EPH-International Journal of Business & Management Science

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP IN MANAGING BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY

Dr. Pankaj Mishra[1], Dr. Abhishek Kumar Pandey[2*], Ms. Sonam Yadav[3], Dr. Shubhangi Tripathi[4], Mr. Indrakesh Yadav[5]

[1]Assistant Professor; Department of Commerce, University of Lucknow, Lucknow, India
Email: mpankajm2020@gmail.com, ORCID: 0009-0000-3801-705X
[2]Assistant Professor, Department of Management, IILM Academy of Higher Learning, Lucknow, India , Email: abhishek.pandey@iilmlko.ac.in, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8251-7278*
[3]Subject Expert, Department of commerce, University of Lucknow, Lucknow Email: punam16online@gmail.com
[4]Subject Expert, Faculty of Commerce, University of Lucknow.
Email: tripathishubhangi19@gmail.com
[5]Research Scholar, University of Lucknow Indar3030@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: Dr. Pankaj Mishra (Email Id : abhishek.pandey@iilmlko.ac.in)

Article History
Received: *2026-01-08*
Revised: *2026-05-26*
Accepted: *2026-09-11*
Published: *2026-09-29*

Abstract
In Business, if, the role of human resources and key leadership will not be considered then it is not possible to measure or find out the driving living force behind any initiatives of business enterprise. This qualitative investigation is an effort to explore such factors and dimensions which are related to mapping out the role of executive leaders (Top – management leadership) in managing & ensuring business sustainability to their respective organisation as well as in shaping the corporate and business level strategies which are mainly related to promoting sustainable business practices. In this ,05 executive statements have been analysed and who are having affiliation with NSE -500 firms. Such firms cater to almost 90% of Indian stock market in terms of market capitalisation. Statements and publicly available dialogues of executives were considered for this research investigation for the time period January, 2020 to December,2025. This study suggests that to a great extent leadership role is influencing the Indian corporation's sustainability efforts and initiatives. This work is noble in the sense that many startups can learn lessons from those leaders who have sustainability mindsets in promoting the greener future of Indian industries and their respective corporations.

Keywords: *Executive Leaders, Business Sustainability, Leadership, Strategic Leadership,Qualitative*

Vol. 12 Issue 9 (September 2026)
ISSN:2208-2190 Pages-114-121
DOI: https://doi.org/10.69980/q18r2c26

1. Introduction

Strategic leadership (SL) is a term which basically caters those executive leaders who take directional and long-term oriented decisions for an organisation. This leadership can also be called as executive leadership (EL) in the context of business organisation. Often such leadership consists of members of the C-Suite profiles like the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Chief Operating Officer (COO) etc. These position holders are in charge of making crucial choices, determining the general course of the business, and ensuring that everyone in the team is pursuing the same set of direction (Agarwal, 2024).

De Vasconcelos Gomes et al. (2024) observed that strategic leaders are critical in managing business failure. In a study by Hitt & Duane (2002), it is highlighted that strategic leadership is indeed important in building and managing human and social capital for the organisations where it found. Strategic leadership is critical in making smooth corporate and strategic level decision making processes (Kraft et al., 2025). In this way, strategic leadership has many crucial tasks and functions to perform and direct in organisations.

Sustainability is commonly known as development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987; Bansal & DesJardine, 2014), and it seeks to ensure intergenerational justice. In same way, business sustainability can be defined as ability of corporations to provide products which fulfils current social demands without over exploiting the natural resources and ensuring business efforts which are aligned to achieve environmental, economic and social requirements. When, it comes to bringing about relevant change, whether it be in political and economic systems, our business models and practices, or in the bigger social arena with stakeholders and society, the leadership is responsible to a greater extent. The leadership model that we have constructed is therefore implicitly about the process of bringing about change in the organisation (Visser & Courtice, 2011).

2. Prominent Models explaining Leadership Sustainability

2.1 Insights on sustainability from Transformational leadership

It is very effective way to inspire people to achieve common organisational goals. Business sustainability can also be achieved through adopting transformational leadership style within workplace. Transformational leaders can play an appropriate role in achieving environmental sustainability (Giergia, 2025). Murari & Mukherjee (2021) observed that transformational leadership brings excellency in managing enterprise and ensuring sustainability in a broader sense. Popescu (2022) mentioned in a research work that transformational leaders have focus on achieving sustainable development goals (SDG).

2.2 Stakeholder Theory and sustainability

There is an interlinkage of stakeholder theory and sustainability accounting (Hörisch et al., 2020). This theory has prime concern that who should be held accountable for sustainability related issues, concern and considerations. Freeman et al. (2021) observed that competitive advantage of a firm become more sustainable when a firm achieve such resources which are valuable and rare one. It emphasises on importance of working on managing different stakeholders of the firm with efficiency and effectiveness.

2.3 Triple Bottom Line and Leadership Insights

Vibrant leaders encourage their subordinates with compassion so as to achieve sustainable aspects in triple bottom line. The people component is related to leadership and role of employees within an organisation (Lenka & Tiwari, 2016). Fry & Nisiewicz (2020) observed that there is a linkage of spiritual leadership in maximizing the component of triple bottom line.

2.4 Responsible Leadership Model for ensuring Business Sustainability

Business organisations need to be vigilant in terms of developing such leadership pipeline which is sensitive to achieve sustainability within their respective unit or responsibility area. In this way, SL or EL must work on establishing a culture of sustainability from day one when a person enters into the organisation.

3. Review of Literature

Environmentally friendly business decisions, activities and actions can be achieved if mindfulness is present in sustainability leadership (Subrahmanyam, 2025). In another study, it is explored that strong leadership skills and personality is essential to manage sustainability within the organisation (Murugan & Prabhadevi, 2025). In a prior study, it is observed that there is direct relationship between responsible leadership and organizational performance on sustainability related factors (Nakra & Kashyap, 2025). Executive leaders play

Vol. 12 Issue 9 (September 2026)
ISSN:2208-2190 Pages-114-121
DOI: https://doi.org/10.69980/q18r2c26

a crucial role in achieving business sustainability by designing competencies for responsible leadership and integrating social and environmental considerations into decision-making processes in an organisation (Hind et al., 2009). Effective sustainability leadership caters extra capacities to engage a wider range of stakeholders and adopt a different mindset regarding organizational purpose (Quinn & Dalton, 2009). Strategic leadership is must for corporate level sustainability, as leaders must communicate their vision, empower managers, and respond flexibly to changes in both internal and external environments (Theodore, 2014).

To achieve the change to "business beyond usual," strategic leaders are required to transform companies and address global issues like climate change and biodiversity loss. While research has explored some micro foundational aspects of leadership for sustainability, gaps remain in understanding affective drivers and values. Identifying, developing, and empowering leaders with transformational potential is crucial for proactively creating heroic leaders capable of driving positive change (Walls et al., 2020).

It is highlighted that Business sustainability is driven by environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues which also emerged as a critical strategic objective for organizations (Dyllick & Muff, 2016). It has popular fact that the role of senior business leaders in promoting sustainability is very important as such leaders have an impact on organizational culture, resource allocation, and corporate strategies. This literature review examines the challenges that business executives face into their efforts to incorporate sustainability into their corporate level strategies (Eccles et al., 2014).

Visser and Courtice (2011) observed that sustainability leadership requires a long-term dedication to the equitable integration of profit, people, and the environment, as well as vision and influence. Corporate level business sustainability is driven by the policies, stakeholder engagement, and innovation insight of these leaders, including CEOs and board level members. Porter and Kramer (2011) observed that business leaders can generate shared value by integrating corporate success with social progress, thereby reviewing conventional corporate social responsibility (CSR) and adopting a more comprehensive approach. Sustainability initiatives are particularly pertinent to transformational leadership, which is different one by innovation and vision (Metcalf & Benn, 2013). By incorporating environmental and social considerations into the corporate culture, transformational leaders motivate employees to adopt sustainable practices. This leadership style is just opposite to to transactional leadership, which focuses on short-term efficiency and conformance over systemic change (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). Business executives face many challenges in the implementation of sustainable practices, despite the growing recognition of sustainability practices. Many Companies frequently refrain from investing in long-term sustainability strategies due to short-term financial limitations (Eccles & Serafeim, 2013). Institutional level investors often prioritize quarterly financial performance, which presents a challenge for leaders who wish to allocate resources to sustainability initiatives that may not generate immediate returns to them (Gond et al., 2012). Additionally, sustainability requires a change and balance in corporate culture, which continuously faces internal opposition (Bansal & DesJardine, 2014). Employees and managers who are attached to traditional business models may oppose changes that creates operational disruptions or additional costs to the business. In this way, leadership role & commitment is essential in dealing with these challenges (Pless et al., 2012). Many business organizations display the influence of effective leadership on sustainability related activities. For example, Paul Polman, the former CEO of Unilever, revolutionized corporate success by emphasizing sustainability through the Unilever Sustainable Living Plan (Lubin & Esty, 2010). In the same way , Tesla's Elon Musk has given attention to sustainability as a core agenda of his business strategy, promoting for renewable energy solutions and electric vehicles (Hoffman, 2018). These cases depicts that visionary leadership has the potential to transform substantial industry transformations into sustainability driven enterprise. The strategic vision, transformational leadership, and corporate culture change of strategic leadership are essential for the advancement of business sustainability. In this way, they encounter challenges such as financial short gain and resistance to change. Strategic Leadership (SL) can address global sustainability issues while contributing to long-term business success by incorporating innovation and employing integrated sustainability strategies to the organisation.

4. Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the role of Executive Leadership in Ensuring Business Sustainability.
2. To analyse the underlying linkages of executive leadership with business sustainability.

5. Research Method

In this research study, the qualitative study approach is primarily grounded by incorporating analysis of executive interviews & statements from NSE-500 businesses. The NSE-500 serves around 95% of the market

Vol. 12 Issue 9 (September 2026)
ISSN:2208-2190 Pages-114-121
DOI: https://doi.org/10.69980/q18r2c26

capitalization of the Indian stock market. This research paper uses a qualitative content analysis as its approach. Secondary data sources have been used in this investigation. Judgmental sampling method is taken into consideration while choosing a particular statement of a business leaders which tells about sustainability and related issues. This research work is based on leadership statements, dialogues and interviews already present in major global business-related media. The time frame for collecting secondary data ranges between Jan. 2020 to Dec. 2025. Companies selected from NSE-500 for the qualitative content analysis of statements of strategic leaders/companies' reports on sustainability purposes are as listed:

Table:01 List of Companies Selected for Study

Sr no.	Name of company	Industry
1	Infosys	IT
2	ITC	FMCG
3	Reliance Industries	Energy, Petrochemical
4	Bharti Airtel	Telecom
5	Hindustan Unilever	FMCG

Source: Author's Compilation

6. Data Analysis & Interpretation

Table:02 Strategic Leadership Outlook on Business Sustainability

Sr. No.	Statement on Business and Environmental sustainability	Name of leader quoting the statement & Profile	Name of the company	Analysis	References/ Date of Publication
1	"The company's ESG roadmap for 2030 reflects its continued aspiration to be a well-governed model organization for diverse talent with an inclusive workplace and community strategies to leverage technology for good"	Salil Parekh, CEO	Infosys	In Infosys company, Top level professionals are aligning their business goals with Global sustainability related initiatives. Technological alignment of Infosys with sustainability is their prime concern.	(Parekh, 2025)
2	"Business models that integrate the creation of environmental capital and large-scale sustainable livelihoods enrich a nation's resources and the social fabric, contributing to a more secure and resilient future."	Mr. Sanjiv Puri, Chairman & MD	ITC	After careful analysis, it is clear that ITC group is getting proper direction of its top leaders which are enabling sustainable business models to its different business segment.	(ITC Sustainability Report, 2024).
3	"Our guiding purpose is prosperity for all people and prosperity for our planet."	Mukesh Ambani Chairman & Managing Director	Reliance Industries	From strategic leadership point of view, RIL is aligned towards achieving the factors prominent in triple bottom line approach i.e. people, planet and profit.	(Reliance Industries Limited, 2025).

Vol. 12 Issue 9 (September 2026)
ISSN:2208-2190 Pages-114-121
DOI: https://doi.org/10.69980/q18r2c26

4	"We continue to remain deeply conscious of our responsibility towards environmental sustainability as wellas our obligations towards society and our stakeholders at large."	Gopal Vittal Vice Chairman & Managing Director	Bharti Airtel	Key management profiles of the Airtel company are active and conscious to promote sustainability at policy level for different stakeholders. It shows the proactive role of strategic leaders in promoting sustainability within the group.	(Vittal, 2025).
5	"Our business strategy charts a clear pathway for us to embed sustainability into our multi-stakeholder model. We have set forth a series of multi-year, time-bound commitments focused on vital areas such as driving climate action, protecting and regenerating nature, waste-free world, positive nutrition, health and well-being, equity, diversity, and inclusion, raising living standards, and the future of work."	Rohit Jawa, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director	Hindustan Unilever	At HUL, strategic leadership has adopted a multi-year, time bound commitments to ensure and promote business sustainability on areas like climate action, protecting the nature, equity, diversity and inclusion.	(Sustainability Report and Boundaries of Reporting, 2024).

7. Source: Review of Literature

The qualitative analysis highlights how Infosys, ITC, and Reliance Industries integrate sustainability into their business models by proactive approach of their strategic leadership. Leadership commitment established an interlinkage with environmental and social goals, driving long-term resilience and responsible growth. Bharti Airtel & Hindustan Unilever focuses on sustainability through leadership-driven strategic policies and commitments to stakeholders. Their proactive strategies to resolve issues like climate action, equity, and stakeholder well-being, ensuring long-term environmental and social responsibility in business operations have greater impact.

8. Managerial Contribution of the Study:

Newly establish as well as already operating businesses should focus to give proper attention on Leadership and Sustainability Strategy. Companies and their managerial employees can learn a number of lessons which are helpful in addressing the issues of business sustainability. Present review study is noble in the sense that it is first of its kind qualitative investigation which explores the role of strategic leadership in promoting sustainable business development in business organisation's context. In a short way, an organisation can refer the below conceptual model to draw its plan for leadership development which is more centred to sustainable initiatives at their senior level of management (Strategic bench of leaders).

Vol. 12 Issue 9 (September 2026)
ISSN:2208-2190 Pages-114-121
DOI: https://doi.org/10.69980/q18r2c26

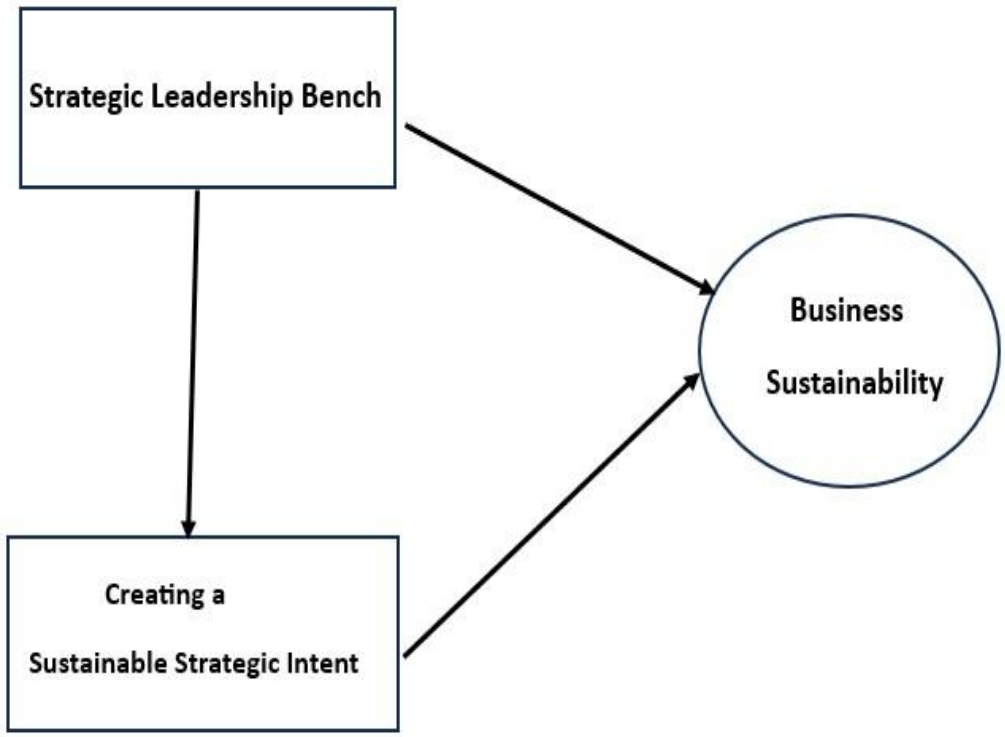


Figure: 01 Underlying Relationship between Strategic leadership and Business Sustainability
Source: Conceptual Diagram by the Researcher based on Review of Literature

9. Conclusion

This study is clearly exploring the latent dimensions of strategic leadership which is crucial in shaping corporate vision and mission of an organisation which ensures business sustainability through alignment of people working at the top ladder of their organisation. This conceptual work is an attempt to predictable role of strategic leaders in designing the sustainability outlook of an organisation. In this, it has been explored that having leaders with strategic mindsets and clarity will create profound intent of the organisation towards sustainable initiatives and as a result a highly sustainable business operations and outcomes will be achieved. This conceptual study explores that if, key leaders have sustainability into their agenda and policy making then they direct organisational policies and other stakeholders towards achievement of that environmental-friendly intent of the organisation. Study explores that researchers can measure critical factors linked to leadership styles and their influence on sustainability in business operations through collecting primary set of data. The limitation of this study is that it only offers leadership statements from five businesses only from secondary sources. Results might be more generalised if maximum corporate entities will be included under this study. Findings are useful as it is offering conceptual linkages on leadership

References

1. Agarwal, A. (2024, July 23). What Is Executive Leadership? - Definition, Meaning & Examples. Kapable Blog. https://kapable.club/blog/leadership/executive-leadership/
2. Avery, G. C., & Bergsteiner, H. (2011). Sustainable leadership: Honeybee and locust approaches. Routledge.
3. Bansal, P., & DesJardine, M. R. (2014). Business sustainability: It is about time. Strategic Organization, 12(1), 70-78.
4. Dyllick, T., & Muff, K. (2016). Clarifying the meaning of sustainable business. Organization & Environment, 29(2), 156-174.
5. Eccles, R. G., Ioannou, I., & Serafeim, G. (2014). The impact of corporate sustainability on organizational processes and performance. Management Science, 60(11), 2835-2857.
6. Gond, J.-P., Kang, N., & Moon, J. (2012). The government of self-regulation: On the comparative dynamics of corporate social responsibility. Economy and Society, 41(1), 41-68.

7. Hind, P., Wilson, A., & Lenssen, G. (2009). Developing leaders for sustainable business. Corporate Governance, 9(1), 7–20. https://doi.org/10.1108/14720700910936029
8. Hoffman, A. J. (2018). The next phase of business sustainability. Stanford Social Innovation Review, 16(2), 34-39.
9. Lubin, D. A., & Esty, D. C. (2010). The sustainability imperative. Harvard Business Review, 88(5), 42-50.
10. Metcalf, L., & Benn, S. (2013). Leadership for sustainability: An evolution of leadership ability. Journal of Business Ethics, 112(3), 369-384.
11. Pless, N. M., Maak, T., & Stahl, G. K. (2012). Promoting corporate social responsibility and sustainable development through management development. Journal of Business Ethics, 106(1), 1-16.
12. Porter, M. E., & Kramer, M. R. (2011). Creating shared value. Harvard Business Review, 89(1/2), 62-77.
13. Quinn, L., & Dalton, M. (2009). Leading for sustainability: implementing the tasks of leadership. Corporate Governance, 9(1), 21–38. https://doi.org/10.1108/14720700910936038
14. Theodore, J.D. (2014). The Necessity Of Strategic Leadership In Corporate Sustainability.
15. Visser, W., & Courtice, P. (2011). Sustainability leadership: Linking theory and practice. Social Responsibility Journal, 7(3), 314-330.
16. Walls, J. L., Salaiz, A., & Chiu, S. (2020). Wanted: Heroic leaders to drive the transition to "business beyond usual." Strategic Organization, 19(3), 494–512. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127020973379
17. Parekh, S. (2025). Infosys - ESG. https://www.infosys.com. Retrieved February 20, 2025, from https://www.infosys.com/about/esg.html
18. Spiliakos, A. (2018, October 10). What is sustainability in business? | hbs online. Business Insights Blog. https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/what-is-sustainability-in-business
19. ITC sustainability Report . (2024). Sustainability at itc. https://www.itcportal.com/sustainability/
20. Reliance industries limited – retail markets | telecom | petroleum refining & marketing | petrochemicals | hydrocarbon exploration & production | jio 4g | reliance shares. (2025). Reliance Industries Limited. Retrieved February 20, 2025, from http://www.ril.com/
21. Vittal, G. (2025). Airtel sustainability. https://www.airtel.in/sustainability-file/chairmans-statement
22. Sustainability Report and boundaries of reporting. (2024). Unilever. https://www.hul.co.in/sustainability/sustainability-reporting-centre/sustainability-report/
23. Subrahmanyam, S. (2025). Sustainability Leadership: Integrating Awareness and. Strategic Approaches to Mindful Leadership and Change Management, 349.
24. Murugan, M., & Prabadevi, M. N. (2025). Emotional Intelligence, Leadership, Governance and Management Strategy: Key Drivers of Business Sustainability in Engineering Services. Qubahan Academic Journal, 5(1), 318-333.
25. Nakra, N., & Kashyap, V. (2025). Responsible leadership and organizational sustainability performance: investigating the mediating role of sustainable HRM. International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management, 74(2), 409-426.
26. De Vasconcelos Gomes, L. A., Chaparro, X. a. F., Maniçoba, R. F., Borini, F. M., & Silva, L. E. (2024). Transformation of the governance of failure for radical innovation: The role of strategic leaders. Research Policy, 54(1), 105108. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2024.105108
27. Hitt, M. A., & Duane, R. (2002). The essence of strategic leadership: Managing human and social capital. Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 9(1), 3-14.
28. Kraft, P. S., Dickler, T. A., & Withers, M. C. (2025). When do firms benefit from overconfident CEOs? The role of board expertise and power for technological breakthrough innovation. Strategic Management Journal, 46(2), 381-410.
29. Bansal, P., & DesJardine, M. R. (2014). Business sustainability: It is about time. Strategic organization, 12(1), 70-78.
30. Visser, W., & Courtice, P. (2011). Sustainability Leadership: Linking theory and practice. SSRN Electronic Journal. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1947221
31. Murari, K., & Mukherjee, U. (2021). Role of authentic transformational leadership for managerial excellence and sustainability. Psychology and Education, 58(4), 3612-3628.
32. Popescu, C. R. G. (2022). Fostering creativity in business: Empowering strong transformational leaders. In Handbook of Research on Changing Dynamics in Responsible and Sustainable Business in the Post-COVID-19 Era (pp. 349-381). IGI Global Scientific Publishing.
33. Giergia, D. (2025). Transformational Leadership: Where Is It Going?. In Creativity 360 Degrees: Exploring the Dynamics of the Creative Industries in Southeast Europe (pp. 163-173). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Vol. 12 Issue 9 (September 2026)
ISSN:2208-2190 Pages-114-121
DOI: https://doi.org/10.69980/q18r2c26

34. Hörisch, J., Schaltegger, S., & Freeman, R. E. (2020). Integrating stakeholder theory and sustainability accounting: A conceptual synthesis. Journal of Cleaner Production, 275, 124097.
35. Freeman, R. E., Dmytriyev, S. D., & Phillips, R. A. (2021). Stakeholder theory and the resource-based view of the firm. Journal of management, 47(7), 1757-1770.
36. Lenka, U., & Tiwari, B. (2016). Achieving triple "P" bottom line through resonant leadership: an Indian perspective. International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management, 65(5), 694-703.
37. Fry, L. W., & Nisiewicz, M. S. (2020). Maximizing the triple bottom line through spiritual leadership. Stanford University Press.