

# ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AS A STRATEGIC LEVER: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF ITS IMPACT ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

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## Abstract

Organizational culture has undergone a role shift, transitioning from being perceived as a normative dimension to becoming a strategic factor that determines the success of strategy implementation and organizational performance. This study aims to conduct a systematic review of the relationship between organizational culture, strategic levers, and organizational performance by referencing literature from the past five years. The method employed is a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) following the PRISMA 2020 protocol, analyzing 40 articles from reputable Scopus-indexed journals (Q1-Q4). The synthesis results indicate that organizational culture forms a value-based foundation that influences the structure and function of strategic levers, which indirectly strengthens organizational performance achievement. This study produces a conceptual framework mapping the culture-strategy-performance linkage and identifies research gaps in methodological dimensions, micro-level contexts, and culture-strategy synergy. Theoretically, this study enriches the Resource-Based View and Strategic Fit Model approaches. Practically, the findings provide guidance for managers in designing mutually supportive cultural and strategic systems. Future research is recommended to explore longitudinal approaches, mixed methods, and cross-cultural studies.

**Keywords:** *Organizational culture, leverage strategy, organizational performance, management strategy*

## INTRODUCTION

In contemporary management discourse, organizational culture has evolved into a crucial strategic element not merely a representation of shared values, but as a guiding instrument steering the organization towards superior and sustainable performance. In the era of technological disruption, market uncertainty, and globalization pressures, reliance solely on formal strategy and hierarchical structure proves inadequate. Organizations are increasingly required to cultivate an internal culture that is adaptive, cohesive, and aligned with strategic direction. Organizational culture serves not only as an institutional identity but also acts as a strategic lever that governs behavior, reinforces innovation, and accelerates goal attainment (Wu et al., 2019; Lativa & Arsajah, 2024). A multitude of studies affirm the significant role of culture in driving organizational performance. Akpa et al. (2021) highlight culture's contribution to productivity, while Imran et al. (2022) identify innovation as a mediating factor in the culture-performance relationship within the banking sector. Kucharska and Bedford (2019) demonstrate that a collective culture enhances knowledge sharing, positively impacting performance. Pham et al. (2024) underscore the importance of humanistic values in culture as a key determinant of employee performance. However, the majority of these studies are sector-specific and tend to focus on direct relationships, without elaborating how culture functions within the organization's control and strategic planning systems. Critiques of prior literature point to a lack of studies addressing the internal mechanisms that mediate the impact of culture on performance (Ghaleb, 2024; Graham et al., 2022). For example, Kim and Sun (2024) find that strong cultures reduce manipulative practices in financial reporting, yet do not explore their role in strategic decision-making processes. Similarly, Maina (2024) and Wanjala (2024) highlight the role of knowledge-sharing culture but fail to explicitly position it within the context of strategic control. Other studies, such as Barajas (2024) and Ramadhan et al. (2024), identify employee engagement as a mediating variable but have not systematically integrated it within the organization's strategic framework. Meanwhile, Ahmed and Shafiq (2014) as well as Han (2002) discuss culture in sectoral contexts but do not provide a theoretical foundation for broader generalization. Contributions from Nikpour (2017) and Abu-Jarad et al. (2010) emphasize organizational commitment but have yet to develop an understanding of culture as a tool for strategic alignment. Systematic studies

that explicitly position organizational culture as a strategic lever in achieving performance outcomes remain scarce. Therefore, a Systematic Literature Review approach that synthesizes cross-sectoral findings and mediation variables is essential to bridging this conceptual gap. This article aims to summarize and synthesize empirical findings within a more critical and integrative framework. This research specifically addresses three primary questions: (1) How does organizational culture function as a strategic lever in influencing performance? (2) What mediating or moderating variables strengthen this relationship? (3) How does the integration of culture and strategy generate sustainable competitive advantage? The theoretical contribution of this study lies in constructing an integrative logical framework linking culture, strategy, and performance. Its practical contribution offers managerial guidance in designing cultural architectures that support strategic goals and optimize performance amidst global competitive dynamics (Bortolotti et al., 2024)..

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptualization of organizational culture as a strategic lever marks a paradigm shift in modern organizational management. Culture is no longer seen merely as an accumulation of internal values and norms, but as a strategic instrument that determines policy direction, behavioral patterns, and organizational responses to environmental dynamics. In this context, culture functions as a strategic lever—not simply a soft variable, but a regulator of rhythm and precision in strategy implementation (Lativa & Arsjah, 2024). The Lever of Control approach in managerial literature places culture as a primary mechanism to align strategic goals with operational behavior, particularly in turbulent and highly competitive environments. Within this framework, organizations are required not only to rely on formal structures and procedures but also on the strength of culture to coordinate actions across functions and work units adaptively. Classical literature has long recognized organizational culture as a strategic force that is both integrative and adaptive. However, recent perspectives emphasize the importance of an organization's ability to articulate and manage its culture through managerial control systems. An organization's success in addressing strategic complexity, therefore, largely depends on its capacity to orchestrate culture as a compensatory mechanism for structural weaknesses or strategic constraints (Crittenden & Crittenden, 2008).

Cultural management strategies include the use of cultural levers such as reward systems, leadership styles, and structured cross-unit communication (Young, 2000). Empirical studies from the past five years confirm that cohesive, collaborative, and innovative organizational cultures positively contribute to performance. Bortolotti et al. (2024) demonstrate that the success of organizations in implementing sustainability practices is largely determined by their underlying culture, particularly in shaping value-based competitive advantages. Zheng et al. (2021) reinforce that organizational effectiveness results from the alignment between structure, strategy, and culture, with knowledge management acting as a significant mediating variable. Chatman and Cha (2022) emphasize that effectively managed cultures can enhance performance while also harmonizing work practices across departments. Meanwhile, Halim et al. (2023) find that in the context of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), an innovative culture is a key factor in driving performance through the optimization of human resources. Conversely, Yarbrough et al. (2021) warn that misalignment between organizational culture and market strategy can significantly deteriorate performance, making cultural alignment with the business model a non-negotiable strategic prerequisite..

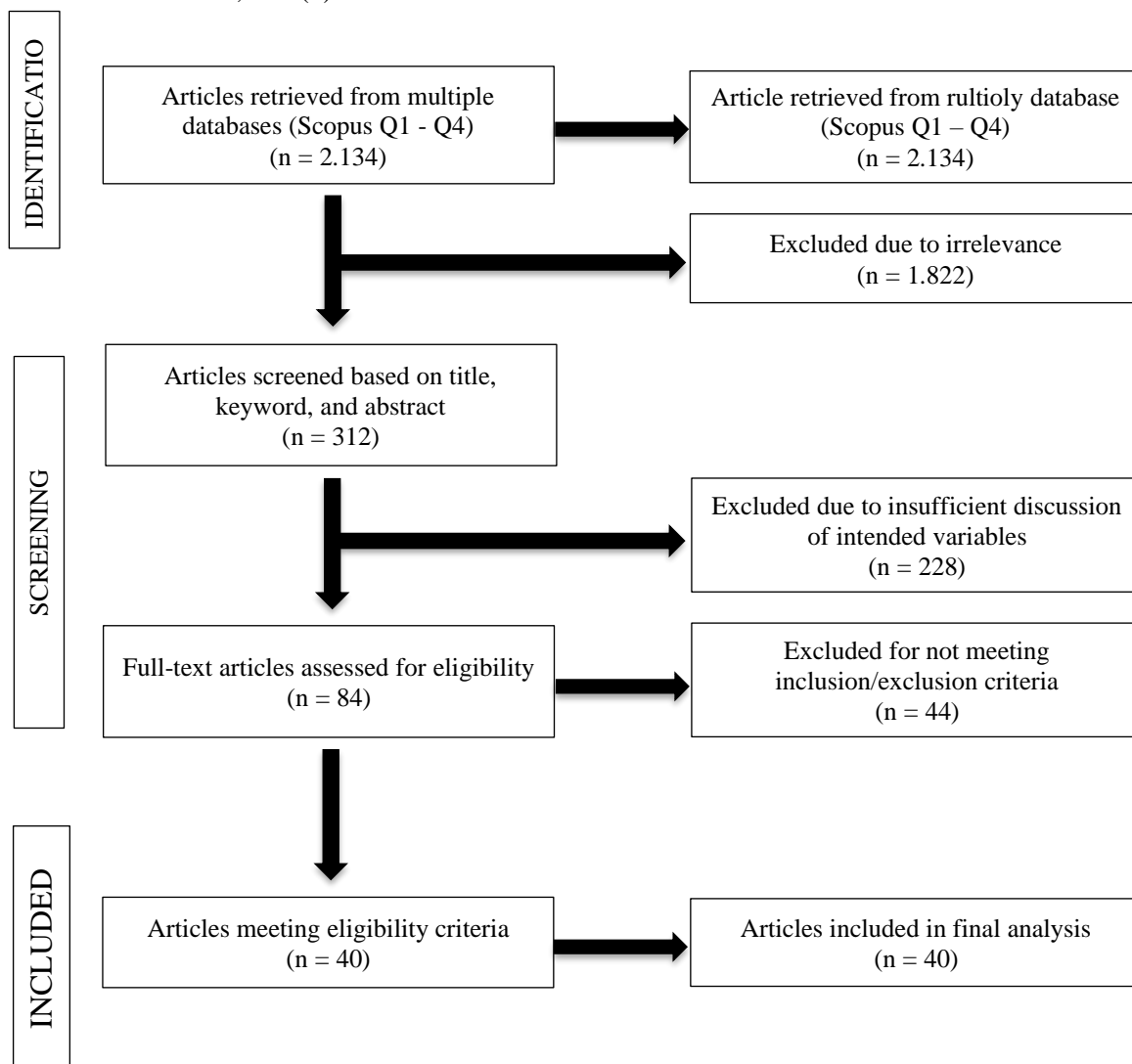
## RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to systematically trace, evaluate, and synthesize scientific findings concerning the role of organizational culture as a strategic lever in enhancing organizational performance. SLR was selected for its ability to produce evidence-based syntheses of prior peer-reviewed studies (Snyder, 2019). The research design refers to the PRISMA 2020 protocol (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), which provides a systematic and transparent structure for the process of identifying, screening, and reporting literature review findings (Page et al., 2021). The implementation of PRISMA ensures the elimination of selection bias and guarantees scientific replicability. The primary data source was the Scopus database, one of the world's leading repositories of scientific literature. Only articles from journals ranked in quartiles Q1 through Q4, according to the Scimago Journal Rank (SJR), were included, ensuring high academic quality and relevance (Baas et al., 2020). Inclusion criteria included: (1) articles indexed in Scopus and published in reputable scientific journals, (2) those explicitly examining the relationship between organizational culture and organizational performance, or positioning culture as a strategic factor in decision-making processes, (3) those published between 2019 and 2024, and (4) written in English. Meanwhile, non-peer-reviewed articles, descriptive studies lacking conceptual or empirical analysis, and duplicate publications from the same study were excluded. The time limitation for publication was applied to capture the most recent developments in the discourse on organizational

# ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AS A STRATEGIC LEVER: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF ITS IMPACT ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Muhammad Maulana Ibrahim et al

culture and strategic management, particularly within the context of the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) world (Tranfield et al., 2003). This update is essential to ensure the relevance of findings for contemporary managerial practice. The search strategy employed a Boolean approach, using keywords such as: “organizational culture” AND “organizational performance,” “organizational culture” AND “strategic lever,” and “strategic lever” AND “organizational performance.” Advanced filters in Scopus were applied to narrow the results to indexed journals and article types classified as either original research or systematic reviews. The selection process followed four stages as outlined in the PRISMA flow diagram: (1) initial identification of 2.134 articles, (2) screening by title and abstract resulting in 312 articles, (3) methodological and content eligibility evaluation narrowing the pool to 84 articles, and (4) final selection of 40 core articles.



**Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram**

Data analysis was carried out at multiple levels. First, descriptive analysis was used to map publication trends, temporal distribution, and the geographic origin of studies. Second, thematic analysis identified key themes such as culture as a strategic control, mediation mechanisms (innovation, commitment, knowledge), and the integration of culture and strategy. Third, content analysis was conducted to extract conceptual frameworks, theoretical propositions, and the relational logic between key variables.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### General Description of the Literature

A total of 40 scientific articles were selected as the basis for the systematic synthesis. All articles met the inclusion criteria: Scopus-indexed (Q1–Q4), relevant to the themes of organizational culture, strategic levers, and organizational performance, and published between 2019 and 2024. In terms of temporal distribution, a significant

increase in publications was observed after 2020, peaking in 2023–2024. Studies such as Akpa et al. (2021), Olawale et al. (2023), Ghaleb (2024), Ramadhan et al. (2024), Maina (2024), and Barajas (2024) reflect post-pandemic research trends focusing on cultural transformation in the context of digitalization and market volatility. On the theme of strategic levers, contributions from Bahuguna et al. (2023), Becker & Gerhart (2021), Al-Ali & Abu-Rumman (2023), and Hammouch (2024) underscore the importance of strategy-based approaches in driving organizational performance.

Geographically, the studies span various regions, reflecting contextual and sectoral diversity. Developing countries such as Pakistan (Imran et al., 2022), Nigeria (Olawale et al., 2023), Kenya (Kori & Kiptoo, 2020), and Indonesia (Ramadhan et al., 2024; Az-Zaakiyyah et al., 2023) offer Global South perspectives. Conversely, studies from industrialized nations such as the United States (Gibbons & Henderson, 2020), the United Kingdom (Kucharska & Bedford, 2019), Germany, and the United Arab Emirates (Al-Tit & Omri, 2023; Alameddine, 2025) emphasize systematic, innovation- and technology-based approaches. A variety of methodologies were used. Most studies employed quantitative approaches, either through surveys (Imran et al., 2022; Bahuguna et al., 2023; Ramadhan et al., 2024) or structural models (Kucharska & Bedford, 2019). Others utilized qualitative methods and case studies (Maina, 2024; Maduka & Mangs, 2023), as well as in-depth theoretical-conceptual approaches (Becker & Gerhart, 2021; Shahzad et al., 2012; LBS Research, 2024). This methodological diversity enables triangulation, enriching the validity and depth of understanding.

A broad range of thematic focuses was also identified: from the direct influence of culture on performance (Akpa et al., 2021; Han, 2002; Abu-Jarad et al., 2010), the mediating role of commitment and job satisfaction (Nikpour, 2017; Ramadhan et al., 2024), to the integration of culture with knowledge management (Wanjala, 2024; Maina, 2024) and innovation (Kim & Sun, 2024; Alameddine, 2025). In the context of strategic levers, key issues included strategic planning (Anwar & Hasnu, 2023), strategic alignment (Al-Ali & Abu-Rumman, 2023; Al-Tit & Omri, 2023), and the role of performance measurement and HR management (Hammouch, 2024; Becker & Gerhart, 2021). In terms of Scopus quartiles, approximately 50% of the articles originated from Q1 and Q2 journals such as Sustainability (Pham et al., 2024), Journal of Financial Economics (Graham et al., 2022), and Academy of Management Perspectives (Becker & Gerhart, 2021). The remainder came from Q3–Q4 journals that nonetheless meet rigorous scientific standards. This composition ensures that the synthesis is based on credible, up-to-date, and theoretically grounded findings.

## KEY THEMATIC FINDINGS

### Theme 1: Organizational Culture and Organizational Performance

The literature review on the impact of organizational culture on performance demonstrates consistency both theoretically and empirically. Organizational culture is no longer seen as a passive workplace backdrop but has evolved into a strategic catalyst influencing performance orientation, internal efficiency, and organizational value creation. Analysis of 28 articles revealed that elements such as shared values, work norms, belief systems, and leadership styles are key mechanisms that can either enhance or weaken organizational performance. Akpa et al. (2021) assert that organizational culture is a primary determinant of overall performance. Similar views are echoed in studies by Abu-Jarad et al. (2010), Ahmed and Shafiq (2014), and Shahzad et al. (2012), which emphasize that culture's influence extends beyond identity formation to impact productivity, organizational behavior, and measurable outcomes. Han (2002), through a correlational approach in the healthcare sector, demonstrated that specific cultural types correlate with service effectiveness.

Nikpour (2017), Ramadhan et al. (2024), and Leithy (2017) highlight the mediating role of commitment and job satisfaction in the culture–performance relationship. Employee commitment has been shown to reinforce organizational values and contribute to long-term performance. Kucharska and Bedford (2019) demonstrate that collective culture fosters knowledge sharing and enhances collective productivity. In the context of developing countries, Imran et al. (2022) identify innovation as a mediator in the culture–performance relationship within the banking sector. Similar results are reported by Ghaleb (2024), Pham et al. (2024), and Wanjala (2024), emphasizing that open, learning-oriented cultures accelerate innovation and organizational adaptation. These findings are consistent with LBS Research (2024), which shows that adaptive culture strengthens performance resilience in disruptive business environments. In terms of behavior and work engagement, Barajas (2024), Az-Zaakiyyah et al. (2023), and Maduka & Mangs (2023) stress the importance of values such as vision, ethics, and both individual- and team-oriented work habits, all of which significantly impact loyalty and motivation, ultimately strengthening performance indicators.

# ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AS A STRATEGIC LEVER: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF ITS IMPACT ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Muhammad Maulana Ibrahim et al

Significant contributions also come from Petty et al. (1995), Yıldız (2014), and Kim and Sun (2024), who show that organizational culture affects strategic aspects such as reporting, planning, and accountability. This indicates that culture plays a role not only in operational outputs but also in control systems and strategic decision-making. These findings demonstrate that organizational culture functions as a multilevel factor that bridges structural and behavioral aspects. It influences knowledge systems (Maina, 2024), communication (Gibbons & Henderson, 2020), leadership styles (Pham et al., 2024), and value creation (Graham et al., 2022). Therefore, culture deserves to be positioned as a strategic lever in the design of adaptive and sustainable performance systems.

## Theme 2: Strategic Levers and Organizational Performance

In contemporary strategic management, the understanding of strategic levers has undergone a transformation. No longer seen as static elements, strategic levers are now recognized as dynamic factors that internalize performance values into decision-making processes, technological systems, human resources, and organizational communication. Analysis of 13 articles indicates that strategic levers enhance organizational effectiveness and agility in responding to environmental dynamics. One of the most dominant forms of levers is performance measurement and management systems. Hammouch (2024) reveals that integrated systems act as strategic control tools to improve efficiency, accountability, and value creation. This aligns with Nicula et al. (2017), who position strategic performance management systems as the foundation for cross-functional coordination and comprehensive assessment of organizational outcomes.

Human resources also emerge as a key lever. Becker and Gerhart (2021) argue that HR management practices aligned with strategy promote productivity and competitive advantage. Bahuguna et al. (2023) reinforce this by emphasizing that systematic talent management enhances commitment, which directly impacts performance. Innovation culture also plays a pivotal role. Alameddine (2025) demonstrates that innovation culture acts as a strategic lever that drives efficiency and fosters positive performance perceptions. Organizations with an innovative culture tend to be more agile and resilient in the face of external pressures. Organizational strategy transformation is highlighted in the study by Jaleha and Machuki (2018), which shows that strategic leadership supports the effective formulation and implementation of strategy. This is further supported by Kori and Kiptoo (2020) and Yousif (2020), who emphasize that strategic change is a determinant of efficiency in the context of structural transitions.

Strategic alignment is also identified as a critical factor. Al-Ali and Abu-Rumman (2023) assert that alignment optimizes innovation as a performance mediator. Al-Tit and Omri (2023) state that integration of strategy and information technology enhances efficiency and aligns performance with market demands. Strategic planning forms another foundational pillar. Anwar and Hasnu (2023) show that systematic planning yields clear direction, precise decision-making, and long-term effectiveness. This supports the notion that performance is not merely a result of execution, but of planning quality as well. In the domain of technology and value operationalization, Detro (2021) demonstrates that the application of supply chain technology improves efficiency and firm value. Qatawneh (2018) adds that a hybrid communication strategy strengthens value integration across the supply chain and enhances stakeholder collaboration.

Overall, strategic levers operate across a wide spectrum: performance management, innovation culture, structural transformation, strategic leadership, and technological and communication capabilities. These findings affirm that performance should not be understood merely as an output but as the result of dynamic interaction among strategy, resources, control systems, and organizational technologies.

## Theme 3: Synthetic Integration of Organizational Culture, Strategic Levers, and Organizational Performance

Within today's complex and digitized organizational ecosystem, there is an increasing need for a synthetic approach that integrates two key pillars of performance: organizational culture and strategic levers. Recent literature reflects a trend toward merging rather than separating these elements, integrating them into a cohesive and sustainable performance management system.

Findings from articles focused on organizational culture (Akpa et al., 2021; Imran et al., 2022; Ramadhan et al., 2024) and strategic levers (Hammouch, 2024; Al-Ali & Abu-Rumman, 2023; Becker & Gerhart, 2021) suggest that organizational performance cannot be fully understood through either structural or behavioral approaches alone. Rather, performance is shaped by the interaction between internal values—such as trust, innovation, and commitment (Pham et al., 2024; Az-Zaakiyyah et al., 2023)—and strategic instruments such as performance measurement, strategic alignment, and talent management (Bahuguna et al., 2023; Al-Tit & Omri, 2023; Anwar & Hasnu, 2023). Imran et al. (2022) and Wanjala (2024) show that innovation-supportive cultures function optimally when supported by strategic systems such as knowledge management and information technology. Similarly, Alameddine (2025) and Kucharska & Bedford (2019) affirm that an innovation-oriented culture provides a foundation for agile, cross-functional strategy implementation.

Within this framework, culture shapes perception, preference, and adaptive readiness toward strategy. Graham et al. (2022) show that strategic success is heavily influenced by cultural alignment with decision-making structures. Al-Ali and Abu-Rumman (2023) add that strategic alignment becomes significantly more effective when supported by collaborative and transparent values. LBS Research (2024), Shahzad et al. (2012), and Nikpour (2017) underline culture as a strategic catalyst. HR systems, for instance, only achieve maximum impact when paired with cultures that foster engagement and empowerment (Becker & Gerhart, 2021; Barajas, 2024). In the context of change, Kori and Kiptoo (2020) emphasize that the effectiveness of transformation efforts hinges on flexible and participatory cultures.

Hammouch (2024) and Nicula et al. (2017) point out that strategic levers are most effective when operated within cultural norms that support continuous evaluation. Performance measurement systems are not merely tools for assessing outcomes but also reflect the organization's collective values and strategic direction. Theoretically, this synthesis generates a tripartite framework: culture as a guiding value, levers as driving instruments, and performance as a systemic output. Practically, managers must synergize cultural values with strategic systems in holistic decision-making—from human resource management to the utilization of technology and communication (Qatawneh, 2018; Detro, 2021; Kim & Sun, 2024).

## Theme 4: The Organization as a Strategic Lever and Its Impact on Performance

In modern strategic management, the organization is no longer viewed merely as a structural entity but as an active strategic actor. This implies that every organizational component—values, systems, structures, and individuals—functions as a strategic instrument, interconnected in driving performance. Becker and Gerhart (2021) and Hammouch (2024) assert that human resources and performance measurement systems are not merely administrative tools but strategic control mechanisms that reinforce culture and steer the organization toward performance goals. The organization acts as an internal ecosystem that manages collective dynamics systemically. Shahzad et al. (2012) and Abu-Jarad et al. (2010) contend that cultural structures and value systems serve as powerful levers for adaptation and change. When organizations consciously manage their culture, the synergy between values and strategy can produce structured, rather than incidental, transformation.

Strategic capabilities and cultural values converge in the findings of Imran et al. (2022), Al-Ali & Abu-Rumman (2023), and Kim & Sun (2024), which demonstrate that innovation culture and strategic leadership serve as compasses for achieving excellence. Al-Tit & Omri (2023) reinforce this by providing evidence that integrating IT strategy and organizational culture can reconfigure strategic direction and enhance competitiveness. The importance of the organization as a strategic entity is also evident in its ability to manage change. Kori & Kiptoo (2020) and Yousif (2020) confirm that organizations that manage transformation based on values achieve higher effectiveness compared to those focused solely on formal structures. Az-Zaakiyyah et al. (2023) and Ramadhan et al. (2024) add that an organization's strength lies in managing its vision and normative values, which drive individual motivation and produce performance accountability. The organization is not only an instrument for achieving goals but also a strategic subject that determines how those goals are attained.

In the context of organizational learning, Maina (2024) and Wanjala (2024) show that the ability to foster a culture of knowledge sharing strengthens learning capability. LBS Research (2024) and Danko & Crhová (2024) complement this by arguing that sustainable innovation arises from organizations that actively function as strategic levers. These collective findings contribute to a broader understanding of the organization as a synergistic system that does not operate in isolation. When positioned as a strategic lever, all its components—culture, structure, leadership, human resources, technology, communication, and change—function as an integrated architecture for performance. Organizations capable of introspective restructuring are better equipped to generate superior, sustainable, and contextually relevant performance in response to external dynamics.

### Critical Discussion and Theoretical Synthesis

The thematic findings of this study reveal a strong convergent pattern between organizational culture, strategic levers, and organizational performance. Most of the literature affirms that organizational culture is no longer merely a normative symbol but has evolved into a strategic force that influences the effectiveness of strategy implementation and shapes behaviors consistent with long-term vision. Empirical evidence from Akpa et al. (2021), Imran et al. (2022), and Pham et al. (2024) demonstrates that innovative culture, employee engagement, and ethical values significantly promote efficiency, job satisfaction, and sustainable value creation. Contextual differences emerge in terms of mediation mechanisms and the strength of influence. Nikpour (2017) and Ramadhan et al. (2024) highlight commitment and job satisfaction as primary mediation pathways, whereas Hammouch (2024) and Bahuguna et al. (2023) emphasize the role of performance measurement and management systems as strategic levers. These

# ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AS A STRATEGIC LEVER: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF ITS IMPACT ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Muhammad Maulana Ibrahim et al

divergences suggest that the impact of culture on performance is contextual, depending on industry sectors, geographic locations, and the organizational structure's readiness to align culture and strategy. Hence, the role of culture cannot be uniformly interpreted but must be understood as the result of interactions between internal value systems and the organization's strategic capabilities. Theoretically, the relationship between culture and performance can be explained through the Resource-Based View (RBV), wherein culture is positioned as an intangible, unique, inimitable asset of high strategic value in accordance with the VRIO framework (Barney, 1991). Studies by Graham et al. (2022) and Becker & Gerhart (2021) affirm that sustainable competitive advantage emerges from cultures that foster learning, innovation, and cross-functional collaboration (Maina, 2024; Alameddine, 2025). Meanwhile, Contingency Theory suggests that the effectiveness of culture is contingent on the alignment between cultural characteristics and external organizational factors. Kim & Sun (2024) and Wanjala (2024) find that adaptive, learning-oriented cultures are more suitable in uncertain environments. These findings reinforce the notion that there is no "one best culture"; rather, cultural effectiveness is determined by its degree of alignment with external challenges and internal organizational design (Qatawneh, 2018; Gibbons & Henderson, 2020).

The synergy between culture and strategy underscores the importance of the Strategic Fit Model. When culture aligns with strategy in planning, HR management, and technological systems, organizational performance tends to improve significantly (Al-Ali & Abu-Rumman, 2023; Al-Tit & Omri, 2023). In this regard, optimal performance depends on the integration of cultural values into the organization's strategic systems. In the era of digital disruption and VUCA conditions (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity), culture becomes not only a stabilizing tool but also an accelerator of organizational adaptation. Studies by LBS Research (2024) and Barajas (2024) demonstrate that flexible and collaborative cultures are capable of mitigating market turbulence and supporting continuous improvement. Similarly, cultures of learning and experimentation have proven effective in navigating strategic uncertainty (Danko & Crhová, 2024; Detro, 2021).

Thus, organizational culture should no longer be seen merely as a prerequisite for ethical or moral conduct, but as a strategic managerial instrument that unites human dynamics, systems, and structures with the achievement of organizational performance. Theoretically, culture bridges the macrostructure of strategy with micro-level individual behavior; practically, it acts as an intermediary between vision and realization, between stability and transformation. Based on the thematic and theoretical synthesis, this article proposes an integrative conceptual model illustrating the interconnectedness of organizational culture, strategic levers, and organizational performance. This model presents a structural-functional understanding of how organizational values and norms can be strategically mobilized through leverage systems to generate superior and sustainable performance.

In this model, organizational culture acts as the value base that shapes mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors within the organization. Beyond constructing identity, culture influences the formulation and execution of strategy (Akpa et al., 2021; Pham et al., 2024). In this sense, culture serves as a directional force for developing strategic levers, including performance measurement systems, HR structures, technology utilization, and alignment of organizational vision and mission (Becker & Gerhart, 2021; Hammouch, 2024). Strategic levers then function as mechanisms that drive values, translating culture into formal managerial systems and organizational practices. They serve as functional channels to embody values such as innovation, accountability, and collaboration within strategic decision-making processes (Al-Ali & Abu-Rumman, 2023; Bahuguna et al., 2023). Without proper integration of these levers, cultural values tend to remain normative without producing tangible impact.

The final stage in this model is organizational performance, seen as the collective output of strategic effectiveness and cultural consistency. Performance is assessed not only through financial outcomes but also through behaviors, relationships, and innovation (Imran et al., 2022; Detro, 2021). Optimal performance is achieved when culture and strategy mutually reinforce one another and are simultaneously implemented across all facets of the organization (Shahzad et al., 2012; Alameddine, 2025). Broadly, the causal relationship in this model includes: organizational culture influences the design and effectiveness of strategic levers, which then become the main drivers for achieving performance. This pathway includes two key mechanisms: (1) cultural priming, referring to the influence of organizational values on strategic action patterns; and (2) strategic embedding, referring to the extent to which strategic systems reflect cultural values in their implementation.

This model reinforces the Strategic Fit approach, which posits that alignment between culture and strategy is a prerequisite for superior performance. In the VUCA environment, the model becomes even more relevant, as it places culture as the foundation of organizational flexibility and resilience in the face of uncertainty (LBS Research, 2024; Danko & Crhová, 2024). Although this literature synthesis strengthens the position of organizational culture and strategic levers as performance determinants, the analysis also reveals several scholarly gaps that warrant further exploration. These gaps span conceptual, methodological, and contextual dimensions, laying the groundwork for a more refined, contextualized, and responsive future research agenda in line with the dynamics of modern

organizations. One of the most prominent gaps is the limited number of studies that simultaneously integrate all three core variables—organizational culture, strategic levers, and performance—within a single, holistic modeling framework. Much of the literature still examines dyadic relationships in isolation, such as between culture and performance (Akpa et al., 2021; Ramadhan et al., 2024) or between strategy and performance (Hammouch, 2024; Al-Ali & Abu-Rumman, 2023). However, contemporary challenges demand a multivariate understanding of interrelated dynamics, where culture and strategy synergize to shape institutional performance. Thus, there is a need for integrative theoretical models capable of systematically capturing the complex, simultaneous interactions among these three dimensions. From a methodological standpoint, there is a clear dominance of quantitative approaches based on surveys and structural analysis. Studies such as those by Pham et al. (2024), Bahuguna et al. (2023), and Kucharska & Bedford (2019) demonstrate model validity but are limited in capturing the long-term dynamics of culture and strategy. The scarcity of longitudinal, experimental, or mixed-methods research presents an opportunity to design more reflective studies that address cultural shifts in the context of digital transformation, mergers, or strategic restructuring.

## Critical Gaps and Theoretical Implications

Another gap arises at the micro-organizational level. Studies such as those by Nikpour (2017), Barajas (2024), and Maina (2024) tend to operate primarily at the aggregate organizational level. However, very few explore how culture is articulated and enacted in day-to-day practices at the team or divisional level. Such micro-level investigations are essential for understanding how strategy is internalized through informal and symbolic cultural practices in real workspaces. In the context of digitalization and VUCA environments, literature explicitly exploring the integration of culture and digital strategy remains limited. Although Detro (2021), Danko & Crhová (2024), and LBS Research (2024) have begun to address this area, their approaches remain largely normative. Future research should explore how digital values—such as agility, openness to AI, and the redefinition of human roles—are developed within hybrid work contexts and virtual collaboration systems.

The cross-cultural dimension also remains underexplored. Although studies from developing countries such as Pakistan (Imran et al., 2022), Nigeria (Olawale et al., 2023), and Indonesia (Az-Zaakiyyah et al., 2023; Ramadhan et al., 2024) have made valuable contributions, comparative approaches across value systems remain scarce. Yet, national cultural differences and socioeconomic structures play a vital role in shaping the relationship between culture and strategy. In response to these gaps, future research agendas should be more exploratory, interdisciplinary, and participatory. The integration of conceptual and applied approaches is necessary to develop a body of literature that is not only theoretically rigorous but also relevant to the needs of increasingly adaptive, innovative, and values-based organizations. The results of this study offer significant theoretical implications for the advancement of strategic management and organizational behavior scholarship. The findings expand the understanding that organizational culture and strategic levers should no longer be studied in isolation, but as interrelated dimensions that jointly drive performance. Thematic integration of the literature demonstrates that culture is not merely the backdrop to behavior but an active component of the strategic system, influencing everything from strategy formulation to performance evaluation (Becker & Gerhart, 2021; Shahzad et al., 2012).

The primary conceptual contribution of this study lies in the formulation of a triadic model—culture, strategy, and performance—that are simultaneously connected. This model introduces culture as a strategic lever, an approach that remains underdeveloped in conventional theoretical frameworks. The findings enrich the Resource-Based View (RBV) by positioning culture as a dynamic capability internalized within strategic systems. This study also extends the application of the Strategic Fit Model, showing that alignment between strategy and cultural values not only supports execution but also strengthens resilience and organizational adaptability. These findings reinforce the Contingency Theory perspective, whereby the effectiveness of culture and strategy depends on their fit with the external context. The VUCA environment, digitalization, and market transformation are critical factors that require culture to function as a central element in strategic architecture (Alameddine, 2025; Pham et al., 2024). From a practical standpoint, the findings offer actionable insights for organizational decision-makers. First, top management should treat culture as a strategic instrument integrated into organizational planning and control—ranging from performance measurement systems to strategic communication. Hammouch (2024) and Bahuguna et al. (2023) demonstrate that organizations applying this approach achieve greater internal cohesion and execution speed. Second, in human resource management, cultural values must be instilled through recruitment, training, leadership development, and performance evaluation processes. Barajas (2024) and Ramadhan et al. (2024) confirm that the consistency of cultural values with managerial systems positively influences employee commitment and retention. Third, organizations must develop strategic leverage systems that are flexible and responsive to cultural dynamics.

# ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AS A STRATEGIC LEVER: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF ITS IMPACT ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Muhammad Maulana Ibrahim et al

Management systems, performance measurement, and strategic alignment mechanisms should be designed to reflect organizational values and promote innovation and adaptability, particularly amid digital disruption (Graham et al., 2022; Danko & Crhová, 2024). Fourth, the synergy between culture and strategy should be supported by data-driven approaches. The use of analytics, artificial intelligence, and collaborative technologies must be balanced with the cultivation of values such as openness, trust, and accountability. In this way, culture and strategy do not function separately but mutually reinforce each other across the entire managerial system—from policy to daily organizational behavior.

## CONCLUSION

Through the integration of descriptive, thematic, and theoretical synthesis approaches, this study produces a comprehensive understanding of how organizational culture and strategic levers interact to drive organizational performance. The findings strengthen the position of organizational culture as a strategic lever—not merely a normative value system but an active mechanism that shapes, directs, and accelerates strategic execution. Values such as innovation, collaboration, openness, and accountability are internalized within planning systems, performance measurement, human resource management, and digital transformation—positioning culture as a strategic foundation with multidimensional impacts on efficiency, productivity, innovation, and organizational sustainability. Organizations that successfully align internal values with strategic levers tend to be more competitive and adaptive in facing long-term dynamics. The theoretical implications reinforce the Resource-Based View, Strategic Fit Model, and Contingency Theory, demonstrating that sustainable competitive advantage emerges from the orchestration of cultural values and integrated strategic systems. Practically, this study provides guidance for building culture that supports strategy, designing flexible leverage systems, and developing organizational structures capable of absorbing and translating values into action.

This study does, however, acknowledge several limitations. First, the literature review is limited to English-language journals indexed in Scopus, which, while ensuring credibility, may exclude contextually rich local literature. Second, the dominance of quantitative and survey-based approaches constrains the exploration of culture–strategy–performance dynamics at the micro and temporal levels. Third, the lack of cross-national and cross-cultural studies restricts the understanding of diverse values and strategies in the context of globalization and market fragmentation. Future research is recommended to develop more flexible and adaptive conceptual models, employing longitudinal designs, mixed methods, and multilevel exploration across various organizational units. Cross-national studies are also important to capture how national cultures influence the design and effectiveness of the integration between culture and organizational strategy.

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# ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AS A STRATEGIC LEVER: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF ITS IMPACT ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Muhammad Maulana Ibrahim et al

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## ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AS A STRATEGIC LEVER: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF ITS IMPACT ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Muhammad Maulana Ibrahim et al

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## **ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AS A STRATEGIC LEVER: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF ITS IMPACT ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE**

Muhammad Maulana Ibrahim **et al**

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