

# Sustainable Leadership in Practice in Hungary

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**Abstract:** 'Sustainability' is one of the most widely used terms today. The practice of sustainability in organisations has been analysed from many perspectives, but fewer studies have focused on the role of leadership, specifically sustainability leadership. Sustainable leadership is not about altruism or charity work or just thinking 'green'. Sustainable leadership makes organisations more competitive, more resilient, faster, more responsive and more attractive to customers. It helps attract talented employees and makes businesses more attractive to investors. Ensuring these conditions is a major management challenge. The aim of this research is to assess the extent to which Hungarian managers are prepared to meet the requirements of sustainable management. The research model, the pyramid of sustainable leadership is based on the belief that leaders should pay attention to social and environmental issues and encourage organisational learning and development. The sustainable leadership pyramid details the three pillars of social, environmental and economic sustainability. These pillars must be balanced to ensure sustainable management. Learning and development form the basis of the pyramid, and social and environmental responsibility and economic performance build on this. The research is based on interviews with 32 top managers of SMEs, using the elements of Avery and Bergsteiner's sustainable management pyramid as the basis for the interview questions. The structured interviews took the form of face-to-face discussions. The questions addressed all elements of the pyramid. Audio recordings of the recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed using the Atlas 8 software. The results show that the elements of the pyramid as elements of expectations for sustainable leadership are only partially reflected in management practice. The most significant gap is in the implementation of the elements of the pyramid presenting the steps of the knowledge management process. The Honeybee philosophy as a contribution to the competitive advantage of organisations is only partially implemented, and overcoming the gaps is a major challenge. The research provides a new approach to sustainable management expectations and valuable lessons for SME managers. Future research will aim to expand the sample for international comparison.

**Keywords:** Atlas.ti, Honeybee, Interview, Sustainable leadership model

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## 1. Introduction

'Sustainability' is one of the most widely used terms today. Google's search engine showed about 1 970 000 000 results (in 0.45 seconds) on 01.06.2023. For organisational life, this figure is 644 000 000 hits (in 0.49 seconds). The definition of sustainability has been formulated by many, depending on the economic sector, industry or organisational activity (Sakalasooriya, 2021; Taticchi, & Demartini, 2021). In a more general sense, thinking at the societal level, the United Nations, in its 1987 report *Our Common Future*, stated that 'Sustainability is the satisfaction of the present needs of humanity, together with the preservation of the environment and natural resources for future generations.' In 2015, a world summit committed to developing a framework for sustainable development. The most serious problems identified were poverty, hunger, climate change, social and economic inequalities, water depletion, burgeoning energy demand and environmental pollution. These were followed by 17 so-called Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 169 additional sub-goals to ensure that the world's countries act on global problems in a coherent way. In the set of goals to be achieved by 2030, the targets under 8 and 9 summarise the expectations that organisations engaged in economic activity must meet.

These include, but are not limited to, the main activities that trigger reflection and action:

- Economic activities that favour human well-being, while respecting general ethical principles
- New models and indicators to support economic growth, alternative economic models
- Rethinking financial systems
- Focus on labour (tackling inequalities (gender, wage, sectoral, etc.), work-life balance, labour law issues)
- New technologies, innovation solutions
- Infrastructural solutions (ICT, waste, water, electricity, renewable resources, etc.)

As our study deals with research on organisations, our findings should be interpreted at this level. The main reasons why it is necessary to address this issue are business efficiency, customer satisfaction, financial stability, reputation, legal obligations, etc. (Wijethilake et al, 2023).

Meeting expectations, creating the conditions and expected positive returns within an organisation is primarily the responsibility of the manager. This means that the leader must have the mindset, knowledge, competencies, behaviours and leadership style to enable him/her to work according to the expectations set out above. These are met by so-called sustainability leadership, which is a new approach to the requirements placed on the leader. Our research questions are formulated as follows:

*Q1: To what extent do the managers of your organisation comply with the requirements of sustainable management, and to what extent is the management style applied?*

*Q2: To what extent do organisational culture and managerial preparedness interact and influence the implementation of sustainable management principles?*

*Q3: To what extent does the attention paid to the human factor (training, succession education, knowledge sharing, etc.) influence managers' sustainability decisions in the context of innovation?*

After a brief theoretical overview, the practical studies and their results are presented.

## 2. Theoretical Overview

### 2.1 Sustainable Leadership

The new conditions of economic development and the social phenomena that accompany it present leaders with new challenges. New thinking, an integrative approach and a holistic approach are needed to integrate economic benefits, social responsibility and environmental protection (Bradley, et al, 2020).

The expectations of leaders can be formulated at three levels: individual, organisational and 'cross'. At the *individual level*, leaders are dominated primarily by their individual attributes, which they can draw on to design and operate sustainable organisations. Of particular importance for sustainability are moral values in the organisational implementation of actions (Renwick et al, 2013) and the attention of leaders to their own needs, especially in terms of their psychological and physiological health (Casserley and Critchley, 2010).

The three basic pillars of sustainable leadership at the *organisational level* are *organisational culture*, *strategy* and *human resource development*. Sustainable leadership approaches the shaping of *organizational culture* from the perspective of innovation, trust and sustainability (Avery and Bergsteiner, 2011), while at the same time it reinforces the activities of sustainable leadership (Amara and Chen, 2020). The *strategic orientation* focuses on the relationships between individuals, business communities, the natural environment and market demand. To achieve this, strategic decisions also focus on social well-being and ecosystem protection (Burawat, 2019). *Human resource development* implies people-centred leadership. Employees are also stakeholders in the organization, acting as a loyal and committed team (Avery and Bergsteiner, 2011). The cross-level means that sustainable leadership, by understanding new trends and linking the organisational and individual perspectives, is better able to integrate sustainability ideas into the development of the organisation. In doing so, they facilitate the transformation of the organisation into a sustainable business.

Tiedeman and colleagues (2013) have put together a model of sustainable leadership expectations. Table 1 summarises the desirable elements and their business terminology.

**Table 1: Elements of sustainable leadership**

Elements of sustainable leadership	Concepts used in economics and business
<b>Context</b>	Recognising interdependence; complexity; ambiguity; interconnectedness; resource constraints; regulators; megatrends
<b>Consciousness</b>	Mindsets; world views; beliefs; mental models; attitudes
<b>Continuity</b>	Long-term horizon; courage; strength; common purpose; centrality; change processes
<b>Connectedness</b>	Serving the needs of all stakeholders; long and short term influence; cooperation; trust; fairness; altruism; kinship; needs rather than wants
<b>Creativity</b>	Innovation for sustainable shared value creation; sustainable business models; new value measurement models; flow
<b>Collectiveness</b>	Increasing collective impact; embedding sustainability in business. structure; sustainable consumption

Source: Tiedeman et al, 2013)

Sustainable leadership is not about altruism or charity work, or just thinking "green". It helps attract talented employees and makes businesses more attractive to investors. Examples of sustainable business leadership can be found around the world (Aung & Hallinger, 2023).

In this environment of shifting expectations, new leadership styles have emerged that aim to achieve sustainable organisational performance. The Pyramid of Sustainable Leadership (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011) and the Cambridge University model (Visser & Courtice, 2011) are two trends that combine sustainable leadership and organizational learning. Both models are based on the belief that leaders should pay attention to social and environmental issues and encourage organisational learning and development.

The sustainable leadership pyramid details the three pillars of social, environmental and economic sustainability. These pillars must be balanced to ensure sustainable leadership. Learning and development form the basis of the pyramid, and social and environmental responsibility and economic performance build on this.

The Cambridge University model favours three foundations for organisational learning: cognitive learning, social learning and learning at organisational scale. The model is based on the premise that organisational learning leads to growth and development, which is essential for sustainable development and leadership.

Both models emphasise the importance of organisational learning to ensure sustainable leadership. While both models play an important role in promoting sustainable management, they have different ways of thinking about the process of sustainable management and the importance of organisational learning. Avery & Bergsteiner's pyramid (2011) most accurately summarises the key role of leadership in balancing the triple aim of economy, society and environment. We therefore followed this logic in our research.

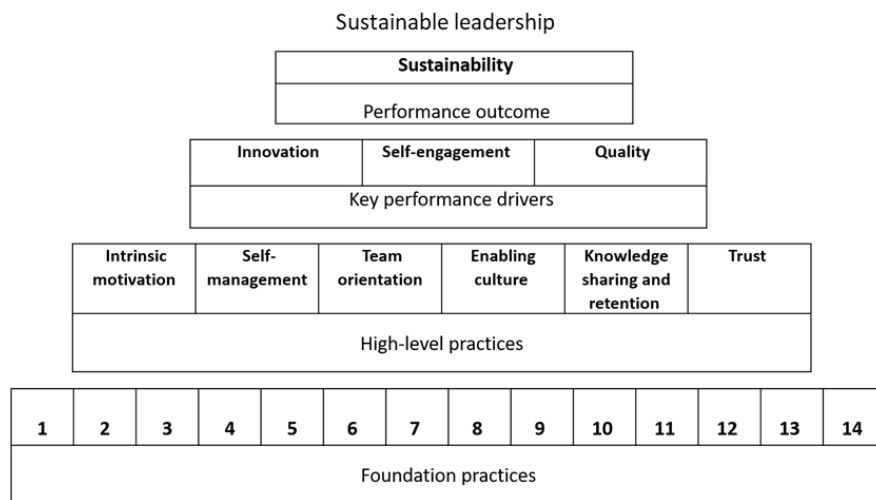
## **2.2 International Outlook**

The topic of sustainability leadership is most theoretically explored in the literature, where it is focused on the characteristics of sustainable organisational functioning in combination with different theories. Few practical studies have been found in recent publications. Mostly, educational institutions have been studied, where teacher behaviour characteristics have been tested against sustainable leadership characteristics (Farooq, 2018; Al-Zawahreh et al, 2019). It is also interesting to note that the practical studies are from poorer countries, mainly in Asia (Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, etc.). Kantabutra and Thepha-Aphiraks (2016) used case studies and interviews to test Avery's 19-element model built in previous research. They were able to identify six elements that characterised the leadership practices of the Thai organisations they studied. Knowledge sharing as a defining element of the Honeybee model was also examined in the study by Iqbal and Piwowar-Sulej (2023). They tested the mechanism of knowledge sharing for innovation in developing countries. They found that the characteristics of sustainable leadership facilitate the process of external and internal knowledge sharing. In another study (Iqbal et al, 2020), they surveyed 405 SMEs on the mediating role of psychological safety between sustainable leadership and performance. The results show that sustainable leadership has a positive indirect effect on sustainable performance. Lee (2017) tested the relationship between sustainable leadership and organizational effectiveness. His results show that the strength of each element of sustainable leadership affects organizational effectiveness in different ways. Armani and colleagues (2020) investigated the supporting role of sustainable leadership in change implementation. Managers of four organisations were interviewed. They concluded that the role of sustainable leadership is a function of organisational maturity. A significant positive effect of sustainable leadership on the relationship between organizational learning and sustainable performance was found by Iqbal and Ahmad (2020) in a sample of SMEs in Pakistan. In another study, experts examined organizational practices in the public sector based on theoretical studies (Rehman et al, 2019). Kalkavan (2015) studied Turkish managers and found that although they possessed significant managerial competencies, their sustainable leadership skills fell far short of expectations. Suriyankietkaew and his colleagues (2022) came to a similar conclusion in their study of Thai SMEs. The only study that could be found tested Avery and Bergsteiner's model in a Spanish context. The study interviewed female managers working in the logistics sector, based on the Honeybee and Locust sustainable leadership model (Bulmer et al, 2021). The results showed that a mixture of Honeybee and Locust type leadership is prevalent in the Spanish logistics sector. Organisations are not very open to knowledge sharing, and considerable development and training in management practices is needed. This will be followed by a presentation of the logic of the sustainable management pyramid and the results of practical research.

## **2.3 The Sustainable Leadership Pyramid**

Avery (2005) introduced the concept of sustainable leadership to the field of corporate governance. He illustrates the concept of sustainable management through the examples of two development models (the

British-American/Honeybee model and the Rhineland/Sasha model), which represent opposing values. The concept of sustainable leadership (Honeybee logic) summarised 19 elements that require the use of new leadership competencies (e.g. long-term decision making, building a team of employees, providing high quality products and services, etc.). Based on this study, Avery and Bergsteiner (2011) identified four additional competencies (self-management, trust, innovation and workplace involvement) and framed them together with the initial 19 elements. This resulted in a 23-element concept of sustainable leadership. The sustainable leadership pyramid provides a visual representation of the different aspects of sustainable leadership. Fleshing out lower level practices facilitates and supports the implementation of higher level practices, while higher level practices build on the core elements. The pyramid is a three-level model that combines sustainability levels (life-space, social and economic) with management levels (tactical, strategic and systemic). The pyramid is a logical mapping of the sustainable management criteria, whose interconnectedness demonstrates how the British-American so-called Honeybee philosophy contributes to the competitive advantage of organisations. The logic of the thinking is illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: The sustainable leadership pyramid (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011)**

The basic elements corresponding to the numbering shown at the bottom of the pyramid include.

*Basic elements*

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Appropriate leadership style          | 8. Long-term horizon                       |
| 2. Talent recruiting and retaining staff | 9. Considered organisational change        |
| 3. Developing people continuously        | 10. Independence from outside interference |
| 4. Internal succession planning          | 11. Environmental responsibility           |
| 5. Respect, diversity and inclusion      | 12. Social responsibility                  |
| 6. Ethics and virtues                    | 13. Broad stakeholder focus                |
| 7. Good governance and accountability    | 14. Strong shared vision and purpose       |

In order for the expectations defined by each element of the pyramid to be met, specific competency expectations, behaviours and values can be formulated for leaders (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). The competency expectations and the elements of the pyramid are paired to show the interdependence and the leadership readiness required to meet the expectations (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Elements of a sustainable leadership pyramid and the required leadership competences**

Expected competences, leadership attitude	Criteria for the elements of a sustainable leadership pyramid
<b>Responsibility</b>	Influencing decisions, CSR, environmental and volunteering programmes
<b>Adaptation to change</b>	Frequency of changes, preparedness
<b>Continuous improvement</b>	Provision of regular training, development opportunities
<b>Collaboration, openness</b>	Management and staff commitment

Expected competences, leadership attitude	Criteria for the elements of a sustainable leadership pyramid
<b>Sensitivity</b>	Characteristics of trust building
<b>Teamwork, cooperation</b>	Teamwork, knowledge sharing in the organisation
<b>Growth orientation</b>	Talent management in the organisation, succession programme
<b>Customer focus</b>	Consideration of the interests of internal and external stakeholders
<b>Value-based leadership</b>	Ethical principles, ethical leadership
<b>Transparency</b>	Characterisation of own leadership style
<b>Innovation</b>	Innovation in the organisation
<b>Role model</b>	Self-management, internal motivation
<b>Long-term thinking</b>	Vision in everyday life, involvement, organisational vision

Source: own construction

In the next chapter, we report on research based on the theoretical framework described above.

### 3. Research Methodology

Using the literature review, we explore our research topic along the following assumptions:

Assumption 1: Leaders in Hungarian organisations do not yet or only partially fulfil the basic elements of the expectations of sustainability leaders.

Assumption 2: An organisational culture based on trust supports knowledge sharing and promotes supportive behaviours of employees towards sustainability goals.

Assumption 3: The level of innovation depends on the level of attention paid to the human factor (training, knowledge sharing, succession planning).

#### 3.1 Data Collection/Sample

For data collection, a qualitative methodology was used, interviews were conducted with (CEOs) or functional (HR, project) managers of organisations in Hungary. Interview subjects were selected by random sampling. As a first step, all 250 items of the Orbis database of Hungarian firms were selected, with a preference for the associates of the Hungarian firms. This resulted in 2068 organisations whose managers were contacted by phone and/or email. A total of 32 interviews were conducted with the managers willing to be interviewed between September 2022 and January 2023 (20 in manufacturing and 12 in service organisations). During the structured interview, open and semi-open questions were asked. Respondents were informed of the topics in advance so that they could prepare for the interview. The interview questions were grouped into three main categories, according to the levels of the sustainable management pyramid: 1) baseline expectations, 2) higher level practices, and 3) key drivers of performance. Interviews lasted 50-70 minutes; all interviews were recorded and transcribed for later systematic analysis. The basis of the questionnaire, the focus of the questions, was the elements of the pyramid with their associated managerial competency expectations.

#### 3.2 Analysis

The primary data for our study was obtained from the structured interviews with managers. In the analysis phase, we used Atlas.ti 8 text analysis software to structure and analyse the qualitative data. The software provides the possibility to code the interview transcripts' text files, categorizing them according to different perspectives, taking into account the research topic. The themes were analysed in terms of our hypotheses. After the management interviews were completed, the transcripts were read several times, reminders were added to the relevant content (memos). In the coding phase, the data were broken down into manageable segments and labelled for identification. Three main aspects of qualitative analysis were considered: representation of managerial opinions, data analysis and interpretation. The results of the detailed analyses are presented in the next chapter.

### 3.3 Research Findings and Discussion

The question sets of the questionnaire, the codes used for the analysis, our assumptions and our research questions are consistent. To test the first hypothesis, we looked for the practical application of the basic elements of the sustainable leadership pyramid. To verify the second hypothesis, we sought to identify the characteristics of a trust-based culture, and to verify the third hypothesis, we sought to identify the relationship between innovation and attention to human resources. The relationship between the codes, the questions and our hypotheses is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Relationship between assumptions and interview questions**

Codes		Focuses of interview questions	Assumptions
Leadership style	Foundation practices	Appropriate leadership style	Leaders in Hungarian organisations do not yet or only partially fulfil the basic elements of the expectations of sustainability leaders.
Talent management		Talent recruiting & retaining staff	
Training		Developing people continuously	
Youth		Internal succession planning	
Concepts		Respect, diversity & inclusion	
Ethical leadership		Ethics and virtues	
Organisational practice		Good governance & accountability	
Long-term aims		Long-term horizon	
Changes		Considered organisational change	
Decision-make mechanism		Independence from outside interference	
Environment		Environmental responsibility	
CSR		Social responsibility	
Stakeholders		Broad stakeholder focus	
Vision		Strong shared vision and purpose	
Motivation		High-level practices	
Culture	Self-management		
	Team orientation		
	Enabling culture		
	Knowledge retention		Knowledge sharing and retention
Values	Trust		
Creativity	Key performance drivers	Innovation	The level of innovation depends on the level of attention paid to the human factor (training, knowledge sharing, succession planning).
Team-building		Self-engagement	
Rules		Quality	
<b>Sustainability</b>			

Source: own construction

To confirm our *first assumption*, we analysed the answers to the questions included in the core elements. For each core element, the 6 most frequently mentioned concepts are listed in the Table 4. As typical exercises show, the results are mixed. Based on these results, our first assumption is confirmed.

Table 4: Core elements and most frequently mentioned terms

Basic elements of Honeybee Pyramid	The most frequently mentioned terms	Typical exercises
<b>Appropriate leadership style</b>	empowering leader, empathetic leader, democratic style, coaching type leader, team player, collaborative	applies
<b>Talent recruiting &amp; retaining staff</b>	apprenticeship programme, talent programme, difficult to recruit and retain, no money, career path, complex job	difficult to find and keep
<b>Developing people continuously</b>	expensive, professional training, in-house, short-term, no regular training, self-training	not all organisations
<b>Internal succession planning</b>	youth education, internal referral programme, mentoring, ad-hoc, fire-fighting, no programme	no well thought-out youth programme
<b>Respect, diversity &amp; inclusion</b>	principles, to be improved, not ok, culture dependent, leadership by example, discrimination	considered important, there are many gaps
<b>Ethics and virtues</b>	bribery, fraud, online training, clear and honest communication, code of ethics, trust	use not integrated into everyday life
<b>Good governance &amp; accountability</b>	strategy building, decisions, rapid response, competitiveness, sustainability, awareness	strategic thinking and decisions are missing from everyday life
<b>Long-term horizon</b>	forward planning, vision, awareness, we bleed from many wounds, we are stuck, we are not good at it	usually one year
<b>Considered organisational change</b>	trust, flexible, external expert, inertia, slow, continuous standby	continuous change
<b>Independence from outside interference</b>	personality dependent, quick decision, be informed, professionally independent, gather useful information, cannot exclude external environmental influences	internal uncertainty or insufficient level of information
<b>Environmental responsibility</b>	topical issue, no such programme, ad-hoc programmes, very small ecological footprint, important value, awareness-raising role	where it exists, it is taken seriously
<b>Social responsibility</b>	no such programme, voluntary tree planting, cooperation with child protection centre, blood donation, litter picking, clothes distribution	in most cases there is no
<b>Broad stakeholder focus</b>	listening to them, conscious customer focus, priorities, internal attention first, external stakeholders second, organisational interest more important than individual interests, compromise	focus more on internal stakeholders
<b>Strong shared vision and purpose</b>	breaking down strategy to individual level, we worked it out together, we dare to dream, teamwork at management level, we don't have a vision, known at management level	with few exceptions, there is vision

Source: own construction

As an illustration, the main terms associated with management style and training programmes are shown in Figure 2.



is not a full climate of trust. Again, an element that divided respondents. Although everyone considers it very important, in practice few cases reported a full climate of trust. In most cases there is a strong ambition, but also serious gaps. The word cloud can be seen in the Figure 5.

Our second hypothesis proved to be true, as the climate of trust was repeatedly mentioned as a condition for knowledge sharing. In all cases, the behaviour and thinking of staff and managers is influenced by the atmosphere that the culture provides, and the leadership style as a role model also has a strong influence. The area of knowledge sharing is at a critical level. Our hypothesis fails to account for one shortcoming, in terms of the direction of influence on employee behaviour. The mention of sustainability was not at all prevalent in any of the responses. Thus, we can only partially confirm this hypothesis.

Term	Count	Relative	Significance	Trend
knowledge	35	14,124	0.000	
sharing	15	6,053	0.000	
share	10	4,036	0.000	
information	10	4,036	0.000	
processes	9	3,632	0.000	
retention	8	3,228	0.000	

Figure 4: Frequencies and trends of knowledge sharing

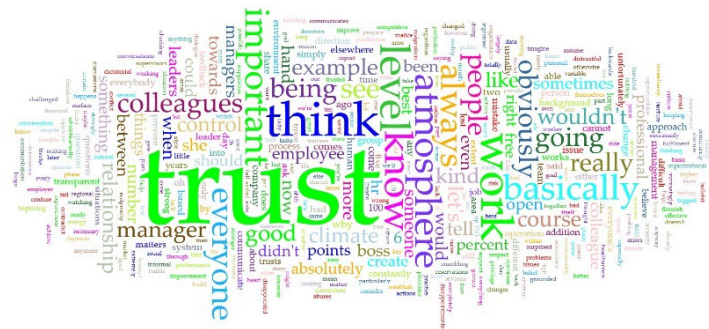


Figure 5: Word cloud of trust

Our *assumption 3* is that the degree of innovation depends on the degree of attention paid to the human factor (training, knowledge sharing, succession planning). This required an examination of key performance indicators (innovation, employee engagement, quality). We looked at the answers to the codes formulated on the basis of the questionnaire questions. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Key performance indicators and most frequently mentioned terms

Key performance indicators of Honeybee Pyramid	The most frequently mentioned terms	Typical exercises
<b>Innovation</b>	moderate presence, operational innovation, the will is there, more than creativity, no room for manoeuvre, digitalisation is the key word	important, most people do, but not at the same level
<b>Employee engagement</b>	basic expectation, culture shaping, honesty, empowerment, delegating leadership, not for everyone	full commitment and belief, with the exception of one company
<b>Quality</b>	process specifications, intolerance, guarantee of long-term cooperation, ISO above all, too many regulations, quality mindset	important operational expectation

Source: own construction

In the analysis of key performance indicators, the success of innovation is a function of human creativity, attention, teamwork, leadership and employee engagement. Nurturing succession, values to be kept in mind during the selection process, tolerance, commitment, trust and leadership by example are all prerequisites for

innovation and continuous renewal. The responses confirmed the need for creativity as a prerequisite for innovation, the commitment of staff and the respect of the rules needed to ensure quality. Although not all of these criteria were expressed verbatim in the interviews, it was clear from the responses and the underlying explanations that our assumption 3 also proved to be true.

The last question of the interviews sought to explore the thinking on sustainability. Frequent statements: complex issue, very important, new approach, funding issue, ecological footprint, distrust raises barriers. An interesting approach was expressed: aim to improve, people are a resource, if you have not chosen the best, improve it, don't 'throw it away'. A number of standard expectations were raised and these are what every manager encounters in their work. Actively implementing sustainability is often perceived as a material issue. The need for a change of attitude, education of staff, culture shaping was mentioned in several cases. The most thought-provoking response is quoted verbatim.

'Sometimes I wonder, if anything were to happen to me, how sustainable would it be to run this company? I think systems and processes are the body of the company. But there is a soul to every company, and it is the person, or the community of people, led by a leader, who holds the community together. In this way, the criterion for sustainability is that the person who created the organisation, who runs it, is always there. There should always be the right person and there should be continuity. That's why succession is very important.'

#### **4. Discussion and Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to answer our research questions and to validate our hypotheses, which aimed to investigate the validity of leadership competencies in sustainable leadership. The research model followed the honeybee logic of Avery and Bergstein. The research method was an interview technique, which provided the opportunity to explore the reasons behind the responses using the Atlas software. We hypothesised that the managers of Hungarian organisations are only partially prepared for the basic requirements of sustainability leadership. Similar results were obtained in their study by Kantabutra and Thepha-Aphiraks (2016), who were able to identify only six elements from the Honeybee pyramid. Kalkavan (2015) and Suriyankietkaew with colleagues (2022) also found that sustainable management practices were limited in the organisations they studied. The only European study also found evidence of a mixture of Honeybee and Locust styles.

Building an organisational culture based on trust, which is a prerequisite for knowledge sharing and retention, is a major challenge. Their responses confirmed that creating this climate promotes knowledge sharing and supportive staff behaviour towards sustainability goals. In their study, Iqbal and Piwovar-Sulej (2023) investigated the mechanism of knowledge sharing for innovation. Their results show that the characteristics of sustainable leadership facilitate the external and internal knowledge sharing process, but their studies show similar results as the leadership behaviour we studied. Knowledge sharing does not work smoothly.

According to the managers' responses, the degree of innovation (which is closely linked to creativity) depends on the attention paid to human resources training, teamwork, knowledge-sharing decisions and succession planning. The above opinions confirmed our hypothesis that sustainable management thinking focuses on the potential of human resources, treating all aspects of culture as assets. Rather than maximising economic results at any cost, knowledge sharing, succession planning, continuous improvement, team building ensure a combination of acceptable success, knowledge sustainability and sustainable operation of the organisation. These ideas are supported by research findings that demonstrate a positive relationship between sustainable leadership and production efficiency, sustainable performance, organisational learning and change management (Lee, 2017; Rehman et al, 2019a; 2019b; Amani et al, 2020).

The limitations of the research are mainly the willingness of the interview subjects to respond and the time required to conduct the interviews. Further research opportunities include increasing the number of interviews and conducting international comparisons.

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