ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Leaders as environmental protection managers

Los líderes cómo gestores de la protección del entorno medio ambiental

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Abstract

Introduction: Society, from the most primitive forms, has always needed people to direct its destinies. Human beings with special characteristics that make them stand out from others. These outstanding people are the ones who transform their environment and achieve redundant results for development. Objective: Consistent with the above, the purpose of this article is to highlight the actions that, from different leadership models, are exercised in terms of environmental protection and conservation. Methodology: The review is based on the work of different writers and researchers who describe the different types of leadership and the commitment in which they are immersed in order to develop ideas that materialise in excellent management that results in the conservation and protection of nature. Conclusions: It is concluded that each style or model of leadership has immersed goodnesses directed to the preservation and conservation of the environment, synthesised in the management of leaders and that, due to the crucial moment that Planet Earth is living due to climate change, many of these goodnesses become a restorative balm of the natural environment.

Keywords: Leadership, environment, organisations, corporate social responsibility.

Resumen

Introducción: La sociedad, desde las formas más primitivas, siempre ha necesitado de personas que dirijan sus destinos, seres humanos con características especiales que los hacen sobresalir de los demás. Esas personas sobresalientes son las que transforman su entorno y logran resultados redundantes para el desarrollo. Objetivo: Consecuente con lo anterior, este artículo tiene como propósito destacar las acciones que, desde los diferentes modelos de liderazgo, se ejercen en función de la protección y conservación del medio ambiente. Metodología: La revisión se apoya en la obra de diferentes tratadistas e investigadores que describen los diferentes tipos de liderazgo y el compromiso en el cual se hallan inmersos para desarrollar ideas que se materialicen en una excelente gestión que redunde en la conservación y protección de la naturaleza. Conclusiones: Se concluye que cada estilo o modelo de liderazgo tiene inmersas bondades direccionadas a la preservación y conservación del medio ambiente, sintetizadas en la gestión de los líderes y que, debido al momento crucial que vive el planeta Tierra en razón del cambio climático, muchas de esas bondades se convierten en un bálsamo restaurador del ambiente natural.

Palabras clave: liderazgo, medio ambiente, organizaciones, responsabilidad social empresarial.

1. Introduction

Planet Earth has been placed on alert for the deterioration that is occurring. Initially, this deterioration was gradual due to the exploitation of its natural resources, which, compounded by the population explosion, exacerbated the damage on a larger scale. Individuals are required to lead processes that collectively impact the generation of a mindset of change in environmental awareness. Additionally, strategies and regulations must be formulated to direct the proposed changes. Throughout history, society has always relied on individuals to guide its destinies; human beings with unique characteristics that distinguish them from others. These exceptional individuals are those who transform their environments and achieve remarkable development outcomes.

This article aims to highlight the role of leaders and the various leadership styles employed to optimize processes. It emphasizes that the selection of a leader should not solely be based on their position of command but rather on their talent, charisma, and conviction. The significance of environmental management within organizations, achieved through activities and resource allocation, is underscored. This management is crucial for the conservation and care of the natural environment, ensuring its viability and sustainability over time.

Furthermore, the importance of implementing the necessary systemic structure to achieve the objectives and results set forth by business organizations for the preservation and protection of the natural environment is highlighted. These objectives must be accomplished through the utilization of processes and procedures structured appropriately within systems.

As a methodological foundation, an exploratory and analytical technique was employed, consisting of a systematic literary review of works by researchers and scholars of prominent leadership models. This review aimed to ascertain the level of commitment among leaders in developing ideas that materialize into exceptional management practices resulting in the conservation and protection of nature. In conclusion, leaders are tasked with making a difference that influences their collaborators to generate contributions leading to the adoption of a new culture that inspires individuals to take care of nature through actions, both small and large. These actions, when collectively implemented, yield the benefits that arise from these efforts. Each leadership model can generate actions that contribute to environmental sustainability.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1 Leadership

Human communities require motivating leaders who guide them toward achieving established objectives, demonstrating the capabilities of their leaders within a community or organizational context. However, every leader, regardless of whether leadership is an innate trait or acquired, possesses a style that, although seemingly distinctive, aligns with established models and paradigms.

Leadership is multifaceted, with one definition provided by Antonakis and Day (2018): "Leadership is a formal or informal process embedded in context, influencing the goals that emerge between a leader and a follower, groups of followers, or institutions." The scientific study of leadership entails the systematic examination of this process and its outcomes, as well as how it is shaped by the leader's attributes and behaviors, followers' perceptions of the leader, and observers' inferences regarding the organization being led.

Similarly, Maya et al. (2019), citing Lussier (2002), assert that "leadership style encompasses the combination of traits, skills, and behaviors that leaders employ when interacting with followers." Alcázar (2020) succinctly defines leadership as "the process by which an individual influences a group to achieve a shared objective." Feirsen and Weitzman (2023) further propose that "the role of a leader is akin to that of an optometrist, assisting followers in adopting a different perspective."

2.2 Relationship Theory Leadership Models

Leaders are indispensable to organizational success. The acceleration of business and the global economy necessitate leaders with distinctive qualities to effectively navigate the consequences and challenges

posed by ongoing transformations and business evolution.

Leadership models and styles have been extensively studied throughout history. Mejía (2007) traces leadership to humanity's origins, highlighting pivotal moments and accomplishments of influential leaders. Giraldo and Naranjo (2014) provide a comprehensive historical overview of leadership's evolution, identifying trends that have shaped its trajectory and contextualizing leadership models' relevance across diverse historical periods. (see Figure 1, "Evolution of Leadership Theories").

Figure 1. Evolution of Leadership Theories
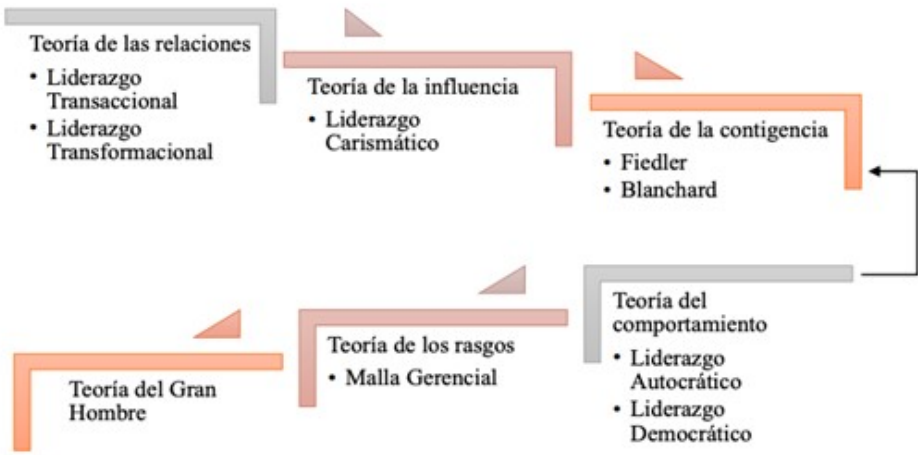
Source: Daft (2006) citado por Giraldo & Naranjo (2014)

As illustrated in Figure 1, each passing era introduces new theories that surpass the previous ones, each characterized by features pertinent to the time of their adoption. Modern times, with the dismantling of trade barriers and the accelerated growth of technology, demand collective efforts from all involved to achieve development objectives.

Recent leadership theories include transformational and transactional styles. Transformational leadership is linked to a leader's charisma and voluntary follower commitment, while transactional leadership relies on goal-oriented dynamics where rewards are contingent on successful outcomes (Fábregas, 2020). The relationship theory, with its transformational and transactional models, highlights its benefits for achieving organizational goals, with each approach offering distinct strengths conducive to organizational success.

In light of this, it is important to classify leadership into different types to better capture its diverse variables. The departure from traditional conceptual tendencies in leadership, driven by the evolving dynamics of management models, has led to new definitions and actors who devise strategies aimed at environmental protection and preservation, emphasizing the need for equality without discrimination based on ideology, gender, race, or other factors. The following table outlines the main features of each leadership model:

3.   Theoretical frawework

The concept of leadership encompasses a range of virtues that are inherent in various leadership styles. These virtues serve as models for interpersonal relationships within society, guiding individuals with diverse roles. The leader is accountable for establishing clear goals and objectives and implementing strategies derived from these models. Some of these strategies may evolve over time to adapt to changing

Tabla 1. Modelos de liderazgo y sus particularidades

MODEL	PARTICULARITY
Transformational Leadership	The main goal is not only to achieve institutional objectives but also to use these achievements to morally transform employees and promote positive behaviors that will result in better levels of work performance for the company
Transactional Leadership	It comprises a series of exchanges between the leader and the follower. Rewards or punishments are provided to followers depending on the results obtained in the execution of tasks.
Business Leadership	It is the leaders who are responsible for leading humanity to sustainable development over time, which augurs a better quality of life in the present, without deteriorating the planet, and can maintain those levels of satisfaction for future generations, as well as promoting business growth in the future.
Leadership for inclusion	The current perception of leadership does not differ significantly between men and women, that is, it is perceived that both genders have the appropriate conditions to exercise a leadership role.
Visionary Leadership	Creative; It articulates a realistic, long-term, attractive, credible vision of the future of the organization.
Moral Leadership	A condition that allows us to affirm that, from a consideration of Philosophical Anthropology, we are all leaders responsible for what we do and that all this connects with the keys that lead to the so-called Ethics of Virtue

Source: Rojas et al. (2020), Mendoza & García (2023), More Huaman (2021), Sinner & Tumino (2022), Rincón (2022), Fernández (2018).

circumstances. Consequently, numerous authors reinforce established theories and paradigms, while others encounter novel challenges that necessitate the development or refinement of distinct leadership approaches.

3.1 Transformational Leadership

There are several concepts regarding this model that serve as a guide for defining the term, which has changed over the years in line with new theories. A definition that aligns with these new terms is provided by Rojero-Jiménez et al. (2019), describing it as "one whose main goal is not only to achieve institutional objectives but also to use those achievements to morally transform collaborators and promote positive behaviors that will result in better levels of job performance for the company."

To complement the concept, there must be a highly skilled and resolute workforce; Hasek de Barbúdez & Ortiz-Jiménez (2021), who cite Bush et al. (2017), assert that "transformational leadership focuses on developing the capacities of the members of the organization and mobilizing them toward common objectives." Similarly, Rojas et al. (2020) state that transformational leaders "have a vision to follow, embodying respect and horizontal communication that promotes intelligence and rationality, leading to individual responses to pressing situations."

3.2 Advantages of Transformational Leadership

The challenges of the contemporary era necessitate leaders who possess not only charisma and demeanor but also the capacity to confront the transformations that characterize these uncertain times. In this context, Torres & Ramírez (2013), drawing upon Seidman & McCauley (2011), argue that "in attempting to establish a leadership style that facilitates change, transformational leadership aligns more effectively with this new perspective, as one of its fundamental characteristics is to foster the development of competencies, wherein each individual contributes to organizational transformation."

Another peculiar characteristic of the transformational leader, as described by Arévalo, Trejo, & García (2015), who cite Rozo and Abaunza (2010), is "the personal approach to the worker, considering them as a person and not merely as a tool." The transformational leader intellectually stimulates the worker, takes their ideas into account, motivates, and inspires them to participate in the organization's results (Jae Young & Kuk-Kyoung, 2021).

A study conducted by Molero, Recio, & Cuadrado (2010), using the MLQ-5X instrument, shows that "the model that best fits our data is transformational leadership, which is composed of four factors: idealized influence attribution, idealized influence behavior, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation." This theory is also supported by authors such as Salazar (2006); Álvarez, Castillo, & Falcó (2010); García (2011); Durán & Castañeda (2015); Andrade et al. (2020), among many others, who indicate that the most suitable leadership for organizations is one that favors shared common goals, with a renewing collective commitment, offering perspectives that encompass much more than the other described models, namely,

3.3   Transformational Leadership

According to Mendoza & García (2023), citing AlNuaimi, Singh & Harney (2021) and Aga (2016), "a series of exchanges between leader and follower—where rewards or punishments are given to followers depending on the results obtained in task execution—prioritizes supervision and control over followers." In this regard, Cuadra-Peralta & Veloso-Besio (2010) assert that the transactional style consists of "strategies linked to contingent reward, which is the extent to which the leader establishes constructive and positive exchanges with followers for their effort, that is, promising rewards for good performance and recognizing achievements."

Ahumada (2004) also supports this theory, stating that "transactional leadership theories focus on how leaders can motivate their followers by creating fair exchanges and clarifying mutual benefits and responsibilities." Similarly, Robles et al. (2013) claim that "transactional leaders recognize what followers want and promise to help them achieve it through an exchange; this type of leader approaches followers with the promise of compensation, a reward for their support."

In the transactional leadership model, the leader, to achieve the set objectives, influences followers under the premise that if they fulfill assigned tasks, they will obtain personal benefits. Meanwhile, in the transformational model, the focus is directed toward team and organizational values, with a leader willing to embrace changes that arise in the pursuit of organizational goals.

3.4   Corporate Leadership

Globalization and the internationalization of production compel the updating of administrative paradigms aimed at improving the economic and social performance of companies and, more recently, addressing the responsibility for environmental care and conservation. According to Sumba-Bustamante et al. (2022), "current business leaders must be very cautious to ensure that the primary motivation of companies is not solely economic performance; rather, this should be a consequence of generating well-being through the service they provide."

In this sense, leaders at all levels are called to take on these responsibilities and guide humanity toward sustainable development that promises an improved quality of life in the present without degrading the planet, allowing these levels of satisfaction to be maintained for future generations and promoting future corporate growth. That is, each employee's level of satisfaction directly impacts the company's success (More Huaman, 2021).

It is worth noting that, although organizations need leaders to bring dynamism and effectiveness in achieving objectives, teamwork also holds significant importance, as it is crucial for accomplishing final goals. Consistent with this, Alatrista (2020) highlights the importance of leaders "establishing concepts of synergy, where each team member's knowledge can be unified under the umbrella of collaboration and camaraderie, while always reinforcing the sense of responsibility in each person's role and accountability for it."

As stated by Paravic & Lagos (2021), "Teamwork has become one of the most valuable assets for achieving success in any project." According to Matos et al. (2018), teamwork is characterized by fluid communication among individuals, founded on relationships of trust and mutual support. It focuses on established goals within a climate of trust and reciprocal support among its members, where synergy prevails. Cardona & Trejos (2020) add that teamwork "leads to greater effectiveness, as it

increases the likelihood of reaching objectives; greater efficiency, as it optimizes resources; and a better organizational climate, resulting from improved communication and commitment."

3.5   Leadership for inclusion

Inclusive leadership seeks to build horizontal collective relationships and avoid the concentration of power, as this in itself constitutes an exclusionary practice (Carrasco & Barraza, 2021). Along these lines, Sinner & Tumino (2022) highlight the progress made in recent decades, noting that the current perception of leadership does not differ significantly between men and women. In other words, both genders are perceived as possessing the appropriate qualities to fulfill a leadership role.

According to Boggi (2021), teams composed of new generations with gender diversity perceive that leadership considered "feminine" demonstrates greater abilities to incorporate differences and foster improvements in performance and innovation, suggesting that it may hold more attributes than traditional leadership styles historically attributed to men. In line with this, Hernández & Stan (2022) assert that organizations that exclude women from decision-making or fail to recognize their leadership risk losing essential talent crucial to their performance. Henríquez-Fuentes et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of establishing "collaborative networks or alliances to make an impact on the micro and macro environment of the organization in social, environmental, and ethical domains."

3.6   Visionary Leadership

This type of leadership, as described by Rincón (2022), is creative and articulates a realistic, long-term, attractive, and credible vision of the organization's future. It grows and improves from the present, foresees events, anticipates problems, and identifies opportunities well ahead of others. Visionary leaders inspire their followers with a clear and compelling vision, helping them feel they are part of a larger whole. The primary advantage of this management style is that everyone knows the team's direction and is therefore more motivated. It does not focus on assigning blame when mistakes occur; instead, it investigates the underlying causes to make the necessary adjustments and encourages subordinates when objectives are achieved.

Cabeza & León (2018) assert that this type of leadership is "considered the most impactful, as it inspires people through its vision and commitment, fostering loyalty." Visionary leadership plans the future collectively, sharing work and effort to achieve corporate goals and objectives while delegating responsibilities to enhance the team members' self-esteem. This approach does not overlook the leader's responsibility for each team member's individual activities.

3.7   Moral leadership

Moral Leadership, as proposed by Donaires (2003), should be fully aware of the dynamics of disintegration and integration that characterize our era and consciously align itself with integrative processes. It entails having a clear vision of the desired society and some of the strategies that will help achieve it. Based on this vision and these strategies, moral leadership actively works to build a better society. To complement this, Bush (2019) states that "the central focus of leadership should be on the values, beliefs, and ethics of leaders." In this regard, Fernández (2018) argues that a "moral framework is the condition that enables us to affirm that, from a Philosophical Anthropology perspective, we are all leaders responsible for our actions, connecting this with the key concepts of what is termed Virtue Ethics." The following table highlights the particular features of each of the models discussed here.

3.8   Environmental Management: An Implicit Commitment in Each Leadership Model

Environmental Management aims to raise awareness of the harm inflicted on the planet through business practices that alter the natural environment, seeking to ensure that these practices—although generating economic development and social transformation—are consistent with environmental care and preservation. Asprilla et al. (2019) argue that "the environment has been subjected to multiple

adverse impacts due to various factors, such as deforestation and pollution of water sources by solid waste."

Projects, initiatives, and ideas, as well as each process undertaken with the goal of protecting and conserving the environment, hold significant importance, as they offer humanity a glimmer of hope. The continuity of humanity is increasingly threatened by constant environmental degradation. This perspective is upheld by Vidal & Asuaga (2021), who affirm that "environmental management encompasses the preservation, conservation, and improvement of the environment, emphasizing the importance of human participation due to the impact it generates"; society's role must be clearly understood, both in preventing and in remedying environmental damage.

3.9   *Environmental Management Initiated by Business Organizations*

Every organization aims to fulfill its social responsibility while simultaneously achieving sustainable and feasible economic goals. Therefore, each organization should have a person dedicated to fulfilling a critical role in situations that require leadership, ensuring that all outlined work strategies are supported by actions contributing to success (Moreno et al., 2021). Leadership, as the cornerstone of the management system, is assumed by top management, who is responsible for empowering all levels with respect to the Environmental Management System (Alzate–Ibáñez et al., 2018).

Corporate environmental management is embedded within a new paradigm that calls upon every organization to take action for the recovery, protection, and conservation of the environment. This is done to align activities that promote economic growth and development with environmental sustainability policies. Under this premise, Páez et al. (2018) and Lozano & Barbarán (2021) highlight that environmental management is now recognized as a highly significant strategy within organizational processes and environmental performance, with its primary purpose being the improvement of eco–efficient activities that contribute to mitigating the extreme negative impacts caused by pollution.

Based on the ISO 14001 Standard, environmental management is defined by Zambrano-Carranza et al. (2021) and Castro & Suysuy (2020) as "the part of the overall management system that includes the organizational structure, planning of activities, responsibilities, practices, procedures, and resources for developing, implementing, carrying out, reviewing, and keeping the environmental policy up to date." Management systems, as Franco & Arias (2018) state, "are very similar to quality management systems from a structural standpoint because they share the same premises and actions."

Effective environmental management does not merely lie in designing a system with manuals and procedures. Progress should be evident in tasks aimed at demonstrating an adequate environmental performance that aligns with the relevance of the implemented environmental management system, incorporating sustainability as a fundamental function with an emphasis on social commitment. In line with this, Salcedo et al. (2020) state that:

"The purpose is to facilitate the achievement of the company's appropriate objectives. From this perspective, the integration of management systems plays a significant role; although leadership and organization were previously treated as secondary aspects, today, there is a heightened awareness of understanding this process from the perspective of people and, therefore, of all elements influencing their behavior."

3.10   *Leaders as Environmental Protection Managers*

Leaders, as noted by Salem (2012), "need to understand the importance of social responsibility and protecting the environment, as solar energy, volcanic activity, and the interactions between air, land, and sea could become tomorrow's organizational resources." Ajarimah (2001) states that "the environment enables industries to operate," concluding that the challenge at all leadership levels is to encourage greater use of technology while simultaneously protecting the environment. Consequently, Payares & Montes (2023) argue that "environmental leadership fosters participation to recognize environmental issues in the surroundings and to take intentional, informed action to transform these realities."

There is an urgent need to start with individuals, both as separate entities and as part of society, to define levels of leadership and sustainable environmental development. Awareness must be raised regarding management as a key factor in understanding our actions. Our lifestyle choices, consumption patterns, and habits are what shape sustainability. It is time to take responsibility for a series of activities in favor of environmental sustainability and to become active agents in protecting the planet, rather than passive inhabitants watching indifferently as the natural heritage for future generations fades away (Santacruz et al., 2020). Similarly, Cantón-Mayo et al. (2021) emphasize that "integrating sustainability into leadership is both a necessity and a challenge that leaders and managers must leverage for survival."

As a guardian of values and resources, the leader must be concerned, as Rodríguez et al. (2022) state, "not only with production efficiency but also with environmentally safe production methods and mitigating the company's environmental impact." Paulín & Carrillo (2021) affirm that the leader transforms organizational culture through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

4.   Conclusions

The different types of leadership and their models allow communities to make improvements that become the focal point for others. Likewise, many innovations and revolutions are driven by a leader who guides a part of society through their ideas. It can be determined that the planet is increasingly degraded, and this degradation is largely due to the reckless use of renewable natural resources, which, although providing prosperity and comfort to its inhabitants, result in excessive and harmful environmental costs for the planet.

To continue humanity's existence on Earth, we need transformative leaders who can influence people in such a way that, from any geographical perspective and starting with small changes, they can contribute to this goal. Protecting the environment is our collective effort to reduce the harm caused by the production of elements that support human well-being.

Leaders are individuals, whether innate talents and virtues or acquired skills, who are called to show the way to follow in order to achieve their goals, ensuring the development of all. They are the ones who safeguard the social and economic development of the organization based on the management model, thus contributing to the protection and preservation of the environment. Each model involves a different type of management, but each one is designed to achieve the established goals and objectives.

The leader is at the service of others with the purpose of making a positive difference for all team members, impacting, influencing, and inspiring. Every personal action taken contributes to generating the cultural change required to normalize that those in leadership positions are capable and committed individuals, regardless of gender (Medina, 2022).

Finally, we conceptualize that humankind has become aware of the irreversible damage it causes to its surroundings, and that, from this awareness, efforts have been made to mitigate the impact through actions aimed at the conservation and preservation of the environment. From this comes the emergence of environmental management systems, and thus, the environmental indicators that audit these systems, certifying the progress or setbacks that, based on legal frameworks and regulations, aim for the perpetuation of our planet, its environmental resources, and humanity's existence on Earth.

Authorship Contribution

Hernán José Hernández Belaides: Conceptualization, Investigation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing, Review, and Editing. Juan Carlos Miranda Passo: Conceptualization, Investigation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, Writing, Review, and Editing.

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