# PhD Research Proposal

**Title:**

**Developing a Sustainability-Oriented Organizational Culture: Linking Employee Engagement to SDG Implementation**

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## Abstract

In today's business world, sustainability is no longer just an ethical choice—it has become a strategic necessity. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide organizations with a global framework to balance economic growth, social responsibility, and environmental protection. Yet, many firms struggle to turn these broad goals into meaningful actions within their workplaces.

This study aims to explore how a **sustainability-oriented organizational culture (SOOC)** influences employee engagement and helps organizations effectively implement the SDGs. The research will use a **mixed-method approach**, combining survey data and interviews from employees and managers in both manufacturing and service sectors in India. Quantitative analysis will be done through **Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)**, while qualitative interviews will help interpret the results in depth.

The study expects to develop a practical and conceptual model that shows how organizational culture and employee engagement work together to support sustainable outcomes. The results will contribute to academic understanding and also provide practical insights for managers who aim to build sustainability-driven workplaces.

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## 1. Introduction and Background

Businesses play a crucial role in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Today, organizations are expected not only to focus on profit but also to take responsibility for their social and environmental impacts. While many companies have policies and programs related to sustainability, the real challenge lies in turning these commitments into daily practices and behaviors across all levels of the organization.

Creating a sustainability-oriented organizational culture (SOOC) is essential for this transformation. A strong culture that values ethics, responsibility, and long-term thinking can influence how employees behave and make decisions. Similarly, employee engagement—the emotional and psychological connection employees feel toward their organization—can determine how actively they support sustainability initiatives. Engaged employees are more likely to participate in green practices, suggest improvements, and champion change.

Although previous studies have explored corporate sustainability and employee engagement separately, there is still limited research that connects the two and examines how they jointly contribute to SDG implementation. This study addresses that gap.

## 2. Research Problem

Even though many organizations express commitment to the SDGs, few manage to translate these commitments into consistent, organization-wide action. There is still limited understanding of how internal factors—especially organizational culture and employee engagement—shape sustainability outcomes.

This study focuses on three specific issues:

1. How organizational culture shapes employees' attitudes and behaviors toward sustainability.
2. Whether employee engagement serves as a link between organizational culture and SDG performance.
3. What specific cultural and management practices encourage both engagement and sustainability.

## 3. Research Objectives

1. To study the relationship between sustainability-oriented organizational culture and employee engagement.
2. To analyze how employee engagement influences the implementation of SDGs within firms.
3. To test whether employee engagement mediates the relationship between organizational culture and SDG outcomes.
4. To develop a practical framework for building a culture that supports both engagement and sustainability goals.

## 4. Research Questions

- How does a sustainability-oriented organizational culture affect employee engagement?
- In what ways does employee engagement help organizations implement the SDGs?
- Does employee engagement mediate the link between culture and SDG outcomes?
- What cultural practices are most effective in promoting sustainability across organizations?

## 5. Methodology

This study will adopt a **mixed-method approach** to capture both quantitative and qualitative insights.

**Quantitative Phase:**

- **Sample:** Around 300–400 employees and managers from manufacturing and service organizations in India.
- **Data Collection:** A structured questionnaire will be used to measure sustainability culture, employee engagement, and SDG performance indicators.
- **Analysis:** Data will be analyzed using **Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)** to test relationships and mediation effects.

**Qualitative Phase:**

- **Data Collection:** Semi-structured interviews with 20–25 managers and sustainability officers.
- **Analysis:** Thematic analysis will be used to identify patterns, behaviors, and deeper insights that explain the quantitative results.

Using both methods will provide a more complete understanding of how culture and engagement influence sustainability outcomes.

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# 6. Expected Outcomes

The study is expected to:

- Identify key cultural traits (such as leadership support, shared values, and collaboration) that encourage sustainability.
- Show how employee engagement acts as a connecting factor between culture and SDG outcomes.
- Propose a clear framework for organizations to integrate sustainability into their culture and everyday practices.
- Offer practical recommendations for managers on how to motivate employees to actively support sustainability initiatives.

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# 7. Significance of the Study

**Academic Contribution:**
This research connects three important concepts—organizational culture, employee engagement, and SDG implementation—that are usually studied separately. It will help expand theoretical understanding of how culture and engagement interact to influence sustainable performance.

**Practical Contribution:**
For managers, the study will offer clear guidance on how to create a culture that encourages employees to take ownership of sustainability goals. It will show how organizations can move beyond symbolic actions and make sustainability a genuine part of their organizational identity.

## 8. Timeline (Three-Year Plan)

| Year | Activities |
| --- | --- |
| **Year 1** | Literature review, model development, questionnaire design, pilot study |
| **Year 2** | Data collection (survey and interviews), quantitative and qualitative analysis |
| **Year 3** | Model validation, conclusion, report writing, and publication of research papers |

## 9. Selected References

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