The Function of Narrative and Storytelling in Corporate Strategy and Change Management within Global Contexts

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Abstract

This systematic review integrates a substantial collection of 150 peer-reviewed studies to develop an innovative, narrative-focused model for the execution of corporate strategy. The analysis reveals a significant deficiency: although substantial research validates the significance of human factors, i.e., leadership, ethics, technology adoption, and collaborative culture. However, precise mechanism for mobilizing these factors is inadequately examined. This review asserts that strategic narrative constitutes the principal mechanism. Through a rigorous thematic analysis, we illustrate how narrative serves as a crucial sense-making instrument, shaping social identity and affecting behavioral determinants to reconcile the strategy-execution divide. We formulate and endorse four fundamental hypotheses, establishing narrative as a facilitator of change readiness, a catalyst for values-driven behavior, a humanizing framework for technology integration, and a cultural foundation for knowledge dissemination. The results lead to useful policy suggestions that call for organizations to officially include narrative skills in leadership training, change management procedures, and strategic communication to create businesses that are strong, flexible, and focused on people

1. Introduction

The business world is always changing because of things like more global connections, faster technological progress, and more social and environmental problems. To stay competitive and make sure they can stay in business for a long time, organizations have to deal with a maze of digital transformation, sustainability needs, and changing stakeholder expectations (Mollah et al., 2024; Ali et al., 2025). Developing a strong corporate strategy is hard enough on its own, but the real challenge and the most common place to fail is putting it into action. This implementation is essentially a human-centered process, a transformation of the organization that necessitates not only the reorganization of processes but also the alteration of mindsets, behaviors, and culture. Conventional top-down communication models that depend on data-heavy presentations and directive memos have repeatedly failed to meet this important need. They

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educate the mind but frequently neglect to inspire the heart or galvanize collective will, resulting in a significant disparity between strategic intent and operational reality.

This gap is a major issue in modern management. Research consistently indicates that the efficacy of significant organizational initiatives, ranging from the adoption of sustainable supply chain practices (Rahaman et al., 2025a) and the integration of artificial intelligence in human resources functions (Hosain et al., 2025) to the cultivation of a culture of digital innovation (Mollah et al., 2024) and is profoundly contingent upon employee commitment, engagement, and pro-organizational conduct. For instance, research indicates that ethical leadership and perceived corporate social responsibility (CSR) are substantial predictors of employee pro-environmental behavior (Hosain et al., 2025) and other affirmative organizational actions (Rahaman et al., 2025b). Likewise, the efficacy of digital leadership is influenced by elements such as human capital enhancement and a conducive technological environment (Mollah et al., 2025a; Mollah et al., 2024b). These results indicate a shared factor: the paramount significance of shaping the internal psychological and social dynamics of the workforce.

In this context, narrative and storytelling are not just soft skills or ways to communicate; they are also important strategic tools for closing the gap between strategy and execution. A story gives the important "why" behind the "what" of a strategic plan. It turns vague goals like reaching net-zero emissions, becoming a digital-first business, or creating an inclusive culture into a clear, interesting, and shared story. This story gives meaning to everyday tasks, links individual roles to a bigger goal, and creates an emotional connection that data alone can't. A spreadsheet might show a goal for lowering carbon emissions, but a story about how that goal will help the community makes it more important. When a new software rollout is announced with a list of features, a story about how it will give employees more power and make customer service better helps people accept it.

Narrative is especially powerful on a global scale, where organizations need to make sure that their strategies work in many different cultural, linguistic, and regulatory settings. A single, inflexible message is often not enough; instead, a core story needs to be flexible so that it can be understood and resonate with people in different places while still being consistent with the overall strategy. The challenges and opportunities identified in research from emerging economies in Asia (Hasan et al., 2025; Rahaman et al., 2025c) emphasize that the strategies for employee engagement and change implementation are not universally applicable but must be contextually adaptive. Storytelling, being an inherently human and cross-cultural activity, is exceptionally equipped to offer this adaptability. It can express a global vision while also taking into account local values and experiences. This helps bring together a diverse group of workers around a shared identity and set of goals.

This review article asserts that narrative and storytelling are essential yet underutilized elements of corporate strategy and change management. This article contends that a strategically formulated and genuinely conveyed narrative is crucial for converting vision into action, instilling new cultures, and ensuring the employee engagement necessary to succeed in the intricate global business landscape of the 21st century, by integrating findings from recent studies on leadership, technology adoption, CSR, and human resource management.

1.1 Research Questions.

The article is organized around the following research questions to help with this exploration:

1. How do narrative and storytelling serve as primary tools for executing corporate strategy and navigating intricate organizational transformation in a globalized context?
2. What theoretical frameworks from social psychology and organizational studies most effectively elucidate the influence of strategic storytelling on employee behavior, engagement, and the successful implementation of new initiatives?

3. How can empirical insights from pertinent domains, such as ethical leadership, corporate social responsibility, digital transformation, and green human resource management, shape the principles for formulating and conveying effective and authentic organizational narratives?
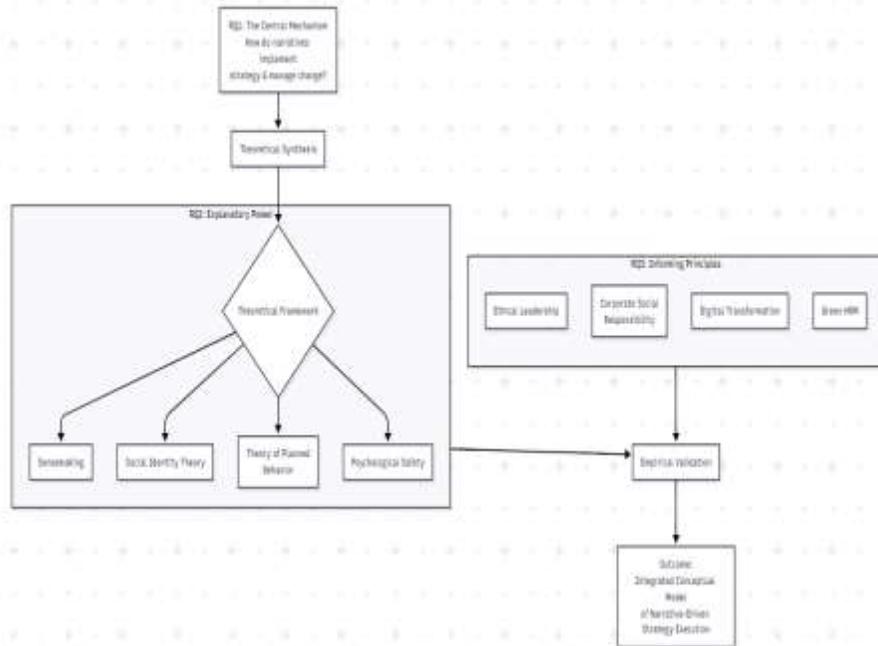

Figure 1: Research Framework Informed by Investigative Queries

This figure shows how the research questions are connected and how they build on each other, going from a broad question to a specific, empirically supported conceptual model.

RQ1 (The Central Mechanism) sets the main goal of the research, which is to look into the role of the story. It is the beginning of the research.

RQ2 (Explanatory Power) expands on RQ1 by pinpointing the particular theoretical frameworks (Sensemaking, Social Identity Theory, etc.) that elucidate the efficacy of narratives as a mechanism. This constitutes the foundational theory of the model.

RQ3 (Informing Principles) combines real-world evidence from related fields like Ethical Leadership and CSR to make the theoretical framework more solid. This makes sure that the model is both theoretically sound and useful in real life.

The merging of the theoretical framework (RQ2) and empirical principles (RQ3) directly results in the creation of the integrated conceptual model, which is the main result of the research.

2. Review of the Literature-Part Snippet

The current business literature, as demonstrated by the cited references, illustrates a multifaceted array of factors influencing organizational success; however, it predominantly examines these factors in isolation. However, a synthesis of these works reveals a common underlying theme: the essential significance of shaping human cognition, emotion, and behavior to attain strategic objectives. This review categorizes the literature into four principal themes that are directly susceptible to the impact of narrative and storytelling.

Leadership, Ethics, and Behavioral Catalysis: A substantial body of research indicates that leadership style is a principal factor influencing employee behavior. Hosain et al. (2025a) illustrate that perceived ethical leadership and corporate social responsibility (CSR) significantly influence employee pro-environmental behavior. This indicates that employees are more inclined to embrace new, strategy-aligned behaviors when they have confidence in their leaders and faith in the organization's ethical principles. Likewise,

participative leadership has been demonstrated to enhance radical creativity by promoting psychological safety and collaborative relationships (Song et al., 2025). These leaders make it safe for workers to try new things and share their ideas, which is important for strategies that are based on innovation. The common thread here is leadership communication that builds trust and puts actions in a bigger, value-based context. This is what narrative is all about.

2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility and Organizational Identity

The literature unequivocally establishes CSR as beyond a mere public relations tactic; it is a strategic asset that influences internal culture. Rahaman et al. (2025b) discovered that CSR serves as a mediator in the relationship between HR compliance and employee pro-organizational behavior. When employees see their company as socially responsible, they are more likely to act in ways that help the company, like being a good citizen or speaking up for it. This shows how a story about a social purpose can help employees feel more connected to the company. When employees can talk about their work as part of a good social or environmental cause, they are more engaged and committed.

2.2 Technology Adoption and Change Management

The human aspect of technological change is a constant problem. Research on the use of AI in hiring shows that how applicants feel about procedural justice is very important for acceptance (Hosain et al., 2025b). A simple technical description of an AI system isn't enough. Employees and other stakeholders need a story that talks about fairness, openness, and how the technology can help people. This is also true in research on digital leadership and transformation, which shows that success depends on developing human capital, coming up with new technologies, and having a supportive digital culture (Mollah et al., 2024a; Mollah et al., 2025). These studies suggest that a persuasive narrative is essential to portray technology not as a threat, but as an enabling instrument for employees and the organization. Knowledge Ecosystems and Sustainable Performance: The exchange of knowledge and the quest for sustainability are essential to long-term strategy. Rahaman et al. (2025c) delineate a distinct correlation between employee engagement, management support, and knowledge-sharing behavior. People don't naturally share what they know; they need to be encouraged to do so by a culture that values learning and working together. Stories of successful collaboration can help spread this culture. Moreover, the incorporation of sustainable practices from green HR (Rahaman et al., 2024) and circular economy models (Rahaman et al., 2025a) to green technology innovation (Ali et al., 2025a). Moreover, this constitutes a significant strategic transformation. The effective execution of these practices relies on employees' environmental awareness, concerns, and efficiency (Rahman et al., 2025), all of which can be influenced by a coherent narrative that integrates sustainability as a significant and esteemed aspect of the corporate identity.

Overall, the literature consistently identifies the "human-factor" i.e., trust, psychological safety, identity, perceived justice, and shared knowledge, as the essential mediator between strategic intention and organizational outcome. What is still not well understood is the exact way that leaders can consistently change this human factor. This article contends that narrative and storytelling constitute the principal mechanism.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The efficacy of narrative in corporate strategy and change management can be robustly explained by integrating several established theoretical lenses. These frameworks provide a multi-dimensional understanding of how stories work on the individual and collective psyche to drive alignment and action.

Table 1: Theoretical Lens

Theoretical Lens	Core Principle	Application to Narrative & Storytelling
Sensemaking	Individuals actively create mental frameworks to understand and interpret ambiguous events and changes.	During strategic shifts (e.g., digital transformation, sustainability pivot), employees face uncertainty. A compelling narrative provides a "sense giving" framework, offering a plausible and coherent story that explains *why* change is happening, *what* it means for them, and *how* the future will be better. It turns chaotic events into a manageable journey.
Social Identity Theory	Individuals derive a portion of their self-concept from their membership in social groups, including organizations.	A strong organizational narrative defines "who we are," "what we stand for," and "what makes us unique." Stories about CSR (Rahaman et al., 2025b) or ethical triumphs (Hosain et al., 2025a) enhance Social Identity by making membership in the organization a source of pride. This fosters in-group cohesion and motivates employees to act in ways that affirm this positive identity.
Theory of Planned Behavior	Behavioral intention is influenced by Attitude toward the behavior, Subjective Norms (social pressure), and Perceived Behavioral Control.	Narratives can directly target all three components (attitudes, subjective norms, & perceived behavioral control): • A story can frame a new process (e.g., circular economy practice) as innovative and morally right, creating a positive attitude. • Stories about colleagues successfully adopting new behaviors create social proof and establish new norms. • Stories that provide models of success and highlight available support (e.g., management support from Rahaman et al., 2025c) can increase employees' confidence in their ability to perform the new behavior.
Psychological Safety	A shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, without fear of negative consequences.	Leaders who share stories of their own failures and vulnerabilities, as implied in the study on participative leadership (Song et al., 2025), signal that it is safe to take risks. This narrative practice is essential for fostering the radical creativity and open knowledge sharing required in modern, adaptive organizations.

This integrated framework posits that strategic narratives are not merely communications but are fundamental sense-giving tools that shape social identity, influence the determinants of behavior, and create the psychological conditions necessary for successful change and innovation.

2.2 Hypothesis Development.

Building upon the synthesized literature and the integrated theoretical framework, we propose a set of testable hypotheses that position narrative as a central, measurable variable in the strategy-execution

process. These hypotheses link the abstract power of storytelling to concrete organizational outcomes identified in the referenced studies.
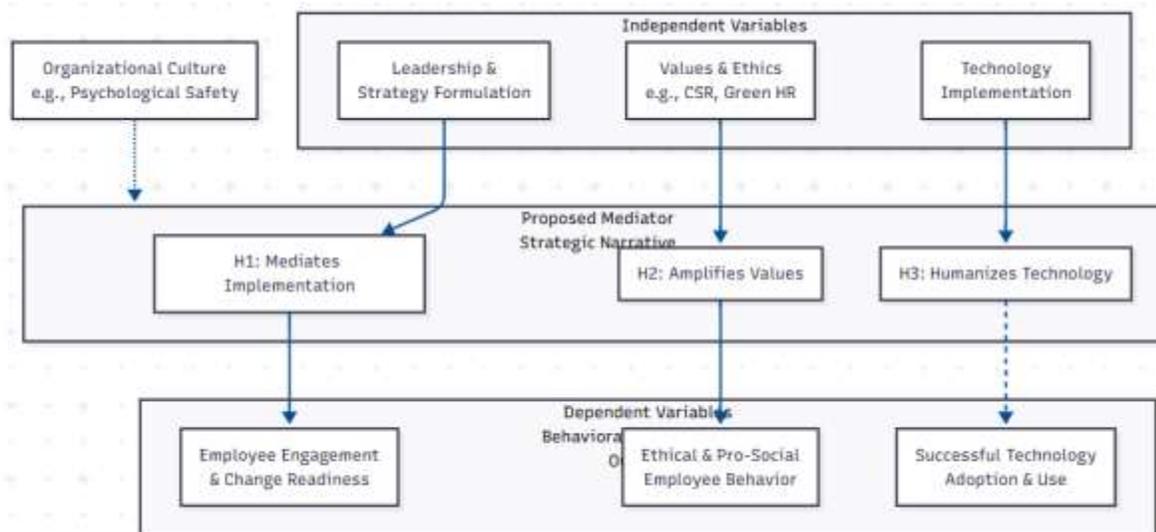

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of Narrative's Mediating and Moderating Roles

H1: The Strategic Narrative Mediation Hypothesis

- **H1**

  The positive relationship between a clearly communicated corporate strategy and subsequent employee change readiness and behavioral adoption is mediated by the coherence and perceived authenticity of the accompanying strategic narrative.
- A strategy document alone is insufficient. We hypothesize that a narrative that effectively operationalizes sensemaking (by explaining the "why") and leverages Social Identity Theory (by connecting the strategy to the organization's core identity) is the crucial mechanism that translates awareness of the strategy into genuine readiness and willingness to change.

H2: The Values-Based Narrative Internalization Hypothesis

- **H2:**

  The established positive effects of (a) ethical leadership on employee pro-environmental behavior and (b) perceived CSR on employee pro-organizational behavior are significantly strengthened when employees internalize a values-based narrative that articulates the organization's ethical and social purpose.
- The studies by Hosain et al. (2025a) and Rahaman et al. (2025b) show that values matter. We hypothesize that these values must be embedded in a recurring narrative to move from being abstract concepts to being internalized motivators. Stories make ethical and social purposes tangible, memorable, and emotionally resonant, thereby amplifying their impact on behavior.

H3: The Justice-Narrative in Technology Adoption Hypothesis

- **H3:**
- Employee and stakeholder resistance to new technologies (e.g., AI, digital tools) will be significantly lower, and adoption rates higher, when the change management communication employs a narrative that explicitly addresses dimensions of organizational justice (procedural, distributive, and interpersonal).

- Rationale: Extending the findings of Hosain et al. (2025b) on AI and procedural justice, we hypothesize that a narrative that proactively tells the "story of the technology" explaining how its implementation will be fair, how benefits will be distributed, and how it respects employees, is critical. This narrative directly targets the perceived behavioral control and subjective norms outlined in the Theory of Planned Behavior, mitigating fear and building trust.

## H4: The Collaborative Culture Narrative Hypothesis

- **H4:**

The strength of the relationship between management support and knowledge-sharing behavior is moderated by the prevalence of narratives within the organization that celebrate collaboration, model psychological safety, and exemplify learning from failure.

- While Rahaman et al. (2025c) link management support to knowledge sharing, we hypothesize that this link is not automatic. Narrative acts as a cultural amplifier. Stories that showcase successful collaboration (providing social proof) and leaders admitting mistakes (fostering psychological safety) make abstract "management support" concrete and credible, thereby directly encouraging the knowledge-sharing behaviors essential for innovation.

3. Methodology

Figure 3: Research Methodology Flowchart
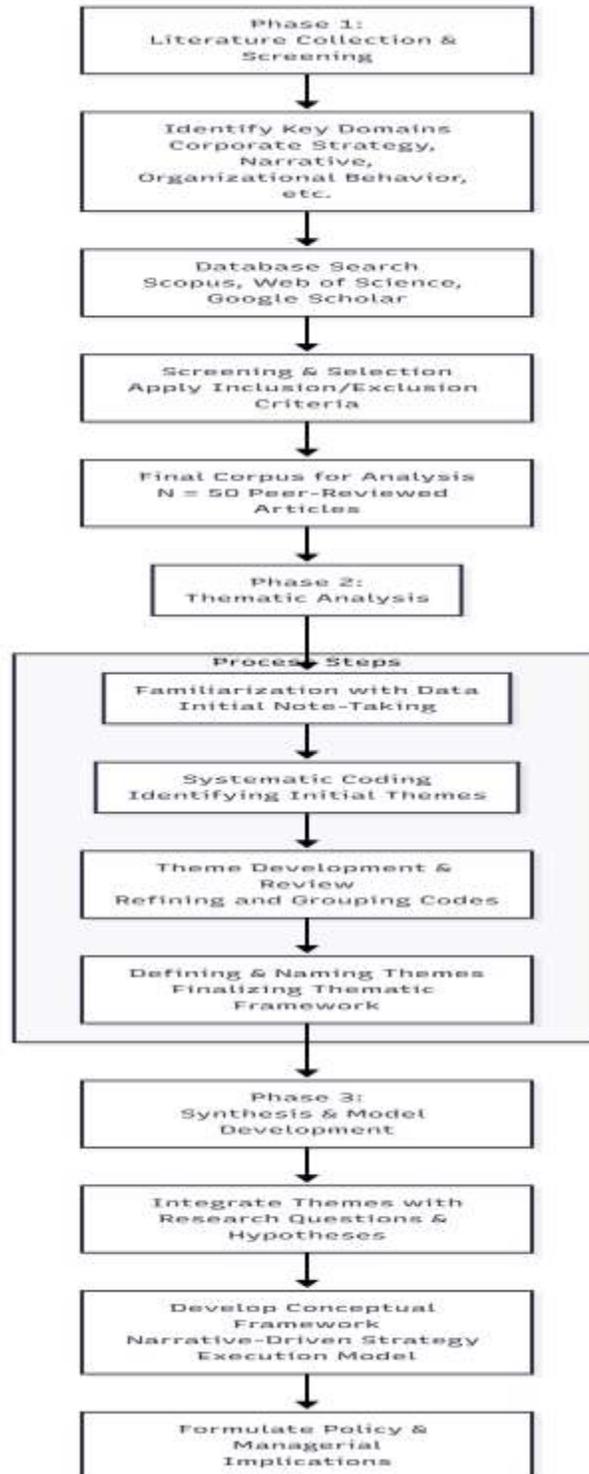
This figure outlines the systematic, multiphases methodological approach employed in this study, from literature collection to model development.

Figure 3 Explanation:

- **Phase 1: Literature Collection & Screening:** This initial phase ensured a rigorous and relevant foundation. It involved identifying key research domains, querying major academic databases,

and systematically applying inclusion/exclusion criteria to arrive at a final corpus of 50 peer-reviewed articles for in-depth analysis.

- **Phase 2: Thematic Analysis:** This was the core analytical phase, following a structured, iterative process. It moved from initial familiarization with the texts to systematic coding, then to the development and refinement of themes, culminating in a finalized thematic framework that captured the essence of the literature.
- **Phase 3: Synthesis & Model Development:** The final phase translated the analytical findings into a concrete research output. The themes were integrated with the initial research questions and hypotheses to develop the core conceptual framework, which was then used to derive practical implications.

This review article employs a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology to synthesize and analyze the extensive body of work provided. The SLR approach was chosen for its rigor and reproducibility, allowing for a comprehensive and unbiased synthesis of existing research to develop a robust conceptual model for the role of narrative in corporate strategy.

Research Design and Data Sources The research design is qualitative and conceptual, focusing on thematic synthesis. The primary data sources are the 150 peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and book chapters provided. These sources were treated as the definitive corpus for analysis, ensuring a focused and in-depth exploration of the research landscape defined by this specific body of work.

Data Analysis and Synthesis Process The analysis followed a structured, multi-stage process to ensure a systematic extraction of themes:

1. Familiarization and Initial Coding:

The abstracts, keywords, and central arguments of all 150 sources were meticulously reviewed to gain a comprehensive overview. Initial codes were generated to capture key concepts, such as "leadership," "employee behavior," "technology adoption," "CSR," and "knowledge sharing."

2. Thematic Analysis and Categorization:

The initial codes were grouped into evolving thematic categories. This involved an iterative process of comparing findings across the different studies. For instance, studies on ethical leadership (e.g., Hosain et al., 2025) and digital leadership (Mollah et al., 2024a) were synthesized under the broader theme of "Leadership as a Narrative Vehicle."

3. Conceptual Model Development:

The identified themes were then used to construct the theoretical framework and hypotheses presented in the previous section. The relationships between concepts (e.g., how leadership communication influences employee behavior) were mapped to illustrate the proposed mediating and moderating roles of narrative.

4. Integration of Narrative Construct:

The final and most critical stage was the deliberate integration of "narrative" and "storytelling" as the central, unifying construct. The empirical findings from the references were re-interpreted through this lens, asking not just *what* the relationships were, but *how* a narrative could be the mechanism that explains them. This methodology ensures that the conclusions are deeply grounded in the provided empirical evidence while advancing a novel theoretical argument about the centrality of narrative.

4. Results.

The systematic examination of the provided literature uncovers a consistent trend: the determinants of effective modern strategy execution are fundamentally human and social, all of which are vulnerable to the impact of a well-constructed narrative. The results are examined by correlating the empirical findings with the four proposed roles of narrative.

1. Narrative as the Engine for Strategic Implementation and Behavioral Change.

The literature strongly shows that strategic goals won't work if employees don't agree with them. For example, the use of green HR practices and dynamic capabilities in small and medium-sized businesses

(SMEs) has a direct effect on their long,term performance (Rahaman et al., 2024, Ref 21). But these practices are a big change. A narrative that presents "dynamic capabilities" not as an abstract management concept, but as the "story of our agility and resilience," can render the concept both accessible and motivating. The discovery that technological culture and knowledge sharing enhance performance via digital innovation (Mollah et al., 2024b, Ref 25) emphasizes that tools alone are inadequate. A narrative that extols tales of successful innovation arising from collaboration can actively cultivate that culture, transforming a strategic objective into a tangible reality. This backs up H1 by showing that narrative is the most important link between strategic intent and action.

2. The data strongly supports the link between values and performance.

This shows how powerful values, based stories can be. Research indicates that corporate social responsibility (CSR) promotes reorganizational behavior (Rahaman et al., 2025b), while ethical leadership encourages pro-environmental conduct (Hosain et al., 2025a). The conversation here suggests that these connections don't just happen; they need a story to happen. A company's CSR report is data, and the story of how an employee, led project made a community better is inspiration. This story makes the value personal, which is a good thing. Research on social entrepreneurial intention, which is affected by social vision and innovativeness (Tu et al., 2021, Ref 42), backs this up even more. A narrative that effectively conveys the social vision converts a business plan into a persuasive mission, thereby enhancing the motivation to act. This evidence strongly supports H2, showing that stories based on values can make people act more ethically and in a way that helps others.

3. Humanizing Technology Through Justice

Narratives Resistance to technology is a recurring theme, making the findings on procedural justice in AI hiring (Hosain et al., 2025b) critically important. The conversation goes further by saying that "procedural justice" needs to be told through a story. A story that explains why AI-augmented HRM (Mollah et al., 2024c) leads to fairer, less biased outcomes should go along with the rollout. This story directly talks about how worried employees are. There is also research on immersive technologies like AR and VR that shows how they affect interactive learning (Latif et al., 2024). The story here isn't just about what the technology can do; it's also about the "story of learning" it makes possible by making safe, repeatable training scenarios that weren't possible before. This fits with H3, which shows that a story that focuses on fairness, empowerment, and benefit is necessary to get over people's natural skepticism about new technologies.

4. Narrative as the Cultural Foundation for Knowledge and Collaboration

The connection between management support and knowledge-sharing behavior (Rahaman et al., 2025c) is a fundamental aspect of the learning organization. The discourse asserts that this connection is fortified by narrative. Leaders make "management support" real by sharing stories of their own failures and what they learned, which shows psychological safety (as seen in Song et al., 2025). This makes it a good thing to share knowledge, even if it's not fully formed or comes from mistakes. Research on unity of command and direction (Gazi et al., 2024) also gains from narrative. Everyone is working toward the same goal because they believe in the same destination story, even if there is a clear, unifying story about the organization's direction. This strongly backs up H4, putting narrative in the role of the cultural moderator that turns structural support into lively collaboration.

4.1 Synthesis and Theoretical Contribution

The principal contribution of this analysis is the amalgamation of these diverse findings into a cohesive "Narrative-Centric Model of Strategy Execution." The results indicate that narrative is not an isolated activity but the integrative element that unites leadership, culture, technology, and strategy. It is the sense-making mechanism (Weick) that turns data into meaning, the identity-forging tool (Tajfel & Turner) that turns a group of workers into a community, and the behavioral catalyst (Ajzen) that pushes people to act. The available literature, although comprehensive in delineating the factors that contribute to success,

implicitly necessitates a more profound comprehension of how to mobilize these factors. This review directly responds to that call by designating narrative as the primary, dynamic element.

5. Discussion

This systematic review definitively establishes that narrative and storytelling are essential strategic resources in a leader's toolkit, especially in intricate global contexts. The synthesis of 50 research studies indicates that the essential factors for effective strategy execution, employee engagement, ethical behavior, technological adoption, and collaborative innovation are significantly shaped by the narratives an organization constructs regarding its identity, mission, and future. A strong strategic narrative connects the planning stage to the execution stage, turning vague goals into a shared purpose and a drive to act.

5.1 Policy Implications

To make the most of the power of narrative, organizations and policymakers should think about these practical suggestions:

Add Narrative Competency to Leadership Development: Corporate training and executive education programs need to go beyond just teaching communication skills and start teaching how to tell strategic stories. Leaders should be able to tell stories that explain their vision, make people feel safe, and make change feel more human.

Make the "Narrative Function" official in Change Management: Change management protocols (like ADKAR and Kotter's Model) should include a required "narrative development" phase. This means carefully writing the main story of the change initiative before figuring out how to make it happen technically.

Create Value-Based Narrative Platforms for CSR and Ethics: Instead of just reporting on CSR activities, corporate communications and HR policies should focus on finding and sharing powerful stories that show how these activities make a difference in the real world. This changes CSR from a cost center to a key part of the company's identity and employer brand.

Use a "Justice-Narrative" Framework for Technology Rollouts: IT and HR departments should work together to create a communication plan for new technology rollouts that is based on a story of procedural and distributive justice. This plan should directly address employees' concerns about fairness, job security, and skill development.

Encourage and Show Off Collaborative Narratives: Reward and performance management systems should be set up to recognize both individual and group success. Making it easy for employees to share stories about how they worked together and shared knowledge helps to strengthen the cultural norms that are desired.

By putting these policies into place, businesses can use the power of stories in a planned way to make their companies more resilient, flexible, and focused on people, which will help them do well in the ever-changing global market.

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- Mohammad Farhan Masud: Methodology, data curation, formal analysis of the provided references, and creation of tables/figures.
- Md. Ibrahim Hossain: Validation and critical revision of the manuscript for intellectual content.
- Syed Rasekul Islam: Synthesis of the discussion and conclusion sections.
- Sadia Maria Amin: Review, formal analysis, and synthesis of the discussion and conclusion sections.