

Review

The Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Model Revisited: Its Role in Sustainable Organizational Development

Ana Del Pino-Marchito ^{1,*}, Agustín Galán-García ¹ and María de los Ángeles Plaza-Mejía ^{2,*}

¹ Faculty of Labor Sciences, University of Huelva, 21004 Huelva, Spain; agustin@uhu.es

² Business Management and Marketing Department, Faculty of Business Sciences and Tourism, University of Huelva, 21002 Huelva, Spain

* Correspondence: adelpino@grupoabastare.com (A.D.P.-M.); plaza@dem.uhu.es (M.d.l.Á.P.-M.); Tel.: +34-615-15-66-44 (A.D.P.-M.); +34-649-26-14-26 (M.d.l.Á.P.-M.)

Abstract: Given the increasing complexity of leadership roles in global, sustainability-driven organizations, this study examines whether Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Model (SLM) provides a sufficiently comprehensive framework for contemporary leadership demands or requires theoretical and practical modifications. Can SLM, originally designed for adaptability in leader–follower dynamics, effectively integrate sustainability principles such as Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors; corporate social responsibility (CSR); and ethical governance? How can leadership models evolve to balance immediate responsiveness with long-term resilience and sustainability-driven decision-making? This research systematically evaluates the synthesis of empirical evidence on the application of the SLM across diverse organizational contexts while exploring its alignment with sustainability-focused leadership approaches. The study further investigates the role of Servant Leadership as a conceptual bridge between SLM and sustainability principles, emphasizing its ethical foundation, stakeholder-oriented approach, and long-term commitment to workforce well-being. Findings suggest that while SLM remains a relevant and adaptable framework, it exhibits a deficiency in explicitly addressing the sustainability dimension. However, integrating Servant Leadership's emphasis on ethical governance and organizational resilience into SLM could enhance its applicability to sustainability-driven leadership models. By addressing these gaps, this study contributes to contemporary leadership theory by proposing an evolved SLM framework that incorporates sustainability-focused leadership competencies. Future research should focus on refining SLM to ensure its alignment with the ethical and environmental imperatives of modern organizations, equipping leaders to navigate the complexities of sustainable corporate governance while maintaining situational adaptability.

Keywords: Situational Leadership Model (SLM); sustainability-driven leadership; servant leadership; ethical governance; Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG); corporate social responsibility (CSR); leadership adaptability; organizational resilience; stakeholder engagement; sustainable corporate governance



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1. Introduction

Since its introduction in 1969, the Situational Leadership Model (SLM) [1] has been extensively utilized by management scholars and practitioners in the pursuit of the “optimal” leadership style. This model defines the “appropriate” leadership approach as one that aligns with the situational demands of the follower at any given time. The effectiveness of this approach has been supported by empirical research, which highlights its adaptability to

diverse organizational contexts [2,3]. However, as leadership challenges continue to evolve, there is a need to assess whether SLM remains adequate in addressing contemporary demands [4].

The SLM [1] model is structured around two fundamental dimensions: follower readiness and leader behavior. The first dimension, readiness, is assessed in terms of task readiness and emotional or psychological readiness. This classification acknowledges the variability in followers' technical competencies and their emotional preparedness to assume responsibilities and engage in decision-making processes. Research has shown that differentiation in leadership approaches helps leaders apply situationally appropriate strategies that maximize employee engagement and performance [5]. Likewise, [6] emphasized that situational leadership during COVID-19 had a positive impact on work motivation and job satisfaction, highlighting its significance in sustaining employee morale amid workplace challenges.

Additionally, two critical behavioral dimensions are outlined for leaders: task orientation and relationship orientation. Based on these dimensions, the model proposes four distinct leadership styles, which differ in the extent of leader–follower participation in decision-making and task execution. Studies on leadership effectiveness suggest that leaders who adopt flexible approaches based on these behavioral dimensions are better able to navigate complex work environments [7].

These four leadership styles, which adapt according to the follower's level of readiness, are:

Directive Leadership (S1) involves high task-oriented guidance, where the leader provides clear instructions and close supervision, making it suitable for followers with low competence who require structured oversight.

Coaching Leadership (S2) combines directive and supportive behaviors, with the leader guiding and motivating followers who possess some competence but still require encouragement to improve their performance.

Supporting Leadership (S3) shifts the leader's role to facilitator and motivator, with minimal direction but high collaboration, being effective for followers with adequate competence but low motivation or confidence.

Delegating Leadership (S4) represents the highest level of autonomy, where the leader offers minimal guidance and supervision, suitable for followers with both high competence and motivation who can operate independently.

The SLM emphasizes flexibility in leadership, reinforcing the need to align leadership behaviors with the evolving capabilities of followers, making it a widely applied framework for enhancing leadership effectiveness in diverse organizational contexts. Ref. [8] empirically evaluated this approach, demonstrating that the effectiveness of situational leadership was closely tied to the congruence between leaders and followers, further supporting its relevance in organizational development.

The effectiveness of the SLM [1] lies in its ability to provide practical, adaptable guidance for leaders in determining the most effective leadership style based on the specific needs and readiness levels of their followers. For example, if followers exhibit low task readiness but high emotional readiness, the leader may adopt a directive style, offering structured guidance and control. Conversely, if followers demonstrate high task readiness but low emotional readiness, the leader might opt for a supporting style, encouraging collaboration and engagement in decision-making [9]. Research in organizational psychology confirms that leaders who adjust their leadership styles to employee needs create more resilient teams [10]. However, while the adaptability of SLT is widely acknowledged, [11] provides a critical review of the model, highlighting its structural limitations in addressing modern leadership complexities. As organizations face increasing challenges related to

sustainability, digital transformation, and remote work, the effectiveness of traditional leadership frameworks is being reevaluated [12].

In response to these emerging challenges, [13] introduced the concept of meta-paradoxical leadership, emphasizing the need for fluid and adaptable leadership approaches that transcend rigid structures. Similarly, [14] explored how different leadership models influenced remote work environments, underscoring the growing importance of adaptability and situational awareness in virtual team management.

Beyond its role in facilitating leader–follower interactions, the SLM [1] has significant implications for sustainable leadership due to its focus on adaptability, which is a key requirement in addressing sustainability challenges [15]. As organizations face technological advancements and growing Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) imperatives, leadership models are expected to evolve to foster resilience, ethical governance, and sustainable workforce development.

Effective leadership serves as a catalyst for optimizing organizational performance and fostering employee well-being, particularly within MSMEs, where transformative, servant, and inclusive leadership styles contribute to a resilient, innovative, and socially responsible business culture [16]. Leaders who adopt situational leadership principles are better equipped to integrate Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors into their strategies, ensuring corporate sustainability and ethical decision-making (IFRS S1 & S2, 2024) (International Financial Reporting Standard—Sustainability 1 (General Requirements for Disclosure of Sustainability-related Financial Information and Sustainability 2 Climate-related Disclosures)).

Based on the existing literature, the original framework of Hersey and Blanchard’s Situational Leadership Model (SLM) demonstrates limitations in effectively addressing the complex and evolving challenges of modern leadership. As organizations navigate cultural transformations in an era of rapid change and heightened social responsibility, leadership models must evolve to foster adaptability, ethical integrity, and sustainable organizational practices [17]. While its adaptability to follower readiness remains relevant, the model does not offer a sufficiently comprehensive framework to serve as a practical guide for leaders seeking to foster sustainable organizational talent development. Considering the widespread social and environmental challenges that organizations encounter, it is essential to develop innovative leadership models, strategies, and tools to drive organizational change and promote sustainable development [18]. This gap underscores the growing need for an adaptive situational leadership approach that not only tailors leadership styles to follower readiness but also fosters sustainable transformation by enhancing human capabilities and driving organizational excellence in a rapidly evolving business environment [19].

Given the transformations occurring in contemporary work environments, including new managerial expectations, remote work dynamics, and a growing focus on corporate sustainability, it is imperative to reevaluate whether the SLM [1] remains relevant, effective, and capable of addressing modern leadership challenges. Studies suggest that corporate leaders who effectively embed sustainability within organizational strategy and systems play a pivotal role in driving long-term resilience and strategic adaptation [20].

This research critically examines the validity, applicability, and limitations of the SLM model in contemporary organizations, with a particular focus on its alignment with sustainable leadership principles. It explores the extent to which SLM can be adapted to ensure it supports ESG integration, workforce resilience, and ethical leadership development. Future research should explore the scalability and long-term impact of hybrid organizations, examining how their integration of sustainability principles and market-driven

strategies influences industry standards, corporate governance, and global environmental outcomes [21].

To critically examine these issues, the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a comprehensive review of the theoretical framework, analyzing the core principles of the Situational Leadership Model (SLM) and its integration with sustainable leadership. This section explores the adaptability of SLM in contemporary organizational contexts and assesses its alignment with ethical governance, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and long-term workforce development. Section 3 outlines the research objectives, refining the scope of the study to focus on the synthesis of empirical evidence on the application of the SLM in modern leadership settings and its applicability to sustainability-driven leadership strategies. Section 4 details the methodology, specifying the search criteria, database selection, and inclusion–exclusion parameters to ensure rigor and replicability in identifying the relevant literature. Section 5 presents the key findings from the review, categorizing the results based on SLM’s effectiveness, limitations, and opportunities for refinement in sustainability-oriented leadership models. Section 6 discusses the conclusions derived from the analysis, summarizing the primary insights gained and assessing the extent to which SLM meets contemporary leadership demands. Section 7 explores the theoretical and practical implications of the study, proposing modifications to SLM to better integrate sustainability principles and ethical decision-making. Finally, Section 8 acknowledges the limitations of the study, including potential constraints related to database selection and publication bias. It also outlines future research directions, emphasizing the need for longitudinal studies and empirical testing to further validate the role of SLM in sustainable leadership.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Foundations of Situational Leadership Theory (SLT)

The Situational Leadership Theory (SLT), developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1969) [1], has been widely recognized as an adaptive leadership framework that enhances leadership effectiveness by aligning leadership styles with follower readiness. Extensive research has validated SLT’s applicability across various organizational settings, particularly in facilitating leadership adaptability, team performance, and employee engagement [2,3]. The model’s strength lies in its ability to adjust leadership approaches based on task complexity, follower competence, and psychological readiness, making it an effective decision-making support system [22]. Additionally, empirical evidence suggests that SLT plays a crucial role in diversity management and coaching. The research by [23] underscored that effective leadership requires adaptability based on employees’ competence and commitment levels. Leaders must assess situational variables and modify their leadership style accordingly—whether directing, coaching, supporting, or delegating—to foster an inclusive work environment. Furthermore, diversity management coaching skills are essential in creating equitable workplaces, ensuring employees from diverse backgrounds receive tailored support for professional growth.

2.2. Critiques and Limitations of SLT in Addressing Sustainability

The study highlights that culturally competent leaders who leverage situational leadership are better equipped to enhance workforce cohesion, engagement, and overall performance.

While SLT has been applied successfully in traditional organizational settings, recent research has highlighted its limitations in addressing long-term sustainability challenges. Neeta Baporikar [24], in her chapter “Corporate Leadership and Sustainability” from “Collective Creativity for Responsible and Sustainable Business Practice”, underscored the

imperative for corporate leadership to transcend traditional models and meet evolving organizational and environmental challenges. She argued that leadership must extend beyond immediate adaptability to incorporate long-term workforce resilience, ethical governance, and sustainability-driven strategies. This perspective reinforces critiques of conventional leadership frameworks, including the Situational Leadership Theory (SLT), which, while effective in short-term adaptability, does not provide a structured approach to sustainable leadership and ethical decision-making. Ref. [24] highlighted the importance of integrating sustainability into leadership practices, emphasizing the need to move beyond the immediate responsiveness prioritized in traditional models like SLT. This integration is essential for fostering ethical governance and long-term workforce resilience in today's dynamic business environment [4].

2.3. Adaptability and Inclusion: SLT in Diverse Work Environments

Given the increasing complexity of contemporary leadership demands, effective leadership serves as a catalyst for optimizing organizational performance and fostering employee well-being. This is especially crucial in MSMEs, where transformative, servant, and inclusive leadership styles contribute to building a resilient, innovative, and socially responsible business culture [16].

Empirical studies have demonstrated SLT's positive impact in various industries and leadership contexts. In health care, the person-centered situational leadership framework (PCSLF) has been found to enhance leadership effectiveness by promoting patient-centered care, ethical decision-making, and adaptive medical leadership [25]. Furthermore, recent research has highlighted the role of SLT in fostering employee satisfaction, engagement, and resilience by emphasizing flexibility, empathy, transparent communication, and innovation as key leadership attributes [26]. Similarly, in education, research has confirmed that situational leadership strategies positively influence teacher performance, job satisfaction, and student engagement [9,27,28].

Within the business and technology sectors, situational leadership applications have been linked to increased leadership confidence, team collaboration, and organizational adaptability in remote work environments [29,30]. Recent studies have explored the applicability of SLM in contemporary work environments, especially with the rise of distributed (remote) work. Ref. [14] examined four leadership models, including SLM, to assess their effectiveness in remote settings. Their findings indicated that SLM is effective in both face-to-face and distributed contexts, as its adaptability allows leaders to provide flexibility and autonomy to remote team members. This flexibility is crucial for task completion and employee development, provided leaders apply the appropriate style based on the team's conditions. However, while SLT's adaptability is well documented, the existing literature suggests that the model does not provide a structured framework for fostering long-term corporate sustainability and ethical leadership [7,10].

2.4. Toward Sustainability-Driven Leadership: Expanding SLT

The growing emphasis on sustainability in leadership studies has prompted scholars to examine how situational leadership principles can be integrated into corporate sustainability strategies [31]. Recent studies have argued that SLT must evolve to incorporate Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors, ensuring leadership decisions align with sustainability goals (IFRS S1 & S2, 2024). Flexible and adaptive leadership requires a deep understanding of diverse contexts, the ability to diagnose situations accurately, and the skillful application of varied leadership behaviors to balance competing values while upholding ethical responsibilities and fostering employee development [32]. The accelerating transition to digital workspaces has further underscored the necessity for

leadership adaptability in managing organizational change. Ref. [33] emphasized the pivotal role of digital leadership in navigating crises and adjusting to the evolving demands of the “new normal”. Their qualitative study highlighted that effective digital leaders exhibit agility, resilience, and adaptability by strategically leveraging technology to sustain productivity and foster engagement in remote and hybrid work environments. The research underscores the critical importance of communication, trust-building, and employee empowerment in virtual settings, as leaders must facilitate collaboration despite geographical dispersion. Moreover, technological proficiency and emotional intelligence emerge as essential competencies, enabling leaders to mitigate uncertainty and ensure organizational continuity.

Research suggests that leaders who successfully integrate SLT with sustainability principles are more effective at navigating organizational uncertainty, global crises, and digital transformation [34]. Studies have highlighted that while situational leadership is effective in dynamic and socially responsible business environments, its existing framework lacks a comprehensive approach to sustainability-driven leadership. Addressing global challenges such as climate change and resource scarcity requires leaders to integrate sustainability into their vision, foster collaboration, and implement innovative strategies that balance profitability with environmental and social responsibility [35].

To remain relevant in contemporary leadership research, SLT must be expanded to integrate sustainability-driven leadership dimensions, including corporate social responsibility, ethical governance, and long-term workforce development. Ref. [24] highlighted that traditional leadership models, including SLT, primarily focus on short-term adaptability and immediate leadership responses rather than fostering sustainability-driven strategies. The author emphasized the necessity for leadership approaches that incorporate long-term workforce resilience, ethical governance, and sustainability-driven leadership to effectively address contemporary challenges. Future research should explore how situational leadership frameworks can be further refined to integrate sustainability principles, ensuring that leaders are equipped to address environmental, economic, and social challenges while maintaining organizational agility and long-term resilience [36].

This study aims to bridge the research gap by critically analyzing SLT’s applicability in sustainability-focused leadership models, identifying its limitations, and proposing an evolved framework that integrates ethical leadership, workforce well-being, and ESG-driven decision-making into situational leadership theory.

3. Objectives

This study aims to critically analyze the Situational Leadership Model (SLM) [1] and its relevance in contemporary leadership contexts, particularly in relation to sustainability-driven leadership practices. By conducting a systematic literature review, this research seeks to assess the synthesis of empirical evidence on the application of the SLM and its applicability in fostering ethical governance, long-term workforce development, and organizational adaptability in sustainability-focused leadership frameworks.

The primary goal of this study is to reassess the relevance and applicability of SLM within contemporary leadership challenges, particularly in sustainability-driven organizational environments. This review will evaluate whether SLM’s adaptability remains effective in navigating evolving leadership paradigms and whether it aligns with long-term corporate sustainability, ethical decision-making, and workforce resilience. Specifically, the study seeks to address the following research question:

Given the increasing complexity of leadership roles in global, sustainability-driven organizations, does the SLM (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969) [1] provide a sufficiently compre-

hensive framework for contemporary leadership demands, or does it require theoretical and practical modifications?

Specific Objectives

1. Empirical evidence on the application of the SLM in Contemporary Leadership Contexts
 - a. Analyze empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of SLM across different organizational sectors, assessing whether its adaptive leadership framework remains applicable in modern business environments.
 - b. Identify theoretical limitations in the model's structure that may hinder its effectiveness in addressing complex leadership challenges in an era of technological, social, and economic transformation.
2. Integration of SLM with Sustainable Leadership Principles
 - a. Evaluate how SLM aligns with sustainability-driven leadership approaches, including corporate social responsibility (CSR); Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks; and ethical governance.
 - b. Determine whether SLM effectively supports long-term workforce development, talent retention, and leadership accountability in organizations prioritizing sustainability. By achieving these objectives, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on leadership effectiveness, adaptability, and sustainability integration, ensuring that SLM remains a relevant and practical tool for modern organizations. Furthermore, this review will provide a research-driven foundation for future empirical studies exploring the evolving role of situational leadership in sustainable organizational success.

4. Methodology

This study employed a systematic literature review based on the PRISMA guidelines to ensure methodological rigor and transparency. Although no meta-analytic procedures were conducted, the study followed a rigorous systematic review protocol with a focus on qualitative synthesis, aiming to identify patterns, thematic clusters, and research gaps. The review consisted of two distinct research lines, each corresponding to a specific research objective:

1. Empirical Evidence on the application of the SLM in Contemporary Leadership Contexts

To evaluate the applicability and impact of the Situational Leadership Model (SLM) in different organizational contexts, a systematic literature review was conducted in 2023, encompassing studies published over the last 25 years, using multiple academic databases, including Google Scholar, Emerald Insight, ResearchGate, and SciELO, chosen for their broad accessibility and diverse range of academic publications.

To ensure transparency in the selection of academic sources, Table 1 summarizes the databases and platforms used in the literature search, along with their respective roles and justification.

Table 1. Summary of Sources and Their Functions in the Literature Review. Source: Own elaboration.

Source/Platform	Function in the Review	Academic Rigor/Justification
Web of Science (WoS)	Primary source for the sustainability-focused segment of the review	High editorial standards; indexes Q1/Q2 journals in organizational psychology, business ethics, and sustainability
Scopus	Used as a reference for journal indexing and quality verification	Broad multidisciplinary coverage and internationally recognized as a standard for academic rigor
Google Scholar	Employed as a mapping tool to identify key authors and frequently cited studies	Used only in the exploratory phase; all retrieved studies were filtered based on peer-review status and indexing
Emerald Insight	Key source for studies in leadership, management, and organizational development	Offers access to peer-reviewed journals in leadership and organizational studies
ResearchGate	Used to access full-text versions of already-identified peer-reviewed publications	Utilized sparingly and not as a primary search source
SciELO	Included to capture peer-reviewed literature from Latin America and underrepresented regions	Regionally focused academic content; articles were screened for methodological quality and indexing in major databases

To refine the search and retrieve relevant studies, specific keywords were applied. The search terms included “Servant Leadership”, “Situational Leadership”, “Leadership Styles”, and “Leadership Theories”. The articles were initially classified based on the proposed methodology, their theoretical justification, findings, and discussions in relation to the Situational Leadership Model. Each article and thesis were systematically categorized in an Excel file according to the following criteria:

- (A) **Type of publication:** Ensured that the selected works adhered to rigorous scientific publication standards, including peer-reviewed journal articles or thesis evaluations conducted by academic committees, doctoral dissertations incorporating case studies on the SLM, or literature reviews explicitly addressing the influence of SLM on organizational performance, written in either English or Spanish.
- (B) **Country of research:** Facilitated the contextualization of the study, allowing for a comparative understanding of the Situational Leadership Model’s applicability across different regions.
- (C) **Year of publication:** Enabled an analysis of the temporal evolution of discussions regarding the Situational Leadership Model, providing insights into its theoretical and practical advancements over time.
- (D) **Objectives:** Assessed the relevance of each study in terms of its methodological application and its contribution to the discourse on the Situational Leadership Model within specific case studies.
- (E) **Methodology:** Documented the research design, the tools and techniques employed, and the extent to which the methodology addressed the research problem, including its scope and limitations.
- (F) **Findings and final discussion:** Synthesized the research outcomes, highlighting key contributions, implications, and areas for further study.

These inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied until the sample reached saturation.

The initial search yielded 100 articles, which were then subjected to a title and abstract screening process, resulting in the retention of 80 articles for full-text review. Following the application of exclusion criteria, 46 articles were selected for the final analysis. These articles were classified based on their reported impact on organizations, with studies demonstrating

positive outcomes highlighting increased leadership effectiveness, adaptability, employee engagement, and organizational resilience, while studies reporting negative outcomes identified challenges such as ambiguities in implementation, inconsistent effectiveness, or limitations in long-term leadership development.

By categorizing these findings, the study provides a structured assessment of the empirical evidence supporting the applicability of SLM in contemporary leadership settings, as illustrated in Figure 1.

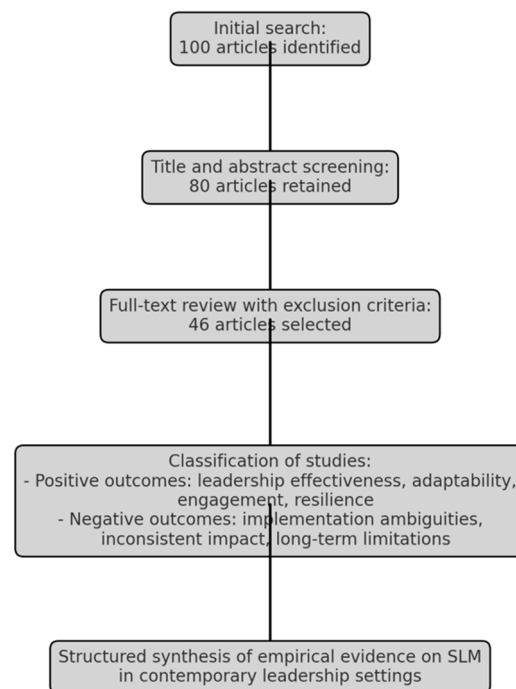


Figure 1. Flowchart of the article selection and classification process. Source: Own elaboration.

Following the initial literature review and the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, a citation tracking process was conducted to identify additional relevant studies for analysis. This strategy enabled the incorporation of 15 additional articles, bringing the total number of selected studies to 61. These articles were chosen based on their relevance and contribution to the theoretical and methodological framework of the research. Thus, the search process was enhanced by including key references derived from the previously identified studies, ensuring greater comprehensiveness in the collection of scientific evidence, as summarized in Table 2, which outlines the article selection and citation tracking process.

Table 2. Summary of the article selection and citation tracking process. Source: Own elaboration.

Year	Authors
2005	Dennis, Robert. S./Bocarnea, Mihai.
2000	Sánchez Santa-Barabará, Emilio
2017	Alava Rade, Fabián E./Vega Chica, Mayra L.
2004	Benavides Coronado, Elsa M./Delgado Alonso, Lucila.
2012	La Torre, Roque
2018	Kwang Chung, Chap K./Cardoso, Soledad.
2018	Zevallos Peñalva, Miguel A.R

Table 2. Cont.

Year	Authors
2013	Torres-Contreras, Claudia C.
2017	Campdesuñer-Almaguer, Ivette; de Miguel-Guzmán, Maragarita; García-Vidal, Gelmar; Pérez-Campdesuñer, Reyner
2021	Franco Mendoza, Josue M.; López Munguía, Olimpia.
2017	Pinto, Yscarlly; Gutiérrez, Thais
2012	López Guttama, Fernando
2017	Molina Alcedo, Neida del C.
2020	Torres Mojica, Alejandro.
2009	Thompson, G., & Vecchio, R. P.
2019	Walls, Elaine
2002	Avery, Gaile C.; Ryan, Jan
2005	Farmer, Ann L.
2016	Meier, David
2018	Thompson, Geir; Glaso, Lars
2011	Brighide, Lynch; Brendan, Phil
2017	Bosse, Duell R.; Van der Wall, Natalie
2020	Wuryani, Eni; Rodlib, Achamani; Sutarse, Sri; Dewi, Nuning; Arif, Donny
2020	Francisco, Christopher D.; Nuqui, Alvin V.
2017	Zigarmi, Drea; Peyton, Taylor R.
2022	Endri, Endri; Umarella, Farid h.; Faridah, Siti; Ridaryanthi, Melly; Mulyana, Ahmad
2017	Ghazzawi, Khalil; El Shoughari, Radwan; El Osta; Bernard
2017	Tortorlla, Guilhierme; Fogliatto, Flávio
2013	Bedford, Christopher; Gehlert, Kurt M.
2017	Brighide, Lynch; McCance, Tanya; McCormack, Brendan; Brown, Donna
2011	Do Rego Furtado, Luis C.; Câmara Batista, Maria da G.; Ferreta Silva, Francisco J.
2015	Pasaribu, Fajar.
2015	Salehzadeh, Reza; Shahin, Arash; Kazemi, Ali; Barzoki, Ali.
2020	Al-Khamaiseh, Zaydoon; Abdul Halim, Bahyah B.; Afthanorhan, Asyraf; Alqahtani, Ayed H.
2014	Parveen, Shagufta; Tariq, Adeel
2016	Perna, Brian S.
2018	Setyorini, RR; Yuesti, Anik; Landra, Nengah
2021	Koswara, Dudung; Hardhienata, Soewarto; Retnowati, Rita
2014	Kaifi, Belal A.; Noor, Ahmad o.; Nguyen, Ngoc-Linh; Aslami, Wajma; Khanfar, Nile M.
2020	Frittia, Happy; Lian, Buckman; Ruslan; Negeri, SD.; Penuguan, Selat
2017	Coetzer, Michiel F; Bussin, Mark; Geldenhuys, Madelyn

Table 2. *Cont.*

Year	Authors
2016	Lemoine, James; Hartnell, Chad; Leroy, Hannes
2018	Nathan, Eva; Mulyadi, Robinb; Sen, Sendjayac; Dirk van, Dierendonckd; Robert, Lidene
2020	Avinash Pawar ¹ ; Khortum Sudan ² ; Satini ³ Denok Sunarsi ⁴
2008	Sen Sendjaya, James C. Sarros and Joseph C. Santora
2014	Curtis D. Beck
2010	Sánchez Santa-Bárbara, E., & Rodríguez Fernández, A.
2009	Weinstein
2002	Robbins
2021	Northouse, P. G.
2012	Hersey, P. Blanchard, K.H. & Johnson, D.E.
2018	Thompson, G., & Glaso, L
2015	Meirovich, G. & Gu, J.
2022	Aslam, S., Saleem, A., Kumar, T., & Parveen, K.
2009	Muitaba, B.G., & Sungkhawan, J.
2015	Bosse, T., Duell, R., Memon, Z.A., et al.
2012	Honoré, R. L., & Robinson, J.
2011	Grove, R.
2020	Muranshkin, M., & Tyrväinen, J.
2010	Cerit, Y.
2008	Sendiava, S., Sarros, J.C., & Santora, J.C.

2. Integration of SLM with Sustainable Leadership Principles

To explore whether SLM can be effectively integrated into sustainability-driven leadership frameworks, a systematic search was conducted in 2025 using the Web of Science database. This approach aimed to examine how SLM aligns with corporate sustainability strategies, particularly in relation to Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors; corporate social responsibility (CSR); and long-term workforce resilience. Web of Science (WoS) was selected as the primary database for the literature search due to its rigorous indexing standards and comprehensive coverage of high-impact journals in leadership, sustainability, and management. While Scopus also offers broad disciplinary reach, WoS provides a more selective, interdisciplinary scope, particularly in business, organizational psychology, and sustainability sciences. This is essential for examining situational leadership within the sustainability context, as it requires insights from multiple disciplines, ensuring access to peer-reviewed, high-quality research.

The study focused on retrieving high-quality, peer-reviewed journal articles that met specific criteria, including a publication period from 2015 to 2025, articles published in English, and study types such as empirical research, theoretical models, and literature reviews, with a content focus on the integration of the Situational Leadership Model (SLM) with sustainability-oriented leadership frameworks. The selection of the timeframe is justified based on the evolution of the literature on situational leadership and sustainability. Prior to 2015, academic research on the intersection of these topics was limited. The adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015 represented a pivotal moment in the global

commitment to sustainability, significantly shaping leadership models and strategic frameworks. Furthermore, the period following 2020 has witnessed a substantial increase in scholarly contributions, driven by the necessity for leadership adaptability in response to global crises, the integration of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles, and the accelerating impact of digital transformation.

To ensure comprehensive retrieval of relevant studies, specific search terms and Boolean operators were used, including “situational leadership” AND “sustainability”, “situational leadership model” AND “sustainability”, “adaptive leadership” AND “environmental, social, governance” (ESG), “leadership styles” AND “corporate social responsibility” (CSR), “situational leadership” AND “organizational resilience”, and “situational leadership” AND “climate change management”.

The initial search yielded 237 articles across the selected databases. After eliminating duplicate entries, 185 articles remained for further screening. A title and abstract review were conducted to assess relevance to the research objectives, reducing the selection to 48 articles. Following a full-text analysis, which applied the established inclusion and exclusion criteria, 23 articles were retained for the final systematic review. These selected studies were categorized based on their findings regarding SLM’s relationship with sustainability, with some classified under successful integration, demonstrating how SLM principles can support sustainability-focused leadership models, while others highlighted challenges and limitations where SLM requires modifications to align with sustainable leadership objectives. The overall selection and classification process is illustrated in Figure 2.

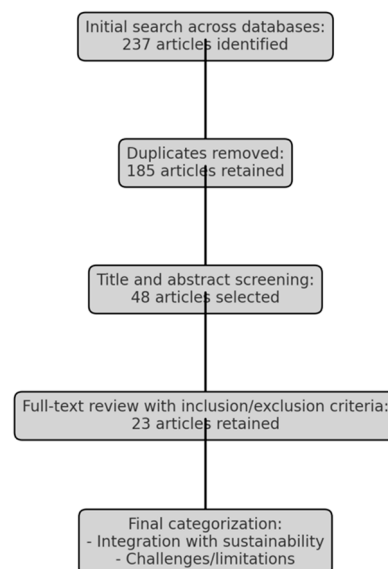


Figure 2. Flowchart of the article selection and classification process. Source: Own elaboration.

However, due to the limited availability of studies directly addressing the relationship between SLM and sustainability principles, the scope of the review was expanded to include indirect connections between SLM’s core characteristics—such as adaptability, leader ethical decision-making, leader–follower dynamics, and situational decision-making—and sustainability-driven leadership frameworks. Studies examining adaptive leadership, ethical governance, and transformational leadership in sustainability contexts were also considered, given their conceptual overlap with situational leadership. This broader analytical approach allowed for a more comprehensive assessment of the potential synergies between SLM and sustainability, offering insights into how elements of the model can be leveraged to enhance corporate sustainability initiatives.

Through the systematic analysis of these studies, this research identifies how SLM can be expanded to address long-term organizational resilience, ethical governance, and sustainability-driven leadership strategies. The following table presents a summary of the article selection and citation tracking process (see Table 3).

Table 3. Summary of the article selection and citation tracking process. Source: Own elaboration.

Year	Authors
2018	Ahn, J; Lee, S; Yun, S
2024	Alavi, SB
2017	Atwijuka, S; Caldwell, C
2022	Baporikar, N
2017	Chikeleze, MC; Baehrend, WR
2016	Dalati, S
2023	Dewi, NK; Suroso, AI; Fahmi, I; Syarief, R
2018	Haddock-Fraser, J; Rands, P; Scoffh, S
2016	Heyler, SG; Armenakis, AA; Walker, AG; Collier, DY
2018	Hull, RB
2022	Jayashree, P; El Barachi, M; Hamza, F
2022	Kafetzopoulos, D; Gotzamani, K
2022	Killion, AK; Michel, JO; Hawes, JK
2018	Lumpkin, A; Achen, RM
2017	McGhee, P; Grant, P
2018	Muralidharan, E; Pathak, S
2019	Nicholson, J; Kurucz, E
2016	Rodrigues, C; Freire, C
2022	Suriyankietkaew, S; Krittayaruangroj, K; Iamsawan, N
2016	Voegtlin, C
2024	Warner-Soderholm, G; Cепенas, S; Minelgaite, I; Akstinaite, V
2024	Zacher, H; Kuehner, C; Katz, IM; Rudolph, CW
2016	Zeni, TA; Buckley, MR; Mumford, MD; Griffith, JA

5. Results

To systematically address the research objectives, this study conducted two independent bibliographic searches to evaluate the empirical evidence of the Situational Leadership Model (SLM) in contemporary leadership contexts and its potential integration with sustainability-driven leadership principles.

The first research line focused on analyzing the applicability and impact of Situational Leadership Model (SLM) across various organizational settings through a systematic review of empirical studies and case analyses. The initial search yielded 100 articles, which were subjected to a title and abstract screening process, resulting in the retention of 80 articles for full-text review. Following the application of exclusion criteria, 46 articles were selected for final analysis. To ensure a more comprehensive assessment, a citation tracking process was subsequently conducted, identifying 15 additional relevant studies, bringing the total number of selected articles to 61. This allowed for a structured assessment of both the positive and negative outcomes associated with the model's implementation, providing

insights into its practical effectiveness, adaptability, and potential limitations in modern leadership environments.

The second research line, by reviewing 23 empirical studies, explored whether SLM could be effectively aligned with sustainability frameworks, assessing its compatibility with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors; corporate social responsibility (CSR); and long-term workforce resilience. Given the scarcity of studies directly linking SLM to sustainability, the review was expanded to include indirect associations between the model's core characteristics—such as adaptability, ethical decision-making, and situational responsiveness—and sustainable leadership strategies. By integrating these two lines of inquiry, the study aims to provide a comprehensive evaluation of SLM's relevance in contemporary leadership research, assessing both its empirical effectiveness and its potential to contribute to corporate sustainability initiatives.

First Research Results

The findings of the first research have been structured based on the evaluation obtained during the analysis. Initially, the 61 articles were categorized into three groups: positive evaluation, moderate evaluation (those requiring improvements to achieve a positive assessment), and negative or insufficient evaluation. Following a preliminary review, it was decided to focus solely on articles classified under positive and negative evaluations, with the analysis of negatively evaluated studies presented below.

5.1. Studies with Negative Evaluations

The analysis of studies classified with a negative evaluation allowed for the identification of key deficiencies in the application of the examined models, providing a solid foundation to guide future research.

Ref. [37] explored followers' perceptions of leadership through a survey evaluating seven dimensions of servant leadership, including active listening, empathy, persuasion, and commitment to team growth. However, the dimensions of altruism and service, considered fundamental according to Patterson's Theory, could not be assessed due to insufficiently precise definitions. This finding underscores the need for a more rigorous and operational conceptualization to ensure the proper measurement of these dimensions.

Ref. [38] analyzed the effectiveness of leadership styles within the Situational Leadership Theory (SLT) through a case study in local administrations. While the author highlighted SLT's adaptability to different contexts, they concluded that no universally effective leadership style exists and emphasize the lack of empirical robustness supporting the theory's claims. This limitation hinders its practical applicability and highlights the need for additional studies that reinforce SLT with solid empirical evidence.

Ref. [39] investigated the relationship between leadership and job satisfaction in an academic institution, emphasizing that Hersey and Blanchard's model lacks clear decision-making criteria for leaders. The authors argued that developing strategies that integrate both individual and group needs is essential to maximize leadership effectiveness and enhance job satisfaction.

Ref. [40] examined leadership within a business consortium, concluding that, while leaders demonstrated strengths in transparency and self-assessment, they lacked innovation and adaptability skills. This finding highlights the importance of reinforcing these competencies to ensure effective management in dynamic environments.

Ref. [41] analyzed leadership in micro and small enterprises, noting that the diversity of approaches and potential methodological biases complicate the generalization of findings. They identified flexibility, communication, and commitment as key leadership factors but stressed the need for more reliable studies to assess leadership's impact in this context.

Ref. [42] investigated leadership styles in the nursing sector, finding that directive and participative styles were the most prevalent, whereas the delegative style was virtually absent. While a correlation between directive leadership and clinical experience was identified, the results suggest that tenure in an institution does not significantly influence leadership styles.

Ref. [43] studied the relationship between managerial behavior and organizational situations in an agribusiness company. Although they successfully identified patterns between leadership styles and specific contexts, they concluded that no formal instruments exist to comprehensively evaluate these relationships, exposing a theoretical and practical gap in the field.

Ref. [44] compared Situational Leadership Theory and Human Action Theory, identifying fundamental differences in aspects such as power, freedom, ethics, and effectiveness. While the former emphasizes situational adaptability, the latter examines the social, economic, and moral impacts of leadership, highlighting the complexity of the leader–follower relationship.

Ref. [45] conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the Situational Leadership Model (SLM) by Hersey and Blanchard, focusing on its empirical and theoretical validity. They identified a fundamental paradox, arguing that while SLM is widely used in leadership development, it lacks strong empirical support. Their analysis highlighted conceptual inconsistencies between different versions of the model, particularly in defining key constructs such as maturity, willingness, and competence.

Additionally, they questioned the reliability of the LEAD instrument, a tool designed to measure SLM’s leadership styles and follower readiness, arguing that it lacks empirical evidence. The study also raised concerns about SLM’s external validity, suggesting that its applicability across diverse organizational and cultural contexts remains unproven due to its reliance on untested assumptions.

Collectively, the studies classified under a negative evaluation highlight substantial theoretical and methodological limitations, as well as the absence of robust empirical evidence in the application of leadership models across various contexts. These findings underscore the necessity of developing more rigorous conceptual frameworks and practical assessment tools that enhance the applicability and reliability of leadership theories. Furthermore, the analysis emphasizes the importance of refining theoretical models to align with the complex and dynamic nature of organizational environments, ensuring their adaptability to diverse situational and cultural conditions.

As a summary, Table 4 is presented below.

Table 4. Studies with negative evaluations. Source: Own elaboration.

Article	Negative Aspect	Description
Alava & Vega, 2017 [39]	Lack of a clear definition of SLM styles and absence of formal evaluation tools.	There is no clear definition of SLM styles, and there is a lack of formal tools to assess these styles.
Campdesuñer-Almaguer et al., 2017 [43]	Absence of formal tools to evaluate SLM.	The lack of formal tools makes it difficult to accurately assess SLM in different contexts.
Dennis & Bocarnea, 2005 [37]	Essential characteristics such as altruism and service cannot be measured due to vague definitions.	The study was unable to fully evaluate some crucial characteristics of servant leadership due to ambiguous definitions.
Kwang & Cardoso, 2018 [41]	Lack of sufficient reliable studies on leadership due to varying approaches and potential biases.	The absence of reliable studies complicates the comprehensive understanding of leadership due to diverse methodologies and biases.

Table 4. Cont.

Article	Negative Aspect	Description
La Torre, 2012 [40]	The SLM does not provide sufficient information to guide leaders' decision-making.	The model lacks the necessary depth to offer adequate leadership decision-making guidance.
Meirovich, G., & Gu, J. (2015)	Not universally applied in organizational settings	Questions the empirical and theoretical validity of SLM, suggesting it may not be universally applicable in organizational settings.
Molina, 2017	Educators do not apply any of the leadership styles described by SLM.	The lack of application of SLM leadership styles by educators suggests limitations in the model's effectiveness within the educational context.
Pinto & Gutiérrez, 2017	Low effectiveness of leadership styles based on Hersey and Blanchard's model.	The limited effectiveness of Hersey and Blanchard's model suggests constraints in its practical implementation.
Sánchez, 2000 [38]	Lack of empirical robustness supporting SLT.	Most unpublished studies do not provide sufficient empirical evidence to support SLT.
Torres, 2020 [44]	Mismatch between SLM theory and practice.	The inconsistency between SLM's theoretical framework and its real-world application raises concerns about its practical relevance.
Torres-Contreras, 2013 [42]	No correlation between experience and leadership styles; the delegative style is rarely present among clinical nurses	The lack of correlation between years of experience and leadership styles calls into question the effectiveness of SLM.

5.2. Studies with Positive Evaluations

The following section presents the findings of studies that received a positive evaluation regarding the Situational Leadership Model (SLM). These results highlight the beneficial effects of the model across various contexts and sectors, demonstrating its versatility and adaptability.

One of the key benefits identified is the improvement of organizational climate. Ref. [10] examined the hospital sector, where the most frequently applied leadership styles were "Directing" and "Supporting", adjusted with varying degrees of flexibility depending on the context. This study analyzed the organizational climate variable and, using Spearman's statistical test, concluded that the SL style exercised by coordinators significantly influences the organizational climate of nursing staff in their respective areas.

In the educational sector, ref. [27] observed an evolution in responsibility management and interpersonal relationships, emphasizing SL's ability to enhance these aspects. Similarly, ref. [9] found that the implementation of Situational Leadership Theory in university settings increases faculty job satisfaction and contributes to talent retention, thereby reducing skilled staff turnover.

In the technology sector, ref. [29] studied remote teams and observed increased trust and leadership capacity, as well as greater satisfaction and role clarity among teams. In the service sector, ref. [30] highlighted that SLT helps manage stress, and through effective communication and shared goal setting, fosters job satisfaction and a cooperative, synergistic work environment.

Another positive effect of SL implementation is the development of more productive and autonomous teams. Ref. [46] emphasized that SLT enhances leadership styles and

promotes greater autonomy in task execution. Similarly, ref. [5] evaluated the impact of principals' and teachers' SL styles in primary schools, concluding that these leadership styles influenced organizational values, professional conduct, and teacher performance.

The research of [4] demonstrated that SL has a significant impact on employee productivity and, consequently, on organizational performance. In a study of hospitals in northern Lebanon, the authors found that managers who understood their subordinates' needs contributed to greater workforce productivity. Complementarily, ref. [47] found that SL-based decision-support systems generated a positive impact on employee motivation and performance, showing a strong correlation between managerial leadership style and these outcomes.

SLM also emerges as a valuable tool in periods of organizational change and uncertainty. Ref. [48] emphasized the importance of evaluating employee development levels and providing continuous feedback—key elements of SL—in navigating dynamic environments. Ref. [3] applied SL theory in a case study of the Australian business sector, concluding that SL facilitates leadership adaptation to dynamic environmental demands, leading to significant improvements in productivity and performance.

Ref. [49] further reinforced the adaptability of SLM, highlighting that leadership effectiveness depends on a leader's ability to modify their approach based on the competence and commitment of their followers. Their work emphasized that leaders who assess follower readiness accurately can implement strategies that enhance engagement, motivation, and overall team performance. Expanding on this perspective, ref. [8] tested leader–follower congruence within SLM, finding that when leaders align their styles with the developmental needs of employees, job satisfaction and productivity increase significantly.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, ref. [6] explored the emergence of SLM as a crisis leadership strategy, identifying that leader who adapted their approaches to remote work, employee well-being, and organizational uncertainty were more effective in sustaining morale and productivity. Their findings demonstrated that SLM's flexibility is a key factor in maintaining stability during external disruptions.

Building on this perspective, ref. [50] provided a comprehensive analysis of leadership adaptability, highlighting the role of situational leadership in fostering organizational resilience. His study emphasized that effective leaders tailor their approach based on follower development levels, ensuring that leadership strategies remain responsive to evolving workplace dynamics. By reinforcing the need for flexibility, active engagement, and individualized support, Northouse demonstrated how situational leadership enhances team cohesion, improves decision-making, and drives sustained organizational success in complex environments.

In response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, ref. [7] analyzed the New Normal Leadership (NNL) model, an adaptation of traditional SLT. This approach, focused on flexibility and resilience, proved effective in maintaining productivity, improving employee satisfaction, and ensuring organizational sustainability during times of crisis.

As a summary, Table 5 is presented below.

In summary, the reviewed studies confirm that SLM is a versatile and adaptable leadership framework, successfully applied across various organizational sectors. The positive effects associated with its implementation include enhancing organizational climate, increasing job satisfaction and productivity, and improving responsiveness to uncertainty and change.

Table 5. Studies with positive evaluations. Source: Own elaboration.

Article	Positive Aspect	Description
Avery, 2005	Adaptation of leadership style to changing business environments	SLM enabled leadership adaptation to evolving business needs, leading to significant improvements in productivity and team performance.
Benavides, 2004 [46]	Development of more productive and autonomous teams	SLM played a crucial role in improving leadership practices and fostering the development of more autonomous and productive teams.
Farmer, 2005 [29]	Increased leader confidence, higher satisfaction, and better understanding of roles and responsibilities within teams	A study in the technology sector on remote teams showed an increase in leadership confidence, team satisfaction, and role clarity.
Francisco & Nuqui, 2020 [7]	SL adaptation during the COVID-19 pandemic	The New Normal Leadership (NNL) model emerged during the COVID-19 crisis, adapting leadership styles to the situation and enhancing productivity, employee satisfaction, and organizational resilience.
Franco & López, 2021 [27]	Evolution in responsibility management and interpersonal relationships	The application of SLM in the education sector demonstrated improvements in responsibility management and interpersonal relationships.
Frittia et al., 2020 [5]	Influence of school principals' SL style on teacher performance in primary schools	The principal's SL style influenced organizational values, school culture, and teacher professionalism and performance.
Ghazzawi et al., 2017 [4]	Positive impact of SL on employee productivity	Leadership behaviors of managers positively influenced employee productivity in hospitals in northern Lebanon.
Parveen & Tariq, 2014 [9]	Improvement in job satisfaction and prevention of talent turnover	The implementation of SLM improved university faculty job satisfaction and reduced skilled staff turnover.
Perna, 2016	Stress management and job satisfaction improvement	Through SLM, stress was effectively managed, and job satisfaction improved in the service sector via effective communication and shared goal setting.
Walls, 2019 [48]	Importance of evaluating employee development levels and providing feedback in SL	Highlighted the necessity of assessing employee development and offering continuous feedback to enhance organizational climate.
Wuryani et al., 2020 [47]	Positive impact of SL on employee motivation and performance	SL-based decision-making support systems positively influenced employee motivation and workplace performance.
Zevallos, 2018 [10]	Improvement in team climate	The SL style significantly influenced the organizational climate among nursing staff in hospitals.
Mujtaba, B. G., & Sungkhawan, J. 2009 [23]	Effectiveness in diverse environments	Examines how SLM, combined with coaching skills in diversity management, enhances leadership effectiveness in diverse environments.

Table 5. Cont.

Article	Positive Aspect	Description
Northouse, P. G. (2021) [50]	Emphasizes leader adaptability	Presents SLM as an effective theory that emphasizes leader adaptability based on follower maturity.
Hersey, P., Blanchard, K. H., & Johnson, D. E. (2012) [49]	Applicability in effective human resource management	Develops SLM by highlighting its applicability in effective human resource management.
Thompson, G., & Glasø, L. (2018) [8]	Improves job satisfaction and performance	Assesses SLM from a leader–follower congruence approach, finding that alignment improves job satisfaction and performance.
Aslam, S., et al. (2022) [6]	Positive impact on work motivation and job satisfaction	Highlights how SLM emerged during COVID-19, positively impacting work motivation and job satisfaction.

Second Research Results

The relevance of the Situational Leadership Model (SLM) in contemporary leadership settings has been examined, particularly regarding its applicability in sustainability-driven organizations. While SLM is recognized for its adaptability, allowing leaders to modify their leadership style based on the readiness and development of their followers, its effectiveness in addressing the complexities of sustainability-oriented leadership remains an area of debate.

Recent findings by [14] highlighted that SLM remains effective across both face-to-face and remote work settings due to its inherent adaptability. However, their study also underscored the model's failure to explicitly integrate corporate sustainability strategies, signaling a gap in its applicability to modern leadership challenges. Similarly, [24] critiqued SLM for its predominant focus on short-term leadership adaptability, arguing that contemporary leadership demands necessitate a framework that incorporates ethical governance and long-term workforce resilience.

Further evidence by [7] revealed that while SLM enhances organizational adaptability, it does not adequately align with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles, which have become critical to modern corporate leadership strategies. Additionally, studies by [12,29] have confirmed that SLM fosters leadership confidence and team collaboration in business and technology sectors; however, they highlighted its deficiency in sustainability-oriented leadership frameworks.

The examination of SLM's alignment with sustainability-driven leadership models necessitates an evaluation of its potential integration with frameworks such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), ESG, and ethical governance. Several studies have emphasized that while SLM provides a flexible leadership approach, it lacks an explicit sustainability focus, necessitating modifications to align with contemporary sustainability imperatives.

Ref. [4] highlighted the absence of a sustainability-driven structure within SLM, advocating for modifications that integrate ethical governance and ESG principles. Similarly, [51] identified key leadership determinants—trust, innovation, and shared vision—that contribute to sustainable business practices. These insights suggest that SLM could be enhanced by incorporating sustainability-focused leadership principles to foster long-term organizational resilience.

Ref. [52] emphasized that adaptive leadership models, including SLM, can support sustainability initiatives, but their effectiveness remains limited unless they are explicitly modified to incorporate ESG considerations. Furthermore, ref. [53] proposed a Global

Leadership for Sustainability (GLfS) model that prioritizes ethical leadership, stakeholder engagement, and sustainability-oriented adaptability. While SLM shares adaptability as a core feature, the authors argued that it must evolve to address broader sustainability challenges beyond immediate situational adaptability.

Ref. [54] further extended this critique by emphasizing responsible leadership as an evolution of traditional leadership frameworks, advocating for a shift beyond short-term leader–follower dynamics toward long-term sustainability, ethical decision-making, and stakeholder engagement. These perspectives collectively suggest that while SLM offers valuable leadership adaptability, it must integrate sustainability principles to remain relevant in global organizations.

The refinement of SLM to better address sustainability challenges has led to discussions on integrating ethical leadership and servant leadership principles into its framework. Several studies have provided empirical evidence supporting the argument that SLM can benefit from incorporating these leadership paradigms, particularly in promoting long-term workforce well-being, ethical governance, and social responsibility.

Ref. [55] argued that Servant Leadership aligns closely with Ethical Leadership due to its emphasis on moral integrity, trust-building, and stakeholder well-being. Their study underscores the importance of integrating Servant Leadership principles into sustainability-driven leadership models, reinforcing the notion that leadership effectiveness extends beyond immediate adaptability to encompass ethical responsibility.

Likewise, [56] highlighted that Servant Leadership fosters workforce resilience and enhances corporate sustainability by prioritizing long-term employee engagement and organizational well-being. These findings suggest that SLM could evolve to incorporate elements of Servant Leadership, reinforcing its ability to address sustainability challenges.

Ref. [57] further emphasized that both Ethical Leadership and Servant Leadership contribute to sustainable business practices by fostering organizational resilience, ethical decision-making, and employee commitment. They argued that SLM's effectiveness in contemporary leadership contexts could be significantly enhanced by integrating sustainability-driven leadership dimensions, including ethical governance and corporate social responsibility.

Several studies have advocated for targeted modifications to SLM to enhance its sustainability focus, ethical decision-making capabilities, and adaptability to the complexities of global leadership in the modern era.

Ref. [36] discussed Transformational Leadership and Social Entrepreneurship as alternative leadership frameworks that successfully integrate sustainability into decision-making processes. They argued that SLM's adaptability should be expanded to include transformational leadership principles that emphasize long-term resilience, ethical governance, and social responsibility.

Ref. [58] explored the intersection between Leadership, Innovation, and Sustainability, highlighting the role of leadership adaptability in driving sustainable innovation. His findings suggest that SLM could benefit from incorporating sustainability-driven leadership competencies, particularly in fostering innovation-oriented leadership strategies.

Ref. [59] further supported the integration of sustainability into leadership frameworks by demonstrating that Servant Leadership enhances leadership sustainability through ethical governance and workforce engagement. His findings reinforce the argument that SLM should incorporate elements of Servant Leadership to align with sustainability objectives.

New case studies provide additional insights into SLM's role in sustainable development across different industries. In the aerospace sector, ref. [60] examined the leadership strategies of Airbus and Tata Advanced Systems Ltd. (TASL). Their research concluded that transformational and servant leadership significantly enhanced sustainable development

outcomes. They advocated for a hybrid leadership approach that integrates transformational and servant leadership traits to promote long-term sustainability in multinational aerospace companies. This study reinforces the argument that SLM must evolve beyond situational adaptability to incorporate sustainability-driven leadership practices.

Similarly, ref. [61] investigated sustainable leadership in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Pakistan, emphasizing its role in fostering frugal innovation. Their findings revealed that sustainable leadership positively influenced innovation, mediated by knowledge sources and moderated by information credibility. This study underscores the necessity for adaptive leadership in resource-limited environments, reinforcing the argument that SLM should integrate sustainability principles to enhance long-term organizational resilience and competitiveness.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, ref. [62] examined the role of managerial networking and sustainable leadership in organizational adaptation within Pakistani SMEs. Their findings indicate that managerial and business connections significantly impacted frugal innovation, especially when supported by sustainable leadership. However, political ties did not influence innovation. The study highlights the importance of situational leadership in maintaining employee engagement, reducing exhaustion, and fostering sustainability-oriented leadership strategies during times of crisis.

The cumulative findings from this systematic review indicate that while SLM remains a relevant and adaptable leadership model, it fails to incorporate an explicit sustainability framework. The model's primary strength lies in its flexibility in addressing short-term leadership challenges; however, its applicability to sustainability-driven organizations remains limited due to its failure to incorporate ESG principles, ethical governance, and long-term resilience strategies.

Studies have confirmed that SLM's effectiveness can be significantly enhanced by integrating leadership paradigms that emphasize long-term sustainability, such as Servant Leadership, Ethical Leadership, and Transformational Leadership. These models provide the ethical foundation, social responsibility focus, and resilience-building strategies necessary for contemporary leadership frameworks.

Empirical evidence further supports the argument that SLM should be expanded to include sustainability-driven leadership competencies, including stakeholder engagement, ethical governance, and environmental responsibility. Future research should focus on refining SLM to align with corporate sustainability strategies, ensuring that leaders are equipped to navigate the complexities of global business environments while upholding ethical and sustainability-oriented leadership principles.

Given the increasing complexity of leadership roles in global, sustainability-driven organizations, SLM should undergo a theoretical and practical revision to integrate sustainability-focused leadership principles. This evolution should involve the incorporation of ESG factors, ethical leadership dimensions, and long-term resilience strategies while maintaining the model's inherent adaptability. Doing so would ensure that SLM remains relevant and effective in contemporary organizational contexts, addressing both immediate leadership challenges and long-term sustainability imperatives.

6. Conclusions

Following the analysis conducted and in consideration of the research objectives, the following conclusions can be drawn, highlighting both the limitations and benefits of situational framework [1] in its organizational application.

The SLM faces several challenges that affect its effectiveness and applicability. Among the primary obstacles is the difficulty in measuring essential leadership attributes, such as altruism and service, due to insufficiently precise definitions, which hinder evaluation

and reduce the possibility of obtaining solid empirical results. This limitation affects the scientific validation of the model, undermining its theoretical credibility. Furthermore, the lack of a clear definition of SL styles and the absence of formal assessment tools complicate both theoretical comprehension and practical implementation. As a result, leaders lack concrete guidance on how to adapt their leadership style to different situations, limiting the model's capacity to inform effective managerial decision-making. The scarcity of reliable leadership studies, influenced by diverse methodological approaches and potential biases, further contributes to significant gaps in understanding the impact of SL on organizational performance.

Another critical issue is the lack of a clear correlation between work experience and leadership styles, raising questions about SL's applicability in specific contexts, such as the healthcare sector, where the delegative style is rarely observed among clinical nurses. Additionally, the low perceived effectiveness of Hersey and Blanchard's leadership styles reinforces the notion of a disconnect between theory and practical implementation. The absence of effective evaluation tools exacerbates this issue, limiting the model's impact on organizational practices.

Despite its limitations, SLM has proven to be a valuable and adaptable leadership tool across various sectors, particularly for its contributions to workplace climate, team cohesion, and interpersonal relationship development. In the education sector, SL has fostered a more harmonious and collaborative work environment, enhanced responsibility management and improving teacher and administrative staff performance. Its implementation has also led to higher job satisfaction and improved talent retention. In the technology sector, SL has increased leader confidence and capability, particularly in remote teams, while also clarifying roles and responsibilities, promoting autonomy, and enhancing productivity in dynamic work environments.

In the service sector, SL has proven effective in managing workplace stress and improving employee satisfaction, fostering a cooperative and synergistic work environment. These improvements have contributed to reducing talent turnover while increasing motivation and commitment among employees. In the business sector, SL has provided a useful framework for evaluating employee development and offering effective feedback. Its adaptability to changing organizational needs has led to significant improvements in productivity and performance, particularly during periods of crisis and transformation.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, SL demonstrated its value as an essential tool for ensuring organizational resilience. The implementation of innovative approaches, such as New Normal Leadership (NNL), underscored the model's ability to adapt to uncertainty, enhance employee satisfaction, and maintain productivity even under challenging conditions. SL's capacity to respond to dynamic environments has been crucial in sustaining its relevance and effectiveness.

In summary, while the SLM presents significant challenges related to definition, evaluation, and empirical evidence, it also offers tangible benefits in workplace climate, interpersonal relationships, job satisfaction, productivity, and adaptability. These findings underscore the importance of overcoming current barriers through future research and the development of practical tools to maximize the model's positive impact on organizations. Furthermore, as sustainability becomes a defining principle in modern business, leadership models must integrate sustainable leadership practices to ensure long-term organizational success. Addressing the intersection of SL and sustainability will be critical for the continued relevance and evolution of the model in contemporary leadership research and practice.

SL remains a valuable leadership approach for managers seeking to enhance team performance and cohesion across a wide range of organizational sectors while adapting to the pressing needs of sustainability-driven leadership in the 21st century.

7. Theoretical and Practical Implications of the Study

The effectiveness of the Situational Leadership (SL) Model lies in its ability to provide a conceptual framework that facilitates the understanding and guidance of leadership actions within an organization, based on the readiness level of followers. This approach offers flexibility and adaptability, both of which are fundamental for effective team management and strategic decision-making.

In the current landscape, characterized by significant transformations in the workplace and organizational structures, as well as the growing influence of technology, it is necessary to reassess the situational framework [1].

Such an analysis should take into account the integration of complementary tools that enhance the comprehensive development of employees. While readiness remains a key dimension, it is crucial to explore additional factors that can provide leaders with a more robust foundation for decision-making in complex and dynamic environments.

Among these tools, those aimed at strengthening communication skills and promoting leadership by example hold relevance. The ability of leaders to serve as role models, embodying organizational values, not only reinforces team cohesion and commitment but also aligns with the ethical and social demands of the 21st century. These competencies contribute to the development of more effective leadership, capable of addressing contemporary challenges with resilience and adaptability.

In this regard, the SL model should not only be valued for its adaptability to the characteristics of followers but also for its potential to be enriched through innovative approaches that address the emerging needs of organizations. The integration of tools that promote effective communication, exemplary leadership, and alignment with organizational values is essential in shaping the leadership profile required by today's evolving work environment.

8. Limitations of the Study and Future Research Directions

The conclusions presented critically reassess Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Model (SLM) [1], identifying key gaps that necessitate further scholarly investigation. These limitations highlight the need for continued research to refine the model and enhance its practical applicability, particularly within the framework of sustainability-driven leadership. Given the expanded scope of this study, which now evaluates both the empirical evidence of SLM in contemporary leadership contexts and its alignment with sustainability principles, the limitations identified extend beyond prior theoretical critiques and now incorporate the model's applicability in addressing long-term resilience, corporate sustainability, and ethical governance.

One of the primary limitations of this study is the restricted empirical evidence on the application of SLM's role in sustainability-driven leadership. While the model has been extensively applied in leadership research, there is a scarcity of longitudinal studies and cross-sectoral analyses that evaluate its effectiveness in sustainability-focused organizations. Furthermore, empirical evidence on how SLM facilitates leadership practices related to Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) integration; corporate social responsibility (CSR); and ethical decision-making remains limited, making it difficult to assess its long-term impact on sustainability-oriented leadership.

Additionally, theoretical and methodological challenges persist due to the absence of clear definitions and standardized measurement tools for assessing SLM styles, particularly

in sustainability contexts. The diversity of methodological approaches used in prior studies introduces potential biases that limit the reliability of findings. Future research should focus on developing comprehensive evaluation metrics that assess SLM's adaptability to sustainability imperatives while ensuring its alignment with emerging leadership paradigms that prioritize ethical governance and long-term workforce resilience.

The cultural and contextual biases embedded in much of the existing research further constrain SLM's applicability in global sustainability contexts. Given that most studies have been conducted in Western, corporate settings, there remains an insufficient understanding of how SLM functions in non-Western cultures, public-sector organizations, NGOs, and industries undergoing green transitions. Expanding the analysis to diverse organizational environments would allow for a more nuanced understanding of how SLM aligns with sustainable leadership practices in sectors with heightened regulatory compliance and stakeholder engagement requirements.

Another key challenge is the difficulty in operationalizing leadership attributes essential for sustainability, such as altruism and service, which are fundamental for leaders whose role includes fostering the growth and development of their teams, and long-term ethical decision-making. This study reveals that SLM does not fully capture the broader spectrum of leadership dimensions required in sustainability-driven leadership frameworks, indicating a need to revise its theoretical constructs to incorporate leadership competencies that extend beyond immediate situational adaptability.

From an applied perspective, the absence of precise definitions and formal evaluation tools hinders the practical implementation of SLM, particularly in sustainability-oriented organizations. The insufficiency of clear criteria for decision-making within the model raises concerns about its efficacy in guiding leaders through the complexities of corporate sustainability, stakeholder relations, and regulatory compliance. Future research should explore how SLM can be expanded to provide clearer, more structured decision-making frameworks that integrate sustainability-oriented leadership principles.

Moreover, the relationship between leadership experience and sustainability-oriented leadership styles remains underexplored. The findings indicate that experience alone does not necessarily correlate with the adoption of sustainability-driven leadership practices, raising questions about whether SLM is universally applicable across industries where long-term resilience and ESG alignment are critical leadership priorities. Future studies should analyze how organizational commitment to sustainability, regulatory factors, and industry-specific challenges influence the effectiveness of SLM in fostering sustainable leadership behaviors.

A recurrent concern throughout the literature is the perceived disconnect between SLM's theoretical assumptions and its real-world application, particularly concerning sustainability. Many studies have indicated that while the model is effective in addressing immediate leadership challenges, it does not inherently support the long-term, systemic thinking required for sustainability leadership. This misalignment reinforces the need for a revised theoretical framework that bridges the gap between situational adaptability and sustainability-driven leadership strategies.

Future Research Directions

To address these limitations, future studies should explore alternative research methodologies that complement the current body of knowledge, which has been largely dominated by quantitative approaches. Incorporating qualitative and mixed-methods research would offer deeper insights into how SLM operates in diverse sustainability contexts, providing a more comprehensive understanding of its role in fostering ethical, responsible, and resilience-driven leadership. Furthermore, expanding the review to underexamined inter-

national databases would allow for a broader, more globally representative perspective on the model's applicability.

Future research should also prioritize the application of SLM in underexplored sectors, particularly government agencies, NGOs, and SMEs, where sustainability challenges differ from those in large corporations. Understanding how situational leadership functions in mission-driven organizations would provide valuable insights into its adaptability to non-traditional leadership settings.

Additionally, longitudinal studies should be conducted to examine the sustained impact of SLM on leadership development and organizational effectiveness over time. Expanding sample sizes across diverse industries, cultural contexts, and leadership levels would strengthen the empirical foundation of SLM and clarify its role in long-term sustainability strategies.

In summary, there are significant opportunities to refine and expand research on SLM, particularly in its alignment with sustainability-driven leadership models. Future studies should prioritize theoretical advancements, methodological rigor, and empirical evidence on the application of the SLM validation to enhance SLM's relevance in contemporary leadership research. By integrating sustainability-oriented leadership principles, ethical governance, and resilience-building strategies, SLM has the potential to evolve into a comprehensive, future-ready leadership model capable of addressing both immediate situational challenges and long-term sustainability imperatives.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

SLM	Situational Leadership Model
SLT	Situational Leadership Theory
ESG	Environmental, Social, and Governance
NGOs	Non-governmental organization
SME	Small and medium enterprise
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
NNL	New Normal Leadership
GLfS	Global Leadership for Sustainability
SLF	Situational leadership factors

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