



Strategic Management and Organizational Culture Fit for Sustainable Universities. A Critical Review

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims at examining the relationship between strategic leadership and organisational culture to support sustainability in higher education institutions. Using systematic literature review approach, the academic information and best practices in the field are integrated to understand the best approaches in leadership and organizational culture to support sustainability efforts. The research outcomes show that a significant level of strategic leadership is needed for a firm to build a strong sustainability platform because of its impact on institutional support, capital deployment, and communication with stakeholders. As the research unfolds, organizational culture stands out as an important antecedent to modulate sustainability performance; sustainable organisational cultures mobilise and inspire people and instigate innovative activities towards sustainability. Leadership and culture are presented as two elements that are critical in the pursuit of positive results in sustainability endeavours. This study provides a theoretical and pragmatic significance to higher education institutions' senior leadership, human resource development, organisational culture measurement, and improved strategies to benefit institutions and stakeholders. Lastly, this study highlights the significance and criticality of embracing strategic leadership and organisational culture perspectives for championing sustainable initiatives in higher learning institutions, and the global sustainable agenda generally.

Keywords: Leadership, Culture, Sustainability, Academic Industry, Engagement, Sustainable Practices, Leadership, Analysis, Sustainability and Sustainable Development, Institutional Support.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

In the last few decades, it has become clearer for the higher education sector to incorporate sustainability as one of the core tenets of the institutions' mission and vision statements across the United States and worldwide. As actors in the generation and dissemination of knowledge, as well as in active shaping of societies, universities potentially have the best conditions provided for sustainable development at regional, national and global levels [17]. This paper will argue that both strategic leadership and organizational culture are critically important in creating structures for sustainability within these institutions.

Effective strategic leadership is the capacity of leaders in a university to chart and ensure the fulfillment of long-term organizational plans that enhance the sustainability of environment, social and even economic capital [12]. This type of leadership is important in educational institutions since there is a multiple interrelated stakeholder's interest that makes the way to sustainable development challenging. University culture, which may be described as the set of norms, attitudes, and procedures with reference to how the members of an institution should behave [20], provides the basis upon which sustainability is envisioned and practitioners in universities.

This means that strategic leadership and organizational culture should work hand in hand in any organization. It can lead to poor outcomes of sustainable practices due to conflict, as leaders may lack means of encouraging facets to practice sustainable behaviors at the organizational culture in their institutions [6]. Therefore, trying to understand the multifaceted and interconnected nature of strategic management and organizational culture is vital for any university that aims at the achievement of sustainability agenda.

1.2 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to explore the alignment between strategic leadership and organizational culture in promoting sustainability within higher education institutions. This study aims to:

- Investigate how strategic leadership impacts the development and reinforcement of an organizational culture conducive to sustainability;
- Examine the challenges university leaders face in aligning their strategic initiatives with the underlying cultural dimensions of their institutions;
- Identify best practices and strategies employed by universities that successfully align strategic leadership with organizational culture to advance sustainability.

1.3 Research Objectives

- In what way does strategic leadership impact the development of a sustainable university culture?
- How can university leaders who are charged with the responsibility of implementing sustainability learn about the barriers and facilitators for sustainability strategy within the existing organizational culture?
- What strategic leadership and organizational culture patterns can be recognized for higher education institutions that remain successful in sustainability initiatives?
- What are the perceived barriers and enablers that university leaders encounter in aligning their sustainability strategies with the existing organizational culture?
- What best practices can be identified among higher education institutions that successfully integrate strategic leadership and organizational culture in their sustainability initiatives?

Through answering these questions, the study will seek to advance knowledge of strategic leadership and organisational culture in sustainable development in higher education and provide insights that will help universities improve their sustainability initiatives.

2. Literature Review

Literature Review section presents an extensive literature search of the existing literature concerning the relations between strategic leadership, organizational culture and sustainability in higher education institutions. The literature is organized into three main sections: the meaning and application of strategic leadership in sustainability, an understanding of the role of organizational culture in sustainability, and an appreciation of their relationship in supporting sustainable initiatives in universities.

2.1 Strategic Leadership & Management in Higher Institutions

Strategic leadership can therefore be defined as the art of leading individuals and organizations in order to formulate and/or select, and later manage and direct an organization's strategies in order to effect achievement of prescribed organizational objectives [13]. Strategic leadership is crucial in relation to sustainability since this is the apex that elevates the institution to the vision of sustainable development and guides it in that direction.

[2] analysis shows that sustainability should become one of the main strategic goals of educational management. Beyond guiding the funneling of resources towards sustainability endeavors, there is also the role of mobilizing and influencing those who are different types of stakeholders, which include faculty, students, and the general public regarding the plural subject of sustainability [16]. Promoters of high commitment to sustainability help to generate legitimacy and sustainable cultural formation within the institution [5].

A qualitative synthesis of the studies shows that strategic leadership can impact the internal environment of organizations and, therefore, their environmental performance [14]. For example, it is observed that Universities that include sustainability as a part of their strategic planning tend to embrace complicated sustainability practices ranging from curriculum inventions, and practical campus reforms to community interactions [10].

2.2 Organizational Culture and Sustainability

Scientifically, organizational culture refers to a system of ingrained values, beliefs, and practices, which guide or define behavior within an organization [20]. It actually plays a decisive role within sustainability research regarding shaping perceptions of sustainability initiatives at universities and how the latter are enacted. Therefore, there is a relationship between a firm's organizational culture and the extent of sustainability practices that way be implemented and propagated in the firm.

According to [8], organizations with a sustainable culture also influence faculty and students to play an active role in sustainability projects. Culture moderates the relationship between strategies and outcomes, in that cultural characteristics influence the way in which change efforts are implemented. For instance, [11] established that perceived corporate culture has positive ordinal association with behaviors and practices engendered by the sustainability drive.

Further it reveals that culture of an organization either supports or poses a barrier for sustainability in an organization. More often than not, the organizational culture which existed in an institution is in sharp contrast with sustainable culture that is in support of new age academic values and ethics

which are much of a nuisance for leaders [18]. This misalignment means that for strategic leaders to be able to engage, create and sustain cultural change efforts that affirms sustainability as a core organizational value.

2.3 The Relationship Between Strategic Leadership and Organizational Culture

This paper, therefore postulates that strategic leadership and organizational culture are complimentary to churn out sustainability in higher learning institutions. However, when the strategic leadership is complemented by an organizational culture that is also supportive of such change, universities can create the necessary leverage to support innovation and sustainability [22].

While [4] posit correctly on the fact that sustainable efforts are a product of the interplay of top leadership and the organizational culture of the university. Thus, this interaction helps leaders to communicate sustainability goals and objectives, take advantages of self-motives of stakeholders, and facilitate the collaborative actions toward achieving the sustainability goals and objectives.

The alignment process does involve leaders to be sensitive to cultural aspects or features and to come up with strategic efforts that would relate to the mentioned culture. This alignment can also encompass some forms of stakeholder engagement, where receivers help to set sustained commitment objectives, creating salutary engagement [15].

Misalignments often arise from earlier assumptions and organizational opposition in the culture. As observed by [9], it requires a robust level of transformational leadership that can reframe culturally the discourses around sustainability while firmly establishing sustainability within the DNA of institutions or organizations.

In this way, the establishment of the described relationship between strategic leadership and organizational culture will not only improve the sustainability performance of universities but also demonstrate sustainable development to the community.

In the literature reviewed in this paper, it revolves around the examination of strategic leadership and organizational culture as important factors that can contribute to sustainability in higher education institutions. Strategic leaders play the roles of shaping a sustainable vision, whereas an organizational culture can facilitate affirmative change and successful implementation of sustainability. Therefore, actions that support the above propositions suggest that universities require a duality of strategic planning and organizational culture change to realize their sustainable development goals.

3. Methodology

The method brief describes the research method adopted in completing the literature review on the link between strategic leadership and organizational culture for sustainability in higher learning institutions. This chapter explains how sources were chosen, how the search was conducted, and the steps taken to extract relevant data and analyse it which makes it clear how the literature was assessed and then reviewed systematically.

3.1 Research Design

The systematic literature review was conducted to ensure that meta-analysis of the literature and practical experience of decision makers in higher education was done effectively regarding the concepts of strategic leadership, organisational culture, and sustainability. This approach was considered to get an extensive [12] overview of the subject area and to establish what areas where the current study can make a contribution [7].

3.2 Selection of Sources

The selection of sources for this literature review was guided by specific inclusion and exclusion criteria:

Inclusion Criteria

- Relevance: The articles reviewed only focused on the relationship between strategic leadership, organisational culture and sustainability within higher education institutions.
- Recency: The emphasis was put on the material published in the last decade (2013-2023) to focus on the recent achievements of the study area.
- Peer-Reviewed Journals: Journal articles were used as sources to guarantee the reliability and the academic reliability of the information found.
- Language: Original investigations and all articles were restricted to those available in the English language.

Exclusion Criteria

- Non-Academic Sources: Research articles but articles in other formats like opinion, blog or news articles were not considered.
- Geographical Limitations: Research that had targeted higher education institutions in areas other than sustainability was excluded for purpose of specificity.
- ERIC-Education Resources information Centre• strategic leadership, and sustainability

- “techniques in higher learning institutions”
- “integration/consistency between leadership practice and culture in higher learning institutions”
- “higher education sustainability measures for this literature review were guided by specific inclusion and exclusion criteria:

3.3 Search Strategy

To identify relevant literature, a structured search strategy was employed across multiple academic databases, including:

- Google Scholar
- JSTOR
- Scopus
- Web of Science
- ERIC (Education Resources Information Center)

The following keywords and phrases were used in various combinations:

- "strategic leadership and sustainability"
- "organizational culture and sustainability in higher education"
- "sustainable practices in universities"
- "alignment of leadership and culture in higher education"
- "higher education sustainability initiatives"

The initial search was made on March, 2023 and finalised in October, 2023 in an attempt to capture recent research.

3.4 Data Extraction and Analysis

Following the ([first search]), a title and abstract review was conducted in order to exclude studies that did not fit the defined ([inclusion criteria]. These selected articles' abstracts were, therefore, consulted for more detailed information on their conclusion, research approach, and theories.

Data extraction involved the following key steps:

- Summary of Findings: The key issues of the articles analysed focused on strategic leadership, organizational culture and sustainability and were therefore systematically synthesised.
- Thematic Analysis: Thus, the literature was reviewed through the identification of emerging thematic patterns and subsidiary categories. This facilitated a systematic presentation of the results, where patterns between strategic leadership and organisational culture were made visible concerning sustainability in higher education.
- Identification of Gaps: In the course of the review, effort was made to point out the emerging lacunas and discrepancies in literature.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Since this research approach entails the integration of prior literature instead of surveying people, ethical issues such as consent to participate, anonymity/privacy were irrelevant. Nevertheless, great effort was made to capture and reference all information to ensure that this is free from intellectual dishonesty [1].

This section has laid down the methodology employed in the literature review on strategic leadership, organisational culture and sustainability within higher education institutions. The structural approach, combined with the purposes of inclusion and exclusion, guarantees that the analysis is both non-fragmentary and formalized and serves as a basis for further conceptual development of the relationship between the essentials in question and the further enhancement of sustainability concepts in universities.

4. Findings

The following is a summary of the literature reviewed in regard to strategic leadership and organisational culture with respect to sustainability in higher education institutions. The analysis is organized around three primary themes that emerged from the literature: There are three research questions in this study: (1) a quantitative analysis of strategic leadership and sustainability, (2) an analysis of sustainability results based on the organisational culture index, (3) the moderating effect of the organisational culture index for strategic leadership and sustainability.

4.1 How Strategic Leadership Supports Development of Sustainability

The literature has revealed that literature consistently details the central importance of strategic leadership in supporting sustainability within HEIs. It means that strategic leaders are not only required to set direction for developing sustainability but also to acquire institutional support and engage stakeholders [15]. Studies indicate that effective strategic leadership can be characterized by several key attributes:

- **Visionary Leadership:** Academic executives that speak of such vision of sustainability have higher chances of creating commitment from the faculty, staff and students towards achievement of these goals. For example, [23] opines that if the universities have leaders who support sustainable development goals, it is possible for an organizational culture that supports sustainability to be developed across the organizations' systems;
- **Resource Allocation:** Many a time, strategic leaders are expected to look for and direct the institutions resources towards sustainable activities. [24] have found that it is the universities that allocate their resources more effectively to the sustainability that receive the improvements in both ecological and operational sustainability.;
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Sustainability strategies involve the use of diverse stakeholders for them to be successful. [21] evidence demonstrates that decision-making frames for more sustainable behaviour are more strongly supported when decision-making is inclusive. In our case where, San Diego State University leaders involve the students and faculty in the formulation of the sustainability policies the latter ingrains a sense of ownership as they are part of the decision-making team.

4.2 Lur Influence of Organizational Culture on Lur Sustainability Outcomes

Organizational culture then proves to be critical to sustainability efforts in higher learning institutions. Key findings related to organizational culture include:

- **Shared Values and Beliefs:** Of equal importance is understanding that implementing sustainability initiatives is more likely expected when an organization operates in a culture that embraces sustainability and care for the environment. [18] put forward a view that universities with sustainability culture are most probable to adopt sustainable development practices in their curricula and processes;
- **Cultural Support for Innovation:** The results demonstrate that corporate culture that prizes innovation leads to the testing of new ideas of sustainability. For instance, [19] established that universities with a culture supportive of innovation have successfully developed and favored innovative sustainability programs that serve as reference within the higher learning institutions;
- **Resistance to Change:** On the other hand, breaking organizational culture that is characterized by resistance to change often proves to be counterproductive to the sustainability cause. [9] opine that cultural values that support the traditional operating model of organisations may be opposed to sustainability objectives, thus resulting in organisational distancing as well as the ineffectiveness of the implementation of sustainability.

4.3 The Three-Way Interaction of Strategic Leadership and Corporate Culture

Hence, knowledge of strategic leadership and the organizational culture is essential to create effective sustainability practices. Key insights on this interplay include:

- **Alignment for Effectiveness:** The more a great strategy is in sync with the organizational culture within the organization the more suitability is likely to follow suit for sustainability.[4] opine that there is a positive interaction between leadership patterns and organisational culture that determines resource capability and competence for organisations to attain sustainable goals and objectives;
- **Transformational Leadership:** For this reason, transformational leadership is most useful in translating the vision and strategy to organizational culture. According to the study conducted by [22], cultural change particularly in leadership for sustainability initiatives activities the ability of the transformational leaders to transform organizational cultures with reference to the common sustainability goals and institutional values;

Best Practices in Alignment: The effectiveness of such an approach is evidenced by the following case studies: First, strategic leaders who encourage cultural mindfulness associate their activities with the promotion of sustainability across a range of practices on the campus, including the provision of sustainability-oriented training programs and the setting up of the cross-functional sustainability committees with the expressed intent of continuity of sustainability reforms [16],[3].

5. Conclusion

Data gathered from participants shows that there is a positive relationship between strategic leadership and sustainability in the higher education, furthermore, organizational culture was identified to be the determinant for sound implementation of sustainability initiatives. However, it is possible to say that relationships between the concepts of strategic leadership and organizational culture affect the formation of an institutional environment for sustainable development. These findings provide a basis for a more detailed analysis of what the implications of these trends would mean for higher education policy and practice as discussed in the next chapter.

The present research has offered a comprehensive analysis on RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE ON SUSTAINABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS. The outcomes shed light on key research findings that shed light on the leadership and culture required for sustainable change.

This study proves that better strategic management is crucial in the process of developing a sound sustainable agenda within campuses of universities. Communicative organizational vision towards sustainability in addition to allocation of available resources and stakeholders' management also defines the degree of institutional commitment and participation.

Interestingly, the research results show that organizational culture is a key determinant of sustainability program outcomes. Cultures aligned with sustainable values and implementations foster increased faculty and staff involvement and creativity, as well as increase student participation; however, change-averse cultures hinder change endeavours.

One interesting feature that is revealed out of the present research is the correlation between strategic management and organizational culture. Sustainability is not just about having a good leader to champion the cause the organisational culture must call for sustainability. The authors observed and understood that leaders who noticed such cultural values present can actually foster a more suitable climate for sustainability.

L&D institutions that best practice, including stakeholder engagement and sustainability management across all functions and activities, are good benchmarks for improvement. Such practices can serve as a model for a greater number of other actors and may significantly affect the overall sustainability processes worldwide.

5.1 Implications for Higher Education Institutions

The implications of these findings are profound for higher education institutions aiming to enhance their sustainability initiatives:

- Leadership Development: Investing in the development of strategic leaders who prioritize sustainability is critical for operationalizing sustainability goals;
- Cultural Assessment and Change: Institutions should actively assess their organizational cultures concerning sustainability and implement initiatives to cultivate a culture that aligns with sustainability values;
- Enhanced Stakeholder Engagement: Engaging all constituents in sustainability discussions and decisions fosters a sense of ownership and accountability, which is crucial for the success of sustainability initiatives.

In conclusion, this research highlights the essential roles of strategic leadership and organizational culture in advancing sustainability within higher education. By recognizing and fostering the interplay between these elements, colleges and universities can effectively contribute to sustainable development while preparing their communities for the challenges of the future. As higher education institutions continue to adapt in a rapidly changing world, the emphasis on strategic leadership and cultural alignment will be vital in driving impactful sustainability practices. The insights gleaned from this study provide a foundation for further exploration and action in the pursuit of sustainability in educational settings.

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