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Managing school culture for sustainable digital transformation

Hoang Thi Tam

National Academy of Education Management, Hanoi City, Vietnam

Abstract---This study examines the role of school culture in promoting sustainable digital transformation from an educational management perspective. Using a conceptual research approach, the study synthesizes recent international literature on digital transformation, school culture, digital leadership, organizational learning, and sustainable education to develop an integrated framework for managing school culture. The findings indicate that sustainable digital transformation extends beyond technological adoption and should be understood as a continuous process of organizational and cultural development. The study identifies five essential cultural dimensions that support sustainable digital transformation, including shared vision and digital values, collaborative professional learning, innovation and organizational learning, trust and organizational commitment, and sustainability-oriented organizational culture. It further highlights digital leadership as the driving force that shapes school culture and promotes organizational learning, thereby enabling sustainable educational innovation. Based on these findings, the study proposes a conceptual framework linking digital leadership, school culture, organizational learning, and sustainable digital transformation. The framework provides a theoretical foundation for future empirical research while offering practical guidance for school leaders seeking to develop adaptive, innovative, and sustainable educational organizations in the digital era.

Keywords---school culture, digital leadership, digital transformation, organizational learning, sustainable education, educational management.



1. Introduction

Digital transformation has become one of the most influential forces shaping educational systems worldwide. Beyond the adoption of digital technologies, it represents a comprehensive process of organizational change that reshapes leadership, teaching and learning, institutional governance, and stakeholder engagement. As education systems respond to rapid technological advancement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), schools are increasingly expected to integrate technological innovation with sustainable educational values (Mohamed Hashim et al., 2022; Alojail & Khan, 2023).

Recent studies indicate that successful digital transformation depends not only on technological infrastructure but also on organizational culture. Digital technologies alone cannot ensure sustainable improvement unless schools cultivate shared values, collaboration, continuous learning, and innovation. Organizational culture shapes how teachers, school leaders, students, and other stakeholders perceive and use digital technologies. Consequently, digital transformation should be understood as a process of organizational and cultural change rather than simply technological adoption (Elbolok et al., 2025; Kanakoglou & Kafetzopoulos, 2025).

School culture has therefore become a strategic factor in sustaining digital transformation. A positive culture promotes collaboration, professional learning, knowledge sharing, innovation, and openness to change, creating favorable conditions for integrating digital technologies into teaching, administration, and learning. Schools with strong digital cultures are better able to implement virtual learning environments, strengthen organizational learning, and sustain educational improvement despite continuous technological change (Purnomo et al., 2024; Vičić Krabonja et al., 2024).

Educational leadership is equally important in shaping school culture during digital transformation. Digital leaders establish strategic visions, empower teachers, promote collaborative professional learning, and create organizational conditions that support innovation. Rather than focusing solely on technology management, digital leadership emphasizes institutional learning, knowledge sustainability, and human development (Phakamach et al., 2023; Connolly et al., 2026). Research further demonstrates that effective leadership significantly enhances schools' capacity for sustainable digital transformation and organizational resilience (Hairani et al., 2025).

Despite increasing scholarly attention, sustainable digital transformation continues to face significant challenges. Resistance to change, insufficient digital competence, fragmented organizational culture, limited leadership capacity, and inadequate policy support remain common barriers (Singun, 2025). In many educational systems, technological investment has advanced more rapidly than organizational and cultural development, reducing the long term effectiveness of digital transformation initiatives (Genga & Babalola, 2025).

In Vietnam, digital transformation has become a national educational priority supported by government policies and institutional reforms. Schools are

increasingly adopting digital management systems, smart learning environments, and online teaching platforms. However, implementation remains uneven because of differences in leadership capacity, organizational readiness, professional development, and school culture (Nguyen, 2024; Thuy & Quang, 2025). Existing studies have mainly examined educational technologies, digital policies, or instructional innovation, while relatively little attention has been given to managing school culture as the organizational foundation for sustainable digital transformation. In particular, the relationships among school culture, digital leadership, organizational learning, and sustainability remain insufficiently explored.

Against this background, this paper examines the management of school culture for sustainable digital transformation from a conceptual and managerial perspective. By synthesizing recent studies on digital transformation, organizational culture, educational leadership, and sustainable education, it develops an integrated framework explaining how school culture supports sustainable institutional change. Specifically, the paper aims to examine the relationship between school culture and sustainable digital transformation, identify the key dimensions of digital school culture, analyze management strategies for cultivating such a culture, and propose recommendations to support sustainable and adaptive school development in the digital era.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1. School Culture and Sustainable Digital Transformation

School culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices that shape how members of a school community interact, make decisions, and pursue educational goals. It extends beyond formal organizational structures by influencing leadership, teaching practices, collaboration, and students' learning experiences. A positive school culture promotes trust, continuous learning, innovation, and collective responsibility, providing a foundation for organizational development in the digital era.

Traditionally, school culture was viewed as a relatively stable characteristic shaped by institutional history and shared experiences. However, rapid technological change has transformed this perspective. Contemporary schools are increasingly expected to cultivate digital cultures that support innovation, collaboration, organizational learning, and effective use of technology. As a result, school culture is no longer considered merely an organizational outcome but a strategic resource that enables schools to respond successfully to digital transformation.

Digital transformation in education extends far beyond adopting digital technologies. It involves comprehensive organizational change affecting leadership, governance, curriculum implementation, professional development, and stakeholder participation. Mohamed Hashim et al. (2022) argue that sustainable educational institutions must integrate technological innovation with organizational sustainability, emphasizing that technology creates value only when accompanied by cultural and managerial change. Similarly, Alojail and Khan (2023) demonstrate that digital transformation contributes to sustainable

development by improving organizational efficiency, innovation capability, and institutional resilience.

Growing evidence also suggests that organizational culture serves as a key mechanism linking digital transformation with sustainable innovation. Elbolok et al. (2025) found that digital organizational culture strengthens the relationship between technological transformation and sustainable innovation by encouraging collaboration, knowledge sharing, openness to innovation, and continuous professional learning. These findings indicate that sustainable digital transformation depends primarily on organizational and human development rather than technology alone.

Within schools, digital culture consists of several interconnected dimensions. It encourages openness to innovation by supporting experimentation, creativity, and continuous improvement. It promotes collaboration through professional learning communities where teachers exchange knowledge, strengthen digital competence, and solve instructional challenges collectively. It also supports evidence informed decision making through digital information systems and educational data while fostering shared responsibility for educational quality and sustainable institutional development.

Empirical research consistently demonstrates the importance of school culture in digital transformation. Purnomo et al. (2024) report that effective change management contributes significantly to developing digital school culture and improving the integration of virtual learning environments. Their findings highlight organizational readiness, collaborative leadership, and teacher engagement as critical conditions for successful implementation. Likewise, Vičič Krabonja et al. (2024) identify professional learning communities as an essential mechanism for strengthening sustainable educational practices while enhancing teachers' digital competence and collaborative capacity.

The relationship between school culture and sustainability has also attracted increasing attention. Sustainable digital transformation requires schools not only to adopt new technologies but also to institutionalize continuous learning, organizational adaptability, stakeholder participation, and responsible use of resources. Prabawati et al. (2025) demonstrate that digital transformation combined with a sustainable organizational culture contributes significantly to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals within educational institutions. Similarly, Genga and Babalola (2025) argue that educational organizations should develop sustainable organizational cultures alongside digital transformation so that technological innovation contributes to broader educational and social development.

2.2. Dimensions of School Culture Supporting Sustainable Digital Transformation

Shared Vision and Digital Values: A shared vision provides the foundation for sustainable digital transformation. School leaders, teachers, students, and other stakeholders should develop a common understanding of the purpose of digital transformation and its contribution to educational quality and institutional development. Shared digital values, including innovation, lifelong learning,

openness to change, and ethical technology use, strengthen organizational commitment and encourage active participation. Digital leadership studies emphasize that organizational vision should connect technological innovation with long term educational development. Phakamach et al. (2023) argue that digital leadership aligns strategic planning, institutional values, and technological development to support sustainable transformation. Likewise, Connolly et al. (2026) highlight that knowledge sustainability depends on leaders' ability to cultivate shared purposes that encourage continuous learning and collective responsibility.

Collaborative Professional Learning: Collaboration is a defining characteristic of an effective digital school culture. Sustainable transformation depends on professional learning communities where teachers continuously exchange knowledge, strengthen digital competence, and solve instructional challenges together. Collaborative learning enhances organizational adaptability because individual experience becomes shared organizational knowledge. Vičić Krabonja et al. (2024) show that professional learning communities improve sustainable educational practices by strengthening collaboration, innovation, and teachers' digital competence. Similarly, Elbolok et al. (2025) identify knowledge sharing and collaborative organizational culture as important mechanisms connecting digital transformation with sustainable innovation. Collaboration should also extend beyond teachers to include school leaders, students, parents, and community partners. Such broad participation strengthens organizational coherence and supports continuous school improvement.

Innovation and Organizational Learning: Innovation and organizational learning are essential components of sustainable digital transformation. Schools with innovative cultures encourage creativity, experimentation, reflection, and continuous improvement instead of maintaining rigid administrative routines. Learning organizations continuously transform experience into institutional knowledge. They view implementation challenges as opportunities for improvement rather than organizational failure. This capacity enables schools to respond effectively to technological change while strengthening organizational resilience. Mohamed Hashim et al. (2022) argue that sustainable educational institutions continuously redesign organizational processes to integrate technological development with educational quality. Likewise, Kanakoglou and Kafetzopoulos (2025) demonstrate that innovation results from the interaction among leadership, organizational culture, and digital transformation rather than technology alone.

Trust, Participation, and Organizational Commitment: Trust and participation are fundamental conditions for successful digital transformation. Teachers are more willing to adopt innovative practices when they experience organizational support, transparent communication, and opportunities to participate in school decision making. Participatory cultures encourage educators to contribute ideas, evaluate implementation, and solve problems collectively. Such involvement reduces resistance to organizational change while increasing ownership of digital initiatives. Hairani et al. (2025) found that schools characterized by participatory leadership demonstrate greater readiness for sustainable digital transformation.

Leadership practices that promote empowerment, communication, and collaboration strengthen teachers' motivation to engage in continuous innovation.

Sustainability Oriented Organizational Culture: A sustainable organizational culture ensures that digital transformation contributes to long term educational development rather than short term technological improvement. Schools should balance technological advancement with educational equity, organizational resilience, environmental responsibility, and lifelong learning. Digital technologies should therefore be used not only to improve administrative efficiency but also to enhance educational inclusion, responsible resource use, and sustainable institutional development. Prabawati et al. (2025) demonstrate that sustainable organizational culture significantly supports the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals through digital transformation. Similarly, Genga and Babalola (2025) argue that educational institutions should integrate sustainability values with digital innovation to maximize long term educational and social benefits. Together, these five dimensions provide an integrated foundation for managing school culture in the digital era. Shared vision, collaboration, innovation, trust, and sustainability reinforce one another to create an organizational environment that supports continuous learning and successful digital transformation. Schools that intentionally cultivate these dimensions are more likely to achieve sustainable educational improvement while remaining adaptable to future technological and societal change.

2.3. Digital Leadership in Managing School Culture

School culture does not emerge naturally but is shaped through leadership, organizational policies, and collective learning. In the context of sustainable digital transformation, digital leadership has become a critical factor influencing whether schools can develop cultures that support innovation, collaboration, and organizational adaptability. Managing school culture therefore requires leadership that integrates technological advancement with educational values, organizational learning, and sustainable development.

Digital leadership extends beyond managing information technology. It involves creating a strategic vision, empowering teachers and other stakeholders, promoting organizational learning, encouraging innovation, and strengthening institutional resilience. Technology is viewed as a means of improving education rather than an end in itself. Accordingly, digital leaders create organizational conditions that enable teachers, students, and staff to strengthen digital competence while maintaining shared educational values and professional ethics.

Phakamach et al. (2023) describe digital leadership as an integrated approach that combines strategic management, technological competence, innovation, and organizational adaptability. Their framework emphasizes that sustainable digital transformation requires leaders to align technological investment with organizational culture, institutional vision, and human resource development. Similarly, Connolly et al. (2026) argue that digital educational leadership promotes knowledge sustainability by supporting organizational learning, collaborative knowledge creation, and evidence informed decision making.

Within schools, digital leadership shapes organizational culture in several ways. Leaders establish a clear strategic direction that communicates the purpose and expected outcomes of digital transformation, reducing uncertainty and strengthening organizational commitment. They also encourage experimentation, reflective practice, and collaboration while ensuring adequate investment in digital infrastructure, professional development, and organizational support. Transparent communication and inclusive participation further strengthen trust and collective responsibility throughout the transformation process.

Empirical studies consistently confirm the importance of leadership in sustainable digital transformation. Hairani et al. (2025) found that leadership practices emphasizing empowerment, collaboration, and professional capacity development significantly improved schools' readiness for digital transformation. Schools led by digitally competent leaders demonstrated stronger organizational commitment, greater teacher engagement, and more successful implementation of digital initiatives.

Leadership also connects school culture with sustainable innovation. Elbolok et al. (2025) report that digital organizational culture mediates the relationship between digital transformation and sustainable innovation, suggesting that leadership promotes innovation primarily by cultivating supportive organizational cultures rather than imposing technological change. Effective leaders encourage continuous learning, recognize innovative practices, and establish environments where innovation becomes part of everyday school activities.

Digital leadership is equally important for managing organizational change. Because digital transformation often challenges established teaching practices and administrative routines, resistance among educators is inevitable. Leaders can reduce such resistance by promoting open communication, providing continuous professional learning, encouraging participation in decision-making, and creating supportive environments where teachers feel confident to experiment and learn from experience.

The relationship between leadership and school culture is reciprocal. Leaders intentionally shape organizational culture through strategic actions, while existing school culture influences leadership effectiveness. Schools characterized by trust, collaboration, and professional learning provide stronger foundations for distributed leadership and collective responsibility than schools dominated by rigid administrative structures.

From a sustainability perspective, digital leadership must balance technological advancement with human development. Sustainable leaders invest not only in digital infrastructure but also in teacher capacity, organizational learning, ethical technology governance, and institutional resilience. This perspective aligns digital transformation with broader educational goals, including equity, inclusion, lifelong learning, and sustainable development (Mohamed Hashim et al., 2022; Alojail & Khan, 2023).

2.4. A Conceptual Framework for Managing School Culture toward Sustainable Digital Transformation

The literature reviewed above indicates that sustainable digital transformation cannot be explained solely by technological adoption. Instead, it results from the interaction among digital leadership, school culture, organizational learning, and sustainable development. Although previous studies have examined these elements individually, few have integrated them into a comprehensive framework for school management. To address this gap, this study proposes a conceptual framework that positions school culture as the central mechanism supporting sustainable digital transformation.

The framework is based on four key assumptions.

First, digital leadership serves as the driving force for organizational transformation. School leaders establish strategic visions, develop digital governance, allocate resources, and create conditions that encourage innovation and continuous learning. In doing so, leadership mobilizes stakeholders toward common digital goals (Phakamach et al., 2023; Connolly et al., 2026).

Second, school culture functions as the central mechanism linking leadership with digital transformation. Leadership becomes sustainable only when it is reflected in shared values, collaboration, trust, innovation, and collective responsibility. Rather than producing change directly, leadership shapes the organizational environment in which digital transformation can flourish (Elbolok et al., 2025).

Third, organizational learning translates cultural values into everyday educational practice. Through professional learning communities, knowledge sharing, reflective practice, and evidence informed decision making, schools continuously strengthen their capacity to adapt to technological change. Organizational learning therefore transforms school culture into sustained institutional improvement (Vičić Krabonja et al., 2024).

Finally, sustainable digital transformation represents the expected organizational outcome. Successful schools move beyond digitalizing administrative procedures and teaching activities to establish adaptive learning environments characterized by innovation, educational quality, organizational resilience, and sustainable institutional development (Mohamed Hashim et al., 2022; Alojail & Khan, 2023).

Based on these assumptions, the framework consists of four interconnected components: digital leadership, school culture, organizational learning, and sustainable digital transformation. Digital leadership shapes school culture through strategic communication, empowerment, and organizational support. School culture promotes organizational learning by encouraging collaboration, professional development, and knowledge sharing. Organizational learning then enhances schools' capacity to implement sustainable digital transformation while continuously strengthening school culture. This reciprocal relationship illustrates that digital transformation is a continuous process of organizational development rather than a single technological initiative.

The framework also recognizes the influence of external factors, including national education policies, technological infrastructure, financial resources, stakeholder expectations, and institutional autonomy. These contextual conditions may either facilitate or constrain schools' capacity to develop digital culture and sustain innovation. In Vietnam, national digital transformation policies have created favorable opportunities for educational reform, although differences in leadership capacity, organizational readiness, and school culture continue to influence implementation outcomes (Nguyen, 2024; Thuy & Quang, 2025).

The proposed framework contributes to the literature in three respects. First, it conceptualizes digital transformation as a process of organizational and cultural development rather than technological implementation alone. Second, it identifies school culture as the central mechanism connecting digital leadership with sustainable educational innovation. Third, it integrates leadership, culture, organizational learning, and sustainability into a unified framework that can support future empirical research and guide school leaders in managing sustainable digital transformation.

3. Implications for School Management

3.1. Establishing a Shared Vision for Digital Transformation

The first management priority is to develop a shared vision that aligns digital transformation with the long term mission and educational values of the school. A common vision provides a clear direction for teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders while reducing uncertainty during organizational change.

School leaders should involve teachers and staff in developing digital transformation strategies rather than imposing administrative directives. Participatory planning strengthens organizational commitment because stakeholders understand the purpose of digital initiatives and recognize their own responsibilities within the transformation process. A shared vision also facilitates consistency between strategic planning, curriculum development, professional learning, and resource allocation.

Furthermore, digital transformation objectives should emphasize educational quality, inclusion, innovation, and sustainability instead of focusing exclusively on technological modernization. Such alignment enables schools to maintain educational priorities while responding effectively to technological change.

3.2. Developing Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities represent one of the most effective mechanisms for strengthening school culture during digital transformation. Sustainable organizational change requires teachers to learn continuously, exchange professional experiences, and collaboratively solve emerging educational challenges.

School leaders should establish organizational structures that encourage regular professional dialogue, peer observation, collaborative lesson design, action research, and knowledge sharing. Digital platforms can further support collaboration by enabling teachers to exchange instructional resources, analyze

student learning data, and develop innovative teaching practices across departments and schools.

Continuous professional learning contributes not only to improving teachers' digital competence but also to strengthening organizational trust, collaboration, and collective responsibility. As organizational knowledge expands, schools become increasingly capable of adapting to future technological developments.

3.3. Strengthening Digital Leadership Capacity

Successful management of school culture requires leadership that integrates technological understanding with educational management and organizational development. School leaders should continuously improve their competencies in strategic planning, digital governance, change management, communication, and instructional leadership.

Leadership development should also emphasize emotional intelligence, collaborative decision-making, ethical leadership, and the ability to motivate organizational learning. Rather than acting as technology managers, school leaders should become facilitators who empower teachers to innovate and participate actively in school improvement.

Distributed leadership can further strengthen digital transformation by expanding leadership responsibilities among teachers, department heads, and professional learning teams. Such an approach increases organizational flexibility while encouraging shared ownership of institutional development.

3.4. Creating an Innovation-Oriented School Culture

Innovation should become an integral component of everyday school life rather than an occasional activity associated with specific projects. School leaders should encourage experimentation, reflective practice, and continuous improvement while recognizing innovative contributions made by teachers and students.

An innovation-oriented culture also requires schools to view implementation challenges as opportunities for organizational learning instead of indicators of failure. Constructive feedback, collaborative problem solving, and systematic evaluation enable schools to improve digital initiatives continuously while maintaining organizational resilience. Recognition systems that acknowledge creative teaching practices, collaborative achievements, and successful digital initiatives can further reinforce innovation as a shared organizational value.

3.5. Building a Sustainable Digital Ecosystem

Sustainable digital transformation requires schools to establish integrated ecosystems in which technology, leadership, organizational culture, and educational practice support one another. Investments in digital infrastructure should therefore be accompanied by continuous professional development, organizational learning, ethical governance, and effective policy implementation.

Schools should also establish mechanisms for monitoring the impact of digital transformation on teaching quality, student learning, organizational effectiveness, and stakeholder satisfaction. Regular evaluation enables school leaders to identify emerging challenges, revise management strategies, and maintain continuous organizational improvement.

Partnerships with universities, educational authorities, technology providers, and local communities may further strengthen schools' capacity to sustain digital innovation. Such collaboration expands access to expertise, professional learning opportunities, technological resources, and policy support, thereby increasing the long-term sustainability of digital transformation initiatives.

Overall, these management implications reinforce the central argument of this study that sustainable digital transformation is fundamentally a process of cultural development. Technology provides important tools for educational innovation, but its long-term effectiveness depends upon leadership, collaboration, organizational learning, and the continuous cultivation of school culture. Schools that successfully integrate these elements are more likely to develop adaptive learning environments capable of sustaining educational excellence in an increasingly digital society.

4. Conclusion

This study highlights that sustainable digital transformation is fundamentally a process of organizational and cultural development rather than the simple adoption of digital technologies. By synthesizing recent literature, it proposes an integrated conceptual framework that positions digital leadership as the driving force, school culture as the central mechanism, organizational learning as the enabling process, and sustainable digital transformation as the ultimate outcome. The study further identifies shared vision, collaboration, trust, innovation, professional learning, and sustainability values as key cultural dimensions that support successful transformation. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that school leaders should strengthen digital leadership, foster professional learning communities, encourage collaborative decision-making, and promote continuous organizational learning to build adaptive and resilient schools. Although the proposed framework is conceptual and requires empirical validation across different educational contexts, it provides a useful foundation for future research and offers practical guidance for managing school culture to achieve sustainable digital transformation in education.

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