THE LEADER'S BEHAVIORAL APPROACH TO BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY
A CASE STUDY: EGYPTIAN SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

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In order to understand drivers and barriers to sustainability-focused business in Egypt, we need to look at leader attributes, it is suggested that in the Egyptian context, if a small firm is going to take an interest in Plant, People and Profit (PPP), it must be leader-led and leader-influenced. This leader, especially in the context of an SME, will make the strategic choices affecting the firm. The purpose of this research is to develop conceptual understanding of the leader attributes (characteristics and/or competencies) that (it is proposed) can support a business focused on a sustainable attitude to the environment for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) companies in Egypt.

KEY WORDS: Sustainability, Leadership,Leadership Style, Culture, Organizational Culture, SMEs

INTRODUCTION

The concept of sustainable business is relatively new. In 1987, the Brundt land Commission coined the phrase *sustainable development*, defining it as a development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Goldemberg, 2007, p. 808). This concept was highlighted during the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. Since this summit, organizations worldwide have adopted practices for sustainable development, economies, and societies (Stoughton and Ludema, 2012). These practices converge around a concern for the environment, economic growth and the development of the world's poor (Stern, 2007).

According to Pearce et al., (2013) sustainability is gaining increasing importance in the organizational context. For example, Gitsham et al., 2009; McWilliams and Siegel, 2001; Matten and Moon, 2005; Pava and Kruausz, 1996; United Nations Global Compact and Accenture, 2010. "We define sustainability as organizational approaches aimed at achieving a balance between short-term organizational goals and long-term enterprise and social responsibility" (Pearce et al., 2013).

The following sections aim to provide a better understanding of the leader's behavioural approach to business sustainability concept in the organizational context, as well as the relationship between business and the environment in context of that concept, and in addition, attempt to highlight the issue and probable solutions concerning the disparity between business profitability and the existence of the sustainability leader in the Small and Medium Enterprises and the organizational financial results.

2.LEADERS AND BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY

1.The leader's behavioral approach to business sustainability

The sample used by Loewe et al., (2013) in their study was 102 SMEs which were all used for the qualitative analysis. The participants in the sample were asked about the main factors of SME upgrading in Egypt and the main reasons for differences in SME upgrading cases in Egypt. Figure 1 below shows that the highest two factors pertain to company leader/owner attributes. This highlights the weight leaders in Egypt have in controlling companies and the direction they take, their growth and changes.
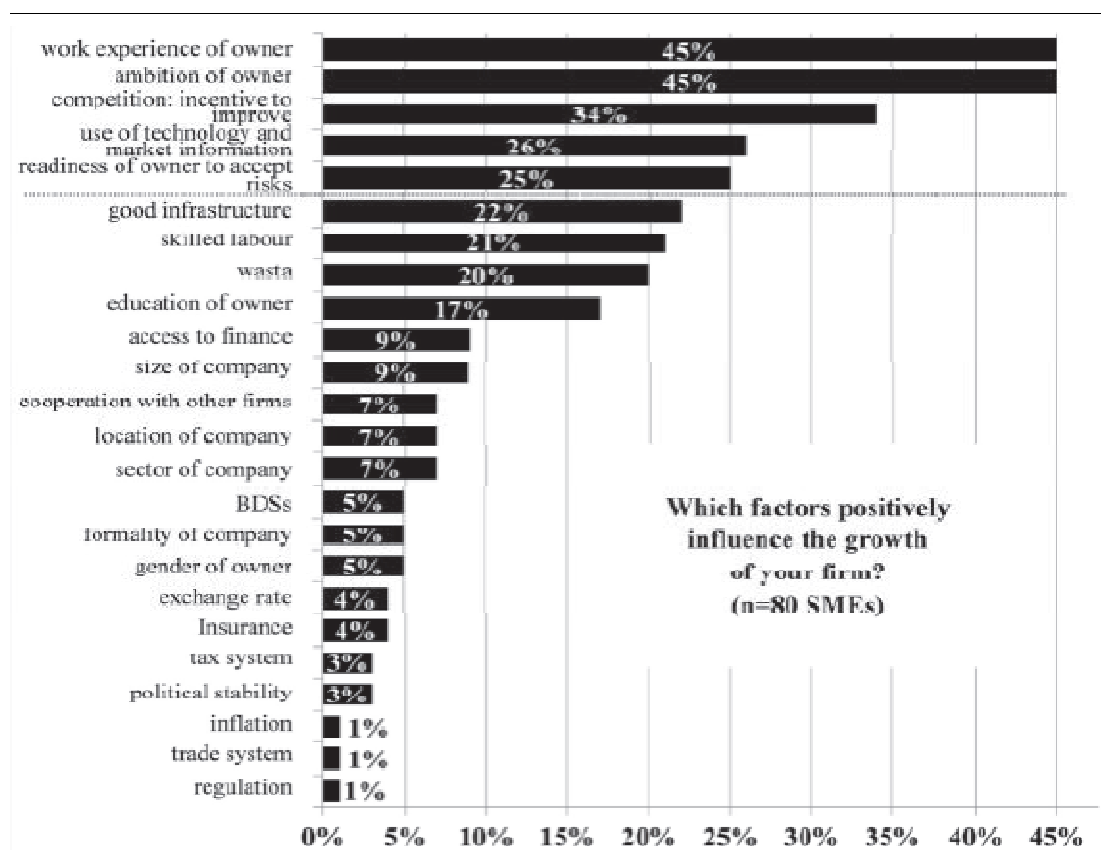
Figure 1. Main reasons for differences in SME upgrading ease in Egypt.

Figure 1. Main reasons for differences in SME upgrading ease in Egypt. Adapted from "Which factors determine the upgrading of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)? The case of Egypt." By Loewe, M., Al-Ayouty, I., Altpeter, A., Borbein, L., Chantelauze, M., Kern, M., and Reda, M. (2013).

Moreover, culture is suggested to add more weight to leaders in Egyptian companies, especially company owners and top management, which is what is understood by leaders in this research. Parnell and Hatem (1999) highlight that in Arab nations the power distance cultural dimension (Hofstede, 1980) characterizes the powerful role of being in a superior position, such as a leader (company owner, president in charge, CEO). Due to this power distance cultural dimension, the opinions of someone in a position of higher authority are accepted by default. In such cultures superiors and those working in subordinate positions are never considered equal and subordinates are always expected to follow orders and be told what to do.

In their own words, Parnell and Hatem (1999) emphasize the role of power distance: In high power index countries like Egypt, employees are frequently afraid to disagree with their superiors, who are often seen as autocratic or paternalistic. That highlights the role of leaders concerning business sustainability since leaders, owners and top managers, have a great influence and undeniable power in shaping company strategies and their implementation. This leads this research to focus on leaders as a main influence for the implementation of business sustainability strategies and processes by virtue of their significant role, power and control as highlighted above.

2.Leadership styles and theories

The research argues that in order to adequately understand a given leader's attributes, these should be examined in terms of a specific structural context across cultures (Elsaid and Elsaid, 2012). Thus, there is a growing need for understanding the way in which leadership is enacted in various cultures .
Culture influences people of a certain region leading to behavioral norms that not only affect people on an individual level but rather impacts the interrelations among them. In this study the researcher explores how culture might shape or influence the leader as well as the interrelation between the leader and his subordinates.
Minkov and Hofstede (2011) list four distinctive cultural dimensions:

- Power distance: Social inequality, including the relationship with authority.

- Individualism-collectivism: The relationship between the individual and the group.
- Masculinity-femininity: The social implications of having been born as a boy or a girl. (Later editions of the book replaced the word "social" using the word "emotional" instead).
- Uncertainty avoidance: Ways of dealing with uncertainty, relating to the control of aggression and the expression of emotions. (Later editions of the book refer to "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations").Later pragmatism and indulgence were added to the original dimensions and are defined as follows:
- Pragmatism: "This dimension describes how every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future" (Hofstede, 2014)
- Indulgence: "This dimension is defined as the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses" (Hofstede, 2014).

Power distance, individualism and pragmatism especially in SMEs where the manager/owner and employees interact more than in large firms (Parnell and Hatem, 1999) are of particular interest to the Egyptian context. This is particularly relevant to leaders in companies and how the relation with subordinates can be shaped. Moreover Parnell and Hatem (1999) remark that in Egypt SMEs have less formal rules as opposed to other countries and that mainly leaders/owners determine the rules to achieve the firm's goals.
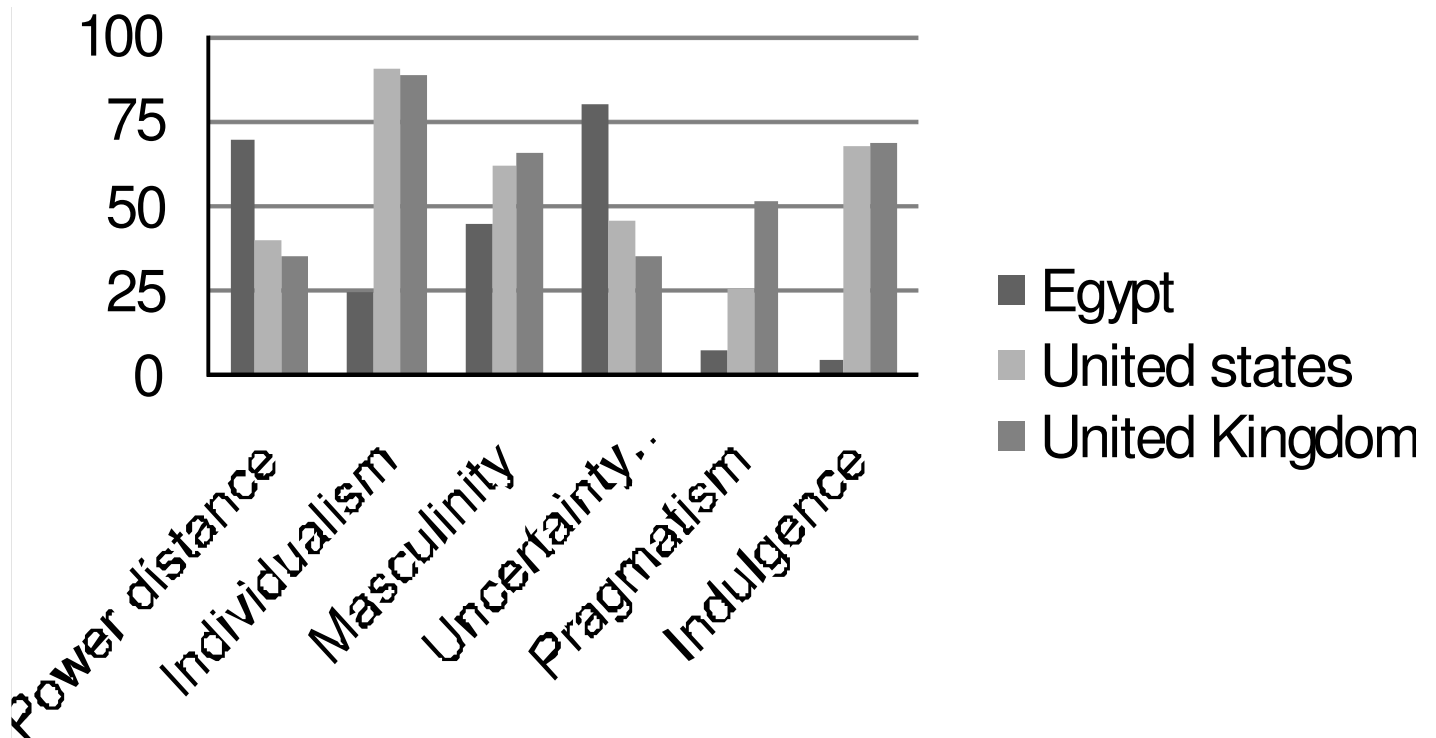

Figure 2. Egypt in comparison with the United States and United Kingdom in a cultural context. Source: (Hofstede, 2014).

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El-Kot and Leat, (2005) cite a classification done by Hofstede (1980) concerning Arab speaking countries, including Egypt, that demonstrate such countries as having high power distance and low individualism. Moreover Hofstede (2014) classifies Egypt as low in pragmatism. Figure 5 illustrates the above in detail. These dimensions are of particular interest to this research. They interrelate in such a way that shows the importance of leaders when shaping their companies' strategies. This has been further explained where the researcher discussed power distance, referred to as the acceptance of inequality as the norm.

This section adds more insight on the role of the leader and his/her relation with subordinates by including the effect of dimensions such as individualism and pragmatism and their interaction with the power distance dimension.

As figure 2 shows, Egypt tends towards being a culture of collectivism, as opposed to individualism, and a culture of very low pragmatism. Collectivists tend to give more importance to group interests than individual interests where they tend as well to view themselves as part of a bigger family (Blodgett et al., 2008). This is therefore a significant factor in the Egyptian culture and combining this with what the power distance dimension refers to leads us to believe that

leaders, owners and top management in this research, tend to have more influence and control on company strategies and control more than the power distance dimension alone suggests.

As mentioned above, pragmatism refers to maintaining some links with the past (Hofstede, 2014). Cultures with low pragmatism such as the Egyptian culture, exhibit great respect for traditions demanding unquestionable compliance and respect for the superiors in rank or the elderly. Being a religious country, both Muslims and Christians, who make up the totality of Egyptians, treat higher powers with reverence and high respect. Combined with power distance and collectivism, it can be easily suggested that leaders in Egyptian companies, especially in small and medium ones, should be the focus of this research if a significant contribution is to be nurtured when we focus on business sustainability in SMEs in Egypt.

This section lists different historical theories mentioned in the literature reviewed and illustrated in table 1 below concerning leadership in general as a necessary introductory step towards better understanding the sustainability leader in particular.

Table 1. Brief Overview of Leadership Theories, from 'Great Man' to 'Complexity' Leadership.

Great man theories. The great man theory evolved around the mid-19th century (1840).	Based on the belief that leaders are exceptional people, born with innate qualities, destined to lead. The use of the term 'man' was intentional since until the latter part of the twentieth century leadership was thought of as a concept which is primarily male, military and Western. This led to the next school of Trait Theories.
Trait Theories (1930s-1940s).	The lists of traits or qualities associated with leadership exist in abundance and continue to be produced. They draw on virtually all the adjectives in the dictionary which describe some positive or virtuous human attribute, from ambition to zest for life.
Behaviorist theories (1940s-1950s).	These concentrate on what leaders actually do rather than on their qualities. Different patterns of behavior are observed and categorized as 'styles of leadership'. This area has probably attracted most attention from practicing managers.
Situational leadership theory (1960s).	Situational: This approach sees leadership as specific to the situation in which it is being exercised. For example, whilst some situations may require an autocratic style, others may need a more participative approach. It also proposes that there may be differences in required leadership styles at different levels in the same organization
Contingency theory. Proposed in 1967 by Fred Fiedler.	This is a refinement of the situational viewpoint and focuses on identifying the situational variables which best predict the most appropriate or effective leadership style to fit the particular circumstances
Substitutes for leadership theory. First developed by Steven Kerr and John M. Jermier in 1978.	In some circumstances, leadership is not needed or its importance is minimized.
Charismatic leadership theory (early 1980s).	Leaders have a divinely inspired gift (charisma) that inspires followers via special relationships.
Transactional theory (1960s).	This approach emphasizes the importance of the relationship between leader and followers, focusing on the mutual benefits derived from a form of 'contract' through which the leader delivers such things as rewards or recognition in return for the commitment or loyalty of the followers

Continuation of **Table 1**

Transformational theory. The term transformational leadership was first coined by J.V. Downton in "Rebel Leadership: Commitment and Charisma in a Revolutionary Process" (1973). James MacGregor Burns first introduced the concept of transformational leadership in his book "Leadership" (1978).	The central concept here is change and the role of leadership in envisioning and implementing the transformation of organizational performance
Distributed leadership theory. Grom (2000) cites Gibb (1954) as the first author to refer explicitly to distributed leadership theory. He proposes that "leadership is probably best conceived as a group quality, as a set of functions which must be carried out by the group" (Bolden, 2011).	Leadership is a process that occurs in groups and involves many leaders.
Shared leadership (Pearce AND Conger, 2003).	Described as "a more robust, flexible and dynamic leadership infrastructure." Though a relatively new concept in organizational literature, shared leadership has recently became the subject of several serious and rigorous studies.
Complexity leadership theory. First mentioned in the Journal Emergence: Complexity and Organization. Issue 8.4, 2006.	Leadership in complex systems is an emergent phenomenon that is an outcome of interactions between many people

Table 1. Brief Overview of Leadership Theories, from 'Great Man' to 'Complexity' Leadership. Adapted from "The role of leadership for environment and sustainability. Perspectives on environment and sustainability" by Taylor, 2011.

According to Taylor, (2011) transformational leadership theory is still the dominant leadership theory, but it is better to use several theories to help understand an aspect of leadership. Some theories are nevertheless more useful in different context such as the complexity leadership theory for environmental leadership. Distributed leadership has become a popular leadership theory whereby leadership is conceived of as a collective social process emerging through the interactions of multiple actors (Fitzsimons, James and Denyer, 2011). From this perspective, distributed leadership is not something done by an individual to others; it is a group activity, rather than individual action. Bolden (2011) asserts that besides the notion or approach of *distributed leadership* there are other notions as well that help reframe how we understand group leadership. The notion of *shared leadership* has also been in use for some time as have those of *collective leadership, collaborative leadership, co-leadership and emergent leadership*. The common factor across all these accounts is the idea that leadership is not the monopoly or responsibility of just one person, with each suggesting a similar need for a more collective and systemic understanding of leadership as a social process (Fitzsimons et al., 2011).The above suggests that the *distributed leadership* concept is useful in supporting business sustainability, and though the researcher acknowledges Badaracco's, (2001) representation of leadership which encourages a shift in focus from the attributes and behaviors of individual leaders to group leaders (a more systemic perspective), yet, due to the newness of the sustainability concept in Egyptian companies, and in SMEs in particular, the researcher suggests that this study should focus on attributes of individual sustainability leaders as an important antecedent to the notion of group leadership. Group leadership, in the context of sustainability, might be a mature concept and practice in western cultures yet not as mature in Middle Eastern cultures, or particularly in Egypt. That is an important reason why this research focused on individual attributes rather than on group dynamics. It is very logical to think of group leadership and dynamics as based on individual persons with leaders' attributes or traits that interact together and play a very important role to initiate and maintain any useful organizational change.

Individual leaders who present their vision and ideas in a social and participative manner are in fact sharing and socializing their vision rather than imposing or forcing it, hence, developing something like a shared cause that ignites passion and drives collective action and behavior all through the organization (Dutra et al., 2011). They further add that such leaders can easily influence, gather and drive people for higher and sustainable achievements around the core purpose of the organization.

Attributes of individual leaders that may determine successful business sustainability are discussed in the following section.

3.Sustainability leader attributes

According to Visser and Courtice, (2011) between the 1920s and 1960s researchers tried to find some traits as the basis of successful leadership. According to Zaccaro, Kemp and Bader (2004) the first empirical study of leadership, examining the qualities that differentiated leaders from non-leaders produced by Terman, (1904) reported such attributes as verbal fluency, intelligence, low emotionality, daring, congeniality, goodness, as well as liveliness as a special attribute characterizing youthful leaders. Moreover there are similar studies burgeoned after Terman's (see Stogdill, 1948). "These studies formed the initial empirical backdrop for trait research" (Zaccaro et al, 2004, p. 102). The average person who occupies a position of leadership exceeds the average member of his group in the following respects: (i) sociability, (ii) initiative, (iii) persistence, (iv) knowing how to get things done, (v) self-confidence, (vi) alertness to, and insight into situations, (vii) cooperativeness, (viii) popularity, (ix) adaptability, and (x) verbal facility (ibid). Zaccaro et al., (2004) categorized different leader attributes to differentiate attributes (cognitive abilities, personality and motivation values) and proximal attributes (social appraisal skills, problem solving skills and expertise/tacit knowledge). Further supporting this categorization, an empirical summary of leader attributes specified five different categories of attributes as follows: (a) cognitive abilities, (b) personality, (c) motivation, (d) social appraisal and interpersonal skills, (e) leader expertise and tacit knowledge (Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs and Fleishman, 2000).

Attributes of leaders in implementing sustainability and enhancing the level of sustainability in organizations was neglected in numerous studies (Metcalf and Benn, 2013; Waldman and Siegel, 2008). However, there are studies that tried to find a relationship between leader characteristics and sustainability in organizations (Angus-Leppan, Metcalf, and Benn, 2010; Metcalf and Benn, 2013; Waldman and Siegel, 2008). Although the theory in general is available, this is mainly focused in the Western culture and there is a lack of studies and development of theories regarding sustainability leadership in Middle Eastern societies. Thus, this research aims at discovering attributes of sustainability leaders in a context where there are no previous studies regarding sustainability leadership therefore addressing an important gap in the literature. Table 3 summarizes findings from different studies that tried to find a relationship between leaders' characteristics and attributes and sustainability in organizations.

Table 2. Brief overview of sustainability leader attributes.

Sustainability leader competencies: A grounded theory study (Schwalb, 2011).	This study has looked at leaders traits/qualities/characteristics/competencies, Finding: Grounded theory model of sustainability leader competencies. Five core dimensions of leader competencies resulted from participant reports: (a) knowledge, (b) skills, (c) style, (d) method, and (e) mission-critical. a) Knowledge: Knowledge in areas of business, economics, markets, human behavior, decision processes, and community life were viewed as fundamental to those who would lead a sustainability initiative or organization. b) Skills: Communication, dealing with ambiguity, building and maintaining relationships, dealing with complexity, project management, and conflict resolution are examples of skills deemed important to be learned and developed. c) Style: Style refers to leadership style, which describes the behavior of a leader. Northouse (2010) says the style focuses exclusively on what leaders do and how they act. d) Method: Method has to do with "how" an individual should lead. e) Mission-Critical: Dutra et al., (2011) describe mission-critical competencies as having the ability to see multiple futures. In this study, qualities of sustainability leaders were limited to business leaders. Findings from the study may not be generalizable to leaders of other types of organizations with other cultures.

Continuation of **Table 2**

Sustainability leadership: Linking theory and practice "Cambridge Sustainability Leadership Model" (Visser AND Courtice, 2011)	This research was concerned in locating sustainability within the leadership literature, defining the concept of sustainability leadership, and presenting a model of sustainability leadership in practice. The model presents insights on sustainability leadership in three areas: Context, individual characteristics, and actions. The individual characteristics are: a) Caring / morally-driven: are for the well-being of humanity and all other forms of life, as well as being guided by a moral compass. b) Systemic / holistic thinker: The ability to appreciate the interconnectedness and interdependency of the whole system, at all levels, and to recognize how changes to parts of the system affect the whole. c) Enquiring / open-minded : Actively seeking new knowledge and diverse opinions, questioning received wisdom, including being willing to have one's own opinions challenged d) Self-aware / empathetic : High levels of emotional intelligence, (the ability to understand their own emotions and those of others), sincerity, personal humility and reflexiveness (the ability to see their own place in and influence on a situation) e) Visionary / courageous: Bringing inspiration, creativity, optimism and courage to bear in the role, driven to produce results and possessing the ability to balance passion and idealism with ambition and pragmatism.
Sustainability managers or rogue mid-managers? A typology of corporate sustainability managers (Tang et.al, 2011)	This study demonstrates that deeper investigation into corporate sustainability at the level of the individual gives us a more holistic view of sustainability management and a broader vision of why it is important. Findings: It identifies four categories of sustainability managers: Scientist, messenger, artist and storyteller. The findings suggest the key role of expertise, empowerment, values, inspiration, strategic thinking and social contribution as key meaning for these managers. The empirical findings help building on understanding of the different psychological dimensions of corporate sustainability management, and provides a useful tool for developing effective organizational leadership, enhancing recruitment and retention of sustainability talent, and improving individual and team performance for key sustainability growth.

Continuation of **Table 2**

Sustainability and authentic leadership: Stumbling blocks and enablers (Lombard et al., 2012).	Finding: Model of stumbling blocks and enablers of authenticity. • An authentic leadership development strategy is urgently needed for leaders to cope with the ethical issues faced in order to achieve sustainability in leadership. • Definitions of authenticity: Within the assignments, participants were asked to draw on published; academic definitions of authenticity and to choose the definition which best reflected their own personal perspectives. The 210 submissions were manually grouped into five themes and categories. The categories which emerged were: *Authenticity and trust, authenticity and self-awareness, authenticity and relationships, authenticity and the perception of others and authenticity and balance.* These form the basis for an overall understanding of authenticity and leadership
The relationship between transformational leadership and organizational sustainability (Ghaem, 2013).	The main finding of the study: There is a positive relationship between transformational leadership and the sustainability of an organization. According to Bass (1990), Transformational leader characteristics are : a) Charisma: Provides vision and sense of mission, instills pride, gains respect and trust. b) Inspiration: Communicates high expectations, uses symbols to focus efforts, and expresses important purposes in simple ways. c) Intellectual stimulation: Promotes intelligence, rationality, and careful problem solving. d) Individualized consideration: Gives personal attention, treats each employee individually, coaches, and advises.
Others	According to surveyed leaders, the three most critical individual leadership competencies necessary for adopting triple bottom line approaches are: Long-term view, communication, and influence (Quinn and Baltes, 2007). Some other key attributes that may be important to leadership behavior are enthusiasm, energy, confidence, propensity to focus on communication, etc. (Taylor, 2011). The shift from centralized leadership style to decentralized shared leadership style is important because according to Pearce et al., (2013), shared leadership highly impacts sustainability outcomes in organizations in different contexts. Moreover, they also found that decentralized, shared leadership is more effective than centralized leadership in influencing the citizenship behavior of different employees. Self-leadership and thinking style may be important attributes which is supported by Prussia, Anderson and Manz (1998) who found a relationship between self-leadership strategies, self-efficacy and performance. Moreover Dutra et al. (2011) refer to how CEOs make decisions by using available information to reach assumptions that guide them in making such decisions and further articulate about how such managers finally reach decisions, demonstrating the complexity and interdependency of different pieces of information that leaders should process in order to make sound decisions in context of the required sustainability outcomes.

Very few or no studies have addressed sustainability leader attributes in Egypt and the Middle East. This research, thus, attempts to discover and address attributes in a new context and under different conditions than those listed and summarized in the table above. The researcher suggests that some of the sustainability leader attributes which are mentioned above, may be manifested while others that are not mentioned may arise as a result of future studies.

Research about leadership styles has shown that there are specific behaviors which prove that styles may differ from culture to culture. "The members of the same culture are more likely to interpret and evaluate situational events in a similar way than those from different cultures" (Shahinand Wright, 2004, p. 501).

It may be convenient to apply leadership theories of North American origin to a region but not to another. (Shahin and Wright, 2004). They suggest that generally, different leadership theories are not applied with the same outcome in different regions or cultures. The important role of local or regional leaders cannot be ignored when influencing the environmental and social process of moving from discussion to action and identifying innovative responses to their local

context concerning sustainability problem (Keys et.al, 2010). According to Keys et.al (2010), turning to the local or regional leaders may help identify the innovative ideas to solve the sustainability problems for their local context.

Shahin and Wright, (2004) illustrate the impact of culture on leadership styles in general not taking into consideration sustainability attributes in particular. Their study supports Bass's (1996) contention that Bass and Avolio's (1994) model of transformational and transactional leadership has universal potential. They also mentioned that this model may require adjustment as we move across cultures arguing that such adjustment was more likely to be required in non-Western cultures.

Moreover, Shahin and Wright, (2004) highlight different categories of leader attributes that may apply to the Egyptian culture:

- Positive leadership" that include items relating to respect, morality, power, direction, checking, reward, collective mission, and strong sense of mission,
- Enthusiastic leadership" which reflects seeking different perspectives to solve problems, suggesting new ways of looking at how to do work, expressing confidence in work, and talking enthusiastically about what should be accomplished,
- Social integration" which reflects encouragement of social gatherings due to the importance of this at work and for the achievement of work objectives, and encouraging group members to discuss work issues together,
- Authoritarian leadership, which reflects, enjoying exercising power and influencing group members and,
- Individual consideration, which reflects, teaching and coaching, treating subordinates as individuals and considering them as having different needs, abilities and aspirations.

4. Egyptian culture and leaders' attributes

In light of the influence that culture exerts on leader attributes it is worth mentioning that Egyptians believe that their deep ancient historical roots will somehow lead them into a new civilization. Shahin and Wright, (2004) remark that Ancient Egypt was ruled by one person the *Pharaoh*, assisted by a top executive and the government council. Subsequent political systems in Egypt show remarkably similar characteristics. Under the Arab Islamic rule Egypt was again controlled by one person, the *Wali* who controlled the executive and judicial functions, the leadership of the army and the police. In 1952, Egypt became a presidential state. The president has dominant political and governmental authority. Such argument suggests that the findings of this research might lead to attributes such as charismatic, authoritarian and resolute.

Family plays a centre role in the Middle East countries. In a survey conducted in Egypt, Egyptians were found to have a great fear of loneliness; they always desire to be surrounded by relatives and friends. That explains why social integration inevitably has a major influence on Egyptian working life. Such argument suggests that the findings of this research might lead to attributes such as giving personal attention, coaching, and advising.

Egypt has a large majority of Sunni Muslims and a small minority of Christians, with the majority of Christians being Coptic Orthodox, and the rest being Protestants and Roman Catholics. Egyptians take their parents' religion. In such a religious culture, the findings of this research might lead to attributes such as honest, modest, exemplar, committed optimism, resiliency, transparency, and ethics.

CONCLUSION

Leaders with these specific attributes understood as characteristics, character, personality, competence and qualities, are able to develop strategies that ultimately can be translated into developing the concept of green business in countries like Egypt, even for SMEs and not just large local companies and multinationals.

It can be easily suggested that since every culture has its special characteristics, the need for researching sustainability leaders' attributes individually in different cultures becomes an important requirement to enrich such field of research and further establishes the importance of the study at hand given that the Egyptian culture is lacking in such research efforts.

All of above conceptual review aim to encourage the researchers to fill part of the gap in knowledge about the characteristics of the SMEs leaders promoting environmental sustainability, especially given their negative perception about the opportunities for sustainability development, and in particular in the Egyptian context. We know that many SME leaders in Egypt are doubtful about achieving a PPP balance; we do not know the attributes of those SME leaders who think it might be possible, and who are trying to achieve it.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SMEs : Small and Medium Enterprises
PPP : Plant, People and Profit

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