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## **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY AS FACTORS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the role of emotional intelligence and psychological flexibility as key psychological factors of sustainable development. Emotional intelligence contributes to more effective decision-making, stress regulation, and the development of constructive interpersonal relationships, while psychological flexibility enables efficient adaptation to change and the maintenance of well-being under conditions of uncertainty. Through the analysis of contemporary theoretical models and relevant research, the paper highlights that these two competencies strengthen resilience, innovation, and long-term stability within organizations and communities. It concludes that the development of internal human capacities is a fundamental component of sustainable strategies and that emotional intelligence and psychological flexibility play an increasingly important role in shaping sustainable systems.

**Keywords:** Emotional intelligence, Psychological flexibility, Sustainable development, Resilience, Human factors

### **INTRODUCTION**

The contemporary concept of sustainable development requires an integrated understanding of economic, social, and psychological factors that shape long-term behavioural patterns of individuals, organizations, and communities. Although sustainability has traditionally been viewed through ecological and economic dimensions, recent research highlights the crucial role of human capacities in adapting to global challenges. In this context, emotional intelligence and psychological flexibility emerge as two important factors that contribute to resilience, high-quality decision-making, and effective change management.

Emotional intelligence enables individuals to recognize, understand, and regulate their own emotions as well as the emotions of others, which facilitates dealing with complex situations and uncertainty. Psychological flexibility, understood as the ability to behave adaptively in accordance with one's values and environmental demands, supports stability and resilience under conditions of change. Together, these abilities enhance the capacity of individuals and systems to respond to sustainability challenges in a constructive and long-term manner.

The aim of this paper is to examine how emotional intelligence and psychological flexibility support sustainable development, and how these psychological dimensions contribute to building more resilient, innovative, and stable organizations and communities. The focus is on the connection between human factors and the principles of sustainability, as well as the analysis of their potential to improve decision-making, adaptation processes, and stress management within modern social and organizational contexts.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence represents a set of abilities that enables an individual to recognize, understand, and effectively manage their own emotions, as well as the emotions of other people. According to the most established models, emotional intelligence includes four core dimensions: emotion perception, understanding emotional signals, emotion regulation, and the functional application of emotions in decision-making processes. These abilities have a direct impact on interpersonal relationships, communication quality, and the capacity to cope with challenges in dynamic environments.

In the context of sustainable development, emotional intelligence contributes to the development of both collective and individual responsibility, ethical behavior, and a long-term perspective in decision-making. Individuals with higher emotional intelligence demonstrate greater stress-management capacity, adapt more efficiently to change, and help create stable and cohesive organizational cultures, all of which are essential components of sustainable systems.

### **Psychological Flexibility**

Psychological flexibility refers to an individual's ability to adapt to environmental demands, remains connected to personal values, and chooses behavior that is most useful in a given moment even when facing discomfort, stress, or uncertainty. This concept is grounded in contemporary psychological principles, especially models that emphasize acceptance of internal experiences, cognitive flexibility, and value-driven action.

Developed psychological flexibility is associated with higher resilience, easier decision-making in changing circumstances, and a stronger capacity for long-term planning. In the context of sustainable development, psychological flexibility enables individuals and organizations to better respond to complex challenges such as uncertainty, innovation demands, and the need to transform established behavioral patterns.

### **Human Factors in Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development has traditionally been viewed through three dimensions: environmental, economic, and social. However, contemporary approaches emphasize that the success of sustainable strategies greatly depends on the psychological and emotional capacities of individuals and communities. Factors such as emotional self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, and the ability to make informed decisions contribute to long-term stability, innovation, and responsible resource use. In this sense, emotional intelligence and

psychological flexibility become key elements of the “human infrastructure” of sustainable development. They influence motivation, behavior, relationships within organizations, and the capacity of communities to cope with change and crises. Thus, human factors are positioned as an indispensable component of strategies aimed at building a sustainable and stable future.

## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Interdisciplinary literature increasingly confirms that sustainable development depends not only on economic and environmental strategies, but also on the psychological capacities of individuals and communities (Senge, 2006). Emotional intelligence and psychological flexibility represent key human resources that shape how organizations and societies respond to complexity, uncertainty, and long-term challenges. Within this framework, these two competencies contribute directly to resilience, ethical decision-making, and adaptive capacity, which are central to sustainable development.

### **The Contribution of Emotional Intelligence to Sustainable Development**

Emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in sustainable development through its impact on decision-making, emotional regulation, and ethical behavior. According to Mayer et al. (2004), emotionally intelligent individuals are better able to interpret emotional information and respond adaptively in complex and uncertain situations.

In organizational and societal contexts, emotional intelligence supports sustainable development by enhancing interpersonal cooperation, facilitating constructive conflict management, and promoting long-term, responsible decision-making. Individuals with higher levels of emotional intelligence demonstrate greater stress, tolerance and emotional stability, which reduces impulsive behavior and strengthens resilience in periods of change.

As emphasized by Goleman (1998), emotionally intelligent organizations are more likely to develop cultures of responsibility, trust, and ethical conduct. Key preconditions for sustainable practices.

### **Psychological Flexibility and Sustainable Development**

Psychological flexibility refers to the ability to remain open to internal experiences, adapt to changing circumstances, and act in accordance with personal values despite discomfort or uncertainty (Hayes, 2016). This capacity is particularly relevant in the context of sustainable development, where constant adaptation and transformation are unavoidable.

Individuals with higher psychological flexibility demonstrate greater tolerance of uncertainty, reduced emotional reactivity, and a stronger orientation toward long-term goals. These qualities support sustainable development by enabling rational planning, openness to innovation, and resilience in dynamic environments (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

At the organizational level, psychological flexibility facilitates learning from change, faster adaptation to new conditions, and the integration of innovative solutions, all of which are essential for sustainable systems.

### **The Synergy of Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Flexibility in Sustainability**

Although emotional intelligence and psychological flexibility are distinct constructs, their combined effect creates a strong psychological foundation for sustainable development. Emotional intelligence enables emotional awareness, regulation, and high-quality social interaction, while psychological flexibility allows adaptive, value-driven action under conditions of uncertainty.

Together, these capacities support resilience, reduce maladaptive stress responses, and promote long-term, values-based decision-making. Contemporary sustainability frameworks increasingly recognize that such human factors represent the psychological infrastructure upon which sustainable organizations and communities are built (OECD, 2021; UNDP).

#### **THE MODEL OF THE INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Understanding sustainable development requires an integrative approach that includes not only economic, environmental, and social dimensions, but also the psychological mechanisms that shape human behavior within organizations and communities. Emotional intelligence and psychological flexibility represent two complementary human capacities that significantly influence decision-making quality, stress regulation, resilience, and adaptive behavior core elements of sustainable systems (Senge, 2006; UNDP, 2021).

Emotional intelligence contributes to sustainability by enabling individuals to recognize and regulate emotional responses, maintain constructive interpersonal relationships, and consider the long-term consequences of their actions. These capacities support ethical behavior, responsible leadership, and socially aware decision-making, which are essential for sustainable organizational cultures (Mayer et al., 2004; Goleman, 1998).

Psychological flexibility complements emotional intelligence by enabling individuals and organizations to remain open to change, tolerate uncertainty, and act in accordance with values despite stress or discomfort (Hayes, 2016). This capacity reduces emotional reactivity, enhances learning from experience, and supports innovation in complex and rapidly changing environments.

The interaction between emotional intelligence and psychological flexibility creates a psychological foundation for resilience and long-term stability. Emotionally intelligent individuals are better able to understand emotional dynamics within systems, while psychological flexibility enables adaptive and value-driven responses to these dynamics. Together, these competencies promote sustainable decision-making, effective stress management, and the capacity for continuous adaptation.

Based on this integrative perspective, sustainable development can be understood as an outcome of emotionally aware, psychologically flexible individuals and systems. Such systems are better equipped to balance short-term demands with long-term goals, respond constructively to uncertainty, and maintain social responsibility over time. This model positions emotional intelligence and psychological flexibility as core components of the human infrastructure of sustainable development.

## **DISCUSSION**

The theoretical analysis presented in this paper indicates that emotional intelligence and psychological flexibility represent essential psychological resources for sustainable development. Rather than functioning as isolated competencies, these capacities jointly shape how individuals and organizations perceive challenges, regulate stress, and make long-term decisions in complex and uncertain environments.

Emotional intelligence supports sustainable behavior by enabling individuals to recognize emotional dynamics within themselves and others, maintain constructive relationships, and integrate ethical and social considerations into decision-making processes. In the context of sustainability, this emotional awareness reduces impulsive reactions and promotes responsibility, cooperation, and long-term orientation qualities that are indispensable for sustainable organizational cultures.

Psychological flexibility, on the other hand, plays a critical role in enabling adaptive functioning under conditions of uncertainty and change. Sustainable development inherently involves transformation, requiring individuals and systems to tolerate ambiguity, adjust established patterns, and remain aligned with core values despite pressure. Psychological flexibility enhances this capacity by reducing emotional reactivity, supporting learning from experience, and fostering openness to innovation.

The integration of emotional intelligence and psychological flexibility creates a synergistic psychological foundation for sustainability. While emotional intelligence enables awareness and regulation of emotional processes, psychological flexibility enables action despite emotional discomfort. Together, these competencies support resilience, values-based decision-making, and adaptive capacity, allowing organizations and communities to respond constructively to long-term sustainability challenges.

From a practical perspective, these findings highlight the importance of investing in the development of internal human capacities as part of sustainable strategies. Training programs, leadership development initiatives, and organizational policies that strengthen emotional intelligence and psychological flexibility can enhance resilience, promote psychological safety, and support innovation. For policymakers and organizational leaders, this implies that sustainable development should be approached not only through technical solutions and regulatory frameworks, but also through systematic support for psychological competencies that enable responsible and adaptive behavior.

The contribution of this paper lies in its integrative perspective. While existing literature increasingly acknowledges the role of soft skills in sustainability, this paper conceptually links emotional intelligence and psychological flexibility within a unified framework of

sustainable development. By positioning these competencies as core elements of the human infrastructure of sustainability, the paper provides a clearer understanding of how internal psychological resources support long-term stability, resilience, and social responsibility.

## CONCLUSION

This paper examined emotional intelligence and psychological flexibility as key psychological factors supporting sustainable development in organizations and communities. In the context of increasing complexity, uncertainty, and global challenges, the findings suggest that sustainable development cannot be achieved solely through technical, economic, or regulatory solutions. Instead, it requires well-developed internal human capacities that enable responsible decision-making, emotional regulation, adaptability, and long-term orientation.

Emotional intelligence contributes to sustainability by fostering emotional awareness, ethical sensitivity, and constructive interpersonal relationships, while psychological flexibility enables individuals and systems to respond adaptively to change, tolerate uncertainty, and act in accordance with core values. Together, these competencies form a psychological foundation for resilience, innovation, and sustainable action across organizational and societal contexts.

The central message of this paper is that sustainability begins from within. Organizations and communities striving for sustainable development must invest not only in external systems and strategies, but also in the development of emotional and psychological capacities that support stability, responsibility, and adaptability. Emotional intelligence and psychological flexibility should therefore be understood as fundamental resources rather than optional skills within sustainability frameworks.

This paper contributes to the theoretical understanding of sustainable development by integrating emotional intelligence and psychological flexibility into a coherent conceptual model. A key limitation of the study lies in its theoretical nature and the absence of empirical data, which opens opportunities for future research. Further studies could empirically examine the relationships between emotional intelligence, psychological flexibility, and concrete sustainability indicators across different organizational and cultural contexts.

By highlighting the role of internal human capacities, this paper offers a broader perspective on sustainability, one that emphasizes awareness, flexibility, and responsibility as essential conditions for long-term stability and sustainable development.

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