

Enhancing the impact of sustainability research and education: Distributed leadership as a guiding model

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United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are presented as a set of highly connected objectives, provide a comprehensive framework for addressing a wide range of global challenges. Higher education institutions play a special role in advancing the SDGs. Here I present some key findings from case studies of Japanese academics working on sustainability research and education, ranging from natural sciences to social science and policy. The academics in this study are at different career stages and are from both research-intensive and teaching-focused institutions in Japan. Qualitative research methods including questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, document analysis were used. I discuss the significance of the research findings through the lens of leadership models and approaches to data in academic work. In particular, I will highlight the transformational potential of distributed leadership in research and education. Distributed leadership requires not only building new institutional structures but also questioning established academic identities and cultures. Informed by findings from this study, I will also argue that distributed leadership may serve as an effective guiding model for enhancing the impact of SDG research and education. In addition, I will also discuss how distributed leadership is implemented in other cultural contexts, including the new American Geophysical Union's Education Section and a UK consortium that aimed to bring research and education closer together.

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