

Systematic Literature Review: The Contribution of Creative Leadership to Sustainable Business Development

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Abstract: The purpose of this research was to establish the relevance of Creative Leadership for Sustainable Business Development. The systematic literature review approach was used as the key method for fact finding and the indicated insights were established from an inception pool of 263 journal articles from two databases namely; Scopus (160 articles) and Web of Science (103 articles). Upon exclusion of some articles using the PRISMA 2020 guideline, 189 articles were reviewed and finally 44 articles were incorporated given their specific relevance to the topic. The intext review was carried out with a comprehensive metanalysis aimed at establishing the findings linked to the key research questions. The findings indicate that there is an adequate sign that the involvement, development and guidance of employees is possible and with creative leadership, the adoption of innovative approaches is seamless with the involvement of the employees. The results of the study provide insights that indicate a cordial relevance for creative, innovative, risk resilient and entrepreneurial oriented leadership if a business is keen about embracing change and creativity so as to attain sustainable business development. Creative leadership in organizations is found to drive intricate realities such as the adoption of ESG, ethical leadership and green practices given that management, more so if comprised of experienced members better appreciates the need for mindfulness in the adoption of innovative approaches to business. With the digital trend developments, big data analytics realities, social media marketing and emerging innovative approaches to business practices, the need for creativity as a driving factor by management is seen to be pertinent. Sustainability and therefore the posterity of the organization is assured with the design of a suitable strategy that incorporates creative management approaches and shape the organizational culture, goals and values towards longer term and therefore envisaged sustainable business development. Creative leaders that advocate for collaboration between private entity stakeholders and for government involvement are also found pertinent for sustainable business development. With these findings, organizational leadership and management teams can be inspired to confidently aspire for the adoption of creative approaches that can drive their businesses towards sustainable development.

Keywords: Creative leadership, Leadership, Creative management, Sustainable business development, Sustainable business, Business development

1. Introduction

The need for creativity in the sustainable development of business seems to be a multi-faceted endeavor that requires the involvement of the leadership, the employees, key stakeholders and aligned systems in place to work together in a bid to enhance the performance of the business or organization while remaining relevant to the changing environmental implications. Lee et al (2020) highlight that, to enhance individual creativity, the need to build a close leader – follower relationship, and the need for the creation of appropriate idea generation processes are highlighted.

A human centered approach is noted as important when exploring solutions for sustainability challenges with creativity by Saleh and Brem (2023). Cacciatore (2023) highlights that leaders that seek for heightened performance of their employees are implored to pay special attention to their conduct towards the employees so as to enable them to enhance their creative performance. There is need for a two-pronged approach where the leaders are mindful of their behavior towards the employees who in turn seek for more creativity in the workplace enhancing sustainable development. Chief Digital Officers (CDOs) who trigger digitization and organization creativity still need to appreciate the development of technology for organizational creativity and humanity (Scuotto et al, 2022)

Yoldas and Yildirim (2023) report that intellectual thinking of administrators can affect their creative leadership behavior whereby managers with intellectual thinking skills tend to exhibit creative leadership characteristics such as problem solving, innovation and visioning more effectively. Transformational leadership is therefore seen to positively affect individual creativity (Kayani et al, 2023). Restuputri et al (2023) find that creative leadership supports organizational performance. This provides a basis for reliance on creativity to overcome factors that may affect organizational or business growth such that if managed with creativity, an entity can be guided by the leadership to keep afloat and continue to grow sustainably.

Alzghoul et al (2023) find that strategic thinking coupled with knowledge oriented leadership lead to an increase in the creativity of employees. This provides us with an indication of the need for the leadership in an organization to provide visionary direction for the business while advocating for creative work approaches. Zahur et al (2022) further affirms that knowledge-oriented leadership indeed has a significant effect on team creativity.

In light of the literature on creative leadership and sustainable business development, it still remains obscure as to whether the adoption of creativity in leadership indeed leads to sustainable business development. This systematic literature review research paper seeks to determine the implication of creativity by management for sustainable business development. This paper seeks to delve deeper and establish;

- The extent to which creativity by leaders contributes to sustainable business development?
- What are the key challenges in creative leadership for sustainable business development?
- Indicate the key recommendations observed for creative leadership to enable sustainable business development?

2. Methodology

A systematic literature review was conducted to establish the relationship between creativity and sustainable business development. The PRISMA 2020 guideline (Page et al, 2021) is adopted.

2.1 Search Approach

The process to establish the available journal articles in reference to the topic was carried out. The researcher limited the journals to the most current findings related to the topic. The key words derived from the topic and searched for included; (“creative leadership” OR “leadership” OR “creative management”) AND (“sustainable business development” OR “business development” OR “sustainable business”). The two source databases were; Web of Science and SCOPUS.

2.2 Selection Process

The selection process commenced with a total of 263 journal articles selected from two renown databases. The Scopus database provided for a total of 160 articles while the Web of Science Database contributed 103 articles. The articles published before January 2020 were excluded from the selection and so were the duplicate and unpublished articles. Furthermore, all articles with inconclusive abstracts in relation to the topic were excluded too. The Inclusion Criteria on the other hand was as illustrated in Table 1 below;

Table 1: The inclusion criteria

INCLUSION CRITERIA
Articles were selected from two databases, including Scopus and Web of Science.
Articles published in the period January 2020 to February 2025
All articles considered were written in English.
Selected articles had Open Access.

As illustrated in the table above, all articles selected were in English. The selection was restricted to the publish period of years between 2020 and February 2025 providing suitable answers to the research questions posed based on the latest findings. Overall, out of 189 abstracts and titles that were reviewed, 44 journal articles were finally selected. The PRISMA 2020 in Figure 1 for the article review process.

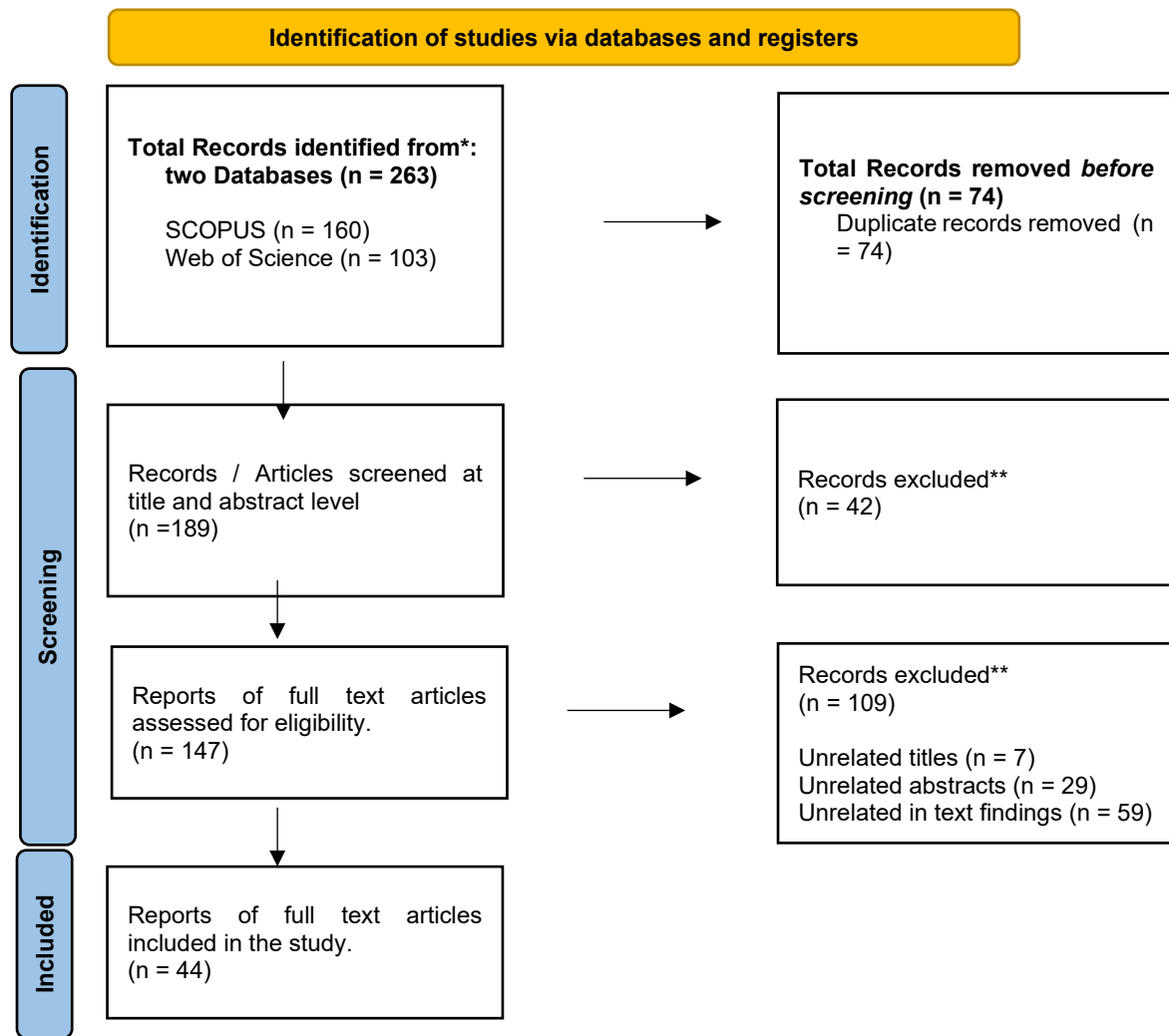


Figure 1: The PRISMA 2020 selection of the final articles

2.3 Descriptive Analysis of Articles

The number of related articles for this study were highest in 2024 with 55 articles, while the 2023 articles were the second highest with over 42 articles. The total of 44 recent articles were selected out of the 189 articles with the inclusion criteria illustrated in Table 1. These further provided for a viable basis for the comprehensive review and compilation of this paper. Table 2 below indicates the selected number of articles per year as illustrated;

Table 2: Selected articles per year

	YEAR	NO. ARTICLES	SELECTED ARTICLES
1	2020	29	02
2	2021	32	05
3	2022	24	03
4	2023	42	23
5	2024	55	9
6	2025	7	2
	TOTAL	189	44

The final selection of 44 articles that were fully representative and contributory to the relevant findings constituted Qualitative design (13), Quantitative (24) and used the mixed design (7).

3. Results

3.1 Creative Leadership Contributing to Sustainable Business Development

The contribution of creativity by leaders and its contribution to the sustainable development of businesses is a multi-faceted endeavor that requires various interventions aimed at improving the specific aspects of the business so as to attain business development sustainably.

Organizational leadership enables the development of the culture and innovation proficiency that in turn influences sustainable performance of businesses (Chowdhury et al, 2022). This provides an inception reassurance that with creative and innovative leadership, sustainable business development is attainable. Farhan (2024) furthermore, looks at the three areas for sustainable development in an organization, namely; having visionary leadership, improving innovative leadership mindsets and adopting an appropriate business leadership approach, in addition, that a business could be sustained in the long run if staff are encouraged to have an innovative mindset. Aziz and Manab (2020), further find that risk resilience and leadership are essential for and inevitable long term business development.

Flexible work arrangements increased employee's psychological empowerment which in turn increased their innovation performance (Wang and Xie, 2023). Its notable that transformational leadership fosters innovation through sustainable practices (Abu Bakir et al, 2024). Transformational leadership, in this instance, is more inclined to creative leadership, coupled with work engagement of employees, specifically looking at the provision of required resources to do the work, actively contributes to job performance (Gutu et al, 2022). Ambidextrous leaders are attained when they learn how to inspire and motivate people and at the same time educating people in the direction of set goals and so, transformational leadership such as this, has a higher impact on sustainability performance (Katou et al, 2023). The fostering of innovation calls for the alignment of an organization's vision and core values with leadership strategies and customer orientation while managing the challenge of employee experience (Linh et al, 2025). Businesses need to remain agile and responsive to change, thus innovation remains the key aspect as a strategic tool for sustainable adaptation and growth (Bashynska et al, 2024). The leadership of an organization is key in shaping the organizational culture which, being in support of organizational learning, creates conditions for sustainable business development (Zivanovic et al, 2023).

The organizational capacity to change is reviewed by Carvajal-Castrillón et al (2023) where they establish that promoting creative development; and with optimizing of communication spaces and conducting workshops to stimulate creativity, and encouraging employees to participate in initiatives can pave a way towards change. In addition, Shihata et al (2023) found that the development of staff with an inclusive approach led to intellectual capital enhancement and therefore improved organizational sustainability. Elzek et al (2023) look at the development of staff with an inclusive approach leading to intellectual capital enhancement and therefore improved organizational sustainability, they further highlight the importance of strategic work force planning and succession management. Upon incorporating creative thinking techniques in leadership, job training and skills development, managers can foster creative behaviors for appropriate and original solutions that benefit the posterity of the organization (Lee et al. 2025). With creative leadership, any work environment can be transformed sustainably, which is further established among the disabled in Indonesia (Purnomo et al, 2023). Nan and Chaiprasit (2023) further highlight empirically that resilient leadership has a positive and significant impact on sustainable business performance

Environmental Innovation strategies can thus be implemented through sustainable leadership as a management strategy (Hu et al., 2023). There is a positive relationship between GHRM practices, ethical leadership, green process innovation and sustainable company performance as indicated by Liu et al, (2023). Ethical leadership and organizational performance have a strong relationship indicating the impact of ethical leadership in enhancing organizational performance (Kawiana et al, 2023; Akpamah, 2023). The level of productivity by employees and employers and the general profitability of a business are enhanced by ethical leadership (Bláha et al, 2021). In addition, human Capital Management and ESG Performance have a strong and positive relationship and when mediated with a long term CEO tenure, there are thus better chances of alignment with the attainment of strategic organizational goals (Cai et al, 2024). Setyaningram et al (2023) found that managers dealing with green creativity SMEs needed to be able to produce novelty and originality as well as consider compatibility with the wants and needs of consumers. In addition, integrating leadership strategies inclined to a green entrepreneurial approach alongside innovation through digital media business sustainability and improved performance can also be attained by SMEs (Antara et al, 2024).

The emphasis of the positive and strong relationship between digital transformation and sustainable business (Chen et al, 2024). Big data analytics is found to have a positive relationship with sustainable business operations (Bag et al, 2021). Chatterjee et al (2021) confirmed that with Social Media Marketing, there is a strong and positive improvement of sustainable business development Kaftan et al (2023) furthermore establish that innovation and digitalization (such as; Smart metering or the internet of things) are becoming the main drivers of the sustainable economic transformation of small and medium enterprises post-pandemic period. The significant transformation of the Maritime Industry was attributed to digital technology that enhanced sustainability and efficiency together with substantial organizational capital and management acumen (Koilo, 2024). Gutu and Medeleanu (2023) note that eligibility profiles for remote work (hybrid and telework) need to be established so as to attain sustainability of the workforce. Notably, as highlighted by Shuhua and Kanokporn (2023), enterprise innovation plays a mediating role between resilient leadership and sustainable business performance. Its no wonder its established that Digital Leadership positively influences sustainable business performance (Saddique et al, 2023).

Dressler (2023) looks at the need for business model design components to be aligned with strategy and the need for the creative process to integrate sustainability into the company strategy. Change, purpose and leadership are noted to be required as a strategy that sustains the business (Bugwandin and Bayat, 2022). Skills and competencies that are enhanced for women entrepreneurs in emerging economies lead to long term success in business (Akther et al, 2024). Ercantan et al (2024) found that entrepreneurial leadership fosters an encouraging and supportive environment in the workplace which in turn leads to sustainable competitive advantage.

The study by Da Rocha Oliveira Teixeira et al (2023) looks at the collaboration between producers in networks such as the Lucca Biodinamica in Italy, which catalyze innovation, knowledge dissemination and collaborative initiatives which in turn enhance strategy uptake and enable advocacy for sustainability. Vigoroso et al (2023) further found that the business and social interests of company leaders who collaborate through open innovation are attained. Intra organization relations or internal relationships in a business also contribute greatly to its sustainability (Slupska et al, 2023). Collaboration is therefore key for business sustainability, both by private and public sectors. The role of Government is explored in terms of the contribution of Business Development Services (BDS) to the transformation of rural based Micro Enterprises so as to enable access to the export market, however, minimizing the cost of the provision of BDS requires that the government comes up with a supportive institutional framework and policies to provide the BDS, suitable to the needs of the Micro Enterprises (Kazungu, 2023). Akpamah (2023); he further establishes that given that most business leaders may not afford leadership training, Government's intervention to provide and finance leadership trainings and seminars for SMEs would be beneficial.

3.2 The Challenges Faced in Creative Leadership for Sustainable Business Development

Business sustainability and development is a daunting task to attain without creative and flexible leadership (Farhan, 2024). Finding business partners and customers that share the same vision, in this case, towards sustainability remains a challenge for businesses, along with the huddle of uncondusive regulations, bureaucracies and corruption in the statutory environment as seen in Romania, Costache (2021).

Without ethical and moral grounding, leaders may not be able to enforce sustainability (Sebastian and Hühn, 2024). In their study, Bashynska et al (2024) found that linking leadership and ethics remained a challenge given that its in that way that leaders would need to make ethically sound decisions and act in a socially and environmentally responsible manner, in addition, that the ethical dimension called for innovation to be pursued responsibly given the impact on communities, environments and future generations.

Micro businesses are normally faced with capital constrains that may hinder them from ably investing in technology. Rusliati et al (2020) established that inadequate technology adaptation makes micro businesses to progressively loose customers to the point of closure.

3.3 Recommendations of Creative Leadership for Sustainable Business Development

There is need for senior management to create a culture, motivate managers and convince share holders to create an approach where long term orientation strategies are prioritized. Gerlich (2023) however finds that the short term orientation is prevalent.

Kantabutra (2021) indicates that with a widely shared organizational culture, the sustainability of the organizational vision and values drives emotionally committed staff that seek to attain the roll out of corporate sustainable practices.

Innovation and creativity, more so by the leadership of a business entity, remain an overarching need for the sustained development and longevity of a business. Kumari and Bisht (2023) emphasize that management plans for effective business development, acknowledging operations in a fast changing technologically advancing world. Managers need to remain teachable and flexible enough, so as to adapt seamlessly, innovate continuously, and keep up with the latest developments that facilitate making sound, strategic and impactful decisions leading to the envisaged sustainable business development.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to establish the relevance of Creative Leadership for Sustainable Business Development. The intext review was carried out with a comprehensive metanalysis utilizing the PRISMA 2020. The key findings are indicative that creative leadership, has a cordial relevance for creative, innovative, risk resilient and entrepreneurial orientation for a business to attain sustainable development.

Creative leadership in organizations is found to drive intricate business sustainability realities such as the adoption of ESG, ethical leadership and green practices with the digital trend developments, big data analytics realities, social media marketing among other emerging innovative approaches to business practices. Sustainability and therefore the posterity of the organization is assured with the enactment of a suitable strategy that shapes the organizational culture, goals and values towards sustainable business development. Creative leaders that advocate for collaboration between private entity stakeholders and for government involvement, are also found pertinent for sustainable business development.

With these findings, organizational leadership and management teams can be inspired to confidently aspire for the adoption of creative approaches that can drive their businesses towards sustainable development. In regards to the literature review however, the restriction was with open access articles which much as they restricted the research to an extent, the researcher believes that the findings therefrom sufficiently provided insights to the topic and the respective research questions. In conclusion, creativity by leaders is a multifaceted and yet intrinsic need for organizations to be able to attain sustainable development.

Ethics Declaration: The authors of affirm that this paper was compiled ethically with originality and without conflicting interests.

AI Declaration: This article was based on thorough research by the authors, without the utilization of AI.

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