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Research Article

Organizational Culture as the Missing Link Between Green Strategy, Innovation, and Environmental Performance: A Conceptual Framework

A. Prathima 

Viceprincipal, Sri Ramakrishna College, Mangalore, India

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Correspondence

Prathimashettyrajesh@gmail.com

ORCID

A. Prathima 

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-9819-6677>

Abstract

This paper proposes an integrated conceptual framework that explains how green strategy, organisational culture, and green innovation interact to influence environmental performance. The aim is to address fragmentation in existing research and clarify the internal mechanisms that support sustainability outcomes. A theory-building approach is used, drawing on a critical synthesis of twenty-three peer-reviewed studies across green strategy, organisational culture, green innovation, and environmental management. Insights from these streams are combined to develop the framework and propositions. The review shows that green strategy, organisational culture, and green innovation each contribute to environmental performance, but they are often examined separately. The proposed framework positions organisational culture as a linking mechanism that enables strategic sustainability intent to translate into green innovation and, ultimately, environmental outcomes. Four propositions summarise the conceptual pathways. The framework is conceptual and requires empirical validation. Future studies can test the proposed relationships using quantitative or mixed-method designs and examine how external pressures interact with internal strategic and cultural conditions. The model highlights the need for alignment between strategy, culture, and innovation. It provides guidance for managers seeking to embed sustainability in organisational routines, strengthen innovation capability, and improve environmental performance. This paper is one of the few to integrate green strategy, organisational culture, green innovation, and environmental performance within a single framework. It advances sustainability theory by clarifying how internal organisational mechanisms jointly shape environmental outcomes.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Firms are encountering increasingly stringent expectations for improvements in environmental performance, and research has revealed the key role of internal strategic decisions in determining these outcomes. Evidence from Chinese industrial enterprises shows that firms with strategic positions that emphasise innovation achieve superior carbon-reduction performance because they invest more in green activities and are more responsive to environmental requirements (Zhao *et al.*, 2025). Similar results from the manufacturing industry demonstrate that green strategies supported by strong capabilities, including artificial intelligence-enabled systems, help companies reduce pollution and improve environmental performance through cleaner processes and more efficient resource use (Chotia *et al.*, 2024). These studies highlight that strategic intent is not neutral in shaping environmental outcomes; it affects the

direction, speed, and depth of environmental action. Green innovation is also consistently identified as a core mechanism through which firms improve environmental performance. Research shows that the application of green technological innovation, green process redesign, and environmentally oriented knowledge practices reduces emissions and improves resource efficiency, while also enhancing competitive positioning (Zhao *et al.*, 2025; Ashraf *et al.*, 2024). In several cases, innovation mediates the impact of strategy on performance, demonstrating that strategic commitments to sustainability must be transformed into new technologies, processes, or practices before measurable improvements in environmental performance can occur (Ashraf *et al.*, 2024).

Organisational culture plays a third internal role by shaping how firms interpret and act on sustainability priorities. Studies show that green-oriented cultural norms enable

organisational learning, foster pro-environmental employee behaviour, and enhance firms' ability to develop and deploy green innovations (Ozgul & Zehir, 2023; Mirahsani *et al.*, 2024; Kareem & Kummitha, 2025). Culture also influences employees' understanding of strategic goals, cross-functional coordination, and the continuity of green practices across the organisation. Research on corporate cultural strength further indicates that strong internal norms can enhance environmental performance by shaping decision-making routines and reinforcing long-term environmental priorities (Costa & Opare, 2025).

Despite these advances, the literature remains fragmented into separate streams. Strategy–innovation studies often overlook cultural enablers. Cultural studies are typically applied to behavioural or human resource practices and rarely link cultural mechanisms to strategic intent or environmental outcomes. Innovation studies demonstrate strong links to performance but seldom situate these findings within the broader strategic and cultural context in which innovation operates. As a result, there is no integrative explanation of how green strategic intent leads to innovation and how innovation subsequently translates into environmental performance. This gap is also evident in the reviewed studies: strategic contributions to environmental performance are examined without considering cultural conditions (Zhao *et al.*, 2025), while cultural influences on innovation are explored without positioning culture within the strategy–performance chain (Mirahsani *et al.*, 2024).

Although the impact of innovation on environmental performance is well documented, studies often fail to embed the strategic and cultural complexities that make innovation effective (Ashraf *et al.*, 2024). This results in a limited understanding of the complete internal mechanisms underlying environmental performance.

This paper addresses this gap by proposing a conceptual framework that positions organisational culture as the missing link between green strategy, green innovation, and environmental performance. The model explains how culture channels strategic sustainability intentions into innovation activities and how these innovations are realised as measurable environmental gains. Integrating these constructs provides a more comprehensive theoretical foundation for understanding how firms achieve environmental outcomes and establishes a basis for future empirical research.

A. Objectives of the Paper

1. To propose a conceptual model of the relationship between green strategy, green innovation, and environmental performance.
2. To present organisational culture as an important linking construct.
3. To define and structure these relationships for future empirical research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Green Strategy

Research on green strategy has moved away from viewing environmental initiatives as compliance tools and now presents them as strategic choices that affect competitiveness. Studies show that firms with proactive or innovation-driven strategic orientations allocate greater resources to environmental initiatives, respond more quickly to regulatory changes, and achieve stronger improvements in environmental outcomes (Zhao *et al.*, 2025). Research in the manufacturing sector confirms that green strategy influences operational practices and emissions, particularly when combined with digital or artificial intelligence-enabled capabilities that enhance process control and environmental efficiency (Chotia *et al.*, 2024).

Other studies emphasise the role of strategic intent in shaping how firms interpret environmental demands, build green capabilities, and pursue differentiation in markets where sustainability expectations are rising (Ashraf *et al.*, 2024). Taken together, the literature establishes green strategy as a decisive internal driver of environmental action but often fails to explain the internal organisational conditions under which strategy is translated into results.

B. Green Innovation

Green innovation is widely recognised as a direct route to enhancing environmental performance. Studies across different industries demonstrate that green product and process innovations reduce waste, lower emissions, and increase resource efficiency (Ha *et al.*, 2024). Research also shows that green innovation improves competitiveness through the introduction of cleaner technologies, the redesign of operations, and the facilitation of low-carbon transformation (Ameer *et al.*, 2024). Several studies position innovation as a mediator between strategic intent and environmental outcomes, suggesting that strategy alone does not lead to results unless concrete innovation practices are activated (Ashraf *et al.*, 2024; Gloria, 2025). Additional research demonstrates that absorptive capacity, green competencies, and stakeholder collaboration enhance firms' ability to generate and apply green innovations (Li *et al.*, 2025). While this literature highlights the impact of innovation on performance, it often separates innovation mechanisms from the organisational culture in which innovative behaviour occurs.

C. Organisational Culture

Organisational culture shapes the understanding, support, and maintenance of sustainability initiatives. Studies show that green cultural norms increase pro-environmental behaviour in the workplace, strengthen environmental learning, and facilitate the adoption of green innovations (Mirahsani *et al.*, 2024; Ozgul & Zehir, 2023). Culture also influences how firms mobilise resources for green initiatives, interpret strategic environmental priorities, and coordinate cross-functional sustainability activities (Kareem &

Kummitha, 2025). Research on corporate cultural strength indicates a positive relationship between strong internal cultural norms and improved environmental performance, as such norms guide managerial decision-making and reinforce long-term environmental priorities. Despite these contributions, cultural influences are typically examined in narrow contexts-such as human resource management, leadership, or behavioural outcomes-without explicitly linking culture to strategic execution or innovation pathways.

D. Environmental Performance

Environmental performance has been examined using indicators such as emission reduction, waste minimisation, resource efficiency, and regulatory compliance. Empirical studies show that green innovation, proactive strategy, and supportive organisational culture all contribute to improved environmental outcomes, albeit in different ways (Zhao *et al.*, 2025; Ashraf *et al.*, 2024; Mirahsani *et al.*, 2024). Some studies emphasise technological innovation as the primary determinant of performance, whereas others identify strategy or culture as the dominant factor. Because these research streams remain disconnected, explanations of environmental performance vary across studies, resulting in inconsistent theoretical interpretations and practical recommendations.

E. Synthesis of Literature

Across these four streams, three patterns emerge. First, strategy, innovation, and culture each affect environmental performance, but they have largely been investigated in isolation. Second, innovation is often positioned as an intermediate mechanism, while the cultural conditions that enable innovation are either overlooked or treated as background factors. Third, the absence of an integrated model means that the internal mechanisms linking strategy, culture, innovation, and environmental performance remain underdeveloped in theory. This fragmentation provides a basis for developing a unified conceptual framework in which organisational culture serves as the central linking mechanism.

III. LITERATURE GAP

Research on sustainability has advanced significantly, yet three strands of work continue to develop in isolation. Studies on green strategy indicate that proactive strategic orientations lead to improved environmental outcomes, particularly when combined with innovativeness or digital capabilities (Zhao *et al.*, 2025; Chotia *et al.*, 2024). However, this body of work provides limited explanation of the internal organisational mechanisms through which strategy translates into environmental results. Research on green innovation identifies technological innovation, cleaner processes, and stakeholder co-creation as key drivers of environmental performance (Ashraf *et al.*, 2024; Ha *et al.*, 2024). Yet these studies often treat innovation as a capability in itself rather than as a behaviour shaped by internal culture and strategic direction. Research on organisational culture adds another important dimension by demonstrating that green cultural norms influence innovation behaviours, learning, and

environmental outcomes (Mirahsani *et al.*, 2024; Ozgul & Zehir, 2023). Despite this, cultural factors are generally examined from narrow perspectives-such as human resource management, leadership, or employee behaviour-rather than being integrated into a broader organisational system. As a result, cultural influence is acknowledged but not fully incorporated into the strategy-innovation-performance chain. This separation creates three clear gaps. First, there is no comprehensive explanation of how green strategy, green innovation, and environmental performance are interconnected within firms.

Second, existing research fails to position organisational culture as the mechanism that links strategy to innovation and innovation to environmental outcomes, despite evidence that culture affects these processes. Third, the absence of integrative models leads to theoretical inconsistency and practical ambiguity; managers lack clarity regarding the internal conditions that must be aligned for environmental improvements to occur. Across the reviewed studies, each construct is shown to be influential, yet their interactions remain underdeveloped. The field therefore lacks a comprehensive framework that explains how cultural enablers translate strategic sustainability intentions into innovation activities and measurable environmental performance. This conceptual gap provides the foundation for the model presented in this paper.

IV. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Environmental performance results from a set of internal organisational conditions that shape how firms interpret sustainability demands, develop capabilities, and act on environmental priorities. The reviewed articles indicate that green strategy, organisational culture, and green innovation each contribute to organisational environmental performance, but these elements have not yet been integrated into a single model. The proposed framework positions organisational culture as the central linking mechanism, connecting green strategy to green innovation and, in turn, to environmental performance.

A. Green Strategy as the Source of Direction

A green strategy reflects a firm's strategic commitment to incorporating environmental concerns into its strategic intent. Evidence shows that strategic orientation influences the degree of a firm's aggressiveness in adopting green technologies, allocating resources, and responding to regulatory pressures (Zhao *et al.*, 2025; Chotia *et al.*, 2024). In companies with proactive strategies, sustainability targets shape functional priorities, reinforcing motivation to innovate and improve environmentally responsible processes. However, strategy alone cannot ensure effective implementation; its impact depends on how employees interpret and support strategic goals, thereby bringing organisational culture into focus.

B. Organisational Culture – The Linking Mechanism

Organisational culture influences whether strategic intentions take hold within a firm. Studies indicate that green cultural values enhance environmental learning, promote knowledge sharing, and increase employees' willingness to engage in sustainability efforts (Mirahsani *et al.*, 2024; Ozgul & Zehir, 2023). Culture also shapes decision-making practices, affects cross-functional coordination, and reinforces long-term environmental expectations (Costa & Opare, 2025). Within this framework, culture translates green strategy into shared norms and behaviours, enabling employees to align their actions with sustainability goals. Without such a supportive culture, a green strategy risks becoming symbolic or disconnected from operational practices.

C. Green Innovation as the Pathway of Capability

Green innovation refers to technological, process, and product changes that directly improve environmental performance. Studies show that green innovation helps reduce emissions, enhance resource efficiency, and enable firms to comply more effectively with environmental standards (Ha *et al.*, 2024; Ameer *et al.*, 2024). Green innovation also mediates the relationship between strategy and performance, meaning that improvements in environmental outcomes often occur through innovation rather than through strategic intent alone. A strong cultural foundation further strengthens this pathway by encouraging innovative behaviour, experimentation, and the reinforcement of environmental values.

D. Environmental Performance as the Outcome

Environmental performance is the outcome of interactions among strategy, culture, and innovation. The reviewed studies show that firms achieve measurable environmental improvements when strategic direction for sustainability, cultural support, and green innovation capabilities are combined (Zhao *et al.*, 2025; Ashraf *et al.*, 2024).

When any of these components is absent, environmental outcomes tend to be weaker or less consistent. The proposed model conceptualises environmental performance as the cumulative effect of aligned internal factors, with organisational culture playing a central coordinating role.

E. Integration Logic of the Proposed Model

1. The conceptual framework unites these insights to propose a clearly defined internal mechanism:
2. A green strategy establishes sustainability priorities and stimulates action.
3. Organisational culture helps employees internalise these priorities and supports innovation.
4. Green innovation transforms cultural support and strategic intent into environmental improvements.
5. Environmental performance occurs when all three elements align.

This model helps address the theoretical gap by demonstrating how strategic direction, cultural enablers, and innovation capabilities operate as an integrated system rather than in isolation. It also offers practical value by helping managers understand the internal alignment required to achieve environmental performance.

The Figure showing organizational culture as the central mechanism linking green strategy to green innovation and, subsequently, to environmental performance. The model illustrates the sequential pathway through which strategic intent is internalized by cultural norms, enabling innovation activities that lead to measurable environmental outcomes



Fig.1 Proposed Conceptual Framework

V. PROPOSITIONS

Before Addressing the Propositions Individually, It is necessary to outline how each Proposition reflects the logical pathways established in the Conceptual Framework. The Propositions illustrate the directional relationships among Green Strategy, Organisational Culture, Green Innovation, and Environmental Performance, While also Clarifying the

theoretical significance of each link. They further demonstrate how the reviewed studies support these relationships and provide a Foundation for future empirical testing. Detailed Information on each Proposition, including its Conceptual Meaning and Supporting Sources, is Presented in Table I.

TABLE I PROPOSITIONS AND THEIR CONCEPTUAL MEANING

	Proposition	Academic Meaning	Supporting Studies
P1	Green strategy shapes sustainability direction	Green strategy provides the strategic intent and prioritization necessary for firms to initiate sustainability-oriented actions. It signals environmental commitment, aligns resources and guides organizational behaviour toward environmental outcomes.	Zhao <i>et al.</i> (2025); Chotia <i>et al.</i> (2024); Ashraf <i>et al.</i> (2024)
P2	Organizational culture enables strategic sustainability action	Culture provides the shared values, norms and interpretations required for employees to internalize and act on green strategy. It functions as the social environment that supports coordinated sustainability behaviours.	Mirahsani <i>et al.</i> (2024); Özgül & Zehir (2023); Kareem & Kummitha (2025); Costa & Opare (2025)
P3	Organizational culture enhances green innovation capability	A supportive culture strengthens a firm's ability to generate, develop and sustain green innovation by promoting learning, knowledge sharing and environmentally oriented problem-solving.	Mirahsani <i>et al.</i> (2024); Özgül & Zehir (2023); Junejo <i>et al.</i> (2025)
P4	Green innovation drives environmental performance	Green innovation acts as the operational mechanism through which strategic and cultural support produces measurable improvements in environmental outcomes, such as reduced emissions and efficient resource use.	Ha <i>et al.</i> (2024); Ameer <i>et al.</i> (2024); Su <i>et al.</i> (2020); Li <i>et al.</i> (2025)

VI. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper makes several contributions to the literature on green strategy, organisational culture, innovation, and environmental performance. First, it synthesises four constructs that have often been examined separately. Prior research treats green strategy, green innovation, and organisational culture as independent predictors of environmental outcomes, resulting in fragmented explanations. By linking these constructs within a single framework, this paper provides a more comprehensive understanding of how internal organisational conditions shape environmental performance.

Second, the paper positions organisational culture as the key linking construct. Although existing studies acknowledge the influence of culture, they frequently limit it to human resource management, behavioural, or leadership contexts. The proposed framework elevates culture to a systems-level mechanism that shapes both the translation of strategy and the development of innovation capabilities. This represents a theoretical advancement by demonstrating that culture is not a detached determinant but the foundation upon which strategic and innovation pathways operate.

Third, the paper clarifies the mediating role of green innovation. While numerous studies show that innovation enhances environmental outcomes, few integrate innovation within the strategic and cultural contexts that enable it. By formally positioning green innovation as the capability that converts strategic intent and cultural alignment into measurable environmental outcomes, the framework

improves conceptual clarity regarding how firms achieve environmental performance.

Fourth, the paper contributes to theory building by developing propositions that enable future empirical investigation. Each proposition specifies a distinct mechanism within the broader framework, providing an organised basis for model testing using quantitative or mixed-method approaches. This supports cumulative theorising and allows scholars to examine how internal organisational structures interact to generate sustainability outcomes.

Finally, the framework advances sustainability theory by demonstrating that environmental performance is the result of internal alignment rather than isolated interventions. It shows that strategy, culture, and innovation must reinforce one another to produce environmental outcomes, offering a more realistic explanation of how firms operationalise sustainability commitments.

VII. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

A. Strengthening Strategic Commitment to Sustainability

The framework demonstrates that clear strategic intent initiates the process leading to effective environmental performance. Managers should incorporate environmental priorities into corporate strategy so that sustainability becomes a guiding principle shaping resource allocation, capability development, and long-term planning. When strategic direction is explicit, employees and departments are more likely to coordinate around shared environmental goals.

B. Creating a Culture that Supports Responsibility to the Environment

Organisational culture is key to translating strategic commitments into action. Managers should cultivate cultural norms that support environmental learning, knowledge sharing, and responsibility. This requires leaders to communicate consistently, model green behaviours, and implement systems that reward environmentally responsible practices. A supportive culture enables employees to internalise sustainability priorities and apply them in their everyday decision-making.

C. Developing and Maintaining Green Innovation Capabilities

The framework positions innovation as the operating mechanism through which strategy and culture generate environmental outcomes. Managers should invest in capabilities that support green product and process innovation, including training, cross-functional collaboration, and access to relevant technologies. Encouraging experimentation and continuous improvement helps firms translate cultural support into tangible environmental results.

D. Aligning Internal Systems to Environmental Performance

Environmental performance improves when strategy, culture, and innovation operate as an integrated system. Managers should avoid isolated initiatives that focus on only one aspect. Instead, they should ensure alignment among strategic intent, cultural reinforcement, and innovation activities. This integrated approach increases the likelihood of sustaining improvements in environmental performance.

E. Diagnosing Barriers to Implementation of Sustainability

The framework is also valuable to managers as a diagnostic tool. When firms struggle to achieve environmental improvements, leaders can assess whether the issue lies in unclear strategy, weak cultural support, or insufficient innovation capability. This diagnostic perspective helps identify targeted interventions rather than broad sustainability programmes that may fail to address underlying causes.

VIII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This conceptual paper has two main limitations. First, the framework is theoretical in nature and has not been empirically tested. The strength and direction of the proposed relationships have not yet been statistically validated with empirical evidence. Second, the model focuses primarily on internal organisational mechanisms and does not account for external factors—such as regulatory requirements, market pressures, or industry characteristics—that may influence the adoption of green strategy, organisational culture, and innovation. These limitations can be addressed by future research in two ways. One important direction is to empirically test the proposed model using quantitative

methods, such as structural equation modelling, across different organisational contexts. A second direction is to extend the framework to examine how external environmental pressures interact with internal strategic and cultural pathways to innovation, thereby influencing environmental performance.

IX. CONCLUSION

This paper employs an integrated framework to explain how organisations achieve environmental performance by combining green strategy, organisational culture, and green innovation. The reviewed studies demonstrate that each factor contributes to sustainability outcomes, yet they have largely been examined in isolation, resulting in fragmented explanations. The framework positions organisational culture as the mechanism that links strategic intent and enables its translation into innovation and environmental improvement. In doing so, the paper contributes to theory development and provides a foundation for future empirical research. The proposed propositions and conceptual linkages offer a pathway for scholars to test the model and for managers to create an internally aligned environment that facilitates meaningful environmental performance.

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