

Innovation Culture through leadership and People Management Systems: A Systematic Literature Review¹

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of innovation leadership and people management systems in shaping innovation culture within organisations. In a context marked by technological transformation, sustainability challenges, and increasing uncertainty, innovation culture is increasingly viewed as a strategic capability that supports adaptability, learning, and long-term performance. The objective of the paper is to analyse how leadership practices and human resource management systems enable employees to contribute to innovation and transform creative ideas into organisational outcomes. The research is based on a systematic literature review conducted according to the PRISMA methodology. Data were collected from the Scopus database, using specific search terms and inclusion criteria related to language, document type, subject area, keywords, and publication period. A final sample of 97 articles and reviews was analysed. The results indicate a growing academic interest after 2018 and highlight the importance of leadership, knowledge sharing, employee development, and HRM practices in building innovation culture. The paper concludes that innovation culture represents an integrated organisational capability that connects human potential with sustainable business performance.

Keywords: *Innovation culture, leadership, people management systems, systematic literature, PRISMA methodology.*

JEL classification: M14, O31, O32

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1. Introduction

Innovation has become an essential condition for organisational competitiveness, adaptability, and long-term performance. In a context marked by technological transformation, sustainability challenges, and increasing uncertainty, organisations are required not only to generate new ideas, but also to create internal conditions that enable these ideas to be developed, shared, and transformed into valuable outcomes. Therefore, innovation culture is increasingly understood as a strategic organisational capability, supported by shared values, behaviours,

¹ The title should be accordingly with both the specific topics of the review and the content of the paper. As well, it is recommended that the title include some of the keywords, in order to be more accessible for the search engines.

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leadership practices, knowledge processes, and people management systems that encourage learning, experimentation, collaboration, and continuous renewal.

Previous research highlights that human resource management practices play an important role in shaping employees' skills, attitudes, and behaviours, while also supporting knowledge creation and organisational learning. However, the relationship between human resources management (HRM) and innovation is not automatic, as HRM practices contribute to innovation only when organisations are able to capitalise effectively on employees' knowledge, which confirms the mediating role of knowledge in this relationship (Lopez-Cabrales et al., 2009). Knowledge sharing also represents a key mechanism through which innovation culture is developed and sustained. In this sense, innovation culture is not limited to individual creativity but depends on the organisation's ability to transform knowledge into shared routines, practices, and capabilities that support long-term competitiveness.

Leadership is therefore central to the development of innovation culture. Leaders influence how employees perceive change, experimentation, collaboration, and risk-taking. Moreover, organisations must balance current performance with future growth, which requires leaders and managers to ensure operational efficiency while also identifying new opportunities and supporting organisational adaptation (Ramos-Garza and Ramos-Garza, 2019).

Although the literature increasingly recognises the importance of leadership, HRM practices, knowledge sharing, and creativity in supporting innovation, the relationships between these elements remain insufficiently integrated. As Hughes et al. (2018) argue, previous studies have often focused on broad leadership styles, while less attention has been given to the specific and gradual effects of leadership behaviours on creativity and innovation. Therefore, further research is needed to understand how leadership behaviours and people management systems interact in shaping an innovation culture that motivates employees, strengthens knowledge sharing, and transforms creative potential into sustainable organisational performance.

Starting from this research gap, the present paper aims to examine the role of innovation leadership and people management systems in the development of innovation culture. To achieve this objective, the study applies a systematic literature review. The review follows the PRISMA methodology, which supports transparency in the reporting of systematic reviews (Haddaway et al., 2022), and uses data extracted from the Scopus database.

By analysing this literature, the paper focused on two main research questions:

1. How do leadership practices shape the development and transformation of innovation culture within organisations?
2. How do leadership and people management systems enable employees to contribute to innovation and translate creative ideas into business impact?

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Innovative HRM and people management systems

Human resources management (HRM) practices are a key mechanism through which employees' skills, attitudes, and behaviors are shaped, and they play an important role in supporting knowledge creation and development within organizations. Prior research also suggests that HRM practices are not necessarily linked to innovation unless they effectively capitalize on employees' knowledge, which highlights the essential mediating role of knowledge in this relationship (Lopez-Cabrales et al. 2009). Moreover, green HRM contributes to green innovation by shaping knowledge-related processes. Pro-environmental HR practices create the organizational conditions needed for knowledge generation and mobilization, while the knowledge creation process serves as the mechanism through which green product and green process innovation are developed (Martínez-Egea et al., 2025).

According to Arsawan et al. (2022), knowledge sharing is positioned as a value-adding knowledge-management process that accelerates collective learning, creativity, and innovation, and supports shared standards and collaboration. Prior research increasingly frames innovation culture as a strategic, organization-wide capability rather than a narrow focus on new products, emphasizing shared values and behaviors that enable experimentation, learning, and continuous renewal. This capability is strongly conditioned by knowledge sharing practices, conceptualized not only as informal exchange but as structured knowledge conversion processes that strengthen collective learning and creativity. Building on this logic, evidence suggests a reinforcing pathway in which knowledge sharing nurtures innovation culture, which then improves business performance and contributes to sustainable competitive advantage through valuable and hard-to-imitate routines and competences. Importantly, the relationship is not purely direct: innovation culture and performance operate as key transmission mechanisms that partially explain how knowledge-based practices translate into longer-term competitiveness. This stream of work therefore supports a resource-based and capability-oriented interpretation of sustainability, where resilience and sustained differentiation emerge from cultivating internal cultural and knowledge processes that continually renew innovation outcomes. Knowledge sharing occurs via meetings, discussions, and consultations across internal and external environments, and notes these cooperative activities support employee and organizational development (Abbas and Khan 2023). Creativity is another important aspect that is framed as the generation of new and useful/valuable ideas (for products, services, processes, or procedures) within a specific organizational context (Martins and Terblanche 2003). Both innovation and creativity entail going beyond conventional practices by proposing original responses to problems (Zare and Flinchbaugh 2019). Managers have an important role in focusing on translating strategic objectives into operational outcomes by planning, organizing, allocating resources, coordinating activities, and maintaining control, thus ensuring efficiency, stability, and the effective functioning of the organization.

Innovation at the individual level is supported by a combination of personality, knowledge, cognitive abilities, and intrinsic motivation. People who are open to experience, intuitive, confident, and willing to take risks are more likely to generate and pursue new ideas. At the same time, innovation depends on relevant expertise and continuous learning, since creative solutions usually emerge from research, analysis, experimentation, and reflection rather than by chance. Cognitive abilities such as: information seeking, holistic thinking, and the capacity to integrate multiple perspectives are also essential for solving complex problems. Finally, intrinsic motivation plays a central role, as individuals are more likely to innovate when they find their work meaningful, challenging, and aligned with autonomy, purpose, and personal growth (Ramos-Garza and Ramos-Garza 2019).

2.2 Innovation leadership and capabilities

To remain competitive, an organization needs leaders at every level who foster a culture of innovation and support its continuous renewal. Leadership has been defined in many ways by different authors. However, most agree that it is a process through which individuals guide, motivate, and influence others to achieve important goals that contribute to an organization's effectiveness (Ramos-Garza and Ramos-Garza 2019).

Adopting participatory models that turn stakeholders from passive recipients into active co-creators thereby embedding experimentation, learning, and engagement into routine practice (Zhang 2025). It supports a view of innovation culture as a governance and leadership as a dependent capability that builds legitimacy, adaptive capacity, and sustained stakeholder commitment, which are essential for long-term resilience in contexts of climate risk and social change (Gürlek and Tuna 2018). The study further notes that regulation and senior management decisions alone are insufficient for an effective innovation strategy if shared values are absent.

The article explicitly supports a people-based mechanism where managers create and disseminate values and in which it is increased employees' involvement, knowledge sharing, participation, and supportive behaviors (Wang 2019).

Warren Bennis, one of the pioneers of leadership studies considered that "leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality". Organizations must constantly balance current performance with future growth, creating a tension between efficiency and innovation. Leaders are therefore expected to manage present operations effectively while also recognizing and pursuing new opportunities. This means ensuring the organization functions well today while investing in ideas that will secure its success in the future. According to Ramos-Garza and Ramos-Garza (2019), effective leaders demonstrate empathy and support by understanding others' feelings, showing genuine care, and building trust that helps colleagues face challenges. At the same time, leadership involves not only communicating a vision but also ensuring that goals are achieved through a strong focus on results, efficiency, and productivity. Strong leaders also welcome

diverse perspectives, rely on careful analysis when making decisions, and solve problems effectively by gathering and evaluating information in a thoughtful way. Moreover, leaders articulate a compelling vision, create a shared sense of purpose, and inspire and influence others to embrace change, thereby enabling the organization to adapt, innovate, and develop over time (Ramos-Garza and Ramos-Garza 2019). According to McShane and VonGlinow (2015), effective leaders are typically characterized by integrity, self-confidence, motivation, and a strong sense of purpose. They often combine personal qualities such as conscientiousness, emotional awareness, and intelligence with a solid understanding of the organization and its environment. Together, these attributes help them make sound decisions, inspire others, and guide their teams toward shared goals. In the view of Ahmed, Shepherd, Ramos-Garza, & Ramos-Garza (2012), effective leaders play a central role in shaping and sustaining a culture that supports innovation. They align their decisions with the organization's shared values, encourage openness, accept mistakes as part of learning, and promote experimentation. They also stay alert to external changes, engage with key stakeholders, and help the organization adapt by setting a clear mission and vision. At the same time, they foster trust, collaboration, and teamwork by guiding and supporting employees and providing meaningful feedback.

It is considered that innovation is comprised by two phases: invention and implementation and for each one of the phases, there are specific characteristics for the leader. Innovative leaders combine expertise, vision, planning ability, and strong interpersonal skills to transform ideas into valuable outcomes. They need enough technical and organizational knowledge to define problems, evaluate ideas, guide teams, and build credibility, while also setting a clear direction aligned with the organization's vision. Innovation leadership also involves scanning the environment, identifying promising opportunities, selecting projects that create value, and connecting the work of one team with the wider organization through collaboration and a multidisciplinary approach. At the same time, effective innovative leaders rely on communication, persuasion, empathy, honesty, and relationship-building to gain support, coordinate stakeholders, and foster a culture in which creativity and innovation can flourish at all levels of the organization (Ramos-Garza and Ramos-Garza 2019). Leaders play a key role in creating, strengthening, and sustaining an organizational culture that attracts and retains talented people while giving them the right conditions to grow, create, and innovate. A culture that encourages interaction with diverse people, ideas, projects, and functions stimulates creativity, while diversity itself helps generate original ideas and more effective solutions.

For organizations to remain competitive, they must recognize when established practices are no longer effective and need to be abandoned (Christensen 1997). This process requires leaders to think differently, reinterpret problems, and shift from resisting change to actively supporting innovation (Christensen and Euchner 2011). Stealth leadership highlights the idea that innovation does not always require visible authority or formal power. Instead, innovative leaders may

influence change quietly by building trust, encouraging collaboration, and helping others recognize the value of new ideas. Such leaders are often intrinsically motivated, reliable, willing to take on challenges, and committed to supporting their teams (Fukuda 2015). Rather than forcing change, they persuade others gradually and create conditions in which innovation can be accepted and implemented (Kervin 2006). This form of leadership suggests that meaningful innovation can begin with individual initiative, but it becomes more powerful when it develops into collective action and organizational transformation (Royal, 2014; Gertner, 2015).

Nevertheless, a research gap remains in the leadership and innovation literature. As Hughes et al. (2018) argue, existing studies have mainly examined broad leadership styles, while less attention has been given to the specific, subtle, and gradual effects of particular leadership behaviors on creativity and innovation. Further research is therefore needed to understand whether different leadership styles are more effective at different stages of the creative and innovation process. Moreover, there is limited evidence regarding which leadership behaviors are the strongest predictors of creativity and innovation, which leadership-related variables influence mediating mechanisms, and how leadership contributes to broader organizational processes that support innovation.

3. Methodology

Systematic literature review is an essential part of in-depth research which relies on synthesizing information which ends in answering to a specific research question (Lame 2019). This approach reduces the risk of being bias in the selection process and inclusion of studies, giving a better quality of the research (Lame 2019). Moreover, this method is primary used for identifying and summarising research issues which must be further investigated (Taoer Yang et al. 2024). According to García-López et al. (2025), the process starts with generation of questions followed by “the exploration of bibliographic sources, the definition of inclusion and exclusion criteria, the selection process and data analysis”. For applying the systematic literature review, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) methodology is applied. This type of model has evolved over time by transforming into a reporting guideline designed to ensure that the methods and results of systematic reviews are described with sufficient detail and transparency (Haddaway et al. 2022). The use of PRISMA in this study is supported by previous systematic literature reviews in the field of innovation culture and related management areas. For example, Kharisma et al. (2025) applied the PRISMA protocol to synthesize the literature on innovation culture, while Fuad et al. (2022) used a systematic review approach to examine innovation culture in education. Similarly, (Kiefer et al. 2021) reviewed the literature on digital innovation culture, identifying organizational cultural characteristics that foster digital innovation. In line with the Taoer Yang et al.

(2024) and García-López et al. (2025) research, Figure 1 shows a conceptualisation of the research methodology for systematic literature review.

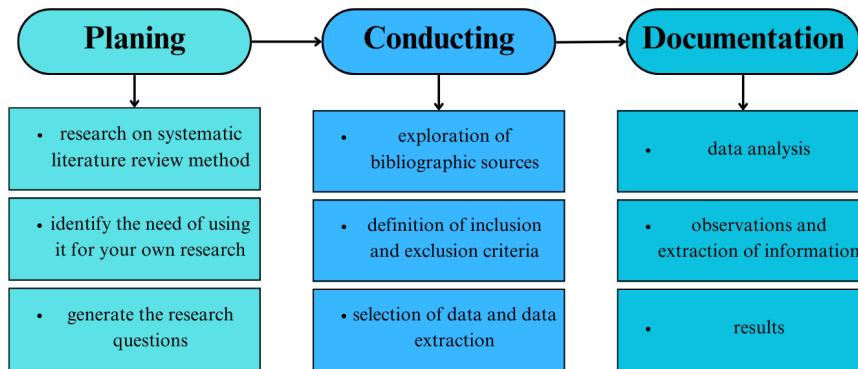


Figure 1. Conceptualisation of the research methodology for systematic literature review

Source: Authors' own research based on Taoer Yang et al. (2024) and García-López et al. (2025) research

The search was made in Scopus database because previous studies, including those by Baas et al. (2020) and Tikhonova and Raitskaya (2020), have highlighted its extensive coverage of scholarly literature. Moreover, Scopus is regarded as one of the largest research databases worldwide, indexing more than 20,000 peer-reviewed journals, which increases the range and availability of relevant publications for analysis (Hael et al. 2024). The search was managed after the title of the articles "innovation leadership" or "innovative leadership" or "people management" or "commercial phenomena" or "innovative organisational culture". Moreover, as inclusion criteria, the search was limited to English language, as document type limited to articles and reviews and the subject area was limited to Social Sciences, Business, Management and Accounting and Economics, Econometrics and Finance. In addition, the search was limited to the following keywords: "Innovative Leadership", "Human Resource Management", "People Management", "Innovation Leadership", "Innovative Organizational Culture", "Innovation Leadership Theory", "People Management Practices". After conducting a comprehensive literature search, a total of 97 papers were identified as potentially relevant and were extracted for further data analysis. Using the (Haddaway et al. 2022) model, Figure 2 shows the Prisma model.

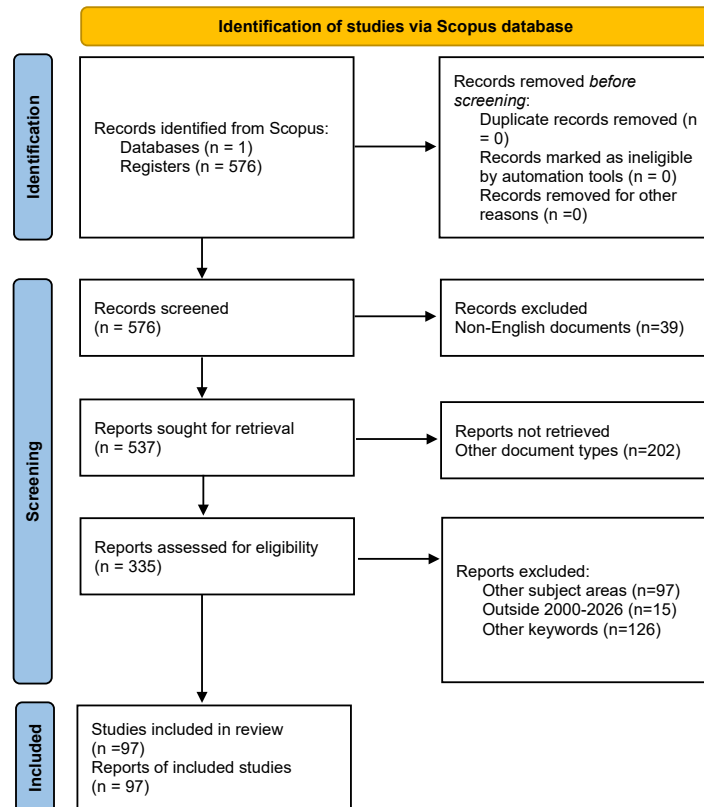


Figure 2. Papers 'structure selecting process based on PRISMA methodology
Source: Authors' own research based on (Haddaway et al. 2022)

After applying the Prisma methodology, the way the systematic literature review is applied transforms into a specific flow diagram. In the initial screening phase, the titles and abstracts of these studies were carefully reviewed using the Rayyan, a web-based tool for systematic reviews to assess their alignment with the research topic and question based on title and abstract screening. This tool has been previously used by numerous authors to support the screening, selection, and organization of studies in systematic literature reviews. This tool has been widely used in previous studies by various authors among which Porto (2024), Andrade et al. (2024), Giannotta et al. (2024), Favot et al. 2024). It offers a user-friendly and easily navigable interface (Ouzzani et al. 2016). Moreover, compared with manual screening, Rayyan is considered to enable earlier identification of abstracts that were potentially relevant to a review (Olofsson et al. 2017). Authors Puijk et al. (2022) and Nguyen et al. (2025) represent relevant examples of scientific papers that used this tool together with Prisma methodology. Guided by the PRISMA framework and supported by the Rayyan tool, the preliminary readings informed

the selection of a group of studies for full-text review. Relevant data were then extracted from these studies to enable a thorough synthesis of the literature.

4. Results and discussion

The Figure 3 illustrates the annual distribution of the 97 studies published between 2001 and 2026. Overall, the number of publications remained relatively low and fluctuating in the early years, followed by a sharp increase after 2018. The annual distribution reveals a strong upward trend, suggesting an exponential increase in studies, with the highest number of publications recorded in 2025. The decrease observed in 2026 reflect incomplete data published for the year.

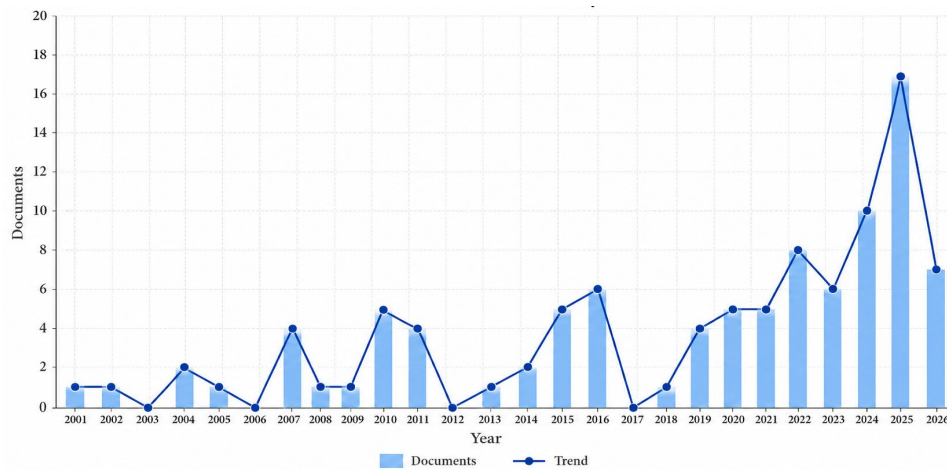


Figure 3. Publication documents per year

Source: Authors' own research, based on data extracted from Scopus

The distribution of documents by subject area in Figure 4 indicates that the research topic is mainly concentrated in Business, Management and Accounting (42.4%), followed by Social Sciences (25.3%). Smaller contributions are observed in Decision Sciences (8.2%), Economics, Econometrics and Finance (5.3%), Psychology (5.3%), and Engineering (4.1%). The remaining subject areas account for lower percentages, suggesting that the topic is primarily approached from managerial, organizational, and social science perspectives.

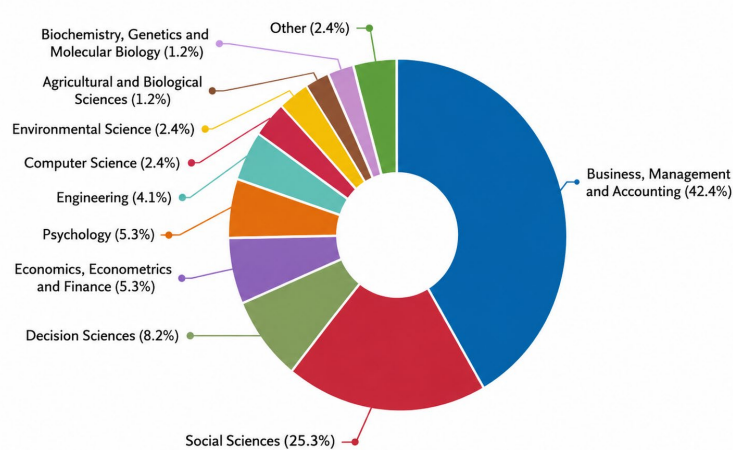


Figure 4. Distribution of documents by subject area
Source: Authors' own research, based on data extracted from Scopus

The distribution of documents by country or territory in Figure 5 shows that the United States has the highest number of publications, with 11 documents, followed by Australia with 10 documents. Malaysia and the United Kingdom each contributed 9 documents, while Thailand accounted for 7 documents. China, India, Jordan, and South Africa each recorded 6 documents, whereas Saudi Arabia contributed 5 documents. Overall, the results indicate a geographically diverse body of literature, with stronger contributions from English-speaking countries and several Asian and emerging economies.

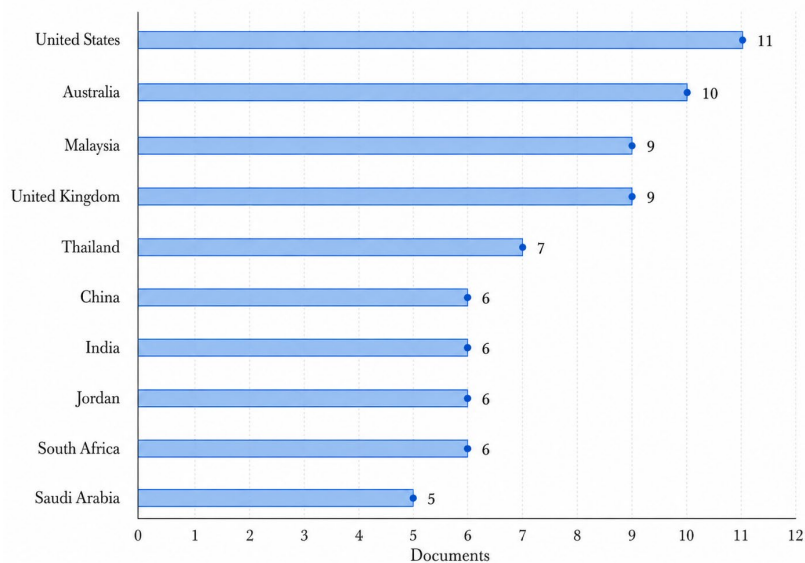


Figure 5. Distribution of documents by country or territory
Source: Authors' own research, based on data extracted from Scopus

The main findings based on the text analysis indicate that innovative HRM and people management systems represent an important foundation for the development of innovation culture. HRM practices contribute to shaping employees' skills, attitudes, and behaviours, while also supporting knowledge creation and organizational learning. However, their impact on innovation appears to depend on the extent to which organizations are able to capitalize on employees' knowledge, confirming the mediating role of knowledge in the HRM and innovation relationship (Lopez-Cabrales et al. 2009). In the context of green innovation, pro-environmental HR practices facilitate knowledge creation processes that support both green product and green process innovation (Martínez-Egea et al. 2025).

Another important result is that knowledge sharing acts as a key mechanism through which innovation culture is developed and sustained. Knowledge sharing accelerates collective learning, creativity, collaboration, and the development of shared standards, thereby strengthening innovation culture as an organization-wide capability (Arsawan et al., 2022). Moreover, knowledge sharing through meetings, discussions, and consultations across internal and external environments contributes to both employee and organizational development (Abbas and Khan 2023). In addition, it is suggested that human capital and capacity building function as innovation infrastructure. Educational programs, training in AI, data science, environmental management, and interdisciplinary approaches, as well as workforce development partnerships, enhance organizational capabilities for AI-enabled sustainability innovation (R. C. Santos and Cagica Carvalho 2025). This shows that innovation culture depends not only on values and behaviours, but also on the continuous development of employee competences.

At the individual level, innovation is supported by creativity, expertise, cognitive abilities, and intrinsic motivation. Creativity is understood as the generation of new and useful ideas within a specific organizational context (Martins and Terblanche 2003), while both creativity and innovation involve moving beyond conventional practices and proposing original solutions to problems (Zare and Flinchbaugh 2019). Employees who are open to experience, willing to take risks, intrinsically motivated, and capable of integrating multiple perspectives are more likely to contribute to innovation (Ramos-Garza and Ramos-Garza 2019).

Referring to leadership, it is highlighted that innovation leadership is essential for transforming individual creativity into organizational outcomes. Leadership is described as a process through which individuals guide, motivate, and influence others to achieve goals that support organizational effectiveness (Ramos-Garza and Ramos-Garza, 2019). Effective leaders foster trust, communicate vision, encourage openness, support experimentation, accept mistakes as part of learning, and provide feedback, all of which contribute to sustaining a culture that supports innovation (Ahmed, Shepherd, Ramos-Garza, & Ramos-Garza 2012).

The analysis also shows that innovation culture requires a balance between operational efficiency and future-oriented change. Leaders and managers are expected to ensure stability and productivity while also identifying new opportunities and encouraging organizational adaptation. This dual role is important because organizations must perform effectively in the present while investing in ideas that support future competitiveness (Ramos-Garza and Ramos-Garza 2019).

Finally, the results point to the relevance of participatory, disruptive, and stealth leadership approaches. Participatory models transform stakeholders from passive recipients into active co-creators, embedding experimentation, learning, and engagement into everyday organizational practice (Zhang 2025). At the same time, disruptive innovation requires leaders to abandon ineffective established practices and shift from resistance to active support for innovation (Christensen 1997; Christensen and Euchner 2011). Stealth leadership further suggests that innovation may also emerge through subtle influence, trust-building, collaboration, and gradual persuasion rather than through formal authority alone (Fukuda 2015; Kervin 2006).

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings highlight the growing academic interest in innovation culture, particularly after 2018, confirming the increasing relevance of this topic in contemporary organisational research. The analysis results show that the field is mainly developed within Business, Management and Accounting and Social Sciences, while the geographical distribution of publications indicates a diverse international contribution. Beyond these descriptive results, the analysis emphasises that innovation culture is a multidimensional organisational capability shaped by leadership, human resource management practices, knowledge sharing, continuous competence development, and individual creativity. Overall, the findings indicate that leadership and people management systems play a central role in shaping innovation culture. The reviewed literature suggests that innovation does not depend only on creative ideas, but also on the ability of leaders and HRM practices to motivate employees, develop their skills, encourage knowledge sharing, support experimentation, and transform individual creativity into organisational outcomes. In this sense, innovation leadership becomes a key mechanism through which organisations can connect human potential with long-term business performance. Therefore, innovation culture should not be understood only as a set of values or attitudes, but as an integrated system of practices, behaviours, leadership approaches, and knowledge dynamics that enables organisations to sustain innovation and long-term competitiveness.

Future research should further examine how leadership behaviours and HRM practices interact in developing an innovation culture that motivates employees, strengthens knowledge sharing, and transforms creative potential into sustainable organisational performance. However, this paper also has several

limitations. First, the analysis is based only on documents indexed in the Scopus database, which may exclude relevant studies available in other academic databases. Second, the selection criteria, such as language, document type, subject area, period, and keywords, may have influenced the final sample of publications. Third, the year 2026 should be interpreted with caution, as the data for this year is incomplete. Finally, although the systematic literature review analysis provides useful insights into the development of the field, it does not empirically test the relationships between leadership, HRM practices, knowledge sharing, and innovation culture. Therefore, future empirical studies are needed to validate these relationships across different organisational and sectoral contexts.

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