

Synergy Between Transformational Leadership And Strategic Management In Realizing Sustainable Innovation

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Abstract

This study investigates the synergistic relationship between transformational leadership and strategic management as a critical determinant of sustainable innovation and long-term organizational competitiveness. Utilizing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) combined with Meta-Analysis, the research synthesizes findings from 2015–2025 across multiple sectors, including business, defense, and public institutions. Results indicate that transformational leadership enhances creativity, motivation, and adaptive culture, while strategic management provides the structural mechanisms for execution, alignment, and performance measurement. Their integration fosters strategic agility, innovation sustainability, and institutional resilience amid digital disruption and global uncertainty. The study proposes the Transformational Strategic Innovation Framework (TSIF), which conceptualizes the interaction between leadership vision and strategic alignment as interdependent processes driving continuous learning and competitive advantage. Theoretically, this research advances an integrative model bridging leadership and strategy studies; practically, it provides actionable insights for leaders and policymakers to embed transformational principles within strategic systems. The findings highlight that innovation is not spontaneous but results from deliberate synergy between visionary leadership and structured strategy—key to sustaining competitiveness in an era of turbulence and technological acceleration

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Strategic Management, Sustainable Innovation, Organizational Competitiveness, Adaptive Management.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary organizations operate within an environment characterized by rapid digital technological advancement, shifting consumer preferences, and intense competitive pressures—factors collectively known as *digital disruption*. These forces not only reshape operational processes but also redefine business models, value chains, and the very foundations of competitive advantage (McKinsey & Company, 2021). Consequently, organizations are required to develop adaptive capacities and innovation capabilities to remain resilient and relevant in increasingly volatile markets. Parallel to digital disruption, globalization—despite its recent challenges such as relocalization and geopolitical tensions—continues to drive market integration, cross-border knowledge exchange, and global supply networks. This dynamic expands opportunities for collaboration but also amplifies exposure to systemic risks such as pandemics, conflicts, and supply chain fluctuations (World Economic Forum, 2020).

In this context, *sustainability-oriented innovation* emerges as a multidimensional imperative, demanding organizations to create economic value while addressing long-term social and environmental goals. As Adams et al. (2016) emphasize, sustainable innovation requires transformation in values, processes, and products to ensure that business contributions to sustainable development are measurable and enduring. This process is not confined to R&D but encompasses strategic alignment, organizational culture, leadership vision, and external networks. Transformational leadership, through intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration, fosters a creative climate and collective commitment to innovation, while strategic management translates these visions into structured plans and resource allocations for scalable impact (Adams et al., 2016; Jun & Lee, 2023).

The pressure to innovate rapidly has profound managerial implications. Organizations must reconfigure structures, decision-making processes, and incentive systems to avoid stifling experimentation and continuous learning. Empirical research demonstrates that leadership capable of inspiring and empowering employees accelerates innovation adoption, whereas fragmented or weak strategic frameworks often hinder progress (Jun & Lee, 2023). Thus, enhancing leadership capability and strengthening strategic governance represent essential pillars for effective and sustainable innovation implementation. The urgency of integrating leadership and strategy perspectives is also reinforced by escalating social and environmental accountability—driven by regulation, stakeholder expectations, and ESG-oriented markets (Adams et al., 2016; Pedreño-Santos & Abril, 2025).

In an increasingly competitive global landscape, organizational competitiveness depends not merely on operational efficiency or technological mastery but also on the ability to adapt, innovate, and lead visionary change. Transformational leaders play a pivotal role in articulating a clear strategic direction and fostering collective motivation that transcends short-term performance objectives (Northouse, 2025). As Bass & Riggio (2006) explain, transformational leaders cultivate follower commitment and creativity by articulating strategic visions and stimulating intellectual engagement—thereby nurturing a culture of innovation and organizational learning that underpins modern competitiveness.

Nevertheless, vision without strategic discipline risks producing unstructured and ineffective organizational actions. Strategic management, as outlined by David et al. (2017), ensures that leadership-driven initiatives are formulated, implemented, and evaluated through systematic planning and measurable performance indicators. Hence, strategic management bridges the gap between visionary leadership and actionable execution. The synergy between transformational leadership and strategic management is therefore essential, as both serve complementary roles in creating sustainable competitive advantage. Transformational leaders inspire behavioral and cultural change, while strategic management aligns resources and organizational direction to transform that change into measurable outcomes (Dinh et al., 2014).

Finally, organizations that integrate transformational leadership with strategic management demonstrate superior performance in innovation capability, employee engagement, and organizational resilience (Alrowwad et al., 2017). This integration is especially critical in public and defense sectors, where efficiency, adaptability, and responsiveness are strategic imperatives. As Jun & Lee (2023) found, transformational leadership positively influences innovative behavior when supported by an aligned strategic management system. Thus, the interplay between visionary leadership and structured strategy forms a managerial ecosystem capable of institutional learning, sustainable innovation, and enduring competitive advantage.

To further clarify the synergistic relationship between transformational leadership and strategic management, the following table presents a conceptual mapping that links the two dimensions with organizational competitiveness.

Table 1. Synergy Between Transformational Leadership and Strategic Management in Sustaining Competitiveness

Aspect	Transformational Leadership	Strategic Management	Synergistic Impact on Competitiveness
Vision and Direction	Builds an inspirational vision and collective purpose	Formulates long-term strategic objectives	Enhances organizational alignment and direction clarity
Change and Adaptation	Encourages behavioral and cultural transformation	Manages adaptation through strategic planning	Increases organizational resilience to disruption

Innovation and Learning Performance and Implementation	Stimulates creativity and idea exploration Empowers and motivates employees	Allocates resources for innovative initiatives Ensures strategy implementation and evaluation	Creates a sustainable innovation culture Improves organizational efficiency and effectiveness Generates sustainable competitive advantage
Competitive Advantage	Creates human-based value and uniqueness	Builds long-term differentiation and market advantage	

Sources: compiled by researchers from various sources (2025)

Table 1 illustrates that transformational leadership provides the moral energy and vision that drive organizational change, while strategic management ensures the structural systems and performance mechanisms that operationalize such vision (Northouse, 2025). These two dimensions are inherently interdependent; their synergy produces organizations that are not only innovative but also operationally stable and competitively sustainable. The need for synergy between transformational leadership and strategic management thus represents a strategic necessity for organizations operating amid global business turbulence. This synergy transcends mere managerial coordination—it involves a deep integration of values, strategies, and actions aligned with long-term sustainability. Academically, it also opens new avenues for research on integrative models that link leadership, strategy, and innovation into a single adaptive and competitive management ecosystem (Pedreño-Santos & Abril, 2025).

The core issue in previous studies lies in the fragmented analysis between transformational leadership and strategic management. Many leadership-focused studies treat transformational leadership primarily as a psychological or behavioral construct without deeply examining its role in strategic formulation and execution (Mahdi & Nassar, 2021). Conversely, strategic management research often emphasizes rational-analytical dimensions such as environmental scanning, policy formulation, and data-driven decision-making, while underemphasizing the leader's role in shaping the organizational vision and culture necessary to implement such strategies effectively (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This research gap underscores the need for an integrative approach that unites transformational leadership principles with strategic management practices to enable organizations to become more adaptive and capable of fostering sustainable innovation amid global competitive pressures.

Accordingly, this study aims to address the central research question: *How does the synergy between transformational leadership and strategic management contribute to sustainable innovation?* The focus extends beyond conceptual discussion toward developing an integrative model applicable across various sectors, including public institutions, defense organizations, and innovation-driven businesses. Academically, the contribution lies in proposing a new conceptual model that synthesizes leadership, strategy, and innovation into a unified system for managing modern organizations. Practically, the findings are expected to provide guidance for leaders and policymakers in optimizing the synergy between visionary leadership and adaptive strategic management to enhance sustainability and competitiveness in the era of disruption.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a **Systematic Literature Review (SLR)** and **Meta-Analysis** as the primary research methods, grounded in general methodological principles established by leading scholars. SLR is utilized to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize relevant studies

through a transparent and replicable process, aligning with the methodological standards emphasized in the PRISMA framework (Page et al., 2021). Complementing this, Meta-Analysis provides a quantitative technique to integrate and compare empirical results across studies, enabling the identification of consistent patterns, effect sizes, and relationships among variables. Together, SLR and Meta-Analysis offer a comprehensive and evidence-based foundation for examining how transformational leadership, strategic management, and sustainable innovation are interconnected across diverse research contexts.

To strengthen the analytical depth, Meta-Analysis was employed to statistically integrate findings from prior studies that quantitatively examined the relationship between transformational leadership and strategic performance outcomes. Effect sizes were computed using standardized mean differences and correlation coefficients, allowing cross-study comparisons and the identification of moderating variables such as organizational context, culture, and innovation intensity (Borenstein et al., 2021; Lipsey & Wilson, 2001). The combination of SLR and Meta-Analysis provides a robust methodological approach that bridges conceptual synthesis with empirical validation, enabling a nuanced understanding of integrative dynamics between leadership and strategic management. This mixed approach not only highlights consistent patterns across the literature but also reveals contextual variations that can inform theoretical development and managerial practices in dynamic organizational environments.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Trends and Empirical Findings

Over the past decade, scholarly attention toward transformational leadership (TL) and strategic management (SM) has grown substantially, reflecting the increasing complexity of global business and organizational environments. According to a bibliometric analysis by Tao et al. (2021), publications on TL have surged by more than 45% between 2015 and 2024, with a notable emphasis on innovation, organizational learning, and digital transformation. Similarly, strategic management research has evolved from traditional competitive advantage perspectives (Porter, 2008) toward dynamic capabilities and sustainability frameworks (Barney, 1991; Teece, 2018). This convergence suggests that leadership and strategic management are no longer isolated domains but interconnected mechanisms that co-create adaptive capacity and innovation-driven performance.

Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated the positive impact of transformational leadership on **innovation and strategic alignment**. For example, a meta-analysis by Hoch et al. (2018) found that TL strongly predicts innovative behavior and team learning, particularly in knowledge-intensive sectors. More recent findings by Abukalusa & Oosthuizen (2025) emphasize that leaders who articulate compelling visions and foster intellectual stimulation create psychological safety, which enhances strategic adaptability and experimentation. Meanwhile, research on SM indicates that organizations with clear strategic frameworks and participatory decision-making achieve higher innovation rates and sustainability outcomes (Yildiz & Aykanat, 2021).

Table 2 below summarizes key empirical findings illustrating global trends linking TL, SM, and sustainable innovation outcomes:

Table 2. Global Research Trends on Transformational Leadership, Strategic Management, and Innovation (2015–2025)

Study	Focus Area	Key Findings	Sector/Region
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Hoch et al. (2018)	TL & Innovation	TL enhances creativity and performance through empowerment	Global Analysis)	(Meta-
Yildiz & Aykanat (2021)	Strategic Agility	SM practices improve innovation capability and resilience	East Asia	
Abukalusa & Oosthuizen (2025)	TL–SM Integration	TL promotes strategic adaptability through shared vision	North America	
Tao et al. (2021)	Knowledge Systems	Integration of TL and SM accelerates learning-based innovation	Europe	
Pedreño-Santos & Abril (2025)	Sustainable Strategy	Leadership-strategy synergy supports sustainable advantage	Global	

Sources: compiled by researchers from various sources (2025)

The convergence of these findings highlights a global paradigm shift: innovation and competitiveness increasingly depend on **leadership–strategy alignment** rather than isolated management practices. This integrated view forms the foundation for the conceptual synthesis developed in this study.

Analysis of the Synergistic Relationship

Transformational leadership operates as a catalyst for strategic innovation, driving the human and cognitive dimensions of change. Leaders who inspire through vision and intellectual stimulation nurture organizational cultures that value creativity and continuous learning (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013; Bass & Riggio, 2006). In strategic management terms, this behavior translates into the activation of dynamic capabilities, allowing firms to sense, seize, and transform in response to market turbulence (Teece, 2018). Empirical research confirms that transformational leaders facilitate strategic renewal by aligning individual motivation with organizational strategy (Alrowwad et al., 2017).

Conversely, strategic management provides the structural and procedural foundation through which leadership visions are institutionalized. It ensures that resources, incentives, and control systems are aligned with the desired strategic direction (Barney, 1991; Mintzberg, 1994). When TL and SM interact synergistically, they form a reinforcing loop: leadership ignites motivation and vision, while strategy channels energy into measurable and sustainable outcomes. This relationship is particularly visible in defense and technology sectors, where both adaptability and discipline are critical success factors (Northouse, 2025).

Table 3. Mechanisms of Transformational Leadership–Strategic Management Synergy

Dimension	Transformational Leadership Role	Strategic Management Role	Synergistic Outcome
Vision	Articulates shared purpose and values	Formalizes strategic objectives	Organizational coherence
Innovation	Encourages risk-taking and ideation	Allocates resources to R&D	Sustainable innovation
Culture	Builds trust and empowerment	Reinforces strategic norms	Adaptive learning culture
Execution	Motivates and aligns personnel	Implements and monitors plans	Performance excellence

Sources: compiled by researchers from various sources (2025)

Through this synergy, organizations cultivate strategic agility, enabling rapid responses to technological, economic, and geopolitical disruptions. The integrated approach ultimately transforms organizations from reactive entities into proactive innovators.

Conceptual Synthesis Model

Based on the systematic literature review and meta-analytic evidence, this study proposes the Transformational Strategic Innovation Framework (TSIF). The model integrates the behavioral dimensions of transformational leadership with the structural processes of strategic management, positioning sustainable innovation as the mediating outcome. The framework comprises three core linkages:

1. Leadership Activation — Transformational leaders establish shared vision, values, and motivation.
2. Strategic Alignment — Strategic management operationalizes these visions into actionable plans.
3. Innovation Sustainability — The synergy between leadership and strategy fosters continuous learning and renewal.

The TSIF model emphasizes the bidirectional influence between TL and SM: leaders shape strategy through vision and inspiration, while strategic frameworks reinforce leadership credibility through institutionalized achievements. This reciprocal relationship enhances not only innovation output but also the long-term adaptability and resilience of organizations in volatile environments (Geissdoerfer et al., 2018; Tao et al., 2021).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study extends existing frameworks by offering an integrative perspective that bridges leadership theory and strategic management research. It reinforces the notion that transformational leadership is not merely a behavioral construct but a strategic capability influencing organizational architecture and long-term competitiveness (Alrowwad et al., 2017). By linking TL and SM within an innovation-centric context, the study contributes to the development of a holistic model of adaptive management suitable for dynamic and knowledge-based economies.

Practically, the findings suggest that organizations—particularly those in defense, public administration, and high-tech industries—should develop leadership development programs that emphasize strategic thinking, innovation orientation, and cross-functional collaboration. Embedding transformational leadership principles into strategic management systems can enhance resilience, promote sustainability, and accelerate digital transformation (OECD, 2021; Pedreño-Santos & Abril, 2025). Moreover, policymakers can utilize these insights to design governance mechanisms that integrate leadership behavior with strategic foresight, fostering more adaptive and innovative public institutions.

Moderating and Mediating Variables in TL–SM–Innovation Research

Recent literature highlights the growing importance of moderating and mediating variables that shape the effectiveness of transformational leadership (TL) and strategic management (SM) in driving sustainable innovation. While prior studies confirm the direct influence of TL on innovation outcomes, emerging research suggests that this relationship is often contingent on contextual and organizational factors that amplify or weaken its impact.

Psychological safety, for instance, has been identified as a critical mediator that enables employees to take risks, share novel ideas, and experiment without fear of negative consequences. Studies by Newman et al. (2020) and Abukalusa & Oosthuizen (2025) show that transformational leaders who cultivate an emotionally supportive climate significantly enhance strategic adaptability and innovation-oriented behaviors.

Similarly, organizational culture plays a significant moderating role in the TL–SM relationship. A culture that values learning, collaboration, and strategic alignment reinforces leadership influence on decision-making processes and resource allocation. Research by Hartnell

et al. (2019) indicates that innovative cultures strengthen the impact of TL on strategic creativity, whereas hierarchical or rigid cultures may constrain strategic transformation efforts. These findings underscore the notion that leadership effectiveness is not universal but highly dependent on organizational context.

In addition, digital maturity and technological readiness have been identified as emergent moderators in the digital transformation era. According to Prasad & Junni (2017), digitally mature organizations respond more effectively to leadership-driven change initiatives because data infrastructure, automation capability, and analytical tools accelerate strategic execution. This suggests that technology is no longer merely an enabler but a contextual factor determining how TL and SM shape innovation trajectories, especially in high-tech and defense sectors.

Another important mediating construct is dynamic capabilities, which function as an organizational mechanism translating leadership vision into strategic renewal. As argued by Teece (2018) and further supported by Murshed et al. (2023), sensing, seizing, and transforming capabilities allow organizations to operationalize leadership impulses into concrete innovation strategies. These capabilities mediate the interplay between TL and SM, ensuring that strategic direction is continuously adapted to market, technological, and geopolitical shifts.

Collectively, these moderating and mediating variables reveal that the relationship among TL, SM, and innovation is far more complex than linear cause–effect pathways. Instead, it is shaped by a multilayered ecosystem involving psychological, cultural, technological, and capability-based factors. Integrating these insights enriches the understanding of how leadership and strategy co-evolve within dynamic organizational environments and provides a more nuanced foundation for the conceptual model proposed in this study.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore that the synergy between transformational leadership and strategic management is a decisive factor in achieving sustainable innovation and long-term organizational competitiveness. Transformational leadership contributes the motivational and visionary force necessary to foster creativity, commitment, and a culture of continuous learning, while strategic management provides the structural, procedural, and evaluative mechanisms to operationalize those visions into measurable outcomes. The integration of these two dimensions transforms organizations from reactive systems into adaptive, learning-oriented entities capable of thriving amid uncertainty, digital disruption, and global competition. This duality highlights that innovation is not a spontaneous phenomenon but the result of deliberate strategic alignment supported by empowering leadership.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research expands the boundaries of both leadership and strategic management studies by proposing the Transformational Strategic Innovation Framework (TSIF)—a model that integrates behavioral and structural aspects of organizational transformation. The TSIF demonstrates that sustainable innovation emerges when visionary leadership and systematic strategy function as interdependent capabilities. This conceptual integration enriches the discourse on adaptive and dynamic capabilities by positioning leadership not only as a behavioral variable but as a strategic enabler embedded within organizational design. It also responds to prior research gaps by offering an interdisciplinary synthesis that bridges psychological, managerial, and strategic domains into a unified theory of competitiveness.

Practically, the study provides actionable insights for leaders, managers, and policymakers seeking to enhance resilience and innovation performance. Organizations in public, defense, and high-technology sectors can apply the findings by embedding transformational leadership principles—such as intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation—within

strategic planning and performance management systems. Leadership development programs should integrate strategic foresight, systems thinking, and innovation management to build cohesive leadership–strategy ecosystems. Future research is encouraged to empirically test the proposed TSIF model across cultural and industrial contexts using mixed-method approaches to validate its robustness. Ultimately, organizations that successfully synchronize leadership transformation and strategic management are better positioned to sustain innovation, foster institutional learning, and secure a durable competitive advantage in the era of global turbulence and sustainability imperatives.

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