



A quick guide to Eco-Leadership



Humanitarian
Leadership
Academy

The term Eco-Leadership was coined by Dr Simon Western to describe a new leadership approach for organisations. Eco-Leadership theory evolved from academic research and consultancy work in leading organisations. Eco-Leadership emerged as a response to three key disruptions:

- Technological revolution
- Environmental emergency
- Globalisation, social change and rising social inequity

All three are interdependent and complex eco-systems which demand an Eco-Leadership response.

Eco-leadership is an evidence-based approach to leadership. The Eco-Leadership Institute was established in 2021 to continue this work.

Moving to a new leadership approach

Eco-Leadership addresses two inter-related challenges:

De-centralising leadership - moving away from top-down approaches to enable everybody to take leadership when appropriate, creating more adaptive, participative, and dynamic organisations.

Responding ethically to social and environmental challenges.



Recognising eco-systems

“Organisations are eco-systems within ecosystems”
(Western 2019)

Eco-Leadership aligns eco-systemic principles with leadership practices to create ethical, sustainable and adaptive organisations.

It recognises the interdependence between environmental, social, and technological systems, and promotes a holistic systems thinking approach to address these challenges.



Three principles guiding Eco-Leadership practice

Social Purpose - Creating Shared Value

Aims to create shared value for the wider society beyond shareholder profit and organisational growth.

Participative Organisations - Unleashing Leadership Everywhere

Distributing leadership across organisations & maximising individual, team and organisational potential.

Eco-Mindsets - From Machine to Eco-mindset

Moving beyond silos and linear thinking to engage with marginalised voices.

Four qualities of Eco-Leadership

Connectivity and Interdependence

Living in a hyper-connected interdependent world.

Systemic Ethics

Taking into account principles and ideals that impact the wider social and environmental contexts e.g. sustainability, pollution and how organisations treat outsourced workers.

Leadership Spirit

Re-imagining and re-enchanting the humanitarian perspective.

Organisational Belonging

Working from the perspective that organisations are connected to the wider society and the environment. Organisations are not separate, closed systems.

The four dominant leadership approaches

Research identifies four dominant leadership approaches that emerged over the past century:

Controller Leadership

'Controlling resources to maximise efficiency'

Therapist Leadership

'Happy workers are more productive workers'

Messiah Leadership

'Vision and strong cultures'

Eco-Leadership

'Connectivity, Networks, & Ethics'

Bridging theory and practice

Each of the four approaches remain active and present in organisations, with Eco-Leadership being the latest evidence-based approach to leadership and bringing in an entirely new ethical and systemic direction to leadership.

It is now used in leading international organisations and taught in business schools.



Creating adaptive organisations

Eco-Leadership empowers organisations to:

- Respond creatively to the challenges and opportunities presented by the rapidly changing world.
- Create cultures of innovation.
- Promote collaboration and partnerships.
- Stimulate learning within organisations.

Eco-Leadership pays particular attention to leading from the edge, enabling marginalised voices to be heard, bringing fresh ideas, experience, knowledge and resources.



Eco-Leadership builds on researching social movements that have led from the edge, such as civil rights and environmental movements.

These show how change can become viral, and small changes can lead to big changes.



Long-term outcomes of Eco-Leadership

In summary, Eco-Leadership recognises the interdependence between environmental, social, and economic systems.

Leaders practicing Eco-Leadership:

- Engage in ethical decision-making
- Consider the well-being of future generations
- Collaborate to address environmental and social issues





To find out more about Eco-Leadership:

www.ecoleadershipinstitute.org

For more information on the Humanitarian
Leadership Academy:

www.humanitarianleadershipacademy.org