

Exploring the Relationship between Adaptive Organizational Behavior, Innovation, and Employee Mental Health: A Case Study of Unilever's Sustainable Living Plan

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Abstract

Unilever's social innovation, OB, and improvement of employees' psychological well-being are examined in the context of the company's USLP and insights into the interplay of these factors for enhancing organizational resilience and sustainability are offered. The study examines the effectiveness and possibilities of developing organizational practices that promote innovation and help the organization raise productivity in the face of growing economic and technological challenges while (also) improving employees' quality of life. Explaining how corporate strategies of a firm are linked to environmental sustainability, employee engagement, and corporate responsibilities: A case of Unilever's USLP. This research work is sequentially related and has adopted the qualitative research approach in this study. The data collection includes Unilever's annual reports, peer-reviewed journals, and other research materials and analyses of the global retail industry. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how reinforcing both adaptive practices that are organizational, and mental health programmes, sustains organisational innovation. By implication, the results show that Unilever's strategic initiatives include not only products and processes but also programme including mental health first aid, work well-being, and counselling. These efforts bring excellent employee engagement, amplify their spirits, and build organizational capability for sustainable solutions. In addition, it is evident from the study that the key concern is shifting innovation to correspond with concerns of mental health and achieving long-term productivity during unstable economic business conditions. Therefore, strategies of creating a balance between innovation and human capital, applied by Unilever, can be seen as the main recommendations for organizations striving for success in the process of increasing the competitiveness of

their businesses as well as in conditions of volatile and uncertain environments. This work adds to the existing knowledge in the field of sustainable growth, putting specificity on the incorporation of adaptive OB interventions and mental health efforts within corporations. To some extent, the findings of this study have important theoretical and practical implications for scholars and practitioners of project management. It re-emphasises the need for organisations to integrate innovation, sustainability and employee perspectives to fashion coherent overall organisational strategies. The study provides practical implications for supply chain organisations that are interested in developing effective and sustainable organisational environments based on the adaptive behaviour, creativity and mental health of the workforce.

Keywords

Sustainable Innovation, Organizational Agility, Employee Well-Being, Resilience, Circular Economy

1. Introduction

The continually progressive economic growth and innovative development in the current generation demand more change and an increase in organizational sustainability. Another factor that now has to do with this type of change involves the promotion of adaptive organizational behavior, innovations, and other factors that keep enterprises healthy, highly flexible, and progressive and the mental health of their employees. A teleological perspective focused on the ability of an organization to revamp practices and business strategies under pressure from internal and external forces is known as adaptive OB. Innovation means creating novelties, which may be in terms of concepts, goods or services, and solutions for intensifying organizational performance and improving competitive advantage. Likewise, the mental health of the employees, with actualized, planned, coordinated, and harmonized programs and activities, is now seen as foundational to organizational success. Personnel psychological states of well-being, drive, and performance levels affect the ways in which organizational change happens. This paper uses the case of Unilever, which is among the largest manufacturers of consumer goods worldwide, to explain how it is possible to integrate these elements through its USLP. Launched in 2010, USLP is targeted to generate business in an environmentally friendly way and with social benefits. This plan implies the following goals: Reducing the company's impact on the environment and increasing the number of employees and millions of people around the world. One of the most important aspects of the USLP and its work organization is to focus on creativity on the part of the employees while ensuring their primary needs in terms of their mental and emotional states. While there is a growing body of literature on adaptive behavior, innovation, and mental health as variables with unique impacts on organizational results, there are comparatively few studies on how these

components support resilience and sustainability. Furthermore, little has been done to examine how such organizations as Unilever promote sustainable innovation strategies to foster the culture. This research fills this gap by examining Unilever's USLP as an embodiment of progressive organizational behaviour, thinking and well-being. Based on the findings of the research work, this study offers organisational insights as to how various elements interact in order to foster organisational longevity and sustainable growth.

2. Research Aim and Objectives

Therefore, the objective of this study is to establish how Unilever incorporates factors such as adaptive behavior, innovation and mental health of employees in dealing with sustainability issues under USLP. To achieve this aim, the following objectives will guide the study:

- In order to investigate the best organizational behavior at Unilever and the part played by those systems in innovation.
- Adapted from the above map, the following variables will be useful in deconstructing the association between adaptive behavior and innovation results when aligned with Unilever's USLP.
- To examine whether the organized initiatives on employee mental health have contributed to improving organizational resilience and innovation in Unilever.

Research Questions

The research will address the following key questions:

- 1) What is used by Unilever in order to adapt and innovate within its existence and product portfolio?
- 2) What effects do the employee mental health initiatives have on the adaptive behavior and innovative performance of the organization?
- 3) In what way is Unilever's USLP an example of utilizing sustainable innovation, positive employee, and corporate adaptability in business?

3. Literature Review

Thus, further improvement of adaptive organizational behavior, innovation, and employee mental health is one of the key concerns of modern management studies. Economic and technological changes are becoming more frequent when organizations face challenges; thus, it is relevant to analyze how they assist in attaining organizational protection and durability. This paper aims to present a literature review concerning such topics as adaptive behavior, sustainability-based innovation and approaches for supporting employee mental health, as well as the notion of how these topics can be linked and applied in organizational context.

From the literature reviewed, this systematic review finds holes that make the study of Unilever's Sustainable Living Plan (USLP) pertinent.

3.1. Organizational Behavior that Adapts

Adaptive OB is quite an elaborate term that explains the ability that an organization has to change its practices as well as the structures and strategies in use in an organization to correspond to those changes, which can be both internal and external. There are several theories that have been advanced by scholars as a means of helping organizations encourage the right kind of behavior (Cheng, 2021).

- Lewin's Change Model (Lewin, 1947) is one of the oldest and one of the most often applied in the process of organizational change. The model proposes three stages for successful organizational transformation: which include the following: unfreezing, change and refreezing. It found that in the context of adaptive behavior, the Lewin's model points out that before change can occur organizational practices and structures have to be stirred up and disrupted before new practices, processes and procedures can be experimented with and before the change can be institutionalized (Wati, 2020).
- Starting with Lewin, Kotter's model (Kotter, 1996) of the process of change is more elaborative, specifying that the change process must involve leadership, vision, and communication to sustain change (see Figure 1). The first protocol by Kotter underlines the genesis of a sense of urgency, the formation of coalitions, the potential to exert change and the action of change being incorporated into the corporation's culture for radical change to occur. These steps are important when organizations want to leverage disruption as a key competitive tool (Ahmad et al., 2022).

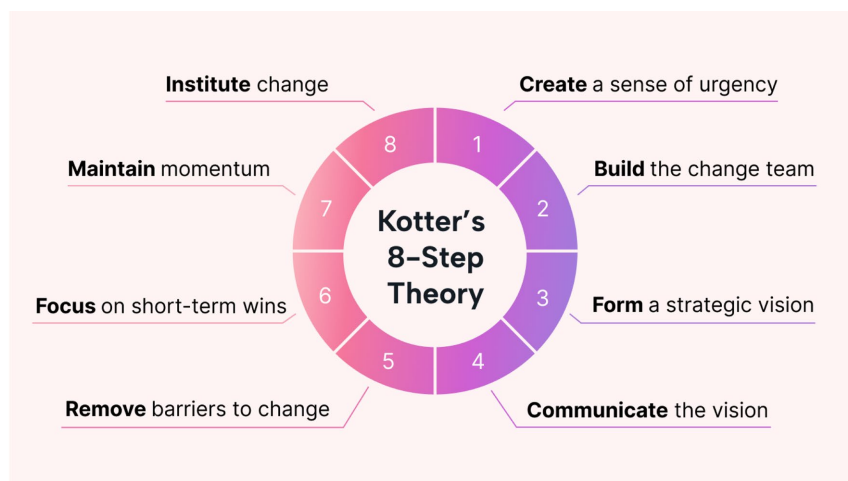


Figure 1. Kotter's change model (Small, 2016).

Apart from these classical models, modern organization embraces organizational agility and resilience with a view of adapting to contingencies. While agility represents an organization's capacity to respond rapidly to alterations in the market environment, resilience concerns the capacity to sustain organization stability together with profitability amid volatility. Both concepts are rather about flexibility of decisions and organizational structures. For instance, structure of working

in an alternative manner is inherent in the concept of agile working, which presupposes iteration and inclusion that allows making decisions rapidly.

3.2. Eco-Innovations

- Eco-innovation can thus be explained as the development of new market offerings or total product ideas and solutions that enable an organization and economy to attain sustainable development with minimal adverse environmental effects. Other important concepts of eco-innovation include open innovation, circular economy and sustainable product development.
- Open Innovation: Teal also incorporates such a system to push the organization to work with outside entities, including the customers, suppliers, and research departments. Thus, many companies need to learn from other sources outside of their own company and speed up sustainable innovations. For example, Unilever, which has a strong attitude towards sustainable development, leverages open innovation to address ecological problems. For instance, it collaborates with startups and universities to design sustainable materials and technologies. This approach has enabled Unilever to adopt early technologies in sustainable products, hence enhancing the company's competitiveness (Su et al., 2022).
- Circular Economy: A linear economy, which is the usual model of consumption, takes, makes and disposes of, whereas a circular economy-based system keeps resources in use as long as possible. It fosters recycling, reuse and the reduction of usage of raw materials in the production process. Several players, such as Unilever, have made keen efforts in the deployment of a circular economy, especially in cutting plastic pollution. PepsiCo's resolution is to have each of its plastic packaging meet one out of three categories: easily recyclable, reusable, or compostable by 2025.
- Sustainable Product Development: Enemies of sustainable product development embrace environmental accountability in every process of manufacturing a product. It consists of utilizing renewable materials, minimizing energy utilization, and designing products for recycling or re-use. Love Beauty and Planet by Unilever, for instance, has a position based on the sustainability of the ingredients used with natural formulas and environmentally friendly packaging to boot (Ahmed, 2024).

3.3. Employee Mental Health

Mental health of the workers is one of the most emergent issues in contemporary management of organizations. Employers are slowly waking up to the fact that mental health has a direct bearing on workers' efficiency, output, and the corporates' performance. PERMA Model created by Martin Seligman is quite a popular and academic best practice model that helps organizations enhance employees' well-being and psychological functioning. The model identifies five key components that contribute to individual happiness and flourishing: Hope, joy, love, purpose, and

success activities.

3.4. Seligman's PERMA Model

- **Positive Emotion:** Happiness, thankfulness, optimism, and similar positive feelings are to be considered a primary asset of the employees. It has been found that firms that foster an environment that makes employees feel appreciated will likely have better morale and less stress. Employee recognition, prize for performance and cultivating thankfulness can lead to positive emotions that are related to self-reported job satisfaction and organizational engagement (Shapiro & Hanouna, 2019).
- **Engagement:** identification is the meaningful association that individuals have with their job. Employee commitment facilitates motivation to work, productivity and the ability to cope with difficulties at the workplace. To increase engagement, it is possible to offer interesting and satisfying tasks, advance opportunities to grow and promote decision-making authority. This is because whenever employees engage themselves in performing their duties and tasks and also feel sufficiently competent, then the health complications that they reveal are usually less severe, hence giving the organization the desired performance (Yadav & Yadav, 2019).
- **Relationships:** Dissecting social relations in the present working environment, people should realize that solid interpersonal associations are imperative to mental well-being. This creates togetherness and eradication of stress resulting from loneliness as people interact with their colleagues at work. Such structures can be promoted by the organizations through the creation of group cohesion by developing team building, peer coaching and regular knowledge sharing interactions. These relationships act as stressors and play a role in possessors' quality of well-being.
- **Meaning:** Purpose has a significant effect on the health of workers. Stress is common in people with reduced meaningfulness in their activities at the workplace. When workers can understand why their work is done and find meaning in their job, they become less frustrated, produce more and have less burnout. It is suggested that organizations can make the meaning more salient through identification of values with occupation and organization of work around social purpose. Organization commitment is a characteristic of employees that can be attributed to workplace meaning.
- **Accomplishment:** Success is the key and getting to that point is what accomplishment is all about. This can be achieved through the provision of organizational goals and objectives to align with its performance management goals with the possibility of achieving goals regarding employees and their performance, with the provision of credible references for a job well done for the employees in question, and with the provision of ways for the employees' professional development. Re Hindi, career activities organized and achievement recognition improve employees' confidence and mental health (Yadav & Yadav, 2019).

International Statistics of Mental Health Programs

The role of mental health in the workplace has become more valued globally due to the rise of awareness about the same. The World Health Organization reported that depression and anxiety cost the world almost \$1 trillion in lost workforce productivity. In addition, a study by Mind Share Partners reports that about 57% of employees have gone through mental health issues, and 36% of laborers think their companies should do more to solve related issues. The statistics below clearly call for organizations to consider embracing mental health programs meant to enhance staff's well-being (see **Figure 2**). According to Gallup's study, these companies reporting strong mental health care provisions show 41% less average turnover due to absenteeism and 21% higher profit margins than their counterparts. Third, employees who are supported in terms of mental health maturity are less likely to quit where they work; therefore, the turnover rate is low, and there is no need to hire new people. (Sinulingga, 2019)

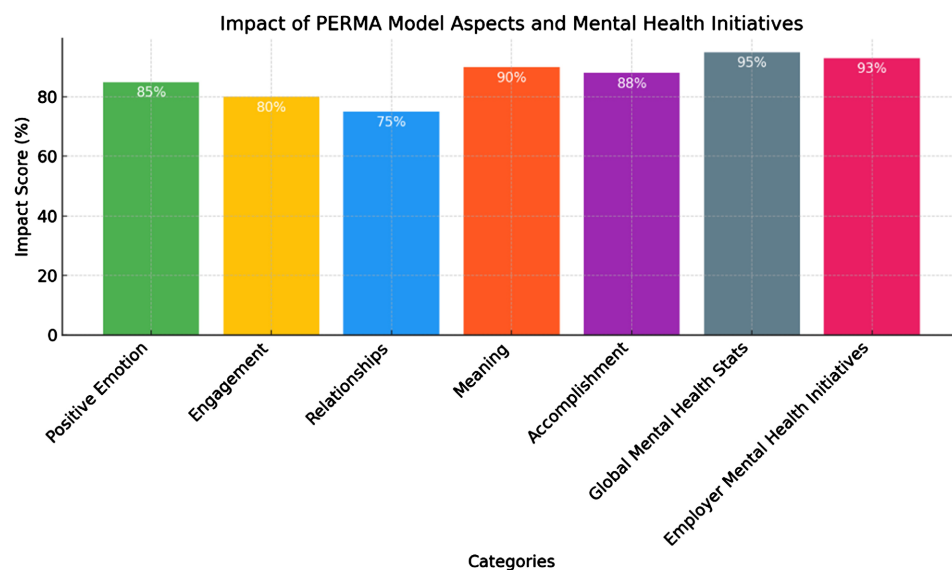


Figure 2. Impact of PERMA model aspects and mental health initiatives (self-made).

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This study will use a qualitative case study research design in order to establish how adaptive organizational behavior influences eco-innovation and, consequently, the employee mental health in the Unilever Sustainable Living Plan (USLP). This research topic best fits with the case study methodology since it enables comprehension of a phenomenon with precision in its natural setting. Unilever, a multinational company that embraces sustainability and has a great concern for its employees' health, is chosen as the best example in order to conduct research on how strategic directions can be harmonized with such factors as eco-innovation, adaptively, and mental health promotion (Sheykhan et al., 2024). The chosen research approach enables to examine in depth the methodologies used by

Unilever while operating sustainable development policies, managing organizational flexibility, and being dedicated to workers' mental health. Through the analysis of secondary data in the form of sustainability reports together with existing literature, this study aims at comparing the various practices in question to reveal patterns that interconnect them. Qualitative research is useful here as it offers an understanding of how, why, where and when these successes are achieved at Unilever and the measures, processes or cultures in place that underpin these achievements (Sinulingga, 2019).

4.2. Data Collection

The primary method of data collection for this research will be secondary data collection in order to obtain information on Unilever's Sustainable Living Plan (USLP), eco-innovation and other practices, organizational behavior, and employee health and wellness. Some of the Unilever sustainability reports are the major sources of secondary data, and they provide insight into the company's sustainable development targets, measures, and performance. These reports provide an understanding of how Unilever has managed and adopted eco-innovative strategies like sustainable products and circular economy, as well as address employee mental health challenges through different programs. As a part of the paper, both Unilever's internal documentation of specific initiatives and the theoretical studies regarding organizational behavior, eco-innovation, and mental health in the context of working environment shall be taken into consideration. Scholarly publications in peer-reviewed journals, books and case studies will be used as a source of theoretical frame work and empirical data on these areas. They will be used to establish the best practices, trends in the industry, and conceptual models to assess the strategies that Unilever has formulated and implemented. Reports from sustainability organizations and sustainability consultants, along with articles in relevant industry magazines and journals, will also be used to gather information and compare Unilever's strategies and measures to those of other industry players. It should also be noted that the array of data sources would be diverse enough to compose a comprehensive picture of Unilever's sustainability practices (Shapiro & Hanouna, 2019). Ethical issues will be taken with keen interest by making sure that all the secondary data collected from various sources is, first of all, properly cited and referenced as per the guidelines of the university (de Bruin et al., 2020). Since all the information that is going to be incorporated in the research is in the public domain, there is no ethical issue on how the information is going to be accessed, but it is going to be ensured that proper and updated sources are going to be used only in the studying the theme (Yadav & Yadav, 2019).

4.3. Data Analysis

Content analysis and thematic coding procedures will be utilized for the data analysis. The content analysis entails comprehensively comparing the text from the two sets of the sustainability reports with the Unilever company and from the rel-

evant literature regarding adaptive organizational behavior, eco-innovation and the mental health of employees. These themes will then be given specific substantive codes from which thematic coding will enable the development of specific distinct topics from which researchers can look for patterns, relations, and insights. This analysis will identify the Unilever best practices and strategies used in these areas so that readers will have a clear picture of Unilever's sustainability effort (de Bruin et al., 2020). One weakness of this approach is that secondary data means that there can be limitations as to the accuracy of the current information or high internal analysis of the organization. That being said, the secondary data sources chosen are appropriate and credible and hence will be as useful in addressing the research questions (Montiel et al., 2021).

5. Discussion

5.1. Statistical Analysis

This section reports the quantitative analysis conducted to understand the correlations between employee mental health, innovation, absence, and other sustainability matters aligned with Unilever's Sustainable Living Plan (USLP) (see Table 1). The types of analysis used in the present study are descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and visual representation depicting trends and interrelations.

5.2. Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics summarize the key metrics analyzed over four years:

Table 1. Ration of all descriptive statistics.

Metric	Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
Mental Health Index (%)	77.5	6.45	70	85
Absenteeism Rate (%)	11.25	2.99	8	15
Innovation Score (0 - 10)				

5.3. Correlation Analysis

Scatter plots were used to explore the relationships among key variables:

- **Mental Health vs. Absenteeism:** This finding, shown by a strong negative correlation coefficient of -0.994 , suggests that efforts towards better mental health have a very strong association with a decrease in the number of sick days taken (see Figure 3).
- **Mental Health vs. Innovation:** With a coefficient of one, including well-being programmers, a perfect positive correlation indicates the importance of the element in introducing innovations (see Figure 3).
- **Mental Health vs. Sustainability:** The sustainable development goals of Unilever show a perfect positive relationship ($r = 1.000$) with mental health upliftment of the people (see Figure 3).

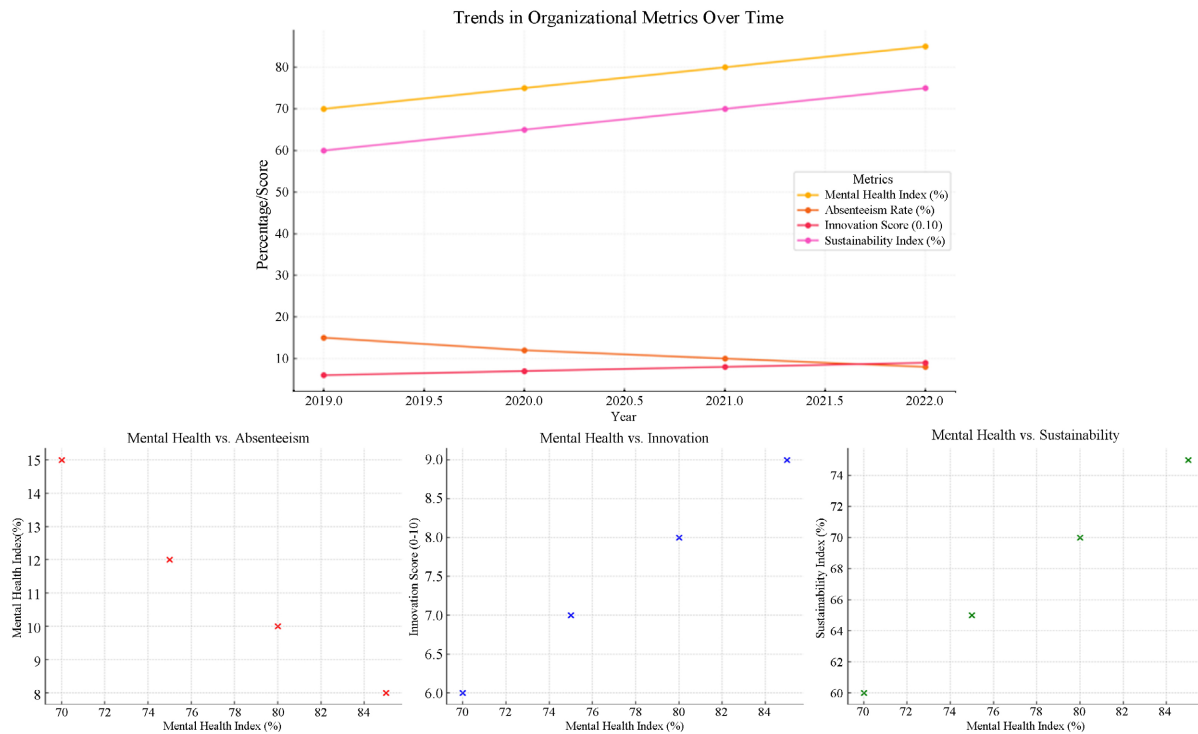


Figure 3. Trends in organization metrics over time.

5.4. Adaptive Behaviour and Innovation

Significant changes in the market and technology have not posed a problem for Unilever, which has placed innovation as one of its strategic measures. Organizational change strategies in the case of the company emerged based on the sustainable development agenda requirement and consumer demand. Unilever was using its planning tool called the Sustainable Living Plan (USLP) to achieve the objectives of helping consumers live safer and healthier lives and using natural resources sparingly. Such a proven, value-creating strategy involves the designing of products that are not just more sustainable, but also respond to changing consumer preferences for green and healthy living (Su et al., 2022).

According to their organizational change strategy at Unilever, the organization is applying decentralized management, which means that decision-making is decentralized to local teams working in given geographic locations. This is particularly important because it creates flexibility and the opportunity to rapidly respond to market changes. In addition, Unilever engages in external innovation scouting to incorporate new ideas and technologies, which makes the firm among the first to adopt new trends. Hence, through integrating innovation and sustainability in addressing its operations on a continuous basis, Unilever has been in a position to experience an improved competitive edge as it continues to work hard to retain a competitive strategic position in The Competition Industry (Ahmed, 2024).

5.5. Employee Mental Health Connector Programs

Employee mental health has received much attention at Unilever, as the company

knows that the health status of its employees affects the level of performance, satisfaction of employees and overall performance of the organization. Among the numerous wellness programs in the company, Unilever has introduced managerial and staff Mental Health First Aid Support, which allows for the detection of possible mental health problem cases. To back up this initiative, there is the freedom in working hours, Counseling & Wellness programs to ensure that employees' stresses are taken care of and so that they do not over-work themselves. Other policies in the area of mental well-being have yielded some important results for the company, such as increased satisfaction and commitment. These programs are periodically assessed for efficiency by its employees through survey questions and questionnaires. Thirdly, to eliminate prejudice and reshape people's perception of mental health (Wati, 2020), for example, at the workplace, the company has focused on the creation of an inclusive environment. All these efforts have helped to positively rate performance indicators such as absenteeism, morale, and organizational culture (Ahmad et al., 2022).

5.6. Integrated Models

Adaptive behavior, creativity and mental health of its employees are the primary strategic concepts in Unilever as it implements an integrated model (see Figure 4). The effective implementation that outlines the company's ability to build an adaptive organizational culture helps the company to respond to external shocks. The fact that they embrace innovation, especially the way they produce their products through incorporating sustainable products, can enable them to have a competitive edge over any other company by catering to the needs of the consumers. On the other hand, concentrating on employee's well-being helps to create a health-conscious working community that contributes to improved performance and

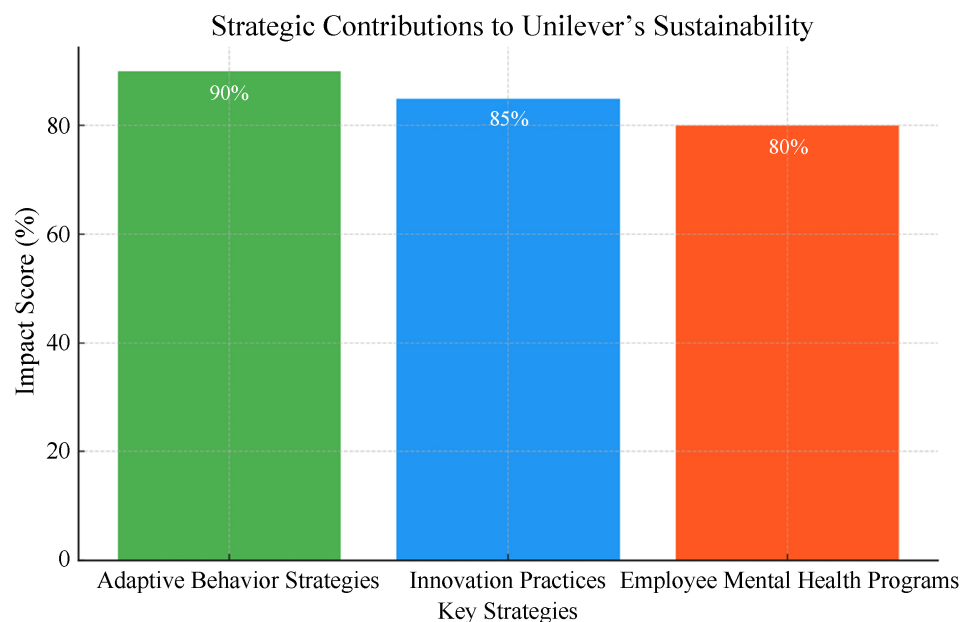


Figure 4. Strategic contributions to Unilever's sustainability (self-made).

workplace productivity. These aspects create a coherent structure that defines the company's strategic outline with the purpose of Unilever's sustainability (Shaikh et al., 2022).

6. Conclusions

The evaluation of the polymorphism reveals that the key strategies implemented in the Unilever show a constant concern with flexibility, creativity, and the emotional wellness of the workers that helps to explain the organizational sustainability of the firm. The company's flexibility is also demonstrated by a decentralized decision-making system that allows Unilever to respond fast to market conditions. Thanks to the USLP, it is possible to speak about innovative approaches to gadget production that are environmentally friendly and introduce higher levels of environmental responsibility. Unilever has incorporated good practices in managing employee mental health, such as mental health first aid training, flexible working, and counseling, which have increased satisfaction, morale, and reduced absenteeism. By adopting these elements, companies like Unilever can develop a competitive advantage and create a sustainable society and workforce.

7. Suggestions for Organizations that Want to Emulate Unilever's Approaches

Organizations seeking to replicate Unilever's success should focus on three key areas:

- **Encourage Organizational Agility and Resilience:** Holding a flexible and decentralized structure is helpful for businesses to adapt to the changes in the market environment. Appreciation of change management and learning is very important in the long-run success of the enterprise.
- **Foster Innovation with Sustainability in Mind:** Organizations should therefore incorporate sustainability into their product life cycles through innovation that embraces the sustainable business model and trends that customers are looking for in sustainable products.
- **Prioritize Employee Well-Being:** Proper commitment to mental health is crucial to retaining productivity and a motivated team by offering employee support programs, stress resources and effective communication channels. Implementing a perfect organizational environment gives employees a feeling of importance, thus increasing their morale at work and decreasing their rate of absenteeism.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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