

DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERSHIP CULTURE FOR SUSTAINABILITY: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how sustainability-oriented leadership culture can be developed and implemented across diverse organizational settings. Employing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach guided by the PRISMA 2020 protocol, this research analyzes nine selected Scopus-indexed articles published between 2020 and 2025. The research identifies a significant gap in understanding how leadership models can be systematically applied to foster sustainability in different organizational contexts. The findings reveal that sustainability-driven leadership is shaped by four dominant models: CSR leadership, transformational leadership, collaborative leadership, and gender-inclusive leadership. CSR leadership enhances organizational green learning and technological innovation, while transformational leadership strengthens employees' commitment to long-term sustainability goals. Collaborative leadership fosters shared responsibility and organizational quality, and gender-inclusive leadership accelerates equality, creativity, and organizational resilience. This study contributes a comprehensive synthesis of how different leadership frameworks support the creation of a sustainability-oriented culture. It also underscores the research gaps in cross-sectoral leadership implementation and suggests future research directions, particularly in areas of inclusivity, policy integration, and experiential leadership development.

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INTRODUCTION

Sustainability has become an increasingly prominent global topic, gaining attention from academics, practitioners, and policymakers alike. In this context, the development of a leadership culture that supports organizational sustainability goals has become an inseparable aspect. A leadership culture oriented towards sustainability can facilitate the achievement of an organization's long-term objectives, encompassing social, economic, and environmental dimensions (Boeske, 2023). Research on leadership culture that supports sustainability has rapidly developed; however, there is still considerable room to explore how this culture can be systematically applied in diverse organizations. One promising approach is through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which not only benefits companies financially but also supports the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a more profound way (Fallah Shayan et al., 2022). Research by Zada, Khan, Zada, and Dhar on CSR leadership reveals that CSR-based leadership can enhance organizational green learning and the adoption of green technologies, directly linking to sustainability goals (Zada et al., 2025). This highlights the importance of understanding leadership culture focused on sustainability as a key to transforming how organizations operate in the face of global challenges.

Research by Saenz, Wu, Uddaraju, Nafei, and Liu indicates that inclusive leadership culture, which supports gender equality, is a crucial factor in advancing organizational sustainability (Saenz et al., 2025). Cultural norms that promote equality in executive leadership can improve diversity and creativity within teams, ultimately contributing to the organization's success in achieving long-term goals (Adeniyi et al., 2024). This also suggests that gender-focused leadership can accelerate organizational sustainability, aligning with the SDGs aimed at reducing inequality in the workplace (Patel & Saqib, 2020). However, existing studies remain fragmented, lacking a holistic synthesis of how inclusive leadership culture can be systematically applied across various sectors and types of organizations to support sustainability more comprehensively.

Furthermore, the concept of transformational leadership is also an essential part of developing a sustainable leadership culture. Afsouran, Charkhabi, and Seidel explain that transformational leadership can play a significant role in increasing employee commitment and organizational development by facilitating positive change (Radi Afsouran et al., 2022). In this regard, leadership that inspires and directs employees to adapt to changes can accelerate the achievement of sustainability goals set by the organization (Boeske, 2023). This is highly relevant in the context of leadership culture development, not only focusing on individual leadership but also fostering collaboration and collective commitment to achieve the organization's long-term goals. This research demonstrates how transformational leadership can be adopted to strengthen sustainability culture within organizations. Nevertheless, most studies on transformational leadership have been sector-specific, and there remains a gap in understanding its broader application in organizational sustainability across industries.

Although many studies have addressed leadership in the context of sustainability, most are still limited to specific sectors or organizations. Therefore, this study aims to broaden the understanding of how sustainability-oriented leadership culture can be systematically applied across various sectors. This research will examine different leadership models that can support the development of a sustainability culture in organizations and how policies and leadership practices can accelerate the achievement of sustainability goals. This is relevant to research by Kielblock, which emphasizes the importance of collaborative leadership in developing organizational quality in all-day educational schools in Germany (Kielblock, 2025). This approach shows that leadership, which shares responsibility and involves various stakeholders, can improve the quality and sustainability of an organization (Afsar et al., 2020). However, there is limited research that explores the intersection of CSR, transformational leadership, and collaborative leadership in fostering a holistic sustainability culture across diverse organizational contexts.

This study also aims to explore the contribution of CSR in building leadership culture that supports sustainability. Chan, Lin, and Shih in their research reveal that CSR serves as a mediator between leadership and organizational commitment, demonstrating that leaders who support sustainability principles can strengthen employee commitment to organizational goals (Chan et al., 2022). This study underscores the importance of CSR in shaping a sustainability-oriented leadership culture, where CSR functions as a bridge between leaders and team members in realizing shared goals (MacNeil & Matear, 2020). This suggests that leadership that integrates CSR into organizational strategy will be more effective in enhancing employee engagement and commitment towards achieving sustainability goals.

This study aims to fill the existing research gap by exploring the impact of leadership culture on organizational sustainability and providing a more holistic understanding of implementing leadership culture that supports sustainability across various sectors and types of organizations. It will also examine the role of CSR in strengthening sustainable leadership culture and how various leadership models can be applied to achieve long-term sustainable organizational goals. Thus, this research is expected to contribute significantly to the development of leadership theory and practice, particularly in the context of sustainability.

Based on the background presented, the research questions in this study are:

1. How can sustainability-oriented leadership culture be implemented in organizations?
2. What factors influence the development of leadership culture that supports sustainability in organizations?
3. What is the role of CSR in strengthening sustainable leadership culture and driving the achievement of long-term organizational goals?
4. What is the relationship between transformational leadership and the development of sustainable leadership culture in organizations?

By answering these questions, this study aims to provide deeper insights into the development of leadership culture that supports sustainability and its implications for leadership practices in various organizational sectors.

METHOD

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach following the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines (Tripathy et al., 2024). The process of literature search, screening, and article selection is carried out systematically through several stages, as explained below:

Identification

The literature search was conducted using the Scopus database, with key terms relevant to the topic, such as "corporate social responsibility (CSR)", "leadership", and "sustainability". The publication time frame used was from 2020 to 2025. From the initial search, 155 articles related to the researched topic were found. Subsequently, an initial selection was made based on the relevance and quality of the articles, with articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria being excluded. At this stage, 60 articles passed the identification stage, sourced from journals indexed in tiers Q1, Q2, Q3, or Q4, and representing primary research.

Screening

The screening stage was conducted to ensure that the selected articles aligned with the focus of the research on leadership culture supporting organizational sustainability, considering the impact of CSR on the development of sustainable leadership. From the 60 articles that passed the identification stage, further screening was performed to exclude articles that were irrelevant, such as those with unrelated topics or using methodologies not suited to the objectives of this study. After screening, 18 articles passed to the next stage, which allowed for full-text retrieval. At this stage, some articles could not be fully accessed, and 9 articles were successfully obtained for further eligibility evaluation.

Eligibility

At this stage, from the 18 articles that continued, 9 articles could not be fully accessed due to access restrictions. These articles remained part of the initial selection process, but only 9 articles were fully accessible. All these articles were evaluated for eligibility based on the established inclusion criteria, such as relevance to the topic, methodological quality, and the ability to significantly contribute to the development of leadership culture for organizational sustainability. Only articles that met the inclusion criteria were included in further analysis.

Inclusion

Finally, the 9 articles that passed the selection process and met the inclusion criteria were analyzed further to assess their contributions to the topic of developing leadership culture that supports organizational sustainability. These articles formed the primary basis for the literature analysis, providing a deeper understanding of the application

of sustainability-oriented leadership culture in the context of CSR and its influence on organizational performance. All articles selected for inclusion were evaluated for eligibility, and no articles were excluded at this stage.

Quality Appraisal

Quality assessment was conducted using the CASP (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme) checklist, which is widely recognized for evaluating the methodological quality of qualitative and quantitative research. This ensured that the studies included in the review were methodologically sound and relevant to the research objectives.

Data Extraction

Data extraction included key details from each article, such as the authors, study objectives, theories used, methods employed, main findings, and limitations. This systematic extraction process enabled the synthesis of relevant data for further analysis and interpretation of how various leadership models contribute to sustainability-oriented leadership cultures.

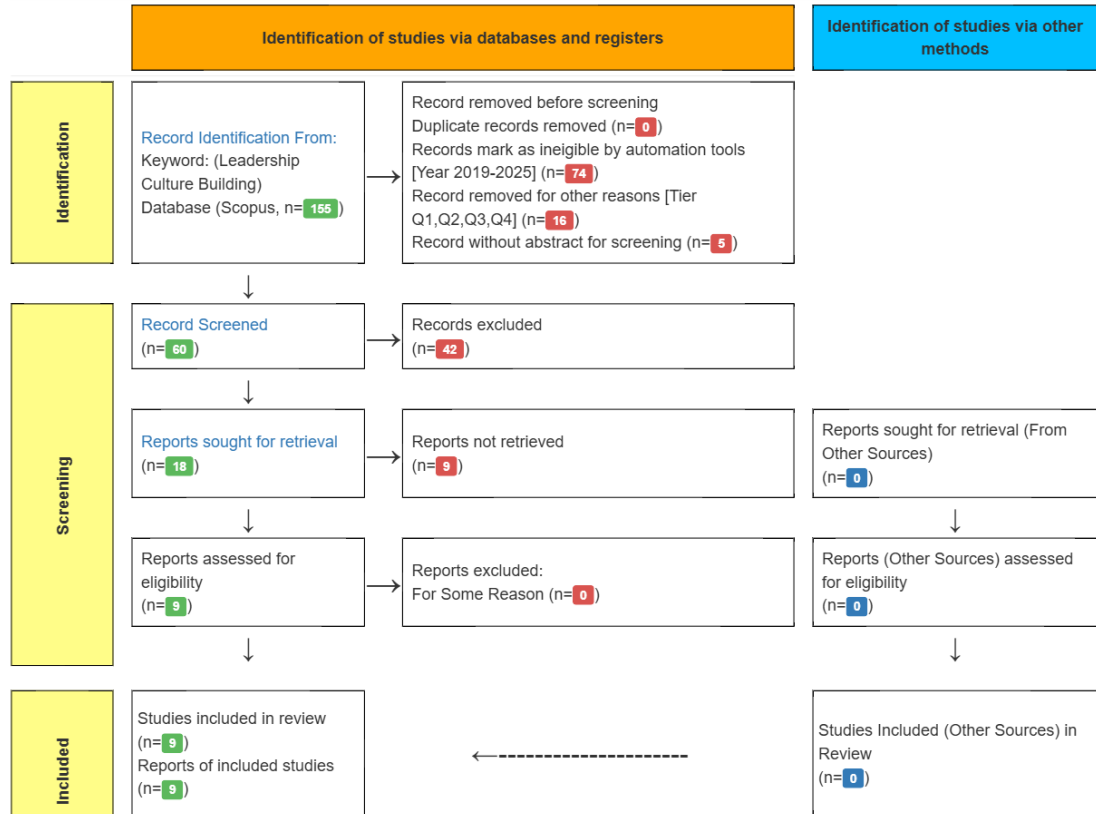
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria: Articles published in English, indexed in Scopus journals in tiers Q1, Q2, Q3, or Q4, discussing leadership, CSR, and organizational sustainability. Articles that are primary research and published between 2020 and 2025 were also included in this criterion.

Exclusion Criteria: Articles not available in full-text form, articles with irrelevant topics, articles that do not meet the standards of primary research methodology, articles published in low-tier journals (Q4 or lower), or articles without an abstract.

Thus, through a stringent selection process, the chosen articles contribute significantly to the understanding of how sustainability-oriented leadership culture can be applied in organizations focusing on social, economic, and environmental sustainability.

Prisma Reporting: Pengembangan Budaya Kepemimpinan



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Figure 1. Process of Identification and Selection of Studies in the Systematic Review Based on the PRISMA 2020 Guidelines

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data Analysis

Table 1. Overview of Key Studies on Leadership, Sustainability, and Organizational Development

Research Title	Research Location	Authors	Year of Publication	Insight	Theories Used	Research Method	Research Findings	Research Limitations	Relevance to the Current Study
Driving Sustainable Development Through CSR Leadership: Insights Into Organizational Learning and Technological Innovation	China (Manufacturing Industry)	Muhammad Zada, Salman Khan, Shagufta Zada, Bablu Kumar Dhar	2025	The important role of CSR in driving sustainable development outcomes through technological innovation and organizational learning.	Stakeholder Theory, Organizational Learning Theory	Time-lag survey design, involving 417 employees in the manufacturing sector in China.	CSR leadership enhances Organizational Green Learning (OGL) and adoption of green technology to support SDGs.	Limitations in generalizing findings to industries other than manufacturing.	Relevance to CSR focus and its impact on organizational sustainability.
Retrospective Review of Leadership Development Programs: Alumni Perceptions of Value, Influence, and Organizational Outcomes	Rutgers University, USA	Ralph A. Gigliotti, Morit Blank Shavelsky, Christine Goldthwaite, Sara E. Spear, Vidhi Waran	2025	Alumni perceptions of the long-term impact of leadership development programs, including organizational outcomes.	Leadership Theory, Program Evaluation Theory	Semi-structured interviews with alumni of leadership development programs at Rutgers University.	Alumni perceive leadership development programs as impactful on competency development and organizational outcomes.	Limitations in long-term studies and generalizability of findings beyond higher education institutions.	Relevance to leadership development research and long-term evaluation.
Equine-Assisted Experiential	Global (Focusing on Leadership	Rubentheran Sivagurunathan, Abdul	2025	EAL as a new approach to develop	Leadership Development Theory,	Literature review on EAL in	EAL improves self-awareness,	Lack of empirical research on	Relevance to experiential-based

Learning: A Literature Review of Embodied Leadership Development in Organizational Behavior	Development in Organization s)	Rahman bin S Senathirajah, Linkesvaran Sivagurunathan, Sayeeduzzafar Qazi, Rasheedul Haque		leadership competencies with an emphasis on emotional and communication skills.	Experiential Learning Theory	leadership development within organizations.	emotional intelligence, and non-verbal communication in the workplace.	the effectiveness of EAL in organizational contexts.	leadership development approaches.
Advancing Gender Equality in Executive Leadership: The Role of Cultural Norms and Organizational Practices in Sustainable Development	Taiwan and Guatemala	Camila Saenz, Shih-Wei Wu, Venkata Uddaraju, Amirhossein Nafei, Yulun Liu	2025	The influence of cultural norms and organizational policies on the gender gap in executive leadership positions in Taiwan and Guatemala.	Gender Theory, Organizational Policy Theory	Quantitative survey with 250 female executives in Taiwan and Guatemala.	Cultural norms and organizational policies act as barriers for women, but inclusive practices increase gender equality opportunities.	Limitations in measuring gender gaps beyond the countries studied.	Relevance to gender gaps in leadership and sustainability.
The Link Between Transformational Leadership and Organizational Development: Testing the Mediating Role of	Senegal (International Development Projects)	Naghi Radi Afsouran, Morteza Charkhabi, Laura Seidel	2022	The role of transformational leadership in organizational development with employee maturity as a mediator.	Transformational Leadership Theory, Organizational Learning Theory	Quantitative approach using data from 80 international project managers in Senegal.	Transformational leadership impacts organizational development through employee maturity mediation.	Limitations in small sample size and lack of influence of organizational culture in international projects.	Relevance to transformational leadership's impact on organizational development.

Employees' Maturity										
A Framework for Leadership in Organizational Development: A Novel Approach for Advancing Women Administrative and Faculty Leaders in Academic Medicine. (Williams et al., 2025)	University of Michigan Medical School, USA	Whitney Williams, Michaela K Baker, Laura Denton, Patricia Andreski, Sonya R Jacobs, Lynn Perry Wooten, Kanakadurga Singer	E 2025	Development of a leadership framework to support women in administrative and faculty roles in academic medicine.	Leadership Development Theory, Gender Justice Theory	18-month training program with factor analysis and pre-post surveys.	The training program improves leadership competencies with long-term impacts on promotion and institutional loyalty.	Limitations in measuring long-term impacts of the leadership training program.	Relevance to leadership development training and its impact on promotions.	
Rethinking Leadership in Extended Education: How Collaborative Development Drives Organizational Quality	Germany (All-Day Education Schools)	Stephan Kielblock	2025	The role of collaborative leadership in improving organizational quality in all-day education schools in Germany.	Collaborative Leadership Theory, School Development Theory	Quantitative survey with 1,355 school leaders in Germany using structural equation modeling.	Collaborative school development improves organizational quality by enhancing staff collaboration.	Limitations in methodology used to measure the impact of collaboration in school development.	Relevance to collaborative leadership approaches in organizational development.	
The Mediator CSR Plays the Effective Leadership	Taiwan (CSR-Focused Companies)	Kuo-Hua Chan, Shang-Ping Lin, I-Tung Shih	2022	CSR as a mediator enhancing organizational	CSR Theory, Sustainable Leadership Theory	Survey with 532 questionnaires analyzed	CSR improves organizational commitment and	Limitations in sample used only on companies	Relevance to the importance of CSR in	

Belief Role for Resource Dilemma Handling Leadership in Organizational Commitment During Sustainability Development				l commitment and the success of sustainable development projects.		using SEM method in Taiwan.	sustainable development outcomes in organizations.	with identified CSR focus.	organizational sustainability and commitment.
Maturity in Leadership and Organizational Commitment: A Framework for Effective Leadership in International Development Projects. (Remy & Sané, 2024)	Senegal (International Development Projects)	Kesner Remy, Seydou Sane	2023	The role of humble leadership in the success of international development projects with a focus on organizational learning.	Humble Leadership Theory, Organizational Learning Theory	Quantitative approach with data from 80 international project managers in Senegal.	Humble leadership enhances project success through organizational learning.	Limitations in small sample size and context limited to international projects.	Relevance to the application of humble leadership in project success.

Discussion

Across the reviewed studies, four dominant themes emerge: the role of CSR leadership, the impact of transformational leadership, the significance of experience-based leadership approaches, and the influence of gender-inclusive leadership. Each of these themes plays a crucial role in developing a sustainability-oriented leadership culture, contributing to long-term organizational success and the achievement of sustainability goals.

CSR Leadership and Organizational Sustainability

The research by (Zada et al., 2025) highlights the critical role of CSR leadership in promoting Organizational Green Learning (OGL) and the adoption of green technologies. Their findings illustrate how companies can integrate sustainability into their strategic frameworks, directly contributing to Sustainable Development Outcomes (SDOs). In line with (Sharma et al., 2025), CSR leadership serves as a bridge between sustainability objectives and organizational performance. However, while these studies emphasize CSR's role in resource-intensive industries, a potential gap exists in understanding how CSR leadership influences organizations across different sectors. In contrast, industries less focused on resource management may face challenges in integrating CSR-driven leadership into their operations, indicating a need for further research into sector-specific CSR leadership models.

Transformational Leadership and Long-Term Organizational Goals

The study by (Gigliotti et al., 2025) provides valuable insights into leadership development programs, specifically how alumni perceive the enhancement of leadership competencies and its impact on their organizations. Transformational leadership is highlighted as a key factor in fostering employee commitment and driving long-term sustainability goals. This finding is aligned with Zada et al. (2025), which emphasizes the importance of individual capacity development for organizational success. However, while these studies demonstrate the positive impact of transformational leadership on organizational outcomes, there is a lack of consensus regarding the mechanisms through which transformational leadership facilitates the achievement of sustainability goals. Further research is needed to explore how transformational leadership interacts with other leadership styles, such as CSR or collaborative leadership, in driving sustainability.

Experience-Based Leadership and Emotional Intelligence

Sivagurunathan, Senathirajah, Sivagurunathan, Qazi, and Haque explore the potential of Equine-Assisted Experiential Learning (EAL) in developing leadership competencies, particularly emotional intelligence and non-verbal communication. The study underscores the importance of emotional and relational aspects in leadership development, essential for building team relationships and organizational effectiveness. This experience-based leadership approach offers a more direct, practical impact on leadership capabilities, suggesting that traditional leadership training may not fully address the emotional and relational needs of leaders. A key takeaway from this study is the potential for experiential learning to complement traditional leadership training, offering a more holistic approach to leadership development. However, the lack of empirical research across diverse organizational settings limits the applicability of EAL in a broader context. Further studies are required to test the effectiveness of such experiential learning techniques in real-world leadership scenarios (Sivagurunathan et al., 2025).

Gender-Inclusive Leadership and Organizational Change

Saenz, Wu, Uddaraju, Nafei, and Liu provide valuable insights into gender equality in executive leadership roles, particularly in countries with conservative cultural norms. Their research underscores the need for cultural and organizational policy changes to achieve genuine gender equality in leadership positions (Saenz et al., 2025). This aligns with Zada et al, which emphasizes CSR as a crucial element in advancing sustainability and equality within organizations. While these studies highlight the importance of gender-inclusive leadership, they do not fully explore the intersection between gender equality and other leadership models, such as CSR or transformational leadership. There is a need for further research on how gender-inclusive leadership can be integrated with sustainability-driven leadership approaches to create a more inclusive, resilient leadership culture. Contradictions may arise in contexts where organizational cultures are resistant to gender equality policies, which can hinder the broader adoption of inclusive leadership practices (Zada et al., 2025).

Critical Reflection

While the studies reviewed provide valuable insights into various leadership models, a few gaps and contradictions remain. First, the interaction between different leadership styles, such as CSR, transformational, and gender-inclusive leadership, has not been fully explored. Although each style has been individually linked to sustainability, how they collectively contribute to the development of a sustainability-oriented leadership culture remains unclear. Second, there is a need for further research into the sector-specific challenges and opportunities in implementing CSR and transformational leadership. While CSR leadership has been shown to work well in resource-intensive industries, its application in other sectors, such as technology or service-based industries, remains underexplored. Third, while experiential leadership models such as EAL show promise, empirical evidence on their long-term impact across diverse organizational settings is scarce.

Conceptual Model

Based on the synthesis of the reviewed studies, we propose a conceptual model that illustrates the relationship between CSR leadership and sustainability-oriented leadership. This model integrates CSR-driven leadership, transformational leadership, and gender-inclusive leadership as key components contributing to a sustainability culture within organizations. It suggests that CSR leadership serves as the foundation for sustainability, while transformational and gender-inclusive leadership amplify its impact by fostering employee engagement, organizational commitment, and long-term goal achievement.

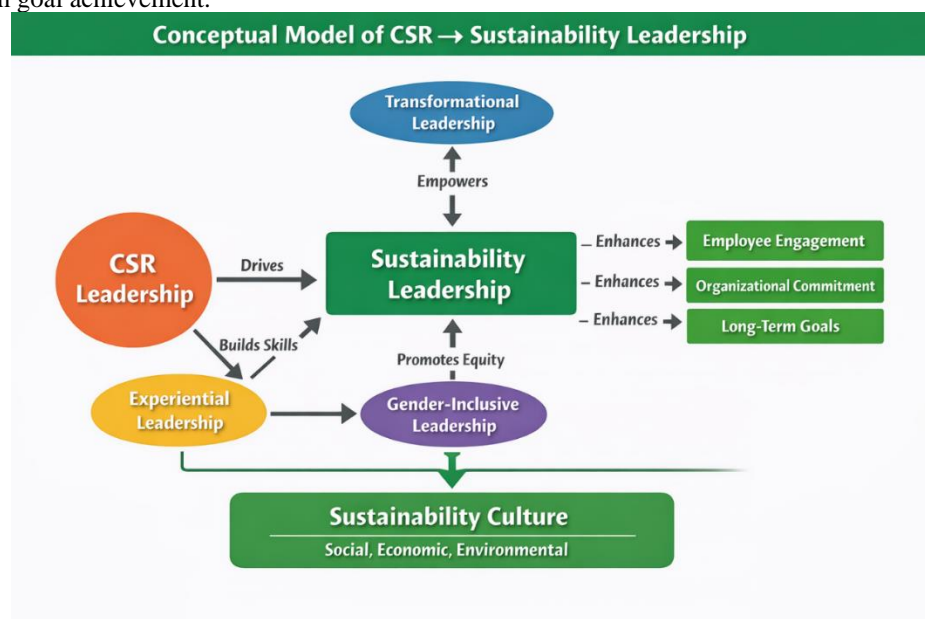


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of CSR → Sustainability Leadership

This conceptual model highlights the interconnectedness of these leadership styles in fostering a sustainable leadership culture, providing a roadmap for organizations seeking to integrate sustainability into their leadership practices

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that leadership models focused on sustainability, such as CSR leadership, transformational leadership, and collaborative leadership, are essential for shaping a leadership culture that supports long-term organizational goals. CSR leadership accelerates the adoption of green technologies and organizational

learning, while transformational leadership enhances employee commitment to collective goals. Collaborative leadership contributes to improving organizational quality, further supporting sustainability.

Gender equality in leadership positions is crucial for organizational sustainability. While inclusive policies have been implemented in some organizations, cultural barriers continue to slow women's advancement into leadership roles. Leadership training programs aimed at women, particularly in academic sectors, have proven effective in accelerating career promotion and leadership development.

This study contributes a synthesized framework for sustainability-oriented leadership that integrates CSR, transformational, collaborative, and gender-inclusive leadership models. Theoretically, it advances our understanding of how these leadership models contribute to sustainability culture within organizations. Practically, organizations can leverage these insights to design leadership development programs aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), enhancing their overall sustainability efforts.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should focus on the implementation of sustainability-oriented leadership culture across diverse sectors and countries, particularly in developing contexts. Further studies are needed to explore the impact of gender equality policies on organizational sustainability and to evaluate the effectiveness of experiential learning methods in leadership development for sustainability.

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