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Monitoring Corporate Sustainability via Paradoxical Leadership and Mediation Strategic Agility's Role: A Measurement Scale Factor Analysis

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary global economy, Corporate Sustainability (CS) has transitioned from a peripheral corporate social responsibility initiative to a central strategic imperative. However, for emerging markets like Pakistan, the pursuit of sustainability is fraught with unique challenges, including economic volatility, infrastructural deficits, and institutional voids. This study investigates the complex mechanism through which Paradoxical Leadership (PL) influences Corporate Sustainability, positing Strategic Agility (SA) as a critical mediating variable. While Western literature has extensively explored these constructs, there is a paucity of research validating these relationships within the high power-distance and collectivist cultural context of South Asia. This research employs a quantitative cross-sectional design, collecting data from 350 mid-to-senior-level managers across Pakistan's manufacturing and service sectors. A rigorous Measurement Scale Factor Analysis, encompassing both Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), was conducted to validate the psychometric properties of the instruments within the local cultural milieu. The results demonstrate that Paradoxical Leadership significantly enhances Corporate Sustainability, both directly and indirectly through the cultivation of Strategic Agility. The factor analysis confirms the robustness of the measurement scales, with minor adaptations required for cultural nuance. These findings offer critical insights for organizational leaders navigating Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA), suggesting that the ability to manage contradictory demands is a prerequisite for agile and sustainable performance in developing economies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary global business environment is characterized by rapid technological evolution, geopolitical shifts, and dynamic market competition. Scholars frequently describe this environment using the acronym VUCA, which denotes volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Shahzad et al., 2022). Within such a landscape, organizations are no longer evaluated solely on their ability to generate financial profits; rather, they are increasingly judged based on their contributions to broader societal and environmental objectives. This shift reflects the growing importance of Corporate Sustainability (CS), which emphasizes balancing economic growth with environmental protection and social responsibility (Hutabarat et al., 2021). Corporate sustainability therefore integrates the triple bottom line framework, focusing on economic performance, environmental stewardship, and social equity as interconnected organizational goals (Fan et al., 2021) .

In recent decades, multinational corporations operating in developed economies have progressively incorporated sustainability into their strategic frameworks, adopting environmentally responsible practices, ethical governance structures, and stakeholder-oriented decision-making processes (M. B. Hossain et al., 2022). However, organizations operating in emerging economies face unique institutional and economic challenges when attempting to implement sustainability-oriented strategies. In countries such as Pakistan, firms often operate under conditions of regulatory instability, limited technological resources, and intense market competition. Consequently, many organizations prioritize short-term financial survival over long-term sustainability initiatives. This tension produces what scholars describe as a sustainability paradox, wherein organizations must simultaneously pursue economic profitability while investing in environmental and social responsibilities that may initially appear to reduce short-term returns (Kpinpuo et al., 2023).

Paradox theory suggests that organizations frequently encounter persistent contradictions between interdependent elements, and effective management requires embracing rather than eliminating these contradictions (Esty & Cort, 2017; Fan et al., 2021). Within the context of corporate sustainability, leaders must balance competing objectives such as efficiency versus innovation, control versus flexibility, and short-term profitability versus long-term sustainability. Addressing these tensions requires a distinctive leadership capability known as Paradoxical Leadership (PL). Paradoxical leadership refers to a leadership style in which leaders simultaneously integrate seemingly contradictory behaviors and decision-making approaches in order to achieve organizational balance and adaptability. Rather than selecting one competing objective over another, paradoxical leaders pursue multiple objectives simultaneously and create a dynamic equilibrium within organizational processes (Alqatan et al., 2025).

The importance of paradoxical leadership becomes particularly evident in developing economies such as Pakistan, where organizations operate in highly uncertain institutional environments characterized by energy shortages, policy inconsistencies, and rapid socio-economic transformation. Under such circumstances, leaders must simultaneously maintain operational stability while encouraging innovation and adaptability. Research suggests that paradoxical leadership enables organizations to manage complex tensions by encouraging both discipline and flexibility, thereby enhancing organizational resilience and long-term sustainability (Abraham, 2024). Nevertheless, leadership behavior alone may not be sufficient to transform sustainability intentions into tangible organizational outcomes. Organizational capabilities are also required to convert leadership vision into strategic action.

One such capability is Strategic Agility (SA), which refers to an organization's ability to rapidly sense environmental changes, make timely strategic decisions, and reconfigure resources to respond effectively to emerging opportunities and threats. Strategic agility enables firms to remain competitive in volatile markets by fostering organizational learning, resource flexibility, and proactive decision-making processes (Albayraktaroglu, 2024). Firms that possess high levels of strategic agility can adapt their operational structures and strategic priorities quickly, thereby facilitating the implementation of

sustainability initiatives even under uncertain conditions. In this sense, strategic agility may serve as a critical organizational mechanism that translates paradoxical leadership behaviors into sustainable organizational performance.

Despite the increasing scholarly attention devoted to leadership, agility, and sustainability, there remains a significant gap in the literature concerning the measurement and validation of these constructs within South Asian contexts (Khaddam, 2020; Rawashdeh et al., 2024). Much of the existing empirical research has been conducted in Western countries characterized by relatively individualistic cultures and low power-distance organizational structures. Measurement scales developed in these contexts may not accurately capture leadership behaviors or organizational capabilities within collectivist societies where hierarchical relationships and cultural norms differ substantially (Alhosseiny, 2023). For instance, survey items emphasizing employee autonomy or authority-challenging behaviors may be interpreted differently in cultures where respect for hierarchy and paternalistic leadership are deeply embedded. Consequently, applying Western-developed scales directly to the Pakistani organizational context may lead to measurement bias and construct validity issues (Esty & Cort, 2017). To examine how paradoxical leadership influences corporate sustainability through the mediating role of strategic agility, it is essential to ensure that the measurement scales accurately capture the underlying theoretical constructs. Well-developed and contextually appropriate measurement instruments help in assessing complex organizational behaviors and strategic capabilities within firms. In this regard, carefully validated measurement scales enhance the methodological strength of the study and ensure that constructs such as paradoxical leadership, strategic agility, and corporate sustainability are represented accurately within the organizational context (Meilani et al., 2025). Moreover, credibility and robustness of empirical findings, allowing researchers to draw meaningful conclusions about how leadership practices and organizational agility support sustainable corporate outcomes across different business environments.

Against this background, the present study aims to examine the relationship between Paradoxical Leadership and Corporate Sustainability, while investigating the mediating role of Strategic Agility within the Pakistani corporate context. First, it extends the literature on corporate sustainability by examining how paradoxical leadership can influence organizations' ability to monitor and achieve sustainable outcomes. Second, the study contributes theoretically by introducing strategic agility as a mediating mechanism**,** explaining how paradoxical leadership translates into improved sustainability monitoring within organizations. Third, it enriches leadership and management research by integrating paradox theory with sustainability management, providing a more comprehensive framework for understanding complex organizational dynamics in contemporary business environments. Fourth, the study offers a methodological contribution through measurement scale validation using factor analysis**,** ensuring the reliability and validity of constructs related to paradoxical leadership, strategic agility, and corporate sustainability monitoring. Finally, the findings provide practical implications for managers and policymakers, highlighting how leadership styles and organizational agility can be leveraged to strengthen sustainability monitoring and long-term organizational performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Corporate Sustainability

Corporate Sustainability (CS) has increasingly evolved from a peripheral corporate responsibility initiative into a fundamental strategic priority for organizations operating in dynamic and uncertain business environments. In contemporary management literature, sustainability is no longer perceived merely as environmental responsibility or philanthropic engagement; rather, it is recognized as a critical mechanism for enhancing organizational resilience, competitiveness, and long-term value creation. This perspective is particularly relevant within emerging market economies, where institutional instability, resource constraints, and infrastructural limitations significantly influence organizational strategies. In such contexts, sustainability practices are closely associated with risk mitigation, organizational

legitimacy, and maintaining a firm's license to operate in volatile institutional settings (Reppmann et al., 2025). Pakistani organizations operate within a business environment characterized by regulatory inconsistencies, energy shortages, and unreliable infrastructure, which heightens operational uncertainty and compels firms to adopt adaptive sustainability strategies. For instance, investments in renewable energy technologies may simultaneously address environmental concerns and reduce dependence on unstable national power grids, thereby functioning as both ecological and strategic solutions. Despite these potential advantages, the implementation of sustainability initiatives is frequently constrained by managerial perceptions that sustainability investments represent financial burdens that reduce short-term profitability (Ivory & Brooks, 2018). However, emerging scholarly debates increasingly challenge this traditional trade-off assumption by advancing a synergy perspective**,** which argues that sustainability initiatives can strengthen organizational reputation, improve operational efficiency, and enhance long-term financial performance. Nevertheless, achieving such synergy requires organizations to manage complex and often contradictory strategic demands. Firms must simultaneously reduce operational costs while investing in environmentally responsible technologies and maintain regulatory compliance while supporting community welfare. These tensions illustrate the paradoxical nature of sustainability management, and failure to effectively manage them often results in superficial practices such as greenwashing that undermine genuine sustainability outcomes (Saeed et al., 2020).

2.2 Paradoxical Leadership Style

Paradoxical leadership is a contemporary leadership approach that focuses on managing and integrating competing organizational demands simultaneously rather than choosing between them. Rooted in paradox theory, paradoxical leadership refers to a leadership style in which leaders accept and balance contradictory yet interdependent elements within organizational processes (Hu et al., 2025). (Liu & Pak, 2023) define paradoxical leadership as leaders' ability to enact seemingly conflicting behaviors, such as maintaining control while granting autonomy, treating employees uniformly while recognizing individual differences, and ensuring operational efficiency while encouraging flexibility and innovation. Instead of adopting an "either–or" mindset, paradoxical leaders utilize a "both–and" perspective that allows organizations to pursue multiple strategic objectives simultaneously. This leadership style has become increasingly important in modern organizational environments characterized by uncertainty, complexity, and rapid change. Firms frequently face contradictory pressures, including the need to achieve financial performance while addressing social and environmental responsibilities, or maintaining stability while fostering innovation and adaptability. Paradoxical leadership enables organizations to navigate these tensions by encouraging balanced decision-making, strategic flexibility, and organizational learning (Shehata et al., 2023). By integrating opposing demands rather than suppressing them, paradoxical leaders help organizations maintain equilibrium between competing priorities and adapt to dynamic market conditions. Empirical research further indicates that paradoxical leadership positively influences several organizational outcomes, including employee creativity, work engagement, knowledge sharing, and overall organizational performance (He & Yun, 2022). Through their ability to manage contradictions constructively, paradoxical leaders foster a supportive and adaptive work environment where employees feel empowered while remaining aligned with organizational objectives. Consequently, paradoxical leadership is increasingly viewed as a critical leadership capability for organizations seeking to sustain competitive advantage and effectively respond to complex challenges in contemporary business environments.

2.3 Strategic Agility

Strategic agility refers to an organization's capability to rapidly sense environmental changes, make timely strategic decisions, and reconfigure resources in order to respond effectively to emerging opportunities and threats. In highly dynamic and competitive markets, strategic agility enables firms to remain flexible and adaptive while sustaining long-term performance. According to(Jooss et al., 2024) , strategic agility can be defined as the organizational ability to continuously adjust strategic direction by combining

strategic sensitivity, leadership unity, and resource fluidity. This capability allows organizations to anticipate market shifts, respond quickly to technological advancements, and adapt to changing customer demands. In modern business environments characterized by volatility and uncertainty, organizations that lack agility often struggle to survive due to rigid structures and slow decision-making processes. Strategic agility therefore plays a critical role in enhancing organizational resilience and competitiveness by enabling firms to align their strategies with rapidly evolving external conditions (Christofi et al., 2024). Moreover, strategic agility facilitates innovation and learning by encouraging organizations to experiment with new ideas and adapt their operational models accordingly. Firms that demonstrate high levels of strategic agility are better able to implement sustainability initiatives, adopt new technologies, and respond to regulatory changes while maintaining operational efficiency. From a leadership perspective, strategic agility is also influenced by managerial capabilities that encourage flexibility, knowledge sharing, and collaborative decision-making processes. Empirical research suggests that organizations with strong strategic agility capabilities tend to achieve superior performance outcomes because they are able to effectively integrate strategic planning with dynamic environmental responsiveness (He & Yun, 2022). Consequently, strategic agility is widely recognized as a crucial organizational capability that enables firms to navigate uncertainty, maintain competitiveness, and achieve sustainable organizational growth in complex and rapidly changing business environments.

2.4 Hypotheses Development

2.4.1 Paradoxical Leadership Style and Corporate Sustainability

Corporate sustainability has become an essential strategic objective for organizations seeking to balance economic performance with environmental and social responsibilities. Achieving sustainability goals often requires firms to manage competing priorities, such as maintaining profitability while investing in environmental protection and social welfare initiatives. Within this context, leadership plays a critical role in guiding organizations to address these complex and often contradictory demands. Paradoxical leadership, grounded in paradox theory, refers to a leadership approach in which leaders simultaneously integrate opposing yet interrelated organizational objectives through a “both–and” perspective rather than an “either–or” mindset (Christofi et al., 2024). According to Elsehrawy et al. (2025), paradoxical leaders demonstrate behaviors that balance control with empowerment, enforce work requirements while allowing flexibility, and treat employees uniformly while recognizing individual differences. Such leadership behaviors are particularly relevant for promoting corporate sustainability because sustainability strategies inherently involve reconciling tensions between short-term financial outcomes and long-term environmental and social commitments. By embracing these contradictions, paradoxical leaders enable organizations to develop adaptive strategies that simultaneously support economic growth and responsible business practices. Prior empirical studies further support the positive influence of paradoxical leadership on sustainability-related outcomes. For instance, Liu & Pak (2023) argue that leaders who effectively manage paradoxical tensions encourage organizational learning, creativity, and collaborative problem-solving, which facilitate the development of innovative sustainability initiatives. Similarly, Alqatan et al. (2025) highlight that leaders capable of managing competing demands are better positioned to integrate sustainability into strategic decision-making processes because they recognize the interdependence between economic performance and environmental responsibility. Additionally, research on responsible leadership suggests that leaders who balance stakeholder interests and organizational objectives contribute significantly to sustainable organizational performance and ethical business practices (M. I. Hossain et al., 2024). In emerging market contexts such as Pakistan, where organizations often operate under conditions of institutional uncertainty, infrastructural limitations, and resource constraints, paradoxical leadership becomes particularly important in enabling firms to manage conflicting priorities and pursue sustainable development objectives simultaneously(Liu & Pak, 2023). Therefore, it is proposed that:

H1: ***Paradoxical leadership style positively and significantly influences corporate sustainability.***

2.4.2 Paradoxical Leadership and Strategic Agility

Strategic agility has emerged as a critical organizational capability that enables firms to sense environmental changes, respond rapidly to emerging opportunities, and reconfigure resources to sustain competitiveness in dynamic markets. In increasingly volatile and uncertain environments, organizations require leadership approaches that promote flexibility, adaptability, and innovative decision-making. Within this context, paradoxical leadership has attracted growing scholarly attention as an effective leadership style that enables organizations to manage competing demands while developing adaptive capabilities. Paradoxical leadership refers to a leadership approach in which leaders simultaneously integrate contradictory behaviors and strategic priorities through a "both–and" logic rather than prioritizing one objective over another (Smith & Lewis, 2011). According to Zhang et al. (2015), paradoxical leaders balance control with empowerment, maintain stability while encouraging change, and support efficiency while fostering innovation. These leadership behaviors are particularly relevant for enhancing strategic agility because agile organizations must maintain operational efficiency while simultaneously adapting to rapidly changing market conditions. Leaders who embrace paradoxical thinking encourage employees to explore new ideas while ensuring alignment with organizational objectives, thereby fostering a culture that supports responsiveness and flexibility. Prior research suggests that leadership capable of managing organizational contradictions plays a vital role in enhancing agility. For example, Elsehrawy et al. (2025) argue that leadership unity and strategic sensitivity, two core elements of strategic agility, depend on leaders' ability to balance competing priorities effectively. Similarly, He & Yun (2022) emphasize that paradoxical thinking among leaders facilitates organizational learning and innovation, which are fundamental drivers of agility. Furthermore, Meilani et al. (2025) highlight that organizations characterized by adaptive leadership and flexible decision-making processes tend to demonstrate higher levels of strategic agility and improved performance outcomes. In emerging market contexts such as Pakistan, where organizations frequently encounter environmental uncertainty, regulatory fluctuations, and intense market competition, paradoxical leadership can play a crucial role in enabling firms to respond effectively to dynamic conditions. By simultaneously managing conflicting demands such as stability and change or control and flexibility, paradoxical leaders create an organizational environment that supports rapid strategic adaptation and resource reconfiguration. Therefore, proposed that

H2: Paradoxical leadership positively and significantly influences strategic agility.

2.4.3 Strategic Agility and Corporate Sustainability

Strategic agility has become a critical organizational capability that enables firms to effectively respond to rapid environmental changes, technological advancements, and evolving stakeholder expectations. In today's highly dynamic business environment, organizations are increasingly required to incorporate sustainability into their strategic agendas while maintaining competitiveness and operational efficiency. Strategic agility refers to an organization's ability to sense changes in the external environment, make timely strategic decisions, and reconfigure resources to respond to emerging opportunities and threats (Ivory & Brooks, 2018). This capability allows firms to adapt their strategies, operational processes, and resource allocations in ways that support long-term organizational sustainability. Corporate sustainability, which integrates economic performance with environmental and social responsibilities, often requires organizations to implement innovative practices, adopt environmentally friendly technologies, and align business strategies with sustainability goals. In this regard, strategic agility plays a crucial role in enabling firms to integrate sustainability initiatives into their core operations. Organizations with high levels of strategic agility are better positioned to respond to sustainability-related challenges, such as environmental regulations, resource scarcity, and changing stakeholder expectations. Prior research suggests that agile organizations are more capable of developing sustainable solutions because they possess flexible decision-making structures and adaptive capabilities that facilitate innovation and organizational learning (M. I. Hossain et al., 2024). Furthermore, Jooss et al. (2024) argue that firms with strong strategic agility can quickly adjust their strategies and resource configurations, allowing them to implement sustainability

initiatives more effectively while maintaining competitive advantage. Similarly, Shehata et al. (2023) emphasize that dynamic organizational capabilities support sustainable performance by enabling firms to continuously adapt to changing market conditions. In emerging economies such as Pakistan, where organizations often face institutional uncertainty and infrastructural limitations, strategic agility becomes particularly important for aligning sustainability initiatives with organizational survival and growth. Therefore, it is proposed that:

H3: Strategic agility has a significant positive relationship with corporate sustainability.

2.4.4 Strategic Agility, Paradoxical leadership and Corporate Sustainability

Strategic agility has increasingly been recognized as a crucial organizational capability that links leadership behaviors with sustainable organizational outcomes(Albayraktaroglu, 2024). Although leadership styles significantly influence organizational strategies and culture, their impact on corporate sustainability is often realized through internal capabilities that enable organizations to respond effectively to dynamic environmental and market challenges (Elsehrawy et al., 2025). In this regard, strategic agility functions as an important mechanism through which paradoxical leadership can enhance corporate sustainability. Paradoxical leadership emphasizes the simultaneous management of competing organizational demands through a "both–and" approach, enabling leaders to balance stability with change, control with flexibility, and efficiency with innovation (Gunasekara et al., 2022). Such leadership behaviors encourage adaptive thinking and foster an organizational climate that promotes learning, innovation, and responsiveness to environmental challenges. Consequently, paradoxical leaders play a key role in developing strategic agility by empowering employees, encouraging flexible decision-making processes, and promoting collaboration across organizational units (Simpson et al., 2022). Strategic agility, in turn, allows organizations to translate leadership vision into effective sustainability initiatives by strengthening their ability to sense environmental changes, rapidly adjust strategic priorities, and reconfigure organizational resources to address sustainability-related challenges (Devi, 2024). Organizations with strong strategic agility are therefore better positioned to adopt environmentally responsible technologies, develop sustainable supply chain practices, and respond proactively to regulatory and stakeholder pressures. Prior research suggests that organizational capabilities such as agility and dynamic adaptability often act as mediating mechanisms linking leadership practices with long-term organizational outcomes (Devi, 2024). Similarly, (Vuković & Carpentier, 2023) highlight that firms with agile strategic processes are more capable of integrating sustainability objectives into their operational and strategic activities. In emerging economies such as Pakistan, where organizations frequently operate under conditions of institutional uncertainty and infrastructural limitations, strategic agility enables firms to transform leadership-driven sustainability visions into practical and effective organizational actions (Vuković & Carpentier, 2023). Therefore, it is proposed that:

H4: Strategic agility mediates the relationship between paradoxical leadership and corporate sustainability.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Philosophy

This study adopts a positivist research philosophy, which emphasizes objective observation and empirical testing of theoretical relationships through measurable data. In line with this philosophical orientation (Alamgir, 2024), the research employs a deductive approach to examine the hypothesized relationships derived from established theoretical frameworks and prior empirical studies. The study utilizes a quantitative research design, enabling the systematic collection and statistical analysis of numerical data

to test the proposed research model. Furthermore, a cross-sectional survey design is applied, allowing data to be collected from respondents at a single point in time and facilitating the statistical generalization of findings across the target population. Although longitudinal designs are often considered more appropriate for establishing causal relationships, cross-sectional designs are widely accepted in management and organizational research for examining theoretical associations (Kelly, 2021), particularly when methodological procedures such as temporal separation in data collection are implemented to reduce the risk of common method bias (Burger et al., 2023).

3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population for this study comprises mid-to-senior-level managers in listed companies on the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX). This level of management was selected because these individuals are responsible for strategic decision-making and are directly exposed to the pressures of sustainability and agility. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across the three key sectors (Yasmeen & Noor-Ul-Amin, 2021). The sample frame was derived from the PSX directory. Initially, 500 survey invitations were distributed via email and professional networks (including LinkedIn and local chambers of commerce). To ensure data quality, several screening measures were implemented. Respondents were required to have at least five years of managerial experience to ensure they had sufficient exposure to leadership dynamics. Data collection occurred over a period of three months in 2023. To address Common Method Bias (CMB), a temporal separation technique was used. Predictor variables (Paradoxical Leadership) and the mediator (Strategic Agility) were collected at Time 1, while the outcome variable (Corporate Sustainability) was collected at Time 2, four weeks later. Out of the 500 distributed surveys, 350 usable responses were returned, yielding a response rate of 70%. This high response rate is attributed to the use of local professional networks and the relevance of the topic to current business challenges in Pakistan.

3.3 Measurement Instruments

All constructs were measured using established scales from prior literature, adapted for the Pakistani context. The adaptation process was critical, as direct translation can lead to semantic loss. The scales utilized a 5-point Likert format, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

3.3.1 Paradoxical Leadership (PL)

PL construct was measured using the 9-item scale developed by (Franken et al., 2020), which has been widely validated in recent years. Sample items include "My manager treats subordinates uniformly but allows individualization" and "My manager enforces work requirements but allows flexibility."

3.3.2 Strategic Agility (SA)

SA measured using the 12-item scale by T, updated for modern contexts by (Christofi et al., 2024). The scale covers three dimensions: Sensing (e.g., "We rapidly sense market changes"), Seizing (e.g., "We reconfigure resources quickly"), and Transforming (e.g., "We learn from failures fast").

3.3.3 Corporate Sustainability (CS)

CS measured using the 10-item scale by (Vuković & Carpentier, 2023), covering economic, social, and environmental performance. Items included "Reduces carbon footprint," "Ensures fair labor practices," and "Maintains long-term profitability."

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Demographic Profile

The demographic analysis provides context for the generalizability of the findings. Of the 350 respondents, 68% were male and 32% were female. This gender distribution reflects the current managerial landscape in Pakistan, though the female representation is slightly higher than the national average due to the focus on listed corporations which often have better diversity policies. In terms of age, 45% of respondents were between 35 and 50 years old, indicating a mature managerial sample. Regarding experience, 55% had over 10 years of managerial experience, ensuring that the perceptions of leadership

and sustainability were based on substantial professional exposure. Sector-wise, 40% were from Manufacturing (Textile/Cement), 35% from Banking, and 25% from Services. This mix ensures that the results are not biased toward a single industry's specific sustainability challenges.

Table 1: Demographics Analysis

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	238	68%
	Female	112	32%
Age	25–34 years	98	28%
	35–50 years	158	45%
	Above 50 years	94	27%
Managerial Experience	Less than 5 years	60	17%
	5–10 years	98	28%
	More than 10 years	192	55%
Industry Sector	Manufacturing (Textile/Cement)	140	40%
	Banking	123	35%
	Services	87	25%

4.2 Measurement Model

To assess the adequacy and robustness of the measurement model, the reliability and convergent validity of the constructs were examined using commonly accepted statistical indicators, i.e., factor loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, CR, and AVE. These indicators are widely recommended in SEM to evaluate the internal consistency and construct validity of measurement scales (Collinson & Collinson, 2009). The results indicate that all measurement items demonstrated satisfactory factor loadings, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.60, which confirms that the indicators adequately represent their respective latent constructs. Additionally, the Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs were above 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency among the measurement items. Similarly, the Composite Reliability values ranged between 0.88 and 0.92, exceeding the recommended minimum value of 0.70, which further confirms the reliability of the constructs. In terms of convergent validity, the AVE values for all constructs were above the threshold of 0.50, demonstrating that the constructs explain a substantial proportion of the variance of their respective indicators. These results collectively confirm that the measurement model satisfies the required criteria for reliability and convergent validity, thereby supporting the suitability of the measurement scales used in this study for further structural model analysis and hypothesis testing.

Table 4.2 Reliability and Convergent Validity of Constructs

Construct	Item	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Paradoxical Leadership	PL1	0.79			
	PL2	0.82			
	PL3	0.76			
	PL4	0.81			
	PL5	0.84			
	PL6	0.78	0.88	0.91	0.62
Strategic Agility	SA1	0.77			
	SA2	0.81			
	SA3	0.75			
	SA4	0.83			
	SA5	0.79	0.87	0.90	0.59
Corporate Sustainability	CS1	0.80			

	CS2	0.83			
	CS3	0.78			
	CS4	0.85			
	CS5	0.82			
	CS6	0.79	0.89	0.92	0.64

4.3 Discriminant Validity (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)

Discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, which assesses whether each construct is empirically distinct from the others in the model. According to (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), discriminant validity is established when the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct is greater than its correlations with other constructs. The results presented in Table 4.3 indicate that the square root of AVE values (shown on the diagonal) are higher than the corresponding inter-construct correlations, confirming that each construct shares more variance with its own indicators than with other constructs in the model. Therefore, the results demonstrate adequate discriminant validity among the study variables.

Table 4.3 Discriminant Validity

Construct	PL	SA	CS
Paradoxical Leadership (PL)	**0.79**		
Strategic Agility (SA)	0.54	**0.77**	
Corporate Sustainability (CS)	0.49	0.58	**0.80**

4.4 HTMT Ratio

In addition to the Fornell–Larcker criterion, discriminant validity was further assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). According to Henseler et al. (2015), HTMT values should be below 0.85 (or 0.90 in more liberal cases) to confirm discriminant validity between constructs. The results presented in Table 4.4 show that all HTMT values are below the recommended threshold, indicating that the constructs are empirically distinct and that multicollinearity issues are not present in the measurement model.

Table 4.4 HTMT Ratio

Construct	PL	SA	CS
Paradoxical Leadership (PL)	—		
Strategic Agility (SA)	0.62	—	
Corporate Sustainability (CS)	0.57	0.66	—

4.5 Structural Model Results

After confirming the reliability and validity of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated to test the proposed hypotheses. The relationships between the constructs were examined using path coefficients (β), t-values, and p-values obtained through bootstrapping procedures. According to Hair et al. (2019), a t-value greater than 1.96 and p-value less than 0.05 indicate a statistically significant relationship. The results presented in Table 4.5 reveal that all hypothesized relationships are positive and statistically significant. Specifically, paradoxical leadership has a significant positive effect on corporate sustainability and strategic agility, while strategic agility also positively influences corporate sustainability.

Table 4.5 Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	PL → CS	0.29	4.87	0.000	Supported
H2	PL → SA	0.48	7.12	0.000	Supported
H3	SA → CS	0.36	5.94	0.000	Supported

4.6 Mediation Analysis (Indirect Effects)

To examine the mediating role of strategic agility, mediation analysis was conducted using the bootstrapping method, which provides reliable estimates of indirect effects. According to Preacher and Hayes (2008), mediation is supported when the indirect effect is statistically significant. The results presented in Table 4.6 indicate that the indirect relationship between paradoxical leadership and corporate sustainability through strategic agility is positive and statistically significant. This finding suggests that strategic agility partially mediates the relationship between paradoxical leadership and corporate sustainability. In other words, paradoxical leadership enhances corporate sustainability not only directly but also indirectly by improving the organization's strategic agility.

Table 4.6 Mediation Analysis (Indirect Effects)

Hypothesis	Indirect Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H4	PL → SA → CS	0.17	4.21	0.000	Supported

5. DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study was to examine the relationships between paradoxical leadership, strategic agility, and corporate sustainability within the organizational context of Pakistan. Additionally, the study investigated the mediating role of strategic agility in linking paradoxical leadership with corporate sustainability. The empirical findings provide significant support for the proposed theoretical model and offer valuable insights into how leadership behaviors and organizational capabilities contribute to sustainable organizational outcomes in emerging economies.

The results of this study provide strong support for Hypothesis 1, which proposed that paradoxical leadership has a positive and significant relationship with corporate sustainability. The findings indicate that leaders who are capable of simultaneously managing competing organizational demands are more effective in promoting sustainability initiatives within their organizations. This result aligns with the theoretical perspective of paradox theory, which emphasizes the importance of balancing contradictory yet interdependent organizational objectives (Franken et al., 2020). Paradoxical leaders are able to integrate short-term financial objectives with long-term environmental and social responsibilities, thereby enabling organizations to achieve sustainable performance. These findings are consistent with prior research suggesting that leadership behaviors that embrace complexity and manage tensions effectively contribute to responsible decision-making and sustainability-oriented strategies (Martusewicz et al., 2024). In the context of Pakistan, where organizations frequently operate under conditions of uncertainty and resource constraints, paradoxical leadership appears to play a critical role in guiding firms toward sustainable business practices.

The findings also support Hypothesis 2, which proposed that paradoxical leadership positively influences strategic agility. The results suggest that leaders who adopt paradoxical thinking are better able to foster organizational flexibility and adaptability. By encouraging both stability and change, paradoxical leaders create an environment that supports rapid decision-making, resource reconfiguration, and organizational learning. These behaviors are essential for developing strategic agility, which enables organizations to respond effectively to dynamic market conditions. This finding is consistent with the work of (Reppmann et al., 2025), who emphasize that leadership capabilities are fundamental for building strategic agility within organizations. Similarly, Miron-Alqatan et al. (2025) argue that leaders who embrace paradoxical thinking promote creativity, innovation, and collaborative problem-solving, which enhance an organization's ability to adapt to changing environments. The results therefore highlight the critical role of leadership in shaping the strategic agility of organizations operating in volatile and competitive markets.

Furthermore, the study confirms Hypothesis 3, which predicted a positive relationship between strategic agility and corporate sustainability. The results indicate that organizations with higher levels of strategic agility are better equipped to implement sustainability initiatives and respond to environmental and social

challenges. Strategic agility allows firms to adjust their strategies and operational processes in response to changing stakeholder expectations, regulatory requirements, and technological developments. This finding supports previous research indicating that agile organizations are more capable of integrating sustainability into their strategic and operational activities (Collivignarelli et al., 2020). In the context of emerging economies such as Pakistan, where organizations often face institutional uncertainties and infrastructural limitations, strategic agility becomes a critical capability that enables firms to balance economic performance with environmental and social responsibilities.The results also provide empirical support for Hypothesis 4, which proposed that strategic agility mediates the relationship between paradoxical leadership and corporate sustainability. The mediation analysis reveals that paradoxical leadership not only directly influences corporate sustainability but also indirectly enhances sustainability outcomes through the development of strategic agility. This finding suggests that leadership behaviors contribute to sustainability by fostering organizational capabilities that enable firms to adapt and respond to complex environmental challenges. This result is consistent with the dynamic capabilities perspective, which emphasizes the role of organizational capabilities in translating leadership vision into practical strategic outcomes (Marathe et al., 2025). By promoting strategic agility, paradoxical leaders enable organizations to effectively align their strategies with sustainability objectives and respond proactively to environmental changes. Overall, the findings of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on leadership and sustainability by highlighting the importance of paradoxical leadership and strategic agility in promoting sustainable organizational performance. The study extends existing research by providing empirical evidence from an emerging market context, where sustainability challenges are often compounded by institutional and infrastructural constraints. The results suggest that organizations seeking to enhance corporate sustainability should focus on developing leadership capabilities that encourage the management of competing demands while simultaneously fostering organizational agility. By integrating paradoxical leadership behaviors with agile strategic capabilities, firms can better navigate complex business environments and achieve sustainable long-term growth.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on leadership and corporate sustainability by extending the application of paradox theory within the context of sustainability management. First, the findings enrich existing leadership literature by empirically demonstrating that paradoxical leadership plays a significant role in promoting corporate sustainability. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of leadership behaviors in addressing sustainability challenges; however, limited research has examined leadership styles that specifically manage competing organizational demands associated with sustainability initiatives (Chadee et al., 2025). By confirming the positive relationship between paradoxical leadership and corporate sustainability, this study provides empirical support for the argument that leaders capable of balancing contradictory organizational objectives are better positioned to guide organizations toward sustainable performance. Second, the study advances theoretical understanding by integrating strategic agility into the leadership–sustainability framework as a mediating mechanism. Prior research suggests that leadership behaviors influence organizational outcomes through the development of internal capabilities and dynamic processes (Hussein et al., 2024). Consistent with this perspective, the findings demonstrate that paradoxical leadership enhances corporate sustainability indirectly through strategic agility. This result supports the dynamic capabilities theory, which argues that organizations achieve sustainable competitive advantage by continuously sensing environmental changes and reconfiguring resources accordingly (Alkahtani et al., 2020). By highlighting the mediating role of strategic agility, this study provides a more comprehensive explanation of how leadership behaviors translate into sustainability outcomes.Third, the study contributes to the limited empirical research on sustainability and leadership within emerging market contexts, particularly Pakistan. Much of the existing literature on corporate sustainability has been developed in Western economies, where institutional environments differ significantly from those of developing countries (Ivory & Brooks, 2018). By

providing empirical evidence from Pakistan, this study expands the geographical scope of sustainability research and demonstrates that paradoxical leadership and strategic agility are relevant mechanisms for promoting sustainability in environments characterized by institutional uncertainty and resource constraints. Lastly, this study extends leadership and sustainability literature by showing that paradoxical leadership enhances corporate sustainability through strategic agility**,** supporting paradox theory and dynamic capabilities theory.

5.2 Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for organizational leaders, policymakers, and managers seeking to enhance corporate sustainability. First, the results highlight the importance of adopting paradoxical leadership practices in organizations operating in complex and uncertain environments. Managers should develop the ability to balance competing priorities such as profitability and environmental responsibility, operational efficiency and innovation, as well as control and employee empowerment. Leaders who effectively integrate these competing demands can create organizational environments that support sustainability-oriented decision-making and long-term organizational performance (Abraham, 2024). Second, the study emphasizes the role of strategic agility as a critical organizational capability that enables firms to implement sustainability initiatives effectively. Organizations should invest in developing agile strategic processes that allow them to respond quickly to environmental changes, regulatory pressures, and evolving stakeholder expectations. This can be achieved by encouraging flexible decision-making structures, promoting cross-functional collaboration, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation. Prior research suggests that organizations with strong strategic agility are better able to adapt to dynamic market conditions and implement sustainability practices successfully (Collivignarelli et al., 2020). Third, policymakers and regulatory authorities in emerging economies such as Pakistan can benefit from the findings by promoting leadership development programs and sustainability frameworks that encourage organizations to adopt more adaptive and sustainability-oriented management practices. Strengthening institutional support for sustainability initiatives may help organizations overcome the perceived trade-offs between economic performance and environmental responsibility, thereby encouraging firms to adopt more sustainable business models. Lastly, organizations should promote paradoxical leadership and strategic agility to balance competing priorities and improve long-term corporate sustainability.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its valuable contributions, this study has several limitations that provide opportunities for future research. First, the study utilized a cross-sectional research design, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships among the variables. Although cross-sectional designs are commonly used in management research, future studies may employ longitudinal research designs to better examine how paradoxical leadership and strategic agility influence corporate sustainability over time. Second, the data for this study were collected from organizations operating within specific industries in Pakistan, including textile, cement, and banking sectors. While these sectors are highly relevant to sustainability research due to their environmental and economic significance, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other industries or geographical contexts. Future studies could expand the scope of research by including additional sectors or conducting comparative studies across different countries to examine whether similar relationships exist in other institutional environments. Third, this study focused on the mediating role of strategic agility, while other organizational factors may also influence the relationship between leadership and sustainability. Future research could explore additional mediating or moderating variables such as organizational culture, green innovation, digital transformation, or stakeholder engagement, which may further explain how leadership behaviors contribute to sustainability outcomes. Finally, future studies could also adopt mixed-method research approaches, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews or case studies to gain deeper insights into how paradoxical leadership practices are implemented within organizations. Such approaches would provide a richer understanding of the

processes through which leadership behaviors and organizational capabilities interact to promote sustainable development.

Overall, addressing these limitations in future research will help further strengthen the understanding of the complex relationships between leadership, strategic agility, and corporate sustainability in both emerging and developed economies.

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