

## **Smart leadership in universities: strategies for achieving sustainable development: Anbar University as a model**

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**Abstract.** Rapid technological development has become the prevailing feature in our current era, which has led to intense competition between the organization, which has led to major economic complications and challenges. In this research, we will work to discover what has influenced smart leadership in universities as strategies for achieving sustainable development. In order to achieve the research objectives, a questionnaire was distributed to a purposive sample consisting of (66) individuals from the leadership at Anbar University The data was analyzed using the Statistical Analysis Program (SPSS), and the research reached a number of conclusions, the most important of which was that the results of the statistical analysis showed a positive correlation between smart leadership in its dimensions and sustainable development. As for the most prominent recommendations, the statistical results showed a weakness in explaining the variation in demographic variables, as they do not explain the differences in sustainable development.

**Keywords.** smart leadership, sustainable development, Anbar University.

### **Introduction**

Sustainable development has become an urgent necessity in our current time, and future directions are also moving toward this goal. This, in turn, requires smart and wise leadership in decision-making in order to achieve higher levels of development, especially as our world today is facing significant challenges on various levels. These challenges create obstacles to implementing the goals of sustainable development. Our current research emphasizes the important role played by smart leadership within the university in achieving the objectives of sustainable development. This is reflected in its commitment to ethical behavior, social inclusion, and environmentally responsible practices. At the University of Anbar, leaders can play a transformative role in advancing sustainability goals both locally and globally. The study affirms that leadership intelligence aimed at achieving sustainability is essential within the University of Anbar. As a result, the university can continue to serve as a driving force for positive change by supporting leaders who integrate innovation, economic growth, and social responsibility. **This research is structured around three main axes: the first focuses on the research methodology; the second addresses the theoretical background, covering both smart leadership and sustainable development; and the third presents the practical and statistical analysis.**

**Section One: Research Methodology**

**1. Research Problem**

The current research problem emerges from the challenges faced by organizations within both their internal and external environments, which, in turn, affect the implementation of sustainable development goals. Addressing these challenges requires smart leadership capable of identifying opportunities, seizing them, and recognizing and resolving weaknesses.

The research problem is framed through the following central question:

**"What is the impact of smart leadership on achieving sustainable development in educational institutions?"**

From this main question, the following sub-questions are derived:

- a. To what degree does the intended organization comprehend the attributes and definitions of smart leadership?
- b. To what extent does the target organization understand the characteristics and concepts of sustainable development?
- c. Is there a relationship—both correlational and causal—between the research variables (smart leadership and sustainable development)?

**2. Research Importance**

The importance of this study lies in its focus on the dual aspects of leadership and sustainable development within the University of Anbar. These aspects are of great value to all members of the university, including its leaders, and reflect positively on the local community.

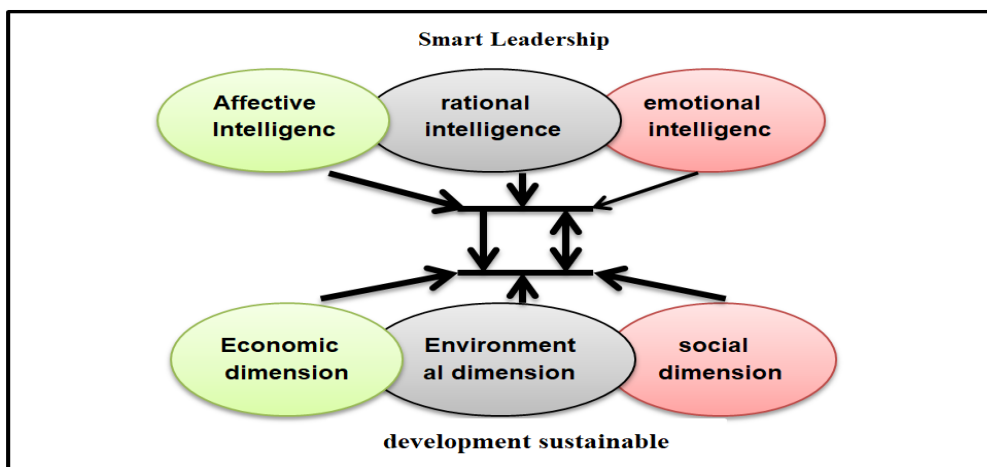
This research is highly significant for promoting sustainable practices, contributing to social, economic, and environmental well-being. It aligns with global sustainability trends and positions the university as a key driver of positive change within the ecosystem.

**3. Research Objectives**

By addressing the key concepts of the main research variables, this study aims to clarify the core dimensions of smart leadership and sustainable development, with the intent of supporting their practical application within the University of Anbar. The research objectives can be outlined as follows:

- a. To develop a theoretical framework for the research variables by defining key concepts, dimensions, and implications, forming a foundation for future researchers to build upon.
- b. To explore the dimensions of the research variables and assess the extent of the organization's commitment and attention to them.
- c. To provide a set of conclusions and recommendations based on the research findings that will enhance the organization's awareness of the importance of adopting smart leadership principles to achieve sustainable development.

**4. The hypothetical plan**



Source: Prepared by the researchers

Figure (1) Hypothetical diagram

#### 5. **Research Hypotheses:**

A significant association exists between smart leadership (all of its aspects) and sustainable development. From the primary theory, the following three sub-theses are deduced.

- a. **First Sub-Hypothesis:** A significant correlation exists between Perceptual Intelligence and sustainable development.
- b. **Second Sub-Hypothesis:** A significant correlation exists between Perceptual Intelligence and sustainable development.
- c. **Third Sub-Hypothesis:** There is a statistically significant correlation between affective intelligence and sustainable development.

There is a statistically significant effect of smart leadership, with all its dimensions, on sustainable development. This hypothesis also leads to the following sub-hypotheses:

- a. **First Sub-Hypothesis:** There is a statistically significant effect of Perceptual Intelligence on sustainable development.
- b. **Second Sub-Hypothesis:** A significant relationship exists between rational intelligence and sustainable development.
- c. **Third Sub-Hypothesis:** There is a statistically significant effect of affective intelligence on sustainable development.

### **Section Two: Theoretical Framework**

#### **Smart Leadership**

1. **Concept of Smart Leadership:** The modern perspective on smart leadership views it as a natural behaviour that emerges in the workplace to foster innovation, inspire change, and utilize advanced technologies to improve organizational effectiveness through the multiple intelligences of leaders. This alignment of goals, values, and both individual and organizational interests reflects the essence of smart leadership (Michela, 2020, 8).

Smart leaders serve as role models for others. Regardless of their roles, everyone in the organization needs to feel valued in order to perform at their best. Smart leadership understands and responds to this need. These leaders constantly seek wisdom, and their leadership positively impacts team members, especially when they feel appreciated and recognize they are a central concern of their leader (Salem et al., 2024,28).

Smart leadership is considered a critical factor in organizational success and in enhancing the organization's strategic position. It ensures that teams are aligned toward a common goal and capable of adapting to challenges and changing conditions (Ahmed et al., 2022, 34). It is also seen as the result of skill development in three main areas: balancing ideas, servant leadership, and sustainability. Strategic vision and thinking help manage complexity—an organization cannot succeed without the development of smart leadership (Al-Ameedi et al., 2022,615).

Smart leadership can also be defined as the leader's possession of strategic thinking skills, creative capabilities, insight, rational, emotional, and spiritual intelligence, and the impact of these abilities on subordinates to enhance the organization's strategic and competitive position (Hussein & Hussein, 2024,147). Another definition describes it as a collaborative and interactive process in which smart leaders identify, organize, and mobilize the necessary resources to improve the lives of individuals within the organization (Banahan, 2021,8).

Researchers view smart leadership as "a cumulative blend of experiences represented in long-term vision, deep thinking, and efficient execution, aimed at building an integrated organization that delivers outstanding services."

2. **Importance of Smart Leadership:** The importance of smart leadership lies in its focus on the future of the individuals working within organizations and the continuity of essential processes for change, aiming to shape the future through shared leadership. This, in turn, reflects positively on the development of knowledge, enhancement of core competencies among employees, integration of these competencies into organizational culture, and the implementation of necessary changes to achieve objectives (Ali & Sheikho, 2024,50). As noted by ( Lee et al,2022, 6) and (Abood et al,2023, 3), the significance of smart leadership can be summarized as follows:
  - a. Smart leaders are inherently strategic thinkers who can visualize the long term, predict opportunities, and address upcoming problems. They have the ability to implement effective strategies that concur with the organization's objectives and mission.
  - b. Smart leaders are innovative and eager to consider new ideas. They inspire their followers to think innovatively and to find new approaches to solving problems and enhancing procedures.
  - c. Smart leaders possess adaptability; they manage change and uncertainty with ease, enabling them to make necessary adjustments to maintain the organization's standing.
  - d. Smart leaders have emotional intelligence that allows them to manage their teams' feelings and emotions humanely and resolve conflicts constructively.
  - e. Smart leaders actively nurture and develop talent within the organization, effectively fostering their teams' potential to face new challenges and responsibilities.
3. **Dimensions of Smart Leadership:**

There is a diversity of opinions among authors and researchers regarding the specification and definition of the dimensions of smart leadership. This variation is a natural outcome of the differing specializations among researchers in this field. However, this difference does not stray far from the fundamental principles of smart leadership. Accordingly, our current research aligns with the dimensions outlined by (Daderman et al,2013, 62), which are as follows:

  - a. **Emotional Intelligence:** This is the individual's capacity to express and access their emotions, as well as understand the responses to emotional situations. It also includes the ability to regulate emotions and promote emotional growth (Stanescu & Cicei, 2012, 108).
  - b. **Rational Intelligence:** Defined as the leadership's capacity to reach logical solutions to administrative problems within the organization, along with possessing advanced logical and analytical skills necessary to complete tasks and achieve objectives (Al-Karad, 2026,20).
  - c. **Affective Intelligence:** Affective intelligence assists individuals in understanding and analyzing others' emotions, enabling greater adaptability with themselves and others. It is recognized that psychological flexibility is dynamically regulated and composed of several interacting intangible elements (Ruzaiq, 2021,1).

### **Sustainable Development:**

#### **1. Concept of Sustainable Development:**

The idea of sustainable development management is integral to global development strategies and agendas. It promotes a mechanism that allows society to interact with the environment without putting a risk on the future generations' resources. Thus, it is considered an approach to managing resources sustainably (Mensah, 2019, 6).

Currently, there is a growing and rapid increase in interest in sustainable development, which allows its continuity. This positively impacts the well-being of people across various countries and disciplines, especially in project management, due to the positive outcomes achieved by transforming environmental and natural resources into services and products (Jumaa & Khaleel, 2022, 90).

Sustainable development is also considered a significant principle that promotes long-term development globally. It focuses on three essential pillars that seek to achieve balanced

economic, social, and environmental protection. Additionally, it provides a framework for environmental work in various countries (Al-Yasiri, 2023, 31).

Sustainable development management is characterized by a strategy that takes into account the needs of the organization and its stakeholders while maintaining and enhancing the resources necessary for the future. It is considered a societal guiding model that addresses various issues related to quality of life over the long term (Blinova et al., 2020, 5).

Researchers view sustainable development as "an integrated process through which the needs of individuals in the present are met while developing methods to ensure the continuous provision of needs for future generations."

**2. Sustainable Development Goals:**

Sustainable development aims to achieve several objectives in order to ensure long-term development for both current and future generations, while preserving the various resources that are essential for human life. Some of these goals include (Reyes-Sanchez, 2024, 32):

- a. Eradication of all forms of poverty globally.
- b. Promoting food security and nutrition through sustainable agriculture.
- c. Enhancing healthy lives for all age groups.
- d. Providing inclusive and equitable lifelong education.
- e. Developing practical plans to combat desertification.
- f. Ensuring secure and sustainable water resources.
- g. Promoting sustainable and equitable economic growth, along with providing decent and productive employment opportunities for all.

**3. Dimensions of Sustainable Development:**

There are diverse perspectives regarding the fixed dimensions of sustainable development. This variation results from differences in opinions and the various environments experienced by researchers in this field. However, most agree on three main dimensions of sustainable development, as outlined by (Mensah, J, 2019, 8):

- a. **Social Dimension:** This dimension seeks greater stability in demographic growth by halting displacement and migration to urban areas. It emphasizes broader public participation in development planning by providing employment opportunities, improving community welfare and quality of life, and achieving justice and equality among individuals (Klarin, 2018, 68).
- b. **Environmental Dimension:** Considered the foundation of sustainable development, this dimension attempts to balance the ecological and economic systems by focusing on the management of human and natural resources. It aims to stabilize life and maintain a more balanced natural environment (Najm, 2023, 9).
- c. **Economic Dimension:** This dimension centers on the present and future impacts of the economy on the environment. Its goals include enhancing welfare by meeting individuals' material needs through production and consumption, eliminating unemployment and poverty, and utilizing modern technology in commerce and industry (Bieler, 2017, 161).

**section Three: Practical Aspect**

**Descriptive Statistics**

**Table (1): Gender**

		Gender			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent(%)	Cumulative Percent(%)
<b>Valid</b>	<b>Male</b>	63	95.5	95.5	95.5

	<b>Female</b>	3	4.5	4.5	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	66	100.0	100.0	

The results of Table (1) indicate a clear disparity in gender representation, with males overwhelmingly dominating the sample. This dominance suggests a male superiority in the studied group and may reflect a sampling bias or particular characteristics of the study population.

**Table (2): Age**

Age					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	<b>31-40</b>	11	16.7	16.7	16.7
	<b>41-50</b>	32	48.5	48.5	65.2
	<b>51 years and older</b>	23	34.8	34.8	100.0
	<b>TOTAL</b>	66	100.0	100.0	

The age distribution shown in Table (2) focuses primarily on the 41 to 50-year age group. This indicates that the majority of the sample consists of middle-aged employees or faculty members. Notably, there is a low representation of younger individuals under the age of thirty, which might reflect the nature of the study.

**Table (3): Educational Qualification**

Educational Qualification					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	<b>Master's</b>	(10)	15.2	15.2	15.2
	<b>PhD</b>	56	84.8	84.8	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	66	100.00	100.00	

Table (3) categorizes respondents into two groups: those holding a Master's degree, which constitutes the smaller group, and those with a Doctorate degree, representing the majority at 84.8%. This distribution aligns with the hiring policies of Iraqi universities and reflects a high academic quality among staff. However, it also suggests the difficulty of employing Master's degree holders in principal academic positions.

**Table (4): Job Position Distribution**

Job Position Distribution					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Department Director	17	25.8	25.8	25.8
	Center Director	7	10.6	10.6	36.4
	Assistant Dean	30	45.5	45.5	81.8
	Dean of the College	12	18.2	18.2	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

Table (4) highlights the hierarchical distribution of positions, where the most represented middle-tier role is Assistant Dean, comprising 45.5% of the sample. This reflects the importance of this role in supporting administrative decentralization, making academic decisions, and serving as a liaison between senior management and operational units.

Lower-level executive positions include Department Head at 25.8%, representing direct leadership of core academic units, and Center Director at 10.6%. Meanwhile, College Dean accounted for 18.2%,

which aligns with the organizational structure of universities where the number of deans is typically smaller compared to other positions.

**Statistical Methodology Used**

The study adopted a descriptive analytical approach to examine correlations and simple linear regression. The objective was to assess the association between the different components of smart leadership (emotional, rational, and sentimental) and the respondents' knowledge of the sustainable development dimensions.. Smart leadership was also tested as a comprehensive concept.

The analysis was based on:

- a. Five-point Likert scale
- b. Statistical values: Means, standard deviations, coefficient alpha, correlation coefficient (R), coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>), F-test, regression coefficient (B), and standardized beta coefficient (Beta).

**Means and Standard Deviations of the Main Dimensions:**

**Table (5): Means and Standard Deviations of the Main Dimensions**

<b>Dimensions or Axis</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
<b>Emotional Intelligence</b>	5	3.8384	0.5154	Good level
<b>Rational Intelligence</b>	5	4.2697	0.43037	The highest level of Smart Leadership
<b>Rational Intelligence</b>	5	4.2606	0.51197	High level
<b>Sustainable Development</b>	9	3.8384	0.50154	Good level

The table (5) indicates that the highest dimension in smart leadership is the (rational intelligence) dimension, with an average response to the questionnaire questions of (4.2697), followed by the (emotional intelligence) dimension with an average response of (4.2606). As for the sustainable development axis, the average responses to the questionnaire questions were (3.8384).

The standard deviations indicate the consistency of the respondents' opinions, as they were less than the number (1).

**Reliability analysis**

**Table (6): Reliability Analysis**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Alpha Coefficient</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Emotional Intelligence	0.781	Good reliability
Rational Intelligence	0.856	Very high reliability
Affective Intelligence	0.759	Good reliability
Sustainable Development	0.774	Good reliability
Overall Questionnaire	0,908	Excellent reliability

It appears from Table (6) that all alpha coefficients are greater than 0.70, indicating good stability of the measurement tools. The highest reliability was for the overall questionnaire, with a value of (0.908), which signifies excellent overall stability. Accordingly, the results were considered valid for use in inferential analysis.

**Hypotheses Testing Results: Pearson Correlation Analysis**

The correlation analysis between the dimensions of smart leadership and sustainable development was conducted to test the main hypothesis and its subordinate sub-hypotheses.

**Table (7): Hypotheses Testing Results: Pearson Correlation Analysis**

Hypothesis	Relationship	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Coefficient of Determination (R <sup>2</sup> )	p-value	Interpretation
Main Hypothesis 1	Smart Leadership & Sustainable Development	0.592**	0.35	0,000	Moderate Positive Relationship
Sub-Hypothesis 1.1	Emotional Intelligence & Sustainable Development	0.490**	0.24	0,000	Moderate Positive Relationship
Sub-Hypothesis 1.2	Rational Intelligence & Sustainable Development	0.491**	0.23	0,000	Moderate Positive Relationship
Sub-Hypothesis 1.3	Affective Intelligence & Sustainable Development	0.619**	0.383	0,000	Moderate Positive Relationship

**\*\*Statistically significant at the 0.01 significance level.**

Table (7) indicates that all relationships are statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ), with the strongest relationship being between the emotional intelligence dimension and the sustainable development axis. All relationships are positive, meaning that as the levels of smart leadership and its dimensions increase, the indicators of sustainable development improve correspondingly. Smart leadership, as a comprehensive concept, is correlated with sustainable development and explains 35% of the variance, reinforcing the hypothesis of a positive relationship.

The emotional intelligence component accounts for 24% of the variance and has a significant and moderate relationship with sustainable development. The rational intelligence dimension contributes moderately to explaining the perception of sustainable development, and this hypothesis is also statistically supported. The emotional intelligence dimension has the strongest effect, explaining 38.3% of the variance, with a large and statistically significant relationship with sustainable development.

Based on the results in Table (7), the main hypothesis and its sub-hypotheses were confirmed, which stated:

A significant correlation exists between smart leadership and its various components and long-term development. The three sub-hypotheses are as follows:

1-1: The first sub-hypothesis:

There is a statistically significant correlation between the emotional intelligence dimension and sustainable development.

1-2: The second sub-hypothesis:

There is a statistically significant correlation between the rational intelligence dimension and sustainable development.

1-3: The third sub-hypothesis:

There is a statistically significant correlation between the emotional intelligence dimension and sustainable development.

**Linear Regression Analysis**

The Effect of Smart Leadership on Sustainable Development

**Table (8): Linear Regression Analysis**

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	F-value	p-value	Interpretation
Main Hypothesis 2	Smart Leadership	0.695	0.118	5.876	34.524	0.000	

Sub-Hypothesis 1	Emotional Intelligence	0.571	0.127	4.499	20.237	0.000	Strong effect
Sub-Hypothesis 2	Rational Intelligence	0.481	0.107	4.514	20.377	0.000	Moderate effect
Sub-Hypothesis 3	Affective Intelligence	0.648	0.103	6.300	39.692	0.000	Strongest effect

This means that every one-unit increase in smart leadership (the independent variable) corresponds to an increase in sustainable development (the dependent variable) by 0.695, while holding other factors constant, as shown in Table (8).

A one-unit increase in the emotional intelligence dimension corresponds towards a higher degree of sustainable development by 0.571. For the rational intelligence dimension, a one-unit increase corresponds towards a more sustainable development by 0.481. Among the dimensions of smart leadership, emotional intelligence has the greatest effect, where a one-unit increase corresponds to an increase of 0.648 in sustainable development.

The standard error was between 0.118 and 0.103, which indicates the accuracy of the analysis. Table (8) indicates that the F values were between 39.692 and 20.237, with a p value of 0.00, which implies that the overall model is significant enough; that is, there is at least one additional variable that has a significant impact on the dependent variable.

Based on the results of the previous table, it is concluded that smart leadership has a strong and positive effect on sustainable development. Emotional intelligence is the most influential, followed by rational intelligence, and finally affective intelligence. All p values are smaller than 0.05, which indicates that all results are significant and important. This implies that the second primary hypothesis and its associated hypotheses have been substantiated:

There is a statistically significant effect of smart leadership and its dimensions on sustainable development, with three sub-hypotheses as follows:

1-1: The first sub-hypothesis:

There is a statistically significant effect of the emotional intelligence dimension on sustainable development.

1-2: The second sub-hypothesis:

There is a statistically significant effect of the rational intelligence dimension on sustainable development.

1-3: The third sub-hypothesis:

There is a statistically significant effect of the affective intelligence dimension on sustainable development.

**Results of Multiple Regression Analysis for Demographic Data with the Dependent Variable**

Multiple regression analysis was employed to assess the demographic variables. (gender, age, educational qualification, job position) and their effect on the level of sustainable development. Table (9) shows that the correlation coefficient reached 0.242, and the coefficient of determination was 0.059, indicating that these demographic variables explain only 5.9% of the total variance in the dependent variable.

The value of the squared coefficient of determination was low, at 0.003, which indicates the weakness of the model in explaining the actual variance of the dependent variable when generalizing these results.

The ANOVA results showed an F value of 0.953 and a significance level of 0.440, which indicates that the model is not significant at the 0.05 level of significance.. This means that the previously mentioned demographic variables do not explain differences in sustainable development in a statistically meaningful way.

**Table (9): Results of Multiple Regression Analysis of Demographic Data with the Dependent Variable**

Demographic Variables	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	f-value	(p-value)	Interpretation
Gender	0.133	0.315	0.425	0.953	0.672	Not Significant
Age	-0.077	0.096	-0.805	0.953	0.424	Not Significant
Educational Qualification	-0.132	0.332	-0.397	0.953	0.693	Not Significant
Job Position	0.101	0.059	1.710	0.953	0.092	Not Significant

The job position was the variable closest to having a significant effect, with a significance level of 0.092, which is the closest among the demographic variables to the acceptable significance level of 0.05. This indicates the possibility of a weak relationship that warrants further investigation.

### **Interpretation of Results**

The tabular conclusions indicate the presence of statistically significant positive correlations between the dimensions of smart leadership and sustainable development. Emotional intelligence is the most contributing dimension in perceiving sustainable practices from the viewpoint of the respondents to the questionnaire at the University of Anbar. This indicates the importance of the emotional dimension in contemporary leadership within educational institutions. Moreover, smart leadership as a whole explains a large proportion of the variance in sustainable development, which supports modern trends that link effective leadership to the achievement of comprehensive developmental goals.

### **Section Four: Conclusions and Recommendations**

#### **First: Conclusions**

1. The statistical results of the demographic variables indicate that the age group from 41 to 50 is the dominant percentage among leadership positions at the University of Anbar, which indicates the presence of experienced and competent individuals in decision-making.
2. The statistical analysis results showed a positive correlation between smart leadership in its dimensions and sustainable development.
3. It was confirmed that the emotional intelligence dimension obtained the highest correlation among the dimensions of smart leadership in the sustainable development variable, which indicates the human and emotional concern of the leadership in the researched organization.
4. The statistical analysis results demonstrate a significant, positive association between the smart leadership variable's dimensions and the sustainable development variable.

#### **Second: Recommendations**

1. Through the descriptive analysis of the demographic information, it was found that the male gender recorded a higher percentage than females, which requires the leadership in the researched organization to give an opportunity and involve the female component in administrative leadership.
2. The statistical results show a weakness in explaining the variance of the demographic variables, as they do not explain the differences in sustainable development.
3. From the data analysis and testing of the impact relationship, it is noted that the rational intelligence dimension ranked lowest among the dimensions, which requires the leadership in the researched organization to pay more attention to rational intelligence.
4. Despite the positive results revealed by the statistics, the leadership in the researched organization must take a more serious approach in applying the various intelligences in order to achieve the objectives of sustainable development.

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