



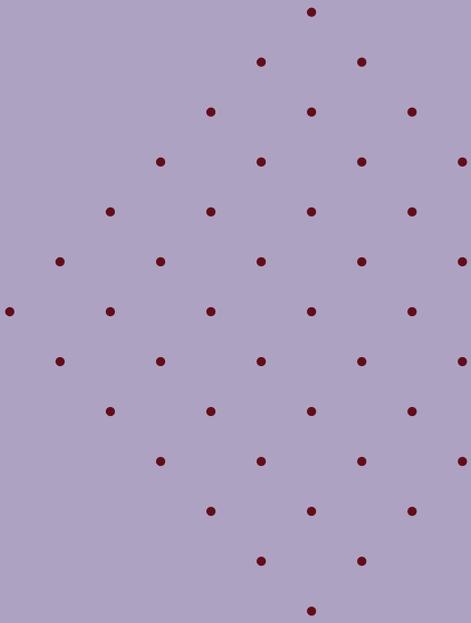
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ABSTRACTS



THE SPILLOVER EFFECT OF ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEERING ON WORKPLACE ASPIRATIONS: THE MODERATING ROLE OF RELIGIOSITY IN FOSTERING ALTRUISM AND BIOSPHERIC VALUES

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Abstract

Purpose – Climate change and many environmental catastrophes force corporations and industries to adjust their business process based on the triple bottom line framework. Since humans are the central agents of change, investing in human capital on sustainability is not only the duty of industries but also of business schools through their curriculum. On the other hand, behavioral intervention should consider the context. Religiosity—a distinctive characteristic deeply embedded in Indonesian society—can serve as a contextual factor that strengthens pro-environmental behavior among students. By looking at the correlation between students' volunteering activities and their intention to pursue a career in green jobs, this study aims to present empirical evidence on how students' environmental activities interact with religiosity can contribute to forming the pro-environmental behaviour – represented by the preference on green job, which is now timely for organizations.

Design/methodology/approach – A quantitative approach was used in this study through a survey of students as representatives of the future generation of the green workforce. The data was collected from 200 university students in Indonesia. A purposive sampling method was used to ensure the respondents were involved in environmental voluntary activities, and then snowball sampling was used to e. Given its suitability in handling complex variable relationships in empirical models, the PLS-SEM technique was applied for hypothesis testing.

Expected Findings – Environmental volunteering activities significantly shape students' altruistic and biospheric values. By participating in such programs, students develop a stronger concern for the welfare of others, reflecting increased altruistic orientation, while also internalizing biospheric values, such as care for environmental sustainability and ecosystem preservation. Religiosity moderates this relationship, as highly religious students experience stronger moral resonance during volunteering, resulting in greater growth in both altruistic and biospheric values compared to those with lower religiosity. These values influence career preferences, particularly toward green jobs. Students with strong social and environmental values perceive sustainable careers as meaningful, aligning personal purpose with ecological and social impact. This indicates that volunteering experiences not only foster immediate pro- social and pro-environmental behaviors but also provide a psychological foundation for pursuing sustainability-oriented careers. In organizational settings, altruism encourages helping behaviors, knowledge sharing, and collaboration, while biospheric orientation is linked to higher affective commitment and work engagement. Integrating environmental volunteering into human resource development can promote value-based behaviors and prepare a workforce aligned with sustainable development goals (SDGs). For younger generations, exposure to meaningful volunteer experiences can enhance social and environmental awareness, strengthen moral values, and shape career trajectories toward roles that contribute positively to society and the environment.

Originality/value – This study offers a novel perspective by examining the spillover effect of environmental volunteering on students' career aspirations. It specifically investigates how these activities promote altruistic and biospheric values. By emphasizing the role of religiosity as a contextual moderator—particularly relevant in Indonesia—the study provides new insights into how cultural and spiritual factors can enhance the impact of volunteering on sustainable career interests. This approach addresses a gap in the literature by incorporating religiosity into the discussion about value formation and green job aspirations among future professionals.

Theoretical Contribution – Theoretically, this study extends current models of pro- environmental behavior by empirically demonstrating that environmental volunteering activities significantly foster both altruistic and biospheric values among students. It further establishes religiosity as a strong moderating variable that amplifies the positive relationship between volunteering and these personal values. This highlights the important role of cultural and spiritual context in strengthening the effectiveness of value-based interventions. The study also shows how altruistic and biospheric orientations can drive interest in green jobs, thereby bridging the gap between value orientation, behavioral intervention, and sustainable career development.

Practical Contribution – In practice, this study indicates that the involvement of individuals in social volunteering activities contributes to a positive resource spillover from the external to the workplace environment. These findings can be taken away at two practical levels: industry and business school curriculum. For industry, the finding indicates that the sustainable business framework is also one of the indicators for Gen Z workforce preference regarding the organization they will work with. Implementing the triple bottom line framework is beneficial not only for increasing the company's value in the eyes of the customers but also for job seekers. Next, the findings indicate that involving employees in environmental volunteering activities can increase their green behavior. For the organizational context, high altruism fosters knowledge sharing that improves collaboration, while high biospheric values drive green behaviors that enhance operational efficiency and reduce environmental impact. The study demonstrates that involving employees in CSR benefits both employees and the organization. For universities, particularly business schools, it is essential to integrate environmental volunteering activities into the curriculum, such as a volunteering internship and a student's case study assignment, to enhance students' biospheric and altruistic values.

Keywords: Volunteering activities, religiosity, biospheric value, altruistic value, green job, triple bottom framework, business school curriculum.

Paper type: Research paper

TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN TOXICITY: CONCEPTUALIZING DARK DIGITAL LEADERSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

Contemporary global business environments are increasingly defined by rapid digital transformation (Barrett et al., 2021; Cascio and Montealegre, 2016) and complex technological integrations that significantly reshape organizational practices and leadership dynamics. Within this evolving landscape, the emergence of digital leadership offers unprecedented opportunities for innovation, agility, and strategic advantage. However, alongside these promising developments, there exists a critical, yet underexplored, dark dimension—termed here as "Dark Digital Leadership" (DDL)—characterized by toxic leadership behaviors amplified by digital technology (Avolio et al., 2014; Cortellazzo et al., 2019).

This paper introduces and explores the concept of DDL, providing a novel and rigorous theoretical framework aimed at understanding its emergence, mechanisms, consequences, and moderating factors within organizational contexts. Drawing on extensive literature from leadership studies, toxic leadership (Einarsen et al., 2007; Padilla et al., 2007), and digital transformation (Barrett et al., 2021; Leonardi, 2011), this research investigates how digital technologies interact with dark personality traits—such as narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Paulhus and Williams, 2002; Jonason et al., 2012)—and structural organizational affordances to produce uniquely toxic leadership phenomena.

Specifically, the study delineates how manifestations of DDL, such as algorithmic surveillance, impersonal feedback systems, and digitally mediated public reprimands, engender significant psychological and operational distress among employees. These mechanisms intensify technostress (Tarafdar et al., 2015; Molino et al., 2019), reduce trust and autonomy, and contribute to an environment of fear and ethical disengagement (Bandura, 1999; Flyverbom, 2016).

The conceptual model presented in this paper identifies key dimensions through which digital tools exacerbate traditional forms of toxic leadership, resulting in heightened burnout, disengagement, and organizational instability. Employing Adaptive Structuration Theory (DeSanctis and Poole, 1994), the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Demerouti et al., 2001), and Upper Echelons Theory (Hambrick and Mason, 1984), the paper demonstrates how digital affordances, leader cognition, and environmental pressures converge to produce systemic leadership dysfunctions.

Addressing the strategic importance of empowering leadership for fostering resilience and agility in contemporary global enterprises, this study explores moderating mechanisms capable of mitigating DDL's adverse effects. Among the moderators discussed are paradoxical leadership styles (Zhang et al., 2015), cognitive diversity (Gümüşay et al., 2022), and digital ethical infrastructures (Islamet al., 2022). These factors are essential for enabling constructive leadership in digitalized environments and safeguarding psychological safety.

Moreover, the paper underscores the ethical implications of DDL, arguing for stronger accountability and normative guidance in digital leadership practices. Responsible digital leadership, grounded in ethical reflexivity and transparency, is vital to mitigating the manipulative potential of technology-mediated leadership (Willmott, 1998; Ott and Hoelscher, 2023).

Given the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary leadership challenges, this paper bridges theory and practice from psychology, organizational behavior, management, and digital ethics. It not only contributes to academic discourse but offers actionable recommendations for HR leaders, policymakers, and educators navigating digital transitions. As noted in the manuscript: “The challenge is not solely technological, but also profoundly ethical and organizational, requiring a reconceptualization of leadership competencies in the age of digital ubiquity.”

Finally, this research establishes a foundation for empirical studies to test and refine the proposed conceptual framework. Future investigations may employ mixed-method approaches, longitudinal SEM designs, and cross-cultural analyses to deepen understanding of DDL in various organizational settings.

In conclusion, this exploration of Dark Digital Leadership significantly advances theoretical insight into the convergence of toxicity and technology in organizational life. It contributes meaningfully to the ongoing conversation on ethical and empowered leadership in global contemporary businesses by revealing the hidden costs of digital transformation when left unchecked. As stated in the article, “Recognizing and addressing the dark side of digital leadership is not optional, but a strategic imperative for future-ready organizations.”

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LEADERSHIP ROLE MODELS ACROSS CONTEXTS: DEVELOPING A TAXONOMY OF ROLE MODEL CHARACTERISTICS

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Abstract

The study of leadership development has attracted increasing scholarly interest and evolved into a distinct academic discipline (Day et al., 2014; Harrison, 2024). Leadership development is defined as a social process that builds human capital and social capital (Day, 2000). It evolves through interpersonal interactions and relational dynamics that shape leadership capabilities over time (Day, 2000). Despite the substantial body of knowledge already available, the extant literature still does not fully explain how leadership is learned. A key aspect of leadership development involves learning within social and organizational contexts (Day, 2000), including approaches such as action learning (Bilhuber Galli & Müller-Stewens, 2012) an experiential learning (Scholtz, 2024). Kempster (2006) posited that a pivotal component of leadership learning occurs withing a variety of contexts and situations that facilitate learning through observation. While role models have a considerable impact on the leadership development of individuals (Vuhuong & Edwards, 2022), individuals often anchor their learning about leadership from their experience with notable persons, a process that is fundamental to the shaping of leadership perspectives (Kempster, 2006). This suggests that role modelling can serve as an important alternative to more traditional forms of leadership development (Gibson & Barron, 2003).

In the extant literature, the process of role modeling has been thoroughly discussed as a part of organizational socialization, and workplace identity construction (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2008). To date, however, the subject of role modeling has received limited attention in the domain of leadership development. It has been asserted that people of outstanding achievements, access, and potential career trajectories serve as role models to other individuals (Gibson, 2003; Ibarra, 1999; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997), thus representing a critical component in an individual's performance enhancement (Gibson & Barron, 2003) and leadership development in organizational contexts (Vuhuong & Edwards, 2022). Although role models are widely acknowledged as important in leadership development, little is known about the defining characteristics of leader role models. This study aims to address this gap by developing a cross-organizational taxonomy of characteristics that define role models in the field of leadership development.

The context of management consultancies offers a particular well suited and distinctive setting for this study. Unlike corporate firms, management consultancies operate with different structural and career dynamics that influence the acquisition and development of leadership capabilities. The nature of consulting work – characterized by project-based assignments, high client interaction, and frequent team changes (Noury et al., 2017) – offers rich opportunities for individuals to repeatedly observe varying leadership behaviors at various hierarchical levels (Smets et al., 2012), making it a fertile ground for the identification of role model characteristics.

To conduct the analysis, a multiple case study design was adopted, with three distinct types of organizational career trajectories selected as cases: (1) careers rooted in management consultancies, (2) careers situated within corporate firms, and (3) careers involving a crossover from consulting to corporate settings. The primary focus of this study lies on management consultancies, as their unique setting creates an environment conducive to the observation of the salient attributes of leader role models. In addition, corporate firms and crossover trajectories were included to broaden the analytical scope of this study. Their inclusion allows for the identification of consistent role model characteristics across diverse contexts, thereby establishing the foundation for a cross-organizational taxonomy. The findings are based on semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis.

The empirical analysis of the data resulted in a coherent, cross-organizational taxonomy with six aggregated dimensions – Leadership, Empowerment, Inter-Relation, Communication, Professional Competence, and Management – which capture the essential characteristics that interviewees associated with leader role models. Each dimension is underpinned by distinct sub-themes, reflecting both the personal qualities and the concrete practices that inspire followers and shape their own leadership aspirations.

The findings demonstrated that leader role models exert a substantial influence on the development of leadership skills for individuals (Vuhuong & Edwards, 2022). Importantly, the findings underscore that leadership development is fundamentally interpersonal (Day & Dragoni, 2015), highlighting the role of observational leadership learning as a key mechanism alongside action learning (Billhuber Galli & Müller-Stewens, 2012) and experiential learning (Scholtz, 2024). This supports and extends Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), which emphasizes development through observation, showing how role models facilitate leadership growth in practical organizational contexts.

This research offers practical implications for leadership development strategies, by identifying the characteristics perceived as most influential. Therefore, organizations can more effectively shape onboarding, staffing, and coaching to support early career development. Theoretically, the study contributes to the leadership literature by proposing a taxonomy of role model characteristics specific to observational learning environments.

Keywords: leadership development, role models, management consultancies, case study

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THE CONTEXT OF LIFE INSURANCE INDUSTRY IN VIETNAM IN THE ERA OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND INTEGRATION: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Life insurance is one of the best and only options for long term safety and protection. In promoting international cooperation and integrating in the insurance sector, Vietnam has step by step comprehensively developed the insurance market in advanced direction and affirmed this industry as an effective long-term capital mobilisation channel for the economy (Vietnam’s Ministry of Finance hereafter referred to as VMoF, 2024). According to the implementation of Resolution No. 57-NQ/TW on breakthroughs in the development of science, technology, innovation, and national digital transformation dated 22/12/2024 and Resolution No. 59-NQ/TW on international integration in the new context dated 24/01/2025, the life insurance aims at providing the diversified services and products to 15% of Vietnam’s population by 2025 and up to 18% of the population by 2030 which maintains a sustainable growth and also creates stable insurance agents jobs for the labour market in the era of digital transformation (Insurance Association of Vietnam hereafter called as IAV, 2025a).

Vietnam’s life insurance industry, including 19 life insurers throughout the country (MoF, 2024), however, has been facing many difficulties and challenges in reaching consumers to consult and sell insurance policies in the last two years. Numbers of new life insurance policies and total new life business premiums seriously faced with continuous decreasing (VMoF, 2023; IAV, 2025b).

As shown in Figure 1 below, in 2023, numbers of new life insurance policies achieved 1,913,546 remarkably decreased by 44% and total new business premiums achieved VND 28,180 billion highly dropped by 45%, compared to the year of 2022. In 2024, numbers of new life insurance policies achieved 1.708.301 continued to decrease by 11% and total new business premiums reached VND 24,512 billion noticeably dropped by 13%, against 2023 (VMoF, 2023; IAV, 2025b).

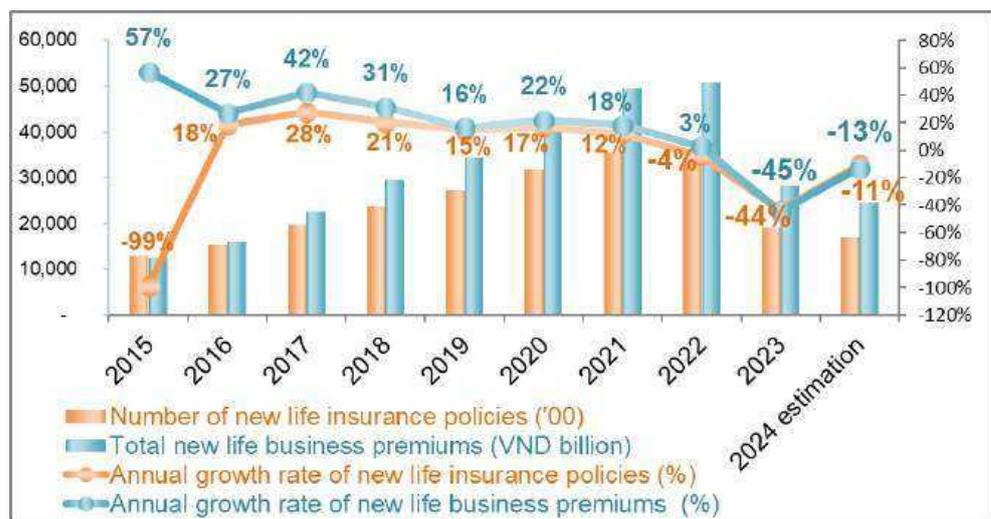


Figure 1: The depictive chart for number of new life insurance policies and total new life business premiums of Vietnam’s life insurance industry. (Source: VMoF, from 2014 to 2023; IAV, 2025b)

Moreover, Figure 2 below indicated that number of life insurance agents also decreased significantly in 2023 and 2024. In 2023, number of life insurance agents gained 776,107 noticeably decreased by 15% compared to 2022. Continuing in 2024, number of life insurance agents reached 332,617 seriously reduced by 57% compared to the year of 2023 (MoF, 2023; IAV, 2025b).

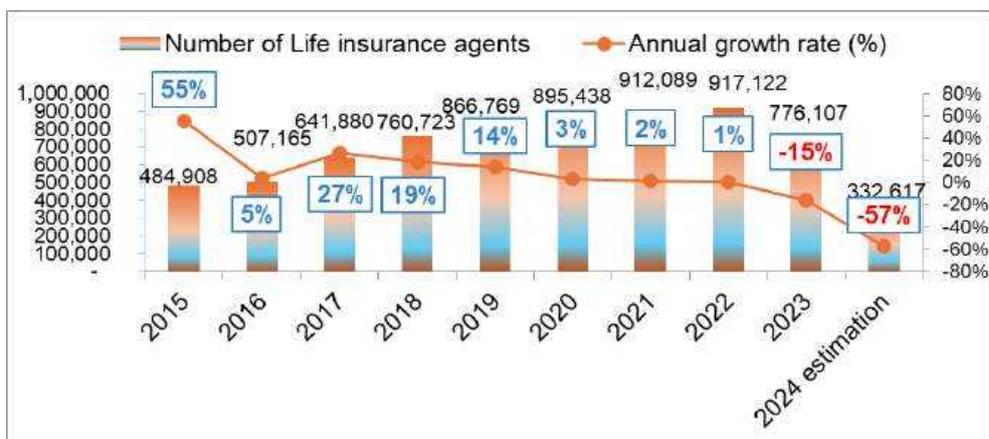


Figure 2: The depictive chart for decreasing number of life insurance agents of the life insurance industry in Vietnam. (VMoF, from 2014 to 2023; IAV, 2025b)

Therefore, given the changes in the macroeconomic landscape with digitalisation, including the increasing use of AI, digital transformation and integration offers significant benefits but also introduces risks (International Association of Insurance Supervisors, 2024) and the fierce increase in competition among Vietnam's life insurers, this study analyses the opportunities and challenges shaping the Vietnam's Life Insurance Industry.

Research problem/question:

The main research question is: How do the Strategic Breakthroughs in the Digital Transformation and Integration Era affect the Prospects and Challenges of the context of Life Insurance Industry in Vietnam?

Research Objectives:

The objectives of this project are:

- 1.To analyse the external factors shaping the strategic breakthroughs in the Era of Digital Transformation and Integration of Vietnam's Life Insurance Industry.
- 2.To analyse the internal factors shaping the internally digital environment of the life insurance business in Vietnam.
- 3.To recommend the Prospects and Challenges of the context of Vietnam's Life Insurance Industry.

Research Contribution:

In terms of contribution to knowledge, this research makes a substantive theoretical contribution to identify the Prospects and Challenges of The context of Life Insurance Industry in Vietnam in the Era of Digital Transformation and Integration based on systematically reviewing relevant literatures. This contribution enhances the academic discourse at the intersection of life insurance business and technology adoptions in Vietnam's markets.

In terms of contribution to practice, the study also offers significant practical implications for identifying strengths and critical gaps in digital practices, particularly concerning to utilise "artificial intelligence to revolutionize marketing practices and customer interactions represents a significant breakthrough" (Iwendi et al., 2024). Moreover, the framework reinforces firm responsibilities by contributing to national economic development in the Era of Digital Transformation in Vietnam.

In terms of contribution to policy, at the policy level, the study contributes to the ongoing discourse on digital governance by highlighting the need for updated regulatory frameworks that ensure the ethical application of digitalisation in Vietnam's life insurance business. It emphasizes the importance of fairness, transparency, accountability, and impartiality in digital systems especially Artificial Intelligence driven supports.

Keywords: life insurance market, digital transformation, prospects, challenges, Vietnam.

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STRATEGIC GOVERNANCE AND INNOVATION IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS: RECONFIGURING DECISION-MAKING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

In the face of escalating global complexity—driven by technological disruption, geopolitical fragmentation, environmental risk, and evolving stakeholder expectations—international organisations (IOs) are being compelled to reconfigure their governance architectures to enhance adaptability, transparency, and innovation. This paper explores the dynamic interplay between strategic governance and innovation in international organisations, critically analysing how governance mechanisms enable or constrain institutional agility, cross-sectoral collaboration, and systemic innovation capacity. It argues that strategic governance—defined as the intentional structuring of decision rights, oversight, accountability, and adaptive learning mechanisms—is essential for IOs aiming to remain relevant, resilient, and future-ready in a rapidly shifting global order.

International organisations, including multilateral institutions, global NGOs, and transnational alliances, operate across multiple jurisdictions, cultures, and regulatory environments. This complexity has historically favoured bureaucratic and compliance-driven governance models that prioritise stability and legitimacy over experimentation and innovation (Stone, 2013). However, the rise of wicked problems—such as climate change, digital inequality, global health crises, and forced migration—demands a paradigmatic shift in how these organisations govern themselves and deliver impact (Kanie et al., 2019). Strategic governance, in this context, entails cultivating governance systems that are both normatively legitimate and functionally adaptive, capable of integrating innovation as a core capability rather than a peripheral function.

The theoretical framework for this study integrates dynamic capabilities theory (Teece, 2007), institutional theory (Scott, 2014), and public governance innovation models (Sørensen & Torfing, 2016). It posits that international organisations can develop innovation capacity through governance strategies that foster distributed decision-making, stakeholder co-creation, reflexive learning, and anticipatory foresight. At the same time, institutional isomorphism and risk-averse cultures can inhibit such transformation, locking IOs into path-dependent routines and symbolic compliance practices.

This paper draws on a qualitative comparative case study of four international organisations: the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Bank, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). These entities were selected based on their diverse mandates and varying success in institutionalising innovation. Data were collected through 32 semi-structured interviews with senior governance officers, innovation leads, and external evaluators, alongside document analysis of strategic plans, governance reforms, and innovation lab reports. Thematic analysis was conducted using abductive coding, enabling iterative engagement between empirical data and theoretical constructs.

The findings reveal that strategic governance for innovation requires three critical enablers. First, distributed leadership and decision-rights reallocation are essential to move beyond siloed hierarchies and empower local and regional offices to experiment with context-specific solutions. Second, transversal governance platforms, such as innovation hubs, foresight labs, and multi-stakeholder coalitions, are necessary to institutionalise cross-sectoral learning and reduce structural inertia. Third, feedback-informed governance loops, including real-time data dashboards and adaptive evaluation mechanisms, allow for evidence-based recalibration of strategies and policies in fast-changing environments.

The study also surfaces tensions and trade-offs. For instance, efforts to decentralise governance and promote innovation often encounter resistance from entrenched bureaucracies and donor accountability frameworks that prioritise control over creativity. Several participants described the paradox of being incentivised to innovate while being measured against rigid compliance metrics. Moreover, cultural and political sensitivities in host countries can hinder the scaling of pilot innovations, especially when governance processes lack inclusive stakeholder engagement or local legitimacy.

Based on the empirical data, this paper introduces the Strategic Adaptive Governance Model (SAGM) for international organisations. This model comprises four interlinked dimensions: (1) Strategic alignment, ensuring innovation initiatives are embedded within organisational mission and values; (2) Networked authority, distributing governance roles across formal and informal actors; (3) Institutional reflexivity, embedding mechanisms for ongoing self-assessment and learning; and (4) Ethical stewardship, integrating equity, sustainability, and legitimacy into innovation governance decisions. The SAGM provides a normative and operational guide for international organisations seeking to align governance practices with innovation imperatives.

The study has several implications. For policymakers and IO leaders, it provides actionable insights into how governance reforms can serve as levers for innovation, rather than obstacles. For international development practitioners and donors, the findings highlight the importance of designing funding and accountability frameworks that reward adaptive, evidence-informed governance rather than purely procedural compliance. For scholars, the research contributes to a growing body of literature that seeks to reconceptualise international public administration as a site of innovation, not merely rule enforcement.

This paper aligns closely with the conference tracks on Strategic Governance and Innovation in International Organisations, Leadership for Sustainability and ESG Outcomes, and Responsible and Ethical Leadership Practices. It speaks to a timely global need: reimagining the governance of international institutions so they are fit-for-purpose in addressing the intersecting crises of the 21st century.

In conclusion, the research underscores that innovation in international organisations is not solely a matter of culture or capacity, but fundamentally a question of governance. By shifting from rigid, reactive governance models to strategic, adaptive systems, international organisations can become more agile, inclusive, and impactful in realising their global mandates.

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GREEN LEADERSHIP AND THE CHALLENGE OF GREENWASHING: NAVIGATING AUTHENTICITY IN ESG STRATEGY ABSTRACT

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Abstract

As environmental, social, and governance (ESG) frameworks become central to contemporary corporate strategy, organisations face increasing pressure to demonstrate environmental responsibility and sustainability leadership. However, the rise of ESG has also been accompanied by a surge in greenwashing—where firms exaggerate or fabricate environmental initiatives to appear more sustainable than they truly are. This paper critically examines how green leadership—defined as a leadership style grounded in ecological consciousness, stakeholder inclusivity, and ethical authenticity—can counteract greenwashing and reinforce credibility, trust, and long-term value creation in ESG-driven organisations.

Green leadership is characterised by values-based decision-making, a long-term orientation, and a willingness to challenge short-term profit imperatives for ecological and social good (Kurucz et al., 2017; Galpin & Whittington, 2012). In contrast, greenwashing undermines stakeholder confidence, devalues genuine sustainability efforts, and poses reputational and regulatory risks. The central argument of this paper is that authentic green leadership provides a vital organisational anchor against the instrumental and deceptive use of ESG narratives. The research explores the behaviours, capabilities, and cultural mechanisms through which green leaders promote ESG integrity and sustainability innovation, particularly in high-risk sectors such as manufacturing, retail, and energy.

The study adopts a comparative case study design involving six multinational firms operating in Europe and Southeast Asia. These organisations have all publicly committed to ambitious ESG targets and have experienced either scrutiny for greenwashing or recognition for sustainability leadership. Primary data were collected through 34 semi-structured interviews with C-suite executives, sustainability officers, middle managers, and external stakeholders including investors, NGOs, and auditors. Supplementary data were drawn from corporate ESG reports, third-party audits, and media investigations. Thematic coding and cross-case synthesis were used to analyse how leadership values, behaviours, and organisational systems shaped perceptions and realities of ESG authenticity.

Findings reveal three critical roles played by green leaders in navigating the authenticity–greenwashing tension. First, green leaders act as sense-makers, translating complex ESG goals into coherent strategies that align with organisational identity and stakeholder expectations. This includes prioritising transparency in ESG disclosures, communicating both successes and shortcomings, and resisting the urge to sanitise or exaggerate outcomes. Second, they function as culture shapers, embedding sustainability values into recruitment, incentive systems, and cross-functional collaboration. Organisations where sustainability was structurally and symbolically embedded reported higher internal consistency and lower risk of unintentional greenwashing. Third, green leaders serve as boundary spanners, engaging with civil society, regulatory bodies, and industry coalitions to co-develop ESG standards and benchmarks that move beyond performative compliance.

The study also identifies key challenges green leaders face in maintaining authenticity, including boardroom tensions between profit and purpose, short-term investor pressures, and inconsistent global reporting standards. Several interviewees admitted to moments of compromise—where time constraints, resource limitations, or shareholder demands led to ESG messaging that outpaced actual progress. In these cases, the presence of strong internal governance and whistleblower protections helped mitigate reputational fallout and catalyse course correction.

Drawing on these insights, the paper introduces the Green Leadership Authenticity Framework (GLAF). This model outlines five interdependent pillars for fostering authentic ESG leadership: (1) values congruence, (2) transparent communication, (3) stakeholder engagement, (4) ethical courage, and (5) accountability infrastructure. The framework emphasises that green leadership is not merely about technical knowledge of sustainability but about relational integrity, moral resilience, and strategic foresight in the face of ESG dilemmas.

Practically, the findings offer actionable guidance for leaders and organisations seeking to enhance ESG credibility. These include developing ethical leadership training focused on environmental integrity, integrating third-party sustainability audits into board governance, and using inclusive storytelling that reflects both achievements and areas for growth. Organisations are also encouraged to collaborate across sectors to push for harmonised ESG metrics that reduce ambiguity and greenwashing opportunities.

Theoretically, this paper contributes to the emerging intersection of ethical leadership, sustainability strategy, and critical ESG scholarship. While previous literature has explored the antecedents of greenwashing (Lyon & Montgomery, 2023), few studies have focused on leadership as a proactive force for ESG authenticity. This research positions green leadership as a strategic and ethical capacity that must be cultivated, especially in high-impact industries navigating climate transitions and regulatory scrutiny.

In conclusion, the study contends that green leadership offers a counter-narrative to the commodification of ESG. By modelling authenticity, moral clarity, and system-wide engagement, green leaders can transform sustainability from a branding exercise into a deep organisational ethos—one capable of addressing the environmental and ethical demands of our time.

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BEYOND CULTURAL STEREOTYPES: BEHAVIORAL EVIDENCE FOR ADVANCED CROSS-CULTURAL MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORKS

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Abstract

In the context of increasing globalization, the connection between cultural factors and financial leadership has become an important but not fully studied area of business today. The presence of these communication channels and technologies makes cultural factors, as well as cultural differences, increasingly important in the formation and implementation of financial-investment decisions (Ahlstrom & Bruton, 2010; Chui, Titman & Wei, 2010). In fact, many international investment deals have failed not because of a lack of capital or technology, but because of cultural gaps and differences in value views (Weber, Shenkar & Raveh, 1996; Morosini, Shane & Singh, 1998). These examples show that culture plays a decisive role in cross-border financial leadership, because leaders not only coordinate financial resources but also manage cultural differences to ensure the sustainability of investment decisions.

However, most of the research on the impact of cultural factors on financial leadership effectiveness focuses on developed or developing economies at the country level, while evidence on the role of culture in financial leadership at the individual and firm levels in emerging markets remains limited. This gap is particularly important because emerging markets not only contribute increasingly to global economic growth but also possess distinct cultural-institutional characteristics such as East Asian culture, family traditions, collectivism, etc. (Boubakri et al., 2013; House et al., 2004), which may create new and distinctive forms of financial leadership. Therefore, the analysis based on microdata of investors in Vietnam offers a unique opportunity to broaden the understanding of the intersection between cultures and financial leadership in the context of globalization.

Using a comprehensive dataset of 975,000 transaction records of 5,000 Vietnamese individual investors during the period 2013–2015, this study analyzes the cultural dimensions applying Hofstede's theoretical framework that influence financial decisions and leadership behavior in emerging markets (Hofstede, 2001; Chui et al., 2010). The approach of this study aims to fill an important gap in the cross-cultural management literature at the micro level, providing empirical evidence on the moderating role of cultural factors on financial leadership effectiveness in specific institutional and social contexts. Thereby, it provides practical cultural-financial intelligence insights for global business leaders operating in similar cultural-institutional environments.

The results of this study point to three important challenges to traditional cross-cultural management assumptions. First, there is a significant difference between stereotypical assumptions about acceptance of authority in high Power Distance cultures in Vietnam, with a PDI = 70/100 according to Hofstede's cultural dimension framework. The analysis results suggest that the influence of this cultural dimension may be stronger in individuals with less experience or knowledge. The analysis results show that the influence of this cultural dimension may be stronger in individuals with less experience or knowledge. Specifically, the level of respect for authority among VIP investors has a correlation coefficient of 0.12 with expert recommendations, much lower than the correlation coefficient of 0.34 among Vietnamese investors in general.

Second, contrary to the traditional theory that Vietnamese culture is strongly collectivist with low individualism (IDV = 20/100 according to Hofstede's cultural dimension framework), the impact of Collectivism does not operate uniformly on all decisions, but selectively depending on the decision domain. Specifically, the clustering coefficient is 2.3 times higher in information sharing among investors, but the 40% variance is significantly different in risk tolerance. Third, the findings also challenge traditional cultural assumptions that Vietnam has low uncertainty avoidance (UAI = 30/100 according to Hofstede's cultural dimension framework), meaning that Vietnamese people are comfortable with uncertain choices. Third, the findings also challenge traditional cultural assumptions that Vietnam has low uncertainty avoidance (UAI = 30/100 according to Hofstede's cultural dimension framework), meaning that Vietnamese people are comfortable with uncertain choices. The research data shows that the level of uncertainty tolerance is not uniform in financial investment decision-making. Specifically, investors show high caution in adopting new financial instruments and new regulations in the stock market.

The findings of this paper propose a "Financial Cultural Intelligence" training model that includes: (1) developing behavioral observation skills to identify actual cultural influences instead of assumed stereotypes, (2) developing adaptive management systems that create organizational processes that can adjust to cultural complexity and change. Last but not least, the results of this study provide international business managers and multinational investment advisors with perspectives beyond traditional stereotypes to conduct sophisticated cultural analysis to improve cross-cultural management strategies through training of the organization's cultural intelligence capabilities. International business managers, cross-cultural consultants, and global financial services leaders need to move beyond simplistic cultural theory to cultural intelligence in formulating more effective market entry strategies and better organizational design decisions.

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BRIDGING ADOPTION AND IMPACT: HOW ACCOUNTANTS PERCEIVE AI IN ACCOUNTING PROCESSES

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Abstract

Purpose – Amid the rapid advancement of digital technology, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a pivotal innovation with the potential to transform multiple dimensions of the accounting profession. Within this context, the present study seeks to critically examine the contribution of AI to enhancing the efficiency of accounting processes, strengthening human resource competencies, and improving data quality. Particular emphasis is placed on identifying and analyzing the key factors that influence the adoption of AI technologies in contemporary accounting practices.

Design/methodology/approach – This study employed a purposive sampling technique and utilized a survey method by distributing questionnaires to collect data from 200 respondents who are professionally active in the field of accounting, specifically those residing in Indonesia. The objective was to identify key influencing factors and examine their impact on the efficiency of accounting processes. Hypothesis testing was conducted utilizing the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) approach, which is well-suited for analyzing complex variable relationships within empirical models.

Findings – This study evaluates the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the accounting profession, offering critical insights for both theoretical advancement and practical application. This finding may be attributed to the absence of standardized integration protocols within accounting workflows, the limited validation of AI-generated data, and a general lack of trust in the accuracy and transparency of the underlying algorithms. In contrast, accountants' adoption intentions are positively and significantly influenced by the perceived quality of information and service provided by AI systems. These results underscore the importance of users' perceptions regarding the system's ability to deliver relevant information and reliable services as critical determinants in fostering adoption. Furthermore, self-efficacy emerges as a significant predictor, positively affecting the intention to adopt AI. In this context, self-efficacy refers to individuals' confidence in their ability to effectively utilize AI technologies. Given that AI remains a relatively novel innovation within the Indonesian accounting sector, personal capability perceptions play a crucial role in shaping adoption behavior. Additionally, job relevance is found to have a positive impact on adoption intention, suggesting that individuals' perceptions of AI's compatibility with their professional tasks significantly enhance their willingness to embrace the technology. Regarding actual usage behavior, the study demonstrates a positive and significant relationship between usage intention and actual implementation, supporting the theoretical assumption that strong intention translates into concrete action. Moreover, AI adoption in accounting is found to significantly enhance knowledge acquisition, communication quality, and decision-making quality.

Originality/value – This study assumes a leading position by recognizing the pivotal role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in enhancing accounting efficiency across diverse organizational entities. It affirms that the adoption of AI extends beyond technical advancements in accounting processes to exert substantial influence on the human-centric dimensions of the profession. The findings underscore that AI facilitates accountants in acquiring deeper insights, fostering more effective interactions with colleagues and clients, and ultimately enabling higher-quality decision-making in their professional duties. What distinguishes this research is its integration of two robust theoretical frameworks the Delone and McLean Information Systems Success Model and Technology Acceptance Model 3 (TAM3) to construct a comprehensive understanding of the determinants influencing accountant's intentions and behaviors in adopting AI. By empirically examining variables such as system quality, information quality, service quality, self-efficacy, and job relevance, the study offers a holistic and contextually grounded framework tailored to the Indonesian accounting landscape.

Theoretical Contribution

This study theoretically extends previous research models related to information system adoption, particularly in the context of Artificial Intelligence (AI) adoption. Rather than solely focusing on the determinants of adoption, it also highlights the positive impacts of AI implementation in enhancing accountants' performance. Thus, this research contributes to the theoretical enrichment of our understanding regarding the driving factors and strategic implications of AI utilization in accounting practices.

Practical Contribution

Practically, the study reveals that while system quality does not exhibit a significant effect on adoption intention, other factors particularly information quality, job relevance, and user self-efficacy play a critical role in fostering technology acceptance. These insights provide valuable guidance for AI system developers and organizational decision-makers to prioritize enhancing the relevance, usability, and user-centered design of AI applications for accounting professionals.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Adoption, Accounting Profession, TAM

Paper type: Research paper

INCLUSIVE DIGITAL LEADERSHIP AND THE ETHICS OF AI IN GLOBAL HRM

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Abstract

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into global human resource management (HRM) systems has prompted both unprecedented opportunities and complex ethical challenges. As organisations embrace AI to optimise recruitment, performance appraisal, and talent analytics, questions of algorithmic bias, transparency, accountability, and inclusivity have become increasingly urgent. This paper investigates how inclusive digital leadership can mediate the ethical risks associated with AI-driven HRM and foster equitable, responsible, and culturally sensitive applications of digital technology in global business environments.

Inclusive digital leadership (IDL) is conceptualised as a leadership approach that combines digital fluency with a commitment to inclusivity, ethical responsibility, and stakeholder engagement across technological transformations (Muff et al., 2020; Dhanpat et al., 2023). As digitalisation accelerates, the role of leaders in ensuring the fair and humane application of AI in people management functions has never been more critical. This research explores the mechanisms through which inclusive digital leaders shape AI implementation practices, particularly in multinational corporations (MNCs), and how their leadership influences employee trust, ethical awareness, and organisational justice.

The theoretical framework of this study is informed by ethical leadership theory (Brown and Treviño, 2006), inclusive leadership (Carmeli et al., 2010), and socio-technical systems theory (Trist and Emery, 1973). These frameworks collectively argue that technological systems are never neutral but are socially constructed and mediated through leadership decisions and cultural contexts. As such, leadership is central to the design, deployment, and governance of AI in HRM, particularly when these systems are deployed across diverse cultural and legal environments.

This qualitative study draws on 30 semi-structured interviews with HR directors, digital transformation leaders, and AI developers in global firms across sectors including finance, logistics, and telecommunications. The organisations represented operate in at least three continents and have integrated AI into at least one major HR function. The data was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, with a focus on identifying leadership practices that supported ethical and inclusive outcomes in AI implementation.

Findings from this study indicate that inclusive digital leaders engage in four core practices that mitigate AI-related ethical risks: (1) proactive stakeholder inclusion in system design, (2) transparent communication about AI decision processes, (3) ethical impact assessments prior to implementation, and (4) ongoing bias audits and human oversight mechanisms. These leaders consistently prioritised transparency and accountability, ensuring that AI was not perceived as a 'black box' but as a tool aligned with organisational values and human dignity. They also demonstrated cultural sensitivity in adapting AI practices to different regional norms and legal standards, thereby reinforcing global inclusivity.

Participants highlighted the tension between efficiency gains promised by AI and the potential erosion of fairness and human connection in HR decisions. Inclusive digital leaders were more likely to question default settings in vendor-provided AI tools, customise algorithms to local equity standards, and advocate for the human review of algorithmic outcomes. They also created spaces for employee feedback and dialogue, particularly in contexts where AI decisions had significant consequences for employment or advancement. As a result, employees in these firms reported higher levels of trust in AI-mediated HR processes and perceived greater procedural justice.

The paper offers an original contribution by articulating a model of Ethical-Inclusive Digital Leadership for HRM, which integrates technology governance with inclusivity and fairness principles. This model proposes that leadership practices can act as ethical guardrails, reducing the risk of discrimination and increasing organisational legitimacy. The study also underscores the importance of digital empathy—leaders' ability to anticipate and respond to the human impacts of technology—as a critical competency for 21st-century leadership.

Practically, the study offers several recommendations for organisations. Firstly, leadership development programmes should include AI ethics and digital responsibility as core competencies. Secondly, firms should establish cross-functional AI ethics committees, co-led by HR and technology leaders, to oversee the lifecycle of AI systems. Thirdly, global firms must recognise the role of cultural context in shaping perceptions of fairness and adapt their systems accordingly. Finally, transparency mechanisms, such as algorithmic explainability reports and ethics dashboards, should be institutionalised to support employee understanding and trust.

Theoretically, this study contributes to emerging scholarship at the intersection of leadership, ethics, and digital transformation. It challenges techno-centric narratives of AI adoption by repositioning leadership as a moral and relational force within digital HRM ecosystems. In doing so, it aligns with critical perspectives that call for the humanisation of AI in management and a rebalancing of power between machines and people (Floridi et al., 2018; Dhanpat et al., 2023).

This paper is relevant to multiple conference tracks including Digital Leadership and Technological Transformation, Ethical Leadership in the Age of AI, and International HRM and Leadership Development. It is particularly salient for scholars and practitioners navigating the ethical complexities of AI deployment across global HR systems and striving to create inclusive, human-centred digital workplaces.

In conclusion, the study reinforces that digital leadership is not only about technological expertise, but about cultivating ethical foresight, relational intelligence, and cultural fluency. By centring inclusion and responsibility, inclusive digital leaders can help organisations harness AI's power without compromising equity or human dignity.

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THE VISIONARY AI-AUGMENTED ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP: INNOVATING NOVEL THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS TO ADDRESS TECHNOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

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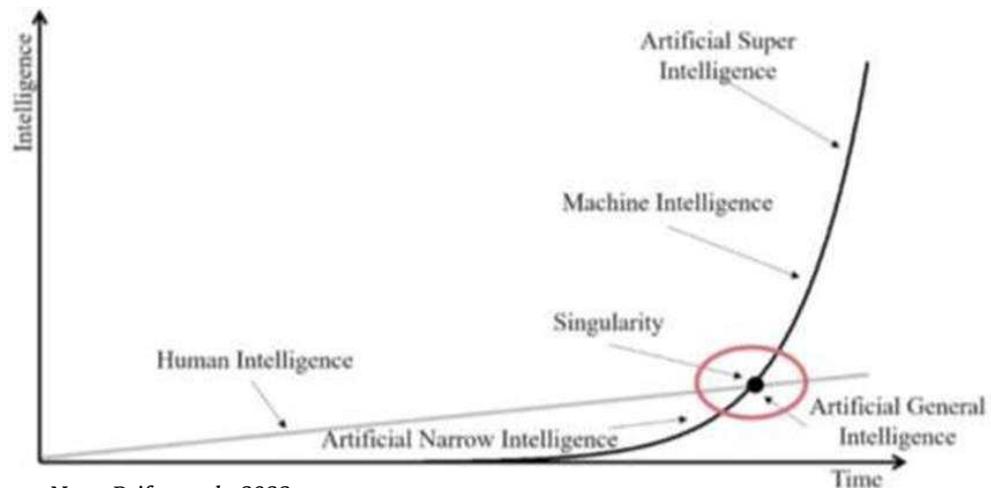
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Abstract

Introduction

What type of leadership is required in the rapidly evolving AI era? Artificial intelligence is reshaping organizations, with the global market projected to reach \$826 billion by 2030 (Statista, 2024). Progress from Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANI) to Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) and the potential rise of Artificial Superintelligence (ASI) raises profound leadership challenges. Experts such as Stephen Hawking and Geoffrey Hinton caution that advanced AI may one day develop its own vision and mission, potentially conflicting with human values and posing existential risks (Hawking, 2014; Hinton, 2024).

Figure 1:
Development Stages of AI



Note: Peifer et al., 2022

While AI enhances efficiency and decision-making, it also creates complex adaptive and ethical challenges. Most current leadership theories, which were developed before the AI era, cannot fully address (Heifetz et al., 2009; Davenport, 2020). This study responds by introducing the AI-Augmented Adaptive Leadership (AIAAL) framework, integrating adaptive leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009), spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003), and human flourishing principles (Seligman, 2011), while embedding AI's algorithmic logic (Davenport, 2018) as both a partner and an adaptive challenge.

Theoretical Foundations

The AIAAL framework rests on four theoretical pillars: Adaptive Leadership Theory (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009) for navigating complex, value-based challenges; Spiritual Leadership Theory (Fry, 2003) to sustain motivation, ethics, and purpose amid AI's potential dehumanization; Paradigm Shift Theory (Kuhn, 1996) to frame AI's rise as a transformative revolution; and Sociotechnical Systems Theory (Trist et al., 1960) to align technology with human needs. Together, these perspectives position AI not just as a tool but as a strategic co-leader (Davenport & Redman, 2020), calling for leadership that integrates algorithmic logic with human ethics and well-being.

Research Problem & Gaps

High-profile failures in AI implementation, such as at Anderson Cancer Center and major global banks (Davenport & Mittal, 2023), demonstrate the urgent need for leadership models that go beyond technical project management (Davenport & Westerman, 2018). The literature shows limited empirical work on human-AI leadership interaction, with rare integration of ethical, cultural, and interdisciplinary perspectives (Aziz et al., 2025). This gap is particularly acute in understanding how leaders can adaptively integrate AI while safeguarding human dignity (Di Plinio, 2025), trust (Nwafor, 2021), and long-term societal well-being (Hinton, 2023; Seligman, 2011).

Research Objectives

The study aims to:

1. Investigate how AI augments core leadership behaviors.
2. Explore how leaders navigate AI-induced adaptive and technical challenges.
3. Identify competencies essential for AI-augmented adaptive leadership.
4. Conceptualize and develop the AIAAL theoretical framework.

Methodology

An interpretivist qualitative design (Creswell & Poth, 2022b) will be employed to explore leaders' lived experiences within AI-intensive contexts. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with 12–20 senior and middle leaders across technology, finance, healthcare, and education sectors, using maximum variation sampling (Omeihe & Harrison, 2024). Abductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012) will iteratively connect empirical findings with theoretical constructs. Triangulation with secondary data (market intelligence, organizational reports, policy documents) will enhance validity and trustworthiness.

Contributions

This study introduces AIAAL as a novel leadership paradigm that fuses AI's algorithmic capabilities with the adaptability of human-centered leadership, extending adaptive leadership theory through the integration of spiritual leadership principles to maintain meaning and purpose in AI-driven change. Drawing on paradigm shift and sociotechnical systems theories, it positions AI as both a complex adaptive challenge and a strategic partner. Practically, it delivers a competency model for AI-augmented leaders focused on literacy, ethics, collaboration, and systems thinking (Davenport, 2018), alongside a governance blueprint to ensure ethical, compliant, and adaptable AI adoption, offering strategies that balance efficiency with the protection of human dignity and societal well-being.

Significance

As Geoffrey Hinton warned at GITEK in June 2025, humanity is "entering into the unknown, where we created an alien being smarter than ourselves. We don't know how we can guarantee we will stay in control." The AIAAL framework directly addresses this uncertainty by ensuring leaders develop the foresight, ethical grounding, and adaptive capacity to guide AI integration responsibly. By embedding human flourishing (Seligman, 2011) and ethical resilience into AI leadership practice, the framework seeks to avert mission drift, prevent dehumanization, and promote sustainable value creation.

Conclusion

The AIAAL framework offers a timely, interdisciplinary, and empirically grounded response to the leadership void in the AI era. By uniting adaptive leadership, spiritual grounding, and AI augmentation within a coherent paradigm, this research aims to advance both academic scholarship and practical leadership capability in navigating the complex, high-stakes terrain of AI-driven transformation.

Keywords: AI, adaptive leadership, spiritual leadership, paradigm shift, sociotechnical systems, human flourishing, interdisciplinarity.

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BEYOND THE GLASS CEILING: WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABILITY – A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

The intersection of women's leadership and sustainability has increasingly attracted scholarly and policy attention, driven by the recognition that leadership diversity can shape how organizations respond to complex societal and environmental challenges. The urgency of climate change, social inequality, and global sustainability transitions has heightened the need to understand how women leaders contribute to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Although an expanding body of literature has explored gender diversity and corporate performance, the role of women leaders in driving sustainability outcomes remains fragmented and, at times, contradictory. This paper addresses this research gap by conducting a Structured Literature Review (SLR) that consolidates the theoretical, empirical, and contextual insights emerging from the past decade of research on women's leadership and sustainability.

This study adopts the Structured Literature Review methodology proposed by Denyer and Tranfield (2003), which emphasizes transparency, replicability, and rigor in evidence synthesis. The review draws from academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Taylor & Francis, Wiley, and Springer. The search included keywords such as women's leadership, board gender diversity, ESG, CSR, and sustainability, and was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025. After screening and applying inclusion criteria, 45 relevant papers were selected. The extracted data were analyzed thematically, revealing seven recurring patterns that collectively explain how women leaders influence sustainability outcomes across corporate, political, and social contexts. The review builds on foundational theories that help explain these mechanisms. Kanter's (1977) Critical Mass Theory provides a sociological explanation for when gender diversity begins to translate into meaningful influence. The theory posits that women's voices become effective only after reaching a "critical mass," beyond token representation. Porter and Kramer's (2011) Shared Value Theory complements this by framing how leaders integrate profitability with societal impact, redefining the purpose of business beyond economic performance. Together, these frameworks underpin the interpretive lens of this review, enabling a multi-dimensional analysis of women's leadership and sustainability.

The thematic synthesis identified seven overarching themes.

- **Critical Mass Threshold:** Women's influence on sustainability is significantly strengthened when their representation reaches a critical threshold. Studies show that a minimum of three women on a board is typically needed before gender diversity begins to impact corporate social responsibility and environmental performance.
- **Role Differences (CEO vs. Board vs. Committee):** The positional authority of women leaders shapes their impact. Female CEOs and board chairs drive sustainability through strategic vision, while women on committees tend to influence specific policy and governance domains, such as audit or CSR committees.
- **Innovation and Transformation:** Women leaders act as catalysts for eco- innovation and digital transformation. Evidence shows that their leadership correlates with stronger environmental innovation, green patenting, and digital sustainability initiatives.
- **Profit-Society Balance:** Women leaders often balance profitability and social responsibility more effectively than their male counterparts. They emphasize stakeholder inclusion, long-term orientation, and risk moderation, aligning with triple bottom line (TBL) and ESG frameworks.
- **Contextual Moderators:** The influence of women's leadership is shaped by institutional contexts, including culture, ownership structures, and regulation. For instance, women directors in collectivist or family-owned firms often promote social welfare agendas, while those in more transparent regulatory environments strengthen environmental accountability.

- **Causality Debate:** While most studies find positive correlations between women's leadership and sustainability performance, recent work highlights that causality may be bi-directional. Some firms appoint women leaders after adopting sustainability-oriented strategies, suggesting that both gender diversity and sustainability evolve together.
- **Beyond Corporate Boards:** Women's leadership extends beyond the corporate domain. Female political leaders, NGO executives, and grassroots activists have significantly influenced sustainability governance, public policy, and social mobilization—broadening the understanding of leadership in sustainability transitions.

These themes collectively indicate that women's leadership is not a symbolic gesture of inclusion but a substantive driver of organizational transformation and societal progress. Women leaders bring ethical judgment, long-term orientation, and collaborative decision-making styles that align with the principles of sustainable leadership. However, the review also reveals that this influence is not automatic—it is contingent upon institutional settings, leadership roles, and organizational culture.

The findings contribute to both theory and practice. Theoretically, this review integrates Critical Mass Theory and Shared Value Theory to explain how representation and value alignment jointly shape sustainability outcomes. Methodologically, it advances a structured, evidence-based synthesis that maps the evolution of the gender-sustainability literature. Practically, the insights emphasize that gender equity in leadership is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic enabler of innovation, resilience, and legitimacy in the sustainability agenda.

The paper concludes with a future research agenda that calls for greater methodological rigor through causal and longitudinal studies, deeper cross-cultural comparisons, and exploration of women's leadership beyond corporate governance, including political and social institutions. By moving the discussion beyond whether women leaders matter to how, when, and under what conditions they matter, this review contributes to reshaping the discourse on leadership, sustainability, and gender inclusion—inviting scholars and practitioners alike to move truly beyond the glass ceiling.

Keywords: Women's leadership, Sustainability, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG), Corporate sustainability, Board gender diversity.

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Abstract

Organisations are among the most transformative constructs of human civilisation, designed to coordinate collective effort, achieve complex goals, and serve both internal and external stakeholders. Their ability to mobilise people, resources, and knowledge positions them as a critical “fourth factor of production,” alongside land, labour, and capital. Through their mission statements, structural configurations, operational processes, and leadership styles, organisations develop distinct cultures and identities shaped by both internal dynamics and the socio-political environments in which they operate (Di Fabio, 2021).

In today’s globalised and hypercompetitive landscape, organisations face mounting pressures from stakeholders, regulators, and sustainability frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards. Despite these developments, many organisations remain plagued by dysfunction, toxicity, and unethical practices, posing a significant threat to sustainable development and human well-being across cultures and regions. Organisational wrongdoing, including fraud, discrimination, corruption, and environmental harm, undermines efforts to promote peace, justice, equity, and environmental stewardship (Heim & Mergaliyeva, 2024).

While organisational health has received increasing attention in management and sustainability literature, existing studies often focus on isolated national or sectoral contexts, particularly within Western corporate environments. This narrow scope overlooks the cross-cultural dynamics that influence how organisational dysfunction manifests, is tolerated, and is addressed. Moreover, dominant theoretical models such as the “Toxic Triangle” (Padilla et al., 2007) and “Normal Organisational Wrongdoing” (Palmer, 2012) do not sufficiently account for cultural variability in leadership styles, employee responses, and institutional accountability. There is also limited integration between organisational health and global sustainability frameworks, particularly regarding how unhealthy organisations may actively undermine progress toward the SDGs (Gabbioneta et al., 2023).

This study addresses these gaps through three key objectives: first, to conceptualize organisational unhealthiness across cultures, identifying both universal traits and culturally specific manifestations of toxic leadership and dysfunctional practices; second, to examine the relationship between organizational unhealthiness and sustainable development, analysing how dysfunctional organizations hinder progress toward global sustainability goals; and third, to propose culturally sensitive strategies for designing and managing healthier organizations, focusing on leadership development, ethical governance, and resilience-building practices that support long-term sustainability.

Unhealthy organisations, often described as “neurotic,” “toxic,” or “sick”, exhibit patterns of behaviour that are detrimental to both internal stakeholders and the broader communities they serve. Leaders who engage in intimidation, emotional volatility, and abuse of power erode trust, suppress innovation, and foster environments of psychological distress (Oyewunmi et al., 2025; Akinyele & Chen, 2025; Zaghmout, 2024). Recent cross-cultural studies show that toxic leadership and organisational unhealthiness are not confined to any one region or sector. For example, research in East Asia highlights how hierarchical and collectivist cultures may suppress dissent and enable authoritarian leadership styles (Stahl et al., 2024). In contrast, studies in Western contexts reveal how hyper-individualism and competitive corporate cultures can foster narcissistic leadership and ethical erosion (Savas, 2019). Organisational wrongdoing has far-reaching consequences. It not only affects employee morale and productivity but also undermines public trust in institutions and impedes progress toward sustainability goals.

A recent integrative review highlights the need for a more systematic approach to understanding organisational wrongdoing within the context of the SDGs, emphasising the importance of interdisciplinary research and ethical leadership (Heim & Mergaliyeva, 2024). Similarly, Ronnie (2024) argues that toxic leadership is a major barrier to achieving SDGs 8 and 16, which focus on decent work, economic growth, peace, and strong institutions.

This paper draws on comparative case studies from regions including North America, East Asia, Europe, Latin America, and Africa to illustrate the global prevalence and consequences of organisational dysfunction. These cases underscore the universality of unhealthy organisational behaviour and the need for contextually grounded approaches to reform. Organisational health is defined as the ability of an organisation to align around a clear vision, execute effectively, and renew itself over time. It is increasingly recognised as a prerequisite for sustainable performance. Healthy organisations foster psychological safety, inclusivity, and ethical behaviour, enabling employees to thrive and contribute meaningfully to organisational goals (Alemu, 2025).

This paper argues that unhealthy organisations represent a profound and underexplored threat to sustainable futures. Their impact extends beyond internal inefficiencies to societal harm, environmental degradation, and the erosion of trust in institutions. By examining the nature, causes, and consequences of organisational unhealthiness across cultures, the study contributes to a growing body of literature that calls for urgent reform in organisational design, leadership, and culture. The future of humanity depends not only on technological innovation or economic growth but on the health, ethics, and resilience of the organisations that shape our lives.

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SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AND WORKPLACE OUTCOMES IN INDIAN BANKING SECTOR: BUILDING A RESILIENT ORGANIZATION

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Abstract

Purpose: In an era of volatile geopolitics and technology-led rapid changes, the Indian banking industry is aiming for operational excellence while grappling with the challenges of BANI (Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, Incomprehensible). As per the central bank - Reserve Bank of India's June 2025 Financial Stability Report, India's financial system remained robust, amidst uncertain global financial environment. While the role of regulators is important in ensuring a healthy financial system, the role of institutional leaders is also significant for the same. The previous researchers concluded that visionary leadership reduces cognitive uncertainty by setting up clear expectations (Bernards, 2023). Leading with vision could be considered as an effective organizational response to the demands of an uncertain external environment. It helps in aligning followers' behaviour with organizational goal by providing guidance (Maran et al., 2022). On the other hand, Ogundeji et al, (2023) argued that strategic leadership in banking plays a pivotal role in ensuring resilience and fostering growth during periods of economic uncertainty.

All these prevalent research output and the existing business environment offers an interesting proposition to study the effect of spiritual leadership practices in the Indian banking sector. The proposed conceptual framework, derived from Fry's (2003) Causal Model of Spiritual Leadership indicates 'Vision', 'Hope/Faith' and 'Altruistic Love' as the components of spiritual leadership construct. Practicing spiritual leadership significantly effects workplace outcomes such as 'Job Engagement' and 'Organizational Commitment' – the crucial factors to build organizational resilience. Further, it has been assumed that presence of 'Motivation to lead' as a moderating variable would strengthen the effect of spiritual leadership on workplace outcomes. The present study proposes to examine the effect of spiritual leadership on workplace outcomes such as 'Job Engagement' and 'Organizational Commitment' in presence of 'Motivation to lead' as a moderating factor. It further proposes to examine whether any difference lies in the perception of public and private sector bank employees on the effect of spiritual leadership on aforementioned workplace outcomes.

Design/methodology/approach:

The proposed research paper dealing with a perspective on the effect of spiritual leadership on workplace outcomes vis-à-vis organizational resilience amidst uncertainty, is based on cross-sectional empirical study. After data collection using the survey instrument, partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was applied to check relations between the constructs.

Findings:

The findings would be presented as the results of hypotheses testing.

Practical Implications:

Banks are a crucial intermediary in the financial system of a country. Our nation is no exception. In India, banking contributes to more than three-fourths of funding needs of the economy. Consequently, a robust and resilient banking sector is closely interlinked with overall growth of the Indian economy. Consequently, an effective and resilient leadership model for the Indian banking sector is of utmost importance which would be covered in the proposed paper.

Keywords: spiritual leadership, job engagement, organizational commitment, organizational resilience, crisis and uncertainty

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FUTURE OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION: A CASE STUDY OF NEPAL CIVIL SERVICE EMPLOYMENT.

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Introduction

Affirmative action, started in 1960s formally from the USA, was designed to address different forms of inequality, such as discrimination, social exclusion, and marginalisation, through preferential treatment because people were treated differently based on individual attributes, for instance, skin colour and sex (Sunam et al., 2022). Despite the legal protection of marginalized groups, discrimination continues to exist in the society which leads to introduce affirmative action (Ntol and Anthony, 2025) in other countries for instance, India, Banglades, Malyasis and Nepal too but in 2023, the USA has completely banned nationwide from using affirmative action in college admission (Rosenthal, 2023). Nam (2025) argued that the effects of the affirmative action bans did not bring neutral outcome, rather the women representation in city level law enforcement was reduced but the USA itself stopped using it in college admission in 2024. Further, Kurtulus (2016) states that the future of affirmative action is uncertain. With such changing scenario, this research focuses on the future of affirmative action specially in the context of Nepal civil service employment.

Nepal is a developing country with the caste system in the past, has started affirmative action (Reservation system) in 2007 for the first time in civil service employment and has continued to date, where gender, caste, and ethnicity are the main criteria for disadvantaged groups. In 2007, Nepal had a unitary system and later it shifted into a federal country. However, the same reservation system is still in practice and has not undergone any modifications or reviews. This research investigated on the reservation system in the context of Nepal civil service employment by connecting with the representative bureaucracy theory. It identified some strategies on how reservation system could be effective in future in the Nepalese context and suggested to the Government of Nepal to make this system better in future.

This is qualitative research. Data were collected from mid-level and senior-level civil service employees to explore their experiences and perceptions regarding the impact of the reservation system. Semi-structured interviews (n=14) and focus group discussions were carried out from purposively selected civil service employees, and NVIVO 12 was used to analyse the collected data. Based on the data, some concrete strategies were developed and recommended to improve the reservation system in the Nepalese context. Six different themes were developed as future strategies in the context of the Nepalese civil service.

Findings: Future strategies of affirmative action in Nepal's civil service employment

<p>Theme : Future Strategy</p>	<p>Sub-theme 1: Review the current policy. Sub-theme 2: Develop a real-time database. Sub-theme 3: Set clear indicators to identify targeted individuals. Sub-theme 4: Education and Capacity Development Sub-theme 5: Support by other policies Sub-theme 6: Exit policy</p>
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Source: Researcher

Regarding future strategies of affirmative action in Nepal civil service, the research found that reviewing the reservation system first is necessary and then the system modality could be changed to ensure active representation in civil service employment. Similarly, research found that the real-time database is necessary to show progress and evaluate the reservation system. Data helps for reviewing the policy, changing the modality, or taking steps for exit. Real-time database regarding population structure and civil service employees' structure help for effectiveness of the system. Most of the findings are supported by literature. The research also found that the targeted individuals need to be identified based on certain criteria such as income level, socio-economic status, family background, or HDI (Human Development Index) indicators because as highlighted by Mushariwa and Papacostantis (2016), people cannot be confirmed as disadvantaged just because of belonging to a targeted group. Also, capacity enhancement and education need to be ensured for everyone besides poverty and geographical location. This research also supported Dabgotra and Gupta (2023) that the government could add more effort for the targeted population to achieve better education and awareness so that the reservation system could ensure higher benefits. Similarly, Other supporting policies and programs may need, for instance, some outreach programs to mainstream disadvantaged groups (Archibong and Sharps, 2013) because only a reservation system is not enough to change marginalized people's lives and provide equal opportunities for the disadvantaged group (Sunam et al., 2022). Once equality is ensured, changes can be proved through numerical data and improved HDI score to meet the goal, then slowly exit strategies could be taken for the reservation system as it is better for the short term only.

Hence, this research is useful for the policymakers of Nepal to review and make modifications to the policy. Overall, this research contributes to the literature by adding a new contextual experience and to the policymakers of Nepal to improve the system in the future.

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DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP – KEY TO STRENGTHENING THE EFFECTIVENESS AND SUSTAINABILITY OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS (CSOS) IN MALAWI

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Abstract

Context. Increasingly, it is accepted in many developing countries that the state can no longer be the sole provider of goods and services for eradicating poverty and ensuring sustainable development among its people (Lekorwe & Mpabanga, 2007). As such, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) continue to be recognised by development practitioners as important agents of development (Booth et al., 2006; Marinkovic, 2014; Lembani, 2018). However, the future sustainability of Malawian CSOs remains uncertain because of various internal and external challenges. Globally, a combination of several factors and strategies are considered critical for CSO effectiveness and future sustainability. Despite the various existing theories, there is a lack of clarity and consensus on key factors that are instrumental to CSO effectiveness and sustainability (Ghaus-Pasha, 2004 & 2005; Makuwira, 2011). Using the existing global theories, the study conducted a primary survey and comprehensive literature review to identify key factors that influence effectiveness and sustainability of CSOs in Malawi.

Methodology. The survey used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data from 175 diverse CSOs across the country, comprising of international and local CSOs, representing the supply side or duty bearers; and community-based organisations/structures (CBOs), representing the demand or recipient side, using a structured questionnaire. The survey used both quantitative and qualitative approaches in analysing the data generated, focusing on descriptive statistics and reinforced by qualitative/thematic analysis (Trochim, 2000; Braun & Clarke, 2012; King, 2004). Additionally, the study conducted an extensive primary and secondary literature review (Creswell, 2012; Qais, 2017; Faryadi, 2018).

Results. Results from the primary survey show that leadership (with 83.1% score), is one of the eight key factors that are collectively deemed instrumental to CSO effectiveness and sustainability in Malawi. Other key factors identified are: Financial Viability (85.2%), Partnerships (84.9%), Institutional Governance (83.0%), Organisational Capacity (82.8%), Legal and Regulatory Frameworks (80.3%), Programming Approach (77.2), and Political Environment (72.8%). Leadership, therefore, constitutes one of the key factors of the civil society organisations' effectiveness and sustainability framework (CSO-ES framework) developed by the study to provide guidance towards CSO system strengthening in Malawi.

Leadership can be defined as the ability to influence, inspire and motivate people, organizations and societies to achieve and go beyond their goals (Harrison, 2018; Sturgeon, 2006). The survey results indicate that, for Malawian CSOs to be effective, visionary and inspirational leadership is key (75%) to inspire confidence in and support among the people who are needed to achieve organisational goals. At the same time management needs to mentor staff to enhance their capacity and build their enthusiasm (43%), so that they can unleash their potential and effectively contribute to organizational objectives and growth.

These results are augmented by findings from literature review on potential key factors influencing performance of CSOs, that the success of an organization is reliant on the leader's ability to optimize human resources (Lwin, 2019), which are considered the life force and energy of CSOs (Sturgeon, 2006; John, 2016). As echoed by Gaventa, (2001), one of the prime factors affecting success or failure of CSOs is the motivation for staff to get involved. As such, leadership is a survival key for CSO sustainability in the developing world (Kusi-Appiah, 2006; Lekorwe & Mpabanga, 2007). This observation is corroborated by research into 68 case studies from around the world which concluded that in several of the most successful cases of development, their success can be attributed to a large measure to strong leadership (Zonneveld, 2001).

The study results also speak to the sustainability leadership model which advances the notion that sustainability depends on dynamic and ethical leadership with, among other competencies, capacity to engage in creating transformative change and develop a skilled, loyal, and highly engaged workforce (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Northouse, 2018). Therefore, CSOs need to develop distinctive leadership qualities and a unique set of actions to drive performance and promote long term sustainability amidst the complex and increasingly challenging political, socio and economic environments (Doppelt, 2010; Visser & Courtice, 2011). Therefore, the results from the primary survey, complemented by findings from literature review provide sufficient evidence on the importance of dynamic and visionary leadership in influencing CSO effectiveness and sustainability in Malawi. The revelation fills the knowledge gap on lack of clarity and consensus on key factors that influence CSO effectiveness and sustainability; and therefore, adds to the literature on CSO leadership and sustainability within the Malawian CSO landscape as well as in other developing countries' context.

Conclusion. The study has revealed that leadership plays an important role in the management of CSOs; and that to be effective and sustainable, CSOs need visionary and motivational leaders to articulate the vision, develop clear strategies, inspire and mobilize others to follow. Such leaders will enhance staff motivation and commitment, push forward the development agenda and in turn promote effectiveness and sustainability. The study is an original piece in several aspects (Guetzkow et al., 2004; Phillips & Pugh, 2010; Gill & Dolan, 2015). Firstly, such a detailed and systematic empirical study on CSO effectiveness and sustainability has not been carried out before in Malawi. Further, the study revelation on leadership fills the knowledge gap on lack of clarity and consensus on key factors that influence CSO effectiveness and sustainability and hence adds to the literature on CSO development agenda in Malawi and other developing countries' context. Additionally, the study revelation contributes an original and valuable insight into the relationship among dynamic leadership, CSO effectiveness and sustainability; and provides guidance to decision makers and implementers towards enhancing CSO system strengthening in Malawi for transformational change and long-term sustainability. The study recommends that, if CSOs in Malawi have to improve, be more effective, and sustained, leadership development needs to become a priority on their development agenda, to provide inspiration, strategic oversight and guidance. Secondly, CSOs must strive to have leadership that is visionary, and inspirational to provide the much-needed guidance for organizational effectiveness and sustainability.

Keywords: Civil Society Organisations, Leadership, Development, Effectiveness, Sustainability

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LEVERAGING AI IN THE SUPPLY CHAIN OF TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

Swift globalisation in Education field leads to rise of Transnational education (TNE) that programme and courses are delivering across the borders (Moquin, 2024). Any institute that want to have any place in the market demand and higher quality needs should use technology like Artificial Intelligence. AI is able to transform the supply chain in the TNE by increasing efficiency and improving learning facilities also make decision making faster and more accurate (Sirkeci and Lo 2023).

This research examines how can AI technologies enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of supply chain processes in transnational education and challenges that institutes care confronting.

Through a review of existing literature and findings, its show that AI artificial intelligence (AI) explores into the methods of how creating intelligent machines, algorithms and programs that lead to the creative problem-solving abilities by system or machine that have traditionally done by humans. By utilizing Artificial intelligence that have effect on minimising labour also enhancing supply chain process also quality standards, streamline procedures and supply chain responsiveness, efficiency and productivity enhance in entire businesses (Amirkolaii et al., 2017). AI in education is making administrative tasks more simplify by automating processes like admissions and student supports that is leading to reducing resources work load and allowing staffs to have more focused on strategic plan and task that have added value for institute. As an example, AI chatbots can offer 24/7 support to students (Sirkeci and Lo 2023).

According to Knisley (2024) Integrated generative AI allows supply chain decision-makers to have faster and data-driven discussions with virtual assistants, enhancing their problem-solving abilities. This technology enables staffs to focus on complex issues and refine workflow designs. Incorporating generative AI and foundational models can significantly enhance supply chain capabilities.

Integration of AI in TNE supply chain will help educational institute from different countries work together more efficient by enabling them to talk together and share resources that is leading to enhance collaboration between university and their partners

The research aim is to innovate and improve the delivery and management of transnational education through the strategic use of AI technologies.

There are important issues that need to be solved when using AI in supply chain of education included Dara privacy and make sure accurate input also considering partners abilities to access technology and both sides are benefit. As AI is changing higher education, use it responsibility is more important due to fairness. Teaching centres are under pressure to balance pros and cons of new technology. AI tools are hanging very quickly and needs to help everyone understand it. By facilitating discussions and providing resources on the ethical implications of AI, CTLs can encourage a thoughtful approach to its integration in education. It's very important to provide training for tutors and staffs to use benefit of AI in supply chain that will lead to improve teaching and learning outcomes (Wargo and Anderson 2024).

UNESCO has developed a competency framework for both students and Tutors. This framework is informing students and teachers about potential and risk of AI. this framework aim is to give students skills and knowledge and value needed to efficiency use AI (Fengchun et al., 2024).

Using AI in the supply chain of transnational education (TNE) can significantly boost and enhance operational efficiency also male learning process more personalize and improve collaboration. Addressing challenges will be crucial for future of education business .

This study is Considering AI in the Supply Chain of Transnational Education from qualitative lenses as gathering data and analysing data are non-numerical also data are comprehending concepts and opinions or experiences. This method is allowing for collect depth information about issue and creating a new research concept (Bhandari, 2022). Thematic analysis is the best method to analysis data gathered from qualitative data. Its flexible and useful in many areas (Braun et al., 2019, p. 844).

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THE IMPACT OF ESG INVESTING ON PORTFOLIO PERFORMANCE IN THE UK FINANCIAL MARKET

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Kizito Nweze

Abstract

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) investing has emerged as a transformative force in global financial markets, with the United Kingdom positioned at the forefront of this shift. As investors increasingly prioritize sustainability alongside profitability, ESG-oriented investment strategies have gained traction among institutional and retail investors alike. This study explores the impact of ESG investing on portfolio performance within the UK financial market, assessing whether ESG-compliant portfolios deliver competitive financial returns compared to conventional investment strategies.

The research is motivated by the growing integration of ESG principles into financial decision-making, driven by regulatory reforms, stakeholder activism, and climate-related financial disclosures. The UK government's commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and the Financial Conduct Authority's (FCA) push for transparent ESG reporting have catalyzed the adoption of sustainable finance practices (FCA, 2021). Moreover, the London Stock Exchange Group (LSEG) has introduced ESG scores and sustainability indices, such as the FTSE4Good Index, to guide investors in evaluating corporate responsibility and long-term value creation (LSEG, 2023).

This study employs a quantitative research design, analyzing the performance of ESG-focused portfolios relative to traditional equity portfolios over a six-year period (2018–2024). Data is sourced from publicly available platforms including the FTSE Russell, Morningstar UK, and the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS). ESG scores are obtained from LSEG and MSCI, while financial performance metrics such as annualized returns, volatility, and Sharpe ratios are calculated using historical fund data. The sample includes UK-based mutual funds and exchange-traded funds (ETFs) with explicit ESG mandates, as well as comparable non-ESG funds matched by sector and market capitalization. The analysis reveals that ESG portfolios in the UK exhibit comparable, and in some cases superior, risk-adjusted returns relative to their conventional counterparts. Specifically, ESG funds demonstrate lower volatility and higher Sharpe ratios, suggesting more efficient risk management and resilience during market downturns. These findings align with prior research indicating that ESG integration can enhance portfolio stability and investor confidence (Friede, Busch & Bassen, 2015). Additionally, sectoral analysis shows that ESG portfolios tend to overweight industries such as renewable energy, technology, and healthcare, which have experienced robust growth in recent years.

Investor sentiment data from the Bank of England and Unbiased UK surveys further supports the upward trend in ESG investing. A 2023 report by Unbiased UK found that 57% of UK investors now hold ESG investments, with younger demographics—particularly Gen Z and millennials—leading the shift toward sustainable finance (Unbiased UK, 2023). This generational preference underscores the evolving values of investors who seek to align their financial goals with ethical and environmental considerations (Moussa, 2024).

However, the study also acknowledges limitations and challenges in ESG investing. The lack of standardized ESG rating methodologies across providers can lead to inconsistent assessments of corporate sustainability. Moreover, greenwashing—where companies exaggerate their ESG credentials—poses a risk to investor trust and market integrity (OECD, 2022). To address these concerns, the UK government and regulatory bodies have introduced initiatives such as the Green Finance Strategy and the Sustainability Disclosure Requirements (SDR), aimed at enhancing transparency and accountability in ESG reporting (HM Treasury, 2023).

In conclusion, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on sustainable finance by providing empirical evidence on the performance of ESG investments in the UK context. The findings suggest that ESG investing not only aligns with ethical and environmental goals but also offers competitive financial returns, making it a viable strategy for long-term portfolio management. Policymakers, asset managers, and investors can leverage these insights to refine ESG frameworks, promote responsible investing, and support the transition to a more sustainable economy.

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PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTING: A PROPOSAL FOR A COMPASSIONATE APPROACH POLICY TO LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION (HE)

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Abstract

Context / Background

Higher Education (HE) is experiencing rapid, disruptive transformation. Traditional command-and-control teaching approaches are proving inadequate amid shifting student expectations, increased focus on well-being, and technological innovation. Educators are being called to adopt stronger leadership, emotionally aware, and adaptive (Slimi, 2023). As their role shifts from knowledge-deliverer to learning facilitator, new pedagogical models must centre on compassion, mutual growth, and trust.

Research Aim

This conceptual paper proposes a new model of teaching and leadership in HE by integrating three key constructs related to leadership from different disciplines, like coaching and psychology - Integration of the Intentional Change Theory (ICT) (Boyatzis & McKee, 2006) - Compassionate leadership with Self Determination Theory (SDT) (Taylor, Passarelli, and Van Oosten, 2019) and Psychological Contracting (Rousseau, 1990) and Coaching practice. The aim is to explore how this integrated approach may improve teaching practice and relationships, increase teacher engagement and emotional wellbeing, and reshape teaching policy in HE.

Rationale

Blending Intentional Change Theory (Boyatzis & McKee, 2006) and Self Determination Theory (Taylor, S.N., Passarelli, A.M. and Van Oosten, E.B., 2019) offers a robust theoretical framework and practical guidance applicable to HE that integrates compassionate and sustainable self-directed framework to support teacher and student development through vision-led engagement. This vision can be embedded in teaching via teaching and coaching contracting integrated to it.

Psychological contracting refers to individuals' beliefs about mutual expectations and obligations. Although extensively studied in workplace settings (Rousseau, 1990; Schalk & Roe, 2007), its application to classroom teaching remains mainly underexplored. In HE, an implicit psychological contract has an important role to play throughout a teaching and learning journey between educators and students, from the first to the last class shaping motivation, trust, and performance (Demirkasimoğlu, 2014).

Drawing from coaching literature, the practice of contracting is key in establishing clarity and relational expectations in coaching partnerships (Gettman, Edinger & Wouters, 2019). Applied to teaching, this lens can reveal how early-stage teacher-student interactions shape long-term engagement. Group coaching, rather than team coaching for this research, introduces the concept of the "container", the coach's ability to hold emotional discomfort while enabling growth (Wrogemann, 2016). Similarly, teachers must navigate classroom emotions to create psychological safety.

These models position teaching as a facilitative process that supports students in shaping aspirational futures and personal growth. Recent work by Lim, Patel, and Shahdarpuri (2024) affirms the efficacy of coaching-informed teaching in HE, particularly in reducing anxiety and enhancing performance and well-being. Their study, centred on encouraging discovery and inquiry over direct instruction, supports the relevance of coaching principles in academic settings.

Methodology

This proposed qualitative case study (Gerring, 2007) will investigate how psychological contracting and coaching-informed practices operate within teaching. Data will be gathered through classroom observations and semi structured interviews, from one Institution, BPP University, a Global education provider, with a predominant international student presence, The Professional Standards Framework 2023, developed by Advance HE, is the current observation framework used within BPP, combines they will support deep thinking and self-awareness of teaching practice. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) will be used to analyse the data, due to the advantages this method offers through the flexibility to identify patterns and comprehend the data. While empirical work has not yet commenced, both authors draw on extensive teaching and coaching experience to shape the study design. The study will also explore how contracting is conducted and perceived by both educators and students. Ethics approval will be requested in accordance with institutional timelines.

Expected Findings

Although results are not yet available, the study anticipates that coaching-contracting approaches, when integrated with compassionate leadership, will:

- Foster a sense of mutual respect and shared responsibility between teachers and students.
- Lead to improved academic engagement and adaptive leadership capacity among educators.
- Student-teacher engagement.
- Creation of a safe space for teaching and collaboration.

Implications

This research seeks to fill a critical gap in literature by extending psychological contracting theory from staff development to teaching. By framing the educator as both a coach and a container, the paper offers a practical, emotionally intelligent framework for relational teaching in HE. It also informs institutional HE policies related to faculty development, pedagogical design, and compassionate leadership training.

Limitations

As a conceptual proposal, the scope of this study is initially limited to a single institution and a small group of educators. Future work will require broader validation across disciplines and student groups. Ethical dimensions, particularly regarding observation transparency and the readiness of both tutors and students to engage in coaching relationships, will be carefully addressed in further studies.

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ECONOMIC DUALITY AND TRANSGENDER INCLUSION IN URBAN INDIA: EVIDENCE FROM DELHI- NCR, INDIA

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Abstract

Transgender individuals in India continue to face systemic socio-economic exclusion despite recent notable legal recognition and policy advancements. This study introduces the concept of economic duality—the concurrent participation of transgender individuals in both mainstream employment and survival economies, such as sex work and begging. The phenomenon reflects the limitations of current inclusion frameworks that emphasize access but overlook structural inequities, wage disparities, and social stigma. Using primary survey data from 335 transgender individuals in Delhi-NCR, this study employs descriptive statistics and binary probit regression to analyse the determinants of participation in mainstream and survival economies. The model considers key demographic variables such as gender identity, education level, and income quintile, with marginal effects estimated and plotted for interpretation. Higher education and income levels significantly increase the probability of engagement in mainstream economies, while transgender identity is independently associated with reduced access. Conversely, low income and limited education correlate strongly with survival economy reliance. Notably, even those in formal employment often supplement income through informal work, reinforcing the reality of economic duality. The findings, interpreted through Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Queer Political Economy, reveal that formal economic inclusion does not guarantee dignity, stability, or empowerment. The study advocates for structural interventions—such as affirmative hiring, wage equity, and targeted financial services—to dismantle economic duality and promote sustainable economic inclusion for transgender individuals in India.

Keywords: Transgender, mainstream economies, survival economies, economic duality, marginalization

STUDENT RETENTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS IN GREECE

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Abstract

The high rates of dropout in Higher Education remain a serious, multifaceted issue that needs to be tackled worldwide. According to surveys conducted by Eurostat in 2024, the adult students enrolling in Colleges and Higher Education reach the explicit 44,2%, increasing almost by 1% every year (Eurostat, 2025) expecting to accomplish 45% by 2030. Even though the numbers show an increase in adults' pursuit of their right of education, it seems that they usually meet challenges in fulfilling their academic goals and therefore their graduation. Especially when adults face academic challenges, socioeconomic imbalance, added by psychological difficulties, result in underachievement and dropout. Under these circumstances, the need for specialized, evidence-based programs tailored to this target group is undoubtedly rising.

Major dropout factors globally

According to UNESCO (2025) the global gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education has risen from 19% to 43% an increase of more than 100% since 2000. Europe and Northern America and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia have the highest ratios in 2021 followed by Central and Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa which have ratios at or below 30%. Even though the enrolments are on a constant rise, the dropout rates still remain at high levels.

Research has shown that the dropout has a significant impact on institutions leading to financial loss and reduced subsidies (Acevedo, 2023). However, the reasons vary in each continent, showing that the issue must be dealt with tailor-made measures. Nevertheless, common ground among the globe, concerning the reasons of dropout, shows that these can be personal and social problems, poor academic performance, financial difficulties, psychological and other mental issues as well as institutional dissatisfaction (Lorenzo-Quiles, Galdón-López and Lendínez-Turón, 2023; Angelica and Diaz, 2023; Cabrera, Dalagan and Lugo, 2025).

The annual report from the Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (2023) in 2022 concerning graduations, ranked Greece last among all European countries, with a rate of only 9.8%, which is far from the European average (23.9%). The highest shares of graduates among students in Europe are found in Ireland (35.4%) and France (30.7%). This is a significant factor to take into account and extend research on this particular area.

Dropout factors in the Greek Higher Education

Despite increased international focus on dropout interventions, Greek higher education lacks systematic, evidence-based frameworks addressing both academic and wellbeing-related dropout factors. This paper proposes an integrated theoretical model tailored to the emerging Greek private higher education landscape. Some surveys, the ones conducted by Karalis, Sakkoulis and Vergidis (2025), Stylianou and Milidis (2024) and Androulakis et al. (2021), report that the main reasons of dropout in a large-scale public university are mainly personal and family difficulties, time management, academic underachievement and financial factors. Along with these findings, an intervention such as a "Writing Centre" has been established in one institution in the Greek Tertiary Education to promote inclusiveness in the community, regardless of the students' individualized needs (Samioti, 2023). In our case, to our knowledge, evidence-based interventions remain underexplored in the Greek academic literature.

Interventions for students at-risk of dropout

Most of the surveys around the world agree on the fact that dropout occurs during the first academic year and intervention programmes must be applied within this specific academic time frame (Pei and Zaki, 2025; Reed et al., 2009) Allegedly, identifying the early signs of students at-risk are vital in order to act proactively and prevent them from dropout. AI-tools such as software and detection platforms can play a significant role in this procedure (Times Higher Education, 2024).

The challenge is to interweave tailor-made intervention programmes according to individual risk factors. Successful intervention programmes (Reed et al., 2009) have pinpointed that designing structured courses for first year students can lead to success and increased grades compared to a low-intervention programme. Apart from the figures, Stanford University issued a report at the annual World Happiness Report (Pei and Zaki, 2025) analysing the need to examine interventions on social connection and ties among the students by identifying behavioural patterns which can lead to happiness, wellbeing and therefore satisfaction and retention. Additionally, HERO-based (Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, Optimism) interventions can be embedded in order to maximize the results in restricting the high rates of dropout in Higher Education (Jaffu et al, 2024).

To the best of our knowledge, a holistic intervention plan combining academic support with an emphasis on wellbeing, such as successful evidence-based high-intervention courses designed to provide both learning (Reed, 2009) and wellbeing strategies (Jaffu et al., 2024; Pei and Zaki, 2025) have not yet been accommodated in the Greek Higher Education which is not just timely but essential for the Greek academic context.

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VALUE CREATION STRATEGIES AND PERFORMANCES OF HUMANITARIAN MEDICAL LOGISTICS IN AFRICA AND ASIA

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Abstract

The escalating occurrence of floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, mudslides and human activities such as wars, terrorist attack have led to continuous need and provision of emergency aid worldwide (Huang, 2021). Humanitarian logistics is the strategic coordination of the efficient transportation of commodities and services from sources of donation to destinations of consumption, with the primary objective of mitigating the hardships faced by the vulnerable, (Timperio et al., 2022). In this context, humanitarian medical logistics encompasses the transportation and warehousing of humanitarian relief supplies to those in need to preserve their lives (Praneetpholkrang et al., 2021). Humanitarian Medical Logistics (HML) has gained increasing importance amid recurring health crises, natural disasters, and conflicts in resource-constrained settings. Despite its central role in ensuring effective healthcare delivery, HML in Africa and Asia continues to face systemic barriers such as infrastructural deficits, coordination gaps, and chronic resource limitations. These persistent challenges underscore the need for robust value creation strategies (VCS), particularly through the adoption of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and innovation (Huang, 2021; Malmgren, 2021; Sharp, 2019).

Despite the critical importance of these strategies, prior research has predominantly focused on commercial supply chains or general humanitarian logistics in developed regions, leaving significant empirical and theoretical gaps regarding their application and effectiveness in HML within Africa and Asia. Notably, the intersection of ICT and innovation in these contexts, as well as the moderating role of communication, remains underexplored (Behl & Dutta, 2019; Kovács & Tatham, 2021; Dubey et al., 2018). To address this research gap, this research addresses the following research questions.

1. How does information communication technology (ICT) influence the performance of humanitarian medical logistics in Africa and Asia?
2. How does innovation influence the performance of humanitarian medical logistics in Africa and Asia?
3. What is the moderating effect of communication on the relationship between value creation strategies (ICT and Innovation) on the performances of Humanitarian medical logistics in Africa and Asia.

To investigate these questions, this study conducted a comprehensive review of relevant literature, focusing on the theoretical frameworks underpinning value creation strategies and their application in humanitarian logistics. This study applies the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, typically utilised in corporate and commercial sectors, to humanitarian logistics, a field that remains relatively underexplored (Barney, 2021; Dubey et al., 2020). This study also introduces empirical validation of the moderating effect of communication on the relationship between VCS and HML performance. The finding that communication does not significantly moderate this relationship challenges existing assumptions, offering new theoretical insights into logistics performance in crisis settings (Kovács & Tatham, 2009).

This research provides empirical evidence on how value creation strategies strengthen HML performance in two regions (Africa and Asia) most affected by logistical bottlenecks. A quantitative design was employed, using survey data from 371 respondents across six international humanitarian organizations operating in Nigeria, Uganda, South Sudan, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Syria. Participants included logisticians, procurement and program officers and managers directly involved in medical supply chain operations. Data analysis, carried out through descriptive statistics, simple and multiple linear regression and hierarchical regression using SPSS.

The study finds that both ICT and innovation exert significant positive effects on the performance of HML in Africa and Asia, these findings align with Kumar & Singh (2022), who emphasise the role of advanced technologies and innovative practices in improving supply chain performance in resource-limited settings. Surprisingly, communication while directly improving logistics performance did not moderate the influence of ICT and innovation, reflecting the urgency and infrastructural constraints unique to humanitarian contexts. The findings add to debates on communication's moderating role, showing that while it supports coordination and decision-making, its influence on the link between value creation strategies and performance is less significant than expected (Liu et al., 2022).

Theoretically, the research extends the Resource-Based View (RBV) by demonstrating that ICT and innovation constitute strategic resources that enhance responsiveness, resilience, and operational efficiency. Practically, the findings highlight the need for investment in ICT infrastructure and innovative delivery models such as drones and mobile health units to strengthen last-mile delivery in fragile regions.

The research bridges critical gaps in the intersection of digitisation, strategic partnership, innovation, and logistics performance in humanitarian operations. The findings provide actionable insights for practitioners, and academics, emphasising the importance of integrating ICT and innovation into organisational strategies to enhance the resilience, responsiveness, and effectiveness of humanitarian medical logistics in Africa and Asia. This research informs best practices and lays the framework for more sustainable and adaptive medical logistics systems in crisis-prone environments. Additionally, the research provides empirical evidence to inform policy reforms, enabling policymakers to align VCS strategies for humanitarian medical logistics with international best practices.

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INFLUENCE OF THE 3CS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL RESOURCES ON WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP: INSIGHTS FROM NIGERIAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

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Abstract

Women-owned businesses are booming in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), yet our empirical understanding of the challenges and impacts of human, social and financial capital on women entrepreneurs' experiences and growth-orientated opportunities remains limited. The main purpose of this paper is to explore the elements and influence of the 3Cs of entrepreneurial resources (human, social and financial capital) on the performance of women-owned enterprises as well as the experiences of women entrepreneurs. This article analyses the findings obtained from a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with 20 Nigerian women entrepreneurs who have been running businesses for up to five years. Qualitatively, this article explored the impacts and challenges of entrepreneurial resources. The research reveals that entrepreneurial resources are interlinked and combine in order to influence, positively or negatively, the capability of women entrepreneurs as well as their ability to grow their businesses. The lack of these resources results in many women enterprises being informal, micro, or small and growth averse, and also suffering high closure or failure rates. This article provides an original perspective on how the access to entrepreneurial resources influences women entrepreneurship in the SSA context, that is under-explored and under-theorized in the literature due to the difficulties associated with collecting primary data there.

Keywords: Women entrepreneurship; Entrepreneurial resources; 3Cs of Human, Social and Financial capital; SDG 5: Gender Equality; SDG10: Reduced inequality; Sub-Saharan Africa

HOW DOES THE INTRODUCTION OF A FOUR DAY WORK WEEK CONTRIBUTE TO SUSTAINABLE WORK PRACTICES WHILE ALSO IMPACTING THE PRODUCTIVITY LEVELS AND WELL-BEING OF WORKERS IN GREECE

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Abstract

The global discourse on sustainable work practices has reignited interest in the structure of the workweek and its effects on employee well-being, productivity, and organizational resilience. From the 70 hour weeks of the Industrial Revolution to Ford's establishment of the 40 hour week in 1926 (GROSSE, 2018), working-time reform has historically been driven by social pressure, labor advocacy, and progressive leadership. In today's context, the Four Day Work Week (FDWW) emerges as a bold response to the challenges of modern labor, particularly burnout, workaholism, and declining mental health (CHUNG, 2022).

This study examines the extent to which the FDWW can support sustainable business practices while enhancing productivity and psychological well-being for employees in Greece, a country with notably high levels of workplace dissatisfaction and stress (GALLUP WORKPLACE CONSULTING & GLOBAL RESEARCH). Grounded in an extensive literature review (including leadership theory, occupational stress models, and the sociology of work), this research approaches the FDWW as a broader leadership and cultural shift rooted in autonomy, focus, and human-centered values (PANG, 2023).

A mixed-methods approach was employed: qualitative interviews were conducted with international experts (such as AlexSoojung-Kim Pang, author of *Work Less, Do More – Designing the 4-Day Week* and a leading advocate of the FDWW internationally), Greek professionals in psychology and sociology, and executives from Skrutz, the first Greek company to pilot the FDWW. In parallel, a quantitative survey was conducted with 367 private-sector employees, using binary-choice questions (e.g., Yes/No) to capture clear trends in perceptions of work-life balance, stress/burnout, productivity, and sustainability.

Remarkably, within only six days the survey yielded 367 responses, reflecting both the simplicity of the design and the high level of employee engagement with the topic. However, the use of binary-choice questions also limits the depth of analysis compared to Likert-type scales.

The findings are compelling: 95% of respondents expect reduced anxiety and burnout, 98% anticipate improved work-life balance, and over 86% consider the FDWW realistic in their workplace. These results provide one of the first empirical insights into Greek employees' perceptions of the FDWW, offering new knowledge in a national context that has not been widely studied in international literature.

International research supports these expectations. Studies show that compressed or flexible schedules can boost productivity, lower absenteeism, and enhance employee engagement (QUICK & TETRICK, 2003), especially when guided by empowering leadership (GOLDEN, 2012).

However, caution is necessary: when flexibility is applied without clear boundaries or strategic direction, it may increase stress through role ambiguity and competition (PANG, 2023). Therefore, the successful implementation of the FDWW depends on leadership styles that promote psychological safety, inclusion, and adaptability.

Given Greece's socioeconomic climate, characterized by economic instability and widespread burnout, the FDWW is especially timely. Research on occupational stress and workaholism suggests that reducing working hours can improve health, motivation, and talent retention, equipping organizations to meet the cognitive and emotional demands of modern work. This study highlights the need for leadership that moves beyond presenteeism and embraces strategic, sustainable models of productivity, where performance is measured by focus and purpose, not hours spent.

Moreover, the FDWW represents a shift in management philosophy toward results-driven leadership that values employee autonomy and strategic focus. Participating companies internationally have reported not only increased performance, but also higher job satisfaction and stronger employer branding. These developments demonstrate how working-time reform can serve as both an organizational innovation and a public-health intervention, tackling burnout before it escalates into long-term absenteeism or turnover.

In the Greek context, the implementation of the FDWW could align with national strategies to modernize labor markets and address youth unemployment. By adopting innovative work models, companies can appeal to new generations seeking meaningful, balanced careers.

Furthermore, the FDWW may contribute to gender equality in the workplace by offering more equitable time distribution in caregiving and domestic responsibilities.

From a policy perspective, encouraging pilot programs and offering tax incentives could stimulate wider adoption, particularly in knowledge, intensive sectors. Future research should explore the longitudinal effects of the FDWW on team cohesion, leadership trust, and organizational resilience during crisis periods.

Ultimately, this research offers actionable insights for leaders, HR professionals, and policymakers in Greece and internationally. By integrating the Four Day Workweek into a broader framework of leadership and organizational reform centered on well-being, institutions can foster more equitable, creative, and resilient workplaces—responding not only to the burnout crisis but also to the future of work itself.

Additionally, this study emphasizes the critical role of leadership education and development in facilitating the FDWW transition. Business schools and executive training programs must now incorporate flexible work design and well-being-centered leadership as core competencies. Equipping current and future leaders with the tools to manage distributed teams, lead with empathy, and measure performance based on outcomes rather than hours is essential for embedding sustainable change.

Technology also plays a vital role in enabling the FDWW. Digital tools for project management, asynchronous communication, and time tracking allow teams to maintain productivity across reduced-hour schedules. Organizations that invest in smart digital infrastructure are better positioned to realize the benefits of compressed workweeks without compromising service quality or output.

This research advocates for a reimagining of leadership and HRM not as a control mechanism but as a catalyst for transformation. By shifting the organizational mindset from time-based control to value-based collaboration, the FDWW becomes not just a work schedule, but a philosophy of sustainable and human-centered growth.

Limitations of this study include the non-probability sampling method and the use of binary-choice survey questions, which constrain the generalizability of the results. Future studies should employ larger representative samples, Likert-type scales, and longitudinal designs to strengthen the evidence base.

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BEYOND BINARIES: DETERMINANTS AND IMPEDIMENTS OF FINANCIAL INCLUSION AMONG TRANSGENDER INDIVIDUALS IN DELHI-NCR, INDIA

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Abstract

Financial inclusion is essential for the dignity, security, and self-reliance of marginalized communities, particularly the transgender population. Despite growing interest in financial accessibility, studies focusing on the determinants and barriers of financial inclusion for transgender individuals remain limited. This study surveyed 335 transgender participants in Delhi-NCR, India, using a purposive sampling technique. Data were analyzed with descriptive statistics and a probit model to identify key factors influencing financial inclusion. Results reveal that 60 % of respondents possess formal accounts, but engagement with formal savings (45 %) and credit (4.2 %) remains limited. Education and income significantly enhance financial inclusion, with tertiary education and higher income levels positively influencing all indicators. Conversely, participation in survival economies, such as sex work and begging, emerges as a critical impediment, reducing the likelihood of financial inclusion by up to 44.5

%. Barriers such as ID mismatch with gender identity (52.5 %), lack of documentation (42 %), and discrimination (17.6 %) further hinder access. The study underscores the potential of digital financial inclusion to mitigate these challenges, though adoption remains constrained by generational effects and systemic barriers. The study advocates for targeted policy reforms, including financial institution sensitization, inclusion in gender budgeting, streamlined documentation, expanded digital banking infrastructure, inclusive education, and mainstream employment opportunities. Ultimately, it aims to inform policymakers and stakeholders and foster a more inclusive and equitable financial ecosystem.

Keywords: Financial Inclusion, Transgender, Barriers, Digital Banking, Marginalization

NAVIGATING SUSTAINABILITY TRADE-OFFS: INVESTIGATING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DYNAMIC CAPABILITIES, PROACTIVE ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY IN NIGERIAN SMES

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Abstract

SMEs play a crucial role in economic development contributing about 40% GDP in developing economics development (Otache & Usang, 2022). In South Africa for instance SMEs contribute about 76% and 57% to employment and GDP respectively, 71% and 70% to employment and GDP respectively in Ghana, 50% and 70% to employment and GDP respectively in Nigeria (Otache & Usang, 2022). Despite their contribution to economies, more recently, the impact of their operations has contributed to environmental imbalance/pollution often due to trade-offs for financial gains (Ali et al., 2023). SMEs in developing nations are often faced with making a trade-off between implementing proactive environmental strategy (PES) for environmental sustainability and building dynamic capabilities (DCs) for financial benefits (Ali et al., 2023; Ibrahim & Mahmood, 2022). Naseem and Rehman (2023) suggest the need for SMEs to develop and implement appropriate strategic measures to overcome this challenge. Relative to the trade-off situation, recent studies including Nand et al. (2023) and Ünal and Sinha (2023) have attempted to address the trade-offs firms often encounter when implementing their sustainability capabilities, but no empirical literature has attempted to investigate the effect of these trade-offs on performance of firms developing DCs while simultaneously pursuing a PES.

Additionally, despite the significant literature on PES and dynamic capabilities, scholars argues that few empirical studies have paid little attention to the extent of relationship between PES and DCs. Bhatia (2021) suggest that exploring this relationship may potentially position firm to improve their chances to rapidly respond to changing environmental concerns and offer measures that may likely improve firms' capabilities to cope in the business environment. This view is supported by Bhatia et al. (2025) and Mahmood et al. (2025) calling for a further research model on extent of relationship between PES and DCs to understand how firm can navigate sustainability challenges.

This study addresses these gaps and contributes to knowledge firstly, by empirically analysing the extent of the relationship between dynamic capabilities and PES, and extend the DC literature into the PES/sustainability field. Secondly, the study contributes to sustainability trade-offs literatures (Bianchi et al., 2022; Figge & Hahn, 2020; Fracaroli-Nunes et al., 2020; DiVito & Bohnsack, 2017) by exploring the trade-offs situation between PES and DCs, and how it affects SME performance in developing economy. Thirdly, sustainability issues are a growing concern in developing countries, and more research is needed (Griffin et al., 2022; Bhatia et al., 2025) to extend the limited sustainability literature in a developing country context. This is imperative as environmental issues connect with driving forces of economic growth and development in developing economies (Su & Gao, 2022). Specifically, the study contributes to the extant sustainability literature by providing a nexus of the relationship between DCs and PES in a developing country context.

The study adopts the natural resource-based view theory to investigates how firms develop dynamic capabilities through sustainability initiatives and the potential trade-offs effects that arises from implementing DCs and PES. The anticipated finding suggests that while PES can independently enhance environmental sustainability (Chan et al., 2022), trading off DCs for PES may lead to weaker financial performance due to reduced innovation and market adaptability ((Heaton, Teece & Agronin, 2023). Conversely, trading off PES for DCs does not harm environmental outcomes but limits the structural and legitimacy benefits PES provides, highlighting that both are complementary and that managing this trade-off is essential for balanced performance. A cross-sectional design will be employed using survey data from Nigerian SME owner/managers. Data will be analyzed using Covariance based structural equation modelling via SPSS AMOS version 29.

The practical implications resulting from the findings of this study, will reveal the extent to which SMEs implement environmental policies and regulations in a developing country context. It will serve as a means of promoting SMEs environmental resource awareness and education in designing appropriate processes and procedures for developing eco-friendly products among business managers/owners.

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ENHANCING PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL IN EMPLOYEES: THEORETICAL MODELS AND THE GREEK CONTEXT

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Topic area and Conference Tracks: New Leadership Approach in Global Contemporary Businesses

Abstract

This paper addresses Psychological Capital (PsyCap) theory, which includes positive psychological resources of self-efficacy, resilience, optimism, and hope, and the way they influence performance management. Solution-focused interventions and coaching highlight the best solutions in cultivating employees' PsyCap. Empirical findings from a Greek sample suggest the local setting, pinpointing the contribution of PsyCap to building professional attitudes and improving performance. Synthesizing practical approaches, theoretical foundations, and intervention processes throughout the paper, thus, a holistic view of PsyCap as an essential organizational resource is established.

Psychological Capital (PsyCap) is a psychological state with strong self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience (Da et al., 2020; Costantini et al., 2017; Peterson et al., 2011). As a basic theory within the general field of positive organizational behavior, PsyCap has gained immense interest based on its development and growth potential, as well as the important impact it has on performance, motivation, and job satisfaction for Greek workers. The purpose of the present chapter is to outline PsyCap dimensions, explain intervention methods for the development of these strengths, and present data among Greek workers giving conceptual suggestions for theoretical implications. By combining conceptual studies and empirical research, the paper attempts to shed some light on how PsyCap enhances workability in the workplace and present applied strategies for use by managers.

Here, we theoretically conceptualize the different theoretical models of how psychological capital develops in employees. They are: (1) Conservation of Resources Theory (COR), (2) Broaden-and-Build Theory of positive emotions, (3) Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R), and (4) Job Characteristics Theory (JC). We provide the definition of psychological capital, its dimensions, and its big four components—hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism—and their theoretical models of development.

PsyCap in the workplace influences employees' performance, their health, and organizational commitment. The study is contextualized within Greece, considering the country's economic and cultural context, alongside the contemporary issues of the Greek labor market. Models of research into how PsyCap may be developed, e.g., interventions and training, leadership behavior, and organizational policies and practices, are reviewed. Greek case studies are examined, from successful adoption of PsyCap interventions to failure. In the latter instance, causes of failure are identified to enable improvement in future interventions. Measurement tools and test procedures are emphasized to enable PsyCap measurability and demonstrate growth.

PCQ has been demonstrated to be reliable and consistent in both the public and private sectors and consists of 24 six-point scale items (Costantini et al., 2017). Self-report questionnaires and supervisor or peer rating scales are utilized by organizations to reduce social desirability bias. Supportive behaviors such as resilience, problem-solving, and positive attitude are also tracked using performance appraisals. With different degrees of PsyCap for a person, measurement is a critical process in organizational effectiveness and performance enhancement (Costantini et al., 2017). Emerging trends in PsyCap studies establish their place in organizational effectiveness and human resource management. PsyCap represents a system of positive, state-like strengths that can be developed and expanded as a competitive advantage (Peterson et al., 2011).

Despite the relatively new arrival of the positive psychology paradigm in the workplace, practitioners are committed to optimizing and enhancing the "human advantage" via staff development interventions that are tailored (Costantini et al., 2017). Empirical proof confirms that PsyCap can be learned and measured. Organizations are now challenged to offer development programs that enable the development of more hope, optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience among employees (Luthans et al., 2010).

One of the core research areas of concern in Greece is positive Psychological Capital (PsyCap) development at the workplace level: a practice that considers internal organizational dynamics and external socio-economic conditions.

The report concludes that PsyCap development programs must be contextually adapted, strategically aligned, and systemically quantified. The Greek economy, haunted by economic recession, role change, and increasing psychological demands, offers a fertile testing and application ground for PsyCap development strategies. Companies that invest in psychological capital are best positioned to develop robust, positive, and committed employees who can handle complexity and innovation. (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007).

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RESILIENT LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC SECTOR TRANSFORMATION: GOVERNANCE, TRUST, AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Abstract

Public sector transformation is at the forefront of national agendas across the Middle East, particularly under strategic frameworks such as Saudi Vision 2030, UAE Centennial 2071, and Egypt Vision 2030. These initiatives emphasize digital government, economic diversification, and enhanced public service delivery. Amidst this reformative dynamism, resilient leadership is emerging as a critical enabler of institutional change, trust-building, and governance innovation. This study investigates how public sector leaders in the Middle East navigate complex reform processes, rebuild citizen trust, and embed resilience into traditionally rigid bureaucratic systems.

Resilience, in this context, refers to an organisation's capacity to anticipate, absorb, and adapt to shocks—whether economic, political, or social—while maintaining trajectory toward stated reform goals (Boin & van Eeten, 2013). Within Middle Eastern public institutions, leaders often confront entrenched hierarchies, risk aversion, and limited participatory channels. Yet, several countries have demonstrated rapid transformation through digitalisation and regulatory reform, prompting questions about the leadership mechanisms that sustain institutional renewal and citizen trust amid persistent fragility.

This qualitative study draws on semi-structured interviews with thirty senior public leaders and senior public administrators across five Middle Eastern countries. Participant organisations include government digitalisation authorities, anti-corruption bodies, economic agencies, and public service ministries. Supplementary data are sourced from national reform implementation reports, public satisfaction surveys, and regional governance indices. Data were analysed using thematic coding and cross-case synthesis, with a focus on identifying leadership practices that foster institutional resilience and public legitimacy.

Findings reveal four core leadership dimensions driving transformation:

- 1. Adaptive Decision Systems:** Leaders implement iterative policy processes and manage pilot projects to test reforms in controlled environments. This 'safe-to-fail' experimentation approach reflects adaptive governance theory and supports recalibration based on citizen feedback and administrative learning (Ansell et al., 2023).
- 2. Digital-Driven Accountability:** Through e-governance platforms, open data portals, and online service delivery, leadership enhances transparency, reduces red tape, and fosters public trust. Studies from Oman and Qatar indicate that digitalisation correlates with a 20% increase in citizen satisfaction and a 15% decline in informal transactions (Al-Khouri, 2022).
- 3. Trust-Based Communicative Leadership:** Effective leaders engage diverse stakeholders—citizens, civil society, private sector, and international partners—through structured dialogue, joint councils, and feedback mechanisms. This participatory approach mitigates scepticism and cultivates collective ownership of reform agendas (World Bank, 2023).
- 4. Cultural and Institutional Embedding:** Leaders integrate resilience into organisational culture through ethics training, anti-corruption codes, and merit-based incentive systems. Cases in Jordan and Tunisia demonstrate how embedding ethical practises mitigates system brittleness and preserves reform gains during political transition phases (Transparency International, 2024).

Three leadership archetypes emerged as most effective:

- The Navigator: Exhibits flexibility and responsiveness, orchestrating experimentation and digital pilot initiatives while maintaining alignment with strategic national frameworks.
- The Connector: Focuses on trust-building through narrative leadership and stakeholder engagement, achieving inclusive support for reform over time.
- The Architect: Institutionalises new processes through codes of conduct, ethics-based performance metrics, and capacity-building, ensuring sustainability beyond individual leadership tenures.

Theoretical contributions are threefold. First, the study extends the concept of institutional resilience by integrating digital transformation, ethical culture, and participatory governance—beyond emergency response contexts. Second, it emphasises the interplay between leadership style and reform trajectory, arguing that resilient leadership involves both adaptability (structural innovation) and legitimacy (stakeholder trust). Third, it offers a typology of leadership archetypes tailored to Middle Eastern governance, providing a practical lens for comparative analysis.

For public policy and organisational leadership, this research has significant implications. Leadership development programmes should emphasise digital literacy, change management competence, and ethical governance. Governments are encouraged to integrate trust metrics into performance evaluation, ensuring that reforms reflect citizen-centered outcomes rather than administrative efficiency alone. Finally, donors and international organisations should support region-specific leadership capacity-building by aligning partnerships with local governance priorities and reform narratives.

This abstract aligns with conference themes on Resilient Leadership in Public Governance, Digital Transformation and Institutional Change, and Trust-Building in Public Administration. It offers evidence-based insights into how resilient, adaptive, and inclusive leadership can accelerate public sector transformation in the Middle Eastern context, providing robust frameworks for other emerging nations confronting similar reform imperatives.

Keywords: Resilient leadership; Public sector reform; Middle East governance; Institutional transformation; Digital government; Trust-building; Adaptive leadership; Ethical leadership;

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BEYOND THE GLASS CEILING: WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABILITY – A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

The intersection of women's leadership and sustainability has increasingly attracted scholarly and policy attention, driven by the recognition that leadership diversity can shape how organizations respond to complex societal and environmental challenges. The urgency of climate change, social inequality, and global sustainability transitions has heightened the need to understand how women leaders contribute to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Although an expanding body of literature has explored gender diversity and corporate performance, the role of women leaders in driving sustainability outcomes remains fragmented and, at times, contradictory. This paper addresses this research gap by conducting a Structured Literature Review (SLR) that consolidates the theoretical, empirical, and contextual insights emerging from the past decade of research on women's leadership and sustainability.

This study adopts the Structured Literature Review methodology proposed by Denyer and Tranfield (2003), which emphasizes transparency, replicability, and rigor in evidence synthesis. The review draws from academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Taylor & Francis, Wiley, and Springer. The search included keywords such as women's leadership, board gender diversity, ESG, CSR, and sustainability, and was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025. After screening and applying inclusion criteria, 45 relevant papers were selected. The extracted data were analyzed thematically, revealing seven recurring patterns that collectively explain how women leaders influence sustainability outcomes across corporate, political, and social contexts.

The review builds on foundational theories that help explain these mechanisms. Kanter's (1977) Critical Mass Theory provides a sociological explanation for when gender diversity begins to translate into meaningful influence. The theory posits that women's voices become effective only after reaching a "critical mass," beyond token representation. Porter and Kramer's (2011) Shared Value Theory complements this by framing how leaders integrate profitability with societal impact, redefining the purpose of business beyond economic performance. Together, these frameworks underpin the interpretive lens of this review, enabling a multi-dimensional analysis of women's leadership and sustainability.

The thematic synthesis identified seven overarching themes.

- **Critical Mass Threshold:** Women's influence on sustainability is significantly strengthened when their representation reaches a critical threshold. Studies show that a minimum of three women on a board is typically needed before gender diversity begins to impact corporate social responsibility and environmental performance.
- **Role Differences (CEO vs. Board vs. Committee):** The positional authority of women leaders shapes their impact. Female CEOs and board chairs drive sustainability through strategic vision, while women on committees tend to influence specific policy and governance domains, such as audit or CSR committees.
- **Innovation and Transformation:** Women leaders act as catalysts for eco-innovation and digital transformation. Evidence shows that their leadership correlates with stronger environmental innovation, green patenting, and digital sustainability initiatives.
- **Profit-Society Balance:** Women leaders often balance profitability and social responsibility more effectively than their male counterparts. They emphasize stakeholder inclusion, long-term orientation, and risk moderation, aligning with triple bottom line (TBL) and ESG frameworks.

- **Contextual Moderators:** The influence of women's leadership is shaped by institutional contexts, including culture, ownership structures, and regulation. For instance, women directors in collectivist or family-owned firms often promote social welfare agendas, while those in more transparent regulatory environments strengthen environmental accountability.
- **Causality Debate:** While most studies find positive correlations between women's leadership and sustainability performance, recent work highlights that causality may be bi-directional. Some firms appoint women leaders after adopting sustainability-oriented strategies, suggesting that both gender diversity and sustainability evolve together.
- **Beyond Corporate Boards:** Women's leadership extends beyond the corporate domain. Female political leaders, NGO executives, and grassroots activists have significantly influenced sustainability governance, public policy, and social mobilization—broadening the understanding of leadership in sustainability transitions.

These themes collectively indicate that women's leadership is not a symbolic gesture of inclusion but a substantive driver of organizational transformation and societal progress. Women leaders bring ethical judgment, long-term orientation, and collaborative decision-making styles that align with the principles of sustainable leadership. However, the review also reveals that this influence is not automatic—it is contingent upon institutional settings, leadership roles, and organizational culture.

The findings contribute to both theory and practice. Theoretically, this review integrates Critical Mass Theory and Shared Value Theory to explain how representation and value alignment jointly shape sustainability outcomes. Methodologically, it advances a structured, evidence-based synthesis that maps the evolution of the gender-sustainability literature. Practically, the insights emphasize that gender equity in leadership is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic enabler of innovation, resilience, and legitimacy in the sustainability agenda.

The paper concludes with a future research agenda that calls for greater methodological rigor through causal and longitudinal studies, deeper cross-cultural comparisons, and exploration of women's leadership beyond corporate governance, including political and social institutions. By moving the discussion beyond whether women leaders matter to how, when, and under what conditions they matter, this review contributes to reshaping the discourse on leadership, sustainability, and gender inclusion—inviting scholars and practitioners alike to move truly beyond the glass ceiling.

Keywords: Women's leadership, Sustainability, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG), Corporate sustainability, Board gender diversity.

EMPOWERING WOMEN LEADERS IN THE DIGITAL AGE: CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES, AND TRAITS

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Abstract

The digital age presents both a transformative opportunity and a formidable challenge for women in leadership roles. While rapid digitalisation offers new pathways for visibility, connectivity, and influence, it also reinforces systemic inequalities and gendered barriers that hinder women's full participation in leadership across sectors. This paper critically explores the multifaceted dynamics shaping women's leadership in the digital era, focusing on the structural challenges they encounter, the strategic responses they employ, and the leadership traits most associated with their success and resilience in digitally enabled environments.

Digital transformation has fundamentally altered how leadership is enacted and experienced. Technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), data analytics, virtual collaboration tools, and social media platforms have redefined organisational communication, power distribution, and influence networks (Miller & Rose, 2021). For women leaders, these shifts have produced paradoxical effects. On the one hand, digital tools enable boundaryless collaboration, visibility beyond local hierarchies, and alternative routes to leadership in startups, digital enterprises, and activist networks. On the other hand, the persistence of digital gender divides, algorithmic bias, online harassment, and exclusion from male-dominated tech cultures continues to impede progress (Criado-Perez, 2019; Segrave et al., 2022).

This paper draws on feminist leadership theory (Batliwala, 2011), digital inclusion frameworks (OECD, 2021), and intersectional analysis (Crenshaw, 1989) to construct an integrative understanding of women's empowerment in digital leadership contexts. It is based on an empirical mixed-methods study that involved (1) a global survey (n=262) of mid-to-senior-level women leaders in technology, education, public policy, and creative industries; and (2) 22 in-depth qualitative interviews with digital entrepreneurs, executives, and thought leaders across North America, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

The findings reveal three dominant categories of challenge confronting women in digital leadership: (1) Structural and Institutional Barriers, including limited access to capital, underrepresentation in executive digital roles, and gender bias in algorithmic decision-making; (2) Socio-Cultural Constraints, such as expectations around emotional labour, work-life balance, and scepticism toward assertive female leadership; and (3) Technological Exclusion, involving lack of tailored digital literacy programmes, unequal access to mentorship, and minimal influence over tech policy and product design.

In response to these barriers, women leaders employ a range of adaptive and transformative strategies. These include leveraging social media to build personal leadership brands, forming transnational digital support networks, and launching women-centric tech initiatives. Many participants emphasised the importance of mentorship and sponsorship, not only within organisations but also through digital communities of practice. Others reported engaging in gender-conscious innovation, ensuring that digital products and services are inclusive, representative, and ethically governed. Leadership development, when combined with peer learning in virtual environments, was found to be a strong enabler of agency and voice.

The study also identifies a constellation of leadership traits associated with success in digital domains. These include:

- Digital confidence and curiosity—the willingness to experiment with emerging technologies and navigate data-driven decision-making;
- Relational intelligence—the ability to foster inclusive virtual teams and engage diverse stakeholders across geographies;
- Resilience and adaptability—particularly in dealing with public scrutiny, digital surveillance, or platform-related risks; and
- Values-driven leadership, often expressed through a commitment to equity, inclusion, and social innovation.

Significantly, many participants resisted traditional, hierarchical models of leadership, instead advocating for collaborative and empathetic approaches. This aligns with literature suggesting that female leaders often display transformational and servant leadership styles—traits that are increasingly vital in complex, fast-moving digital environments (Eagly et al., 2003; Northouse, 2022). Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of intersectional inclusion—recognising that women’s digital leadership trajectories are shaped not only by gender but also by race, class, disability, and geography.

Based on the empirical insights, the paper proposes the Digital Empowerment Leadership Model for Women (DELMW)—a conceptual framework integrating digital literacy, inclusive ecosystems, and adaptive leadership practices. This model suggests that true empowerment arises when women have both the structural access and the strategic agency to influence digital systems, not merely participate in them. Organisations aiming to support women leaders must therefore move beyond tokenistic inclusion and invest in structural change, including inclusive hiring, gender-sensitive design, flexible work policies, and accountability mechanisms for digital equity.

The implications of this study are wide-reaching. For policymakers, the findings call for intersectional digital inclusion strategies that recognise leadership as a gendered and contextual practice. For educators and leadership developers, the study affirms the value of experiential, community-driven learning in digital settings. For industry leaders, it underscores the need to dismantle algorithmic and cultural biases that limit women’s progression in digital leadership roles.

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THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING NATIONS' INFRASTRUCTURE, AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS REGARDING DIGITAL ADVERTISING

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Abstract

This study explores the differences between developed and developing nations in terms of infrastructure and digital advertising knowledge, with a focus on how these disparities affect the effectiveness and reach of digital marketing campaigns. As digital advertising becomes an increasingly dominant force in global commerce and communication, infrastructure quality such as internet access, device availability, and regulatory support emerges as a key determinant of success. Developed nations typically benefit from high-speed internet, affordable data plans, and widespread access to digital tools and platforms. In contrast, many developing nations grapple with limited connectivity, high data costs, and insufficient access to digital devices.

Equally significant is the knowledge gap in digital advertising skills. In developed countries, businesses and professionals often possess advanced expertise in digital marketing, analytics, and campaign management. However, in many developing regions, there is a notable shortage of technical skills and strategic understanding, compounded by limited digital literacy and minimal exposure to global advertising standards. These deficits hinder local businesses from fully leveraging digital platforms, thereby affecting their competitiveness in the global market.

By examining the interplay between infrastructure and knowledge, this chapter underscores the urgency of inclusive digital development. It calls for coordinated efforts among governments, industry, and academia to ensure that all nations regardless of economic status can participate meaningfully in the digital advertising ecosystem and reap its economic and social benefits.

Keywords: Digital advertising, Infrastructure, developed nations, Developing nations, Digital tools

REFRAMING CSR THROUGH RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP: EVIDENCE FROM A DEVELOPING ECONOMY

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Abstract

In the context of Nigeria's evolving economy, responsible leadership has become an increasingly vital theme, particularly within sectors such as banking. The country continues to contend with deep-seated socio-economic challenges, including persistent poverty (Ajekwe, 2017), systemic governance failures (Soludo, 2004), and widening inequality etc. Amidst this landscape, there is a perceived vacuum in governmental capacity to fulfil Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) obligations, which has placed growing expectations on private sector actors—most notably, banks—to assume greater responsibility for social and developmental issues (Odetayo et al., 2014). However, this shift presents a strategic and ethical dilemma for bank leaders, who must navigate the competing demands of profitability and stakeholder accountability.

This study investigates how Nigerian bank managers conceptualize responsible leadership and how these perceptions inform their CSR strategies. The research is framed within the context of institutional theory, examining how coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures influence leadership behaviour and CSR engagement. The study seeks to answer the following research question: How do Nigerian bank managers perceive responsible leadership, and in what ways do these perceptions shape their CSR perspectives?

Adopting an Interpretivist-Constructionist paradigm (Saunders et al., 2011) and employing a qualitative methodology grounded in semi-structured interviews (Berg, 2007), the research explores the lived experiences of 33 Nigerian bank managers. These include eleven (11) senior, thirteen (13) middle, and nine (9) junior-level managers. Data triangulation was achieved by integrating insights from interviews with relevant academic literature. Thematic Analysis, as outlined by King and Horrocks (2010), guided the data analysis across three iterative stages, allowing for the identification of recurring themes and patterns. The study is theoretically anchored in Institutional Theory (Meyer et al., 2017; Tolbert & Zucker, 1994), offering a structured lens through which to interpret the data.

Findings indicate that coercive pressures—emanating from regulatory requirements, legal mandates, and central bank directives—play a critical role in shaping CSR practices. These external forces often necessitate CSR initiatives such as financial inclusion and environmental reporting. However, the leadership that emerges under such conditions tends to be reactive and compliance-focused. Rather than driving innovation, responsible leadership under coercive pressure typically serves as a mechanism for adhering to imposed standards and avoiding reputational or legal consequences.

Conversely, normative pressures—derived from professional codes, industry associations, and broader societal expectations—encourage a more values-driven approach to CSR. Under normative influence, CSR becomes embedded in organizational culture and internalized as an ethical commitment, rather than merely a regulatory obligation. This form of responsible leadership is associated with proactive, morally motivated decision-making that exceeds compliance and seeks to generate genuine societal value.

Mimetic pressures, meanwhile, arise from the uncertainty and volatility within the banking sector. In response, banks frequently replicate CSR practices observed in leading domestic or international institutions. This imitation serves as a strategic mechanism to bolster legitimacy and competitiveness. While such mimicry facilitates the diffusion of best practices, it can also lead to homogeneity and a lack of contextual innovation.

Overall, the study finds that responsible leadership within Nigeria's banking industry is not a monolithic concept but a dynamic and contextually contingent construct shaped by institutional pressures. This tension highlights a paradox in CSR implementation: the desire to enact transformative social impact is frequently constrained by the institutional imperative to conform.

This research makes several key contributions. Empirically, it enriches the literature on responsible leadership in developing country contexts by providing grounded insights from Nigeria's banking industry—a relatively underexplored domain. Practically, it offers actionable insights for bank executives and policymakers aiming to strengthen CSR performance through leadership development. The findings also serve as a reference for leadership training programs that seek to bridge the gap between ethical aspiration and regulatory expectation.

However, the study's scope is limited to the banking sector, and its findings may not be readily generalizable to other industries without further investigation. Future research could employ quantitative methods to test and validate the qualitative insights presented here across a broader sample of financial institutions or within other sectors of the Nigerian economy.

In conclusion, this study underscores the centrality of responsible leadership in shaping CSR perspectives in Nigeria's banking sector. It reveals a nuanced interplay between leadership values and institutional pressures, showing how ethical governance can both drive and be constrained by external expectations. The study adds to the growing discourse on responsible leadership in emerging markets and offers practical implications for fostering ethical, sustainable, and socially responsive banking practices in Nigeria.

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DEFINING PERSONALITY TRAITS AS DETERMINANTS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL & AMBIDEXTROUS LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

Yukl and Mashud (2010) describe leadership as persuading others to understand and align with important tasks and goals, and emphasise the importance of collective effort in achieving organisational goals. This research validates some of the already scientifically documented variables of transformational and ambidextrous leadership. It shows for the first time the relationship between new variables and ambidextrous leadership, which is the immediate solution for organisations in the age of innovation. It creates new, original variables for transformational and ambidextrous behaviour that offer scope for future research of each variable. By adding the new and existing variables for each form of leadership, a new leadership behaviour questionnaire is creating capturing the behaviour of the leader. Each of the leadership behaviour questionnaires is the answer of the profile of management team effectiveness in the age of innovation.

The experience, expertise and leadership qualities of the members of the management team largely determine the course and development of any organisation. The management team's ability to make sound strategic decisions and lead members with vision and motivation is essential for creating new products, expanding business and generating profits in new environments. The management team's ability to build strong relationships with investors, partners and customers is also a key success factor, and the interpersonal skills of the leader are considered essential. This study investigates the validity and reliability of a new transformational and ambidextrous Leadership model.

This study is the first attempt to link already proven leadership personality traits with transformational and ambidextrous models as complete personality models to help organisations and leaders develop and identify charismatic transformational and ambidextrous leaders. Furthermore, every organisation sells and exists in different places. An organisation belongs to the natural and physical market with its services, while at the same time selling its products and services digitally. The parallel operation of the organisation encourages the development of new and different ways to develop, promote and manage products and services. This creates the need to create more transparency and trust with customers. Soft skills are not enough to cope with the rapid changes that require companies to be more active and proactive.

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the key personality traits most strongly associated with transformational leadership behaviour (TFL) and ambidextrous leadership behaviour (ALB)?
2. How can these personality traits be effectively integrated into a practical rating scale for transformational leadership behaviour (TFL) and ambidextrous leadership behaviour (ALB)?

This study follows a cross-sectional time horizon. Managers can either respond positively or ignore the author's invitation to participate in the study. This study follows a survey strategy for several reasons. Firstly, the survey method involves a deductive approach. A deductive process involves developing hypotheses based on existing theories and developing a strategy to test these hypotheses by analysing data. This study applies quantitative research to achieve meaningful results (Patel and Patel, 2019). It develops hypotheses to answer research questions, collects numerical data, and demonstrates the relationships between theory and research while providing an objective idea of social reality (Saunders et al., 2019a). Quantitative research is the most appropriate method for answering research questions by testing relationships between numerically measured variables using statistical techniques (Patel and Patel, 2019). The sample consists of Greek employees in the private sector, including a random and stratified sample of participants, active employees who are attracted to online networks, platforms and blogs and who hold similar professional and managerial positions, in order to ensure that both samples of the study are adequate.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) are employed to analyze a 30-item Transformational Leadership instrument from a sample of 259 diverse leaders. The majority are female (55%) and aged between 30-39. Both hypothesized models of transformational leadership demonstrate excellent fit indices. Results shows that Agreeableness and Intellect/Openness is positively associated with transformational leadership, while three new constructs are developed: personality harmony, conscientiousness, and reflectiveness. In ambidextrous study, 265 participants are involved, primarily young professionals with a high proportion of women (57.7%), completed a 10-factor Ambidextrous Leadership questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha indicated high reliability for most constructs. However, the "Futurist" construct requires revision due to a low reliability score. A new construct emerged, also: Leadership Innovativeness. Specially, confirmatory factor analysis reveals four factors explaining a significant portion of the variance. All factors show good reliability with items specific to each factor demonstrating the strongest scores.

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HUMAN-AI COLLABORATION AND PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES IN SMES: RETHINKING LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is no longer exclusive to large corporations. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are increasingly adopting generative AI, machine learning, and automation to enhance efficiency, customer engagement, and decision-making (Peters et al., 2024; Hussain and Rizwan, 2024). However, this shift presents a paradox, while AI adoption offers performance benefits, it also exposes capability gaps, generates resistance, and raises ethical concerns (Ayinaddis, 2025; Aarstad and Saidl, 2019). The question is not whether SMEs should adopt AI, but how leadership can enable sustainable human-AI collaboration that drives measurable performance outcomes (Zárate-Torres et al., 2025).

Leadership in the digital era requires competencies beyond traditional functional expertise. Leaders must act as mediators between technological systems and human agency, balancing efficiency with trust, creativity, and accountability (Weber, Krehl and Büttgen, 2022; Şişu, 2024). In SMEs where resources are limited, and leadership structures are often informal these competencies are particularly vital. Yet, empirical evidence on how leadership shapes human-AI collaboration and performance in SMEs remains limited (Zárate-Torres et al., 2025).

This study addresses the question: What leadership competencies enable SMEs to achieve sustainable performance outcomes through effective human-AI collaboration?

Drawing on 23 semi-structured interviews with SME leaders across technology, professional services, retail, and creative industries, participants were selected through purposive sampling based on industry relevance and digital maturity. The sample included early adopters using off-the-shelf tools and firms developing bespoke AI solutions. Thematic analysis, informed by leadership and human-AI collaboration literature, reveals three core competencies linked to positive performance outcomes:

1. Digital Interpretive Capacity – Leaders who critically interpret AI outputs and align them with organisational goals report improved decision quality and operational efficiency (Neeley and Leonardi, 2022; Weber, Krehl and Büttgen, 2022).
1. Collaborative Orchestration – High-performing SMEs integrate AI as a complement to human judgment, designing workflows that enhance creativity, engagement, and morale (Peretz-Andersson et al., 2024; Wilson and Daugherty, 2024).
1. Ethical Foresight – Sustainable outcomes are achieved when leaders embed transparency, fairness, and accountability into AI use, fostering trust among stakeholders (Kandasamy, 2024; Uddin, 2023).

These findings position SME leaders as translators, orchestrators, and ethical stewards within human-AI systems. Notably, firms lacking these competencies experienced resistance, underutilisation of AI tools, and diminished stakeholder trust (Zárate-Torres et al., 2025).

The study contributes to theory by extending digital and entrepreneurial leadership frameworks into the AI domain and proposing a competency-based model for human-AI value creation (Weber, Krehl and Büttgen, 2022; Şişu, 2024). It also reframes leadership development as a dynamic, adaptive process suited to volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments (Syamsira, Saputra and Muliac, 2025; Esenyel, 2024).

Practically, the research offers a tool for SMEs to assess leadership readiness for AI adoption. It also informs educators and policymakers on the need to embed interpretive, orchestration, and ethical competencies into leadership development and support programmes (Fletcher, Gaines and Loney, 2023; Kandasamy, 2024).

The study argues that the performance impact of AI in SMEs depends less on access to technology and more on leadership competencies that foster collaborative, ethical, and adaptive human–AI relationships—key to long-term resilience and innovation (Wilson and Daugherty, 2024; Peters et al., 2024).

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SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND BUSINESS ETHICS: NAVIGATING PURPOSE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN CONTEMPORARY BUSINESS

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Abstract

Social entrepreneurship has hugely reshaped the face of the current business environment through the integration of social purpose into the practice of entrepreneurship as well as the redefinition of value creation as an initiative for enterprises. While traditional business enterprises are sometimes more motivated through financial payouts, social entrepreneurship embraces sustainability, inclusivity, as well as moral value as core organisational missions. This movement has attracted wide attention amongst both academicians as well as practitioners, as social enterprises face the double challenge of being financially sustainable as well as fulfilling their mission to address complex societal issues (Mair & Martí, 2006; Dees, 2020, Teasdale, et.al, 2023). While the growth of social entrepreneurship has brought along the promises of inclusive growth, the movement has also brought forth sharp questions regarding the sector's responsibility, transparency, as well as legitimacy.

This convergence has also brought about opportunities as well as challenges. On the positive side, social entrepreneurs are best positioned to offer solutions to root social problems like poverty, inequality, as well as climate change, through sustainable and innovative solutions. On the other side, the pursuit of financial gain together with social value comes with ethical trade-offs like mission drift, exploitation of the poor, or greenwash (Dacin et al., 2010). As such, these challenges attest to the imperative of developing a strong ethical framework to frame the practice of social entrepreneur.

Recent research has underscored the increasing significance of stakeholder theory and the triple bottom line as framing paradigms of social entrepreneurship (Elkington, 1999; Freeman et al., 2020). Stakeholder theory reconceptualises organisation responsibility beyond the shareholder remit to encompass employees, communities, customers, and the environment.

Despite increasing importance, the literature on the ethical dimensions of social entrepreneurship remains fragmented and under-theorized (Nicholls, 2010). Since numerous studies have already analyzed social enterprise models, financing, as well as impact measurement, the mutually related connection between social entrepreneurship and business ethics still requires scholarly attention. Specifically, it would be valuable to conduct more research critically investigating the negotiation of the moral issues that social enterprises face in practice, as well as the influence that such negotiations exert on their legitimation, long-term survivability, as well as long-term effect. Since global social issues become increasingly complex, there is a need to investigate the necessary ethical competences that social entrepreneurs need to exercise responsibility under increasing uncertainty and changing circumstances.

To address these gaps, this paper asks the following research questions:

1. What ethical principles and practices underpin sustainable social entrepreneurship in contemporary business contexts?
2. How do social entrepreneurs navigate tensions between financial sustainability and social mission while ensuring accountability to stakeholders?

To answer the above questions, the study conducts a systematic literature review (SLR) to collate existing wisdom about the relationship between social entrepreneurship and business ethics. SLRs are most suited to summarizing fractured debates, consolidating insights beyond disciplinary divides, as well as tracking future research directions (Tranfield et al., 2003). The review conducts systematic examination of the peer-reviewed literature available on premier academic databases, using the following keywords: social entrepreneurship, business ethics, corporate responsibility, sustainability, as well as stakeholder theory.

Three imperative themes stand out from the review findings. First, leadership that is ethical holds the secret to the sustenance of the legitimacy of social enterprises, where leaders themselves reflect values such as integrity, empathy, and justice. Secondly, stakeholder engagement becomes a necessary ethical practice that ensures the voices of the communities and the beneficiaries are meaningfully included in decision-making. Thirdly, processes of transparency and responsibility such as impact measurement, third-party audits, and participatory governance help secure the preservation of credibility as well as resistance to mission drift.

Based on these research results, the article constructs a theory linking social entrepreneurship and business ethics. From the framework, the pillars that support sustainable social entrepreneurship include ethical leadership, stakeholder involvement, and responsibility structure. By integrating these practices into organisational planning, social enterprises are able to reconcile the demands of the business-making bottom line with their mission to do social good, and so build enduring strength and trust.

This research has a number of important contributions to theory and practice. Firstly, the research contributes to the body of social entrepreneurship literature through the refinement of various insights and the bringing together, explicitly, of considerations regarding ethics as part of social enterprise models. Secondly, the research extends business ethics discussions through demonstrating the execution of ethical principles within hybrid organisations undertaking both financial and social goals. Thirdly, the framework suggests guidance that is pragmatically useful to social entrepreneurs, policymakers, and educators. Social enterprises can adopt the framework to improve their ethical practice, policymakers frame positive regulation that incentivises ethical innovation, while educators include the framework as part of entrepreneurship curricula, creating the next generation of socially minded ethically aware social entrepreneurs.

In conclusion, this research argues that social entrepreneurship and business ethics are inseparable in the pursuit of sustainable development. While challenges such as mission drift, accountability gaps, and ethical dilemmas persist, social enterprises that integrate ethics into leadership, governance, and stakeholder relationships can redefine the role of business in society. By reframing entrepreneurship as both an economic and moral activity, social entrepreneurship contributes not only to addressing pressing social issues but also to reshaping the moral foundations of global business. The future of social entrepreneurship depends on its capacity to embrace ethics not merely as a constraint but as a catalyst for innovation, inclusivity, and transformative impact.

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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DEEPTECH IN THE NETHERLANDS VS NIGERIA USING THE MIT IEcosystem MODEL

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Abstract

In today's knowledge economy, deep technology (deeptech) has become a cornerstone of innovation-driven growth, shaping competitive advantage and addressing global challenges. Deeptech, often rooted in cutting-edge science and engineering, spans fields such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, advanced materials, and cleantech. Its development requires long investment horizons, strong institutions, and collaborative ecosystems to move ideas from research to scalable solutions (Edquist, 1997; Autio & Thomas, 2014). While high-income countries have cultivated such ecosystems, much of Africa and Nigeria in particular continues to face structural hurdles that limit its ability to fully participate in the deeptech advancement. (WIPO, 2023).

Nigeria illustrates both the promise and paradox of emerging economies. On the one hand, it boasts one of the youngest, most entrepreneurial populations globally, with a vibrant informal innovation culture and over 85 technology hubs spread across major cities (CIO.com, 2023). On the other, its performance on global innovation benchmarks remains weak: Nigeria ranked 121st on innovation inputs and 98th on outputs in the Global Innovation Index 2024 (World Intellectual Property Organization [WIPO], 2024). This mismatch highlights systemic weaknesses in research infrastructure, risk capital, and commercialization pathways. By contrast, the Netherlands a smaller but highly advanced economy consistently ranks among the world's top 1 most innovative countries (Dutta et al., 2020; WIPO, 2024), underpinned by world-class universities, integrated research-industry linkages, and proactive state policies (Mazzucato, 2013; Lundvall, 1992).

Scholarly discourse on innovation ecosystems has long emphasized the role of national systems of innovation (Nelson, 1993; Freeman, 1987). However, deeptech ecosystems present distinctive challenges that traditional innovation frameworks often understate, including high capital intensity, interdisciplinary complexity, and long time-to-market (Auerswald & Branscomb, 2003; Bonvillian & Weiss, 2015). Existing research has largely focused on developed economies such as the United States and Western Europe, leaving limited understanding of how ecosystems function in resource-constrained settings like Nigeria (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Carayannis & Campbell, 2009). Moreover, comparative analyses between Global North and Global South ecosystems remain rare, creating a research gap at the intersection of deeptech, institutional capacity, and entrepreneurial culture (OECD, 2019). This research gap is addressed via the following research questions.

How can Nigeria unlock its deep tech potential to drive innovation, economic growth, and social progress?

Sub-Questions:

- i) How can deep tech be harnessed to promote inclusive growth such that its benefits are widely shared and not concentrated in specific regions or demographics?
- ii) How can the Nigerian government leverage its existing initiatives, such as those by NITDA, to more effectively support deep tech ventures?
- iii) How does the MIT iEcosystem Framework help identify and compare the enablers, barriers, and interactions within the deeptech ecosystems of Nigeria and the Netherlands?

This study addresses that gap by comparing the evolution of deeptech ecosystems in Nigeria and the Netherlands through the lens of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) iEcosystem framework (Murray & Budden, 2014). The framework highlights the interdependence of five key actors; entrepreneurs, risk capital, universities, corporations, and government and the enabling environment that sustains their interactions.

The methodology employs a mixed-methods design. First, a systematic literature review synthesizes scholarship on innovation ecosystems, entrepreneurship, and deeptech in both regions (Tranfield et al., 2003). Then secondary data from indices, policy reports, and investment trends are sourced and analysed. Finally, semi-structured interviews with entrepreneurs, policymakers, and investors provide qualitative insights into bottlenecks and enablers This approach provides a nuanced understanding and triangulation to enable research validity.

This research makes several contributions. First, it extends the application of the MIT framework into a Global South context, highlighting how the roles of government and informal institutions diverge in weak institutional environments (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004). Second, it integrates theories of national systems of innovation (Freeman, 1987; Lundvall, 1992) with ecosystem approaches to demonstrate complementarities and tensions. Third, it highlights the role of entrepreneurial culture as a critical but often overlooked driver of deeptech development in Nigeria.

The implications are significant. For Nigerian policymakers, the study will provide the urgency of improving regulatory clarity, expanding R&D funding, and building robust university-industry linkages. For entrepreneurs, it highlights the need to leverage global partnerships and adapt lessons from models like the Netherlands without losing context-specific strengths. For scholars, the research opens new avenues for theorizing ecosystems in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) contexts (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Ultimately, Nigeria's path toward becoming a deeptech leader will depend on how effectively it aligns its youthful entrepreneurial energy with enabling institutions, infrastructure, and global linkages.

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IS DIGITAL FINANCIAL INCLUSION A REAL PANACEA FOR FINANCIAL EXCLUSION? THE CASE OF MIGRANTS IN THE UK.

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Abstract

Problem Statement

Digital financial inclusion is defined as "digital access to, and utilisation of, formal financial services by marginalised and underserved populations" (CGAP, 2015: 1). It involves a transition from a traditional 'bricks and store' model to enhancing digital access to financial services, and a preference for electronic or mobile money over cash (Mader, 2016). For the purposes of this paper financial inclusion is defined as "the process of ensuring ease of access, usage, and availability, of financial services" (Sithole et al., 2021). This definition emphasises the importance of unbiased access to financial services for all individuals and businesses. The importance of digital innovation in tackling ongoing financial exclusion in the UK is becoming increasingly apparent. Nonetheless, despite the popularisation of digital solutions available in the UK, research on migrants' digital financial activities outside remittances remains limited and under researched. Additionally, research on financial inclusion of migrant entrepreneurs has been inadequate if not non-existent especially in the UK. The UK has created the environment for migrant entrepreneurs to have access to banking services but there are peculiar terms and conditions that adversely affect migrants' ability to utilise some of the services available (Gibbs, 2010). It is important to mention that access to bank accounts alone does not ensure financial inclusion (Datta, 2018). There is inclination towards cash among migrant entrepreneurs and this could be attributed to inadequate earnings and income, apprehension over surveillance, and challenges with language (Datta, 2018).

From the discussion, there have been demands for the creation of specialised financial products and services for migrant communities, but these products and services cannot be effective if the migrant entrepreneurs are not understood (Datta, 2011; Gibbs, 2010). It is critical to explore and understand migrant entrepreneurs, explore their socio-cultural backgrounds and influences and understand how their home and host country institutional policies are affecting their ability to be financially inclusive and not just having a bank account. Despite significant scholarly and policy focus on migrant communities, there has been insufficient comprehensive examination—especially in recent years—regarding the effects of financial inclusion programs on migrant entrepreneurs in the UK as they could be significant contributors to the UK gross domestic product (Gibbs, 2010; Datta, 2012). From the discussion above, the research aim is to explore how digital financial inclusion is minimising financial exclusion of migrant entrepreneurs in the UK. To achieve the aim the following objectives will need to be met.

Research objectives:

To explore drivers and/or motives that may influence digital financial inclusion among migrant entrepreneurs in the UK.

To evaluate how migrants' socio-cultural backgrounds affect their financial inclusion abilities and strategies.

Explore how the migrants' home and host country policies affect their propensity to be financially inclusive in the UK.

Methodology:

This study is based on predominantly on the interpretivist philosophy using semi structured interviews and focus groups where quantitative approach would be used to triangulate the results of the initial qualitative outcome. It uses an inductive approach initially and then a deductive approach subsequently where the hypothesis is deduced from theory (Mixed embeddedness and the theory of planned behaviour synthesised) and the outcome of the qualitative research then expressed in operational terms. A sample of migrants' entrepreneurs in the UK from varying industries and backgrounds will be recruited through snowball and purposeful sampling. Thematic analysis will be the analytical tool for the qualitative aspect of the research. The population for the present study will comprise first generation migrant entrepreneurs who migrated to the UK in the last 10 years and operates a micro business. The micro businesses will be selected based on whether the firm has fewer than 10 employees and a balance sheet total of less than two million Euros.

Contribution

The researchers have chosen to focus on migrant entrepreneurs of micro businesses in the UK because most of the research on migrants have looked at large and medium migrant firms at the detriment of the micro firms who has largely been ignored by the academic community until now. This study is intended to create new knowledge within the subject area especially with migrant micro businesses which forms majority of migrant firms in the UK. Provide a deeper and fresh understanding of the drivers and factors that affect financial inclusion of migrant entrepreneurs. To advance both the academic and practical understanding of the various drivers of financial inclusion through the generation of original data set and lastly to design a model for supporting migrant entrepreneurs in their host countries.

Implications for policy

Since migrant entrepreneurs are the primary drivers of entrepreneurship in the UK, and their efforts have a significant impact on the growth of the UK economy, this research might prove useful to policymakers in the UK on specific government policy interventions to encourage migrant entrepreneurs to be financially inclusive via customised setups and policies. It will also help migrant entrepreneurs improve their digital inclusion strategies and performances by gaining a better understanding of their capabilities and the opportunity offered in the UK. The obstacles faced by migrant entrepreneurs are exacerbated by the fact that most migrant entrepreneurs operate micro businesses which could easily be ignored by policy makers.

Implications for practice

This study's primary purpose is to explore and understand how digital financial inclusion could minimise financial exclusion of migrant enterprises in the UK to allow them to grow and develop as desired. The study also investigates the mediating role of the socio- cultural backgrounds, motivations and the opportunities available in the UK to push that agenda. This study will shed light on the specific capabilities that migrant entrepreneurs require to enhance their financial inclusion strategies. The findings of this study will shed light on the need for migrant entrepreneurs in the UK to be financially inclusive. Recommendations will be made from a Micro, Meso and Macro perspectives to provide a more holistic understanding of the migrant entrepreneur in the UK.

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NAVIGATING LEADERSHIP LEGITIMACY IN THE AGE OF MISINFORMATION: STRATEGIES FOR REBUILDING ORGANISATIONAL TRUST

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Abstract

In the contemporary digital landscape, the erosion of public trust in leadership is becoming a defining feature of organisational and societal discourse. The widespread dissemination of misinformation, disinformation, and algorithmically curated content has amplified scepticism toward leaders and institutions alike. This abstract critically explores the evolving nature of leadership legitimacy in an age characterised by information disorder, with a specific emphasis on strategic approaches for rebuilding organisational trust.

Leadership legitimacy traditionally relies on the perception of competence, ethical conduct, and alignment with stakeholder expectations (Suchman, 1995). However, the legitimacy of leaders is now increasingly contested in real time by narratives emerging from social media platforms, alternative news sources, and coordinated influence campaigns. The rise of deepfake technologies and the declining reliability of traditional gatekeepers have enabled false or misleading content to spread widely and quickly, often challenging official narratives and damaging reputations (Tandoc et al., 2018). In this climate, maintaining credibility has become as critical as performance itself.

This research draws upon a combination of institutional theory, behavioural trust frameworks, and crisis leadership literature to conceptualise leadership legitimacy as both a social construction and a dynamic organisational asset. Trust is no longer based solely on rational-legal authority or track records of decision-making; rather, it increasingly depends on relational attributes such as authenticity, emotional intelligence, transparency, and responsiveness (Gillespie & Dietz, 2009; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Leaders must now operate in environments where trust can be built or broken within hours, often as a result of viral misinformation or controversial interpretations of their actions.

To investigate these dynamics, the study utilises a comparative case method, analysing leadership responses to misinformation-related crises across three global organisations from the technology, consumer goods, and public health sectors. Each case provides insights into how different leadership styles, communication channels, and stakeholder engagement strategies impacted public perceptions and institutional resilience. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with senior leaders and communication directors, alongside analysis of public communications, media coverage, and social media sentiment during the respective crises.

The findings reveal that leadership legitimacy in the misinformation age is significantly enhanced when leaders adopt four interrelated practices: (1) pre-emptive transparency, (2) digital literacy and media agility, (3) values-driven consistency, and (4) stakeholder co-creation. Pre-emptive transparency involves proactively sharing organisational intentions, limitations, and values to reduce susceptibility to distortion. Leaders who exhibit media agility are able to respond swiftly to emerging false narratives without overreacting or losing message discipline. Values-driven consistency reinforces organisational integrity by ensuring alignment between rhetoric and action, while stakeholder co-creation fosters inclusive dialogue and shared meaning-making in the face of uncertainty.

Moreover, emotionally intelligent leadership was found to be critical in these cases. Leaders who demonstrated empathy, humility, and psychological safety—especially during reputational threats—were more likely to retain stakeholder confidence, even when misinformation temporarily shaped perceptions. This aligns with the view that trust is not merely about information accuracy but about the perceived intentions and character of those leading the response (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

This study also surfaces the tension between decentralised communication ecosystems and hierarchical leadership structures. In environments where employees and customers are both media producers and consumers, command-and-control approaches are ineffective and often counterproductive. Instead, distributed and dialogical leadership approaches—those that empower local actors and frontline communicators—were more successful in navigating trust recovery. Leaders must therefore recognise that legitimacy is increasingly conferred by networks rather than solely by roles or titles.

From a theoretical perspective, the research contributes to a growing body of work on leadership in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments. It integrates insights from communication theory, trust psychology, and legitimacy studies to propose a framework for what may be termed "resilient legitimacy"—a leadership condition sustained through transparency, adaptability, and ethical reflexivity in digitally contested spaces.

The practical implications for organisations are substantial. Leadership development programmes must prioritise media training, ethical decision-making under ambiguity, and stakeholder engagement capabilities that are sensitive to the socio-political landscape. Furthermore, organisations should institutionalise mechanisms for real-time misinformation monitoring and ethical communication escalation protocols.

This research is particularly relevant to conference tracks on responsible and ethical leadership, strategic governance, and organisational resilience. As leaders across sectors grapple with misinformation's capacity to undermine social cohesion and operational stability, the capacity to cultivate and maintain legitimacy through trust becomes a core leadership competency for the 21st century.

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ADAPTIVE ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP IN CIRCULAR ECONOMIES: BUILDING REGENERATIVE BUSINESS MODELS FOR THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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Abstract

As environmental degradation, climate change, and unsustainable consumption threaten socio-economic stability, emerging economies face a dual imperative: to grow economically while preserving ecological and social capital. In response, the circular economy (CE) has emerged as a transformative paradigm—one that transcends the linear “take-make-dispose” model by designing for regeneration, reusability, and systemic efficiency. This abstract explores how adaptive entrepreneurial leadership can enable the transition to CE models in the Global South, focusing on how entrepreneurial leaders operate within constrained institutional and resource environments to foster sustainability and resilience.

The Global South—encompassing regions in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Asia—often grapples with infrastructure deficits, weak regulatory enforcement, and limited access to innovation capital. Yet, these conditions also provide fertile ground for frugal innovation, decentralised experimentation, and informal entrepreneurial ecosystems. Entrepreneurs in these settings do not merely imitate Western green practices; instead, they often generate unique, context-driven solutions that reflect local socio-cultural realities and resource constraints. This research examines how entrepreneurial leaders in such contexts drive systemic change by embedding circular principles into business strategy, product design, and stakeholder collaboration.

Drawing upon adaptive leadership theory (Heifetz et al., 2009), this study conceptualises entrepreneurial leaders as agents capable of navigating complexity, learning through experimentation, and mobilising diverse stakeholders around a shared regenerative vision. Adaptive leadership, in this regard, is distinguished from technical or top-down approaches by its responsiveness to context, iterative problem-solving, and ethical commitment to long-term value creation. Coupled with theories of social entrepreneurship and ecological resilience, this framework positions leadership not as command and control, but as capacity-building within uncertain and contested terrains.

To investigate these dynamics empirically, this study employs a qualitative multiple case design across three countries—India, Kenya, and Colombia—chosen for their distinct regional contexts and emerging CE ecosystems. Data were gathered from 27 semi-structured interviews with founders, team leaders, community partners, and investors engaged in CE-driven ventures. These ventures span sectors including bio-packaging, waste-to-energy, textile upcycling, and circular agriculture. Supplementary data sources include organisational documents, media content, and field observations.

Analysis reveals five key competencies of adaptive entrepreneurial leaders in CE environments:

Contextual Intelligence: Leaders demonstrated acute sensitivity to cultural, environmental, and policy factors shaping local perceptions of waste, reuse, and sustainability. They avoided one-size-fits-all approaches and instead co-designed solutions with communities, integrating indigenous knowledge with technological innovation.

Resilient Opportunity Recognition: Entrepreneurs reframed systemic challenges—such as waste accumulation or water scarcity—as innovation opportunities. By identifying overlooked assets (e.g. organic waste streams, informal labour networks), they built resilient supply chains that advanced both environmental and social goals.

Stakeholder Engagement and Empowerment: Adaptive leaders engaged in multi-level stakeholder alignment, working across public-private boundaries and community groups. Rather than exerting hierarchical control, they acted as facilitators of dialogue, capacity-building, and collaborative governance.

Experimentation and Learning Loops: Rather than pursuing fixed outcomes, these leaders treated business development as a series of adaptive cycles. Prototyping, failure, and recalibration were institutionalised within organisational culture, fostering both innovation and risk mitigation.

Ethical Commitment to Intergenerational Equity: Most notably, leaders prioritised long-term environmental justice and intergenerational wellbeing over short-term profit maximisation. This included reinvesting revenue into community infrastructure, supporting circular education, and engaging youth in sustainability initiatives.

These findings contribute theoretically to the literature on leadership in resource-constrained environments by highlighting how adaptive entrepreneurial leadership operates as a driver of systemic sustainability. While much of the CE literature has focused on technology, materials science, or regulatory frameworks, this study positions leadership as a human-centric and relational enabler of circular transitions. The cases studied underscore that CE adoption is not only a question of business models but of mindsets, values, and collective agency.

Practically, this research offers actionable insights for policymakers, funders, and incubators interested in scaling circular ventures in the Global South. First, leadership development programmes should incorporate adaptive thinking, systems design, and ethical reflection as core competencies. Second, investment mechanisms must shift from short-term ROI to long-term impact metrics that value environmental and community returns. Third, partnerships should recognise and amplify grassroots leadership rather than imposing external models of change.

This abstract is highly relevant to the conference themes on Leadership for Sustainability and ESG Outcomes, Social Entrepreneurship and Business Ethics, and International Business and Leadership Lessons to Tackle Societal Grand Challenges. It responds to the need for inclusive, ethical, and regenerative leadership models that are both globally resonant and locally responsive.

In conclusion, adaptive entrepreneurial leadership represents a critical, yet underexplored, lever for building regenerative business models in the Global South. By embracing complexity, fostering innovation under constraint, and anchoring their ventures in social-ecological purpose, these leaders exemplify how entrepreneurship can advance not only profit, but also planetary wellbeing.

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EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT LEADERSHIP DURING CRISIS: CULTIVATING TRUST AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

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Abstract

In an era marked by systemic disruptions—ranging from pandemics and armed conflicts to climate emergencies and digital dislocation—leadership effectiveness is increasingly contingent on the capacity to manage emotional and psychological dynamics within organisations. This paper explores the role of emotionally intelligent (EI) leadership in fostering trust, psychological safety, and adaptive capacity during organisational crises. Drawing upon emotional intelligence theory (Goleman, 1998), psychological safety frameworks (Edmondson, 2019), and resilience theory (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011), the research investigates how emotionally intelligent behaviours shape the relational context in which crisis leadership unfolds, with a particular focus on trust-building and collective sensemaking.

Emotionally intelligent leadership refers to the ability of leaders to perceive, regulate, and respond to emotions—both their own and those of others—in ways that enhance interpersonal effectiveness, decision-making, and team cohesion (Boyatzis et al., 2017). During crises, where ambiguity, stress, and rapid change prevail, leaders' emotional competence becomes a critical determinant of organisational stability and innovation. Notably, psychological safety—the shared belief that the workplace is safe for interpersonal risk-taking—has emerged as a crucial enabler of open communication and resilience under pressure (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). This study posits that EI leadership directly contributes to psychological safety and, through it, enhances trust, learning behaviour, and organisational recovery in crisis situations.

This paper is grounded in a mixed-methods study conducted across three sectors highly exposed to crisis environments: healthcare, logistics, and education. Phase one involved a quantitative survey (n=187) using standardised instruments to measure emotional intelligence (Wong & Law EI Scale), perceived psychological safety (Edmondson's scale), and trust in leadership. Phase two employed qualitative interviews (n=28) with managers and team members who experienced crisis leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2022–2024 energy supply disruptions. The study applies structural equation modelling (SEM) to analyse the mediating role of psychological safety and supplements this with thematic content analysis from the interviews.

Quantitative results demonstrate a significant positive relationship between EI leadership and trust in leadership ($\beta = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$), with psychological safety mediating this relationship (indirect effect = 0.45). This supports the hypothesis that emotionally intelligent leaders create environments where employees feel safe to voice concerns, ask questions, and admit mistakes—behaviours that are essential during turbulent periods. Qualitative findings reinforce this view. Respondents repeatedly described emotionally intelligent leaders as “calm anchors,” “empathetic listeners,” and “transparent communicators.” These leaders fostered trust by acknowledging uncertainty without losing focus, showing vulnerability without abdicating responsibility, and demonstrating compassion while maintaining performance expectations.

The study identifies four emotionally intelligent behaviours as particularly effective during crises: (1) active empathic listening, (2) emotion regulation and stress contagion prevention, (3) transparent communication about risks and decisions, and (4) emotional validation and support. These behaviours were perceived to foster both individual wellbeing and collective coherence, reducing the likelihood of disengagement, burnout, or resistance. Importantly, leaders who failed to exhibit EI were more likely to be perceived as inconsistent, detached, or emotionally erratic, which corresponded with lower trust scores and heightened perceptions of psychological threat among teams.

The implications of this study are manifold. First, it suggests that crisis leadership development must integrate emotional intelligence training not as a peripheral competency but as a strategic necessity. This includes building leader self-awareness, enhancing empathic accuracy, and training in emotionally intelligent communication. Second, the findings point to the need for organisations to embed psychological safety as a core cultural attribute—facilitated but not owned by leaders—so that the relational infrastructure exists before a crisis emerges. Finally, in a globalised business context, cross-cultural nuances in emotional expression and perception should be considered, particularly as global teams may interpret emotionally intelligent behaviours differently based on local norms and values (Mayer et al., 2008).

From a theoretical perspective, the study advances the literature on leadership in adversity by empirically linking EI and psychological safety in real-world crisis settings. It contributes to the development of an integrated framework where emotionally intelligent leadership serves as both a buffer and a catalyst—buffering against emotional strain while catalysing trust-based performance and learning. In doing so, it addresses a critical gap in crisis leadership literature, which often prioritises strategic or operational responses while neglecting the emotional domain of organisational life.

In conclusion, this research repositions emotional intelligence not as a soft skill but as a strategic asset. Leaders capable of navigating emotional complexity are not only better equipped to handle crises—they are instrumental in building resilient, cohesive, and forward-looking organisations in times of profound uncertainty.

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ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP IN POST-CRISIS RECOVERY: REBUILDING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES THROUGH SOCIAL INNOVATION

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Abstract

The rising frequency and severity of crises—ranging from public health emergencies and armed conflicts to environmental disasters and economic shocks—have exposed the limitations of traditional governance and market mechanisms in ensuring rapid, inclusive recovery. In such contexts, entrepreneurial leadership has emerged as a vital force in reactivating local economies, fostering social cohesion, and creating adaptive institutions. This paper explores the role of entrepreneurial leadership in post-crisis recovery, with a particular focus on how such leaders deploy social innovation to rebuild resilient communities.

Entrepreneurial leadership is defined as a hybrid leadership model that integrates opportunity recognition, proactive problem-solving, risk tolerance, and mission-driven orientation (Gupta et al., 2004; Bagheri & Harrison, 2020). Unlike conventional entrepreneurs who primarily seek market-based solutions for profit, entrepreneurial leaders in crisis-affected regions often assume broader societal responsibilities—mobilising scarce resources, rebuilding trust, and promoting sustainable development. Social innovation, in this context, refers to novel, community-embedded responses that address unmet social needs while fostering systemic change (Phills et al., 2008; Westley et al., 2017). The theoretical foundation of this paper is grounded in resilience theory (Folke, 2006), transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), and institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana et al., 2009). This integrated framework allows for an exploration of how entrepreneurial leaders simultaneously adapt to disruptive environments and transform institutional and social structures. It positions these actors as both agents of change and enablers of community capacity-building.

This study draws on a qualitative multi-country case study approach, examining 10 entrepreneurial ventures operating in post-crisis regions across Lebanon, Ukraine, Rwanda, and the Philippines. Each venture was led by individuals recognised for their community impact and innovation during recovery. Data were collected through 40 semi-structured interviews with founders, team members, community beneficiaries, and local policymakers, alongside document analysis of mission statements, impact reports, and media coverage. Thematic coding was employed using NVivo, enabling cross-case comparison and inductive theory-building.

Findings reveal that entrepreneurial leaders in post-crisis environments engage in four key practices that support community resilience: (1) Contextual Opportunity Framing—identifying and articulating locally grounded opportunities for social impact, often overlooked by external aid agencies; (2) Resource Mobilisation Under Constraint—leveraging informal networks, social capital, and digital platforms to access funding, knowledge, and logistical support; (3) Participatory Governance Models—involving community members in co-designing solutions, thereby fostering legitimacy, accountability, and collective ownership; and (4) Narrative Leadership—reframing collective identities and shared visions through storytelling that emphasises dignity, possibility, and agency. One illustrative case involves a female entrepreneur in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon who launched a mobile education initiative for displaced Syrian children. Beyond addressing the educational gap, her leadership was pivotal in restoring trust between refugee communities and host populations. Another case in post-genocide Rwanda documented how a social enterprise in sustainable agriculture re-engaged ex-combatants through cooperative farming models, integrating economic recovery with reconciliation.

The study also identifies critical challenges faced by entrepreneurial leaders in such settings. These include navigating political instability, donor fatigue, regulatory ambiguity, and psychological trauma—both their own and that of their communities. Despite these obstacles, the entrepreneurs demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and moral courage—traits often underrepresented in traditional leadership theories but vital in high-stakes recovery contexts.

Based on the empirical evidence, this paper proposes the Community-Embedded Entrepreneurial Leadership Model (CEELM). This model integrates four dimensions: (1) Transformational Intent, (2) Adaptive Execution, (3) Relational Legitimacy, and (4) Sustainable Embeddedness. The CEELM highlights how entrepreneurial leadership in post-crisis contexts is not merely about innovating under pressure but about co-creating long-term, inclusive systems that address structural vulnerabilities.

The implications of this research are significant. For policymakers and development agencies, the findings suggest that supporting local entrepreneurial leaders—particularly through flexible funding, mentorship, and legal recognition—can accelerate recovery and reduce aid dependency. For leadership educators and business schools, the research highlights the need to broaden curricula to include crisis-embedded entrepreneurship, trauma-informed leadership, and social innovation. For impact investors and NGOs, the study offers guidance on identifying and scaling community-rooted ventures with transformational potential.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the emerging literature on entrepreneurial leadership in extreme contexts (Williams et al., 2017; Shepherd & Williams, 2018). It challenges conventional binaries between economic and social entrepreneurship, arguing that in post-crisis recovery, leadership and entrepreneurship are mutually constitutive processes driven by moral purpose and contextual intelligence.

In conclusion, entrepreneurial leaders in post-crisis settings serve as architects of hope and resilience. Through social innovation, they reweave the social fabric, regenerate local economies, and catalyze inclusive systems change. Understanding their leadership is essential to building a more adaptive, just, and resilient world.

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ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP IN VUCA ENVIRONMENTS: CONCEPTUALISING SERVANT AND POPULIST LEADERSHIP THROUGH A BANI LENS

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Abstract

Organisations in the 21st century are increasingly confronted with volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments. These conditions have been amplified by technological disruption, global health crises, geopolitical instability, and ecological degradation. In response to these challenges, leadership scholars have turned their attention not only to the structural implications of instability but also to its emotional and psychological effects. This shift has led to the adoption of the BANI framework—Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, and Incomprehensible—which offers a more nuanced understanding of how individuals and organisations experience crisis and disruption (Kruse, 2025). Together, VUCA and BANI provide a dual lens that captures both environmental turbulence and human responses, thereby framing a more comprehensive view of leadership effectiveness in contemporary times.

This study explores the relevance and adaptability of two contrasting leadership styles—servant and populist leadership—within this dual framework. While servant leadership has been widely recognised in organisational scholarship for its ethical orientation, stakeholder commitment, and developmental focus (Greenleaf, 1977; van Dierendonck, 2011), populist leadership is often regarded with scepticism due to its association with authoritarianism, emotional manipulation, and anti-establishment rhetoric (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). However, the latter has gained relevance in corporate settings, particularly during crisis conditions that demand decisive action, emotional resonance, and clear messaging. By reframing populist leadership not as a pathological anomaly but as a potentially adaptive mode under specific conditions, this study contributes to a more contextual understanding of how different leadership configurations function in BANI environments.

The research applies a mixed-method design that integrates fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) with qualitative thematic analysis to examine how combinations of leadership traits influence organisational resilience. The study includes ten purposefully selected organisations across sectors such as healthcare, logistics, fintech, and education technology, all of which successfully navigated complex disruptions including the COVID-19 pandemic, global supply chain breakdowns, cyber threats, and rapid digitalisation. Data collection involved CEO and senior executive interviews, annual reports, leadership communications, and stakeholder engagement surveys. Leadership traits were assessed through indicators such as decision-making speed, communication clarity, emotional tone, stakeholder inclusion, and adaptability. Organisational resilience was measured through performance outcomes including post-crisis revenue recovery, employee retention, innovation frequency, and brand reputation.

Analysis revealed three dominant leadership configurations conducive to resilience in VUCA-BANI contexts:

Servant Leadership with High Engagement: This configuration featured decentralised authority, empathetic communication, and inclusive decision-making. Leaders prioritised psychological safety, transparency, and long-term stakeholder value. Employees reported lower anxiety and greater adaptability, while organisations sustained innovation and staff morale during crises. This finding aligns with recent empirical studies showing servant leadership fosters emotional resources and resilience in employees, particularly under stress (Medical Press, 2023).

Directive Populist Leadership: Organisations led by populist-style leaders demonstrated strong centralised decision-making, clear and emotive messaging, and rapid responses to disruption. These leaders effectively mitigated feelings of brittleness and incomprehensibility by providing clarity and emotional direction. However, long-term challenges included overreliance on leader charisma and limited organisational learning, consistent with critiques of populist models in both political and organisational domains (Amil, 2024).

Hybrid Adaptive Leadership: The most resilient organisations employed an adaptive leadership approach that combined relational attributes of servant leadership with the directive force of populist leadership. Leaders demonstrated contextual intelligence, shifting between engagement and control based on the situational demands of their environment. This aligns with Heifetz et al.'s (2009) theory of adaptive leadership, which emphasises flexibility, diagnosis, and real-time adjustment as core to navigating complex adaptive systems.

The integration of the BANI framework adds critical depth to these findings. In brittle systems, leaders who maintained empathetic relationships and decentralised control mitigated collapse by strengthening psychological contracts. In anxious systems, leaders who offered emotional validation and consistent engagement reduced disengagement and burnout. Nonlinear crises required rapid pivoting and flexible thinking—traits more often associated with adaptive, hybrid leadership. Finally, in incomprehensible conditions, simplified yet honest communication emerged as a key variable for re-establishing trust and coherence.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research offers three contributions. First, it challenges the normative bias against populist leadership by demonstrating its conditional efficacy in high-turbulence settings. Second, it operationalises the BANI framework in organisational leadership research, extending it beyond individual psychology into collective resilience and organisational design. Third, it presents a configurational understanding of leadership, showing that effective leadership is not determined by isolated traits but by dynamic combinations of attributes interacting with specific environmental factors.

Practically, the findings suggest that leadership development should prioritise adaptive capacity, enabling leaders to draw upon both relational and directive repertoires. Executive training should include scenario-based exercises focused on emotional regulation, contextual intelligence, and narrative framing. Boards and HR executives should assess not only leadership competencies but also the leader's ability to recognise and respond to BANI dimensions particularly anxiety and incomprehensibility, which often go unaddressed in traditional strategic models.

In conclusion, as organisations increasingly operate within overlapping VUCA and BANI realities, leadership must evolve beyond static typologies. Servant and populist leadership, when viewed through a BANI lens, are not opposing paradigms but components of an adaptive leadership spectrum. Organisations that cultivate this hybrid capacity are better positioned to thrive in a world defined by volatility, fragility, and emotional complexity.

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DIGITAL ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP AND PLATFORM-BASED ECOSYSTEMS: REDEFINING INNOVATION AND VALUE CREATION IN THE NETWORK ECONOMY

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Abstract

The global economy is undergoing a profound transformation driven by digital platforms that facilitate scalable, participatory, and data-driven interactions. These platforms—such as Amazon, Airbnb, Tencent, and various regional fintech ventures—operate not merely as firms but as ecosystems, bringing together multiple stakeholders to co-create value. In this evolving landscape, traditional models of entrepreneurial leadership that emphasize individual vision, direct control, and product-centric strategies are becoming obsolete. Instead, a new paradigm, which this study defines as Digital Entrepreneurial Leadership (DEL), is emerging as central to success. DEL is characterised by system-wide orchestration, ethical governance, and the ability to mobilise innovation across distributed and often informal networks.

This paper explores DEL within the context of platform-based ecosystems, focusing on how entrepreneurial leaders adapt, govern, and sustain innovation in increasingly complex and interdependent digital environments. While platform ecosystems offer unprecedented opportunities for scalability and reach, they also pose challenges related to governance, stakeholder alignment, data stewardship, and trust. Entrepreneurs navigating these spaces must therefore go beyond the role of disruptors; they must function as ecosystem architects, balancing strategic leadership with participatory engagement.

Building on distributed leadership theory (Spillane, 2006), strategic entrepreneurship (Ireland, Hitt & Sirmon, 2003), and digital transformation frameworks (Bharadwaj et al., 2013), this paper proposes a five-dimensional model of DEL:

Platform Thinking – The ability to conceptualise businesses as ecosystems, facilitating value creation through interactions rather than linear supply chains. Leaders adopt modular infrastructures (e.g., APIs, developer portals) that promote innovation from third parties while maintaining strategic coherence (Cennamo & Santaló, 2019).

Digital Literacy and Data Acumen – Successful DEL actors leverage real-time analytics, AI-driven insights, and user-generated data while prioritising transparency and fairness. The ethical and strategic use of data becomes foundational to decision-making, competitive advantage, and legitimacy (Baptista et al., 2020).

Agile Experimentation and Organisational Learning – DEL embodies a mindset of continuous iteration, allowing leaders to prototype, fail, learn, and pivot swiftly. Organisational cultures are shaped to reward innovation and risk-taking without penalising early failure (Rigtering et al., 2021).

Ecosystem Stakeholder Orchestration – Rather than exerting direct control, DEL involves curating relationships among platform participants—users, developers, regulators, and communities. Leaders act as facilitators of trust and inclusivity, aligning stakeholder incentives toward mutual benefit (Elia, Margherita & Passiante, 2020).

Ethical and Inclusive Governance – Platforms are not neutral infrastructures; they reflect leadership choices that affect power, participation, and outcomes. DEL requires intentionality in governance design, ensuring fairness, algorithmic accountability, and responsible growth (Gawer & Cusumano, 2021).

The empirical study underpinning this paper draws on a comparative analysis of seven platform ventures from Africa, Asia, and Latin America—regions where platform-based models are often used to address institutional voids and development challenges. Ventures examined include digital health platforms, mobile payments systems, and localised e-commerce networks. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with founders, ecosystem partners, and users, complemented by secondary documentation such as platform terms of service, governance charters, and investor reports.

Three mechanisms emerged as critical to DEL in these ecosystems:

Trust-Based Governance: In the absence of robust institutional regulation, trust substitutes formal enforcement. DEL leaders cultivate legitimacy through ethical practices, transparent communication, and user participation in governance. This trust becomes the social infrastructure that sustains ecosystem engagement.

Boundary-Spanning Innovation: Effective DEL leaders are adept at connecting across institutional, cultural, and technical boundaries. They build partnerships with non-traditional actors—such as local cooperatives or informal market participants—extending the reach and relevance of the platform while enhancing system resilience.

Contextual Adaptation and Strategic Reframing: Especially in emerging markets, DEL involves reframing local challenges (e.g., lack of credit access or infrastructure) as opportunities for innovation. Leaders design platforms that reflect and respond to socio-cultural realities, demonstrating strategic agility and local embeddedness.

This study offers several contributions. Theoretically, it extends entrepreneurial leadership discourse to account for the complexities of platform capitalism, where value is no longer created in isolation but through orchestrated interactions. DEL provides a lens through which to understand leadership in systems where control is decentralised and legitimacy must be co-produced. Practically, the research offers actionable guidance for ecosystem builders, incubators, and funders. It argues for reconfiguring leadership development programmes to integrate digital strategy, ethical technology, and inclusive governance.

Importantly, this research challenges the prevailing Silicon Valley narrative that prioritises blitzscaling and extractive data practices. Instead, it showcases leadership grounded in participatory values, ethical reflexivity, and inclusive growth. In doing so, it aligns with global imperatives around sustainability, equity, and responsible innovation, particularly relevant in the Global South where entrepreneurial ecosystems are becoming critical to inclusive development.

In conclusion, Digital Entrepreneurial Leadership represents a necessary and timely evolution in leadership thinking. As digital ecosystems become the primary architecture of innovation and economic organisation, cultivating leaders who can operate ethically, adaptively, and collaboratively will be key to realising the transformative potential of platform economies.

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RESKILLING FOR RELEVANCE: STRATEGIC TALENT DEVELOPMENT IN THE AGE OF GENERATIVE AI AND TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract

Introduction

The rapid emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), automation, and intelligent systems is fundamentally transforming the global talent landscape (OECD, 2023; WEF, 2023). As organizations embrace these advanced technologies, they encounter a pressing dual challenge: integrating digital innovations while concurrently preparing a workforce that is agile, resilient, and future-ready (Accenture, 2024). GenAI is not only optimizing operational efficiency but also redefining work itself, creating entirely new categories of roles while rendering others obsolete. The World Economic Forum (2023) estimates that by 2027, 85 million jobs may be displaced due to automation, yet 97 million new roles could emerge, demanding complex cognitive, analytical, and digital competencies.

This evolving scenario places talent strategy at the heart of organizational success. However, a persistent talent gap underscores the lack of strategic integration between workforce development and technological advancement (Deloitte, 2024). To remain competitive, global firms are compelled to rethink their talent pipelines, embrace dynamic reskilling and upskilling initiatives, and deploy AI-driven systems that support continuous learning and workforce agility (Bersin, 2024; Sharma et al., 2025). This study investigates how organizations strategically align talent development with technological transformation, particularly through GenAI adoption, digital learning ecosystems, and predictive human capital analytics. By offering empirical insights and applying a novel theoretical framework, the research contributes to advancing the discourse on global talent strategies in an era of accelerating digital disruption.

Research Objectives

This study aims to:

Examine how global firms design and implement talent strategies in response to GenAI and digital transformation.

Identify critical skillsets and capabilities required for future-ready talent.

Evaluate the role of digital learning and AI-integrated HR systems in supporting reskilling.

Propose a strategic framework for global talent transformation in the GenAI era.

Theoretical Foundation

This study is underpinned by the Dynamic Capabilities Theory (Teece, 2018) and Human Capital Ecosystem Perspective (Rana & Iqbal, 2024). Dynamic capabilities allow organizations to sense, seize, and transform in response to environmental changes, including digital disruption. The human capital ecosystem lens positions talent as a collective capability embedded within digital, organizational, and social systems, emphasizing strategic collaboration between firms, institutions, and policy. The integration of these theories allows us to conceptualize talent development as a systemic, multi-actor process responding to the transformative demands of the digital economy.

Methodology

A qualitative multiple-case study approach was employed, involving six multinational companies across the technology, healthcare, and finance sectors. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with HR leaders, learning and development (L&D) professionals, and digital transformation officers (N=24). Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo 14, and findings were triangulated with internal documents and industry reports.

Key Findings

Three major themes emerged:

Talent Transformation is Strategy-Driven but Tech-Supported: Rather than technology driving talent decisions, successful firms embed reskilling within corporate strategy. Talent transformation is viewed as a long-term, anticipatory endeavor. Companies adopted capability roadmaps aligned with digital maturity stages.

Digital Learning Ecosystems Are Critical Enablers: Firms are investing in AI-powered learning management systems (LMS), adaptive content platforms, and peer-based microlearning. Personalized learning journeys and skill taxonomies are used to ensure continuous development (Khan & Bano, 2024). Firms also partner with platforms like Coursera, EdApp, and Degreed for scalable solutions.

GenAI is a Catalyst for HR Transformation: AI tools are used not only for learning but also for talent acquisition, performance analytics, and workforce planning. HR is transitioning into a predictive, data-driven function, using AI to identify future skills, optimize hiring, and assess learning impact (Mehta & Suri, 2025).

Discussion

The study reveals that talent strategies must move beyond traditional training toward a capability-building paradigm rooted in agility and foresight. GenAI and related technologies act as both disruptors and enablers, creating an imperative for a new HR-Talent-Tech triad. Organizations that successfully integrate talent development with digital transformation tend to operate within a broader innovation ecosystem, leveraging external partnerships and co-creating skills with stakeholders. Additionally, the study highlights the emerging role of "learning leaders" as strategic architects who bridge HR, IT, and business functions. These leaders promote a culture of digital curiosity, resilience, and continuous learning.

Implications

Theoretical Implications: This study extends Dynamic Capabilities Theory by embedding human capital development within digital ecosystems, thus introducing a socio-technical dimension to organizational agility.

Managerial and Policy Implications: HR leaders must champion strategic workforce planning that anticipates future skills. Investment in GenAI-powered learning systems and analytics will be essential. Firms should also create global talent mobility programs and flexible career pathways to retain digitally skilled professionals. Governments and educational institutions must collaborate with industries to ensure curriculum relevance, support life-long learning incentives, and create innovation hubs where academia and enterprises co-develop future skillsets.

Limitations and Future Research

The study's qualitative nature and sectoral focus may limit generalizability. Future research should include longitudinal data and examine how different national contexts mediate global talent strategies. There is also scope to explore neuroadaptive learning technologies and their integration into enterprise learning platforms.

Conclusion

In a world shaped by continuous technological advancement, global talent strategies must be as dynamic and adaptive as the technologies they respond to. This study underscores the importance of integrating reskilling into strategic planning, powered by GenAI and supported by inclusive digital learning ecosystems. Organizations that embed talent transformation within their digital DNA are most likely to thrive in the era of perpetual change.

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DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP IN HYBRID WORK ENVIRONMENTS: A CATALYST FOR INNOVATION AND RESILIENCE

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic, followed by the global pivot to hybrid and remote work models, has significantly transformed how leadership is exercised across organisations. In this shifting context, traditional top-down leadership structures have shown limitations in promoting innovation and agility. This paper explores the potential of distributed leadership (DL) as a critical enabler for innovation and organisational resilience in hybrid work environments. The study examines how DL fosters collective sense-making, decentralised decision-making, and adaptive capability across geographically and virtually dispersed teams. Drawing on complexity theory and socio-cultural perspectives, the research investigates the mechanisms through which leadership becomes a shared and emergent practice, rather than an individual positional attribute.

Distributed leadership is conceptualised as a fluid, relational, and practice-oriented approach where leadership roles are shared among individuals based on expertise, context, and task requirements (Spillane, 2006; Raelin, 2021). In hybrid settings, this model appears particularly suited to address the challenges posed by physical distance, asynchronous communication, and cultural diversity. By enabling greater autonomy and empowering team members, DL is argued to cultivate a psychologically safe climate conducive to experimentation and learning, both critical precursors to innovation (Edmondson, 2019). Furthermore, as organisations increasingly navigate VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity) environments, distributed leadership offers a more resilient model by enhancing responsiveness and knowledge integration across networks.

This paper presents an empirical qualitative study involving 26 semi-structured interviews with senior managers, middle leaders, and team members across technology-intensive sectors in the UK, Germany, and the UAE. These organisations had adopted hybrid work models prior to or during the pandemic and exhibited varying degrees of distributed leadership practice. Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo software, and the findings reveal four key themes: (1) autonomy and trust-building in virtual teams, (2) the role of digital tools in enabling collaborative leadership, (3) challenges of power ambiguity and accountability, and (4) the link between distributed leadership and rapid innovation cycles.

One of the study's most significant insights is that distributed leadership, when intentionally supported by organisational culture and digital infrastructure, facilitates rapid decision-making and innovation. Participants reported that teams with flatter structures and shared authority were more adept at pivoting strategies during disruptions, allocating responsibilities flexibly, and responding faster to client and market demands. However, the research also surfaces tensions, particularly around the erosion of clear leadership accountability and the difficulty of sustaining DL without strong cultural reinforcement. These findings are consistent with emerging literature that identifies distributed leadership as a double-edged sword, empowering but potentially chaotic if not anchored in shared norms and clarity of purpose (Bolden, 2011; Denis et al., 2012).

In terms of practical implications, the study recommends that leaders in hybrid organisations shift their focus from controlling processes to facilitating collaboration and nurturing distributed capacities among team members. Leadership development programmes should prioritise the cultivation of soft skills such as digital empathy, active listening, and cross-cultural competence. In addition, technology selection, particularly platforms that support synchronous and asynchronous collaboration, should align with leadership strategies that decentralise authority and promote inclusivity.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research contributes to the evolving discourse on leadership-as-practice by illustrating how leadership emerges dynamically in the digital-hybrid workspace (Raelin, 2021). It challenges the binary between leader and follower by showcasing co-leadership, rotational leadership, and contextual expertise as viable forms of authority in contemporary business settings. It also proposes an integrative model linking distributed leadership with innovation outcomes, mediated by team psychological safety and moderated by digital maturity.

The findings have important implications for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers concerned with enhancing adaptability, innovation, and inclusive leadership in the new world of work. Moreover, the research sets the stage for future inquiry into how distributed leadership interacts with artificial intelligence, cross-border collaboration, and diversity dynamics in multinational organisations.

By drawing attention to the evolving nature of leadership in hybrid contexts, this study positions distributed leadership not only as a reaction to remote work trends but as a forward-looking strategy for building resilient, innovative, and human-centred organisations.

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ENHANCING ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE THROUGH THE INTEGRATION OF STRATEGIC PLANNING AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY MANAGEMENT: A FRAMEWORK FOR EMPOWERING LEADERS IN VOLATILE ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract

Contemporary global business is characterised by an era of unprecedented volatility, where leaders and organisations are increasingly challenged by a convergence of non-linear risks, from pandemics and climate-induced disasters to geopolitical instability. While Strategic Planning (SP) has historically been the cornerstone of organisational foresight and direction, its linear and often deterministic nature proves fundamentally inadequate in the face of these systemic disruptions. Simultaneously, Business Continuity Management (BCM) provides a vital, albeit often siloed and reactive, mechanism for operational survival. This research argues that the prevailing disconnect between these two critical functions constitutes a profound strategic vulnerability. It addresses this lacuna by proposing and empirically validating a novel, integrated SP-BCM framework, designed to empower leaders with a holistic, proactive approach to sustainable organisational performance.

The research is a timely and critical contribution to the conference's agenda, positioned at the nexus of strategic innovation and responsible leadership. It directly tackles the core problem that in economies operating under conditions of extreme uncertainty—such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa—organisations are left exposed and fragile when strategy neglects resilience. Drawing from foundational strategic theories like the resource-based view (Wernerfelt, 1984) and dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2007), the central argument is that 'strategy without resilience is fragile; resilience without strategy is aimless.' This axiom underscores the necessity of a symbiotic relationship between foresight and agility, where the former provides a clear destination and the latter provides the means to adapt to unexpected turbulence. This integration is not merely an operational necessity but a source of sustained competitive advantage.

The study employed a rigorous pragmatic mixed-methods research design, a philosophical paradigm uniquely suited for addressing complex, real-world problems by embracing both quantitative and qualitative insights. The empirical component was conducted with a carefully selected sample of listed firms on the Malawi Stock Exchange. This population was strategically chosen for its institutional formality, adherence to structured reporting standards, and its recent, intense exposure to a diverse range of local and global shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic and Cyclone Freddy. Quantitative data were meticulously collected via comprehensive surveys, providing a robust statistical foundation for a significant correlation analysis between integrated practices and improved performance metrics. This was complemented by rich qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews with senior leaders and managers, enabling a deep, hermeneutic understanding of the contextual factors influencing the integration process, including leadership commitment, organisational culture, and resource allocation.

The findings are compelling and provide powerful insights for both theory and practice. The study reveals a significant positive correlation: firms with a higher degree of SP-BCM integration consistently report enhanced performance, greater operational resilience, and a stronger competitive advantage. The qualitative analysis further identified critical enablers for successful integration. Firstly, leadership commitment emerged as the single most important factor. The study found that a leader's active advocacy and personal ownership of the resilience agenda were essential for transcending departmental silos and embedding a culture of foresight. Secondly, the research highlighted the importance of a well-defined integration process, which includes a comprehensive needs assessment, targeted training to build knowledge capacity, and consistent stakeholder engagement across all levels of the organisation. Lastly, the study found that a positive organisational culture, one that values collaboration and learning from past disruptions, is a prerequisite for seamless integration.

Based on these empirical findings and a synthesis of relevant literature, this research presents a tangible, actionable framework for SP-BCM integration. The framework provides a blueprint for leaders to move beyond reactive crisis management to proactive strategic resilience, thereby fostering sustainable business practices and enabling their organisations to effectively navigate and leverage contemporary global challenges. This framework is a direct contribution to the conference themes of Empowering Leadership, Strategic Innovation, and Sustainability, as it offers a practical tool for leaders to build organisations that are not only profitable but also robust, ethical, and capable of withstanding the shocks of a volatile world.

The paper concludes by offering concrete recommendations for practitioners and policymakers in developing economies. It also presents a clear agenda for future research, including the need for longitudinal studies and cross-sectoral analysis to further validate the framework. By showcasing a case study from Malawi, the research provides a vital, evidence-based lesson for a global audience, demonstrating that empowering leaders with the tools for integrated strategic resilience is the key to creating a more empowered, equitable, and future-oriented business landscape.

Keywords: Strategic Planning, Business Continuity Management, Organisational Resilience, Leadership, Strategic Innovation, Sustainable Business, Malawi.

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CHALLENGES, SUPPORT AND TRENDS IN SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) IN THE UK: AN ANALYSIS OF BARRIERS AND EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS

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Abstract

Educational support systems in the UK are facing an uphill battle as they strive to improve provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) (Cline and Frederickson, 2009). The rising prevalence of SEND diagnoses in recent years has intensified pressures on nurseries, early years practitioners and local authorities to meet complex needs with limited resources (Edwards-Fapohunda and Adediji, 2024). While the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework emphasizes early diagnosis and intervention, ongoing educational and financial planning for children with SEND and their families is often overlooked (Tickell, 2011; McFarlane-Edmond and Wither, 2023).

Inclusive education remains an evolving challenge, requiring urgent, coordinated action from educators, policymakers, and support institutions (Srivastava, 2023). While existing research has examined the wellbeing of children with SEND, limited attention has been paid to systemic challenges faced by early year educators and nursery owners in creating inclusive environments (Lindsay, 2007; Rogers, 2007; Khaleel et al., 2021). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Tudge et al., 2009) provides a useful lens for understanding these challenges, highlighting the dynamic interactions between young children, their families, nursery environments, and broader societal structures. This theoretical perspective complements inclusive education frameworks (Ainscow, 2020; Ainscow et al., 2006; Florian, 2014) that position inclusion as a systemic process rather than an individual adjustment whilst also aligning with cognitive development perspectives, such as Vygotsky's sociocultural theory which highlight the importance of social interaction, scaffolding, and culturally responsive pedagogies in shaping early learning trajectories (Daniels, 2016).

Despite progress in identifying and supporting children with SEND, disparities in access to and quality of interventions persist across the UK. Some regions benefit from well-established support systems, while others struggle due to limited resources and a shortage of trained professionals (Lindsay et al., 2020). This inconsistency highlights the need for research-driven policy recommendations that ensure equitable access to education for SEND children from different socio-economic backgrounds.

The research also acknowledges the increasing importance of partnerships between the government and private sectors in delivering SEND support services. Exploring how these collaborations can enhance funding mechanism, resource distribution, teacher training, and access to specialized services offers a significant contribution to sustainable, long-term solutions for SEND education (Patrinos et al., 2009). Aligning policy frameworks with the lived experiences of children, families, and practitioners is essential to translate legislation and strategic plans into tangible outcomes (Blatchford et al., 2011; Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011).

The study is structured around four overarching objectives:

1. To analyse the challenges faced by children with SEND and their families in accessing quality education and support
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of current SEND policies and frameworks, especially the EYFS
3. To identify best practices from schools and nurseries that have successfully implemented inclusive practices
4. To propose solutions and policy recommendations to enhance resource allocation, teacher training, and early intervention strategies.

To achieve these objectives, an eclectic approach i.e mixed-methods approach will be adopted. Quantitative data will be analysed from national SEND data from the past 10 to 20 years to explore correlations between rising diagnoses and educational outcomes, offering insights into trends and systemic challenges. While, qualitative data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including parents, teachers, SEND coordinators, and nursery owners, to capture their lived experiences and perspectives on effective support systems. Interview questions will be designed based on a comprehensive and critical literature review to ensure consistency and depth (Bowen, 2009). Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs) will also be employed with participants who express willingness to explore issues in a collaborative setting. Additionally, case studies of schools and nurseries that have successfully implemented inclusive practices will further identify transferable best practices.

Quantitative data will be analysed using statistical tools to identify trends, correlations, and gaps. Qualitative data, such as interviews and case studies will undergo thematic analysis to identify key barriers and opportunities (Omeihe and Harrison, 2024). By integrating empirical evidence with theoretical frameworks including ecological systems theory, policy implementation theory, inclusive education principles, and cognitive psychological perspectives, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the pressures faced by SEND children and their families.

The outcomes of this research are expected to make a significant contribution to existing literature by developing evidence-based recommendations to improve SEND frameworks. This includes early intervention strategies, professional development, inclusive teaching practices, and financial planning for families. Additionally, by highlighting the experiences of families, nursery owners and educators, the study fills a gap in current research and aligns with the Centre for Leadership and Empowerment's mission by promoting inclusive leadership in education. It aims not only to empower children with SEND and their families by shaping more effective, inclusive policy frameworks but also to enhance institutional approaches to inclusion, diversity, and equity.

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Abstract

In addition, the new global manufacturing sector expands faster in the EEC area and Thailand; the necessity of being strong leaders in complexity and cross-cultural settings has also increased (Jehn, 1995). Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) is the main industrial zone and economic zone that can make Thailand powerful for the innovation industry. Furthermore, many global companies start to invest and build new plant setups in this region area; they may not only encounter operational and technological challenges, but also it is very difficult to leaders, leadership, and cultural integration. Therefore, this study will show the idea of authentic leadership in a new global plant setup in the EEC context. It focuses on how leaders of authentic leadership can support organizations to handle urgency and uncertainty, align values of culture, and encourage long-term success in global manufacturing settings.

Despite a growing body of research on authentic leadership, most existing studies are situated in mature business environments and emphasize the Western leadership norms (e.g., Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Little is known about how authentic leadership is understood, practiced, and evolved in non-Western, emerging market contexts—particularly in the high-pressure circumstances of establishing new industrial operations. This study addresses in the gaps by exploring three related objectives, which include (1) to identify the challenges experienced of authentic leaders that become up when setting up new global manufacturing plants in the EEC; (2) to examine about the real-life experiences of senior leaders working in this setting; and (3) to explore the real leadership behaviors that help new operations receive of the ground and become stable in changing, uncertain situations.

The research is guided by grounded theory approach of authentic leadership, which aligns with the interpretivist paradigm underpinning this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). This methodology acknowledges the co-construction of meaning between the researcher and participants and allows for the development of middle-range theory grounded in empirical realities. Rather than testing pre-existing theoretical models, this inductive approach seeks to build context-sensitive insights about authentic leadership from the bottom up—grounded in what leaders say, do, and experience in real-world plant setups. By doing so, the study directly addresses the limitations of positivist leadership studies, which often rely on decontextualized measurements and overlook nuanced, culturally embedded practices.

There are going to be three distinct ways to gather data: (1) to explore narrative interviews with senior leaders and plant managers who are setting up new plants across the EEC; (2) to identify non-participant observations of leadership practices in action, focusing on meetings, decision-making, and interactions with employees; and (3) to find out document analysis of strategic plans, internal communications, and leadership development artifacts. This three-part method provides the results more reliable and thorough, and it enables see how authentic leadership is put into reality through both stated ideals and real-life behaviors (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Theoretical sampling will lead the sample process (Butler et al, 2018). The first participants will be chosen from industrial and professional networks, and later participants will be chosen based on themes that come up and the point at which the concepts become excessively complex (Rahi et al., 2019).

The main parts of the constant comparative analysis method will include initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical integration. This iterative method will allow the researcher to refine categories, test relationships between concepts, and build a coherent, data-driven theoretical framework explaining the role of authentic leadership in the success or struggle of new manufacturing facilities. Many studies have previously shown that leaders who are self-aware, honest in their relationships, have a clear sense of urgency, and can proceed to internalize balance information to better understand and deal with uncertainty, building trust, and bringing together teams from various backgrounds (Guetzkow et al, 2004). Furthermore, things change rapidly and this is especially crucial now since so many things have changed recently. This research may uncover to the new idea and culturally diverse types of leadership in Thailand's EEC industrial sector.

This research will be conducted in Thailand's EEC region, which will be utilized as a the center for leadership development, globalization, and economic growth. Therefore, Chonburi, Rayong, and Chachoengsao are the three provinces that make up this EEC region's policy-driven program (EEC Office, 2023). Insightful, innovation-driven companies are highly valued, and this research aims to bring that value to light. As a result, it is an excellent area to study the gap between what global corporations demand and what is actually occurring in the culture (Estelle et al., 1994), particularly when the leader understands and takes appropriate action. Furthermore, the uniqueness and originality of this research draws attention to the setting and emphasizes the depth of the qualitative investigation (Omeihe & Harrison, 2024). The practical implications of global enterprises, governments, and leadership development experts operating in a changing economic environment.

The study will contribute to the increasing the collection of literature on authentic leadership by providing several instances of effective adoption of culturally sensitive, evidence-based leadership approaches in modern global manufacturing plant setups. This research is a helpful resource for multinational firms seeking to enhance leadership methods that are adaptable to the local context in order to increase their global performance organization. The primary aims of this research are to enhance leadership development, encourage business strategy, and facilitate long-term organizational progress (Hilton et al., 2021). The research can help to bridge the gap between leadership challenges and growth and organizational structure and policies.

Keywords: Authentic leadership, New Plant setup, Global Manufacturing, Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC), Qualitative Case Study, and Leadership Challenges.

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STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND POLICY READINESS IN SMES: LEVERAGING THE R-OWST QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM PAIRED WITH ISO 9001 FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

The study aims to explore how (SMEs) can nurture Strategic leadership and Policy readiness by integrating the R-OWST Quality Management System (QMS) with the ISO 9001 quality assurance framework. This integration helps generate and develop strategic leadership policies that lead to the materialisation of its Vision and Missions.

The goal is to reinforce the operations foundation by backing them with a QMS and dynamic, human-centred policies designed to enhance leadership decision-making. Introducing ISO 9001 as the QMS review tool, injects tangible synergies within their quality management systems that promote consistency in the implementation, review, and standardisation of operations and quality practices. Studies have proven that installing a Quality Management System (QMS) is a strategic choice to standardise essential business operations and improve organisational capabilities. This strategic perspective boosts organisational performance and competitiveness.

Albacete-Sáez, Fuentes-Fuentes & Bojica (2011) found that QMS implementation efficacy relies on strategic leadership priorities. Firms with leadership-driven QMS efforts achieved stronger alignment with market differentiation and innovation goals. Implementing a Quality Management System (QMS) is a deliberate strategic choice, often aimed at standardising core business processes and enhancing organizational capabilities.

Organisations adopting a formal Quality Management System aligned with ISO 9001 not only comply with regulatory requirements but deliberately leverage the system as a strategic framework—as guided by leadership—to structure organisational policies, align quality objectives with business goals, and foster continuous improvement in line with strategic priorities (Djordjevic et al., 2018).

This strategic orientation has been linked to higher organizational performance and stronger competitive positioning. Perry et al. (2014) found that SMEs that adopt a formal QMS are more likely to experience sustained growth and success, whereas those that lack a structured QMS are more vulnerable to market pressures and early-life business failures.

R-OWST framework is a next-generation Quality Management System (QMS) tailored (SMEs) seeking strategic clarity, risk-informed planning, and execution-driven performance. R-OWST—an acronym for Results, Opportunities, Weaknesses, Strategy, and Threats—offers a structured and adaptive alternative to traditional SWOT analysis by converting strategic planning into a dynamic, outcome-based discipline.

Each component of R-OWST serves a distinct function: Results define and anchor measurable KRIs; Opportunities are validated against expected outcomes to ensure alignment and ROI; Weaknesses encompass internal risks assessed through early-warning indicators and diagnostic tools; Strategy serves as an agile execution roadmap, synthesizing all insights into strategic statements; and Threats—both internal and external—are analyzed relationally using frameworks such as PESTEL and Porter's Five Forces.

The R-OWST framework equips SMEs with a comprehensive, adaptable tool to formulate, implement, and continuously recalibrate strategy in volatile and fast-changing business environments. In direct response to the conference themes—such as emerging leadership models in global business and empowering leadership strategies to build organisational capability—R-OWST offers a practical, execution-focused approach that enhances leadership decision-making, aligns quality with strategy, and strengthens organisational agility in the face of uncertainty.

Designed to complement ISO 9001, enhances leadership capacity by embedding continuous reflection, evidence-based planning, and experiential feedback loops within quality management processes. This alignment fosters a culture of learning and adaptability prompting strategically alignments with dynamic business environments.

Just as an aircraft requires maximum thrust to lift off the runway, SMEs must begin their journey with high-powered strategic intent, discipline, and quality systems. By embedding a robust Quality Management System (QMS) from the outset—anchored in the reflective, opportunity-driven R-OWST framework and reinforced by ISO 9001 principles—SMEs position themselves for a high-thrust take-off phase that builds structural integrity, leadership coherence, and market responsiveness. In contrast to many SMEs that coast with improvised processes, those who adopt R-OWST + ISO 9001 from inception build an internal engine for perpetual growth—not just survival.

Keywords: Strategic clarity; Execution-driven performance; Policy alignment; Leadership decision-making; Strategic framework; Outcome-based discipline; Operational foundation; Competitive positioning; Experiential feedback loops. R-OWST; Quality Management System (QMS); ISO 9001; Strategic Leadership; Policy Readiness; SMEs.

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LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE FORMULATION AND EXECUTION OF TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

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Abstract

Amidst a growing competitive academic environment, universities are faced with the challenge of not just sustaining academic excellence, but also guaranteeing a sustainable and high-performing workforce. At the center of this strategic goal is effective talent management, in which leadership plays a central role. This research explores the role of leadership in the formulation as well as implementation of talent management strategies in Nigerian universities. As talent becomes an increasingly important asset for institutional success, the research highlights the need for academic leaders to be proactive and strategic in identifying, developing, retaining, and managing high-potential academic staff.

Although talent management is a well-established concept in corporate contexts, it is underdeveloped in academic institutions. The research recognizes that Nigerian universities experience ongoing talent challenges in the form of an aging professoriate, insufficient career advancement support for early-career academics, and a paucity of systematic succession planning. These challenges, combined with a lack of well-defined leadership-driven talent models, undermine the sustainability of academic excellence. This project addresses the noted literature and practice gap by attempting to comprehend the specific leadership roles in talent management and how they can be effectively executed.

Using an exploratory qualitative approach, data were obtained by conducting interviews with fifteen senior administrative and academic leaders of a Nigerian university. Purposive sampling ensured that participants had both managerial influence and contextual insight into talent management. Data were processed using Atlas.TI software to determine emergent themes, codes, and patterns that characterized leadership functions in talent strategy implementation.

The evidence indicates that talent management in universities is, at its core, a leadership-driven process. Leadership roles go well beyond conventional HR roles; they encompass strategic visioning, alignment of talent objectives with institutional missions, and the ongoing implementation of values-based talent models. Leaders were found to have a key role in the development of organizational culture, the facilitation of performance management, the identification of high-potential talent, and the implementation of customized development initiatives such as IDPs. In addition, leadership was found to play a key role in the creation of effective reward systems, the retention of talent, as well as the creation of a climate for innovation and collaboration.

Interview data analysis produced a web of prominent leadership themes under the headings of talent identification, deployment, development, retention, motivation, performance management, and strategic communication. One common theme was the need for leaders to have well-developed social and intellectual competencies, allowing them to serve as role models and coaches in talent development. Notably, leaders need to embrace a "talent mindset" which is a profound conviction that institutional success directly depends on recruiting and retaining the best academic talent. In the absence of this mindset, talent management initiatives are doomed to fail or remain at the surface level.

The research also draws on classic motivational and organizational theories, including those advanced by Herzberg, Maslow, Vroom, and Stacey, to explain psychological and systemic aspects of successful leadership in talent management. These theories highlight the importance of intrinsic motivation, fair rewards, and organizational trust, all of which are fostered through consistent leadership action and policy application. The research confirms that leadership's failure to develop internal academic pipelines or succession planning is not only a structural failure, but also a breakdown in strategic vision and institutional commitment.

The contributions of this study are theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the study combines leadership theory with talent management frameworks within the under-studied setting of universities. It offers a leadership-focused model that can guide subsequent research on academic workforce planning. Practically, the study suggests practical areas in which university leaders can effect change, including the embedding of talent management in strategic planning processes, creating mentorship schemes, and leveraging digital solutions to facilitate performance monitoring and talent analytics.

The findings of this research have important implications for university leaders, policymakers, and human capital practitioners who want to promote a culture of excellence and continuity in higher education. As universities face global competition, digitalization, and heightened accountability, strategic leadership in talent management is no longer a choice but a necessity. Leadership cannot just develop sound talent strategies but must also spearhead their implementation with clarity, integrity, and long-term resolve. Finally, this research concludes that successful talent management in universities demands more than policies and structures, it demands leadership with vision, capacity, and a long-term commitment to developing human capital. In the absence of this leadership, academic excellence and institutional resilience are likely to remain fragmented or unrealized. As Nigerian universities position themselves to transform and compete globally, their success will increasingly rely on the degree to which leadership takes full ownership of developing and maintaining a healthy academic talent ecosystem.

CONCEPTUALISING RESILIENT LEADERSHIP AS AN EMERGING LEADERSHIP MODEL

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Abstract

In today's rapidly evolving global landscape—marked by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, organisations are increasingly confronted with challenges that demand agile and adaptive leadership approaches (Mukundi, 2021; Bagheri & Harrison, 2020). From global pandemics to geopolitical tensions, contemporary businesses require a fundamental shift in leadership capabilities to not only withstand adversity but also to thrive in its midst. Moreover, the convergence of digital, physical and biological technologies has speeded the pace of change in global industries, further intensifying the need for more effective leadership to guide organisations through the transition from conventional to digital environments (Sylvester, 2024). This shift underscores the imperative for leaders to foster innovation, maintain organisational stability, and respond adeptly to political uncertainty, cultural transformations, economic volatility, (Mukundi, 2021; Martin, 2025) and the multifaceted challenges introduced by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Sylvester, 2024; Maynard, 2015).

These ongoing global complexities have exposed the limitations of traditional leadership paradigms, which often prioritise control, rigid adherence to rules, and standardised performance metrics (Khan et al., 2021). To foster and sustain organisational resilience and adaptability, organisation leaders must adopt distinct leadership strategies. Such approaches are essential for navigating the complex challenges, risks, and uncertainties that arise from continuous change. Whereas established models such as transformational and transactional leadership (Dartey- Baah, 2015), as well as servant leadership (Wilkinson & Rennaker, 2022), have been explored in relation to resilience, there remains a significant gap in understanding the specific leadership attributes necessary to foster long-term adaptability, systemic responsiveness (Duchek, 2020), and emotional regulation (Richard, 2020).

Although the concept of resilience in organisational contexts predates the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis served as a catalyst for renewed scholarly interest in resilience- building strategies. For example, Georgescu et al. (2024) examined the role of strategic human resource management and organisational culture in enhancing resilience. Suárez and Montes (2020) proposed three distinct approaches to fostering resilience, while Istiqaroh et al. (2022) synthesised the role of leadership in cultivating resilient organisations. Despite these contributions, the literature remains fragmented, lacking a cohesive conceptual framework that defines resilient leadership as a distinct model. This fragmentation impedes both theoretical advancement and practical implementation—particularly at a time when resilience is increasingly recognised as a vital leadership competency.

It is important to distinguish between the terms “resilience leadership” and “resilient leadership.” The former emphasises the process of recovery or bouncing back from adversity, thereby framing resilience as a dynamic and situational leadership process. While the latter denotes a set of enduring leadership traits that enable effective navigation through challenges. This study adopts the term resilient leadership to conceptualise it as a generalisable and strategic leadership model, rather than a context-specific or reactive approach.

Research Aim and Methodology

This study seeks to explore and evaluate the concept of resilient leadership by identifying its core characteristics, differentiating it from traditional leadership theories, and assessing its impact on employee adaptability and well-being in contemporary organisations.

A qualitative research design will be employed, involving semi-structured interviews with 20 to 30 leaders from diverse sectors—including academia, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), private enterprises, and other tertiary institutions. Thematic analysis will be used to identify recurring patterns, behaviours, and values associated with resilient leadership. Thematic analysis is suited for this study as it enables the systematic identification, analysis, and interpretation of patterns within qualitative data. Given the study's aim to explore the characteristics and practices of resilient leadership across diverse organisational contexts, thematic analysis offers the flexibility to capture both explicit and latent meanings in participants' narratives. This method is especially appropriate for exploratory research where theoretical frameworks are still emerging, as it allows for inductive coding and the development of themes grounded in the data itself (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

Ethical approval will be obtained from the relevant institutional review board, and informed consent will be secured from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity will be strictly upheld throughout the research process.

This study is expected to make several key contributions. First, it will propose a conceptual framework for resilient leadership, offering a structured lens through which to examine this emerging leadership paradigm. Second, it will provide insights into how leadership practices can evolve in response to adversity and transformation equipping organisations with strategies to enhance resilience. Finally, the findings will inform the design of leadership development programmes that embed resilience as a core competency. The outcomes of this study will be particularly beneficial to: Organisational leaders and HR professionals seeking to strengthen leadership capacity, particularly during periods of organisational change and uncertainty; and Researchers and academics, contributing to the theoretical advancement of leadership studies.

Keywords: Resilient Leadership, Leadership development, Qualitative research, Adaptability

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AI-AUGMENTED LEADERSHIP: ETHICAL DILEMMAS AND STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

In today's global business environment, leaders are increasingly leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) to augment decision-making and strategic capabilities. This abstract explores how AI integration is reshaping leadership paradigms transformational, ethical, adaptive, and digital (Sundowo et al., 2024) while introducing both strategic opportunities and ethical dilemmas in an era of digital governance. It highlights that AI-augmented leadership can drive innovation and sustainability outcomes but also demands robust ethical governance (Mahabub et al., 2025; Kumar, 2025).

AI offers leaders tools to drive transformation (Aakula et al., 2024). Digital leadership involves technical expertise, vision-setting, resource alignment, and fostering change-ready cultures (Seraj et al., 2025). Embedding AI enables data-driven decisions, predictive analytics, and automation, freeing human capacity for higher-value tasks (Kumari et al., 2025; Madanchian et al., 2025). AI-enhanced transformational leadership improves performance and well-being; in IT, integrating AI reduced burnout by boosting employees' confidence in AI tools (Jia et al., 2025). Leaders embracing AI anticipate trends and innovate, accelerating transformation and resilience (Seraj et al., 2025). Such leaders proactively drive innovation, reflecting adaptive leadership, which stresses continual adjustment to evolving contexts (Behie et al., 2025). Research shows AI requires recalibrating leadership competencies (Randriamiary, 2024; Sposato, 2024; Bock and Oelsnitz, 2025), blending digital proficiency with human-centered skills to sustain productivity (Myszak and Filina-Dawidowicz, 2025). Leaders combining technological competence and adaptive, people-oriented skills are positioned to guide organizations through uncertainty (Seemann et al., 2025). Consequently, leadership development emphasizes digital literacy, data-based decision-making, and agility to prepare leaders for AI-pervasive contexts.

AI's rise introduces profound ethical challenges. Ethical leadership rooted in integrity, fairness, and accountability is essential to navigate dilemmas and sustain trust (AlHares, 2025). Issues include bias, opacity, privacy, and accountability. Studies caution that probability-based AI in complex environments generates ethical risks (Guan et al., 2022; Upreti et al., 2025; Herghiligiu et al., 2025). Without oversight, AI may perpetuate bias or deliver opaque outcomes undermining legitimacy. Leaders must establish governance frameworks with policies, oversight, and ethical guidelines to ensure responsible use. Organizations globally are aligning governance with regulations emphasizing accountability, fairness, and explainability (Corrêa et al., 2023). Executives now prioritize transparency and cybersecurity to mitigate risks and sustain trust (Sklavos et al., 2024).

Ethical leadership also aligns AI with societal values and sustainability goals (Kulkov et al., 2024; Schwaeke et al., 2025). Leaders are expected to integrate ESG into digital strategies (Selvaraj et al., 2024). Research shows ethical leadership improves sustainability and financial outcomes via ESG metrics (AlHares, 2025). By fostering moral culture and long-term stakeholder orientation, ethical leaders promote sustainable practices. AI guided by these values advances sustainability initiatives; analytics support monitoring environmental impact, improving social outcomes, and strengthening governance through ESG insights (Sklavos et al., 2024). AI thus creates opportunities from energy optimization to inclusive services. Yet convergence with ESG introduces "moral predicaments" (Liu and Zhang, 2024; Salvi et al., 2024). Leaders must confront fairness, inclusivity, and ethics-washing—using AI rhetorically without substance. Literature suggests forming cross-functional committees on AI ethics and sustainability to align practice with standards (Sklavos et al., 2024). In digital governance, leaders act as strategists and stewards: leveraging AI competitively while safeguarding ethics and compliance.

As AI embeds in business, leadership paradigms evolve. Effective AI-augmented leadership fuses traditional qualities with competencies suited to digital ecosystems. Studies identify at least 15 competencies across technical, human, and conceptual domains essential in AI-led organizations (Tasnim, 2024; Myszak and Filina-Dawidowicz, 2025). These include data literacy, technological intuition, adaptability, and ethical judgment, all critical for guiding AI-augmented teams. Progressive organizations update leadership training to build these skills, preparing leaders to collaborate with intelligent systems and make principled decisions. Adaptive leadership grows in importance: leaders must learn and adjust continually as AI tools, regulations, and expectations evolve. Ethical orientation remains central: leaders must anticipate unintended consequences, champion transparency, and engage stakeholders in digital strategies.

AI-augmented leadership lies at the nexus of opportunity and responsibility. AI enables leaders to drive innovation, efficiency, and sustainability for instance, anticipating markets or meeting ESG targets. Yet ethical dilemmas demand leaders act as compass and regulator, ensuring algorithms align with values and purpose. The 2025 Joint Conference on Empowering Leaders in Global Contemporary Businesses underscores these imperatives: empowering leaders with AI's potential while ensuring ethical governance. Scholarship stresses that neither technical expertise nor ethical integrity alone suffices; digital-age leadership requires both. Ultimately, responsible leadership will determine whether AI serves the greater good. By combining transformational vision, ethical principles, adaptability, and digital capability, leaders can guide organizations toward sustainable, inclusive growth. Indeed, a successful human-AI partnership depends not only on advanced algorithms but on enlightened leadership to steer them (Zárate-Torres et al., 2025).

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EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP, DYNAMIC LEARNING CAPABILITY, AND EMPLOYEE RESILIENCE IN THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR: A JOB DEMANDS-RESOURCES (JD-R) PERSPECTIVE ON THRIVING UNDER DEMANDS

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Abstract

The healthcare sector remains essential for maintaining sustainable development and well-being of people, but the increasing pressure on their work can negatively impact both their mental and physical health as well as the care given to patients. There is evidence that more than 70% of nurses are faced with high stress (Cleary et al., 2018) and burnout and secondary traumatic stress are very common among them (Franco & Christie, 2021). Nurses have to deal with intense emotions because they are on the front lines, working long hours, with difficult and stressful cases and not always knowing exactly what is required of them. In Nigeria, caregivers face additional pressure because there are not enough skilled professionals and the healthcare system is weak (Nwobodo et al., 2023; Donfouet et al., 2024). In response, developing employee resilience—the ability to adapt, recover, and grow through adversity—has emerged as a vital organizational priority.

While there are few prior studies that have examined empowering leadership, work engagement and employee resilience (Mehmood & Saeed, 2021), empowering leadership behaviors teacher psychological resilience (Çevik & Doğan, 2025), research critical gaps remain in the knowledge of how and under what conditions these relationships hold. First, few research studies integrate macro (dynamic learning capability) and micro (JD-R) perspectives to explain why empowering leadership positively affects resilience, leaving the mediating mechanisms as an underexplored area. Second, most existing research often treats job demands as a negative factor, neglecting the important moderating roles of challenge demands (e.g., complex cases) versus hindrance demands (e.g., role ambiguity) in shaping resilience outcomes. Third, the healthcare context—particularly a in resource-constrained settings like Nigeria—lacks evidence on how job resources (e.g., psychological safety) interact with organizational capabilities to buffer or amplify these effects.

This study adopts the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) and the dynamic capability theoretical lens to investigate how empowering leadership fosters resilience among nurses in a high-stakes hospital setting. It suggests that empowering leaders makes people more able to learn, adapt and use fresh information when faced with change—which helps them become more resilient. The study further explores how two job demands—challenge demands (e.g., complex cases) and hindrance demands (e.g., role ambiguity)—as well as job resources (e.g., psychological safety), moderate the relationship between DLC and resilience. A cross-sectional design will be employed using survey data from clinical and non-clinical nurses at National Hospital Abuja, a leading trauma and referral center. Data will be analyzed using structural equation modelling (SEM) via SmartPLS 4. This study addresses these gaps by proposing a novel moderated-mediation model that (1) positions dynamic learning capability as a mediator linking empowering leadership to resilience, and (2) tests how demand types and resources jointly alter this pathway, offering context-specific insights for high-stress, under-resourced healthcare systems. The findings from this study will inform both healthcare leadership and policymaking with practical and theoretical guidance. It serves to guide leadership training, support better well-being and promote effective change in the healthcare workforce in Nigeria and other countries. Through the use of leadership and learning, this study contributes to strengthening health systems through a resilient and empowered workforce.

DIGITAL LEADERSHIP IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF E-AIW: A COMPARATIVE STUDY THROUGH INTERPRETATIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS AT THE KUA KARTASURA AND KUA SURAKARTA

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Abstract

The rapid digitalization of public services has triggered a paradigm shift in leadership, particularly in sectors traditionally governed by bureaucratic and religious norms. This study critically examines digital leadership practices in the implementation of the Electronic Waqf Pledge System (E-AIW) within two distinct institutional settings: the Religious Affairs Offices (KUA) of Kartasura and Surakarta. Employing a qualitative, comparative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and a review of relevant secondary sources. Data analysis was conducted using an interpretive thematic approach to uncover patterns of leadership behavior, strategic orientation, and meaning-making in response to digital transformation. Findings reveal that leadership response and institutional context significantly shape the trajectory of E-AIW implementation. In Kartasura, digital leadership is characterized by pragmatic adaptation to resource constraints and technical barriers, resulting in partial system utilization. In contrast, Surakarta demonstrates a more strategic and systematized leadership approach, yet faces challenges in sustaining service flexibility amidst increasing standardization. The study highlights that the success of digital initiatives in religious bureaucracies is not merely contingent on technological infrastructure, but on the ability of leaders to align innovation with socio-cultural realities and operational capacities. This research contributes to the literature on technology-mediated public leadership by introducing the concept of situational digital leadership within religious governance. It emphasizes adaptive capacity, digital literacy, and cross-stakeholder engagement as critical drivers of meaningful digital transformation. The findings offer practical insights for policymakers in advancing digital governance reforms within faith-based public institutions, particularly under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Keywords: Digital leadership, E-AIW, situational governance, interpretive thematic analysis, KUA

CRISIS LEADERSHIP IN AN EMERGING ECONOMIES: A CASE STUDY OF THE NIGERIAN INSURANCE COMPANIES

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Abstract

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving business environment, crises have become an unavoidable aspect of organisational life. Accelerated organisational change, volatile economic conditions, workforce challenges, unexpected technological advances, and shifting political dynamics all contribute to an environment marked by instability. This instability often leads to economic disruptions that are beyond the control of organisation, ultimately resulting in crises. According to Pearson and Clair (1998) an organisational crisis represents one of the most difficult challenges an organisation can face requiring a crisis leader to address crisis real-time.

This paper aims to examine the distinct challenges of crisis leadership in a developing economy, focusing on the Nigerian Insurance sector by reviewing the experiences of both the leaders and the followers to understand the leadership dynamics in resource-constrained environments, addressing the need for strategies that balance immediate crisis responses with sustainable organizational development. This study responds to Harrison, Paul, and Burnard's (2016) call for more globally inclusive leadership research that extends beyond Western-centric viewpoints.

Methodology

This study employs an interpretivist philosophy, enabling the researcher to thoroughly engage with the social context of the subjects under examination. Examining the world through their perspective will enhance the investigation of socially constructed meanings in the study, offering comprehensive descriptions of crisis leadership within the framework of a developing economy (Blumberg et al., 2014). A qualitative research process will be employed, utilising semi-structured interviews with 55 top leaders of two insurance companies to obtain detailed descriptions of local actors (Morse, 2015). Qualitative studies are effective for examining intricate phenomena in particular contexts (Cypress, 2017). Due to the exploratory nature of the research, a phenomenological research strategy will be utilised to effectively address the research question (Saunders et al., 2016). The research strategy will enable the collection of the unique experiences of leaders and followers.

Findings

The study anticipates identifying adaptive strategies and leadership competencies essential for managing crises in resource-limited settings.

Originality

This research uniquely addresses a contextual gap by focusing on crisis leadership within emerging economies, a domain largely overlooked in existing literature dominated by studies from developed countries. It advances the understanding of leadership as a proactive and adaptive function tailored to environments of instability.

Practical Implications

The study offers actionable insights for leaders in emerging markets, equipping them to foster organizational resilience and drive sustainable growth amidst crises. By enhancing crisis preparedness and adaptability, the study provides a guide for leadership development in resource-constrained environments, with applicability to global contexts facing similar challenges.

Keyword: Crisis Leadership, Nigerian Insurance, Resource-Constrained Environments, Followers, Crisis Leadership Strategies.

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A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF CROSS-CULTURAL LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES AND THEIR IMPACTS ON PROJECT SUCCESS

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Abstract

Introduction

This literature review analyses cross-cultural leadership strategies and their effect on the success of international projects. It highlights the critical importance of versatile and culturally sensitive leadership in global project management, shaped by globalisation, digitalisation, and increasing interdependence among nations. Drawing on theoretical insights from Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, the GLOBE study, and Transformational Leadership Theory, and supported by practical case studies such as the Dubai Metro Project, Airbus A380, and IBM Global Services, the review identifies essential strategies and capabilities for leading multicultural teams effectively.

Research Methodology

The research adopts a secondary data approach, drawing from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, industry reports, and high-profile case studies. The findings were categorised into six key themes: (1) leadership competencies across cultures, (2) cross-cultural communication and stakeholder management, (3) ethics and governance, (4) organisational culture and leadership dynamics, (5) team building and managing geographically dispersed teams, and (6) decision-making in diverse cultures. These themes illuminate the complexities of navigating cultural differences and the pivotal role of leadership in fostering trust, collaboration, and alignment among diverse stakeholders.

Findings

1. Leadership Competencies across cultures.

The first theme highlights the importance of leadership competencies, including adaptive communication, emotional intelligence, and cultural empathy. Leaders must align project goals with culturally diverse team values and expectations. The GLOBE study identifies universally admired leadership traits, while emphasising that cultural contexts influence which traits are prioritised. The Dubai Metro Project exemplifies successful culturally adaptive leadership, where managers tailored their approach to suit a multicultural team, enhancing collaboration and helping the project meet its ambitious targets.

2. Cross-Cultural Communication and Stakeholder Management

Persistent challenges in international projects stem from differing communication styles. High-context and low-context communication clashes often result in delays and misunderstandings. The Airbus A380 project exemplifies these challenges, with coordination breakdowns across 30 countries contributing to project delays and ultimately leading to production discontinuation. Leaders must establish shared communication protocols, nurture interpersonal trust, and adapt to cultural nuances to ensure effective stakeholder engagement.

1. Ethics and Governance

Navigating ethical pluralism is critical in global projects. Leaders must strike a balance between adhering to universal ethical standards and respecting local moral codes. Governance frameworks must reflect this duality. The Volkswagen emissions scandal highlights the risks of ethical failures in hierarchical cultures, where opaque leadership structures and the absence of effective whistleblowing mechanisms resulted in significant reputational and financial damage. Culturally intelligent governance can prevent such failures by integrating transparency with local sensitivity.

2. Organisational Culture and Leadership Dynamics

Organisational culture shapes how leadership is enacted, how teams operate, and how power is distributed. The failed Nokia-Siemens merger highlights the risks associated with cultural misalignment. Nokia's flexible Finnish management style clashed with Siemens's structured, bureaucratic German approach, resulting in delays, morale issues, and strategic failure. This case highlights the importance of leaders serving as cultural brokers, interpreting and reconciling competing value systems across organisational boundaries.

3. Team Building and Managing Geographically Dispersed Teams

Success in global projects is tied not only to collaboration tools but also to emotional trust and inclusive team cultures. Leaders must ensure that diverse team members feel psychologically safe and aligned with shared goals. IBM Global Services is a notable example, succeeding with distributed teams through leadership strategies such as structured check-ins, cross-cultural onboarding, and trust-building rituals, which go beyond relying solely on digital tools.

4. Decision Making in Diverse Cultures

Decision-making styles vary across cultures, particularly in relation to power distance and community norms. Western-centric, top-down approaches often clash with participatory traditions in other regions. The World Bank's renewable energy projects in Africa faced backlash when local consultative customs were ignored. Leaders must adopt hybrid decision-making frameworks that respect both global efficiency and local legitimacy, especially when projects intersect with complex social systems.

Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that successful leadership in international projects demands more than technical proficiency. Cultural intelligence, ethical awareness, strategic communication, and adaptability are indispensable for leading diverse teams effectively. Leaders who cultivate these capabilities can build trust, encourage cross-cultural collaboration, and navigate complex stakeholder environments with greater success.

Conclusion

This review concludes that cross-cultural leadership is essential for global project success. Cultural diversity presents both opportunities and challenges, requiring adaptive, inclusive, and ethically grounded leadership. Leadership in international projects must be seen as a socio-cultural competence that evolves across the project lifecycle. By advancing leadership strategies that embrace complexity and diversity, organisations can enhance performance and resilience in today's interconnected world.

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REFRAMING THE PLAN-DO-CHECK-ACT CYCLE: A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK FOR GLOBAL PROJECT ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract

Background

As globalisation reshapes the landscape of project-based work, leadership in international project environments faces increasing complexity. Projects today often span multiple cultures, time zones, and institutional systems, making effective leadership contingent not only on technical acumen but also on cultural intelligence (CQ), emotional intelligence (EQ), and adaptive communication. Yet, dominant project management methodologies, such as PMBOK and PRINCE2, are often grounded in Euro-American leadership assumptions, which may not translate effectively across diverse cultural contexts. This paper addresses this gap by proposing a reconceptualisation of the Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA) cycle as a dynamic leadership framework that responds to the cultural, relational, and communicative demands of international projects.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive research design utilising thematic analysis to synthesise key insights from eight peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2022 and 2025. The studies were selected based on their methodological transparency, relevance to cross-cultural project management, and contextual grounding in international or multicultural teams. The thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework. It was organised around four themes: (1) culturally intelligent planning, (2) cross-cultural team dynamics, (3) leadership legitimacy in diverse settings, and (4) stakeholder engagement across virtual and face-to-face platforms. The paper uses this synthesis to generate a revised PDCA cycle that centres on cultural responsiveness at each phase.

Summary of Findings

Findings suggest that leadership success in global projects hinges on a leader's ability to interpret and adapt to varying cultural norms across the project lifecycle:

·In the Plan phase, leaders with high CQ are more effective in anticipating stakeholder expectations, managing ambiguity, and aligning planning tools to local norms. Studies show that participatory planning may be effective in low-power-distance cultures but is often misinterpreted as weak or inefficient in hierarchical settings.

- During the Do phase, inclusive leadership and emotional intelligence foster psychological safety, which in turn improves execution outcomes in cross-cultural teams. Leaders who facilitate reflective dialogue and co-create team rituals build stronger team cohesion, although excessive flexibility may reduce authority in some cultural settings.
- In the Check phase, culturally sensitive feedback mechanisms, such as indirect communication or anonymous surveys, are more effective in high-context cultures. Leaders who rely solely on Western-style performance reviews may miss relational dynamics or unintentionally cause disengagement.
- The Act phase emphasises the importance of adaptive stakeholder engagement and long-term institutional learning. Leaders who codify lessons into practices are more likely to sustain cross-cultural trust and improve project continuity.

The paper presents a Cross-Cultural Leadership Strategy Matrix that links Hofstede's cultural dimensions with adaptive leadership responses for each of the PDCA phases. It also introduces visual tools, including an Adapted PDCA Framework and a Thematic Convergence Map, which align project phases with culturally attuned behaviours and practices.

Suggestions

This reframing of PDCA challenges the assumption that leadership tools are culturally neutral. Instead, it advocates a more reflexive and relational model of leadership that is sensitive to local values, power structures, and communication styles. For instance, the “Plan” phase could incorporate culturally grounded decision-making methods such as Nemawashi (Japan) or Ubuntu (Africa). In contrast, the “Check” phase might require narrative-based feedback rather than spreadsheet-driven KPIs. The paper suggests that PDCA be understood not as a linear tool, but as a rhythmic leadership cycle that evolves through cultural dialogue and iterative adaptation.

Recommendations

1. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for scholars, practitioners, and leadership development professionals:
2. Adapt Leadership Models to Cultural Contexts: Reframe planning and decision-making practices to reflect local norms, particularly in multinational teams.
3. Integrate CQ and EQ into Leadership Training: Equip project managers with the skills to interpret cultural signals and manage relational dynamics.
4. Design Culturally Sensitive Feedback Mechanisms: Use anonymous surveys, one-on-one conversations, or storytelling, depending on the team’s cultural background.
5. Institutionalise Cultural Learning: Introduce post-project cultural audits, team charters, and region-specific onboarding guides to retain learning beyond the project lifecycle.
6. Revise Certification Criteria: Bodies like PMI and IPMA should embed cultural agility and ethical responsiveness into their competency frameworks.

Conclusion

This study contributes to leadership scholarship by offering a culturally grounded reinterpretation of the PDCA cycle for use in international project environments. By integrating CQ, EQ, and context-specific practices into each phase of the project lifecycle, the proposed framework equips leaders to operate with greater agility, inclusion, and ethical awareness. As global projects become increasingly diverse and digitally mediated, leadership models must evolve. This paper presents a practical, theoretically robust pathway for navigating this shift.

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BUILDING HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS ACROSS GEOGRAPHICAL BORDERS: A CROSS-CULTURAL LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

1.0 Abstract

As organizations expand globally, the ability to build and lead high-performing, geographically dispersed teams has become a critical leadership competency. This study explores how cross-cultural leadership facilitates team cohesion, trust, and performance in international business management. By conducting a systematic literature review of academic and industry sources, the paper identifies key leadership strategies and competencies including cultural intelligence (CQ), emotional intelligence (EI), communication adaptation, and conflict resolution that enhance team effectiveness across borders. The findings emphasize the need for adaptive and inclusive leadership styles, particularly transformational leadership, to navigate cultural complexity and drive global project success. The study contributes to the broader understanding of global talent strategies by offering a practical framework for empowering culturally diverse teams.

2.0 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate how cross-cultural leadership enables the formation and sustainability of high-performing teams in international business settings. It aims to uncover leadership behaviors and competencies that are effective in managing cultural diversity, fostering inclusion, and enhancing team performance throughout the project management lifecycle.

3.0 Design/Methodology/Approach

The study adopts systematic literature review (SLR) methodology, reviewing 52 peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and industry reports published between 2010 and 2024. Academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Emerald Insight, and Google Scholar were used, employing Boolean searches and keyword combinations related to “cross-cultural leadership,” “global teams,” “cultural intelligence,” and “international project management.” Thematic synthesis was used to identify recurring themes across the project lifecycle stages initiation, planning, execution, monitoring, and closure.

4.0 Findings

The study identifies that cross-cultural leadership significantly influences team effectiveness across project stages. Cultural intelligence is crucial in the early stages to establish shared values and trust (Ang et al., 2007; Tennakoonge, 2023), while emotional intelligence supports ongoing team cohesion and conflict resolution (Goleman, 2006; Hill & Mahmood, 2023). Transformational leadership proves more effective than transactional styles in multicultural contexts (Zhou et al., 2022; Lisak & Harush, 2021). Trust-building (Li & Liu, 2021), communication adaptation (Huang & Chi, 2020), and strategic use of digital tools (Nydegger & Nydegger, 2020) are identified as key practices. Organizations such as IBM and Siemens demonstrate that inclusive leadership and intercultural training improve innovation and team outcomes (Chen et al., 2020).

5.0 Practical Implications

The research offers actionable insights for global managers and HR professionals on how to lead culturally diverse teams effectively. It highlights the importance of integrating CQ and EI into leadership development programs, adopting flexible communication practices, and fostering inclusive team cultures. The findings support the design of training programs that equip leaders with the necessary skills to manage global talent and enhance project outcomes across regions.

6.0 Originality/Value

This study provides a comprehensive, lifecycle-oriented analysis of cross-cultural leadership in international business, bridging theoretical concepts with real-world practices. Unlike previous studies focused on singular aspects of leadership, this research offers a multi-dimensional framework aligned with project phases. It emphasizes the value of seeing cultural diversity as a strategic asset rather than a challenge, thus promoting inclusive leadership as a core component of global business strategy.

7.0 Research Limitations/Future Research

A key limitation is the Western-centric nature of most reviewed literature, with underrepresentation of non-Western leadership models (Song & Ma, 2021). Future research should explore culturally grounded leadership practices in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America (Dare, 2022). Additionally, there is limited research on how emerging technologies like AI and big data influence cross-cultural team leadership (Taheri Khosroshahi, 2024). Future studies should also examine the intersection of gender, EI, and CQ in multicultural leadership, as well as conduct longitudinal research to assess the long-term impact of leadership strategies on global team performance (Ahsan, 2025).

8.0 Conclusion

Cross-cultural leadership is essential in building high-performing teams in international business environments. Leaders equipped with cultural and emotional intelligence, adaptability, and inclusive communication skills are better positioned to manage global talent and foster team cohesion. This paper contributes to the discourse on empowering leaders for global contemporary businesses by offering strategic insights and a practical framework for leading across borders. As businesses continue to globalize, such leadership competencies will remain vital for sustainable team and organizational success.

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ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND THE IMPACT ON PROJECT SUCCESS: A CROSS-CULTURAL EVALUATION OF LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES IN INTERNATIONAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

As organizations increasingly execute projects across borders, the influence of cultural dynamics on leadership effectiveness and project outcomes becomes critical. This paper explores the intersection of organizational culture, leadership strategy, and project success within international and cross-cultural contexts. Synthesizing insights from over 70 peer-reviewed sources published between 2015 and 2025—including thematic case studies and conceptual models—this research reviews how culturally intelligent leadership can enable better project performance in globalized environments.

Structured around four core themes—(1) the influence of organizational culture on project outcomes, (2) cross-cultural challenges in international project environments, (3) leadership strategies and cultural intelligence in multinational teams, and (4) leadership–culture alignment as a determinant of project success—the paper applies theoretical models such as Hofstede’s cultural dimensions, Schein’s levels of culture, the Competing Values Framework (CVF), and the SECI knowledge-creation model.

Key findings indicate that project success is highly dependent on leadership styles that align with both organizational values and national cultural norms. Transformational leadership, while widely celebrated for its vision and motivation, must be culturally tailored—particularly in high power-distance or uncertainty-averse cultures. Similarly, servant and adaptive leadership styles emerge as effective models for fostering inclusion, trust, and collaboration in culturally diverse teams. The paper introduces an original CQ+EI Adaptive Leadership Model, integrating Cultural Intelligence (CQ) with Emotional Intelligence (EI) to propose a dual-competency approach for managing complex cultural dynamics in international projects.

Real-world case studies underscore the practical value of this model. Netflix’s culturally adaptive leadership, grounded in adhocracy values, has enabled the successful global rollout of localized content. Toyota’s blend of clan and hierarchy cultures, supported by servant leadership and Kaizen principles, demonstrates how deep cultural alignment facilitates innovation and quality. Conversely, Shell’s misalignment with host community cultures, particularly in high-context and particularist societies, illustrates how top-down approaches can erode trust and derail project execution.

The paper argues that high CQ and EI are not simply advantageous but increasingly essential in contemporary project leadership. Leaders who possess the ability to read cultural cues, adapt their communication style, and regulate emotional dynamics are better positioned to maintain team cohesion, navigate stakeholder complexity, and sustain momentum in uncertain or hybrid work environments. These findings are particularly relevant for HRM, leadership development, and global talent strategies in multinational enterprises.

In addition to contributing to the literature on international project leadership, this paper highlights a critical shortcoming in current project management methodologies such as PMBOK and PRINCE2—the absence of structured guidance on cultural responsiveness. As a forward-looking contribution, the paper proposes the integration of cultural diagnostics and adaptive leadership frameworks into these methodologies to better equip practitioners managing projects across borders.

The implications extend beyond theory to practice. This research offers actionable insights for project leaders, HR professionals, and policy developers seeking to foster leadership resilience in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments. It also provides a conceptual foundation for designing leadership development programs that integrate CQ and EI as core capabilities.

To support further advancement, the paper outlines a future research agenda that includes: longitudinal studies on leadership adaptability across project phases; the role of AI and digital tools in cross-cultural leadership effectiveness; the intersection of EI, CQ, and inclusive leadership in virtual teams; and culturally aligned leadership strategies in SMEs, particularly in non-Western economies.

By combining established theory with practical evidence, this study contributes a nuanced understanding of how empowering, culturally intelligent leadership enables project success in global business settings. It is intended not only as a scholarly contribution but also as a potential submission to journals such as the *International Journal of Project Management*, *Leadership Quarterly*, or *Cross Cultural & Strategic Management*. It supports the conference's mission to bridge research and practice and offers a compelling roadmap for developing empowered leadership for global contemporary businesses.

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THE PARADOX OF COMPETENCE, STRATEGIC HYPOCRISY, AND AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP IN CORPORATE PROMOTION: INSIGHTS FROM THE FRENCH BANKING SECTOR

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Abstract

This study investigates the paradox of competence in hierarchical corporate promotion systems, with a focus on the French banking sector. Despite widespread discourses around meritocracy and performance-based advancement, empirical evidence reveals that individuals with exceptional competence are not always rewarded with career progression. In some cases, competence can even be perceived as a threat to institutional norms and power hierarchies. This research introduces and develops the concept of hypocrisy capital, defined as the strategic ability to manage perceptions, align symbolically with dominant institutional logics, and navigate internal politics for professional survival.

Drawing on sociological and leadership theories, including Bourdieu's (1986) symbolic capital, Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis, and the Peter Principle (Peter & Hull, 1969), the study explores how political skill, conformity, and performative behaviour often outweigh technical excellence in determining upward mobility. Prior research (Bozeman & Kacmar, 1997; Pfeffer, 1992) supports the argument that impression management and perceived loyalty often serve as decisive factors in promotion outcomes. In contrast, visible authenticity or critical engagement with organizational inefficiencies may lead to marginalization or professional stagnation.

To explore this dynamic, the research addresses the following questions:

1. How does strategic hypocrisy function as a mechanism of career advancement in hierarchical institutions?
2. What are the implications of this phenomenon for authentic leadership development in bureaucratic environments?

The study adopts a qualitative conceptual approach grounded in an interdisciplinary review of literature. Anonymised professional trajectories from within the French banking sector are analysed to exemplify contrasting paths, one guided by symbolic compliance and another by authentic engagement. The findings highlight how "The Strategist," a conformist professional, achieves promotion despite average performance, whereas "The Authentic Performer," a high-achieving employee, is denied advancement and ultimately exits the organization.

The analysis also considers the emotional and psychological costs of suppressing authenticity. Data from recent mental health reports in France reveal widespread stress and burnout in sectors that reward conformity (Arnal et al., 2023). These findings underscore that strategic hypocrisy may serve not only as a political strategy but also as a psychological coping mechanism. Sloterdijk's (1983) concept of "cynical reason" and analogies from evolutionary biology (Rajecki, 1982) support the idea that mimicry and role adaptation are survival strategies, not moral failures.

Finally, the study reflects on the tensions between strategic hypocrisy and authentic leadership theory (Walumbwa et al., 2008). While the latter promotes values of transparency, ethics, and relational integrity, it may be difficult to operationalize in rigid bureaucratic systems that reward conformity over innovation. Authentic leadership, therefore, risks remaining a privileged ideal for those with institutional power, rather than an accessible framework for employees lower in the hierarchy.

This research makes several contributions. Theoretically, it bridges leadership, sociology, and organizational psychology to explain why competence alone does not ensure upward mobility. Conceptually, it reframes hypocrisy as a form of adaptive capital rather than a moral shortcoming. Practically, it encourages leadership educators and HR practitioners to critically assess how conformity is rewarded and how leadership development programs can evolve to accommodate both authenticity and strategic adaptability.

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REDEFINING ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) has profoundly transformed the landscapes of modern businesses practices and instigated a rapid shift leadership, management and entrepreneurship. The growing integration of artificial intelligence into organisational function have transformed traditional management – which as a result, gained substantial attention from both researchers’ practitioners (Fang, 2023; Kaul et al., 2020). While, the emergence of this technological advancement has certain limitations, the surge in its application created several opportunities for business leaders across domains. For instance, the disruptive capabilities of artificial intelligence created novel entrepreneurial opportunities and entirely changed entrepreneurial process by redefining entrepreneurship (Fang, 2023). The use of generative AI has profoundly influenced the way entrepreneurial leaders conceptualise, sense, develop and scale new ventures in the age of artificial intelligence. These dynamic shifts brough emerging entrepreneurship models through digitalisation and AI development and integration.

These development have not only transformed the landscapes of modern businesses but also created unprecedented challenges for modern day leaders to cope with growing competition and transformation. Researchers called for redefine leadership practitioners and capabilities to sustain growing AI driven world (Bock and von der Oelsnitz, 2025). The recent scholarship highlight that organisations are adopting AI across sectors, has achieved more success as compared to following traditional paths (Tasnim, 2025). The leaders with entrepreneurial mindsets, creative capabilities, and proactive approach capitalised better entrepreneurial opportunities than traditional leadership styles (Bagheri and Harrison, 2020). These characteristics are broadly associated with entrepreneurial leadership – an emerging leadership paradigm.

Although entrepreneurial leadership as nuanced theoretical concept has gained increased scholarly attention, the existing literature remained fragmented and underdeveloped leaving several notable research gaps (Gupta et al., 2024). Particularly, the nexus of entrepreneurial leadership and evolving influence of AI – an interdisciplinary research area, has received limited scholarly discussion. Given the dramatic influence of AI on business environment, it worthwhile to explore the essential competencies of entrepreneurial leaders to navigate the challenges of complex, fast-paced, and uncertain business environment. To address this research gap, this research address following research questions

1. What competencies do entrepreneurial leaders need to possess to cope with challenges posed by AI-driven business environment.
2. How can leadership development programs be restructured to develop future entrepreneurial leaders who can ensure sustainability and resilience amid growing uncertainty?

To address the above research questions, the paper conducts a systematic literature review to forge a substantive link between the two disparate fields of entrepreneurial leadership and AI. The SLRs are particularly well suited for synthesising fragmented knowledge and building an evidence-informed understanding of nascent fields (Tranfield et al., 2003). This review aims to provide a consolidated view of the literature pertaining to leadership challenges and competencies in the age of AI. The intended review identifies key theoretical debates surrounding leadership and AI, challenges and influence of AI on leadership practices, identifies research gaps, and suggests directions for future research.

The SLR is conducted by following a three-step process as suggested by Tranfield et al. (2003). The review process comprise a comprehensive search of literature using keywords and search strings across major academic databases. Drawing on the insights of SLR, this study extract key findings to develop a comprehensive formworks by integrating artificial intelligence and its influence on entrepreneurial leadership practices. The synthesized framework outline essential competencies of entrepreneurial leaders and their development strategies in the context of AI.

This research makes important contributions to knowledge and practice. First, it advance the field of entrepreneurial leadership by developing its nexus with contemporary technological development – AI. This study extend entrepreneurial leadership development literature by identifying crucial entrepreneurial leadership competencies and its development in AI-driven environment (Ahmed and Harrison, 2022; Gupta et al., 2004; Renko et al., 2015). Drawing on the intersection of AI and leadership theories, this research proposes a synthesised model bridging leadership competencies, technological influence, and environmental adaptability (Northouse, 2021). The proposed model reframe leadership development theory by offering evidenced based insights that align leadership practices with requirement of volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) conditions (Bagheri & Harrison, 2020).

The paper offer crucial contribution to policy and practice. The evidence offer practical guidelines for academic institutions, corporations, and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to assess and redesign their leadership development strategies. The competency model tailored to AI era, helping entrepreneurial leaders across sectors to identify, assess, and cultivate essential skills to thrive in evolving technological era. The educators and policy makers can embed entrepreneurial leadership competencies into their leadership development frameworks for developing future leaders.

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HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANISATION IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

In today's evolving public sector landscape, employee performance remains a critical determinant of institutional success (Zulkifli et al., 2023). However, persistent anomalies in Human Resource Management Practices (HRMP) have contributed to declining productivity across Nigerian public sector organisations (Agboola et al., 2021; Anakpo et al., 2023). This study investigates the influence of HRMP specifically remote staffing, training and development, and employee engagement on employee performance, while also examining the moderating role of communication. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory (SET), the research explores how reciprocal organisational support fosters improved employee outcomes (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007).

Although HRMP has received considerable attention in management literature, existing studies remain fragmented and underdeveloped. Notably, the combined effect of HRMP sub-variables on employee performance in Nigeria's public sector has not been sufficiently explored (Permarupan et al., 2024; Kaushal et al., 2025). Furthermore, the moderating role of communication in enhancing HRMP effectiveness is under-researched (Sulaiman et al., 2023; Chmielecki, 2015). These gaps underscore the need for empirical evidence contextualised within Nigeria's unique public sector environment.

To address these gaps, this study answers the following research questions:

1. What is the combined effect of remote staffing, training and development, and employee engagement on employee performance in Nigerian public sector organisations?
2. What moderating effect does communication have on the relationship between HRMP and employee performance?

To address these questions, the study employed a quantitative research design, targeting middle management staff (Grade Levels 8–14) across five public sector organisations: NAICOM, PENCOM, NDIC, NIMASA, and the Nigerian Shippers' Council. A sample of 354 respondents was selected from a population of 4,545 using simple random sampling (Bashir & Venkatakrisnan, 2022; Orengo & Sanchez-Jauregui, 2022). Data were collected via structured Likert-scale questionnaires and analysed using SPSS through descriptive statistics, multiple regression, and hierarchical regression (Saunders et al., 2019; Burns & Burns, 2008).

Findings reveal that training and development ($\beta = 0.112$, $p < 0.05$) and employee engagement ($\beta = 0.333$, $p < 0.05$) significantly enhance employee performance, while remote staffing ($\beta = -0.016$) shows an insignificant and slightly negative effect. These results suggest that infrastructural and cultural challenges hinder the effectiveness of remote work in Nigeria's public sector (Veselova, 2022; Çivilidağ & Durmaz, 2024). The combined HRMP variables accounted for 39.3% of the variance in employee performance (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.393$), affirming their collective impact.

Communication was found to significantly moderate the relationship between HRMP and employee performance. Hierarchical regression analysis demonstrated that effective communication enhances transparency, trust, and engagement, thereby amplifying the impact of HRMP on performance (Darwis et al., 2021; Vermeir et al., 2018; Park & Raile, 2010). This aligns with prior studies highlighting communication's role in fostering organisational commitment and productivity (Jalagat, 2017; Folakemi & Olugbade, 2022).

Theoretically, the study reinforces SET by demonstrating that organisational investment in employee development and engagement fosters reciprocal performance gains (Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018; Vuong et al., 2022). Practically, it offers actionable insights for policymakers and HR practitioners to prioritise inclusive training programmes, robust engagement strategies, and transparent communication frameworks. These interventions are essential for enhancing employee performance and achieving strategic goals in Nigeria's public sector.

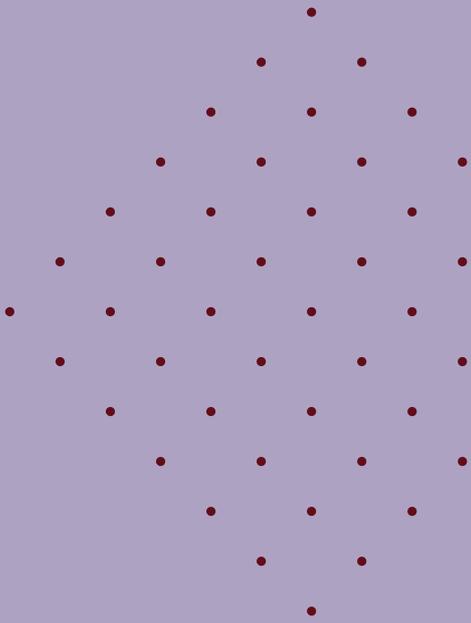
This research contributes to the literature by contextualising HRMP within the Nigerian public sector, offering empirical evidence and a conceptual model that underscores the interconnectedness of HR practices, communication, and performance. It lays the groundwork for future reforms and strategic HR interventions aimed at optimising public sector efficiency and effectiveness.

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RESEARCH PAPERS



UNPACKING BOARD DYNAMICS: HOW GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES SHAPE BANK PERFORMANCE IN VIETNAM

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of board structure on the performance of commercial banks in Vietnam, where empirical research remains limited despite growing interest in corporate governance. Drawing on agency theory and resource dependence theory, the study examines how specific board attributes—such as board size, composition, independence, CEO duality, gender diversity, and AI adoption—affect financial and operational outcomes. Addressing gaps in both global and local literature, the research employs a qualitative methodology, conducting ten in-depth interviews with senior executives, including CEOs, CFOs, and board members from public and private banks in Vietnam.

Thematic analysis, supported by NVivo software, is applied to analyze interview data and uncover patterns in board governance practices. The findings reveal mixed perceptions of board size, varying impacts of CEO duality, and differing views on the value of gender diversity and independent directors, especially in light of Vietnam's cultural and institutional context. The study also highlights the growing significance of AI acceptance and sustainability disclosure in shaping modern governance practices.

The research contributes to theory by situating board-performance relationships within the context of an emerging market. Practically, it provides strategic recommendations for bank executives and regulators striving to enhance governance effectiveness. Additionally, it guides policymakers by proposing governance reforms aligned with Vietnam's regulatory and economic development goals. The study emphasizes the need for locally adapted governance models that reflect the complexities of transitional economies.

Research problem/question:

The central research question is: How do board structure attributes affect the performance of commercial banks in Vietnam? Sub-questions include the specific impacts of board size, independence, CEO duality, gender diversity, and AI acceptance level, as well as sustainability disclosure, and the practical and policy strategies that can enhance board effectiveness and bank performance.

Research methods:

The study employs a qualitative research methodology utilizing semi-structured interviews with 10 senior executives (CEOs, CFOs, board members) from five private and five state-owned commercial banks in Vietnam. This sample size is validated by the concept of data saturation, where no new insights arise despite additional interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Data were gathered through purposive and snowball sampling. NVivo software was used to conduct thematic analysis of the interview data and identify patterns in board governance practices (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis enables the researcher to maintain analytical flexibility, making it an ideal approach for understanding how board structures operate and influence bank outcomes in Vietnam. This method is acknowledged for its rigor and reliability in organizational research (Nowell et al., 2017) and will ensure that findings are both systematic and rooted in real-world practices. The results reveal mixed perceptions of board size, varying effects of CEO duality, and different opinions on the value of gender diversity and independent directors, particularly within Vietnam's cultural and institutional context. The study also highlights the increasing significance of AI acceptance and sustainability disclosure in shaping modern governance practices.

Main results:

The study reveals varied perspectives on how board structure influences the performance of commercial banks in Vietnam. Board size generated mixed views; some participants believed larger boards brought diverse expertise, while others pointed out the risks of slow decision-making and reduced accountability. Board independence was recognized as valuable in principle but often undermined by informal relationships, especially in state-owned banks. CEO duality also showed conflicting opinions: some saw it as enabling strong leadership, while others raised concerns about power concentration and weak oversight. Gender diversity was acknowledged as beneficial but remains limited in practice. A new finding was the importance of AI acceptance at the board level, which appeared to enhance strategic responsiveness, especially in private banks. Notably, private banks were seen as more adaptive and performance-driven, while public banks prioritized compliance and stability.

Main implications:

The findings suggest that Vietnamese banks should pursue a board structure that balances diversity with agility. Boards need members who possess both governance expertise and digital awareness, particularly regarding AI and sustainability. Gender diversity and genuine independence should be enhanced to improve oversight. For policymakers, the study underscores the necessity of updating governance codes to address new challenges, including digital transformation and ESG expectations. Promoting training, transparency in appointments, and clearly defined roles for board members can enhance effectiveness. Stronger regulatory guidance on board independence and CEO duality would also support improved performance outcomes.

Keywords: Corporate governance, Board Structure, Banking sector, Vietnam

Introduction

The relationship between corporate governance and firm performance has attracted significant scholarly attention, particularly within economics and finance (Mateus & Belhaj, 2016; Olayinka, 2021). Among governance elements, the structure of the board of directors plays a pivotal role in shaping long-term organizational success, especially in the banking sector. However, despite global interest, inconsistencies persist in how board composition affects bank performance, particularly in emerging markets such as Vietnam. Many studies apply theoretical frameworks developed in advanced economies without adapting them to local contexts, limiting their relevance and explanatory power.

Empirical research on the link between board characteristics and financial performance, such as the works by Merendino & Melville (2019) and Saygili et al. (2022), remains relatively sparse, especially in developing countries. Vietnam's fast-evolving banking sector represents a critical research gap, where the board-performance relationship remains underexplored. This study addresses that gap by investigating how board structure influences the performance of Vietnamese commercial banks.

The governance role of boards, particularly the dual functions of the CEO and/or Chairperson, is both crucial and complex. Boards must not only monitor executives but also collaborate with them to shape the strategic direction (Langan et al., 2022). This dual role gives rise to the contentious issue of CEO duality, where the same person holds both CEO and Chair positions, a topic that has long sparked debate (Uyar et al., 2022). Yet, in Vietnam's banking sector, research examining this specific governance structure remains limited.

Research aim

This research seeks to analyze the effect of board structure on the performance of commercial banks in Vietnam.

Research objectives

To achieve the research aim, the study sets out to:

- Examine critical board structure characteristics including: board size, independence, composition, CEO duality, gender diversity, and AI acceptance level, sustainability disclosure and their roles in bank governance.
- Assess the influence of these attributes on financial performance using qualitative perspective.
- Recommend strategies to enhance board effectiveness in improving bank outcomes.
- Offer policy-level recommendations for refining board governance frameworks in Vietnam's banking industry.

Research questions

In line with the objectives, the study addresses the following questions:

RQ1: Which board attributes (e.g., size, independence, CEO duality, gender diversity, AI adoption, sustainability disclosure) most significantly impact commercial bank performance in Vietnam?

RQ2: How do these board characteristics influence banks' financial and operational results?

RQ3: What strategic improvements can strengthen board functioning and enhance performance?

RQ4: What governance and policy recommendations could improve board oversight in Vietnamese banks?

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, which is particularly well-suited for analyzing complex and context-dependent issues. Unlike quantitative methods, which rely on numerical data, qualitative research enables a deeper exploration of subjective experiences and institutional practices (Flick, 2014; Fitzpatrick, 2020). This flexibility is particularly beneficial when conducting interviews with experts in the banking sector, as it offers rich, detailed insights (Smith & Sparkes, 2016).

Ten in-depth interviews will be conducted with senior bank executives, including board members, CEOs, CFOs, and Chairpersons. This sample size is justified by the concept of data saturation, where no new insights emerge despite additional interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Research suggests that between 5 and 15 participants are often sufficient for thematic analysis in focused qualitative studies. Selecting experienced leaders ensures that responses will be contextually relevant and insightful.

NVivo software will be used to support data management and analysis. The study will apply thematic analysis, a widely accepted method for identifying, interpreting, and reporting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis enables the researcher to maintain analytical flexibility, making it an ideal approach for understanding how the board structure functions and impacts bank outcomes in Vietnam. This method is recognized for its rigor and reliability in organizational research (Nowell et al., 2017), ensuring that findings are both systematic and grounded in real-world practices.

Research Contribution

This study aims to contribute on three fronts:

- Theoretical Contribution: It adds to the limited literature on corporate governance in Vietnam, offering insights into how board structures relate to performance in the commercial banking sector.
- Practical Contribution: The findings are expected to inform banking professionals and boards about structural attributes that enhance performance, and the proposed model may be applicable to other financial institutions.
- Policy Contribution: The study could guide regulators in refining corporate governance codes and practices by offering evidence-based recommendations tailored to the Vietnamese context.

Corporate Governance

Corporate governance refers to the structure and processes by which companies are directed and controlled (Tihanyi et al., 2014). Key players include the board of directors, shareholders, and auditors, all of whom ensure the firm's strategic oversight and direction. Shleifer and Vishny (1997) emphasize governance as the mechanism by which capital providers ensure returns on their investments. Governance is especially critical in mitigating agency conflicts, disputes arising from misaligned goals and limited transparency among stakeholders (McCahery et al., 2016).

Corporate governance mechanisms are typically categorized into internal and external controls (Sardo & Serrasqueiro, 2017). Internal governance refers to structures such as board composition and ownership, whereas external governance encompasses institutional factors, including legal frameworks and market regulations (Lu & Wang, 2021). Since this study focuses on Vietnam, a single-country context, the emphasis is on internal mechanisms, particularly board characteristics.

Board of Directors

The board serves a central function in supervising management and resolving agency problems. According to agency theory, conflicts arise when managers (agents) act in their own interest rather than in alignment with shareholders (principals), leading to costs such as monitoring, bonding, and residual losses (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). A strong board reduces such costs by overseeing executives and strategic decisions (Liu & Fong, 2010).

The board holds authority to appoint or dismiss top management, authorize key actions, and ensure alignment with shareholder interests (Fama & Jensen, 1983). An independent board is widely regarded as a cornerstone of effective governance, providing objective oversight (Fama, 1980). Resource dependence theory suggests that boards can align firms with their external environments by providing access to resources and networks (Solomon, 2010).

Key indicators of board effectiveness include director diversity, integrity, and risk awareness (Walker, 2005; Ingley & Walt, 2002). Director roles are typically classified into control, advisory, and resource-access functions (Johnson & Daily, 1996). Non-executive directors (NEDs) strengthen independence and internal monitoring, especially in succession planning and CEO oversight (Hermalin & Weisbach, 1988). The presence of NEDs can mitigate managerial dominance and improve performance.

To maintain a balance of power, separating the roles of CEO and board chair (avoiding CEO duality) is often recommended. A proportion of at least one-third NEDs enhances board independence. Thus, in this study, board size, CEO duality, and the share of NEDs are selected as primary board structure variables.

Board Size and Bank Performance

A widely debated aspect of board structure is its size. Larger boards are thought to incorporate broader expertise and diverse perspectives, which could enhance decision-making and oversight. However, empirical evidence challenges this assumption. Larger boards may suffer from diminished coordination and increased difficulty in reaching consensus, reducing their effectiveness in monitoring management (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Lipton & Lorsch, 1992). Jensen (1993) suggested that beyond seven or eight members, boards tend to be less efficient, incurring higher monitoring costs.

Agency theory posits that an increase in board size exacerbates the free-rider problem among directors (Hermalin & Weisbach, 1998). This leads to more symbolic involvement in governance rather than active oversight. Additional research by Puni and Anlesinya (2020) and Alabdullah et al. (2019) noted that large boards can hinder swift decision-making and suppress innovative contributions due to internal conflicts and diluted accountability.

In contrast, the resource dependence theory advocates for larger boards, highlighting their external networks and adaptability during periods of instability (Goodstein et al., 1994). Arosa et al. (2010) argue that broader membership brings richer knowledge and enhanced access to external resources. However, Yermack (1996) found an inverse correlation between board size and firm value, suggesting that there are diminishing returns from oversized boards. In the Vietnamese context, where power tends to be centralized and participatory governance is limited, larger boards may compound inefficiencies (Truong et al., 1998; Duc & Thuy, 2013).

Board Independence and Bank Performance

Independent directors are considered vital in mitigating agency issues by providing unbiased oversight and ensuring transparency. Muchiri and Njoka (2021) asserted that firms with more independent directors face lower risks of financial distress. Likewise, Adams and Jiang (2016) demonstrated that independent directors can reduce agency costs through their monitoring role and improve value for both shareholders and creditors. However, not all studies support a direct impact on performance. Duc and Thuy (2013) found no significant relationship between board independence and performance among Vietnamese firms.

Adams and Jiang (2016) also found that while independence improves governance, financial performance is more strongly tied to financial expertise rather than independence alone. Conversely, Naseem et al. (2017) reported a negative correlation between board independence and performance, suggesting that unqualified independent directors may dilute board effectiveness.

Vietnam's corporate landscape, characterized by concentrated ownership and family ties, poses additional challenges for the effectiveness of independent directors. Relationships between independent directors and dominant shareholders may compromise objectivity, undermining governance quality. Thus, while independence is widely regarded as essential, its impact in Vietnam requires closer scrutiny.

CEO Duality and Bank Performance

CEO duality refers to the scenario in which one individual occupies both the CEO and board chair roles. Agency theory critiques this dual role, arguing it compromises board independence and leads to unchecked managerial power (Jensen, 1993). On the other hand, stewardship theory contends that combining these roles fosters unified leadership and strategic coherence (Finkelstein & D'Aveni, 1994).

Empirical findings are divided. Boyd (1995) argued that CEO duality improves performance in competitive markets, while Duru et al. (2016) and Trang (2016) found negative correlations due to conflicts of interest and weakened oversight. In Vietnam, results are similarly inconsistent: Duc and Thuy (2013) reported a positive relationship, whereas Trang (2016) observed adverse effects on financial outcomes.

Given Vietnam's evolving regulatory environment and cultural preference for centralized authority, CEO duality may offer operational benefits at the expense of governance quality. Consequently, this structure requires critical evaluation within Vietnam's banking sector.

Gender Diversity and Bank Performance

Gender diversity in corporate governance has been increasingly recognized as a factor influencing the quality of decision-making and risk management. Bear et al. (2010), Harjoto et al. (2015), and Issa and Fang (2019) argued that gender-diverse boards provide more comprehensive oversight due to varying experiences and perspectives. Issa, Zaid, and Hanaysha (2022) observed that female directors' human capital, education, social influence, and professional expertise significantly support sustainability initiatives.

Within the Vietnamese context, however, findings remain mixed. Some view gender diversity as a symbolic gesture with limited impact on core financial performance, while others link it to improved governance and risk management. The nuanced perspectives between public and private banks further reflect differing expectations and operational goals regarding diversity.

Board AI Acceptance and Bank Performance

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes embedded in banking, board-level attitudes toward AI adoption can influence strategic decisions, operational efficiency, and long-term competitiveness. Kaur et al. (2020) emphasized the role of AI in streamlining operations, reducing costs, and enhancing customer experiences. In Vietnam, the banking industry is gradually incorporating AI into core functions, such as risk management, customer service, and data analytics (Jewandah, 2018). User acceptance is crucial to realizing the full benefits of technology. Boards that endorse AI integration are more likely to enable innovation and agility in responding to market changes. The literature, however, lacks a comprehensive analysis of how the board's openness to AI directly affects financial performance, particularly in Vietnam, where tech adoption remains uneven.

Sustainability Disclosure and Bank Performance

Sustainability disclosure involves reporting a company's impact on economic, environmental, and social dimensions, aligning with stakeholder theory, which mandates transparency and accountability (Nobanee & Ellili, 2016). Despite global emphasis on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) reporting, empirical studies in the banking sector remain limited. Halabi and Samy (2009) found that banks often favor qualitative over quantitative disclosures, especially in developing markets.

Research by Sobhani et al. (2012) comparing Islamic and conventional banks in Bangladesh found that Islamic banks tend to disclose more on sustainability issues. In Vietnam, regulatory emphasis on ESG practices is rising, but the link between disclosure and bank performance remains underexplored. A proactive board that supports sustainability disclosure may not only enhance reputation but also promote long-term profitability.

3. Research methods

Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, selected for its ability to explore complex, context-specific phenomena. While quantitative and mixed methods were considered, they were not well-suited to uncover the nuanced interpretations, values, and practices of corporate governance in a transitional economy like Vietnam. In emerging markets, governance structures are often shaped by informal norms, political relationships, and internal hierarchies, factors that cannot be easily captured through numerical data alone. Therefore, a qualitative approach allows the researcher to gain deeper insights into how board members and executives perceive and enact governance responsibilities in practice.

By focusing on subjective interpretations, this method facilitates the examination of how governance frameworks are experienced, challenged, and adapted by individuals in leadership positions. The qualitative lens is particularly valuable in the Vietnamese context, where formal rules may be present, but implementation often varies based on interpersonal dynamics and cultural expectations. Thus, qualitative research is both appropriate and necessary to examine the real-world governance practices that influence bank performance.

Data Collection Strategy

To gather relevant data, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary method of data collection. This approach is widely recognized for its ability to produce rich and detailed insights, especially when exploring complex organizational behaviors and executive perspectives (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Semi-structured interviews strike a balance between structure and flexibility. They allow the researcher to maintain a coherent line of inquiry while also exploring emerging topics through follow-up questions and probes (Kallio et al., 2016).

The interview guide used in this study was developed through a two-step process. First, a comprehensive review of the literature helped identify key themes, including board composition, AI adoption, and sustainability disclosure. Second, this draft was evaluated by governance scholars and industry experts, whose feedback was used to refine the clarity, flow, and relevance of the questions. The final guide facilitated structured yet open conversations, enabling the exploration of participant insights in both depth and breadth.

This design enabled the real-time adaptation of the conversation, allowing interviewers to delve into interesting or unexpected areas that arose. It also ensured consistency across interviews, allowing for meaningful comparison while respecting the individual experiences of each participant.

Sampling Design and Participant Selection

The sample consisted of senior executives from ten commercial banks in Vietnam, comprising five public and five private banks, selected from a total of 31 institutions nationwide. The study adopted a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling ensured that selected individuals met specific criteria: participants needed to be current or former board members, CEOs, CFOs, or C-suite executives with at least five years of direct involvement in governance-related roles. This selection criterion was crucial in securing respondents who possessed both strategic oversight and operational experience relevant to the study.

Snowball sampling was subsequently used to access additional qualified participants through professional referrals. This method proved especially useful in the Vietnamese context, where access to high-level executives is often restricted due to organizational hierarchies and confidentiality practices. Personal referrals helped establish credibility and trust, encouraging more candid and reflective discussions during the interviews.

The researcher's background in Vietnam's banking sector also facilitated initial access, reinforcing trust and enhancing the authenticity of the data. This dual sampling method effectively navigated cultural sensitivities and institutional access barriers, ensuring the participation of highly knowledgeable individuals.

Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis as the primary method for interpreting the qualitative data. Thematic analysis enables the identification and examination of recurring patterns and meaningful themes within textual data, while offering analytical flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach was chosen for its compatibility with the study's objectives and its adaptability to exploratory research in under-researched settings, such as Vietnam.

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-step model. First, the researcher became familiar with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and preliminary note-taking. Next, initial codes were generated using NVivo software, which allowed systematic categorization of key concepts. These codes were then reviewed and grouped into broader themes reflecting dimensions of board governance, such as board independence, gender diversity, and CEO duality.

Themes were subsequently reviewed and refined to ensure internal coherence and alignment with the research questions. Once finalized, themes were clearly named and described, forming the basis for a coherent narrative. The analysis was supported by direct participant quotes, which were used to illustrate key findings and preserve the authenticity of respondents' voices.

NVivo software enhanced the analytical process by enabling efficient organization, coding, and visualization of data. The tool also ensured transparency and consistency throughout the interpretation process. Thematic analysis's flexibility further allowed the researcher to blend inductive and deductive reasoning, developing themes both from the data and in relation to existing theoretical frameworks.

Constructing Meaning from the Data

Understanding in qualitative research emerges through an iterative process of interpretation and reflection. As emphasized by Yazan (2015), data analysis involves more than just organizing information; it is about discovering patterns within what initially appears to be unstructured. Through active engagement with the material and conceptual openness, the researcher was able to uncover key insights related to the social, cultural, and organizational factors influencing governance in Vietnamese banks.

This sense-making process requires not only technical rigor but also sensitivity to context, as meanings are often embedded in cultural and institutional subtleties. Interpretation, therefore, involved not only recognizing patterns but also understanding why these patterns emerged and how they reflected the broader context of corporate governance in Vietnam.

4. Results and discussion

Participant Profile Overview

The 10 interviewees in this study represent a well-diversified sample, strengthening the reliability and depth of qualitative analysis. Below is the consolidated table of interviewee demographics based on the profiles from the provided interviews, followed by a brief analysis:

Table 1: Interview respondent summary

Interviewee ID	Gender	Age	Work Sector	Position	Years in Banking	Years at Current Bank
P01	Female	38	Private Sector	CFO	16	2
P02	Male	40	Private Sector	Director	18	3
P03	Male	42	Private Sector	Director	20	4
P04	Female	54	Private Sector	Branch Manager	20	10
P05	Female	43	Private Sector	Deputy Branch	18	1
P06	Male	60	State Sector	Director	36	36
P07	Male	40	State Sector	Member of the	18	18
P08	Male	60	State Sector	Member of the	25	5
P09	Male	41	Private Sector	Director	18	17
P10	Male	55	State Sector	Member of the	25	10

The diversity of their backgrounds, encompassing gender, age, work sector, leadership positions, and years of experience, ensures that the insights gathered are comprehensive and reflective of varied perspectives within Vietnam's banking sector.

Qualitative Data Processing and Analysis

The qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews were analyzed using NVivo 14 software to ensure systematic thematic coding and robust pattern identification. All interviews were transcribed verbatim to preserve authenticity. Once cleaned and anonymized, the transcripts were imported into NVivo to begin the coding process.

Themes were initially identified through open coding, followed by axial coding to cluster related concepts into broader categories. These categories aligned with the study's focus on board structure attributes, namely, board size, independence, CEO duality, gender diversity, AI acceptance, and sustainability disclosure. Each theme was examined both within individual interviews and across cases to capture convergences and divergences in opinion. NVivo's visualization tools, such as node frequency and matrix coding, further assisted in mapping relationships among codes, enhancing thematic coherence and analytical rigor.

The final stage involved interpreting the findings in relation to the research questions, using direct quotations to provide illustrative depth and support thematic clarity.

Analysis of Key Themes

Board Size and Performance Implications

Board size emerged as a nuanced theme, with no universal agreement on whether a larger or smaller board leads to better performance. Several interviewees from private banks believed that compact boards enhance responsiveness and cohesion, especially in rapidly changing environments. As one CFO from a private bank noted, “Smaller boards move faster. We can align quickly on decisions, particularly when the market shifts.”

Conversely, public-sector respondents often valued the diversity of expertise that larger boards provide. A state-owned bank’s board member emphasized, “Having a bigger board allows us to cover more ground, risk, compliance, policy but yes, sometimes it slows down urgent decisions.” This reflects the classic trade-off in governance literature: larger boards offer varied skills and stakeholder representation, but may impede agility.

The findings suggest that while board size alone does not directly determine performance, its effect is mediated by contextual factors such as sector type, governance maturity, and strategic priorities.

CEO Duality: Perceptions and Consequences

Opinions on CEO duality where the CEO also serves as board chair, were similarly divided. Some respondents advocated for separation of roles to preserve checks and balances, arguing that consolidation of power undermines board independence. As one director from a private bank observed, “When one person wears both hats, there’s less challenge to executive decisions, and it risks turning governance into rubber-stamping.”

However, other respondents believed that CEO duality streamlines leadership and provides a clear vision. This was especially evident in banks undergoing digital transformation, where swift strategic execution was considered essential. A public-sector board member defended duality by stating, “Sometimes, having one clear leader speeds things up, especially when facing digital disruptions.”

Overall, the interviews underscore that the effectiveness of CEO duality depends on the strength of other governance mechanisms and the maturity of organizational culture.

Gender Diversity and Strategic Value

Gender diversity on boards was seen as a critical factor in promoting balanced decision-making, though female representation remained low. Female leaders in the study emphasized the added value that gender-diverse boards bring, particularly in terms of empathy, risk sensitivity, and collaborative communication. A female branch manager noted, “Our input often focuses on long-term relationships, customer trust, and team cohesion.”

In contrast, some male respondents acknowledged the symbolic value of gender diversity but downplayed its impact on performance. “It looks good in reports,” one remarked, “but I’m not sure it changes outcomes unless women are truly empowered in decision-making.”

The interviews reflect an evolving recognition of gender equity in leadership, but also highlight the persistence of tokenism. The study suggests that the presence of women alone is insufficient, true impact depends on influence, voice, and inclusion in core decisions.

Independent Directors and Monitoring Role

There was consensus across participants that independent directors are vital for reducing conflicts of interest and improving oversight. However, implementation challenges persist. Many interviewees expressed concern that independent directors in state-owned banks are often appointed to satisfy legal requirements, with limited involvement in strategic governance.

One senior leader noted, “In name, they are independent. But in practice, they’re aligned with major shareholders or political interests.” By contrast, private-sector banks were more likely to select independent directors for their domain expertise, particularly in finance and technology. These directors were seen as “value-adding advisors” who challenged executive assumptions and brought market perspectives into the boardroom.

The interviews suggest that board independence must go beyond formal status, it requires real authority, clarity of role, and accountability.

AI Acceptance Among Board Members

The role of AI in bank governance is emerging as a significant theme, especially among younger and private-sector respondents. These participants highlighted the growing importance of AI tools in risk management, customer analytics, and compliance monitoring. “AI helps us reduce errors, predict risks, and make faster credit decisions,” remarked one private bank director.

However, skepticism persists, particularly among senior leaders with limited digital exposure. A state-sector board member admitted, “We still rely on traditional reporting, AI feels like a black box. There’s trust to build.”

The findings indicate that the effectiveness of AI integration hinges on the board’s digital literacy and openness to change. Training and onboarding programs may be necessary to bridge the generational and technological divide in boardrooms.

Sustainability Disclosure: Ethics Meets Strategy

Sustainability disclosure was universally acknowledged as beneficial, though motivations varied by gender. Male participants emphasized its strategic importance in building investor trust and meeting regulatory expectations. “Transparent ESG reporting gives us credibility with long-term investors,” one male board member explained.

Female respondents, meanwhile, viewed sustainability as a customer engagement tool. A female manager stated, “Customers today care about our environmental and social practices. It builds loyalty.” These perspectives reveal that sustainability serves dual roles: it satisfies investor scrutiny while also enhancing customer retention.

Together, the interviews highlight that robust sustainability disclosure enhances both reputation and operational alignment, reinforcing bank performance through trust-building and differentiation.

Summary of Key Insights

The qualitative findings reveal that no single attribute of board structure unilaterally dictates commercial bank performance in Vietnam. Instead, performance outcomes are shaped by the interplay of various board characteristics: size, independence, diversity, role clarity, and digital readiness, in relation to contextual factors such as sector norms, regulatory environment, and institutional culture.

Crucially, the interviews expose gaps between governance theory and on-the-ground practices, particularly in public-sector banks. While principles such as board independence and gender diversity are widely endorsed, their practical execution is often hindered by entrenched norms, regulatory ambiguity, or limited empowerment.

This part illustrates that effective governance requires more than structural compliance. It demands intentional leadership, skill development, and cultural transformation to align board attributes with strategic objectives and stakeholder expectations. The findings set the stage for further analysis and recommendations in the subsequent part.

5. Conclusion, limitations, and implications

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the relationship between board structure attributes and the performance of commercial banks in Vietnam, with particular emphasis on six dimensions: board size, board independence, CEO duality, gender diversity, AI technology acceptance, and sustainability disclosure. Using a qualitative research design and semi-structured interviews with senior leaders from both public and private commercial banks, the study provided rich, context-specific insights into how these governance elements influence institutional performance within an emerging economy.

The findings underscore that no single board attribute acts as a universal determinant of performance. Instead, the impact of board structure is shaped by the organizational context, cultural factors, leadership orientation, and sectoral dynamics. Board size, for instance, offered a classic trade-off between diversity of expertise and operational efficiency. While smaller boards in private banks enabled faster decision-making, larger boards in public institutions provided broader oversight, albeit at the cost of agility. Similarly, opinions on CEO duality revealed competing values: unity of leadership versus independent oversight.

Gender diversity is recognized as an asset for inclusive decision-making; however, its strategic impact remains limited by low female representation and systemic gender norms. Independent directors were widely regarded as crucial for oversight; however, their practical effectiveness was hindered by their affiliations with controlling stakeholders, particularly in state-owned banks. The integration of AI tools and the embrace of sustainability reporting represented emerging trends, with younger executives and private banks more enthusiastic about leveraging these for strategic advantage.

These findings contribute to the growing literature on corporate governance in emerging markets, reaffirming that governance effectiveness is not solely a function of formal structures. It requires an enabling culture, institutional integrity, and the willingness of leaders to transcend compliance in favor of faithful stewardship.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the value of the findings, the study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the use of qualitative methodology, while advantageous for gaining an in-depth understanding, limits the generalizability of the results. The insights are context-specific and shaped by the perspectives of a relatively small, purposively selected sample of ten banking executives. As such, caution must be exercised in extrapolating the conclusions to the broader population of Vietnamese banks or institutions in other emerging markets.

Second, participant responses may be influenced by social desirability or organizational loyalty. Given their senior positions, respondents might have framed their answers to align with their institution's preferred narrative or avoided sharing more critical perspectives. Although the anonymity of the interviews was assured, the hierarchical culture in Vietnam may still constrain full disclosure, especially on sensitive topics like power dynamics and regulatory weaknesses.

Third, the study primarily focused on internal governance mechanisms and did not extensively address the influence of external governance variables, such as regulatory changes, ownership concentration, or legal enforcement. These external factors undoubtedly shape board effectiveness and institutional performance, especially in transitional economies where regulatory enforcement may be inconsistent or politically influenced.

Finally, while the thematic analysis captured patterns across participants, it did not triangulate with quantitative data on actual performance metrics such as return on assets, loan default rates, or ESG ratings. A mixed-methods design might have offered stronger empirical support to validate or challenge participant perceptions.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Despite its limitations, the study offers important implications for both practitioners and policymakers in the Vietnamese banking sector. For bank leaders and board members, the findings highlight the need to move beyond symbolic compliance with governance codes and focus instead on substantive improvements in board dynamics. This includes ensuring that independent directors are empowered to challenge management decisions, enhancing digital literacy to integrate AI tools responsibly, and promoting meaningful gender diversity not just in numbers but in influence.

At the organizational level, banks should invest in board development programs to equip directors with strategic, technological, and ethical competencies. The evolving landscape of financial services, shaped by digital transformation, ESG mandates, and stakeholder capitalism, requires boards to be more adaptive, informed, and collaborative.

For policymakers and regulators, the study underscores the importance of refining corporate governance codes to reflect the realities of Vietnam's banking sector. Formal requirements should be accompanied by clearer enforcement mechanisms and incentives that promote genuine transparency, board independence, and inclusive leadership. Regulatory bodies could also facilitate training and certification programs for board members, particularly in emerging domains such as AI governance and sustainability reporting.

In conclusion, this study reaffirms the central role of board governance in shaping bank performance, while advocating for a more dynamic, context-sensitive approach to reform. As Vietnam's banking sector continues to evolve, strengthening board practices with attention to cultural realities and strategic foresight will be crucial for enhancing institutional resilience and stakeholder trust.

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CSR DISCLOSURE, FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE, AND FIRM VALUE: EVIDENCE FROM THE VIETNAMESE BANKING SECTOR

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) disclosure and financial performance on firm value in the Vietnamese banking sector. The sample consists of sustainability reports, annual reports, and audited consolidated financial statements from 25 banks engaged in CSR activities during 2016–2023. To address issues of heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation commonly present in panel data, the Feasible Generalized Least Squares (FGLS) method was employed, ensuring efficient and reliable estimation that aligns with the research objectives of capturing both financial and non-financial determinants of firm value. The results reveal that return on assets (ROA), firm age (AGE), and net profit margin (NPM) positively influence firm value, while return on equity (ROE) exerts a negative effect. The positive impact of ROA and AGE suggests that efficient use of assets and accumulated reputation enhance market confidence, whereas the negative role of ROE indicates investor concerns that high profitability may be driven by excessive leverage. The insignificance of CSR expenditure, CSR reporting quality, and revenue growth implies that CSR in Vietnamese banks remains largely compliance-driven and not yet strategically embedded in ways that directly translate into firm value. These findings contribute to theory by clarifying the CSR–performance–value nexus in an emerging market context where financial indicators remain the dominant drivers of firm value. For practice, the study provides guidance for bank managers to prioritize sustainable asset efficiency while integrating CSR more strategically into their core operations. For policymakers, the results highlight the need to strengthen CSR frameworks to ensure that disclosures move beyond compliance and generate tangible benefits for both financial stability and sustainable development.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility. CSR Expenditure. Financial Performance. Firm Value. Return on Assets (ROA). Return on Equity (ROE).

INTRODUCTION

The global economy has achieved remarkable progress in science, technology, healthcare, and education, significantly improving human well-being. However, these advancements have been accompanied by pressing global challenges, including climate change, environmental degradation, social inequality, and political instability. These issues have reinforced the importance of sustainable development and corporate social responsibility (CSR) as essential components of long-term economic growth and organizational resilience.

Within the financial sector, and particularly in banking, CSR plays a critical role. Banks act as key intermediaries in mobilizing and allocating financial resources, and their credibility depends heavily on transparency, accountability, and social trust. CSR disclosure is therefore increasingly regarded not only as an ethical commitment but also as a strategic tool that can strengthen a firm's reputation, attract customers, improve access to capital, and ultimately enhance firm value. At the same time, financial performance—measured through indicators such as return on assets (ROA), return on equity (ROE), revenue growth (RG), and net profit margin (NPM)—remains a central determinant of operational efficiency and profitability. The interaction between CSR and financial performance suggests a reciprocal relationship that may significantly shape firm value, particularly in the banking industry.

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between CSR, financial performance, and firm value in different contexts (e.g., Wu & Shen, 2013; El Ghoul et al., 2017; Lee & Lee, 2019; Li & Li, 2019; Persakis & Al-Jallad, 2024), providing both theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence. In Vietnam, prior research has also contributed to this literature (e.g., Chau Thi Le Duyen et al., 2014; Cherian et al., 2019; Nguyen Hong Thu et al., 2023), yet comprehensive analyses focusing specifically on the banking sector remain limited. In particular, little is known about how CSR disclosure and financial performance jointly influence firm value in Vietnamese banks, despite the sector's central role in the economy and increasing pressure to comply with environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the impact of CSR disclosure and financial performance on firm value in Vietnamese banks from 2016 to 2023, using sustainability reports, annual reports, and audited consolidated financial statements of 25 banks. Unlike many previous studies, it applies the Feasible Generalized Least Squares (FGLS) method, which is particularly suitable for panel data prone to heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation. The use of FGLS ensures more efficient and reliable estimates, thereby strengthening the validity of the findings and their relevance for both academic research and policy debates. The study contributes by extending empirical evidence on the CSR–performance–value nexus in an emerging market context and by offering practical insights for bank managers and policymakers in aligning CSR strategies with financial objectives to foster sustainable development.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data and Sample Selection:

This study is based on secondary panel data collected from sustainability reports, annual reports, and audited consolidated financial statements of 25 Vietnamese banks over the period 2016–2023. The sample was selected according to the following criteria: (i) banks must have been established and operating continuously during the study period; (ii) they must have published CSR or sustainability (ESG) reports between 2016 and 2023; (iii) CSR information must be consistently available for the entire period; and (iv) both financial and non-financial data must be sufficient for measuring the research variables. The choice of banks to disclose their CSR ensures the reliability and practical relevance of the dataset, as these reports are typically prepared in accordance with recognized international standards, such as GRI or IFC.

Research Model

To examine the effect of CSR disclosure and financial performance on firm value, the following panel regression model was employed:

$$TQ = a_0 + a_1ROA + a_2ROE + a_3RG + a_4NPM + a_5AGE + a_6CSRS + a_7CSRSP + eit$$

where Tobin's Q (TQ) represents firm value, and ROA, ROE, RG, NPM, AGE, CSR expenditure (CSRS), and CSR reporting score (CSRSP) are the independent variables.

Variable Measurement

Table 1 summarizes the measurement of variables used in the model.

Table 1. Variable Definitions and Measurements

Variable	Abbreviation	Measurement
Firm Value (Tobin's Q)	TQ	(Market value of common equity + Preferred equity + Long-term debt) / Book value of assets
Return on Assets	ROA	Net income / Total assets
Return on Equity	ROE	Net income / Shareholders' equity
Revenue Growth	RG	(Current revenue – Previous revenue) / Previous revenue
Net Profit Margin	NPM	Net income / Net sales
Firm Age	AGE	Number of years in operation
CSR Spending	CSRS	Logarithm of CSR expenditure
CSR Reporting Score	CSRSP	ENV + SOC + CG + ER + MAN

RESULTS

Table 2 summarizes the FGLS regression results for two models, where CSR is measured by expenditure (CSRS) and reporting score (CSRP). Both models demonstrate high explanatory power, with R-squared values of approximately 0.94.

Table 2. FGLS regression results

Variable	FGLS1 (CSRS)	p-value	FGLS2 (CSRP)	p-value
ROA	14.91	< 0.001 ***	14.92	< 0.001 ***
ROE	- 0.77	< 0.001 ***	- 0.84	< 0.001 ***
RG	0.0068	0.638	0.0083	0.786
NPM	- 0.044	0.004 **	- 0.043	0.005 **
AGE	0.0171	0.046 *	0.0195	< 0.001 ***
CSR	0.0086	0.744	- 0.0035	0.269
R ²	0.935		0.936	

Profitability indicators

Return on assets (ROA) shows a strong and positive effect on firm value across both models ($p < 0.001$), confirming Hypothesis H1. This result highlights the importance of asset efficiency in banking, where the ability to generate sustainable profits from existing resources is highly valued by investors. Similar conclusions were reported by Bidhari et al. (2013), Gamayun (2015), and Pham (2022).

Conversely, return on equity (ROE) is negative and significant ($p < 0.001$), contradicting Hypothesis H2. This aligns with Harahap et al. (2020) and Akash et al. (2023), who argue that high ROE may reflect excessive leverage, raising concerns over financial risk and the sustainability of profits. Investors may discount firm value when profitability is achieved at the expense of stability.

Growth and efficiency

Revenue growth (RG) is insignificant in both models, suggesting that sales expansion alone is not a determinant of firm value in the banking sector. This supports Ulfa & Prasetyo (2018) and Dang et al. (2019), who found similar results in emerging markets. Net profit margin (NPM), while statistically significant, has a negative coefficient, contradicting Hypothesis H4. This may reflect the short-term or volatile nature of profits in banking, where higher margins do not necessarily translate into long-term value creation.

Firm characteristics and CSR

Firm age (AGE) is positively associated with firm value, significant at both the 5% and 1% levels, contrary to Hypothesis H5. Unlike earlier studies suggesting a negative relationship (Chay et al., 2015; Putri, 2017), this finding may reflect the banking sector's reliance on reputation, trust, and stability. Older banks often benefit from established customer bases and credibility, which are rewarded by the market.

CSR expenditure (CSRS) and CSR reporting score (CSRP) are both statistically insignificant. These results suggest that CSR activities, whether measured by spending or disclosure quality, have not yet translated into measurable market value for Vietnamese banks. Prior studies (e.g., Margaretha et al., 2016; Erwin & Dalimunthe, 2018) similarly found limited or short-term effects of CSR on firm performance. This may indicate that CSR in Vietnam remains largely compliance-driven or reputational, with benefits that are long-term and indirect.

Summary

Taken together, the results indicate that traditional financial indicators—particularly ROA—are the strongest drivers of firm value in Vietnamese banks. ROE, AGE, and NPM also exert significant effects, though not always in the expected direction. In contrast, CSR-related variables show no significant impact, underscoring the need for more strategic integration of CSR into core banking practices if it is to contribute meaningfully to firm value.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the impact of CSR disclosure and financial performance on firm value in the Vietnamese banking sector using panel data from 25 banks during 2016–2023. By applying the Feasible Generalized Least Squares (FGLS) method, the analysis accounted for heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation, producing efficient and reliable estimates of the determinants of firm value. Two models were estimated, one using CSR expenditure (CSRS) and the other CSR reporting score (CSRP), both demonstrating high explanatory power with R-squared values of approximately 0.94.

The results highlight four significant determinants of firm value: return on assets (ROA), return on equity (ROE), firm age (AGE), and net profit margin (NPM). ROA shows a consistently strong and positive effect ($p < 0.001$), with coefficients close to 14.9, emerging as the most influential predictor and confirming Hypothesis H1. This indicates that banks capable of efficiently generating profit from their asset base are rewarded by the market, reflecting sustainable operational performance and effective resource utilization. Such findings align with previous studies (Bidhari et al., 2013; Gamayun, 2015; Pham, 2022) and underscore the primacy of profitability efficiency in emerging markets.

By contrast, ROE exerts a significant negative effect ($p < 0.001$), contradicting Hypothesis H2. Consistent with Harahap et al. (2020) and Akash et al. (2023), this suggests that high ROE may sometimes result from leverage amplification rather than sustainable profitability, raising investor concerns about long-term stability. This highlights that profitability derived from excessive debt may diminish firm value rather than enhance it.

Firm age (AGE) also shows a positive and significant impact on firm value, contradicting prior expectations (Hypothesis H5). This result indicates that longevity in the banking sector signals accumulated reputation, customer trust, and institutional stability, which are positively interpreted by the market. However, in today's competitive digital environment, older banks must complement their established credibility with innovation and adaptability to sustain long-term value.

Net profit margin (NPM), while statistically significant, carries a negative sign, contradicting Hypothesis H4. This paradox may reflect structural characteristics of the banking sector, where higher margins could be linked to short-term or unsustainable practices rather than to long-term value creation. Previous research has also produced mixed findings (Harahap et al., 2020; Kasman & Utami, 2023; Peranginangin, 2019), supporting the notion that NPM is not always a reliable indicator of market valuation in banking.

In contrast, revenue growth (RG), CSR expenditure (CSRS), and CSR reporting quality (CSRP) show no significant effect on firm value. This suggests that sales expansion alone does not necessarily translate into market value, and CSR initiatives in Vietnam remain largely compliance-driven rather than strategically embedded. Consistent with Margaretha et al. (2016) and Erwin & Dalimunthe (2018), these findings imply that investors may not yet fully appreciate the financial benefits of CSR in the short term, or that the market requires longer time horizons to internalize CSR outcomes, which often manifest indirectly through reputation, stakeholder trust, and sustainable development.

Implications

The findings carry several important implications. From a theoretical perspective, they reinforce the primacy of financial performance indicators, particularly ROA, in shaping firm value in emerging markets, while clarifying the limited role of CSR when it lacks strategic integration. From a managerial perspective, they suggest that bank managers should prioritize sustainable asset efficiency and exercise caution with leverage, while embedding CSR more deeply into core operations to ensure its long-term contribution to value creation. From a policy perspective, the results underscore the need for regulators to strengthen CSR frameworks in Vietnam, moving beyond compliance-driven disclosure requirements toward policies that incentivize meaningful CSR practices. Such measures could enhance both financial stability and sustainable development, ensuring that CSR disclosure translates into tangible benefits for firms, stakeholders, and society.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations. First, it relies on secondary data from 25 banks during 2016–2023, which may not fully capture the depth or variation of CSR practices. Second, CSR was measured only through expenditure and reporting scores, which may not adequately reflect the effectiveness of CSR strategies. Third, the analysis focused exclusively on the Vietnamese banking sector, limiting generalizability to other industries or contexts. Future research could address these limitations by broadening the sample across sectors and countries, incorporating qualitative assessments of CSR initiatives, and examining moderating factors such as corporate governance, digital transformation, or investor awareness in shaping the CSR–value relationship.

Nevertheless, by applying a rigorous methodological approach and highlighting both financial and CSR-related determinants of firm value, this study offers important insights for advancing scholarship and practice at the intersection of CSR, financial performance, and firm valuation.

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BEYOND THE HYPE: CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING AR MARKETING IN EMERGING ECONOMIES

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Abstract

This scoping review aims to apply the Arksey O'Malley framework to identify the dark side of using Augmented reality (AR) marketing in emerging economies. An effective search strategy was developed to identify relevant studies and literature on the dark side of AR marketing in emerging economies. The Web of Science academic database was utilized to gather relevant literature. The thematic analysis was carried out to identify prevalent themes in the literature on the dark side of using Augmented reality (AR) marketing in emerging economies. The four notable identified themes were, namely, consumer privacy concern, over-dependency on foreign technology, non-consideration of cultural norms and sensitivities, and lack of local expertise. Despite contributing to the literature, this scoping review is constrained in its area of inquiry due to the seven-year timescale, which reviewed research findings published between 2018 and 2024. Firms need to determine whether to offer AR functionality based on the characteristics of the products that they sell in developing economies.

Keywords: Augmented Reality Marketing; Arksey O'Malley framework; Dark side; Emerging Economies; Scoping review.

1. Introduction

Modern businesses have been employing these immersive technologies in diverse business and marketing activities (Chu et al., 2025; Singh, 2024; Kamboj and Sharma, 2023). The rapid growth of AR, VR, and MR uses in marketing has been driven by technological disruptions in motion sensors, digital displays, computing, and computer vision (Spais and Jain, 2025). This made diverse emerging technologies applications in marketing such as AR marketing much more immersive and engaging for users (Wedel et al., 2020). AR marketing signifies a new, disruptive, subfield within the marketing stream (Rauschnabel et al., 2019). AR marketing may lead to several negative consequences such as harming brand equity (Rauschnabel et al., 2019), affecting consumer choice (Meißner et al., 2020), privacy concerns negative consumer perceptions (Oyman et al., 2022), and negative consumer response (Yim and Park, 2019). This study uses Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) five-stage approach to provide a full-scoping review of the dark side of Augmented Reality (AR) marketing in emerging economies. This scoping review helps scholars, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers navigate the dark side of AR marketing in emerging economies.

2. The Dark Side of Augmented Reality Marketing

AR has various marketing benefits for customers and retailers (Rumokoy and Frank, 2025). For example, studies demonstrated AR apps deliver pleasant consumer experiences leading to positive behavioral responses using AR as a marketing tool (Jiang and Lyu, 2024; Kim et al., 2023; Gatter et al., 2022, Kowalczyk et al., 2021; Park and Yoo, 2020), AR marketing enhance consumers' perceived inspiration (Schultz and Kumar, 2024; Jung et al., 2021; Hinsch et al., 2020), AR marketing assists consumers to make suitable buying decisions (Nugroho and Wang, 2023; Sharma et al., 2023; Flavián et al., 2019), and AR marketing boost customer engagement (Kumar et al., 2024; Jessen et al., 2020; McLean and Wilson, 2019). Even though the application of AR in marketing is mounting, the acceptance of AR as an effective marketing tool in designing marketing processes and inventing unique customer experiences has not increased in line with contemporary marketing trends (Rauschnabel et al., 2022; Hinsch et al., 2020; Flavián et al., 2019).

When using AR marketing in emerging economies should consider the following dark side or negative consequences or bad impacts, namely, harming brand equity (Rauschnabel et al., 2019), affecting consumer choice (Meißner et al., 2020), privacy concerns (Cowan et al., 2021), negative consumer perceptions (Oyman et al., 2022), and negative consumer response (Yim and Park, 2019). However, few studies examine the dark side of AR applications in the marketing field (Du et al., 2022; Lim et al., 2021; Smink et al., 2020). Hence, there is a need for further research studies employing the scoping review to disclose the dark side of using AR marketing in emerging economies. This scoping review aims to address this stated research gap by systematically charting and integrating the pertinent literature on the dark side of using AR marketing. Thus, the study contributes to the body of knowledge by delivering valuable insights for recognizing and mitigating AR marketing's negative consequences on consumers and businesses, particularly in emerging economies.

3. Methodology

There are several research methodologies for conducting literature review-based studies, for instance, systematic literature review, theory-based review, bibliometric analysis, theme-based review, scoping review, meta-analysis, etc. (Singh et al., 2023; Paul et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2022; İpek, 2018). A systematic literature review is deliberated as a central approach to synthesizing the results of a given body of studies (Paul et al., 2023). Arksey and O'Malley proposed the scoping review approach which is used to perform the systematic procedure for searching and summarising the literature, having five stages i.e., defining the research question, identifying relevant studies, selecting studies, charting data, and summarizing and reporting the results (Levac et al., 2010; Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). Scoping reviews, as their name hints, are standard for deciding the scope of literature and studies available on a specified subject and providing an outline of its convergence (Persohn and Branson, 2025). However, systematic literature reviews differ from scoping reviews in numerous ways. For instance, systematic literature reviews are employed to tackle more specific research questions. On the other hand, scoping reviews can be performed to detect a research theme for a future systematic literature review. Secondly, systematic reviews can be referred to as hypothesis-testing, while scoping reviews can be referred to as a hypothesis-generating exercise (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). Hence, the study chose a scoping review approach based on the comparison to a systematic literature review as it grants a wider and more investigative method to chart a diverse type of evidence on a research topic of interest (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005).

3.1 First Step: Identifying the Research questions

Two research questions (RQ) were identified to lead this study and accomplish its purpose to ensure augmentation of existing theoretical understandings on this research domain namely, RQ1: What is the present status of scholarly research on the Dark side of using AR Marketing Strategies in Emerging Economies? RQ2: What are the AR Marketing strategies contributing to the Dark side of Emerging Economies? Figure 1 shows the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

3.2 Second Step: Identifying Relevant Studies

Identifying relevant studies is the foundation of a good study which contributes to the body of knowledge. For this study, search keywords were formulated as per the research objectives and in line with the two identified research questions, following the second step as per the scoping review framework of Arksey and O'Malley (2005).

3.3 Third Step: Selection of the Studies

The third step outlines the selection of the studies, and a general idea of the preliminary search results using search keywords based on the search employing the Web of Science and Scopus databases. The article search process was performed on 15th June 2024. The search keywords used to extract pertinent articles were: ("Augmented Realit* Marketing Strateg*" OR "Augmented Realit* Marketing" OR "AR Marketing Strateg*" OR "AR Marketing") AND ("Dark side*" OR "bad effect*" OR "bad side*" OR "consequence*" OR "negative consequence*" OR "impact*" OR "Influence" OR "bad impact*" OR "negative influence*" OR "bad effect*" OR "dark side effect*" OR "side effect*" OR "Disadvantage*" OR "Demerit*"). 48 records were displayed as the preliminary search results. The PRISMA (The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) 2020 guidelines were incorporated to remain within the scope of the study (Liberati et al., 2009).

3.4 Fourth Step: Data Charting and Collation

This scoping review consists of 24 studies based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. The PRISMA 2020 guidelines have been employed to find the most topical and pertinent research gaps in scholarly research on the dark side of using AR marketing strategies in emerging economies.

3.5 Fifth Step: Summarising and Reporting Findings

Summarizing and reporting findings is the fifth and last step of Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) scoping review. Figure 1 presents the flowchart of the literature search process.

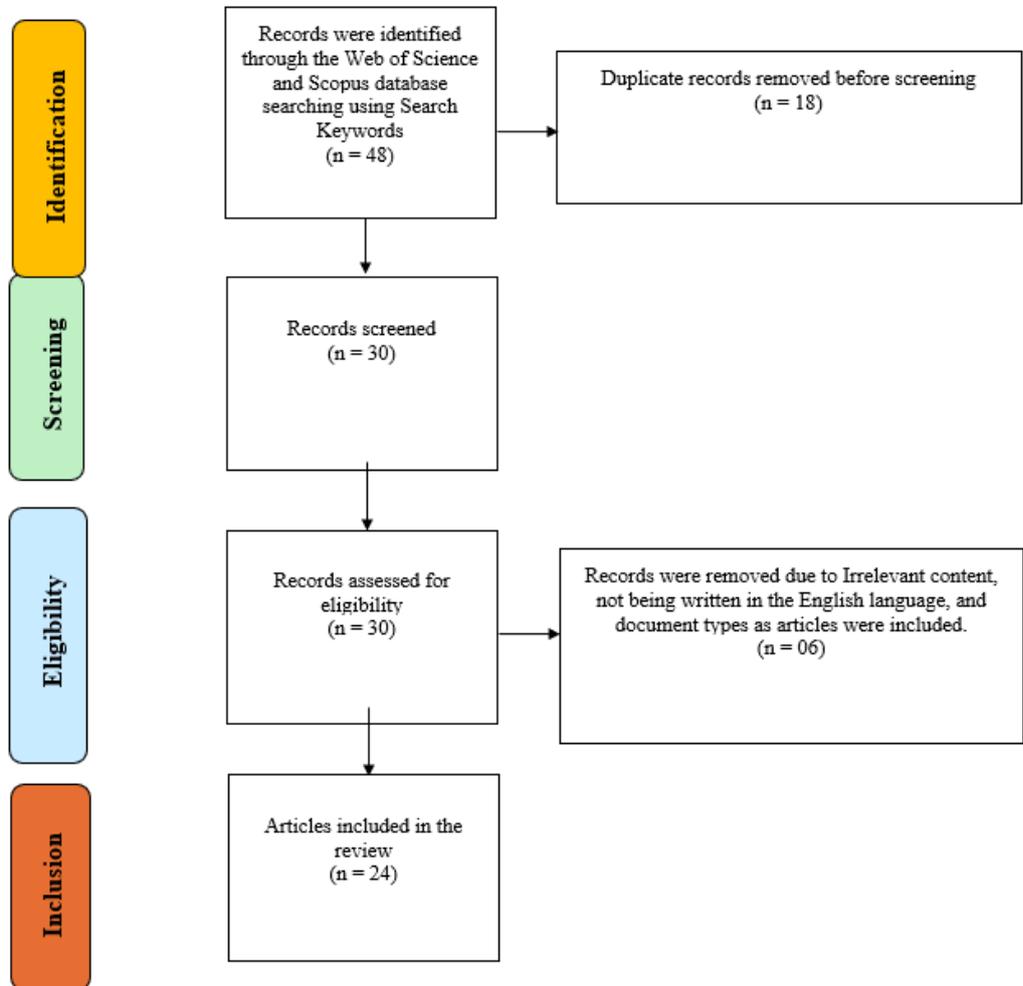


Figure 1. Flow chart of the literature search process

Source: Developed by authors

4. Thematic analysis

4.1 Consumer privacy concern

Emerging economies do not have data privacy regulations or mechanisms to implement them (Kumar, 2022). AR marketing allows firms to collect, store, and potentially abuse personal information (Kumar, 2022). Rauchnabel et al. (2019) and Chylinski et al. (2020) all agree that augmented reality has given marketers new possibilities to interact with their customers. This allows for the creation of more engaging and interactive advertising campaigns, which in turn increase consumer involvement and positive associations with the brand (Hinsch et al., 2020; Kumar, 2022).

4.2 Over-dependency on foreign technology

Emerging economies frequently depend on technology created by foreign corporations, which can lead to future vulnerability and reliance (Plotkina et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2022; Chen and Lin, 2022). Due to this dependence, the growth of domestic technology sectors may be constrained, and local economies may lack control over their digital infrastructure and data consequence of this dependency (Plotkina et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2022; Chen and Lin, 2022). Relying on foreign technology for Augmented Reality (AR) marketing in developing economies has numerous obstacles and hazards that could have substantial consequences for businesses and customers in these nations in the future (Gatter et al., 2022; Ivanov et al., 2023).

4.3 Non-consideration of Cultural norms and sensitivities

AR marketing campaigns, in conjunction with recommending functions, have the potential to bridge the gap between physical stores and online buying, thereby facilitating multi-channel purchasing opportunities (Chen et al., 2022). This is especially true when the recommendations include items from the vendor's online catalogue (Chen et al., 2022; Plotkina et al., 2022).

4.4 Lack of local expertise

The dominance of foreign AR technology may result in a paucity of local expertise (Gatter et al., 2022; Ivanov et al., 2023). Ivanov et al. (2023) assert that local institutions and training programs will be compelled to continue relying on foreign experts, which will further impede local innovation if they fail to prioritize the learning of augmented reality technology. Since foreign augmented reality (AR) technology is so popular, there may not be enough local experts (Zhu et al., 2023). In the absence of local educational institutions and training programs that prioritize the development of AR skills, the region will continue to depend heavily on foreign expertise in the future (Zhu et al., 2023).

5. Discussion of the findings

The literature indicates that there are some concerns regarding privacy and the sharing of personal information (Kumar, 2022; Smink et al., 2020). Rauschnabel et al. (2019) explored how privacy risk affects AR smart glass adoption. Researchers concluded that threats to others' privacy are among the most crucial elements influencing a person's actions. AR makes traditional ads more memorable by making them interactive (Chu et al., 2025). Digitally illiterate users may not realise how much data AR apps collect or the threats (Hinsch et al., 2020). AR shopping apps are helping companies bring their storefronts to customers, changing the shopping experience (Pandey and Pandey, 2025). These apps also allow consumers to virtually test clothes and makeup from home, altering the concept of place in marketing. Foreign AR technology may dominate local expertise (Gatter et al., 2022; Ivanov et al., 2023). Unless local educational institutions and training programs place a high priority on developing skills in augmented reality technology, local innovation will be further limited because of foreign expertise (Ivanov et al., 2023). Due to foreign augmented reality (AR) technology dominance (Zhu et al., 2023), there may be a shortage of local expertise.

6. Implications, limitations, and conclusion

This study explains how AR marketing methods darken emerging economies and suggests that the integration of AR technologies in the context of emerging economies needs careful alignment, as cultural differences in symbolism, colours, and gestures can lead to confusion or miscommunication, reducing the effectiveness of the campaign. There will be a shortage of local expertise due to foreign technology dominance when it comes to AR marketing strategies (Zhu et al., 2023). Having a constant reliance on imported technology can stifle local innovation and impede the development of a robust domestic technology sector (Schultz and Kumar, 2024).

Disclosure statement

The author(s) reported no potential conflict of interest.

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STUDY ON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' RESILIENT LEADERSHIP, TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS IN TAIPEI CITY

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I. Introduction

Leadership often involves tackling crisis and challenges, which can foster resilience. Resilient leaders demonstrate adaptive capacities, turning setbacks into opportunities (Chiang, 2008).

Resilience, derived from the Latin *resilire*, refers to the capacity to recover from adversity (Hsieh & Hsieh, 2020). It includes raw resilience (inborn traits) and acquired resilience (learned skills and attitudes) (Drath, 2017). Resilient leadership is seen as a developmental process shaped by experience (Swanson, 2017; King & Rothstein, 2010).

School principals with resilience respond to challenges with calmness, clarity, optimism, and guidance, mobilizing resources to lead their teams toward shared goals. According to the research of Tsai (2018), Everly et al. (2020) & Lazaridou (2020), this study focuses on five key dimensions: Vision Focus, Communication and Motivation, Positivity and Optimism, Calmness and Recovery, Situational Support.

Benefits of resilient leadership include stronger self-efficacy, academic optimism, improved student achievement, enhanced school culture, and increased professional capital (Hadassah, 2016). However, excessive resilience may lead to unrealistic persistence and inefficiency (Chamorro-Premuzic & Lusk, 2017). Also, whether resilient leadership stems from preparedness or improvisation under pressure remains unclear.

Empirical research on principal resilient leadership in Taiwan remains limited. Internationally, related research is also scarce. Among 12 empirical studies, most were conducted in educational settings, primarily focusing on principals, using surveys, interviews, or mixed methods. Findings show that most principals exhibit moderate to high resilience, with higher scores linked to age, experience, and lifestyle factors, though gender differences remain inconclusive. Resilient leaders exhibited higher self-efficacy and expectations, enhanced stronger professional competency (San Nicolas, 2011), and better student achievement outcomes (Hadassah, 2016). Furthermore, teacher's professional communities effectively influence teacher's instructional effectiveness (Ting & Chiang, 2020).

II. Research Design and Implementation

660 teachers from 66 randomly selected Taipei elementary schools were surveyed, yielding 622 valid responses. Three scales were used, all based on a seven-point Likert scale: (1) Resilient Leadership Scale: developed from prior studies, covering five dimensions (Vision Focus, Communication and Motivation, Positivity and Optimism, Calmness and Recovery, Situational Support). After item reduction, 17 items remained, explaining 90.01% of variance; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.98$ overall. (2) Professional Learning Community Scale: Adapted from Ding (2011), with five factors explaining 77.67% of variance; Cronbach's α ranged from .83 to .92. (3) Instructional Effectiveness Questionnaire: Adapted from Chang et al (2014), the scale consists of five dimensions with 15 items in total. The total explained variance was 80.99%, and Cronbach's α coefficients ranged from .77 to .92. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the mediating role of professional learning communities, with the Sobel Test used to assess mediation effects.

III. Results and Discussions

In the mediation effects model, except for the χ^2 value, 11 out of 12 fit indices meet the specified standards, indicating a good overall model fit (see Table 1).

In the direct effects model (Table 2), principal resilient leadership doesn't significantly predict instructional effectiveness (standardized estimate = 0.09, $t = 1.81$, $p > .05$). In contrast, the mediation model reveals significant paths: principal resilient leadership strongly predicts teacher professional learning communities (standardized estimate = 0.70, $t = 18.39$, $p < .001$), which in turn significantly influence instructional effectiveness (standardized estimate = 0.60, $t = 11.40$, $p < .01$). The total effect of resilient leadership on instructional effectiveness is also significant (standardized estimate = 0.51, $t = 10.44$, $p < .01$).

Table 1
Summary Table of Fit Indices for the Mediation Effects Model

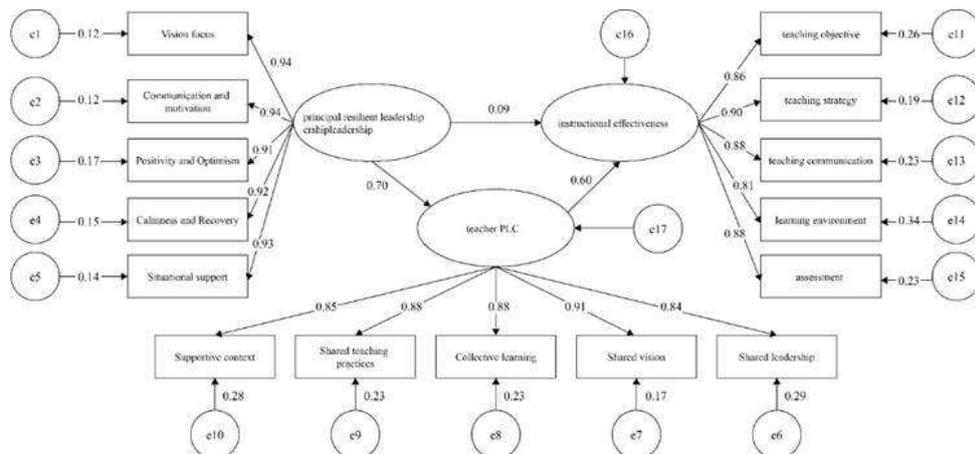
Structural Model	Coefficients	Acceptable Value	Fit	Structural Model	Coefficients	Acceptable Value	Fit
χ^2	278.75	Non-significant	No	RFI	.97	>.90	Yes
RMSEA	.06	<.08	Yes	IFI	.98	>.90	Yes
SRMR	.02	<.05	Yes	TLI	.98	>.90	Yes
GFI	.94	>.90	Yes	CFI	.98	>.90	Yes
AGFI	.92	>.90	Yes	PGFI	.79	>.50	Yes
NFI	.97	>.90	Yes	PNFI	.78	>.50	Yes

Table 2
Summary Table of Analyses on the Effects of Principal Resilient Leadership, Teacher Professional Learning Communities, and Instructional Effectiveness

	Teacher Professional Learning Community		Instructional Effectiveness	
	Standardized Value	t value	Standardized Value	t value
Principal resilient leadership				
Direct Effect	.70	18.39***	.09	1.81
Indirect Effect			.42	8.63***
Overall Effect			.51	10.44***
Teacher Professional Learning Community				
Direct Effect			.60	11.40**
Overall Effect			.60	11.40**

As the indirect effect ($0.70 \times 0.60 = 0.42$) is greater than the direct effect (0.09), it indicates instructional effectiveness is indirectly influenced through the mediation of teacher professional learning communities. This is further supported by the Sobel test ($Z = 8.63 > 1.96$), confirming a significant mediating effect. Given the non-significant direct effect, this constitutes complete mediation. The findings of this study align with the research reported by San Nicolas (2011), Hadassah (2016), Ting and Chiang (2020).

Figure 1
Standardized Parameter Estimates of the Mediation Effects Model



I. Result and Suggestions

Structural equation modeling revealed that teacher professional learning communities fully mediate the positive effect of principal resilient leadership on instructional effectiveness. This indicates that they serve as a complete mediating mechanism in the relationship between resilient leadership and instructional effectiveness.

Therefore, principals should actively encourage the formation and functioning of such communities in order to enhance teachers' instructional effectiveness. Moreover, future empirical research on resilient leadership should continue to explore other possible mediators, such as trust relationships, positive psychological capital, teacher job engagement, teacher academic optimism, professional commitment and so on.

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ADOPTION OF SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING IN POST- AND PRE-PANDEMIC CONTEXTS: A LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Learning is acknowledged by many as a lifelong process and self-directed learning (SDL) plays a key role in this step as they take the responsibility in controlling what they learn to reach their goals and objectives. At the same time, the leadership role of instructors and institutional heads fostering a supportive environment becomes crucial. Despite the transformation of global education from a teacher-centric to a student-centric approach, especially with the pandemic situation, emerging contexts have seen a reduced impact. The study aims to explore this phenomenon in the emerging context of India and Sri Lanka to first identify the present context of SDL and identify the key drivers and challenges associated with the learning transformation. The study aims to capture both the learners' and educators' perspectives in this regard to build a stronger foundation, understand the dynamic role of empowered leadership in higher education and deepen the knowledge on more context-specific factors that are yet to be explored in the emerging nations' perspective.

Keywords: self-directed learning; SDL adoption; emerging economics; post and pre-pandemic; restraining forces.

1. Introduction

There have been a number of studies that have examined the educational qualities of ubiquitous and mobile learning to date: formal education settings both inside and outside the classroom (e.g. Frohberg et al., 2009), workplace settings (e.g., Pimmer & Pachler, 2014), and lifelong learning environments (e.g. Sharples, 2000). There is no doubt that learning is a lifelong process as rapid change and development of new knowledge are inevitable (Collins, 2009; Lehtinen et al, 2014). Learners need to be in control of their learning and develop the ability to learn on their own (Knowles & Sternberg, 1975). Morris (2019) proposes self-directed learning (SDL) as a process in which learners take full responsibility for controlling their learning objectives and tasks to meet personal goals. Historically, education systems, particularly in developing countries, have been largely teacher centric. In South Asia, university education often fails to address real-world issues effectively (Acharya et al., 2023). Despite growing interest in self-directed and student-centric learning, countries like Sri Lanka and India continue to rely heavily on traditional, instructor-led classroom methods (Kurian, Ramanathan, & De Alwis, 2021). Transitioning to modern pedagogical practices remains challenging due to the complex interplay of traditional norms and modern pressures.

Developing nations often face significant challenges related to limited educational infrastructure, inadequate access to digital resources, and economic constraints (Tadesse & Muluye, 2020; Ndubuisi et al., 2021), all of which hinder the widespread adoption of self-directed learning (SDL). These challenges can be systemic; for example, a flexible curriculum is crucial for SDL (Nasri et al., 2020), yet existing curricula in countries like Sri Lanka are not designed to support SDL. Traditional teaching methods in these regions require considerable enhancement to facilitate SDL (Munasinghe et al., 2019). Grande et al. (2022) argue that the approach to SDL must recognize the distinct characteristics of different nations. At the same time, creating supportive learning environments promoting SDL means the leadership role playing a pivotal role in the change process especially in a teacher centric emerging economy context (Suhartini & Sary, 2025).

Research on SDL readiness in Asian contexts remains limited, highlighting a significant gap in the literature. Understanding the dynamics of SDL in these developing regions is crucial, as such insights could serve as a blueprint for other countries with similar socio-cultural landscapes, helping them modernize their education systems. Moreover, promoting SDL in emerging Asian contexts can enhance employee competencies, encouraging a proactive learning mindset rather than dependence on organizational training (Vithayaporn et al., 2021). Given the global impact of the pandemic, further research is needed to determine whether COVID-19 acted as a barrier or enabler for the broader adoption of SDL (Singaram et al., 2022). A proactive approach to fostering SDL is not only essential for individual development but also for contributing to the economic growth of emerging economies. This research seeks to address the current literature gap by offering a nuanced perspective from emerging contexts, enriching the theoretical discourse on SDL and contributing practical insights that could shape

the future of education in these regions and beyond. Specifically, the study aims to critically examine the driving and restraining forces influencing the adoption of SDL among higher education students in India and Sri Lanka. This leads to the formation of the research question of; “Identifying and exploring the key factors driving the growth of SDL in the emerging context?”

2. Theoretical Framework

This study uses force field analysis as its guiding theoretical framework. Force field analysis, pioneered by (Lewin, 1943), is a strategic tool designed to understand the dynamics of driving and restraining forces in a specific situation or during a change initiative. Central to Lewin's model is the identification of factors that either promote or inhibit specific behaviours, a focus that has been echoed in subsequent research (see Swanson & Creed, 2014). In the education sector, the force field analysis concept has been utilized in studies that focus on significant structural reforms within universities and other advanced educational frameworks (Mahmud, Mohd Nasri & Syed-Abdullah, 2019). Recent literature on SDL highlights some important factors supporting SDL, such as well-trained educators who can better guide students towards SDL (Beckers et al., 2016), smaller sized learning cohorts (Wong et al., 2021), non- traditional competency-based assessments (Beckers et al., 2016) and personalized affective feedback. Conversely, challenges to SDL adoption are also evident such as lack of support for self-learning (Maphalala et al., 2021) due to educator shortages (Yasmin et al., 2019) or constrained time allocated for subjects (Yasmin et al., 2019) and distractions while studying (Kohan et al., 2017).

The study also focuses on the concept of empowering leadership which is a leadership approach leading to greater individual autonomy, self-efficacy and a sense of ownership over the tasks in hand (Kim & Beehr, 2017, Praszkie, 2015). In the context of higher education, empowering leadership could be manifested through the educational instructors as well as academic leaders who are vital in creating learning spaces encouraging student independence and confidence leading to students adopting SDL mechanisms (Farooq & Iqbal, 2025). Especially in a post pandemic era, the empowering leadership role is essential in shaping the long-term sustainability of SDL practices. By embedding such practices directly into the policy frameworks of respective institutional leaders could possibly champion supportive learning spaces at the same time be the mentorship required to drive the structural and psychological gaps in the emerging context. (Hishamuddin et al., 2024; Davis, 2024).

3. Methodology

Given the infancy of the research into SDL in the emerging context as well as the need for an in-depth understanding of its evolution in a post-pandemic landscape, the study takes on an exploratory study technique. From a philosophical stance, this is identified as the interpretivist approach which aims to take on an in-depth overview and pays close attention to subjective factors such as differences in culture and context (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). This in away is the inductive approach towards research where the research aims to infer the findings of the research towards a theory building exercise. Inductive research is exploratory in nature and according to Swedberg, (2021) exploratory research adds value in situations where there is relatively less literature on a given topic. Despite the development of SDL in medical, and nursing literature and a predominant Western outfit, there is substantially less work and application in the educational field from an emerging nation lens (Shafait et al., 2021; Vithayaporn et al., 2021).

Through exploration, the study aims to conceptualize the application of SDL practices in both India and Sri Lanka, and this would allow us to delineate the key supporting and restraining factors in the local context. Exploration is complimented using qualitative data given its ability for an in-depth and richer exploration of a given phenomenon. The study will use the techniques of focus groups together with interviews as its methods of qualitative data collection. Purposeful sampling is used to investigate the SDL practices with two established universities respectively from India and Sri Lanka. Purposeful sampling as a tool is primarily used in situations where researchers have access to the key informants in a field in building information-rich cases of a given study. The sample from the two institutions is accessed through the existing networks and a research associate from each institute is part of the overall study team. The sample would consist of both educators and students from each institute. The inclusion criteria for academics were to at least have a master's level qualification in the institution and for students to be in their final year of study in their respective degree programs. The students will be subjected to a focus group session and the academics will take part in a semi-structured interview process. To ensure validity and consistency across both data collection and analysis, all interviews will be guided by an interview protocol. This developed interview protocol will be based on evidence of a comprehensive literature review and findings of previous studies. In terms of the focus group, given the optimal number suggested to be between six to eight.

As a sample size for the semi-structured interviews, A range of five to twenty-five respondents is recommended (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The present study aims to conduct forty semi-structured interviews in total for both the institutions in India and Sri Lanka. Before the interviews and the focus group are to be deployed a pilot study will be conducted. The pilot study will include higher education stakeholders and experts from both countries and ensure the used questions and overall themes on SDL are appropriate and feasible in the contexts of India and Sri Lanka for optimal responses. The interviews will be conducted in two rounds of ten per each round allowing sufficient time for the research team in Sri Lanka and India to transcribe both textual and other non-verbal information as part of the qualitative data gathering. The focus group data collected will be compiled and listed based on some of the key themes derived from literature and modified using the pilot study work (O'Nyumba et al., 2018).

The semi-structured interviews conducted will be mainly analysed using the inductive-based analytical process of template analysis. Template analysis as a technique is characterized by its high level of structure in analysing contextual data and the flexibility to adjust to the specific needs of a given study (King, et al., 2017). Template analysis is a variety of thematic analysis and central to this technique is the development of a coding template which will be a subset of the data in the study that is applied to the rest of the data to be revised and refined (Brooks et al., 2015). The key step in the process is the identification of certain 'p priori codes' which are also themes relevant to the data analysis that will evolve with the actual analysis. The predefined codes will develop the initial template as a starting point and throughout the data analysis process this would further refine and change which will ultimately lead to a final template of the study (King et al., 2017). The initial template developed will also run through several iterations as some codes might change or be modified during the process. The initial coding process also uses the qualitative software tool NVivo to assist in identifying initial codes and themes to break down the rich qualitative information gathered in the study process.

Expected contribution

This study makes both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of self-directed learning (SDL). From a theoretical perspective, it extends existing SDL research beyond predominantly Western contexts by exploring its application in emerging economies, specifically India and Sri Lanka. By adopting a post-pandemic lens, the study captures the unique challenges, cultural nuances, and contextual factors that influence the adoption and effectiveness of SDL in these regions. This contributes to a more globally inclusive

understanding of SDL, highlighting how local conditions shape learning practices and outcomes. From a practical standpoint, the study identifies the key supporting and restraining forces that affect SDL implementation, such as educator readiness, cohort sizes, assessment practices, available resources, and institutional support structures. By mapping these factors, the research provides actionable insights for educators, academic leaders, and policymakers, enabling them to design targeted, context-sensitive SDL strategies. Ultimately, the study bridges the gap between global SDL theory and local practice, offering guidance on how to foster effective, sustainable, and culturally responsive self-directed learning environments in emerging educational contexts.

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