TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DIGITAL ORGANISATIONS: INTRAPRENEURSHIP AS A STRATEGIC DRIVER OF INNOVATION AND RESILIENCE

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Abstract: *This paper examines the intrapreneurial perspective within sustainable digital organisations, with a particular focus on the role of human capital and employee behaviour in shaping organisational innovation processes. The objective of the study is to analyse how the involvement and openness of individuals across different hierarchical levels contribute to the development and innovation of digital organisations. Human capital can be regarded as a key driver of any organisation, encompassing the recruitment of competent personnel, the implementation of management policies and practices, and the broader professional development of individuals factors that collectively determine not only financial growth but also long-term organisational evolution.*
The study adopts a systematic literature review methodology, drawing on academic sources retrieved from Google Scholar and Scopus, covering publications from the past ten years (2015–2025), in order to capture evolving perspectives over time. Only peer-reviewed articles published in English were considered, using keywords such as "intrapreneurship", "digital transformation", "sustainable organisations", and "human capital". The paper's primary contribution lies in proposing a human capital-centred perspective that positions intrapreneurial behaviour as a strategic driver of innovation and resilience in sustainable digital organisations an angle that remains underexplored in the existing literature, which tends to focus predominantly on management systems rather than on employee-level dynamics. The findings suggest that intrapreneurship and employee initiative may contribute to the development strategies of digital organisations. Importantly, the paper highlights that senior management should pay greater attention to intrapreneurial behaviour and its strategic advantages, as in practice these aspects are frequently overlooked despite their significant organisational value.

Keywords: *intrapreneurship; human capital; sustainable digital organisations; digital transformation; organisational resilience; innovation*

JEL Classification: *M13; O31; Q01; L26*

1. Introduction
Digital transformation and the increasing need for sustainable development are the two main transformative forces defining the modern business environment. Organisations across all industries face growing pressure to innovate technologically

while simultaneously adopting sustainable and responsible practices (Verhoef et al., 2021).

Human capital continues to be the primary driver of organisational performance in this context. Ultimately, it is people their initiatives, skills, and entrepreneurial spirit who determine whether a business succeeds in navigating these dual challenges. As Leitão et al. (2020) argue, employees represent the central focus of any organisation seeking to build long-term competitive advantages through digitalisation and connectivity.

Intrapreneurship — broadly defined as the entrepreneurial behaviours and initiatives undertaken by employees within existing organisations has emerged as a critical mechanism connecting human capital, innovation, and sustainability. However, the existing literature tends to focus predominantly on management systems and leadership structures, affording comparatively little attention to the daily contributions and experiences of employees at various hierarchical levels. This represents a notable gap, given that it is precisely these individuals who constitute the engine of real organisational change.

The present paper addresses this gap by exploring the theoretical foundations of intrapreneurship and its strategic role within sustainable digital organisations. As opposed to prior literature that have primarily directed attention toward management structures and leadership frameworks, this paper shifts attention toward the employee level, suggesting that intrapreneurial behaviour at all hierarchical levels represents a practical and overlooked source of sustainable digital transformation. In terms of contribution, this study is essentially a conceptual integration, drawing on contributions from intrapreneurship, digital transformation, and sustainability literature. The mechanisms presented above are intended to establish an preliminary foundation for further empirical investigation rather than a rigorously confirmed theory. As opposed to much of the existing literature reviews on intrapreneurship and digital transformation, which have mainly focused on large-scale quantitative analyses or top-management perspectives, this paper provides a ground-level view grounded in real organisational practice. The limitations observed in real organisational settings particularly the gap between management priorities and employee-level intrapreneurial behaviour have influenced the direction of this study, differentiating it from more abstract theoretical contributions in the field. The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the methodological approach; Section 3 examines the conceptual foundations of intrapreneurship; Section 4 explores the defining characteristics of sustainable digital organisations; Section 5 offers an exploratory conceptual integration of intrapreneurship as a strategic driver; Section 6 presents conclusions, limitations, and directions for future research.

2. Methodology

This study employs a systematic literature review as its primary methodological approach. The aim of this method is to identify, evaluate, and synthesise existing academic research relevant to the intersection of intrapreneurship, digital transformation, and organisational sustainability. Systematic literature reviews are widely recognised in management research as a rigorous and transparent means of mapping the conceptual landscape of an emerging field (Tranfield et al., 2003).

The literature search was conducted using two primary academic databases: Google Scholar and Scopus. These platforms were selected for their broad coverage of

peer-reviewed management, entrepreneurship, and sustainability journals. The search was restricted to publications from the past ten years (2015–2025), a timeframe chosen deliberately to capture the evolving nature of scholarly perspectives on digital transformation and sustainable development, while ensuring the currency and relevance of the sources reviewed.
The following keywords and keyword combinations were used in the search process: "intrapreneurship", "corporate entrepreneurship", "digital transformation", "sustainable organisations", "human capital", "organisational resilience", "ESG", and "innovation". Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied to refine search results and ensure comprehensive coverage of the relevant literature.
Inclusion criteria required that articles be: (1) published in peer-reviewed academic journals or conference proceedings; (2) written in English; (3) directly relevant to at least two of the core themes of this study. Articles were excluded if they focused exclusively on entrepreneurship outside organisational boundaries, or if they addressed sustainability solely from an environmental engineering perspective without reference to organisational behaviour or management.
The selection process involved an initial screening of titles and abstracts, followed by a full-text review of the most relevant sources. Key works were further identified through backward citation tracking that is, by examining the reference lists of selected articles to identify foundational studies. This process yielded a final corpus of sources that form the theoretical basis of the present paper. The multiple database search through Google Scholar and Scopus generated over 13,000 results in total. Subsequently, 19 sources were found to be directly related to the core themes of the current study after the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied methodically and augmented by title, abstract, and full-text screening. These sources are included in the reference list.

3. Intrapreneurship: Conceptual Foundations
The concept of intrapreneurship was formally introduced by Pinchot (1985), who described intrapreneurs as individuals within existing organisations who assume direct responsibility for transforming ideas into tangible outcomes through proactive initiative and risk-taking. Drucker (1986) further positioned the concept within the broader framework of entrepreneurial management, and it subsequently gained increasing scholarly prominence.
A significant theoretical contribution was made by Antoncic and Hisrich (2003), who defined intrapreneurship as emergent behavioural intentions and behaviours related to departures from the customary ways of doing business in existing organisations. Their multidimensional model identified eight key components, including self-renewal, risk-taking, innovativeness, and proactiveness — dimensions that together capture the full scope of intrapreneurial action at both individual and organisational levels.
It is worth noting that, despite increased scholarly interest, the field remains conceptually fragmented. The absence of a universally accepted definition has been highlighted by a number of authors, with some scholars preferring the term corporate entrepreneurship to describe similar organisational-level phenomena (Kuratko, 2017). Nonetheless, regardless of the terminology employed, there is broad agreement that intrapreneurship constitutes an essential source of organisational survival, competitive advantage, and strategic renewal (Neessen et al., 2019).

More recently, researchers have begun examining intrapreneurship in the context of digital transformation. Leitão et al. (2020) argue that motivated employees equipped with dynamic and digital competences play a central role in improving organisational performance and building long-term competitive advantages. Rather than viewing intrapreneurship solely as an innovation tool, this emerging perspective positions it as a strategic human capital capability essential for navigating the complexities of the modern digital economy.

4. Sustainable Digital Organisations

A sustainable digital organisation can be understood as a company that deliberately integrates digital transformation with environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles as part of its core strategy. Since sustainability and digitalisation are closely interconnected, these organisations pursue both imperatives concurrently rather than treating them as separate agendas (Verhoef et al., 2021).

Digital transformation enables organisations to monitor their environmental impact, enhance stakeholder involvement, and improve governance structures through the application of technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and data analytics (Xu et al., 2023). At the same time, a genuine commitment to sustainability provides organisations with a long-term strategic orientation that extends beyond short-term financial performance, encompassing broader social and environmental responsibilities. As George, Merrill, and Schillebeeckx (2021) argue, digital sustainability refers to the capacity of organisations to deploy digital innovations in ways that generate economic value while simultaneously addressing environmental and social challenges.

Research increasingly confirms that digital transformation has a significant positive impact on ESG performance. Liu and Wang (2025) suggest, based on an extensive analysis of firm-year observations, that digitalisation improves sustainability outcomes through both direct and indirect channels, with innovative capabilities serving as a key intermediary. The World Economic Forum (2023) similarly highlights that digital transformation and ESG represent mutually reinforcing strategic directions rather than competing organisational priorities.

Within this context, sustainable digital organisations are characterised by five key features: digital agility, ESG integration, innovation orientation, organisational resilience, and stakeholder centricity (Teece et al., 1997; Leitão et al., 2020). These characteristics reinforce one another, creating an organisational environment in which innovation and sustainability co-evolve. It is precisely within such environments that intrapreneurial behaviour is most likely to emerge and flourish (Ciasullo et al., 2025).

5. Intrapreneurship as a Strategic Driver: An Exploratory Conceptual Integration

The literature review carried out in Sections 3 and 4 identified three recurrent themes that appeared consistently throughout the examined sources: the role of employees in fostering innovation, the ability of organisations to adapt in the face of disruption, and the integration of sustainability as a strategic orientation. These themes informed the development of the three mechanisms proposed in the present section.

Building on the conceptual foundations established in the preceding sections, this section offers an exploratory integration of intrapreneurship within the sustainable digital organisational context. Rather than proposing a fully formalised theoretical framework, the aim is to identify and discuss three primary mechanisms through which intrapreneurial behaviour may contribute to sustainable digital transformation: the amplification of innovative capacity, the enhancement of organisational resilience, and the embedding of sustainability as a lived organisational orientation.

5.1. Amplifying Innovative Capacity
The most direct mechanism through which intrapreneurship contributes to sustainable digital organisations is the amplification of innovative capacity. In this context, innovation extends beyond the development of new products or services to encompass process improvements that reduce environmental impact, social innovations that enhance stakeholder value, and business model innovations that generate long-term competitive advantage.
Employees who indicate intrapreneurial behaviour, characterised by proactive initiative, willingness to take calculated risks, and the capacity to identify opportunities within organisational boundaries, serve as natural catalysts for innovation across these dimensions (Antoncic and Hisrich, 2003). The availability of digital tools further amplifies this function: collaborative platforms facilitate cross-functional knowledge exchange, data analytics provide actionable insights for opportunity identification, and digital prototyping tools accelerate iterative experimentation (Hua et al., 2024). The interaction between individual intrapreneurial agency and organisational digital capability thus creates a dynamic environment capable of sustaining a continuous flow of meaningful innovations.

5.2. Enhancing Organisational Resilience
The second mechanism concerns the contribution of intrapreneurial behaviour to organisational resilience — understood as the dynamic capacity to absorb disruption, reconfigure organisational routines, and adapt to environmental uncertainty (Teece et al., 1997). Sustainable digital organisations operate under conditions of rapid technological change, evolving regulatory requirements, and shifting stakeholder expectations. In such conditions, resilience depends not only on robust technological infrastructure but equally on the human capacity for adaptive and creative problem-solving.
Intrapreneurs contribute to organisational resilience through two complementary roles. As organisational sensors, their proactive information-seeking and boundary-spanning networks enable early detection of environmental signals before they escalate into critical disruptions. As adaptive agents, their tolerance for experimentation equips the organisation to respond creatively rather than reactively to change (Hornsby et al., 2023). The involvement of employees across different hierarchical levels in these processes is particularly significant, as it distributes adaptive capacity throughout the organisation rather than concentrating it exclusively at senior management level.

5.3. Embedding Sustainability as Organisational Orientation
The third mechanism concerns the role of intrapreneurial employees in embedding sustainability as a genuine and practised organisational orientation, rather than a compliance-driven exercise. Employees who suggest intrapreneurial initiative are well-positioned to identify sustainability-oriented opportunities and mobilise internal

resources in pursuit of them — often prior to such opportunities being recognised through formal strategic planning processes (Shabbir, 2023).
This mechanism is particularly significant in organisations where ESG orientation and digital culture are mutually reinforcing. Ciasullo et al. (2025) stated that organisations scoring highly on both dimensions exhibit significantly greater intrapreneurial behaviour and sustainable performance outcomes. This finding underscores a practical reality that is frequently overlooked: when senior management actively cultivates an environment that values both digital capability and sustainability commitment, intrapreneurial behaviour is more likely to emerge and be directed toward meaningful organisational goals.

6. Conclusions
This paper has examined the role of intrapreneurship as a strategic driver of innovation and resilience within sustainable digital organisations. Through a systematic review of academic literature published between 2015 and 2025, three primary mechanisms have been identified through which intrapreneurial behaviour contributes to sustainable digital value creation: the amplification of innovative capacity, the enhancement of organisational resilience, and the embedding of sustainability as an organisational orientation.
The central finding of this paper is that human capital and specifically the intrapreneurial behaviour of employees across different hierarchical levels may represent an important and frequently underutilised resource in the pursuit of sustainable digital transformation. While senior management attention has historically been directed toward structural and technological dimensions of transformation, the evidence reviewed suggests that employee-level initiative and intrapreneurial engagement may prove equally significant for organisational outcomes. Organisations that create enabling conditions including autonomy, psychological safety, access to digital resources, and ESG-aligned incentives are likely to achieve more meaningful and sustained progress toward their sustainability and innovation objectives (Rigtering et al., 2024). At a practical level, organisations aiming to develop intrapreneurial behaviour should consider targeted approaches that extend beyond formal procedures. For instance, managers could allocate time of regular team meetings — such as the final ten minutes of weekly sessions — to focused discussion points, encouraging employees to share what went well and what could be improved. Such practices redirect emphasis from purely operational targets to the behaviours and development of each individual. Similarly, team-building activities and open feedback cultures can create a safe environment necessary for employees to express creative suggestions freely and without hesitation

6.1. Limitations
Several limitations of the present study warrant acknowledgement. First, as a theoretical contribution based on a literature review, the mechanisms identified in this paper have not been empirically tested and therefore remain exploratory in nature. The relationships proposed are derived from the synthesis of existing literature rather than from primary data collection. Second, the literature reviewed, while broad in scope, is not exhaustive; the selection process may have introduced a degree of subjectivity in the identification and prioritisation of key sources. Third, the paper does not fully address the potential tensions and trade-offs that may arise

when intrapreneurial activities are directed toward competing sustainability objectives, or when digital and sustainability transformations generate conflicting organisational demands.

6.2. Directions for Future Research
Future research should prioritise the empirical validation of the conceptual mechanisms proposed in this paper. Mixed-method research designs — combining in-depth qualitative case studies with large-sample quantitative analyses — would be particularly well-suited to examining how intrapreneurial behaviour manifests across different organisational and national contexts. The Romanian and broader Central and Eastern European context represents a promising avenue for empirical investigation, given the region's dynamic trajectory of digital transformation and growing sustainability awareness. Additionally, future studies should examine the specific role of middle management as enablers or inhibitors of intrapreneurial activity, as well as the conditions under which senior management attention to intrapreneurial behaviour translates into measurable organisational outcomes.

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