WORKING MODEL FOR ESTABLISHMENT AND VALIDATION OF SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP IMAGE FOR INDIVIDUAL POSITIONING IN THE UNIVERSITY INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT THROUGH CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS APPROACHES

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Abstract

Nowadays, the topic about leadership, sustainable leadership practices, new educational models, bringing up bright young people with sufficient knowledge, skills, competences, appropriate approach to problem solving, information and communication management and understanding of the globalizing world, the information environment and the multicultural perceptions, attitudes and values of people in general is definitely considered up-to-date and a subject of great importance.

The theme of preserving peoples identity, cultural traditions and values is considered is widely discussed, especially, in the light of the influx of various influences and the consequent changes in public attitudes and values are particularly discussed. In the constantly changing dynamic environment, in the individuals professional and personal life, educational models based on the principles learning-by-doing and applying best practices play an essential role for creating and developing leadership qualities, integrity, identity, sustainable values, moral and ethical norms of every society. Of course, the so-called background, mentality, family environment, home upbringing, the environment in which the individual is formed, exists and develops: education, career development, working environment, social status, ethnic identity, religion, political, social, etc. are a significant part of the above mentioned thesis, as well as the views and affiliations, the desired image that a person aims to create and present to his/her personal or professional environment and to the society.

The current paper is an attempt to explore and analyse the ways and means to establish, validate and apply a sustainable leadership image for individual positioning in the university information environment through corporate communications approaches.

Keywords: Image, Leadership, University Information Environment, Education, Sustainable Image, and Corporate Communications.

1 INTRODUCTION

‘It is not the most intellectual of the species that survives; it is not the strongest that survives; but the species that survives is the one that is able to adapt to and to adjust best to the changing environment in which it finds itself’…… [Charles Darwin, ‘Origin of Species’]

In the drastically changing modern globalizing world, where the principles of adaptability and tolerance play a major part in the development of the society and the positioning of the individual in the society, the topic about leadership, sustainable leadership practices, new educational models, bringing up bright young people with sufficient knowledge, skills, competences, appropriate approach to problem solving, information and communication management and understanding of the world development processes, the information environment and the multicultural perceptions, attitudes and values of people in general is definitely considered up-to-date and a subject of great importance. Of course the concept about being a leader in the contemporary world is subject to the principle of adaptability, since only the ‘one that is able to adapt to and to adjust best to the changing environment’ [6] will be able to affirm him/herself in the constantly changing and evolving environment.

What better way to observe the process of acquiring the above-mentioned knowledge, skills and competences, than to conducted the attempted research in a contemporary university information environment?

Of course, the process of forming an individual, followed by forming a perception of self and an image, that is to be viewed by others as a complete fulfilled member of the society (respectively/possibly a leader) starts at an earlier stage. One of the known formal definition of the term individual is a single person or thing, especially when compared to the group or set to which they belong, being, unit. Each
representative of the human race is a human individual, a complete representative of its kind. Its social interaction with other individuals is mediated through language, without the necessary goods, the individual will not be able to exist.

Unnecessary to explain, no human can satisfy all his needs by himself. Its existence is possible only in the community, as the production of material and other goods is realized only in the conditions of collective activity. The formation and the development of the individual is carried out through the communities following the rules they have created. Each community imposes a specific type of communication, relations and dependency/co-dependency on it. Collectivity is a leading prerequisite for the existence of the individual within the community. The genesis of the ethno-social organism is grading from tribe to people, from people to nation; and in the present to globalizing information society, in which the individuals develop, form their identity and build their image in a rather dynamic conditions, influenced by various factors.

As members of a certain nation, preserving our identity and cultural traditions is considered very important and is widely discussed, especially, in the light of the influx of foreign influences, the consequent changes in public attitudes and values and the much necessary tolerance. Tolerance in the sense of acceptance of the difference.

An essential role for creating identity, human system of values, and the moral and ethical norms of every society, plays the so-called background, mentality, family environment, home upbringing, the environment in which the individual is formed, exists and develops: education, career development, working environment, social status, ethnic identity, religion, political, social, etc. views and affiliations, the desired image that a person aims to create and present to his / her loved ones and to the society, as well as the knowledge of the history, traditions and cultural peculiarities of the respective state and / or nation.

All of the above listed factors are of particular importance to the perception of the world, the personal development, the self-determination, and the formation of an understanding of life in general.

In a purely human life plan, the assessment of the proper adherence to the established traditions, norms, values, opinions and attitudes, and the extent to which point, foreign influences should be comprehended and accepted, is usually a matter of personal choice.

The dynamic social, technical and technological, technologies development, requires from the individuals from different social groups and from the different societies to keep up with the latest perceptions, trends and influences and to be able to form an adequate attitude and perception to the changing world.

This process of adaptation is possible only by apprehending the political (state policy, legislation), socio-cultural, technological, technical, human factors, as well as the needs, motivation, social expectations, demographic characteristics: the dynamics of the human population - the processes of population growth - natural and mechanical (birth, death, reproduction, migration, age) quality of life, etc.

Contemporary society demands from its members to set aside differences and work in direction of creating leaders and the establishment of sustainable leadership models.

The Leadership topic is a subject approached by many researchers in different scientific disciplines. There are multiple definitions of leadership, as well as various leadership theories. Philosophy, psychology, political science, sociology, biology, organizational theory, economics are among the theoretical foundations on which leadership emerges as a separate interdisciplinary field. Many classifications and typologies of theories of leadership can be found, depending on the approach.

For the purposes of the general orientation in the text, we are to use the following summarised definitions:

A leader is considered to be a person, holding a dominant or superior position, throughout the appropriate knowledge, personal and professional skills and competences, within his/her operational field, who is able to exercise a high degree of control and/or influence over other individuals and possesses the unique ability to inspire them, to make them feel like their interests are protected, that their opinion is taken into account, that they are put first; to motivate a team to rally around a cause, and to guide by example (interpretation of [32] and [53]).

A person is considered a leader if he/she is good at decision making, especially in difficult situations (when there is a necessity of a sound judgement, fast reaction, efficient and effective decisions), creating
and articulating clear vision, able to communicate and establish achievable goals, as well as to provide his/her followers with the knowledge and tools necessary to achieve those goals.

An effective leader should possess characteristics and basic traits such as: self-confidence, strong communication and management skills, creative and innovative thinking, perseverance in the face of failure, willingness to take risks, openness to change, and levelheadedness and reactiveness in times of crisis, charisma (personal and professional qualities, rhetorical skills, an image corresponding to people’s perceptions, attitudes, values and the established sustainable norms, defined by the dynamics of democratic processes in the social system); the ability to implant his ideas through inspiration, individuality, etc.

In the context of corporate communications, the use of all modern theoretical, practical, technical, technological and cutting-edge means to achieve the improvement of the sustainable public image that contributes to establishment of good relations and the development of communication-information strategies for influencing audiences is a quite popular approach.

The task of corporate communications in the context of the current research is to determine the mediation of the communication and information process in all spheres of social activity through specific means, channels and models. In the context of globalization and the modern information society, it is crucial to communicate and exploit the corporate communications in the right manner, in order to achieve a more reliable public image, resulting in beneficial positioning of the individual in the information environment and ensuring effective and efficient interaction.

The up-to-date nature of the study is driven by the emerging necessity for universities to find new approaches to permanently enhancing their benefits by improving the educational process and using the corporate communications to respond to the growing challenges of the new environment in which they conduct their research and learning activities.

Usually the evaluation and the university ranking is based on the positioning of the university in the public space. Moreover, what better assessment than the graduates and the alumni who assert themselves as capable successful knowledgeable specialists influencing the environment they reside in.

As already noted the concept for sustainable leadership model is often difficult to understand

It is a challenge for today’s organisations to define it to be able to measure it. According to the management specialist Tom Peters (1989) leadership is about “discovering the passion, persistence and imagination to get results, to be able to find the Wow factor and to be able to think the weird thoughts necessary to learn and thrive in a disruptive age” and the “leader is someone who can craft a vision and inspire people to act collectively to make it happen, responding to whatever changes and challenges arise along the way.’ In their research the specialists from the University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership define the sustainable leadership as a leadership of someone who inspires and supports action towards a better world.” [26]

In the drastically changing world where appearance, assertive behaviour and presentation tends to take more and more space and gain an important place, the topic for sustainability leadership and sustainable leadership model is a guarantee that at the end of the day there is more to placing oneself in a flattering position and creating the right image, than only the correct presentation skills and the skill of keeping appearances. The individual must indeed acquire sufficient knowledge in corporate communication theories, leadership theories, behavioural sciences, organizational psychology, and organizational culture, to enrich his/her general culture in order to develop leadership skills, competences and qualities, to succeed in creating a socially positive image and to beneficially position him/herself in the information environment.

2 METHODOLOGY

The organization of the research combines the traditional sequence of scientific methodology, observation in real environment, analysis synthesis and formulation of conclusions. In the course of the research detailed literary review, theoretical and corporate communication methods along with the main concept of modern leadership are complementing each other in building the overall structure.

The main approaches determining the dynamics of the research are: review of the latest developments in corporate communications; research, analysis and synthesis of information resources, data and document collections; presentation of the results and their application in the context of the topic under consideration.
The methodology used in the development of the study both theoretical and empirical (analysis, synthesis, comparison, classification, method of qualitative assessments) is selected, in order to provide not only theoretical, but a practical application of the results and include the following:

- Review of the state of the art of the existing situation from communication-information aspect, and the latest publications and research in the field of sustainable leadership and corporate communications;
- Systematization of the gathered information to obtain a more complete and varied picture of the current state;
- Case study - observing processes from the daily life of in higher education university information environment (the observations have been made during the educational and training process in several Bulgarian Universities including the State University of Library Studies and Information Technologies);
- Informal semi-standardized interview with employees and students on the topic of: Sustainable Leadership, Positioning of the individual in working and studying environment, The importance of education and the academic information environment for the formation of future leaders and development of the suitable skills, competences and qualities, The application of the corporate communications for creating an image;
- Analysis and summary of the empirical material, gathered from the interviews;

In addition, the research team has used the Cambridge Sustainability Leadership Model [51] to present the importance of its concept, especially when referring to education young specialists and making sure to provide them with the required information and use the right teaching methods to inspire the forming of leadership qualities in them.

*Cambridge Sustainability Leadership Model*

![Cambridge Sustainability Leadership Model](image)

*Figure 1. Cambridge Sustainability Leadership Model.*
One of the main reasons for intensifying attention to corporate communications and communication and information issues to use them as means for establishing and validating a leadership model and creating and individual’s image to beneficially position him/herself in an information environment can be found in the objectives of the European Union: to improve the quality of the information environment, to rationalize social relations and to build a competitive information society. It should be based on knowledge and communication as a means of controlling the quality of information, aimed at overcoming various situations and forming optimal compilation in the control and use of information.

Universities exist in a dynamic and changing communication, information and social environment, which requires continuous adaptation. Essential in this process is the human factor as the main driving force, resource of the organization and the invisible values that organizations possess, namely - corporate culture, organizational and corporate identity, united through organizational communications.

The communications of each organization are essential to enhancing the motivation of members of the organization by helping them understand both their work and their specific role in implementing this policy. Achieved organizational identity and identification with the organization is a key factor for effective and efficient information and communication provision of the work process at the interinstitutional, interinstitutional, national and European level.

The significance of the study is determined by the fact that the use of the theoretical formulations of corporate communications for the design of a conceptual model for improving communication in the information environment and using the sustainability leadership along with the suitable communication and information strategy will create favourable conditions for the development not only of these institutions, but set an example to the users of the educational and training services.

3 RESULTS

The present study is focused on the application of the already existing sustainable leadership model in the development of personal image of the individual (in this case of the students and or staff at the State University of Library Studies and Information Technologies) in university information environment.

Using the structure of the sustainable leadership model, the concept of the leadership potential and the methodology of the corporate communication in the context of image-making, the research team unites around the idea that the leadership potential can be developed gradually, taking into account individual tendencies, peculiarities and abilities, of each person/student. Including of know-how and best-practices from leadership and communication fields in the study programmes will assist with acquiring a set of communication, organizational, instrumental and communication competences and skills (i.e. the ability to motivate others, the inspirational speaking, rhetoric, etc.).

The results of the study have been based on the case-studies and the surveys amongst the students at the State University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (SULSIT) - Sofia, Bulgaria, conducted in the framework of the scientific project ‘Conceptual model for generating image-based trust and leadership positions in university information environment’, implemented with the financial support of the Bulgarian Science Fund to the Ministry of Education and Science.

Incorporating the idea for the development of a beneficial image and positioning of the individual in the information environment throughout sustainable leadership models and validating it through using test subjects – students from the Communication specialities in SULSIT confirms the ability to use the corporate communications techniques to building a new contemporary leadership model.

Instead of relying on the traditional approaches of the transaction leadership: incentive versus punishment, sustainable leadership models rely more on the features of transformational leadership, namely, to motivate and include others to a moral common goal.

In the modern society, we live in the concept of creating and developing our individual image, presenting ourselves in a flattering light and taking favourable position in everyday personal and professional life becomes a key factor to our overall perception of our own value and success, our importance and the relevance of our way of life/lifestyle to the world itself. For successful realization of the students in their future career path, it is necessary to master the fundamental knowledge, to develop the skills and competences required to meet the challenges of the information society and the globalizing world.

The individual leadership potential is the ability to professionally use the communicative and organizational experience of problem solving, (especially when unconventional situations occur) and to ensure the continuous personal growth of all individuals in the team.
The need to develop and validate a socially acceptable positive image and position oneself as a competent, reliable, adequate, well-informed individual in work and social environment can be facilitated by the opportunities, provided in a specially organized educational university information environment, namely by creating and stimulating pedagogical situations aimed at adapting social roles and behavioral patterns, gaining socially and personally significant communication experience during the education and training process.

The exploitation of the theme for the leadership in the education and training and in the learning process, and the great interest that it poses in today's young people, proves that the teaching and 'learning of leadership' is not 'an art of the impossible' [46], [48]. In the modern environment, the acquisition of leadership skills is of great importance for any situation, in which people have deal with complex situations and that require valid problem solving abilities. By acquainting the basic principles of the theory of leadership, the methods and approaches of corporate communications, the rules for building a desired vision and maintaining a good image the students, in the modern university information environment receive access to the right tools for linking the leadership theory with the behavioural attitudes of the person; they learn to cultivate leadership skills and apply the knowledge gained from studying the variety of the leadership patterns and situations in the performance of each individual's activity regardless of his / her life status, and enables students to form the right set of behavioural responses needed to change opinions and attitudes of their opponents by implementing the sustainable leadership model, knowledge and use of corporate communications approaches and convincing communication. Following the working model for sustainable leadership image for individual positioning in the university information environment through corporate communications approaches the current knowledge and the accumulated experience of situational games of the students becomes the skills they will apply in the professional environment, in the family, among the friends, in the community, in the opponents and in the society, with which to win the others like-minded, instead of using instructions and coercion.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we can summarize that using the theoretical principles of the corporate communications, we can create a Working Conceptual Model for Establishment and Validation of Sustainable Leadership Image for Individual Positioning in the University Information Environment that can be applicable to other higher educational institutions and allowing its implementations can be a trigger for stimulating the knowledge flow and know-how exchange and a prerequisite for the emergence of new ideas, creating a spirit of mutual learning.

In today’s globalizing yet divvied modern world, it is possible for people to establish good and correct relations, using sustainable leadership models, based on mutual understanding, shared values, and shared development, in the spirit of mutual benefit, tolerance, respect and harmony for creating a better future.

The leader in the modern society should be a collective image of a competent, knowledgeable, respected, authoritative, recognized, trustworthy and trustworthy individual, transparent in terms of his/her aims and intentions, possessing the necessary potential and know-how, the professional and personal skills and competences - a desirable partner in implementing various initiatives, activities, and project.

The University role will be to create and/or provide the necessary and sufficient conditions, the qualified academic and administrative staff and the suitable study programmes opening new horizons to the comprehension and the adoption of the worldly attitudes and values, while preserving the history and traditions, at the same time, ensuring the natural building of relations between different cultures, and providing possibilities for exchange of best practices, traditions and knowledge on various issues, while ensuring the quality of education and science and promoting shared values and goals for the sustainable development, the improving of social conditions, the establishing of strategic cooperation and promoting the benefits from the free movement of capital, technology and people, and building a spirit of interaction, mutual assistance and mutual respect maintaining corporate vision for achievement of greater recognition and good reputation.

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