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WHAT DO SUSTAINABILITY LEADERS NEED? A REFLECTIVE VIEW USING THE CORPORATE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP CONCEPT

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Abstract. Corporate social entrepreneurship (CSE) is a recent concept whereby organizations can aim for corporate sustainability in the pursuit of resilience. It has only rarely found its way into the discussion on leadership frameworks and styles, which raises the question of what impact CSE will have on sustainability leadership. Our research is based on different leadership frameworks including sustainability leadership, linking it to the CSE concept and its corresponding competences. The CSE concept transverses all parts of the business, employing different leadership styles. Although our results reinforced key aspects of sustainability leadership, we reveal that the transformation process towards a CSE organization requires partially opposing leadership styles.

Keywords: sustainability leadership, corporate social entrepreneurship, corporate social responsibility, corporate sustainability, transformational leader, entrepreneurship education, leadership skills.

JEL Classification: M14.

Introduction

Background and purpose

"Corporate Social Entrepreneurship is an incredibly interesting process that will greatly contribute to our collective quest for superior organizational performance and societal betterment. Because of this, we believe it is also a sifting process for those who truly have what it takes to bring us there; or, in other words, CSE can be seen as an incubator for tomorrow's leaders" (Popovici & Muhcina, 2012, p. 1114). Popovici and Muhcina (2012) described Corporate Social Entrepreneurship as an important method of ensuring the resilience of not only the organization that follows the CSE concept, but also society. In addition, they assert the competence of future leaders is based on the capabilities of corporate social entrepreneurs. Further, they claim that corporate social entrepreneurs' competences are those of the future leaders. Our research goes into greater depth about the contribution CSE makes to sustainability leadership and the type of leadership style it entails.

The changing environment of businesses, framed by shifting geo-politics, climate and financial crises, global pandemic as well as threats to democracy and security due to disinformation and cybersecurity, demand new leadership and business models to promote the resilience of business organizations. The interdependencies of businesses, consumers, governments, and social and educational organizations created by urgent concerns and landscapes, fuel the search for new referents of leadership for new vision and inspiration. There is a need for new types of interactions and commitments to deal with the changing context of businesses and society (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). These are pressing social and environmental challenges, from climate change to wealth inequality, which pose fundamental risks for the stability and well-being of our society.

We argue that corporate social entrepreneurship (henceforth, CSE) can build resilience in organizations to 'future proof' themselves against, or at least be adaptive to manage unforeseen emergencies (such as pandemics and global economic crises), creating opportunities to cultivate, nurture, and catalyze systemic change within and outside their organizations. Therefore, corporate social entrepreneurs need to embark on a leadership journey, cultivating, developing, and sustaining conditions whereby transformations take place.

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Companies that do not have a clear or meaningful purpose that incorporates the triple bottom line of profit, planet and people will struggle to attract both talent and customers in the years ahead. For a worker to be able to view his or her work in a positive light, he or she must be able to identify individually meaningful contributions he or she has made according to Steger (2016). In addition to affecting hiring opportunities, employee loyalty, and regulatory relationships, Corporate Social Responsibility has been positively associated with the reputation of a company, Russell et al. (2016). Haski-Leventhal et al. (2020, p. 98) argue that corporate social entrepreneurship in its social intrapreneurship aspect can be an innovative way for companies to offer solutions to global pressing issues, while also serving their instrumental, moral, and relational motives to do so: "It can also help companies to become more strategic in their CSR, offering a holistic approach and utilising the company's resources, knowledge, talent, intellect, and skills to create a positive social impact."

Today's leaders are developing the skills to be resilient in the modern volatile, complex, and ambiguous business world. Terms like "leaders of the future," "leadership in a changing world" and "leading through complexity" are being increasingly used. Leaders of the future will need to be motivated by a purpose that aligns the success of the business to delivering positive societal outcomes. These leaders will need to have a clear sense of purpose, coupled with the necessary values, critical thinking tools, knowledge, attitudes, and skills to deliver change at pace and scale. This has significant implications for the way leaders are developed.

Corporate social entrepreneurship

Although corporate social entrepreneurship (CSE) has gained momentum in recent years, the concept remains a relatively new phenomenon with academics and business practitioners who are involved in corporate sustainability. This raises questions of how to lead an organization sustainably, or how to move an existing organization towards corporate sustainability, and the question of what sustainability leadership is, which lacks clarity and unity in the academic discourse.

Porter and Kramer (2006) have accelerated the debate around the role of corporations to benefit society and postulated a further developed, more integrated way to engage in corporate social responsibility to benefit business and society simultaneously. They claimed that "if, instead, corporations were to analyze their prospects for social responsibility using the same frameworks that guide their core business choices, they would discover that CSR can be much more than a cost, a constraint, or a charitable deed–it can be a source of opportunity, innovation, and competitive advantage" (Porter & Kramer, 2006, p. 2). Literature of the 2010s suggest that the use of this entrepreneurial approach to corporate sustainability received the most attention in emerging or low-income

countries as a means to diminish extreme social imbalances, (Sirine et al., 2020; Zaefarian et al., 2015; Agrawal & Sahasranamam, 2016; Raimi et al., 2015; Spitzeck et al., 2013).

The Knowledge Alliance project EMBRACE which started in 2019 **is a three-year project co-funded by the framework of ERASMUS+, Knowledge Alliances programme** aims to foster CSE and CSE education. The project has developed the following definition of CSE "as: 'a way of doing business' so that all staff in any given organization (public, private or third sector) are fully aware of their role, responsibility, and contribution to the sustainable socioeconomic enhancement of their organizations and the communities in which they live and work. The CSE process includes, creating an enabling entrepreneurial environment, fostering corporate social intrapreneurship, amplifying corporate purpose and values as well as building strategic alliances in order to solve economic and social problems and to promote the success of emerging innovative business strategies" (http://csembrace.eu/).

The following view of the research results emphasises the role of CSE as a breeding ground for sustainability leaders and their success in their organizations. Our argument assumes that entrepreneurial skills and an entrepreneurial mindset are crucial to successful sustainability leaders as outlined by Halberstadt et al. (2019).

1. Materials and methods

To answer the question, what implications CSE has on the concept of sustainability leadership and other types of leadership, we employed a literature review and a conceptual framework analysis to identify commonalities and differences among these concepts. In other words, the definitions and concepts of sustainability leadership and leadership styles are linked with the concept of CSE. We used the current EMBRACE concept of Corporate Social Entrepreneurship. **The Embrace project aims "to promote CSE in HEI educational programs and improve students' competences,** employability and attitudes contributing to the creation of new business opportunities dealing with social change inside companies as well as promoting collaboration among companies" (EMBRACE, 2020). The EMBRACE consortium consists of ten partner European organizations of nine EU countries (Ireland, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain, Hungary, Romania, Germany, Greece, and the Netherlands) and has conducted different pillars of research (desk research, focus groups, surveys, interviews). Different EMBRACE publications, e.g., the Handbook for Social Corporate Entrepreneurs or the Corporate Social Entrepreneurship Curriculum, have been published and are the basis of our research.

We utilize different definitions and theories of sustainability leadership, transformational and servant leadership and the concept of corporate social entrepreneurship to categorise overlaps and differences. This is

based on frameworks and concepts on the one hand, and relevant skills and competences of a sustainability leader and CSE expert on the other hand.

2. Results

2.1. CSE concept and key dimensions

CSE is a way to make organizations resilient or at least to make organizations responsive and proactive to deal with systemic insecurities and unforeseen influences (such as pandemics, global economic crises, climate changes, or political instabilities). Corporate social entrepreneurs are change agents that support their organizations to adapt to challenges and to make their organizations successful in the long run. At the same time, they assist to tackle complex and systematic societal challenges.

CSE includes four dimensions that cover the holistic process within the entire organizations: through "fostering a supportive environment to implement CSE" (http://csembrace.eu/), the mind-set, vision and mission of an organization must integrate social, ecological, and financial values in order to lead to a cultural shift. The promotion of corporate social entrepreneurship strengthens those actors who are responsible to implement CSE in an organization. "Amplifying corporate purpose and values" is another key dimension that leads to concrete decisions and actions towards the sustainable purpose and values. The last dimension is to set up strategic alliances in order to solve societal challenges and to pave the ground for innovation in new business models (EMBRACE, 2021a).

2.2. The CSE competences and skills

Corporate Social Entrepreneurs require complex competences to "learn and generate processes of leading and modelling CSE practices" (EMBRACE, 2022, p. 15). Based on previous analysis the EMBRACE project has found that "CSE is a multidimensional set of competences, the combination of cognitive, functional, personal, and meta-competence that creates activities that are innovative, social, and added value-creating." As CS entrepreneurs lead sustainable processes and ultimately act as a change agent to transform the organization to sustainability, we assume that this in itself is one type of sustainability leadership.

The CSE competence framework (see Table 1) depicts personal, professional and core CSE competences. The EMBRACE consortium based this framework on rigorous research that combined qualitative empirical research in nine European countries (Germany, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and UK) plus Brazil and the USA (EMBRACE, 2021b)). The CSE set of competences makes use of different competence frameworks, including EntreComp (MacCallum et al., 2019) and entrepreneurship education at the centre, and the UNESCO set of key sustainability competences (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2017). It also uses transformative

competences complementing the entrepreneurship core to act on opportunities under uncertainty to create value, in which economic, social, or environmental value can be meant. This is supported by the Hanze UAS entrepreneurial competences and complexity and systems innovation competences (EMBRACE, 2022).

This framework includes innovative social intra- and entrepreneurial competences, skills, and mind-sets. Transversal knowledge, skills and competences that are needed for the future work emphasized skills and competences, such as lifelong development competences that takes account of intrapreneurial skills. The following table lists the competences that are necessary to become a CSE expert as defined by the EMBRACE consortium.

Table 1. Competence Framework of a CSE Expert (source: EMBRACE, 2022)

Personal and professional skills
– Questioning norms and taking a stance – Embracing ambiguity, uncertainty and risk – Facilitating thinking outside the box – Anticipating futures and consequences of chosen actions – Capable of creating visions and strategy for long term resilience – Capable of implementing coping strategies – Proactively seeking and connecting across disciplines – Holistic approach to implementing strategies
CSE core skills
– Understanding corporate identify and the need for change – Responsive in enacting innovative solutions for change – Ability to connect social challenges to core business activities – Implementing difference between complex societal and business challenges – Embeds engagement with new external stakeholders – Propagating shared awareness – Consistently boundary scanning and implementing results – Enabling favourable conditions to future scope the business – Mobilizing allies for change

2.3. Sustainability leadership

When organizational leaders aim to move the dial from generating profit to recognising that sustainability can be a business development opportunity, they can create a sustainable business and support a sustainable environment for society (Tideman et al., 2013). Creating a sustainable business model will support these organizations to create and deliver value to all stakeholders internally and externally in economic, social, and cultural forms, Nosratabadi et al. (2019).

Hargreaves and Fink (2004) define sustainable leadership as being applicable to any area of business within the organization, and the essence of the sustainable leader is experienced in how he/she delivers on activities that are focused on having a long-term lasting impact, that does no harm, ensuring the present is an enabler of the future. To be a sustainable leader means being self-aware and

conceiving a way of thinking that goes beyond the four walls of the business to incorporate all stakeholders: employee, organization, community, and society in general.

Tidemann et al. (2013) stated that the change towards sustainability leadership (SL) affects a change in mind-sets and in skill sets and concluded by defining the 6C Sustainability Leadership model, the key components of which are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. The 6Cs of sustainable leadership (SL) (source: Tidemann et al., 2013, p. 25)

SL elements	Concepts used in economics and business
Context	Recognizing interdependence; complexity; ambiguity; interconnectedness; resource constraint; regulators; mega-trends
Consciousness	Mind-sets; world-views; beliefs; mental models; attitudes
Continuity	Long-term horizon; courage; strength; common purpose; centredness; change processes
Connectedness	Serving needs of all stakeholders; both long and short term influencing; collaboration; trust; fairness; altruism; relatedness; needs instead of wants
Creativity	Innovation for sustainable shared value creation; sustainable business models; new value measurement models; flow
Collectiveness	Scale up for collective impact; embedding sustainability in business structures; sustainable consumption

2.4. Leadership types and CSE elements

According to Hemingway (2005) a corporate social entrepreneur "may identify opportunities for and or champion socially responsible activity within the corporation, regardless of an organizational culture that is perceived to be pre-disposed towards CSR" (p. 244). The entrepreneur in Hemingway's view is regarded as an agent with strong personal characteristics, which can be considered highly relevant for business leaders. The CSE concept lends new depth to the discussion of how to develop a modern, transformational leader.

Similarly, Austin and Reficco (2009) see a corporate social entrepreneur as an agent of change and a counterpart of a manager. This stresses the need when leading a CSE process for transformational competencies. Austin and Reficco are particularly interested in the roles of CS entrepreneurs and managers, as well as the challenges of facilitating organizational change: In CSE, both roles coexist permanently; corporations need to be entrepreneurial to innovate and go beyond their traditional managerial approaches. This ultimately means transforming the way the company is managed and led. In order to move the organization in this direction, it must have individuals with the focus and capability to foster and promote the organizational shifts and innovations that

will advance the organization to a higher level of CSR (Austin & Reficco, 2009).

Transformational leadership refers to a leadership style in which leaders inspire, motivate, and encourage employees to innovate and bring about changes that will drive the future success of the company. To accomplish this, the leader sets a positive example, embraces employee ownership and independence in the workplace. The leader sets their sights on supporting employee creativity, scanning the future business horizon, and uncovers novel solutions to the myriad of challenges and opportunities the business faces. According to Bass (1999) the transformational leader "emphasises what you can do for your country?", effectively leading followers beyond their own self-interests through "idealized influence (charisma), inspiration, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration." Through this, followers become more mature, are concerned with goals, self-actualization, but are also conscious of the wellbeing of others, the organization, and society. Some key competency areas notable in transformational leaders which align with corporate social entrepreneurs include, that they demonstrate ethical behaviour within the organization and encourage others to do the same and they create an ethical work environment based on clearly defined values, priorities, and standards. In addition, they establish a company culture which encourages employees to transcend an attitude of self-interest towards a mindset in which they are working for the common good.

"The *servant-leader* is servant first" (p. 6) according to Greenleaf (1977). It begins with a natural feeling that one wants to serve and is followed by a conscious decision and aspiration to lead. Leaders demonstrate leadership by showing others the way. A leader always has a goal and though it may be arrived at by consensus, or where the leader has simply said "Let's do this," the leader knows what the goal is, communicates it clearly and instils a sense of purpose and certainty in others to achieve it.

Specific characteristics of servant-leadership include listening, persuasion, stewardship, and community building, all of which are gaining traction in today's business world and align closely with CS entrepreneurship competences. One trait of the servant leader is the concept of building communities which Greenleaf (2015) notes they need to do both inside and outside the organization. Topcu et al. (2015) showed that the mediating characteristic of a servant leader, promoted the innovative behaviour of employees at work, making this a desired competence when leading a CSE project. Covey (1998) who has written extensively on Greenleaf's servant leadership states his belief that the evolving dynamics of today's globalising marketplace, the connectedness and interdependency of decision making, needs servant-leadership which he sees as key to "promoting a sense of community, of togetherness, of connection" (p. 265).

Following the ethical scandals of the 2000s, corporates have been pushed to engage in social responsibility

according to Achbor and Abbot (2004). While many corporate executives are conflicted between maximising profits and engaging in corporate social responsibility, one thing is coming to the fore and that is, that these two efforts are integral. Although the phenomenon is not clearly illustrated on a widespread scale in today's marketplace, several companies have achieved both goals including Starbucks, Motorola, Cisco Systems, Tom's Shoes, and TDIndustries, all of which have maintained positions in their respective industries and are high achievers in the area of corporate social responsibility (Bogle, 200; Zohar, 1997). This is a significant factor when assessing the challenges of taking an organization on the journey from CSR to CSE as central to CSE is that maximising profit and generating societal good are aligned and not opposing factors.

3. Discussion

3.1. CSE implications on the sustainability leadership discourse

The conducted literature review and concept analysis has shown that the process of organization towards sustainability can be reached by implementing corporate social entrepreneurship and using entrepreneurial concepts and supporting key elements of aligning towards a triple bottom line, creating an enabling environment and co-generating value with partner organizations. This process requires strong leadership – by definition sustainability leaders. As organizations face major changes to remain resilient and future proof, CSE change agents especially require transformational leadership skills and characteristics and play an important part in the CSE competence framework.

When mapping the CSE concept with the concepts of sustainability leadership, there are – as expected – a lot of overlaps. It is acknowledged in all of these approaches that all areas of business and organizations are in the focal point of sustainability leaders. They all have in common that sustainability leaders manage change, they change mind-sets and skill sets in organizations.

There is one aspect that has not been covered by other sustainability leadership concepts that play a crucial role in the CSE concept: this is the element of co-generating value. The external alignment, not only to deliver economic, environmental and social value to all stakeholders – inside and outside the organization – but also to collaborate with third parties to maximise shared value. The reasoning behind building strategic alliances is that organizations are specialised in their business and purpose and require additional knowledge and skills to expand their business model towards sustainability in order to tackle social and environmental problems and to promote successful new innovative business models.

The incorporation of CSE into the current sustainability leadership discourse would mean that the aspect of co-generating value would be added to the concept. We propose that the 6C SL model of Tidemann et al. (2013)

should be developed to a 7C SL model, in which the seventh C refers to "Co-generation". All other Cs are also covered by the CSE concept. See the following Table 3:

Table 3. 7Cs SL model based on Tidemann et al. (2013), expanded by CSE concept

7C SL model	CSE elements
Context	Amplifying corporate purpose and values / fostering corporate social entrepreneurship
Consciousness	Creating an enabling entrepreneurial environment
Continuity	Amplifying corporate purpose and values / fostering corporate social entrepreneurship
Connectedness	Amplifying corporate purpose and values
Creativity	Fostering corporate social entrepreneurship
Collectiveness	Fostering corporate social entrepreneurship
Co-generation	Building strategic alliances

3.2. CSE and different leadership types

Although Corporate Social Entrepreneurship is not about defining a new leadership style, the CS entrepreneur or leader employs a range of leadership characteristics or competences from a number of leadership styles. Ferdig (2007) suggests that "the assumption that leaders have an enlightened view about what is required for the success of the enterprise" only works in a stable environment and not in the complex, fast changing world we envisage right now. The unpredictability and complexity of today's business world requires "complex responsive processes of human activity" (Ferdig, 2007).

As a change agent's transformational competences are the core of the leadership style and shows the most commonalities. According to EMBRACE (2022) transformative competences are used by the corporate social entrepreneur "to perceive a different and inclusive perspective on corporations, entrepreneurs and social challenges", "to understand the role in a societal context" and "to innovate [...] the role in a societal context" (p. 19) and include among others:
- Seeing and using the connection between social challenges and core business: creating corporative and societal value.
- Working with complexity: Bridging the controllable and plannable world and the complex, dynamic and unpredictable world and seeing and using differences between complicated and complex societal and business challenges.
- Seeing and using systems dynamics: interconnections micro/macro, escalating processes and feedback loops, etc.
- Bridging interests, worldviews and positions of shareholders and stakeholders.

At the same time, CSE professionals who want to enable a social intrapreneurial environment and hence provide the employees with space and responsibility to be able to act as an intrapreneur who can identify chances and take opportunities with given resources and within a certain room for decisions, can be successfully make use of a servant leadership style. In exploring leadership and the area of environmental CSR, Afsar et al. (2018) found that servant leadership has a positive effect on the environmental behaviour of employees.

Notably, servant leadership and corporate social responsibility appear to embody similar foundational principles including emphasising the importance of stewardship and community building, which are core to philanthropy and community investment, major pillars of corporate social responsibility. In addition, awareness and foresight are key servant-leadership competences that underscore the corporate social responsibility ideals of environmental management and sustainability.

Reid et al. (2018) identified characteristics of servant leadership as moderating factors of entrepreneurship where servant leadership accounts for all factors and considers the needs of other people in the community. This is primarily achieved by encouraging individuals to enhance their social skills in order to develop entrepreneurial capacities. This leadership style emphasises the development of vision, empowerment characteristics, and trust in their followers to assist them in the achievement of entrepreneurial success (Liden et al., 2008).

Transformational leadership and servant leadership are both focused on leader-follower relationships, however only SL is oriented towards followers' empowerment and organizational achievement is a secondary outcome (Choudhary et al., 2013; Stone et al., 2004).

Conclusions and future research

This research shows that the concept of Corporate Social Entrepreneurship adds important aspects to the concept of sustainability leaders. The dimension of co-generating value through building strategic partnerships has hardly been recognized in the sustainability leadership literature. This leads to a widening of the sustainability leadership concept and likewise embraces other leadership types into the discourse. Not only are transformational competences necessary to move organizations towards economic, social and environmental goals, we showed that a CSE organization has to make room for different types of leaders like servant leaders to make full use of the concept and act as a real change agent.

Our research is based on recent research on CSE and its competences and current leadership literature. The next step should be to validate our findings through empirical research. The question arises as to what types of different leadership styles appear in a CSE organization? Further, the research on transformational leadership might be sharpened by integrating explicit environmental and social aspects.

Finally, the EMBRACE consortium has provided an important step towards systematic and formal education of CSE professionals. The next necessary step is to expand this curriculum towards leadership education, in order to anchor environmental, social and economic sustainability aspects in tomorrow's leaders that aim to form resilient organizations.

Contribution

Conceptualization, CS and IR.; methodology, IR.; formal analysis, CS and IR.; investigation, IR and CS.; writing – original draft preparation, CS, and IR.; writing – review and editing, CS and IR.; visualization, IR; supervision, IR; project administration, IR.; funding acquisition, CS and IR. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Disclosure statement

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