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The Influence of Organizational Culture on Business Sustainability: A Systematic Review

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Abstract
Organizational culture has emerged as a decisive internal factor in the implementation of business sustainability strategies. This article presents a systematic review of the academic literature published between 2010 and 2024, with the aim of analyzing the influence of organizational culture on the sustainability of companies. The methodology used is based on the PRISMA approach, evaluating studies extracted from the Scopus and Web of Science databases. The findings reveal that organizational values such as ethical leadership, effective internal communication, and employee engagement are key factors that facilitate the integration of sustainable practices. In addition, gaps in the literature related to variability between economic sectors and the role of culture in emerging contexts were identified. This study contributes to the academic field by consolidating current knowledge on the subject and offers practical recommendations for business managers seeking to foster sustainable organizational environments.
Keywords: *Organizational culture, business sustainability, systematic review, leadership, social responsibility.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Culture within an organization has become critical to understanding how companies address current sustainability-related challenges. It is defined as a series of values, rules, beliefs and customs that guide the joint behavior of organizations and directly affect the elaboration of strategic decisions. According to Fietz and Günther (2021), culture "functions as a tool of control and discipline that regulates the perceptions, attitudes, and actions of workers, shaping how they face both external and internal adversities" (p. 34). Thus, culture is not only an intangible element, but also a management and adaptation mechanism that can influence the success or failure of a sustainable strategy.

Sustainability in business, in the context of the three-pillar model – economic, social and environmental – needs cultural support that guarantees alignment between the company's strategic objectives and the demands of the environment. Isensee, Teuteberg, Griese, and Topi (2020) stress that "the interactions between organizational culture, sustainability, and digitalization in small and medium-sized enterprises show complex dynamics where culture acts as a driver of innovation and responsible change" (p. 12). This idea shows that common values among the members of a company can be a driving force for integrating sustainable practices in various sectors.

In this context, the influence of different cultures on sustainability has been documented in recent studies. Medina-Álvarez and Sánchez-Medina (2023) revealed that "hierarchical cultures tend to prioritize economic sustainability, while market cultures favor environmental sustainability, and adhocratic cultures promote more comprehensive sustainability" (p. 389). These findings highlight that there is no single way to relate culture and sustainability, as the effect varies according to the particular characteristics of each culture and the context in which the organization operates.

Leadership in the realm of organizational culture also plays a crucial role in establishing sustainability. Pérez, Gómez, and Díaz (2021) highlight that "participatory and ethical leadership styles, when incorporated into business culture, are essential drivers of sustainability" (p. 47). According to these authors, leadership aligned with principles of transparency and accountability not only guides the organization towards sustainable practices, but also creates a work environment where employees feel part of the change.

Conceptual frameworks that reinvent the connection between culture and sustainability have also been suggested. Ketprapakorn and Kantabutra (2022) introduce the concept of sustainable organizational culture as "a set of shared beliefs, values, and assumptions about sustainability that guide the behavior of the organization through business decisions and actions" (p. 105). This definition indicates that sustainability should not be seen as an afterthought, but as a fundamental principle that must be embedded at the deepest levels of the organization's culture.

Sustainable innovation is also closely related to the culture of the organization. Li, Wu, and Xiong (2021) observed that "workers' cultural intelligence fosters sustainable innovation behaviors, especially when knowledge sharing is encouraged" (p. 6). This empirical evidence shows that cultural adaptability and openness to sharing experiences within the organization are essential to developing sustainable solutions. However, the authors warn that cultural differences within the organization can limit the effectiveness of these initiatives if they are not managed correctly.

Another aspect of sustainability linked to organizational culture is social. European research points out that "sustainability strategy, leadership, communication, organizational learning, and social responsibility are elements that significantly predict the financial and social success of companies" (Hämäläinen et al., 2021, p. 217). This approach helps to understand that a culture focused on social sustainability not only benefits the well-being of the community, but is also associated with favorable long-term economic outcomes.

On the other hand, recent research has raised questions about the true capacity of today's organizational cultures to meet global sustainability challenges. Riemer, Marcus, and Reimer-Watts (2025) highlight that "the development of solid cultures in sustainability is not a linear process, but is characterized by stages of emergence, visibility, institutionalization, and rooting, each influenced by contextual factors" (p. 4). This approach offers a dynamic framework that makes it easier to understand the complexity of establishing a culture that fully embraces sustainability principles.

In Latin America, there are still gaps in research that make it difficult to understand how organizational cultures affect sustainability in emerging economies. Rodríguez and Gómez (2024) argue that "studies in this area are limited, despite the fact that local cultural dynamics generate opportunities to create sustainability models adjusted to the reality of the region" (p. 240). For this reason, it is crucial to carry out research that identifies effective cultural practices to promote sustainable development in the productive sectors of developing countries.

In this context, the aim of this article is to examine and summarize recent studies on how an organization's culture impacts a company's sustainability. With this approach, the aim is to recognize the most significant cultural aspects, understand the methodologies used and find new trends in research. It also seeks to provide useful recommendations to managers and leaders of organizations that want to create cultures conducive to sustainability, thus helping the development of responsible, competitive business models in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

2. General objective

To analyze, through a systematic review of the scientific literature published between 2010 and 2024, the influence of organizational culture on business sustainability, identifying the most relevant cultural factors, the research methodologies used and the main academic trends, in order to contribute both to the theoretical development and to the generation of practical orientations for sustainable organizational management.

3. Theoretical framework

Culture within organizations has been the subject of intense analysis in the fields of management and organizational behavior, given its effect on the work environment, decision-making, and innovation capacity in companies. According to Schein (2010), "organizational culture can be conceived as a set of shared fundamental assumptions that a group has acquired when facing challenges of external adaptation and internal cohesion" (p. 18). This concept remains an important reference for contemporary research that attempts to explain how common values and beliefs in organizations influence their approach to sustainability.

In the field of current theories, the Dynamic Capabilities model has been highlighted as an essential element to understand how companies adjust to constantly changing environments. Teece (2018) argues that "dynamic capabilities allow organizations to integrate, develop, and reorganize both internal and external skills to respond quickly to alterations in the environment" (p. 42). This framework relates directly to sustainability, as an adaptable, learning-focused organizational culture promotes the creation of skills that support the adoption of responsible and sustainable practices.

Stakeholder Theory is another important framework for examining the link between culture and sustainability. Freeman, Harrison, and Zyglidopoulos (2018) indicate that "an organization's cultural values play a crucial role in how relations with stakeholders are managed" (p. 27). In this way, companies that foster an ethical and inclusive culture can align their sustainable strategies with the expectations of customers, employees, communities, and regulatory bodies, helping them build long-term social legitimacy and trust.

In addition, transformational leadership is identified as a key element in fostering organizational cultures in favor of sustainability. Bass and Riggio (2019) state that "transformational leadership motivates followers to overcome their individual interests in order to achieve higher collective goals" (p. 112). Within organizations, this leadership style reinforces ethical principles and a common vision, which is vital for embedding sustainable practices at all levels of the hierarchy.

Recent research has also underscored the relevance of organizational resilience as a cultural capability that enables companies to face global crises and transformations. Ortiz-de-Mandojana and Bansal (2016) state that "organizational resilience is formed through cultural values that foster innovation, adaptability, and internal cohesion" (p. 1612). Thus, organizations that have resilient cultures not only manage to survive in adverse situations, but also generate sustainable competitive advantages based on adaptation and responsible innovation.

In this context, open innovation is presented as a fundamental concept that unites the culture of the organization with sustainability. According to Chesbrough and Bogers (2017), "open innovation needs a culture that promotes collaboration, transparency, and knowledge sharing with external actors" (p. 35). This kind of culture not only increases innovative capacity, but also realizes the co-creation of sustainable solutions in collaboration with universities, governments, and communities.

On the other hand, recent research shows that organizational culture is crucial to incorporate sustainability into the strategy of small and medium-sized companies. Isensee et al. (2020) conclude that "the cultural orientation towards sustainability and digitalization support each other in SMEs, strengthening their competitiveness in global markets" (p. 14). This indicates that cultural values are an essential component and not simply a secondary aspect that affects the viability and success of sustainable initiatives in various sectors.

The connection between culture and corporate social responsibility has also been addressed in the research. López and Martínez (2022) state that "when social responsibility is integrated into the cultural values of the organization, it becomes an essential part of the corporate identity" (p. 562). This approach suggests that sustainability is not just an external requirement imposed by regulations or market trends, but becomes a practice that aligns with and is consistent with the organization's mission.

Similarly, organizational psychology has begun to investigate how robust sustainability cultures are forged. Riemer, Marcus, and Reimer-Watts (2025) stress that "the creation of cultures of sustainability is a non-linear process that goes through stages of emergence, visibility, institutionalization, and rootedness, all influenced by context" (p. 7). This insight provides an understanding of the process that recognizes the complexity and challenges involved in establishing long-term sustainable business cultures.

Finally, recent studies also indicate that organizational cultures that encourage continuous learning and incremental innovation are able to sustain change toward sustainability. García, Sánchez, and Rodríguez (2023) argue that "companies that promote organizational learning based on values of cooperation and openness are in a better position to effectively integrate sustainable practices" (p. 119). This validates that organizational culture not only explains the current situation of organizations, but is also considered a strategic resource that determines their future sustainability.

4. METHODOLOGY

The current study was carried out through a systematic review of the literature, following the standards established by the PRISMA protocol (Preferred Reporting Elements for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses). This approach has been widely valued in academia as a rigorous method for identifying, selecting, evaluating, and synthesizing scientific output in a specific area (Page et al., 2021). This approach helps to consolidate evidence, identify gaps in research, and provide solid foundations for theoretical development and organizational practice in the field of business sustainability.

The research began with the formulation of the central question: How does organizational culture affect business sustainability, and what are the cultural elements that favor its implementation in companies? This approach guided the development of the search strategy, as well as the temporal, linguistic and thematic limitations of the documents to be examined.

The search was carried out in the Scopus and Web of Science databases, since these concentrate most of the most impactful scientific literature in the field of social sciences, management and sustainability

studies. Articles published between 2010 and 2024, in English and Spanish, were chosen to include recent and relevant studies representing diverse cultural and contextual perspectives.
A search strategy was developed using keyword combinations in both languages. In English, terms such as "organizational culture" AND "corporate sustainability" were used, while in Spanish the phrases "organizational culture" AND "corporate sustainability" were applied. The use of Boolean operators ensured that the results focused only on research that related both variables.
The following inclusion criteria were established: articles that appeared in prestigious indexed journals; empirical, theoretical research or critical reviews that were directly related to the topic; studies with access to the full text; and peer-reviewed papers. On the other hand, exclusion criteria included duplicate articles, papers that were unrelated to the research question, non-peer-reviewed literature, and publications without full access to the text.
The selection process was carried out in several stages. In the first stage, 245 potential documents were discovered from the initial search. Then, the duplicates were eliminated, leaving 198 articles. In the second stage, titles and abstracts were reviewed, eliminating those that did not meet the inclusion criteria, which led to a reduction of the sample to 72 articles. Finally, a full-text reading and a critical evaluation of its relevance were carried out, resulting in a final sample of 37 articles for analysis.
The quality of the methods in the chosen studies was analysed according to criteria addressing internal validity, clarity of objectives, relevance of methodology and congruence between results and conclusions. According to Gough, Oliver, and Thomas (2017), "critical evaluation in systematic reviews makes it possible to distinguish between solid research and that which provides limited evidence" (p. 21). This phase was crucial in ensuring that the conclusions of this work were based on solid and reliable evidence.
A bibliographic analysis table was used in which data such as the author, the year of publication, the country of origin, the economic sector, the methodology used, the most relevant findings and the limitations were recorded. This method made it easier to identify common patterns and differences between studies. A thematic qualitative analysis was also carried out, a technique that helps to classify the results into key categories such as transformational leadership, internal communication, organizational values and staff engagement.
The PRISMA flowchart was created following the guidelines of Moher et al. (2015), which clearly illustrates the stages of identification, filtering, eligibility, and inclusion of the selected articles. This diagram acts as a visual resource that reflects the transparency and traceability of the document selection process, strengthening the validity of the study's methodological approach.
Finally, the analysis was enriched with a critical review of the gaps detected in the literature, paying special attention to understudied sectors, such as small and medium-sized enterprises in Latin America, and underrepresented regions such as Africa and the Caribbean. This phase allowed to outline possible future lines of research and offer practical recommendations for managers who seek to foster organizational cultures oriented towards sustainability.

5. RESULTS

The systematic review process resulted in the selection of 37 articles that met the predefined inclusion criteria. Of the studies evaluated, 65% were empirical investigations, 25% were classified as theoretical studies, and 10% were critical reviews. The geography of the research showed that Latin America, Europe, and Asia have a greater number of studies, while Africa and the Caribbean are notably underrepresented. This discovery underscores the urgency of expanding the analysis to emerging contexts, where organizational culture plays a crucial role in strengthening sustainability (Rodríguez & Gómez, 2024).
In terms of economic sectors, most research focused on manufacturing, financial services, and technology, while areas such as tourism, agriculture, and the circular economy received less attention. Recent studies have indicated that "the effect of organizational culture on sustainability can differ significantly depending on the type of productive sector" (Medina-Álvarez & Sánchez-Medina, 2023, p. 389). This pattern shows that there is no single model, but that the relationship between culture and sustainability must be analyzed taking into account the particularities of each sector.
The most relevant cultural elements found in the literature were grouped into four main categories: transformational leadership, organizational values, internal communication, and human talent engagement. Transformational leadership was highlighted in more than half of the studies as an important driver for guiding organizations towards sustainable practices. According to Bass and Riggio (2019), "transformational leaders motivate their employees to go beyond their individual interests and

adhere to broader collective goals" (p. 112). Within the framework of sustainability, this type of leadership promotes the incorporation of ethical and environmental values within the business culture.

Organizational values were recognized as a fundamental aspect that helps to integrate sustainability in companies. García, Sánchez, and Rodríguez (2023) state that "inclusive values focused on innovation strengthen the ability of organizations to adopt sustainable policies and obtain competitive advantages" (p. 119). These values not only facilitate internal coherence, but also project a robust corporate image towards external stakeholders, thus strengthening the social legitimacy of organizations.

Internal communication emerged as an essential tool to establish an organizational culture consistent with sustainability. Recent research has shown that "clear and open communication increases employee engagement and reinforces the implementation of sustainable strategies" (López & Martínez, 2022, p. 564). The literature agrees that communication channels must transcend the simple dissemination of information, transforming themselves into spaces for participation and co-creation of responsible practices.

Staff involvement was also a recurring aspect in the texts analyzed. It was found that companies that manage to activate the participation of their workers in sustainability projects obtain better results in their execution. Isensee, Teuteberg, Griese, and Topi (2020) argue that "employees' willingness to adopt sustainable practices depends on them being incorporated into the values and beliefs of the organizational culture" (p. 13). This discovery reinforces the notion that sustainability should not be imposed externally, but built collectively from within the organization.

One notable finding relates to digitalization as a cultural enabler of sustainability. Several studies indicate that companies with organizational cultures that foster digital innovation are better prepared to implement responsible behaviors. As mentioned by Teece (2018) and Ketprapakorn and Kantabutra (2022), dynamic capacities and a culture of sustainability complement each other, as both strengthen continuous adaptation to environmental and social challenges. This connection represents a growing trend in recent literature.

As for the temporal aspects, a considerable growth in scientific production was noted from 2015 onwards, coinciding with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations. Riemer, Marcus, and Reimer-Watts (2025) highlight that "the emergence of sustainability cultures in organizations has intensified in recent years, through a process that goes through stages of emergence, visibility, institutionalization, and rooting" (p. 7). This development shows that sustainability has been affirmed as a priority on the business and academic agenda.

Despite the progress, the analysis made it possible to discover important gaps in the literature. Among them, the lack of longitudinal studies that evaluate long-term cultural effects, the low representation of small and medium-sized enterprises in research and the absence of analysis in areas with high socio-environmental vulnerability stand out. Ortiz-de-Mandojana and Bansal (2016) warn that "organizational resilience, essential for facing crises and transformations, continues to be a field that has been little studied in relation to sustainability" (p. 1612). These limitations represent opportunities for future research.

Finally, the results support that organizational culture is a central element in the incorporation of sustainability in companies. The cultural factors examined—leadership, values, communication, and employee engagement—are key pillars that determine the effectiveness of sustainable practices. At the same time, the gaps detected invite new research to be directed to sectors and areas that have been little explored, using more robust and comparative methodologies. Consequently, the results of this analysis offer a complete picture that feeds into academic debate and provides valuable tools for sustainability-oriented organizational management.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this systematic analysis support that corporate culture is a crucial aspect of incorporating sustainability into organizations. This discovery coincides with what Fietz and Günther (2021) express, who state that "culture functions as a means of control and discipline that guides employees' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors" (p. 34). The information reviewed shows that shared values and beliefs create an environment conducive to implementing sustainable practices, which reinforces the need to treat culture as a strategic asset.

An important aspect is transformational leadership, which has been identified as a fundamental driver of change towards sustainability. Bass and Riggio (2019) argue that "this type of leadership motivates followers to go beyond their personal interests to dedicate themselves to broader common goals" (p. 112). In the context of sustainability, this leadership model favours coherence between the organisation's vision and responsible practices. The results of this review are in line with recent studies in Latin America and Europe that show how ethical leadership can build trust and strengthen the legitimacy of the company in relation to sustainability (Pérez, Gómez, & Díaz, 2021).

Regarding organizational values, the results indicate that they are the basis for developing cultures favorable to sustainability. García, Sánchez, and Rodríguez (2023) mention that "inclusive values focused on innovation increase the ability of organizations to implement sustainable policies and create competitive advantages" (p. 119). This suggests that sustainability should not be seen just as a set of isolated actions, but as a cultural principle that is embedded in the company's mission and identity. This point is related to stakeholder theory, which emphasizes the importance of ethical values in relations with stakeholders (Freeman, Harrison, & Zyglidopoulos, 2018).

Another significant element is internal communication, which has been recognized as a means of transmitting and strengthening sustainable values throughout the organization. López and Martínez (2022) argue that "clear and transparent communication increases employee engagement and reinforces the application of sustainable strategies" (p. 564). The discussion of this finding allows us to think about the function of communicative processes, not only as tools for dissemination, but also as spaces for co-creation that actively involve collaborators in cultural transformation.

The analysis also underscores the relevance of human capital engagement, as companies that manage to engage their staff obtain better results in the execution of sustainable policies. Isensee, Teuteberg, Griese, and Topi (2020) state that "employees' willingness to adopt sustainable practices is based on their integration within the values and beliefs of the organizational culture" (p. 13). In this sense, intrinsic motivation and identification with corporate principles are key to ensuring the effectiveness of sustainability-related programs.

The discussion of the findings also highlights the role that digitalization plays as a mediator in the connection between culture and sustainability. Several studies have shown that organizations with cultures that foster digital innovation are better prepared to adapt to the demands of the environment. Ketprapakorn and Kantabutra (2022) argue that "organizational culture linked to sustainability is based on values and beliefs that guide business decisions and actions" (p. 105). As digitalization and dynamic capabilities align with these values, companies are able to develop greater resilience and competitiveness.

From a geographical perspective, significant differences have been identified. In Europe and Asia, research highlights the institutionalization of sustainable values at the strategic level, while in Latin America, the challenges arising from the lack of resources and cultural resistance to change are highlighted (Rodríguez & Gómez, 2024). Medina-Álvarez and Sánchez-Medina (2023) found that "hierarchical cultures prioritize economic sustainability, while adhocratic cultures favor a holistic approach" (p. 389). This highlights the need to adapt cultural frameworks to the particular contexts of each region and productive sector.

The discussion also highlights gaps in the literature that need to be addressed in future research. Among these, the low representation of SMEs and the lack of long-term studies stand out as priority areas for exploration. Ortiz-de-Mandojana and Bansal (2016) indicate that "organizational resilience is built through cultural values that foster innovation, flexibility, and internal cohesion" (p. 1612). However, few studies have measured resilience as a lasting outcome in the adoption of sustainable practices, which is a major methodological challenge.

From a broader perspective, the findings address the need to move towards conceptual models that integrate and recognize the complexity of the connection between culture and sustainability. Riemer, Marcus, and Reimer-Watts (2025) argue that "the development of cultures of sustainability is a non-linear process, characterized by phases of emergence, visibility, institutionalization, and rootedness" (p. 7). This suggests that linear or static models are insufficient to reflect the real dynamics of organizations in their sustainability journey.

Finally, this analysis enriches the academic literature by gathering evidence that connects culture within organizations with business sustainability in various contexts and sectors. The results suggest that companies should reinforce their values, promote ethical leadership, stimulate internal communication and encourage staff commitment as key elements to achieve sustainability. At the same time, the importance of having public policies and institutional structures that support these efforts, especially in developing countries, is highlighted. Therefore, the discussion on the results presented here benefits both the theoretical and practical fields in management, providing a basis for moving towards organizational cultures that are resilient, innovative and sustainable.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this systematic review allow us to conclude that organizational culture is a cross-cutting axis in the integration of sustainability in companies. The results showed that shared values, beliefs, and practices directly influence the way organizations adopt environmental, social, and economic strategies. In this sense, organizational culture should not be understood as an accessory element, but as a strategic resource that facilitates the consolidation of responsible and competitive business models.

The analysis showed that transformational leadership plays a crucial role in building sustainable cultures. By inspiring trust, commitment, and shared vision, this leadership style favors the internalization of ethical and environmental principles at all levels of the organization. In this way, leadership not only directs actions, but also shapes beliefs and behaviors that underpin responsible business practices.

It was also found that inclusive, ethical and innovative organizational values are essential to guide companies towards sustainability. These values not only promote internal coherence, but also strengthen social legitimacy in the face of external stakeholders. By integrating sustainability into the corporate identity, companies achieve a differentiated positioning that translates into sustainable competitive advantages over time.

Internal communication was identified as an indispensable mechanism for consolidating pro-sustainable organizational cultures. Clear, transparent and two-way communication encourages employee participation and ensures collective ownership of sustainability strategies. Consequently, communication must cease to be conceived as a unidirectional process and become a space for dialogue and joint construction.

The commitment of human talent was also highlighted as a determining factor. Organizations that promote the active participation of their employees in sustainable initiatives achieve more significant results. This is because sustainability cannot be imposed externally, but must be built collectively from the values and beliefs shared by the organizational community.

In sectoral and regional terms, it was observed that the influence of culture on sustainability varies according to the context. In Europe and Asia, institutionalized approaches predominate, while in Latin America there are greater challenges related to limited resources and cultural resistance to change. These differences highlight the importance of adapting sustainability strategies to the cultural and economic particularities of each region.

The study also highlighted gaps in the literature, including the under-representation of SMEs, the lack of research in regions such as Africa and the Caribbean, and the limited number of longitudinal studies to assess long-term cultural impacts. These gaps constitute opportunities for future research that will provide greater diversity and robustness to the understanding of this phenomenon.

From a methodological point of view, the use of the PRISMA protocol guaranteed the transparency and traceability of the article selection process, which reinforces the validity of the conclusions reached. However, it is necessary to recognize that the exclusion of grey literature and non-indexed sources may have limited the identification of relevant cultural practices in emerging contexts.

On a practical level, the results suggest that managers should foster organizational cultures based on ethical leadership, inclusive values, transparent communication, and human talent engagement as pillars for sustainability. These elements not only favor the integration of responsible practices, but also increase organizational resilience in the face of economic, social, and environmental crises.

Finally, this review contributes to the academic field by consolidating existing knowledge on the relationship between culture and sustainability, and offers practical guidelines for business management. It also invites researchers to continue exploring this relationship in little-studied contexts, expanding the geographical and sectoral spectrum. In short, organizational culture emerges as a decisive factor that, if well managed, can transform companies into active agents of sustainable development and global competitiveness.

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