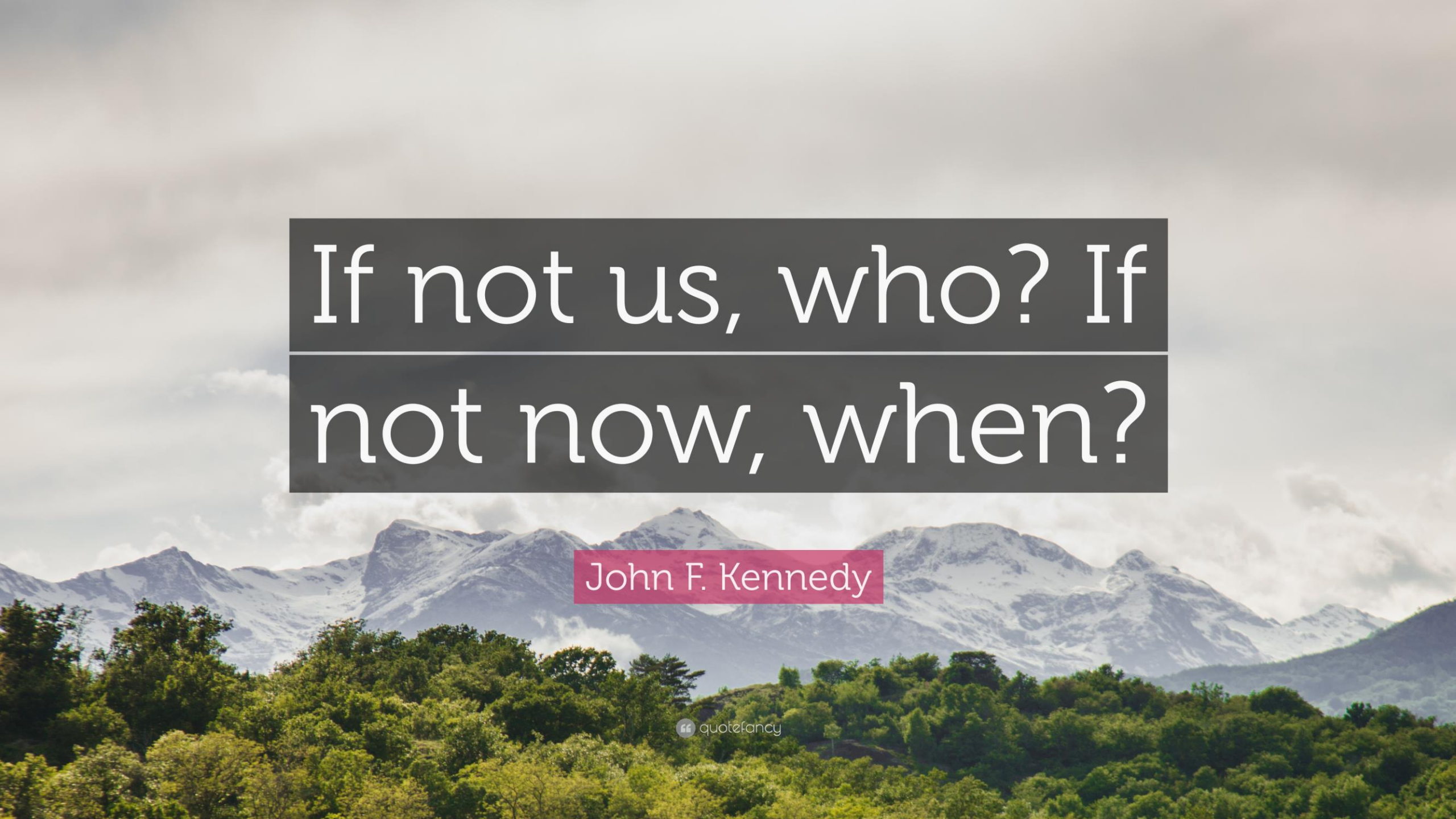
Promoting sustainable development is **rarely easy**. Often it involves significant resistance, stakeholder conflict, setbacks, and long-time frames. There is also a significant risk of sustainability leaders 'burning out' or leaving a leadership initiative too early. A key principle of leadership development is to **prioritise self-leadership** by building self-awareness of our purpose, values and strengths.
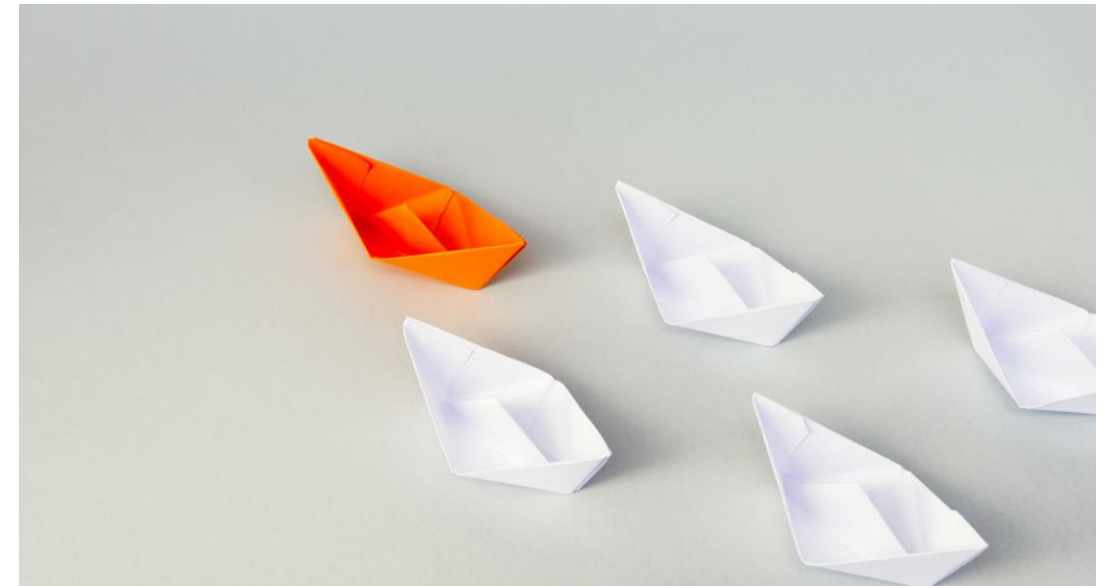
"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, **you are a leader**."

John Quincy Adams, American statesman, politician, diplomat, lawyer, and diarist who served as the sixth president of the United States, from 1825 to 1829.
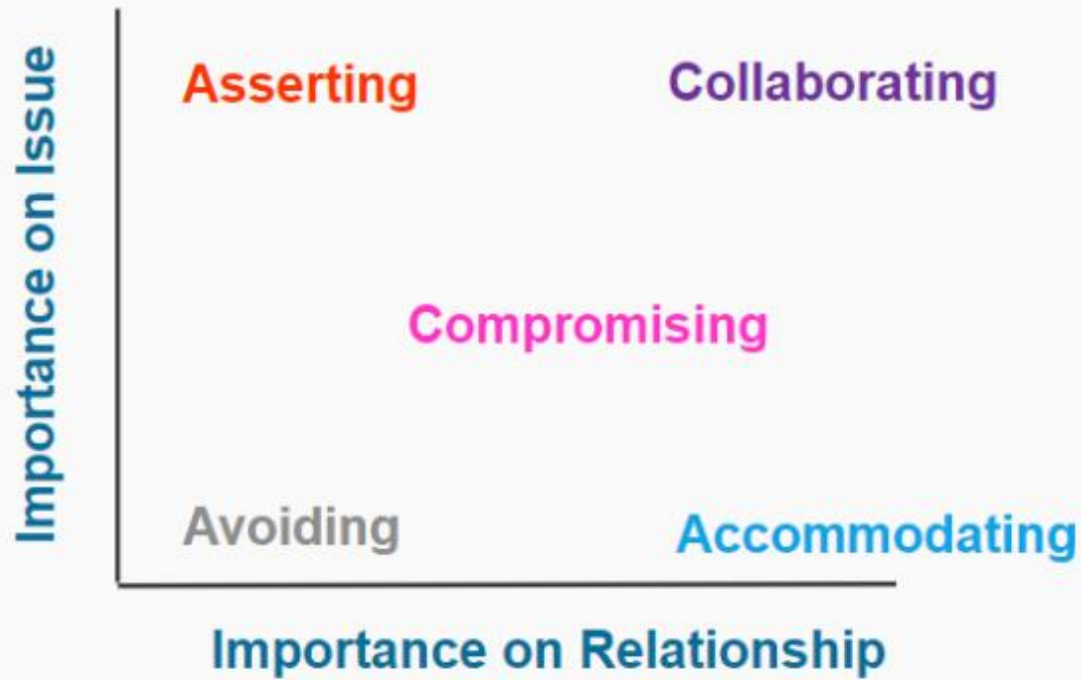
If not us, who? If not now, when?

John F. Kennedy

Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)

Thomas-Kilmann Mode of Understanding Conflict Styles

Importance on Issue

Asserting   Collaborating

Compromising

Avoiding   Accommodating

Importance on Relationship

TKI is a tool that assesses an individual's typical behaviour in conflict situations, describing the behaviours along two dimensions: assertiveness and cooperativeness.

TKI **helps leaders understand how interpersonal group dynamics are affected by conflict-handling styles**, as well as helps them make informed decisions about choosing an appropriate style when approaching a conflict situation.

Competing

You try to satisfy your own concerns at another's expense. You win and they lose.

Some people think competing is bad. It's not bad; **competition is necessary at times**, based on the situation.

However, if you only manage conflict through competition, then you are ineffectively managing situations and people.

Collaborating

You try to find a solution to the conflict that satisfies all concerned: a win-win.

Collaboration **takes a lot of time**, **resources**, and **energy**. Though many leaders encourage collaboration, it is often difficult for both parties to get exactly what they want, which is why it is often used in high-risk situations.

Often, when people say "collaborate", they actually mean either "compromise" or just "work together."

Compromising

Your solution only **partially satisfies** each member in the conflict. There are no winners and no losers.

Compromise is an **acceptable solution.**

However, be aware that if you are a leader who only compromises, the team may start to **game the system** and **ask for more** than what they truly need, as they know their leader will compromise during the negotiations.

Avoiding

AVOIDING — Nobody wins.

You don't try to satisfy yourself or other people involved in the conflict.

Instead, you **stay away from the situation** entirely. This mode is used when **emotions** are running **high**.

Avoiding is a Band-Aid for the conflict situation; nothing is resolved and the topic is put into a parking lot until later. The fact is, you will have to **eventually deal with the conflict**.

Accommodating

You are willing to **sacrifice** your own needs and desires for other people involved in the conflict. You lose and they win.

Some people think accommodation equates to being a doormat: "Only wimps accommodate; I have a business to run." This is not right. Accommodation is the **best** tool to use when you are **not the subject matter expert** or when the **outcome** is **not** that **important** to you.
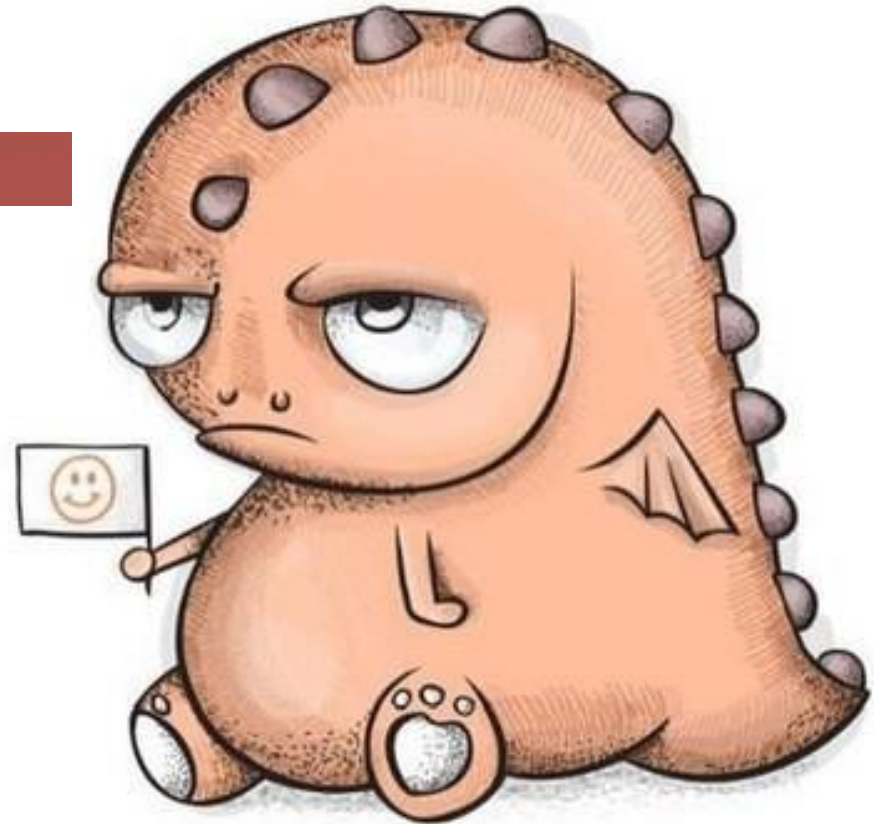
I'M FINE

When leaders are negotiating and problem-solving disagreements, keep in mind these simple rules:

1. **Separate the people from the problem.** Focus on working on the common goal. Build trust among members.

2. **Focus on interests not positions.** Decide what is important for the organization's success and not just for the individuals.

3. **Invent options for mutual gain.** Brainstorm for solutions that can meet the needs of both parties.

4. **Insist on objective criteria.** Find a set of criteria that both parties can agree on to settle the dispute.