

Sustainability Leadership Relational Model[©]



A sustainability leader is anyone who chooses to engage in the process of creating transformative change with others aimed toward a sustainable future: economically, environmentally and socially.

Sustainability Leadership Practices

Take Responsibility

Making Sustainability Relevant To Others. Articulating the ways in which sustainability strategies are relevant to the immediate and long-term success of business, organization and community; to understand and make visible the ways in which sustainable solutions are often the best solutions for core challenges.

Making Things Happen. Knowing how to collaboratively construct and implement strategic initiatives; Engaging in creative thinking and action within existing laws and policies while; Initiating changes in laws and policies needed to support sustainability progress; Developing techniques to hold self and others accountable for achieving agreed upon outcomes.

Sustaining Energy and Momentum. Finding ways to sustain one's own and others' energy, momentum and belief in what is possible in the face of daunting challenges; i.e., developing practitioner communities of reflection, learning and development.

Look for Holistic Interconnections

Thinking Holistically: Being Mindful of Interdependent Connections. Building capacity for thinking holistically and recognizing relationships among seemingly independent entities or actions; producing sustainable solutions that build on one another; relate challenges and progress to what is happening within the whole.

Marshalling and Amplifying Resources for Optimal Impact. Exploring opportunities to acquire and leverage the impact of resources developed through strategic partnerships.

Convene Constructive Conversations

Creating Spaces for and Participating in Constructive Conversations. Inviting inquiry that stimulates one's own and others' thinking as a matter of course; crafting good questions and holding them open long enough to explore and discover perspectives and connections that might otherwise be overlooked (See Leadership Engagement Framework).

Building Authentic Relationships. Building and expanding authentic relationships for developing and implementing integrated solutions; i.e., long-term partnerships, inter-generational engagement, learning and support relationships.

Engaging Experts as Collaborators. Engaging outside resource people willing to work as part of a team in ways that invite collaboration, collective discovery and the learning needed to broaden system capability.

Embrace Creative Tension

Inviting Diverse Voices and Perspectives: Expanding the Network of Leaders. Inviting and acknowledging diverse points of view, while simultaneously seeking common ground and figuring out solutions for the collective good.

Working with Relational Power Dynamics. Understanding the complex nuances of dynamic power relationships, and associated creative tension, when working with others whose active support is critical for learning and success.

Understanding and Working with Paradox, Ambiguity and Conflict. Letting go of the need certainty in the face of contradictory "truths;" holding open the space for disagreement and conflict, recognizing that the associated tension is a potent source of energy for generating creative shifts in understanding and direction.

Facilitate Emerging Outcomes

Continually Assessing Opportunities and Risks. Assessing risks/opportunities associated with sustainability strategies (which may not be immediately visible) as outcomes unfold over time. Assessing risk of *not* employing sustainability strategies. Supporting an environment in which calculated risks are encouraged.

Understanding and Working with Paradox and Ambiguity. Letting go of control, certainty and the need to predict outcomes; instead, engaging with others to find solutions in the face of uncertainty and contradictions.

Making Things Happen. Achieving concrete results with and through others by co-creating and abiding by agreed-upon "rules of the game" within a flexible strategic framework. Structuring tangible processes and agreements for timely execution of actions and joint monitoring of accountability.

Understand Social Change Dynamics

Noticing and Making Sense of Patterns. Understanding what people do and say, individually and collectively, from a behavior pattern perspective, experimenting with strategies to interrupt existing patterns that serve to galvanize the status quo.

Understanding Human Change Processes. Drawing from new social change models that help describe the ways in which diverse people experience the dynamic, natural rhythms of change in a chaotic environment when new and unconventional ideas are being introduced.

Experiment, Learn and Adjust

Adapting and Using Sustainability Frameworks for Integrated Analysis and Action. E.g., Five Domains of Sustainable Communities (and related EcoStep Model), The Natural Step System Conditions, Natural Capitalism, ISO14001 environmental management systems), and SLI Leadership Engagement Framework.

Learning through Experimenting. Stretching, being willing to learn in new ways; taking calculated risks to test emerging ideas; reflecting on and learning from experiences of all kinds; looking for unrealized potential through experimental thinking and doing with others.

Sharing Information and Knowledge as it Unfolds. Letting others know the thinking behind decisions and action; inviting others to learn with you in process of doing; strengthening the collective practice of experimentation, adaptation and learning.

Expand Conscious Awareness

Grounding Conversations and Action in Personal Integrity. Being clear about one's own identity, principles and intentions before engaging others in the work of change. Frequently reexamining personal integrity to guide action in the present moment in the context of complex and ever-changing circumstances.

Practicing Consciousness Awareness. Continually noticing self in relationship with others and the work; engaging in authentic interaction, (words and actions); encouraging joint reflection about what is happening, has happened, why, and what it means for future thinking and action.