

PRINCIPLE-CENTERED LEADERSHIP: A CATALYST FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between the manifestation of Principle-Centered Leadership (PCL) and the attainment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among middle managers at Isabela State University (ISU), Philippines. Grounded in Covey's Principle-Centered Leadership framework, the research explored four dimensions of leadership manifestation - personal trustworthiness, interpersonal trust, managerial empowerment, and organizational alignment - and their influence on contributions to six SDG clusters: education, economic sustainability, health, environment, human rights, and global partnership. Using descriptive-correlational research design, the study gathered quantitative data from 250 regular faculty members across ISU campuses. Findings revealed a high level of PCL manifestation among middle managers, particularly in areas of trust, empowerment, and alignment of vision and mission. Their contributions were most notable in promoting quality education, fostering global partnerships, and advancing human rights initiatives, while efforts toward environmental and economic sustainability were less pronounced. Correlational analysis indicated a strong, positive, statistically significant relationship between PCL and SDG attainment, suggesting that ethical, values-based leadership practices substantially influence institutional sustainability outcomes. The study underscores the strategic role of principle-centered leadership in driving higher education institutions toward achieving sustainable and transformative development.

Keywords: Principle-Centered Leadership, Sustainable Development Goals, academic middle managers, higher education, Isabela State University, leadership and sustainability

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Leadership in higher education plays a pivotal role in shaping institutional direction, performance and contribution to global development. In recent years, universities worldwide have faced increasing complexity driven by rapid technological change, globalization, political uncertainty, and societal expectations for inclusivity and sustainability. These pressures demand a shift from traditional administrative management toward leadership that is ethically grounded, adaptable, and sustainability oriented. Academic leaders are now expected not only to manage resources and people effectively but also to champion the integration of sustainable

practices aligned with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015; Žalėnienė and Pereira, 2021).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have provided higher education institutions (HEIs) with a comprehensive global framework for advancing education, equality, and environmental stewardship. However, evidence suggests that progress among universities remains uneven and fragmented (Armas and Jugo, 2024; UN, 2024). Many institutions continue to struggle with operationalizing the SDGs beyond rhetoric and embedding them into institutional leadership, governance, and everyday academic practices (Lanshina et al., 2019). In this context, the leadership exercised by academic middle managers - such as deans, and campus academic directors - has become increasingly crucial. These leaders serve as institutional linkages translating strategic visions into concrete actions across teaching, research, extension, and resource generation (Bush, 2022; Christiansen, et al., 2024).

The challenge, however, lies in identifying the kind of leadership that effectively aligns institutional performance with sustainability outcomes. Recent leadership scholarship in higher education has emphasized ethical and principle-based leadership as essential for navigating complexity and inspiring long-term institutional change (Davidson and Butcher, 2018 and 2019; Duarte and Vardasca, 2023). Among these frameworks, Covey's (1992) Principle-Centered Leadership (PCL) stands out for its emphasis on internalized values that transcend situational or positional leadership. PCL operates across four interdependent levels - personal, interpersonal, managerial, and organizational - anchored in trustworthiness, trust, integrity, and alignment of vision and mission. These principles resonate strongly with a moral and collaborative imperatives of the SDGs, making PCL a potentially powerful catalyst for sustainability in higher education (Bourned, 2017; Davidson and Butcher, 2019).

Despite the theoretical alignment between principle-centered leadership and sustainability, empirical research remains limited, particularly in developing countries where institutional leadership often focuses on compliance rather than transformation (Maddock, 2023; Niemczyk, 2023). In the Philippine higher education context, studies on middle management leadership have largely concentrated on administrative efficiency and instructional performance, with little attention to how ethical leadership influences the localization and attainment of the SDGs (Coll and Ruch, 2023). This gap underscores the need for contextually grounded research exploring the nexus between leadership principles and sustainable development outcomes.

At Isabela State University (ISU) - a leading state university in Northern Philippines with a vision to become a premier research university in the ASEAN region - academic middle managers play a strategic role in actualizing institutional goals through program management, faculty development, and community engagement. ISU's commitment to people, nature, entrepreneurship, and innovation (ISU, 2019) provides an appropriate setting for investigating how leadership principles translate into sustainable academic and social outcomes.

1.1 Purpose and Objectives

This study examined the level to which middle managers at ISU manifest principle-centered leadership and contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Determine the level of manifestation of principle-centered leadership in terms of personal trustworthiness, interpersonal trust, managerial empowerment, and organizational alignment of vision and mission.
2. Assess the extent of contribution of middle managers to the attainment of SDGs in the areas of education, economic sustainability, health, environment, human rights, and global partnership.
3. Examine the relationship between the manifestation of principle-centered leadership and the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals.

2.0 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Principle-Centered Leadership (PCL) Theory

The study is grounded in Stephen Covey's (1992) Principle-Centered Leadership (PCL) framework, which emphasizes that effective leadership is founded upon universal principles rather than positional authority or situational control. Covey posits that truly effective leaders align their character and behavior with ethical and moral principles - such as integrity, honesty, fairness, and service - resulting in trust-based relationships and organizational coherence. The model operates through four interrelated levels:

1. Personal Level (Trustworthiness): This level centers on the leaders' integrity, character, and authenticity. This is the foundation upon which all other leadership levels are built. Leaders who act consistently with their values foster credibility and moral ascendancy (Covey, 1992; Davidson and Butcher, 2018).

2. Interpersonal Level (Trust): At this level, leadership is manifested through effective relationships and communication based on respect and empathy. Mutual trust enables collaboration and reduces relational fiction (Davidson and Butcher, 2019).

3. Managerial Level (Empowerment): Principle-centered leaders empower subordinates by creating systems and climates of trust, accountability, and participation. Empowerment strengthens innovation and intrinsic motivation (Bourne, 2017).

4. Organizational Level (Alignment): The highest level involves aligning institutional structures, policies, and culture with shared vision and mission. Alignment ensures that organizational goals reflect ethical and sustainable principles (Covey, 1992; Bush, 2022).

This holistic model integrates character development, relational trust, managerial empowerment, and organizational synergy. It resonates strongly with the values and operational expectations of higher education institutions that must be balanced with academic excellence, ethical governance, and social responsibility (Niemczyk, 2023; Christiansen et al., 2024).

2.2 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Higher Education Leadership

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes education and institutional governance as key enablers of sustainable transformation (UN, 2015, UN, 2024). Among the 17 SDGs, several are directly relevant to higher education - particularly Goal 4

(Quality Education, Goal 5 (Gender Equality), Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), Goal 13 (Climate Action), and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Universities are increasingly expected to contribute to these goals through teaching, research, community engagement, and institutional management (Armas and Jugo, 2014; Žalėnienė and Pereira, 2021).

However, the localization of SDGs within universities depends largely on leadership practices that integrate ethical vision with systematic strategy. Middle managers - who link administrative directives with faculty and community initiatives - play a critical role in embedding SDG-related principles across institutional processes (Coll and Ruch, 2023). Leadership that is ethical, participatory, and sustainability-driven can transform higher education institutions into engines of sustainable societal change (Duarte and Vardasca, 2023; Hunter, et al., 2023).

2.3 Linking Principle-Centered Leadership with SDG Attainment

The intersection between PCL and SDG attainment lies in the shared emphasis on ethics, empowerment, and alignment. Principle-centered leadership ensures that leaders’ decisions are guided by moral principles that promote equity, inclusion, and stewardship - values foundational to sustainable development (Davidson and Butcher, 2019; Bourne, 2017). Trustworthiness and trust foster transparency and collaboration, which are essential in implementing SDG-aligned initiatives across departments. Empowerment enhances institutional participation in sustainability programs, while organizational alignment ensures that vision, mission, and strategy are coherently directed toward long-term societal impact (Beerkens and van der Hoek, 2022).

In the higher education context, PCL can be conceptualized as a catalyst for SDG localization: leaders who embody integrity and trust create a culture where sustainability principles are naturally integrated into academic, research, and extension functions. Thus, the leadership philosophy of “living by principles” translates into actionable outcomes that advance institutional contributions to education, economy, health, environment, human rights, and global partnership.

2.4 Conceptual Framework of the Study

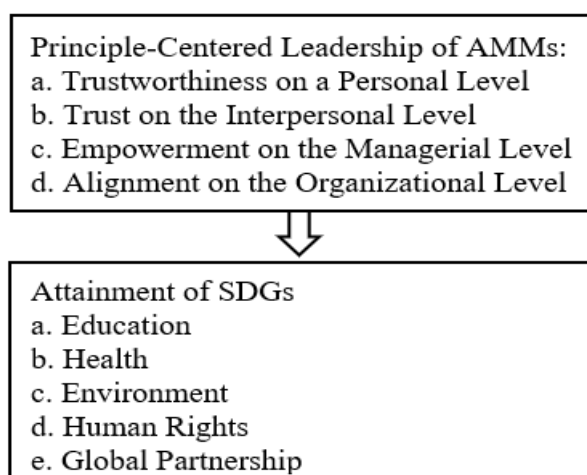


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesized relationship between Principle-Centered Leadership and the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals. The model assumes that higher levels of PCL manifestation across personal, interpersonal, managerial, and organizational dimensions positively influence the extent of contribution to the six SDG clusters relevant to higher education institutions. Specifically, personal trustworthiness fosters ethical responsibility and credibility, enhancing leadership influence. Interpersonal trust enables collaboration and stakeholder participation. Managerial empowerment encourages innovation and accountability in SDG-related programs. Organizational alignment ensures that institutional systems and strategies reflect sustainable and ethical principles. This conceptual linkage positions principle-centered leadership not merely as a moral ideal but as a strategic enabler for sustainability performance in higher education.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to determine the level of manifestation of Principle-Centered Leadership among academic middle managers at Isabela State University and their contribution to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. The design was deemed appropriate because it sought to describe existing conditions and examine the degree of relationship between variables without manipulating them (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Descriptive statistics were used to determine the levels of PCL manifestation and SDG contributions, while correlational analysis tested the association between the two constructs.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

The respondents comprised 250 regular faculty members from various campuses of ISU who worked directly under academic middle managers such as college deans and campus academic directors. The selection used stratified random sampling to ensure equitable representation across colleges and campuses. The participants provided valuable assessments of their middle managers' leadership practices and perceived contributions to institutional sustainability initiatives.

3.3 Research Instruments

There were two survey instruments utilized:

1. Principle-Centered Leadership (PCL) Scale. This was adapted from Covey's framework and validated by experts in leadership and educational management. It consisted of four dimensions: personal trustworthiness, interpersonal trust, managerial empowerment, and organizational alignment. Each item was rated on a four-point Likert scale (4=Highly Manifested, 1=Not Manifested).

2. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Scale. This was developed in accordance with the United Nations 2030 Agenda, measuring contributions across six SDG clusters relevant to

higher education: education, economic sustainability, health, environment, human rights, and global partnership. Each item was rated on a four-point Likert scale (4=Very Much Agree, 1=Not Agree).

The instruments underwent content validation by a panel of experts and pilot testing among faculty members from one of the campuses of the university system. Both instruments demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0,90.

3.4 Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the university administration. The researcher coordinated with the university president, the dean of the graduate school and various campus heads from different campuses for the distribution of the questionnaires. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and voluntary participation. Completed surveys were retrieved and encoded for statistical analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean scores determined the level of PCL manifestation and extent of SDG contribution, while Pearson's correlation tested the relationship between PCL and SDG attainment at 0.01 level of significance. The strength of relationships was interpreted following conventional effect size standards. The strength of the relationship was interpreted according to conventional correlation benchmarks (weak, moderate, strong).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research standards concerning voluntary participation, confidentiality, and integrity of data handling. Participants were assured of anonymity, and data were used exclusively for academic and research purposes.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Level of Manifestation of Principle-Centered Leadership

Findings revealed that academic middle managers of ISU exhibited a high level of manifestation of PCL across four dimensions: personal trustworthiness, interpersonal trust, managerial empowerment, and organizational alignment.

Table 1. Level of Manifestation of Principle-Centered Leadership

Variables	Mean	Desc
1. Trust on the Interpersonal Level	3.43	HM
2. Alignment on the Organizational Level	3.43	HM
3. Empowerment on the Managerial Level.	3.43	HM
4. Trustworthiness on the Personal Level	3.40	HM
Average Weighted Mean	3.42	HM

HM - Highly Manifested

As revealed in Table 1, results indicate that middle managers consistently demonstrate high levels of principle-centered leadership across all dimensions ($M=3.42$). Interpersonal trust, managerial empowerment and organizational alignment were equally rated as highest except for personal trustworthiness. This suggests a balanced leadership approach characterized by interpersonal relationships, empowerment of faculty and staff, and clear alignment with the university's vision and mission. However, personal trustworthiness signals an area for continuous personal and professional growth. Strengthening self-awareness, integrity, and emotional intelligence can further improve leadership effectiveness. Overall, these findings highlight that sustaining high-levels of principle-centered leadership is significant for advancing institutional performance on a college level.

This resonates well with the argument of Daniel-Ozah and Dede (2024) that leaders who embody principles can create a thriving academic environment that enhances personal, collegial and institutional success. The high ratings in interpersonal trust, empowerment, and alignment affirm Bush's (2022) and Christiansen et al.'s (2024) view that ethical and participatory leadership enables middle managers to translate institutional vision into sustainable practices. These findings are also reinforced by Sifat (2019) who argued that leadership effectiveness in sustainable organization depends on influence rather than authority. He emphasized that genuine leaders empower and mobilize their colleagues as gifted partners in achieving shared institutional goals. This is also consistent with Tushar's (2017) conceptualization of ethical leadership as the stabilizing element of a sustainable organization, where leaders' moral integrity and fairness fortify trust, organizational culture, and long-term institutional performance. Likewise, Jung (2022) found that authentic leadership among deans and directors significantly enhances trust, organizational commitment, and alignment with institutional goals, demonstrating that transparency and moral consistency drive sustainable academic environment.

Meanwhile, the slightly lower score in personal trustworthiness echoes Davidson and Butcher's (2018, 2019) observation that maintaining integrity under bureaucratic pressure remains a challenge for educational leaders. As Coll and Ruch (2023) note, reflective leadership that nurtures authenticity and accountability strengthens institutional trust and coherence. In relation to this, Tushar (2017) emphasized that ethical sustainability in leadership depends on the personal growth of leaders who balance the social, ethical, and professional dimension of decision-making, while Jung (2022) underscored the importance of self-awareness and authenticity in sustaining faculty empowerment and institutional trust. Reinforcing trustworthiness and moral consistency among ISU's middle managers, therefore, can further enhance their leadership capacity and ensure that ethical principles remain at the core of institutional growth, sustainability, and alignment with the university's mission and the Sustainable Development Goals.

4.2 Extent of Academic Middle Managers' Contribution to the Attainment of SDGs

Table 2. Extent of Contribution to the Attainment of SDGs

Variables	Average Weighted Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
1. Education	3.39	VMA
2. Economic Sustainability	3.28	VMA
3. Health	3.24	MA

4. Environment	3.13	MA
5. Human Rights	3.35	VMA
6. Global Partnerships	3.37	VMA
Grand Mean	3.29	VMA

VMA - Very Much Agree; MA - Much Agree

As revealed in Table 2, the grand mean indicates that middle managers are perceived to contribute substantially to SDG-related outcomes (3.29, VMA). Variations occurred on the six clusters on the extent of middle managers’ contribution to the attainment of the SDGs with the strongest perceived impact in Education, Human Rights, and Global Partnerships. This suggests a favorable evaluation on the middle managers’ efforts toward aligning institutional functions and initiatives with global development goals, particularly in areas closely aligned with higher education functions such as in education, human rights, and global partnerships. Their efforts are generally assessed as impactful, demonstrating a strong commitment to integrating sustainability principles into college programs and initiatives. Overall, the findings reveal that middle managers are active contributors to sustainability development.

Additionally, among the six domains, Education received the highest mean score, indicating a very strong perceived contribution of middle managers in promoting inclusive and quality education. This reflects the centrality of educational leadership at Isabela State University, and reaffirms the middle managers’ pivotal role in enhancing curriculum, access, equity, and quality. Empirical work shows that authentic and values-based leadership at the dean or director level increases organization trust and commitment, which in turn enables faculties to undertake curriculum, research, and extension initiatives aligned with SDG 4 (Jung, 2022). This also reflects the role of middle managers as described by Reyes (2019), who reported that middle managers were most effective in instruction which is very evident in the attainment of SDG 4 on Quality Education.

Global Partnerships also garnered high mean rating which reflect the middle managers’ commitment to fostering international collaboration, and institutional linkages. This resonates Guarini et al.’s (2022) findings that localizing SDG requires strong managerial leadership in forging institutional linkages and partnerships with government agencies, private sectors, and international organizations to advance these efforts. Further, Kaloutsu, et al. (2025) emphasized that higher education institutions act as hubs of knowledge, innovation, and sustainability, contributing significantly to the attainment of SDGs through collaborative partnerships. They note that effective global partnerships facilitate research collaboration, knowledge transfer, and policy development which allows universities to broaden their sustainability impact. Furthermore, Jongbloed and Veidemane (2021) stressed that academic deans who proactively lead global collaborations significantly impact institutional SDG efforts, confirming the role of AMMs in advancing sustainability through global partnerships.

Additionally, Human Rights received a high mean rating suggesting that middle managers are strong advocates of human rights within their respective campuses and colleges. To enhance their contributions to human rights-related SDGs, campuses and colleges should strengthen leadership programs that equip them with skills in diversity, inclusion, and governance strategies; it also needs to expand partnerships with government and civil society to ensure broader engagement in social justice initiatives. It further needs to enhance monitoring and

evaluation frameworks to track the real-world impact on gender equality, equity, and governance reforms. This aligns with the findings of Seale & Cross (2018), who noted that middle managers play a critical role in institutional transformation but often struggle with role ambiguity and balancing administrative and academic responsibilities. Additionally, Iqbal et al. (2022) highlighted that middle managers serve as strategic intermediaries, ensuring fair governance and participatory decision-making processes. The findings suggest that middle managers are actively engaging in governance reforms, research on justice-related issues, and fostering institutional transparency.

Additionally, Economic Sustainability was still rated as high underscoring the contribution of their involvement in research commercialization, resource generation, capability development and strong support for innovation and entrepreneurship - all of which are critical for long term institutional and community viability. This reflects what Sifat (2019) described as the transformative role of leaders who mobilize people and resources to advance economic and social sustainability through participatory and innovative practices. Similarly, Jung (2022) emphasized that authentic academic leaders cultivate trust and organizational commitment that enable research productivity and the pursuit of entrepreneurial initiatives consistent with institutional sustainability goals. On the other hand, the clusters on Health and Environment both rated moderately and were not emphasized. While still positive, this suggests that respondents perceive a relatively moderate level of involvement of middle managers. This pattern may be explained by the more program-specific or indirect roles that middle managers play, as many sustainability-related initiatives in these areas are often led by specialized units such as university clinic, research and extension centers, and environment-related offices are housed within the campus. McFarlane et al. (2024) noted that effective sustainability leadership in higher education is multi-layered, requiring coordination between academic, administrative, and technical sectors. Similarly, Hefnawi (2024) underscored that middle leaders function as change mediators who align institutional strategy with everyday practice, but the success of their sustainability contributions often depends on systemic collaboration and distributed governance.

4.3. Relationship between Manifestation of PCL and Attainment of SDGs

Table 3. Relationship between PCL and Attainment of SDGs

Variables	N	r (ρ)	P-Value	Remarks
PCL	250	.768*	.000	Significant Positive Correlation
SDG				
SDG Areas				
1. Education		.710	.000*	Significant Positive Correlation
2. Economic		.748	.000*	Significant Positive Correlation
3. Health		.624	.000*	Significant Positive Correlation
4. Environment		.584	.000*	Significant Positive Correlation
5. Human Rights		.728	.000*	Significant Positive Correlation
6. Global Partnership	.703	.000*	Significant Positive Correlation	

** - Not Significant; * - Significant at .01 level

Table 3 shows the correlation between middle managers' principle-centered leadership and their contribution to the attainment of the SDGs. The computed r (.768), indicate a strong

positive correlation, and the P-Value (.000) confirms that result is statistically significant at the .01 level. This suggests that trustworthiness, trust, empowerment and alignment to institutional vision and mission tend to directly relate and translate into the middle managers' greater contribution to the attainment of the SDG targets in education, economic sustainability, health, environmental protection, human rights, and global partnerships.

This result reinforces the theoretical underpinning of Covey's PCL, which posits that leaders who align their practices with enduring north principles naturally foster outcomes that are sustainable, equitable, and impactful. This aligns with findings of Mojeke et al. (2019) who emphasized that ethical leadership directly contributes to long-term institutional development and broader social transformation.

While the overall correlation between PCL and SDG attainment is strong, the breakdown of correlation across individual SDG areas reveals varying levels of influence. These results indicate that PCL shows the strongest correlations with Economic Sustainability and Human Rights, suggesting that ethical and empowering leadership strongly supports initiatives related to equity, institutional justice, innovation, financial viability, entrepreneurship. The lowest correlation is seen in environmental sustainability, which may imply a need for stronger leadership engagement in environmental initiatives.

These results affirm that leadership development programs must include SDG frameworks and ethical competencies to equip middle managers as sustainability champions. Alhazemi (2024) argues that sustainable leadership practices, when combined with technology adoption, can significantly enhance SDG implementation in HEIs. Similarly, Martin et al. (2023) and Zala (2021) highlight that specific leadership styles, such as transformational and servant leadership, may have stronger impacts on sustainability outcomes, but their effectiveness depends on organizational structures and support systems. The strongest validation comes from Dartey-Baah (2014) and Sifat (2019), who argue that leadership effectiveness, particularly through transformational and strategic leadership, is crucial in driving sustainable development. They assert that there is no development without leadership, and effective leadership is a necessary driver for sustainability.

On the other hand, the arguments of Lanshina (2019) and Alfathy et al. (2024) present a contrasting view wherein leadership in sustainable development is strengthened when institutions implement systematic national-level strategies, structured policies, stakeholder engagement, and institutional integration. Similarly, Ocaña-Zuñiga et al. (2023), and Chackseliani & McCowan (2021) emphasize that universities play a critical role in sustainability by embedding SDGs into academic and operational frameworks, and that SDG attainment in higher education is molded more by policy integration and resource mobilization rather than by individual leadership approaches. Additionally, Shava et al. (2023), Ang (2021) and the report of the United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability, UNESCO Bangkok and the Ministry of the Environment of Japan (2019) reinforce these ideas. These studies strengthen the idea that broader institutional mechanisms are the primary drivers of SDG success. Similarly, Suklun & Bengu (2024) and Singh & Blessinger (2023) highlight that raising awareness of SDGs, overcoming bureaucratic hurdles, and fostering an inter-institutional collaboration are more critical factors for SDG success than individual leadership traits. As Abdel-Zahra et al. (2023) points, ethical leadership acts as a

vehicle towards sustainable performance, aligning moral behavior with strategic institutional goals. Hence, cultivating ethical competence and structural support among middle managers can ensure that sustainability becomes not only a vision but an operational reality within higher education institutions.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The findings revealed that principle-centered leadership significantly enhanced trust, empowerment, and alignment among middle managers at Isabela State University, leading to an improved academic and institutional environment. It also contributed to stronger alignment between individual, collegial, and organizational goals, resulting in higher engagement toward the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, the manifestation of leadership grounded in integrity and shared purposed strengthened faculty participation and collegial cooperation, which are vital for promoting inclusive and quality education, human rights, global partnerships, and economic sustainability within the university.

The results also indicate a positive relationship between principle-centered leadership and sustainable institutional contribution to the attainment of the SDGs. The application of ethical principles and trust-based management supported participatory decision-making and reinforced accountability among leaders and their teams. This leadership approach fostered an environment where empowerment, transparency, and collective responsibility prevailed - enhancing the university's overall reputation and capacity for sustainable innovation. Although middle managers showed high levels of engagement in education-related SDGs, moderate participation in health and environment program suggests areas for growth through interdisciplinary collaboration and institutional support. Overall, principle-centered leadership serves as a moral and strategic framework that drives the university's sustainable performance and contributes meaningfully to national and global goals.

Based on the theoretical and applied conclusions, the following points are presented:

- Principle-Centered Leadership is a vital and effective model for academic institutions. Strengthening its core dimensions - trustworthiness, trust, empowerment, and alignment - ensures the continuity, integrity, and growth of higher education institutions.
- The university demonstrates a clear awareness of the importance of principle-centered leadership as shown by the high ratings across all leadership dimensions.
- Leadership practices must continuously adapt to the institutional ecosystem; sustained ethical and participatory leadership reduces operational barriers and improves organizational effectiveness.
- There exists a direct positive relationship between principle-centered leadership and extent of contribution to the attainment of the SDGs.
- The findings affirm the viability of the leadership framework adopted in the study and its potential as a guide for institutional policy and development planning.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- The university should continue to strengthen and institutionalize programs that promote principle-centered and ethical leadership among a middle manager to sustain their positive influence on institutional performance and SDG integration.
- Cross-unit collaboration must be enhanced to broaden middle managers' participation in health and environmental sustainability initiatives.
- The administration should develop an internal monitoring system to align college programs and projects with SDG indicators and report progress regularly.
- Leadership development programs should emphasize trust-building, integrity, emotional intelligence, and systems thinking as part of middle managers' continuing professional education.
- The university should pursue strategic partnerships and linkages with national and international organizations that share the same sustainability agenda, thereby amplifying its global impact and visibility.
- Management should strengthen faculty relations and participation, fostering a sense of shared ownership and commitment to institutional success and innovation.

Future Directions

Future research may conduct qualitative inquiries on how middle managers internalize and practice principle-centered leadership in decision-making, mentorship, and community engagement. Comparative or longitudinal studies across multiple higher education institutions may be undertaken to examine differences in leadership practices and long-term impact on SDG attainment.

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