



INTEGRATION OF PERSONAL COMPETENCIES OF MANAGERS IN THE BUSINESS OF ORGANIZATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF BUSINESS AND SUSTAINABILITY REPORTS OF SLOVENIAN ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

Sustainable awareness and increasing focus on this area has led many researchers to look for ways to best ensure that this mindset is transferred to all stakeholders within the organization. Leaders have the greatest role in this, so their personal competencies are also our main focus of the research. We discuss the recognition of personal competencies defined by other authors through sustainable leadership, the theory of sustainable leadership and competency models, and in the business and sustainability reports of large organizations in Slovenia, we look for the occurrence of recognized personal competencies – ethics, emotional intelligence and personal integrity. The theoretical framework of the research provides some important findings in the field of sustainable management, on the basis of which we carried out a qualitative and quantitative phase and thematically analyzed the business and sustainability reports of large companies in Slovenia and looked for the frequency of occurrence of individual personal competencies. The results provide leaders with insight into the awareness of the competencies that are exposed through the reporting of organizations and in a way set a mirror for them to improve in the field of achieving reporting practices. We found that the awareness of personal competencies is insufficiently shown through business and sustainability reports, which is not yet an indicator of what is the actual awareness of the importance of these competencies in the implementation of sustainable practices. Nevertheless, the research provides some original starting points for further researchers and the basis for conducting in-depth interviews among the heads of larger companies or quantitative research among management bodies.

Keywords: Leadership, Competencies, Sustainability, Sustainable Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, Ethics, Personal Integrity

1 INTRODUCTION

Focusing on climate and social change, which is increasingly affecting the business environment, is becoming a constant on the organization's agenda. Not only from the point of view of competitiveness,

but also in order to avoid possible volatile situations that arise as a result of climate change, social diversity and management challenges. We are talking about sustainability, i.e. a concept that defines the integration of care for the environment, air and water on the one hand and society and all its stake-

holders on the other (Luna-Nemecio, Tobón, & Gribran, 2020, p. 2) and through the management aspect dictates that organizations work towards a commitment to implement sustainable practices. Directing the organization towards restructuring and the search for organizational forms that shape the economic process in such a way that they contribute to social and ecological problems, changing and not depleting and destroying human and environmental resources is a problem that we will encounter more and more often in the study of contemporary paradigms. Understanding how organizations navigate all these aspects of management, however, is often placed on the shoulders of managers to decide whether to implement a sustainability policy and transfer it primarily to employees, later to all stakeholders in the interaction of their work, or whether their management practices will not go in the direction of integrating sustainability (Zacher, Kühner, Katz, & Rudolph, 2024, p. 383). In this context, the concept of “sustainable management” emerges, which can help to define sustainability leadership more precisely. Despite the growing visibility of sustainable management, it remains an open question to what extent organizations actually identify, develop and communicate these competencies in their strategic documents, especially in business and sustainability reports.

Tian and Wang (2023, p. 3) define sustainable leadership as leadership that supports sustainable practices at both the organizational and societal levels while meeting the still key goal of each organization, making a profit, and dictating a more sustainable approach to management, the long-term operation of organizations, and care for all stakeholders (Bencsik & Pangsy-Kania, 2023, p. 4). The literature specifies that sustainable leadership follows patterns of behavior that are believed to result in a different sustainability-oriented mindset (Zacher, Kühner, Katz, & Rudolph, 2024, p. 367), but it is about the ability of leaders to influence individuals and the organization in order to achieve a long-term vision of sustainability (Khan, Saqib, Abbasi, Mikhaylov, & Pinter, 2023, p. 2; Hu, et al., 2023, p. 3). Such thinking is also supported by Boeske (2023, p. 6), who says that sustainable leadership is about focusing on people, the environment and profit, and about the shared responsibility of different

stakeholders, shaped by the behavior, values, and moral and ethical commitment that defines the culture of the organization. However, Ryan and Cross (2024, p. 147) conclude that sustainable leaders have the power to transform an organization either positively or negatively, so it is important that they are aware of the competencies and behaviors they use in their work.

The need to evaluate the competency-based leadership approach of leaders is urgent and has a significant impact on the effectiveness of sustainable leadership. Olugboyega, Ejohwomu, Omopariola, and Omoregie (2024, p. 192) have built their theory on previous research that has examined leadership through the competencies of inspiring and motivating, integrity, and responsibility, which translates into personal growth. By upgrading this research, the correlation between managerial competencies and transformational leadership style was measured, while not neglecting the mechanisms that affect the formation of these competencies and are subject to constant change and development. And it is precisely this breadth that Olugboyega, Ejohwomu, Omopariola, and Omoregie (2024, p. 193) have shown through leadership orientation that means that leaders, due to their competencies, begin to prioritize those beliefs that have been created by their personality and are in line with their leadership orientation, which ultimately shapes the culture and direction of the organization and influences the behavior of all followers. Their research also proves the importance of competencies in the effectiveness of sustainable leadership, which attracted our attention even more for further research.

Most studies of sustainable leadership and related leadership competencies are mapped into competency models in order to find those that ensure the effective implementation of sustainable practices. Initially, the models were focused on expertise, but later evolved in the direction of personal motivation and networking (Wells, 2022, p. 24). Fry and Egel (2021, p. 3) have developed a global leadership model for sustainability based on aligning vision and values, empowering teams, and addressing economic, social, and environmental issues. Altman and Fry (2024, p. 12) emphasize that sustainable leadership is only effective in organiza-

tions where leaders are focused on developing their competencies and having a holistic understanding of sustainability practices. Competency models therefore recognize an environment that enhances self-development, strengths and important aspects of leadership, while the recognition of competencies through competency models also becomes crucial for the development of leaders and the framing of leadership potential.

Although many organizations publicly support sustainable values, it remains unclear whether and how they express awareness of the personal competencies required for sustainable leadership in their strategic documents (e.g. sustainability and business reports). Therefore, this research addresses the question of how these competencies – especially ethics, emotional intelligence and personal integrity – are presented in the discourses of organizations through business and sustainability reports. Such reports are a strategic communication tool through which organizations shape their identity, values and attitudes towards social and environmental issues. In the context of Slovenia, where organizations are increasingly committed to non-financial disclosure, such reports provide insight into how leaders express their sustainability through personal competencies such as ethics, emotional intelligence, and personal integrity.

2 THEORETICAL STARTING POINTS

2.1 The role of sustainable leaders through the sustainable management model

The concept of sustainability is becoming the focus of many debates around the world, while simultaneously opening up the gaps caused by the modern way of life of organizations due to rapid development, better living conditions, increased educational opportunities, limited natural resources, a warming atmosphere, water, air and soil pollution, and the unequal distribution of wealth (Afridi et al., 2023, p. 13; Fisher et al., 2023, p. 3), which represents an intensely researched topic in the recent period. Sustainability, which we are talking about through the aspect of organizations and its operation, comes from the definition of the Brundtland Commission in 1972 and is based on maintaining

and improving the ecological, social and economic position for human development and the development of organizations in general, which will be our starting point for further research. In short, definitions that look at the development of organizations through all three areas of sustainability (environmental, social and economic) and transferring this mindset to other stakeholders, which we want to examine from a leadership perspective, remains our central focus. (Mensah, 2019, str. 15)

This transfer of a sustainable mindset to other levels belongs to leaders and their function of working in the organization. The new field of sustainable leadership, which is developing in parallel with the development of sustainability in organizations, is considered in the literature as a confrontation with the challenges posed by sustainable development and falls under the modern management mindset (Ruwanika & Massyn, 2024, p. 5), and the organization must remain agile and responsive to change in the face of many challenges. The concept of sustainable leadership has been increasingly present in academic discourse in recent years, but it is not uniformly defined. Some authors understand it as integrating economic, environmental, and social goals into leadership practices (e.g., Tian & Wang, 2023), while others emphasize leaders' personal values such as integrity, emotional intelligence, and moral awareness (Armani, Petrini & Santos, 2020; Visser & Courtice, 2011). In short, competencies, which, according to Boyatzis' definition (1982, p. 12), represent certain qualities or abilities of a person with which he demonstrates success in his actions in the work environment, and later definitions of the term touch on the reflection of actions and attitudes that leaders show in the effectiveness of the performance of their tasks, but also include personal qualities and circumstances, actions, knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and beliefs, through which managers influence employees, consumers, suppliers, and other stakeholders in the process (Eberz et al. 2023; Papademetriou, Ragazou, Garefalakis, & Passas, 2023; Visser & Courtice, 2011). In this research, we follow an approach that emphasizes personal competencies as a key aspect of sustainable leadership, as we want to explore whether and how they appear in the communication documents of organisations.

2.2 Competencies of sustainable leaders through a competency model of leadership

The development of paradigms has changed or upgraded directions over time, and throughout the development of organizational theories, people and the dilemma of how to lead them have been important. Sustainability has further upgraded and targeted this mindset, primarily through the expansion of business models that require the integration of social interests and environmental awareness, and consequently this means the involvement of all stakeholders and their appropriate management. Although it is a matter of multifaceted and different definitions of concepts in the field of sustainable management and competences related to these concepts, which the authors highlight according to the area of interest, we will draw on some of those authors (García Martín, Duran-Heras, & Reina-Sánchez, 2023; Tian & Wang, 2023; Visser & Courtice, 2011), whose models emphasize the personality characteristics of leaders and represent the basis for the formation of a sustainable leadership style and the implementation of sustainability in the practice of organizations.

The literature emphasizes that leaders are key because they provide vision, set direction, and motivate followers to change and take different actions, ones that are more related to sustainable action, valuing economic, social, and environmental issues, and if we talk about a sustainable leader, Umair, Waqas, Mrugalska, and Al Shamsi (2023, p. 7) describe as such that leader who strives for sustainability, It is concerned with the conservation of resources and the prevention of environmental and social damage, while encouraging others to take actions that lead to sustainability. Similarly, Visser and Courtice (2011, p. 4) define a sustainable leader as a mix of leadership characteristics that encompass new ways of thinking and interacting that lead to innovative and more sustainable solutions combining multiple factors into a sustainable leadership model.

Sustainable leaders value human development and are aware of the importance of environmental impact, strengthen the internal resources of the organization, create value, are responsible for the development of the community, without neglecting the economic aspects of the organization's operations

(Armani, Petrini, & Santos, 2020, p. 821), and at the same time take on a key role of facilitator in the relationship between environmentally-oriented leadership, quality and performance of organizations (Mulyani & Basrowi, 2024, p. 473). Such leaders have a sustainable perspective, recognize the concerns that sustainability brings, promote green initiatives, and adopt sustainable management practices (Khan, Saqib, Abbasi, Mikhaylov, & Pinter, 2023, p. 2), i.e. they have certain competencies. We will use the term competency to define the key elements that characterize a sustainable leader, and in reviewing the literature, we came across a number of terms that can be equated with the one under consideration, such as characteristics, behaviors, skills, roles (Armani, Petrini, & Santos, 2020, p. 823). We were interested in how competences are defined in relation to sustainability, so in order to understand the essential areas of sustainable management, we examined some models that are the subject of research in the existing literature. In principle, the models are based on new sustainable leadership theories derived from moral values, conscious leadership, ethics and strengthening responsibility in order to contribute to the solution of social and environmental needs (García Martín, Duran-Heras, & Reina-Sánchez, 2023, p. 4) and represent a set of mechanisms that underpin the formation of a sustainable leadership style (Tian & Wang, 2023, p. 2).

For example, Papademetriou et al. (2023, p. 16) highlight those sustainable competencies that pursue experience, one's own beliefs, are learned and adaptable at the same time, but here we did not encounter a clear demarcation between personality competencies. On the other hand, Altman and Fry (2024, p. 8), based on a review of the existing literature, highlighted five competencies in their model that they categorized as strictly necessary and encompass organizational development and process competencies that represent collaboration with stakeholders. The competencies that they recognized as key to the development of a sustainable leader and appropriate cooperation are relationship empowerment, process change management, joint decision-making, conflict management, entrepreneurial approach, influencing and motivation. Again, it has not been studied whether these competencies stem from personality traits or whether

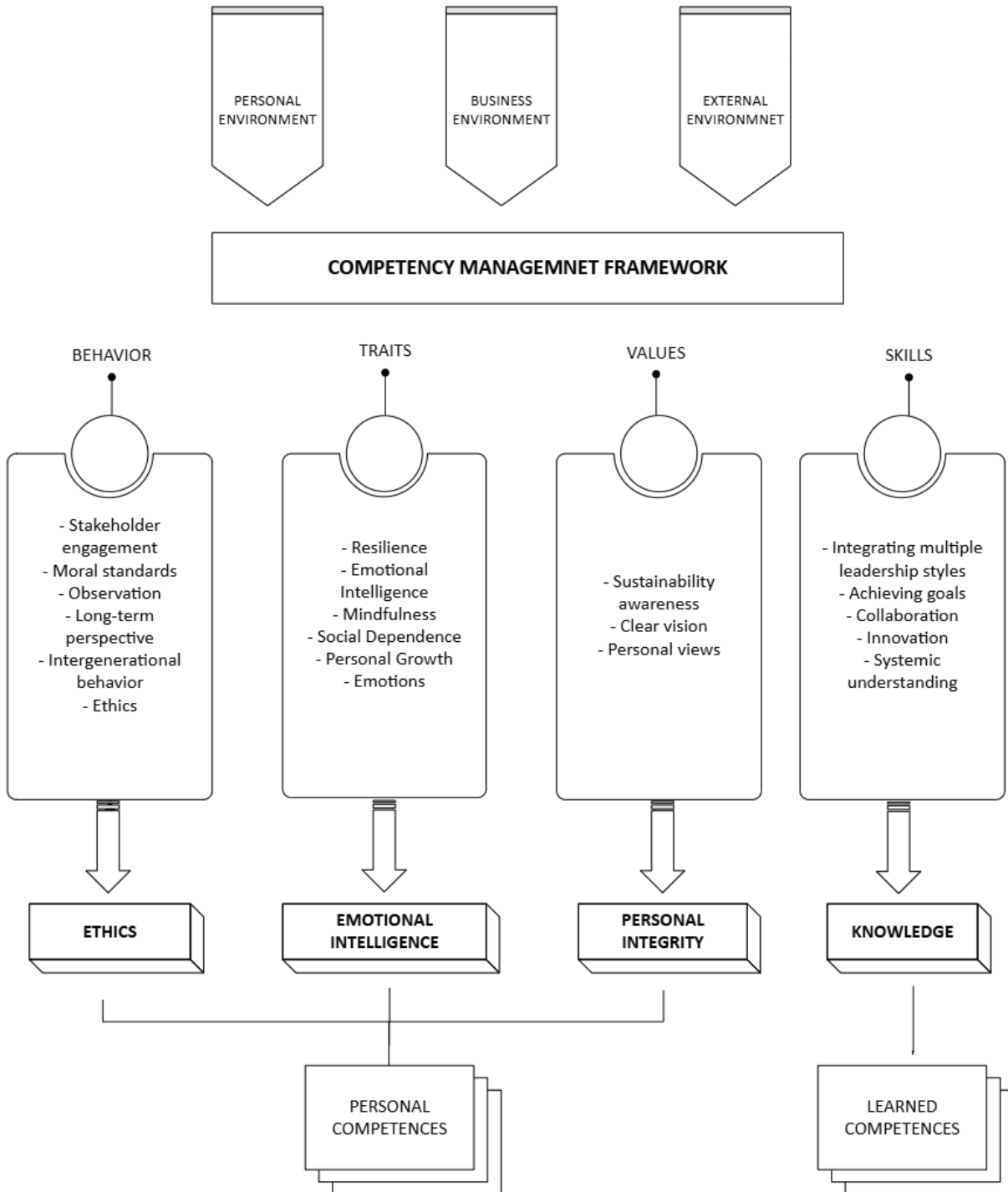
they may be general beliefs and following the vision of the organization. The research, conducted by Armani, Petrini and Santos (2020, pp. 827-830), aimed to understand the competencies that characterize the profile of a sustainable leader and reveals what is essential for leaders for whom sustainability is paramount. They highlighted the seven areas that were most often mentioned by the interviewees, namely leadership, skills, focus, orientation towards change, alignment with organizational culture, values and moral principles, and visionary through the realization of the vision, which only briefly touches on competencies as such. Eberz and his colleagues (2023, p. 4), on the other hand, examine the competencies that Wiek et al. have positioned as a model for the study of competencies for the development of academic programs and are considered as a fundamental work in the field of sustainability, as they are one of the more referenced studies (3134 citations, Google Scholar, August 12, 2024). Based on the interviews conducted, they tried to determine which competencies decision-makers need when dealing with sustainability challenges in their daily decisions. It's about systems thinking, which means being aware of global thinking, being able to focus on the organization's vision, developing transformation for sustainability, and being able to see challenges as an opportunity. All this is accompanied by the awareness that the need for interconnection, which must reach a heterogeneous circle of stakeholders, is adequate communication, cooperation and involvement of the wider community, while mutual cooperation and systemic thinking were most often highlighted in terms of the number of statements. The research is extensive and interesting, but personal competencies are touched on in passing, so for our research we focused on the model presented by Visser and Courtice (2011, p. 5) and refers to the context of leadership in which leaders operate, i.e. the external and internal environment of the organization, the personality characteristics of the leader and the actions of leaders that are manifested through decision-making, providing strategic direction, accountability, empowerment and inclusion. Each of the three areas represents one piece of the puzzle in the overall sustainable management model and allows for broad options in research. This breadth of the presented model was narrowed down through the research by focusing only on the person-

ality area of leaders, where Visser and Courtice's model highlights characteristics or competencies, leadership style, skills and knowledge.

In the model, the skills of leaders are directly intertwined with knowledge, as we are talking about solving complex issues, responding to risk, uncertainty, following a vision, making decisions, adopting innovations and long-term thinking, which is directly related to the knowledge of sustainable development, which leaders must constantly upgrade (Visser & Courtice, 2011, pp. 9-10). Numerous leadership competencies, as building blocks of the competency model, represent an important part of the sustainable development of leaders, and therefore represent an important step in the model of understanding this area. To highlight only those competencies that Visser and Courtice (2011, p. 8) devote the most attention to, these are moral or ethical leadership, interconnection and interdependence at all levels, openness to different opinions, a high level of emotional intelligence, reflexivity, creativity, optimism, inspiring relationships and vision. The basis of this model, with a focus on personal competencies highlighted by other authors, is the basis of our research. In order to synthesize the presented models and identify the most frequently mentioned personality competencies of a sustainable leader, we have designed the scheme below (Figure 1). The diagram shows which competencies appeared in different models, how they relate to the personality traits of leaders, and which were most often emphasized in the literature. Special emphasis is placed on those that occur multiple times and in different research environments.

As can be seen from Figure 1, there are some consistencies between the models, especially in competencies such as ethics, emotional intelligence, and integrity, which occur in different contexts and are often recognized as fundamental. It is also interesting that some competencies, e.g. systems thinking, visionary (Eberz, Lang, Breitenmoser, & Niebert, 2023) dominate in more strategically oriented models, while others, reflexivity, creativity (Visser and Courtice, 2011) come out from more personality-psychological approaches. These findings were the basis for the decision to focus on personality competencies in our research, as we are interested in how organizations present them in their communication documents.

Figure 1: Competence framework for sustainable management



In doing so, of course, we must take into account the environment, both business and external, as well as the personal environment of the leader, that is, his internal thinking and attitudes, which was also confirmed by Visser and Courtice (2011). Based

on this synthesis, the research focused on personal competencies, which are most often highlighted by various authors and which are recognized as a key factor in leading sustainable changes within the organization. Thus, ethics, emotional intelligence and

personal integrity formed the starting point for the design of the research goals and served as the basis for the formulation of research questions and the search for these competencies in the business and sustainability reports of large companies in the Republic of Slovenia. We were interested in whether and how these competencies appear in the business and sustainability reports of Slovenian organizations (RV1 and RV2) and whether there are differences between sectors in terms of their discursive presence (RV3). In doing so, the research directly contributes to the understanding of the extent to which organizations recognize and communicate the personality competencies of leaders as part of their sustainability narratives.

2.3 Research questions

The research questions arise from the aim of the research, which is to examine whether and how Slovenian organizations discursively present selected personal competencies of leaders – ethics, emotional intelligence and personal integrity – in their business and sustainability reports, and to what extent differences between sectors occur.

Research question (RQ1): How are the personality competencies of leaders (ethics, emotional intelligence, integrity) discursively presented in business and sustainability reports?

The aim is to analyse whether these competencies are presented as concrete actions, normative values or mere general statements.

Research question (RQ2): How often do business and sustainability reports of Slovenian organizations contain content related to ethics, emotional intelligence and personal integrity of managers?

The purpose is to identify the presence of these competencies quantitatively and qualitatively.

Research question (RQ3): Are there differences in the representation of personal competencies of sustainable leadership between organizations from the manufacturing and service sectors?

The research questions arose from research gaps that were identified during the literature review. The main purpose of the research was to determine how Slovenian organizations include the personal competencies of leaders in their business and sustainability reports, with a special emphasis on ethics, emotional intelligence and personal integrity.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on a qualitative research paradigm, using the approach of thematic analysis with elements of discourse analysis, supplemented by a descriptive presentation of the incidence of selected categories, and quantitative research of incidence was carried out below. Thematic analysis, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 4) as a fundamental method for qualitative analysis, remains crucial, allows for the systematic identification and interpretation of patterns of meaning within qualitative data, and is particularly suitable for the analysis of discursive sources (Ussher & Perz, 2014), such as annual reports, sustainability reports, and other forms of organizational communication. In accordance with their guidelines and recommendations of Lamut and Macur (2012) on conducting thematic analysis and reporting, qualitative research is taken into account as closely as possible in the preparation of qualitative research.

Since the topic of research is constructed through a subjective view and social interactions, we strive to understand complexity and multi-layeredness. The choice of thematic analysis with elements of discourse is justified in the goal of the research, which is aimed at understanding the content, meanings and manner of talking about a particular phenomenon Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 5), while supplementing it with a descriptive presentation of the occurrence of selected categories contributes to greater transparency and provides insight into the distribution of certain topics or discourses within the analyzed corpus, without distracting attention from the qualitative nature of the research. Thematic discourse analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 10), defines patterns or topics within data in order to unify the mode of expression as constructive and social meanings, so the research took into account the analyticality of the

meaning of concepts from different perspectives. In the research, we use the concept of “discourse”, which Fairclough (2010, p. 56) understands as a structured way of speaking that shapes what can be said, thought and done about a particular phenomenon. Such an approach contributes to a richer understanding of the research problem and provides insight into both the frequency and qualitative nature of phenomena, which will further increase the contribution to science, as we expect to obtain data on how organizations talk about leadership, leaders and their competencies. Thematic analysis was used in order to identify topics that express discourses and representations of personal competencies of leaders as they appear in business reports. The representations that Hall (1997, p. 15) defines as the creation of meaning through language have been sought in leaders and treated as linguistically constructed images that include certain competencies such as emotional intelligence, ethics, integrity. These concepts serve as analytical tools for understanding how the personality competencies of leaders are formed through language practices in official documents.

The empirical environment of our research is Slovenia. By focusing on only one geopolitical environment, we tried to remove cross-border influences that could complicate the analysis and, due to the diversity of legislation, lead to inequality in the data collected. The analysis was based on a sample of 30 business and sustainability reports, which serve as communication and narrative sources for the analysis of leaders’ personality competencies, i.e. they represent the urns within which we analyze discourses. The number 30 was chosen because it allows for sufficient breadth and diversity of data, while remaining analytically manageable within time and research constraints. The sampling was not random, but targeted and based on purposeful sampling, which in qualitative research is more appropriate than random sampling, when we want to gain an in-depth understanding of specific phenomena in a particular context. The documents were publicly available on the websites of Slovenian organisations or through national databases (Ajpes)(Patton, 2002). The main objective was not statistical representativeness, but to provide a theoretically informed set of documents that allows for

an in-depth analysis of discourses on leadership competencies in the context of sustainable management. The reports were selected on the basis of substantive and contextual criteria that enabled the identification of relevant narratives and representations. Such an approach has enabled the creation of a meaningful analytical unit suitable for synthetic qualitative analysis, while maintaining contextual diversity within the Slovenian business environment. We also took into account that the reports were published in 2023 and belonged to large organizations under the Companies Act from two different sectors – manufacturing and services, as this represents the essence of the data to carry out a descriptive representation of incidence in Q3 response. A heterogeneous sample was consciously chosen, as the purpose of the research is to understand the different ways of expressing personality competencies in diverse organizational contexts, and not to test the hypothesis on a representative sample. Such an approach allows for greater transferability of findings to a similar social and organizational context, which is often the goal of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

After a selection of documents and careful reading, we set up the coding scheme that is listed in Table 1. It is used to assign codes based on the initial understanding derived from the data in the integrated reports. All analysed reports were tagged with internal codes in order to maintain the anonymity of the organisations, while allowing the traceability of the origins of the citations used in the analysis. In the analysis of the reports, we considered that terms such as ethics, integrity, and emotional intelligence are discursive representations of personality competencies that occur in specific linguistic, stylistic, and symbolic contexts. We follow an understanding of representation as a practice of meaningfulness, where an organization does not merely “describe” but actively shapes meaning (Hall, 1997; Barthes, 1972). In addition, we analyzed the narrative structures by which companies shape narratives about their sustainable operations, leadership, and values in reports (Boje, 2001; Ricoeur, 1984). At the forefront of interest are those records that construct the identity of a sustainable leader and define the organization as a bearer of social responsibility. The data coding process was carried out

according to the recommendations of Braun & Clarke (2006) for the implementation of a thematic analysis, in which we used the examined broader assumptions of the three personality competencies of the leaders as a basis for what is actually presented in the reports.

We recorded prevalence at the level of each data source, by checking the number of times a particular topic appeared for each report. Thus, we were able to find out in what proportion of the analyzed reports the topic was present. The coding was carried out in the Atlas.ti program, which enables systematized and transparent management of qualitative data, especially when working with a large number of text documents, and through the review of records and keywords, we sought a connection between recognized personality competencies and publications that are directly related to managers. The analysis was performed using a combination of directional (deductive) and open (inductive) coding. In the first step, we designed an initial coding framework based on the literature, which was based on three selected personality competencies: ethics, emotional intelligence and personal integrity. In the reviewed reports, we then searched for phrases and terms that thematically fall into these three categories, taking into account semantic variants and synonyms. In emotional intelligence, we paid attention to terms such as the presence of emotions, empathy, soft skills, social identity, self-reflection, mindfulness, compassion. Expressions such as personal growth, self-worth, self-awareness, doing the right thing, compliance with actions, unity

of words and actions, focus on vision were associated with personal integrity.

In the following, we conducted a thematic analysis, in which we classified the designed codes into broader topics, combed through them, compared them and, if necessary, combined them. The thematic clusters developed iteratively, with each coding phase contributing to the refinement of the thematic framework, with reference to research questions all the time. The last step of the analysis included a quantitative calculation of the incidence of codes (frequency statistics), which determined the extent to which individual competencies are present in the reports. This combination of qualitative insight and quantitative support has enabled a rich interpretation of the data and the reliable formulation of research findings.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Discourses on personality competencies of ethics, emotional intelligence, and personal integrity in reports

The analysis of business and sustainability reports has shown that ethics in decision-making is one of the most common topics when it comes to the representation of personal competencies of leaders. In many documents, terms such as code of ethics, social responsibility, responsible conduct, compliance and corruption appear most often in connection with ethics: *“our leaders ensure strong corporate governance and set and implement goals and act as an ex-*

Table 1: Coding scheme

Thematic section	Assigned code	Code descriptor
Ethics	Personal liability Honesty Code of Ethics Care for rights	A textual description, image, or diagram that mentions ethics in direct relation to leadership or leaders
Emotional intelligence	Empathy The presence of emotions Soft skills Self-reflection Hearings	A textual description, image, or diagram that mentions emotional intelligence in direct relation to leadership or leaders
Personal integrity	Personal growth Self-values Self-awareness Compliance with actions Focus on vision Leading by example Doing the right thing	A textual description, image, or diagram that mentions personal integrity in direct relation to leadership or leaders
Discourses of personal competencies of leaders	Ethics as a culture Personal integrity leader as an example	A textual record that directly addresses any of the three personality competencies in relation to leaders

ample of value and good business ethics and integrity" (PP K2 23-13), which are often placed in the context of strategic decisions, attitudes towards stakeholders or sustainable management. These are terms that were directly related to employees or heads of organizations in the reports, especially most often the company's top management, and reflect a focus on ethics, compliance and responsible conduct, which is reflected in statements such as: "We emphasize leaders and leadership, we build on taking responsibility, working by example, inspiring change and mutual trust" (PP M2 23-20). Together, these concepts form a framework of values and practices that support organizations in their transition to sustainability and ethical performance, with leadership playing a key role in guiding employees and setting an example through their own actions. The vast majority of the organizations studied have an accepted code of ethics "we address the code of ethics *at the level of principle for the purpose of our engagement in our daily business...*" (PP K2 23-13), which speaks in general about justice and moral responsibility, especially of senior management, but much less about ethics as personal competence. Interestingly, ethics often appears in connection with transparency and social responsibility and compliance, which points to the so-called "external" dimensions of ethical leadership: "Our managers play a key role with regard to compliance. Given their position within the company, they bear a special responsibility to set an example for their staff" (TP H1 23-08). An important insight of the research is also the gap between the frequent citation of ethical principles and the rare presence of concrete descriptions of practices on how these standards are incorporated into decision-making processes. Only a handful of reports included cases where ethics would be described in relation to decision-making processes, for example by referring to indicators measuring compliance and fairness in relation to accountability.

The presence of emotional intelligence as a personality competence of leaders in the analyzed reports was noticeably much less explicit than ethics or integrity. Nevertheless, it has emerged several times through discourse on personal development, the presence of emotions and education: "As part of the project partnership, we have prepared a series of workshops for our leaders on empowerment,

stress management, emotional intelligence and leadership strengthening" (PP M2 23-20), which shows indirect references to its key components – empathy, personal skills of leaders, suitcases and emotional intelligence, which is our central concept studied. Emotional intelligence as a leadership competency was highlighted only in one organization, where they wrote: "We place great emphasis on the development of behavioral and emotional competencies of leaders to lead subordinates as much as possible..." (TP M 23-19). Keywords such as empathy, personal growth, education, and coaching emphasize organizations' focus on strengthening leadership skills and personal development. Particular emphasis is placed on skills that include such soft competencies as communication skills, emotional intelligence, and systems thinking, which organizations recognize as useful, but do not place them in the formulas among the key leadership competencies.

In the case of integrity, the word integrity itself was highlighted, along with the concepts of doing the right thing, leading by example, and the consistency of personal conduct. Integrity, both personal and corporate, is emphasized as a key element that combines honesty, transparency and consistency between values and actions: "Leaders at all decision-making levels are an example to other employees in concrete actions with their integrity, transparency, accountability and professionalism" (TP H2 23-09). Frequently used terms such as code, conduct, integrity, and compliance emphasize the importance of establishing clear rules and standards that guide the actions of organizations and their employees, which is reflected in records such as: "We emphasize leaders and leadership, we build on taking responsibility, working by example, inspiring change, and trusting each other" (TP Z23-30). In many cases, it has been possible to discern that organizations perceive integrity as a fundamental personality trait of leaders, but this trait is often presented as self-evident rather than explicitly defined. Integrity appears in discourse primarily in the context of trust, personal example, and the harmony between words and actions. A typical emphasis is placed on the fact that leaders embody the values of the organization through their actions and thus set standards for others. Statements such as "personal responsibility is the foundation of leadership" (PP A-23-02) or "integrity guides us in our

work; we say what we think and do what we say” (PP M2 23-20) emphasize the role of moral leaders, but without specifying how this is measured or developed. It is portrayed as a constant and unchanging trait, which may indicate an idealized notion of leaders that leaves no room for the real complexities and conflicts that leaders face.

According to the research question (RQ1), most of the references to the mentioned competencies were of a principled and normative nature, which means that they are often presented as values that the organization supports or promotes, rather than as concrete competencies that would be systematically developed, verified or reflected. Ethics is often associated with organizational responsibility and a code of ethics, while personal integrity is portrayed as an individual trait that acts as a moral compass, but rarely as part of the planned development of managerial personnel. Emotional intelligence, on the other hand, appears discursively as a soft skill that improves the work climate and is often the subject of education, but rarely as a formal criterion of leadership. In this sense, we can speak of the predominance of a discourse that emphasizes values rather than behavioral indicators of these competencies.

4.2 Prevalence of the occurrence of the personality competencies studied

In the following, we present a quantitative distribution of the occurrence of selected personal competencies – ethics, emotional intelligence and personal integrity – in the analyzed business and sus-

tainability reports of Slovenian organizations. Table 2 shows the frequency distribution by individual reports according to the number of detections of those terms. For each of the three selected personality competencies, ethics, emotional intelligence and personal integrity, we recorded the number of occurrences in individual documents. Frequencies are displayed to indicate the proportion of reports in which a particular competency occurs 0 times, 1 time, 2 times, etc. In this way, we get an overview of the prevalence and intensity of the occurrence of these competencies in the analyzed material.

We can see that the concept of ethics did not appear even once in thirteen documents, which represents 43.3% of all analyzed reports. Only once was the concept of ethics mentioned in six documents, which is 20% of all reports, and twice was ethics mentioned in ten documents. In total, the concept of ethics appears in seventeen reports, which represents 56.7% of all analyzed reports, on the basis of which we can conclude that organizations focus on ethics in relation to leadership in the preparation of reports, which indicates a good beginning of knowledge of the importance and awareness of this competence among the leaders of their organizations. However, we cannot ignore the fact that ethics in reports is often conceived as a normative expectation, but not necessarily as an operational leadership competence. Therefore, we can conclude that the presence of ethics in discourse is strong, but at the same time often limited to the level of symbolic expression, rather than concrete leadership.

Table 2: Prevalence of personality competences

Variable	Ethics		Emotional intelligence		Personal integrity	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
0	13	43,3	17	56,7	14	46,7
1	6	20	7	23,3	7	23,3
2	10	33,3	4	13,3	5	16,7
3			3	6,7	3	10
4					1	3,3
more than 4	1	3,33				

Looking at the frequency of occurrence of emotional intelligence in the analyzed reports, we can conclude what attention is paid to this concept through the design of the reports. More than half of all reports (56.7%) did not contain the term emotional intelligence or related terms from our codes. The range of conceptions in the sequel follows from a single mention to a maximum of three. There are seven such organizations where they have a low perception of emotional intelligence (23.3%), in four organizations (13.3%) the term occurs twice, and in only three organizations the incidence is three.

Let us also look at the prevalence of the concept of integrity in the reports under consideration. In fourteen documents, the term was not detected, which means that almost half of the reports do not contain a reference to integrity. Integrity was mentioned only once in seven organizations, which amounts to 23.3%, two mentions of integrity were detected in five documents, three were mentioned three times, and only one was mentioned four times. even though it is considered a key ingredient in leadership by many authors (Javed, Niazi, Hoshino, Hassan, & Hussain, 2021; Mohi Ud Din & Zhang, 2023). Similar to ethics, the incidence of the term is in a similar proportion to non-occurrence, but it still exceeds just over half of the reports analyzed, indicating a low level of awareness among organizations about achieving personal integrity among their executives.

In conjunction with the second research question (RQ2), it turned out that ethics is the most frequently mentioned competence, which is prominently present in almost all reports, often in connection with the

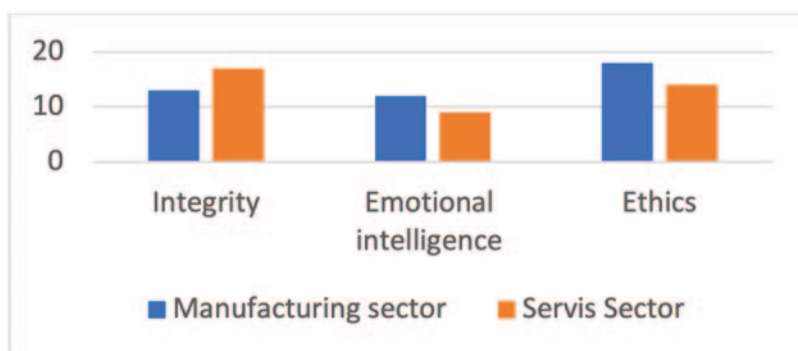
code of ethics, accountability and compliance. Integrity occurs somewhat less frequently, but it is often presented as a fundamental personality attribute of leaders. Emotional intelligence is the least explicit, but it is often reflected indirectly – through discourses about cooperation, education, and relationships.

4.3 Integrating personal competencies into business and sustainability reports across sectors

In the context of the third research question (RQ3), it was shown that there are some patterns of differentiation between sectors.

As can be seen from Figure 2, the manufacturing sector is much more inclusive of ethics and emotional intelligence in its reports, potentially suggesting a greater focus on the personal component of leadership, while the service sector places more emphasis on integrity, which is key to maintaining customer trust. While organizations in the service sector mention emotional and interpersonal competencies, especially in relation to culture, employees and stakeholder satisfaction, companies in the manufacturing sector are more focused on ethics in the context of legality, compliance and social responsibility. Integrity occurs similarly frequently in both sectors, but in the service sector it is somewhat more related to employee trust, while the manufacturing sector often places it in the context of long-term and stability. The analysis shows that the two sectors differ in the way of discursive representation of competences – reflecting different functional logics and expectations of stakeholders within each sector.

Figure 2: Prevalence of personal competencies by sector of activity



5 DISCUSSION

The categories of normative, latent, and idealizing discourse were formulated based on a combination of literature (Fairclough, 2010) and inductive insight from reflective thematic analysis. Each of these discursive strategies represents the way organizations shape the meaning of personality competencies. The results of qualitative and quantitative research confirm that although the personality competencies of managers are present in the reports, they are rarely considered by organizations as an integrated part of the systematic profile of leaders. Instead, they are more often used as value markers of organizational identity, which opens up space for further exploration of the differences between declarative discourse and actual managerial practice.

Within the framework of reflective thematic analysis, characteristic discursive strategies were identified by which organizations represent the personality competencies of leaders. The findings reveal that the way we talk about ethics, emotional intelligence, and personal integrity is not neutral, but is often related to organizational norms, values, and stakeholder expectations. Discourses shape the image of the leader and reflect the prevailing organizational interpretations of responsibility, trust, and competence.

In most reports, ethics appears within the framework of a normative or legally binding discourse, where the emphasis is on compliance with legislation, internal rules and codes of conduct: *“Our managers comply with all ethical standards of business as set out in internal and external regulations”* (PP AM 23-01). Such use points to a minimalist ethical framework, where ethics is understood as a means of risk man-

agement rather than as a reflected value or personal attribute of leaders. Less often, ethics is portrayed as part of an individual leader’s internal moral judgment, but as a mechanism for ensuring legitimacy and trust in the eyes of the public and stakeholders. This is consistent with the findings of other authors, who point out that ethics in organizational communication is often exposed through moral considerations and reflects organizational culture in general (Sebastian & Huhn, 2024, p. 5), environmental and intergenerational justice by supporting sustainable development (Sajjad, Eweje, & Raziq, 2024, p. 2856).

Emotional intelligence is less often explicitly named, but it emerges through latent discourse. The emphasis is on encouraging cooperation, personal development and advocating for an inclusive culture: *“Leaders create an environment where open communication, empathy and cooperation are key values”* (TP P1 23-23), which is most often manifested through the education plan as a possible promotion and measurement of the personal competencies of leaders. It is a softer, emotionally tinged language that is not focused on formal rules, but on atmosphere and relationships. However, due to the absence of an explicit designation, emotional intelligence often remains an invisible competence placed behind organizational values. This contrasts with the awareness of emotional intelligence of leaders that other researchers have highlighted, as they believe that leaders who have developed this competence have a positive impact on their followers (Hu, et al., 2023, p. 5; Drigas, Papoutsis, & Skianis, 2023, p. 2), therefore, this competence becomes essential for predicting leadership effectiveness (Olugboye, Ejowomu, Omopariola, & Omoregie, 2024, p. 192).

Table 3: Discursive features

Theme	Discursive features	Discourse through reports
Ethics	Normative discourse	Ethics is presented as something that “must” – social and personal responsibility, code of ethics, compliance and honesty are often mentioned.
Emotional intelligence	Latent discourse	It is seldom spoken of directly; It is present through terms such as “education”, “promotion of cooperation”, “personal development”, “presence of emotions in leadership”
Personal integrity	Idealizing discourse	Leaders are required to be personally responsible, consistent in words and actions, and lead by example.

Personal integrity emerges as a value marker that is most often associated with the leader's role as a moral role model. The discourse is dominated by an idealized representation, which often lacks concrete operational evidence or examples: *"Trust in leadership is based on personal integrity, which leaders exercise on a daily basis in all processes"* (TP N 23-21). Such use of integrity creates a symbolic image of the leader as an irreproachable individual. What is lacking, however, is a critical discussion of challenges or dilemmas, which may point to a moralizing discourse in which integrity is used as doing the right thing, taking care of compliance, and responsibilities, rather than necessarily as a practical guideline. Also worrying is the fact that the absence of personal integrity can lead to a negative connotation of leadership, difficulty in assessing the situations in which they find themselves and in encountering obstacles (Olugboyega, Ejohwomu, Omopariola, & Omoregie, 2024, p. 203), and leadership without integrity can mean causing harm to organizations in the design of the work environment (Javed, Niazi, Hoshino, Hassan, & Hussain, 2021, p. 2).

The results of the quantitative analysis reveal significant differences in the frequency of mentioning the selected personality competencies of managers. Despite the fact that key competencies such as emotional intelligence, integrity, and ethics are clearly highlighted in the literature (Advani & Mergenthaler, 2024; Altman & Fry, 2024; Armani, Petrini, & Santos, 2020; Eberz, Lang, Breitenmoser, & Niebert, 2023; Javed, Niazi, Hoshino, Hassan, & Hussain, 2021; Sajjad, Eweje, & Raziq, 2024), the results of the analysis show that these competencies are not so prominently represented in the reports of Slovenian organizations. Ethics is the most common, indicating that organizations still understand this area as a key component of social responsibility and compliance with standards. However, high frequency does not necessarily imply substantive depth – the discourse on ethics is often normative and focused on meeting regulatory requirements. By contrast, emotional intelligence is significantly less explicitly mentioned, for example, more than half of the reports (56.7%) contain no mention of this competence. The same is true of integrity, where mention occurs only in fragmentary form and often only in connection with the consistency of

personal conduct and leading by example. In terms of ethics, the situation is slightly better, we can see more connections of this concept with leaders, but probably at the expense of the code of ethics.

Although personal competencies play an important role in shaping sustainable leadership (Altman & Fry, 2024; Armani, Petrini, & Santos, 2020; Eberz, Lang, Breitenmoser, & Niebert, 2023; Sajjad, Eweje, & Raziq, 2024), the results of this survey show that organizations mostly treat them normatively or symbolically in their reports. This highlights the need for further research to examine how personality competencies are developed, operationalized, and reflected in actual leadership practice – not just in the discursive construction of reports. Frequency analysis has shown that the term ethics appears more frequently than emotional intelligence and personal integrity, reflecting the more established status of ethics in the context of corporate social responsibility and compliance (Armani, Petrini, & Santos, 2020). This is also confirmed by the implementation of a thematic analysis, which reveals that ethical references are often limited to a formalistic discourse, which manifests itself through a code of conduct without an in-depth reflection on the competences of managers. The notion of personal integrity, however, is more recognized as a more important trait of leaders (Javed, Niazi, Hoshino, Hassan, & Hussain, 2021, p. 2; Mohi Ud Din & Zhang, 2023, p. 2), but it appears mostly in symbolic or idealized form in the analyzed reports. In most cases, it is associated with the trust, reputation, or example of leaders, without specifying how integrity is reflected in day-to-day decision-making. Emotional intelligence is often implicitly present, but rarely explicitly named. References to empathy, personal development, the presence of emotion, i.e., soft leadership skills, indicate the presence of emotional intelligence as defined by Hu, et al. (2023, p. 3), but without a clear naming.

There are also differences between the manufacturing and service sectors, which dictate the possible development and integration of competences according to specific needs, tasks and challenges. Taken together, the results show a gap between the highlighted importance of these competencies in theory and their real occurrence in reporting practice. Although organizations may operate in accor-

dance with some values, this is not consistently articulated or reflected in their reports, which can reduce transparency, stakeholder trust and, ultimately, the implementation of sustainable practices in the organization. As Molek and Čop (2025) point out, when analysing the transition to a sustainable economy, we must not neglect the individuality or pragmatism of meanings that are formed within broader symbolic and structural frameworks, as it is not an isolated and merely discursive process, but develops through multiple interactions. In addition, various analytical models are formed that address and explore these interactions through the daily appropriation of new practices and, on the other hand, within broader structural frameworks that determine what is possible and legitimate in a particular socio-economic and political context. This dialectic of honey means the conceptualization of habitus, where cultural norms are not only reproduced, but also redefined through practice.

With such a conclusion, therefore, we should not focus solely on personality competencies (Eberz, Lang, Breitenmoser, & Niebert, 2023, p. 13; Armani, Petrini, & Santos, 2020, p. 829), but it is necessary to functionally integrate all the competencies dictated by a sustainable leadership style in order to meet the challenges of sustainability. However, we must take into account that competencies also differ in terms of factors that affect them, such as the manager's field of activity, industry activity, geographical and cultural diversity, and probably many other influences that should not be ignored, so our findings open up space for further research.

6 CONCLUSION

The prevalence of personal competencies, which we focused on in our research, sometimes appears as an important factor in the development of sustainable practices (Armani, Petrini, & Santos, 2020; Altman & Fry, 2024; Bashynska, et al., 2024; Eberz, Lang, Breitenmoser, & Niebert, 2023; Khan, Saqib, Abbasi, Mikhaylov, & Pinter, 2023; Melean, et al., 2023), and in our research, these competencies are present unevenly, and often only superficially articulated. Although ethics occurs relatively more frequently, its discourse is often formalistic, tied to conformity and normative statements, which re-

duces its transformative potential in organizational culture. In contrast, emotional intelligence and personal integrity are rarely explicitly exposed, indicating the absence of a comprehensive understanding and implementation of these competencies in the strategic communication of organizations.

Thematic research has shown that most of the statements in the reports do not have a clear link to specific management practices, metrics, or development policies. Personal competencies are presented as part of the values of the organization, and not as leadership behavior that would be subject to monitoring or strategic development. In particular, the lack of self-reflection of the organization regarding leadership styles is noticeable, which limits the opportunities for the development of sustainable and responsible leadership.

The conducted research provides us with an answer to all three research questions and consequently indicates the possibilities for improvement of organizations in upgrading reporting practices in the direction of observation and development of personal competencies. Research question Q3 was only analysed in terms of frequency, which we see as a limitation of this research that could be built upon with a deeper implication of differences and a search for the absence of competences in one or the other sector. Another limitation is the distinction between a leader's personal perspective and values, or the influence of a leader's personal perspective on implementing sustainability in their leadership style. This influence was neglected or not addressed in the research.

The personality competencies of leaders represent an essential importance in the creation of sustainable practices (Armani, Petrini, & Santos, 2020, p. 823), and our analysis has shown that the personality competencies of leaders are often addressed implicitly and deficiently in current business and sustainability reports. Guidelines for their more systematic integration can help organizations better communicate leadership values, strengthen sustainability strategies, and increase the credibility of reporting.

From the point of view of the impact on practice, organizations, society and the environment, the contribution of our research is visible in the fact that, through a combination of frequency and thematic

analysis, it opens up an insight into the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of the competencies discussed, and at the same time contributes to the understanding of how modern leadership values are realized (or neglected) in corporate reporting. The findings can serve as a basis for further research of competencies in organizational communication, as well as for the development of guidelines for the integration of personal competencies into the practice of sustainable and responsible leadership.

The research was designed as a case study based on **purposeful sampling**, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the specific context, but not a statistical generalization of the findings. The combination of thematic and frequency analysis provided insight into the quantitative and qualitative occurrence of personality competencies and revealed the discursive mechanisms of their representation. In this way, the research contributes to the understanding of how the image of the leader is formed in organizational reporting, and how the (non)articulation of competencies affects transparency, credibility and sustainability orientation. The findings can serve as a starting point for the development of guidelines for the systematic integration of competences into reporting and man-

agement practices. Publicly available documents were used, so the analysis does not include internal practices or informal discourses. In addition, there is a possibility that key competences are expressed synonymously or implicitly, which can pose an analytical challenge. We have tried to mitigate the presence of interpretive subjectivity through reflexive coding, but it cannot be completely ruled out.

We suggest that researchers explore the possibility of standardized reporting approaches, where the personal competencies of leaders would be recognized as an integral part of sustainable leadership strategies. However, we suggest that further research focus on expanding the methodological approach in this area, for example the use of some other qualitative method, which would also reveal the effects of the occurrence of personality competencies on business results, or quantitative methods, where the presence of personality competencies would be verified through surveys with the managers of large companies themselves. This would enable a deeper understanding of how and why certain personality competencies are more or less present and how they can be systematically integrated into the strategic development of organizations.

EXTENDED SUMMARY/IZVLEČEK

Trajnostna ozaveščenost in vse večja usmerjenost v to področje sta spodbudili številne raziskovalce k iskanju načinov, kako najbolje zagotoviti, da se ta miselnost prenese na vse deležnike v organizaciji. Vodje imajo pri tem ključno vlogo, zato so tudi njihove osebne kompetence glavno izhodišče naše raziskave. Obravnavamo prepoznavanje osebnih kompetenc, kot so jih opredelili drugi avtorji skozi trajnostno vodenje, teorijo trajnostnega vodenja in kompetenčne modele, ter v poslovnih in trajnostnih poročilih velikih organizacij v Sloveniji iščemo pojavnost prepoznanih osebnih kompetenc etike, čustvene inteligentnosti in osebne integritete. Teoretični okvir raziskave ponuja nekatera pomembna spoznanja na področju trajnostnega managementa, na podlagi katerih smo izvedli kvalitativno in kvantitativno fazo ter tematsko analizirali poslovna in trajnostna poročila velikih podjetij v Sloveniji ter preverili pogostost pojavljanja posameznih osebnih kompetenc. Rezultati vodjem ponujajo vpogled v ozaveščenost o kompetencah, ki se izpostavljajo skozi poročanje organizacij, in jim na nek način nastavljajo ogledalo za izboljšave na področju poročevalskih praks. Ugotovili smo, da je ozaveščenost o osebnih kompetencah v poslovnih in trajnostnih poročilih pomanjkljivo prikazana, kar pa še ne pomeni, da to odraža dejansko ozaveščenost o pomenu teh kompetenc pri uresničevanju trajnostnih praks. Kljub temu raziskava ponuja izvirna izhodišča za nadaljnje raziskovalce in osnovo za izvedbo poglobljenih intervjujev z vodilnimi v večjih podjetjih ali kvantitativnih raziskav med vodstvenimi organi.

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