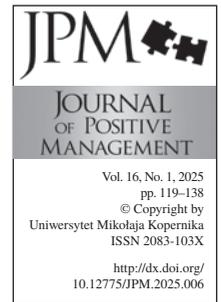


# HUMAN FLOURISHING AND SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS: A HUMAN-CENTRIC APPROACH TO CORPORATE GROWTH

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This article explores how human flourishing can be understood as an organizational capability that supports sustainable success, rather than solely as an individual psychological outcome. It aims to integrate insights from positive psychology, leadership, and organizational studies into a coherent human-centric framework.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The article adopts a conceptual research design grounded in an interdisciplinary review of literature. To enrich and illustrate the proposed framework, it draws on qualitative insights from in-depth interviews with three senior executives operating in highly competitive global industries. These insights are used illustratively rather than for empirical generalization.

**Findings:** The article develops an integrative framework identifying three interrelated levers that enable flourishing-oriented organizations: values-based leadership, organizational cultures fostering psychological safety, creativity, and belonging, and the strategic embedding of well-being into everyday organizational practices. Together, these levers link human flourishing to long-term organizational resilience, innovation, and meaningful performance.

**Implications/limitations:** The study offers practical implications for leaders seeking to move beyond short-term performance metrics toward more sustainable, human-centric models of success. As a conceptual article supported by illustrative qualitative insights, its main limitation lies in the absence of large-scale empirical testing, which opens avenues for future research.

**Originality/value:** The article contributes to positive management scholarship by reframing human flourishing as a collective organizational capability and by clarifying the mechanisms through which leadership and culture connect flourishing to sustainable success.

**Keywords:** human flourishing, sustainable success, values-based leadership, organizational culture, well-being, positive management

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the concept of success has evolved beyond traditional metrics such as financial achievement, career advancement, or organizational growth. Increasingly, scholars and practitioners are calling for a broader understanding of success – one that integrates well-being, purpose, and ethical responsibility into the pursuit of high performance (Mewafarosh et al., 2024; Uusiautti & Hyvärinen, 2021). This shift reflects a growing recognition that narrowly defined performance indicators are insufficient to capture what enables organizations to remain viable, legitimate, and resilient over time.

At the same time, the modern workplace is undergoing rapid and multifaceted transformation. Globalization has intensified competition and interconnectedness, requiring organizations to navigate complex, multicultural, and often volatile environments (Friedman, 1995). Digital transformation is reshaping business models, communication patterns, and modes of collaboration, demanding agility and continuous learning (Normann, 2001). These dynamics are further compounded by mounting environmental and social challenges – from climate change and inequality to mental health crises and political polarization – which increasingly press organizations to act more responsibly, inclusively, and transparently (George et al., 2016).

As a result, there is a growing call for new models of leadership and value creation – models that go beyond instrumental efficiency or short-term profit maximization, and instead foreground human flourishing, ethical accountability, and long-term resilience (e.g. Cebral-Loureda et al., 2022; Fowers et al., 2024; Liang et al., 2024; Liao, 2022). Within this emerging perspective, leadership is no longer understood solely as strategic decision-making or control, but as a relational and value-driven practice. Leaders are increasingly seen as stewards of well-being who shape organizational cultures that foster trust, meaning, inclusion, and psychological safety (Mewafarosh et al., 2024; Pawelski, 2022).

This shift aligns with the growing interdisciplinary discourse on *human flourishing*. Rooted in positive psychology, virtue ethics, and broader humanistic traditions, flourishing refers to a multidimensional state of optimal functioning encompassing physical, emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Importantly, flourishing is not merely defined by the absence of distress, but by the presence of purpose, meaning, connection, autonomy, and engagement. As recent reviews (see Cebral-Loureda et al., 2022; Verma et al., 2025) highlight, the concept has been adopted across disciplines, yet remains theoretically plural and often fragmented in its organizational applications. Within organizational contexts, flourishing increasingly refers not only to individual vitality, but also to cultural and structural conditions that support growth, belonging, and contribution over time (Ahsan & Khawaja, 2024).

Parallel to this development, scholars have begun to link human flourishing to broader notions of sustainable success – understood as the long-term integration of individual well-being, organizational effectiveness, and societal impact (Karima & Uusiautti, 2018; Mewafarosh et al., 2024; Porcini, 2022). However, despite growing empirical interest in flourishing at work, existing research has often emphasized measurement, individual-level outcomes, or instrumental performance effects, leaving less explored how flourishing is interpreted, enacted, and sustained through leadership and organizational culture, particularly at senior decision-making levels (see Peethambaran & Naim, 2025).

Against this backdrop, important questions remain insufficiently addressed. What does it mean, in practice, to lead in ways that foster both human flourishing and sustainable success? How do senior executives conceptualize these ideas in their everyday leadership and strategic decisions? And what organizational conditions enable – or constrain – their realization over time? This article addresses these questions

The article is structured as follows. The first section develops a theoretical framing of human flourishing and sustainable success, positioning these constructs within contemporary debates in organization studies, leadership research, and positive management. The second section introduces an integrative conceptual framework that links flourishing and sustainable success through leadership practices and organizational culture. This is followed by a section outlining the illustrative methodological orientation of the study, which clarifies how executive interviews are used to enrich and exemplify the conceptual argument. The subsequent section presents illustrative executive insights, highlighting shared values, practices, and tensions across leadership contexts. The final section discusses the theoretical implications of the framework, reflects on the limitations of the illustrative approach, and outlines directions for future research, advancing a vision of organizational success anchored in flourishing and sustainability rather than short-term speed or extraction.

By combining conceptual reflection with grounded voices from practice, this paper contributes to the growing literature on positive management and humanistic leadership (see Dey et al., 2022; Liao, 2022; Uhl-Bien, 2006), and invites scholars and practitioners alike to reconsider success as a collective, sustainable, and life-enhancing organizational endeavor.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### *Human Flourishing and Sustainable Success in Organizational Studies*

The concept of human flourishing has deep philosophical and interdisciplinary roots and has increasingly gained attention within organizational and management research. Originating in Aristotelian philosophy, flourishing (*eudaimonia*) is

understood as the highest human good, characterized by purpose, virtue, and the realization of human potential. Contemporary psychological and humanistic approaches have built on this foundation by conceptualizing flourishing as a multidimensional condition encompassing emotional, psychological, and social well-being, as well as engagement, meaning, and high-quality relationships (Colbert et al., 2016; Verma et al., 2025).

Within modern well-being research, flourishing is typically distinguished from hedonic notions of happiness or satisfaction. Rather than referring to transient positive affect, flourishing denotes a condition of optimal functioning, marked by the simultaneous presence of positive emotions, purposeful engagement, personal growth, autonomy, and social connectedness (Redelinguys et al., 2019). Integrative frameworks further emphasize that flourishing involves moral character, meaningful relationships, health, and material stability as interdependent components of a good life (e.g. VanderWeele, 2017). These perspectives converge in rejecting purely economic or instrumental indicators of success, instead framing flourishing as a holistic and value-laden concept.

Importantly, flourishing is not conceived as a purely individual achievement. Capability-based and humanistic perspectives stress that flourishing is inherently relational and contextual, depending on access to social, institutional, and material conditions that enable individuals to develop and exercise valued capabilities such as dignity, participation, recognition, and meaningful contribution (Colbert et al., 2016). From this viewpoint, flourishing is co-produced through social arrangements and organizational structures rather than achieved solely through individual traits or effort.

These insights have increasingly informed organizational and management scholarship. Within this literature, flourishing and closely related constructs—most notably *thriving at work*—are understood as dynamic experiences characterized by vitality and learning that emerge from supportive relationships, autonomy, and meaningful task engagement (Spreitzer et al., 2010). While thriving and flourishing are sometimes used interchangeably, recent reviews emphasize important distinctions: thriving typically captures more proximal states of energy and learning, whereas flourishing refers to a broader and more enduring configuration of well-being, meaning, and social functioning over time (Peethambaran & Naim, 2025). This distinction is particularly relevant for organizational research concerned with sustainability and long-term outcomes.

Empirical studies (e.g. McGhee & Grant, 2020) consistently associate flourishing with positive individual and collective outcomes, including physical and psychological health, resilience, ethical sensitivity, and adaptive capacity. At work, flourishing has been linked to engagement, creativity, prosocial behavior, and learning-capacities that are central to leadership effectiveness and organizational adaptability. As a result, flourishing is increasingly conceptualized not merely

as an outcome of favorable work conditions, but as an enabling condition that supports sustained participation, moral development, and constructive contribution within organizations.

At the same time, scholars note that flourishing at work depends critically on leadership practices, relational climates, and organizational cultures. Leadership behaviors that foster trust, inclusion, and voice, as well as cultures characterized by psychological safety and meaning-making, are repeatedly identified as key contextual conditions under which flourishing can emerge and be sustained. This has shifted attention away from individual-level interventions toward organizational and relational mechanisms, positioning flourishing as a phenomenon deeply embedded in everyday organizational life.

### ***Sustainable Success Beyond Performance Metrics***

In parallel, organizational and management research has increasingly questioned narrow concepts of success defined primarily through short-term financial performance ref. In response, the notion of *sustainable success* has emerged to capture organizational viability and value creation over time, extending beyond immediate economic outcomes to incorporate ethical responsibility, resilience, and long-term learning (Uusiautti & Hyvärinen, 2021). Rather than representing a discrete outcome, sustainable success is commonly understood as an organization's capacity to endure, adapt, and remain socially legitimate across changing conditions.

This perspective aligns closely with stakeholder-oriented approaches in management, which conceptualize long-term organizational success as dependent on the quality of relationships with multiple stakeholders, including employees, customers, communities, and society at large (Civera & Freeman, 2019). From this view, sustainable success cannot be reduced to efficiency or profitability alone, but is shaped by ethical governance, trust, and the organization's ability to balance competing interests over time. Research on sustainable leadership similarly emphasizes long-term orientation, people development, and stewardship as central conditions for enduring organizational performance (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018).

Recent scholarship conceptualizes sustainable success as a dynamic and systemic achievement rather than a static endpoint (Liang et al., 2024). This shifts analytical attention away from isolated performance indicators toward the structural, relational, and cultural conditions that enable organizations to sustain value creation. Sustainable success, in this sense, emerges through ongoing processes of learning, sensemaking, and value alignment, rather than through episodic achievements or short-term optimization. Organizational cultures that support adaptability, ethical reflection, and continuous learning are therefore seen as critical foundations of long-term success.

Despite its growing prominence, sustainable success remains difficult to implement in practice. Many organizations continue to operate within performance regimes that privilege short-term profitability and efficiency, often at the expense of employee well-being, ethical deliberation, and long-term resilience (Hallencreutz et al., 2025). Research on burnout and work intensification suggests that such regimes may generate short-term gains while simultaneously eroding the human and relational resources required for sustained functioning (Maslach & Leiter, 2000). As a result, narrowly defined success models may become self-undermining over time.

Moreover, scholars highlight persistent challenges in assessing sustainable success, as long-term, cultural, and relational outcomes are inherently more complex and less immediately observable than conventional financial indicators (Richards & Gladwin, 1999). This has contributed to a gap between normative calls for sustainability-oriented success and the practical realities of organizational measurement and governance. In response, recent work increasingly advocates for more holistic conceptions of success that integrate ethical leadership, learning capacity, and human well-being as central components of long-term organizational viability.

### *The Unresolved Interface Between Human Flourishing and Sustainable Success*

Although the literatures on human flourishing and sustainable success have developed largely in parallel, their intersection remains only partially theorized. Both streams increasingly acknowledge the importance of well-being, ethics, and relational quality for long-term organizational outcomes. However, they often operate at different levels of analysis and emphasize different mechanisms. Research on flourishing has predominantly focused on individual experiences of well-being, meaning, and optimal functioning, while research on sustainable success has tended to emphasize organizational – or system – level outcomes such as resilience, legitimacy, and long-term performance.

As a result, the connection between flourishing and sustainable success is frequently asserted rather than explained. While it is widely suggested that flourishing employees contribute to better organizational outcomes, the specific organizational processes through which flourishing translates into sustained success remain underdeveloped. In particular, there is limited theoretical integration explaining how human-centric values and well-being-oriented practices become embedded in organizational structures, leadership routines, and cultures in ways that support long-term viability.

A further limitation concerns the role of leadership. Although leadership is frequently invoked as important in both literatures, empirical and conceptual work often treats leadership in abstract or generalized terms. There is comparatively

little insight into how senior leaders interpret, prioritize, and operationalize flourishing-oriented principles within highly competitive and performance-driven contexts, or how such interpretations shape organizational cultures over time. Consequently, the micro-level mechanisms linking leadership practices, human flourishing, and sustainable success remain insufficiently specified. From an organization studies perspective, this gap is consequential. Organizations do not achieve sustainable success solely through strategic positioning or performance optimization, but through ongoing processes of coordination, sensemaking, and relational work. These processes are shaped by leadership practices and cultural conditions that influence how people experience work, interact with one another, and interpret organizational goals. Accordingly, understanding how human flourishing becomes a generative condition for sustainable success requires a framework that foregrounds leadership and organizational culture as central linking mechanisms.

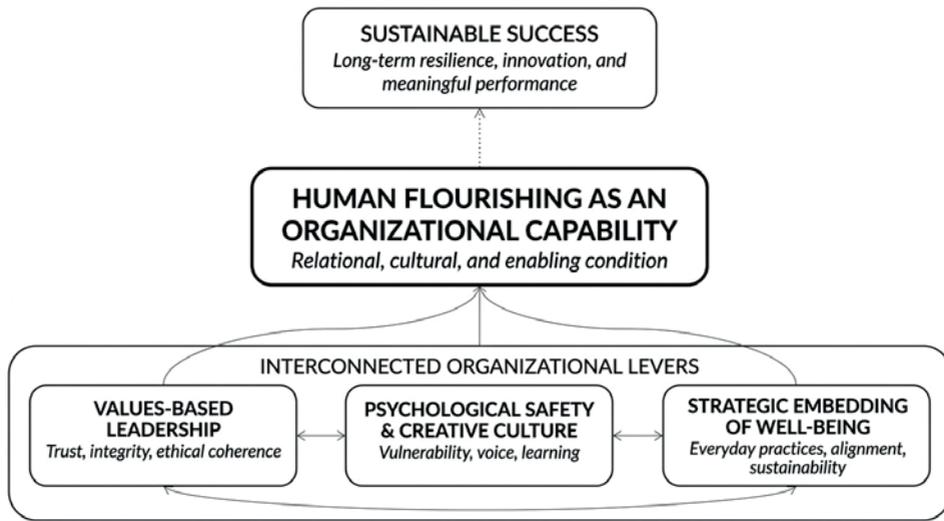
### **3. An Integrative Conceptual Framework Linking Human Flourishing and Sustainable Success**

Building on the theoretical framing, this article develops an integrative conceptual framework that links human flourishing and sustainable success through leadership and organizational culture.

The integrative framework proposed here responds to this need by conceptualizing sustainable success as emerging from organizational conditions that actively support human flourishing. Rather than treating flourishing as an individual outcome or an ethical add-on, the framework positions it as an organizationally produced condition that sustains learning, adaptability, and meaningful performance over time. In doing so, the framework bridges insights from human flourishing research, sustainability-oriented management, and leadership studies, offering a coherent lens for examining how human-centric values are enacted in organizational life.

Figure 1 illustrates how human flourishing operates as an organizational capability that connects leadership practices and organizational culture with sustainable success. The framework highlights three interconnected levers – values-based leadership, psychological safety and creative culture, and the strategic embedding of well-being – that jointly shape the conditions under which individuals can flourish and organizations can sustain long-term resilience, innovation, and meaningful performance. Rather than depicting linear causality, the framework emphasizes dynamic and mutually reinforcing relationships among leadership, culture, flourishing, and sustainable success. These levers are not conceptualized as independent variables or discrete interventions, but as mutually reinforcing elements of an organizational ecosystem shaped through leadership and culture. Together, they shape the relational and cultural conditions

**Figure 1.** An Integrative Conceptual Framework Linking Human Flourishing and Sustainable Success



under which individuals can flourish and organizations can sustain success over time. Leadership plays a central role in activating and aligning these levers, while organizational culture provides the context in which they are enacted and experienced.

### *Values-Based Leadership*

The first lever of the framework concerns values-based leadership. Leadership is conceptualized here not as a set of formal roles or traits, but as a relational practice through which values are articulated, modeled, and reinforced in everyday organizational life. Values-based leadership emphasizes ethical integrity, trustworthiness, and consistency between espoused values and enacted behavior. Through such practices, leaders shape normative expectations regarding how people should treat one another, how decisions are made, and what forms of behavior are considered legitimate.

Within the proposed framework, values-based leadership functions as a foundational condition for human flourishing. By modeling ethical conduct, openness, and respect, leaders create environments in which individuals feel recognized, safe to express themselves, and motivated to contribute meaningfully. At the same time, values-based leadership supports sustainable success by fostering trust, legitimacy, and alignment across organizational levels. These qualities enable organizations to navigate uncertainty, manage tensions between competing demands, and maintain coherence over time.

Importantly, values-based leadership is not limited to formal ethical policies or abstract principles. Its influence lies in how values are enacted through everyday

interactions, decision-making processes, and responses to challenges. In this sense, leadership serves as a key translation mechanism through which human-centric values become embedded in organizational practice.

### ***Psychological Safety and Creative Culture***

The second lever of the framework concerns organizational culture, with particular emphasis on psychological safety and creativity. Psychological safety refers to shared beliefs that interpersonal risk-taking—such as speaking up, admitting uncertainty, or proposing new ideas—is acceptable and will not result in negative consequences. Within the framework, psychological safety is conceptualized as a cultural condition that enables learning, experimentation, and constructive disagreement.

Cultures characterized by psychological safety are particularly important for human flourishing, as they allow individuals to engage authentically with their work, develop competence, and build meaningful relationships. Such cultures also support sustainable success by facilitating continuous learning and adaptation, especially in complex and uncertain environments. Creativity, in this context, is not limited to artistic expression or innovation outcomes, but refers more broadly to the capacity to explore alternatives, recombine knowledge, and respond flexibly to emerging challenges.

The framework highlights that psychological safety and creativity are mutually reinforcing cultural qualities. Psychological safety enables creativity by reducing fear and encouraging exploration, while creative engagement contributes to a sense of meaning and vitality that supports flourishing. Together, these cultural conditions help organizations avoid rigid performance routines and instead sustain dynamic capabilities over time.

### ***Strategic Embedding of Well-Being***

The third lever concerns the strategic embedding of well-being in everyday organizational practices. Rather than treating well-being as a peripheral benefit or isolated initiative, the framework emphasizes its integration into core organizational processes, including goal-setting, performance management, work design, and leadership development. This embedding signals that well-being is not merely instrumental, but integral to how the organization defines and pursues success.

Within the framework, strategically embedded well-being supports human flourishing by ensuring that organizational demands are balanced with resources, that work is experienced as meaningful, and that individuals have opportunities for growth and recovery. At the same time, it contributes to sustainable success by reducing burnout, supporting engagement, and preserving human and relational resources over time. By aligning well-being with strategic priorities, organizations

move beyond reactive or symbolic approaches toward more durable human-centric models of success.

Crucially, the strategic embedding of well-being requires coherence across organizational levels. Policies, leadership practices, and cultural norms must align to avoid inconsistencies between espoused commitments and lived experience. When such alignment is achieved, well-being becomes a stabilizing force that supports both individual flourishing and organizational continuity.

### *Dynamic Interactions and Long-Term Orientation*

Collectively, the three levers form a dynamic and interdependent system. Values-based leadership shapes cultural norms and priorities; cultures of psychological safety and creativity enable learning and engagement; and the strategic embedding of well-being sustains human and relational resources over time. These elements reinforce one another, creating feedback loops that support both human flourishing and sustainable success.

The framework emphasizes that sustainable success is not achieved through linear causality or isolated interventions, but through the ongoing alignment of leadership practices, cultural conditions, and strategic priorities. From this perspective, flourishing and success are not competing objectives but mutually reinforcing processes that unfold over time. By foregrounding leadership and organizational culture as central mechanisms, the framework provides a human-centric lens for understanding how organizations can sustain performance while supporting meaningful and dignified work.

## **4. Methodology: Research Design and Illustrative Executive Insights**

The empirical material in this study is used with an explicitly illustrative and sensemaking purpose in relation to the conceptual framework developed in the previous section. Consistent with qualitative traditions in organization studies, the interviews are not intended to test hypotheses, establish causal relationships, or generate theory inductively. Rather, they serve to illuminate how senior leaders interpret and enact flourishing-oriented practices within demanding organizational contexts.

The study draws on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with three senior executives operating in highly competitive and visibility-intensive industries, including food and beverage, entertainment technology, and professional sports. These contexts were selected because they are characterized by strong performance pressures, rapid change, and public scrutiny, making them particularly relevant for examining how human-centric values are reconciled with expectations of sustained success.

All interviewees occupied senior leadership roles with strategic responsibility and direct influence over organizational culture and people-related decisions.

Focusing on senior leaders is theoretically aligned with the aims of the article, as leadership at this level plays a key role in shaping organizational values, cultural norms, and long-term orientations toward success. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, allowing for comparability across conversations while leaving space for reflection on leadership, organizational culture, well-being, and sustainable success. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The analytical approach followed a theory-informed, abductive logic. Rather than applying inductive coding procedures aimed at category generation or saturation, the interview material was read iteratively using the three elements of the conceptual framework – values-based leadership, psychological safety and creative culture, and the strategic embedding of well-being – as sensitizing lenses. Recurring emphases across executive narratives informed the thematic organization of the illustrative insights presented in the following section.

Accordingly, the empirical material does not claim representativeness or generalizability. Instead, it provides analytically selected examples that enrich the conceptual argument by showing how abstract ideas related to flourishing and sustainable success are articulated and made meaningful in leadership practice.

## **5. Results: Illustrative Executive Insights on Human Flourishing as a Pathway to Sustainable Success**

The following thematic insights are presented as illustrative patterns emerging across the executive narratives and are intended to support and enrich the proposed conceptual framework, rather than to claim empirical generalizability.

### ***Values-Based Leadership: Trust, Kindness, and Integrity***

One of the most salient themes emerging across the interviews with senior executives was the emphasis on leadership practices grounded in human values rather than hierarchical authority or technical control. While their organizational contexts varied, all three leaders described trust, kindness, and ethical consistency as foundational to their leadership philosophy. These values were not perceived as abstract ideals but as essential levers for cultivating motivated, resilient, and collaborative teams. The executives emphasized that fostering a positive and supportive work environment requires leaders to be emotionally attuned, morally coherent, and willing to empower others – particularly in uncertain or fast-changing conditions. This shared emphasis points to a broader trend: the redefinition of effective leadership as a relational and value-driven practice that actively supports human flourishing in the workplace.

Across all interviews, indeed, leadership was not framed as control or authority but as a human, ethical, and enabling practice. The Chief Design Officer of a global food and beverage corporation described leadership as grounded in

kindness, curiosity, and optimism – what he called “meta-skills” that shape how individuals approach collaboration and innovation:

*“I don’t want to work with people who are arrogant, cynical or egocentric... They kill innovation. I want people who are kind and optimistic and curious.”*

He emphasized that hiring for character – not just technical skills – is key to building resilient teams, especially in moments of crisis:

*“We hire people not for their skills only, but for who they are. Because when things get hard, their character is what makes the difference.”*

The CEO of a global entertainment technology company highlighted the importance of ethical consistency and leading by example:

*“If you say something and do something else, people will not follow you. Credibility is everything in leadership.”*

He also stressed humility and the capacity to empower others:

*“You don’t need to be the smartest in the room. You need to be the one who empowers others to express their intelligence.”*

From the perspective of the Marketing and Digital Director of a major international football club, leadership was associated with autonomy and trust. He described his approach as non-intrusive, aimed at enabling others to succeed:

*“I don’t like to control every step people take. I trust them. I create direction and then I step back.”*

These views resonate with contemporary perspectives on flourishing-oriented and ethical leadership, which emphasize psychological safety, integrity, and strength-based development as foundations for sustained organizational performance (Edmondson, 1999; Brown et al., 2023; Liang et al., 2024).

### ***Organizational Culture: Designing for Creativity, Vulnerability, and Belonging***

A second recurring theme concerned the role of organizational culture in enabling or constraining human flourishing. The leaders interviewed described culture not as a fixed set of norms or values, but as an evolving system deliberately shaped to support creativity, psychological safety, and meaningful connection.

Across industries, they emphasized the importance of designing cultures that normalize vulnerability, encourage open dialogue, and promote a shared sense of purpose and belonging. Rather than treating well-being or inclusion as ancillary concerns, these leaders articulated a vision of organizational life in which human development and cultural adaptability are central to sustainable success. Their reflections suggest that culture functions as both the medium and the message of flourishing – shaping what is possible for individuals and for the collective.

The Chief Design Officer described organizational culture as something to be consciously designed – an ecosystem that enables people to express vulnerability and take creative risks. He framed psychological safety as a prerequisite for innovation:

*“We’ve built a culture where vulnerability is not a weakness but a strength. Where you can say: I don’t know, I made a mistake, help me.”*

He further illustrated this through the metaphor of sports:

*“Like football players need a good pitch, creatives need a culture where they feel safe to try, to fail, to speak up.”*

The CEO of the entertainment company emphasized the need for transparency and shared purpose as key elements of a flourishing organizational culture:

*“If you want people to engage, they need to know the direction, the values, the purpose. Otherwise, it’s just work.”*

He shared how team-wide conversations around strategic decisions help foster collective alignment and psychological ownership. Diversity and inclusion were also framed not as formalities but as value-generating practices:

*“Diversity isn’t just about numbers. It’s about making sure different voices shape decisions.”*

The Marketing and Digital Director noted that adaptability and openness are fundamental in fast-moving industries like sports and media:

*“There’s no such thing as a monolithic culture anymore... Organizations must be able to evolve quickly, listen to weak signals, and include diverse perspectives.”*

These reflections illustrate how organizational cultures that support vulnerability, dialogue, and inclusion function as critical conditions for both

human flourishing and sustainable success. They support the view that flourishing is socially co-constructed through cultural signals that encourage learning, experimentation, and belonging (Pawelski, 2022).

### ***Individual Well-Being and Long-Term Organizational Success***

The third thematic insight concerned the perceived connection between individual well-being and the long-term success of organizations. All three executives underscored that sustainable performance is inseparable from the health, motivation, and fulfillment of employees. Rather than viewing well-being as a discretionary benefit or HR initiative, they positioned it as a strategic priority embedded within leadership choices, team dynamics, and organizational practices. Their perspectives reflect a shift from short-term performance optimization toward cultivating conditions in which people can thrive over time. In doing so, they implicitly challenge traditional trade-offs between productivity and care, suggesting that flourishing individuals are not only more engaged and creative, but also more likely to contribute to collective resilience, innovation, and loyalty.

All three leaders agreed that employee well-being is not a peripheral concern but a strategic foundation for sustained success. The Chief Design Officer explained that flourishing employees are not only more innovative but also more committed and loyal:

*“If people feel respected, inspired, challenged – they stay. They innovate. They care. And that’s how companies win long term.”*

He challenged the assumption that well-being is a “soft” variable:

*“There’s nothing soft about kindness, about creating meaning. That’s where true innovation comes from.”*

The CEO emphasized the role of work-life balance and personal meaning as protective factors against burnout and disengagement:

*“You can’t burn people out and expect them to give their best. Happiness matters – not because it’s nice, but because it fuels everything else.”*

He described fulfillment and recognition as vital to long-term motivation:

*“When people feel seen and appreciated, they become much more than just employees. They become ambassadors of the company.”*

The Marketing and Digital Director reinforced this by connecting pride, identity, and purpose to high performance:

*“People need to feel part of something meaningful. When they do, they go beyond their job description. They grow.”*

These narratives echo findings in organizational behavior and positive psychology, linking individual flourishing to engagement, creativity, loyalty, and long-term performance (Ahsan & Khawaja, 2024; Liang et al., 2024).

## 6. Discussion

This article explored how the concepts of human flourishing and sustainable success intersect in contemporary leadership and organizational practice. Building on an integrative conceptual framework grounded in positive psychology, ethical leadership, and organization studies, and enriched by illustrative executive narratives, the discussion advances understanding of how flourishing-oriented practices can function as enabling conditions for long-term organizational success. Rather than treating flourishing and sustainable success as parallel or loosely connected ideals, the insights highlight how they are linked through leadership practices and organizational cultures that shape everyday work experiences. In doing so, the article contributes to ongoing debates on human-centric models of leadership and sustainable value creation.

### *Rethinking Leadership as a Relational Practice*

The insights resonate with a growing body of literature suggesting that effective leadership in the twenty-first century is increasingly defined by relational, ethical, and value-based qualities rather than by formal authority or technical expertise alone (see Liang et al., 2024; Lim, 2024). By foregrounding trust, kindness, and integrity, the illustrative insights support theoretical perspectives that conceptualize leadership as a relational practice through which meaning, dignity, and psychological safety are enacted in organizational life (Dey et al., 2022; Porcini, 2022).

Importantly, the contribution of this study lies not in reiterating that such qualities are desirable, but in showing *how* values-based leadership operates as a connecting mechanism between human flourishing and sustainable success. The executive narratives illustrate how leadership practices – such as hiring for character, modeling humility, and maintaining behavioral consistency – function as cultural signals that shape how individuals engage with work, collaboration, and risk. In this sense, leadership emerges not as a position of control, but as an enabling and sensegiving practice that aligns ethical coherence with long-term organizational viability. This extends existing leadership research by situating

flourishing not only as an individual experience, but as an outcome of relational leadership processes that sustain trust and resilience over time.

### ***Culture as a Designed Ecosystem for Flourishing***

The emphasis placed on organizational culture highlights an important shift from treating culture as a background condition to understanding it as a deliberately shaped and dynamic organizational asset. Consistent with flourishing-oriented organizational scholarship (Pawelski, 2022), the insights suggest that cultures supportive of flourishing are characterized by intentional practices that normalize vulnerability, encourage dialogue, and foster belonging and meaning.

From a theoretical standpoint, these insights reinforce and extend organization studies perspectives that view culture and structure as deeply intertwined. Rather than positioning flourishing as an individual outcome or a by-product of isolated well-being initiatives, the insights show how flourishing is embedded in everyday routines, interactions, and organizational arrangements. Cultural practices such as openness and inclusion are intertwined with structural supports—including autonomy, feedback mechanisms, and opportunities for learning—creating conditions under which both human development and organizational adaptability can be sustained. In this way, the article contributes to the literature by clarifying how culture operates as a mediating mechanism through which flourishing becomes organizationally consequential.

### ***Flourishing as a Driver, Not Just an Outcome***

A central theoretical contribution of this study is the reframing of human flourishing as a generative organizational capability rather than solely a normative aspiration or outcome. In line with emerging research, flourishing individuals tend to display cognitive flexibility, intrinsic motivation, and prosocial behavior-capacities that are particularly relevant for navigating complexity and sustaining innovation over time (Balda, 2022; Schulte & Vainio, 2010). The illustrative insights suggest that flourishing functions as an enabling condition that supports learning, resilience, and long-term engagement, thereby contributing directly to sustainable success.

At the same time, the insights underscore that flourishing cannot be reduced to isolated well-being programs or delegated to discrete organizational functions. Instead, flourishing requires alignment across leadership behavior, cultural norms, and strategic priorities. By making this alignment visible, the article advances theoretical understanding of how flourishing can be used as a diagnostic lens for assessing whether organizational environments enable or constrain human potential over time. This perspective directly addresses the gap identified in prior literature, where the link between individual well-being and sustainable organizational outcomes is often asserted but insufficiently explained.

### *Toward a New Paradigm of Organizational Success*

The discussion points toward a broader reconceptualization of organizational success—one that integrates economic viability with human and societal value creation. The illustrative narratives reflect an emerging awareness that long-term organizational resilience depends not only on financial outcomes, but also on ethical leadership, relational quality, and the capacity to foster meaningful engagement. This aligns with calls for more holistic performance frameworks that incorporate non-financial indicators such as psychological safety, inclusion, and purpose alignment (Uusiautti & Hyvärinen, 2021).

Theoretically, this article contributes to positive organizational scholarship and organization studies by bridging abstract conceptualizations of flourishing with situated leadership practice. By using executive narratives illustratively, the study shows how concepts such as kindness, vulnerability, and trust—often treated as intangible or “soft” are translated into concrete organizational choices, including recruitment criteria, communication norms, and feedback practices. These choices shape the organizational conditions under which sustainable success can be pursued and maintained over time.

## **7. Conclusion**

This article examined how human flourishing and sustainable success can be meaningfully integrated within leadership practice and organizational culture. Drawing on an integrative conceptual framework grounded in organization studies, positive psychology, and ethical leadership, and enriched by illustrative insights from senior leaders operating in highly competitive contexts, the analysis identified three interconnected levers through which flourishing-oriented organizations can be understood: values-based leadership, cultures designed to foster psychological safety and creativity, and the strategic embedding of well-being in everyday organizational life.

The insights suggest that human flourishing is neither an abstract ideal nor a peripheral concern, but a foundational condition for long-term resilience, innovation, and meaningful performance. Leadership practices grounded in trust, kindness, and ethical integrity create organizational conditions in which individuals feel empowered to contribute their judgment, creativity, and responsibility. Similarly, organizational cultures that normalize vulnerability and purpose-driven collaboration enable teams to engage with uncertainty and complexity in more adaptive and sustainable ways. When well-being is embedded in strategic and everyday practices rather than treated as a discretionary benefit, organizations signal a shift toward a more human-centric understanding of success.

By conceptualizing flourishing as both an individual condition and an organizational capability, this article contributes to ongoing debates on sustainable

**Table 2.** continued

success by moving beyond short-term performance metrics and instrumental views of well-being. The framework developed here highlights how leadership and culture operate as critical linking mechanisms through which human-centric values become organizationally consequential. In doing so, the article offers a perspective on organizational success grounded not in extraction or exhaustion, but in care, coherence, and shared meaning.

## **8. Limitations and Future Research**

The conceptual and illustrative nature of this article entails certain limitations. The executive interviews are not intended to provide empirical generalization, statistical representativeness, or theoretical saturation. Rather, they serve to illuminate and exemplify key dimensions of the proposed framework. As such, the insights presented reflect situated leadership experiences and should be interpreted as illustrative rather than exhaustive.

While this approach enables conceptual clarity and depth, it limits the ability to draw causal conclusions or to assess the prevalence of flourishing-oriented leadership practices across organizations. Future research could address these limitations by examining the framework proposed here across a broader range of organizational contexts and empirical settings.

Building on the conceptual contributions of this article, several avenues for future research emerge. Empirical studies could test and refine the proposed framework by examining the relationships between flourishing-oriented leadership practices, organizational culture, and sustainable success outcomes across sectors and cultural contexts. Mixed-method designs may be particularly valuable in capturing both the subjective experiences of flourishing and the structural conditions that support it.

Longitudinal research could further explore how values-based leadership and flourishing-oriented cultures evolve over time, particularly under conditions of crisis, growth, or organizational transformation. Such approaches would help illuminate the dynamic processes through which flourishing is sustained – or undermined – across longer time horizons.

Finally, interdisciplinary research integrating organization studies, leadership research, design thinking, and moral philosophy could contribute to more robust and actionable frameworks for designing flourishing-centered organizations. This aligns with broader efforts to reconceptualize management not merely as a technical or instrumental practice, but as a humanistic and socially embedded endeavor oriented toward long-term value creation.

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