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REVIEW ARTICLE

Section: *Literature, Linguistics & Criticism***A systematic review of humanistic discourse analysis for SDG-aligned total quality management in manufacturing organizations**Abdul-Wasea Abdul-Ghani Saif Al-Mekhlafi^{1*}, Mohamad Ahmad Saleem Khasawneh² & Sayed M. Ismail³¹College of Business Administration Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia²Special Education Department, King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia³Department of English Language and Literature, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia*Correspondence: a.almekhlafi@psau.edu.sa**ABSTRACT**

This systematic review surveys literature that highlight the intertwined and overlapped relations among humanistic discourse analysis, Total Quality Management (TQM), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in manufacturing contexts. It adopts PRISMA methodology for analysing 78 peer-reviewed articles (2010-2023) with the aim of identifying dominant discourses, their philosophical frames, and their implications for SDG alignment. The findings of the present study have underscored three basic discursive frameworks: instrumental humanism, where humanistic principles serve efficiency goals; ethical humanism, highlighting dignity and rights; and transformative humanism, supporting systemic change. The present study has also identified a critical gap between aspirational SDG discourse and operational TQM practices, known for semantic decoupling and rhetorical compliance. The review contributes to humanities scholarship by revealing how discourse analysis foreground the contested terrain of “quality” and “sustainability” in manufacturing, proposing a framework for critical discursive praxis that bridges humanistic values with sustainable production systems. The present study argues that manufacturing organizations need more than technical integration—they need discursive transformation to align TQM with SDGs.

KEYWORDS: humanistic discourse analysis, critical management studies, total quality management, sustainable development goals, manufacturing discourse, organizational rhetoric, quality paradigms

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1. Introduction

The manufacturing sector finds itself at a pivotal point, transitioning from an industrial legacy to a sustainable transformation. It has been caught in the middle between a relatively old industrial paradigm and its commitment to sustainable transformation. It went through a state of transformation, which is not either linear or coherent. While companies are so interested in producing a positive discourse of sustainability, calling for green and clean environment, there is discursive-performative gap that can be best described as legitimizing veneer. They just use such an ecological discourse as a cover for their actions that causes a big environmental destruction and damage ((Banerjee, 2008; Milne, Kearins, & Walton, 2006). The manufacturing sector has recently gone through remarkable changes in terms of sustainability, leaving behind a long-standing industrial legacy that did not take into consideration the significance of sustainability due to either lack of awareness or ignorance.

However, this transition coincides with a crucial epistemic turning point. While Total Quality Management (TQM) has developed into two distinct stages—statistical process control to broader organizational philosophy (Dahlgaard-Park, 2011)—and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a comprehensive framework for global betterment, their integration remains problematic. Within such a contested discursive battlefield, Total Quality Management has taken an unclear and ambiguous position that is discursively focused on customer satisfaction and continuous improvement. (Dahlgaard-Park, 2011). Technical approaches to “SDG-aligned TQM” does not consider the basic discursive and philosophical dimensions of this integration (Ferrón-Vílchez & Ortiz-de-Mandojana, 2022).

Yet, as Zbaracki (1998) argues, TQM used a positive discourse inside the companies and manufacturing environments, as this discourse is related to trusting and empowering employees. They use positive, empowering discourse like ceremonial implementation while imposing their strict control, intensifying mentoring, and making the workplace more demanding and strict. Humanistic discourse empowerment, such as uplifting language used by TQM, such as “our people are our great asset,” empowers front-line workers and fosters a culture of trust and continuous improvement. However, such a positive discourse covers a different reality, which is exemplified by intensified work discipline and managerial control. Instead of feeling empowered and independent, they are faced with more monitoring, strict performance metrics, increased work pressure with the aim of improving efficiency and error reduction, tighter rules disguised as quality standards, and more responsibility without real authority or decision-making power.

The suggested technical integration of SDG-aligned TQM represents a deep philosophical and discursive problem. The idea is that while primary approaches tries to align sustainability metrics to the existing quality management systems, they ignore their potentially incompatible foundational assumption (Fernando & Lawrence, 2014). In this respect, Ferrón-Vílchez and Ortiz-de-Mandojana (2022) argue that these approaches have not taken into consideration the fundamental discursive and ideological dimensions of integration. To put it simply, TQM paradigm is best described as rational, predictable, and waste reduction , which regard human being as a resource and this is a kind of reduction to human being into an object conflicting with the sustainability conception of human being as an integral component of nature. By contrast, SDGs—especially those connected to **Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8)**, **Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9)**, **Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10)**, **Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12)**, **Climate Action (SDG 13)**, and **Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16)**—require explicit attention to dignity, fairness, ecological limits, and governance (United Nations, 2015).

Therefore, it has been argued that the integration of SDGs into TMQ is intriguing and challenging; however, it is achievable, and it is going to yield great fruits for the studies concerned with TMQ and the workplace. To address such a challenge, the present study proposed what is known as humanistic discourse analysis. This approach draws heavily on the Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2013), organizational discourse studies (Grant, Hardy, Oswick, & Putnam, 2004), and humanistic management philosophy (Melé, 2016). It treats language as a socio-cultural product that is not neutral but as a constitutive and ideological force. It investigates how speech, text, and narrative could manage to construct organizational realities, legitimize specific power-knowledge relations, and either support or undermine dominant ethical positions (Alvesson &

Kärreman, 2000). A humanistic vision focuses this analytical power on questioning the dignity and the ethical construction of human beings with economic systems.

Consequently, the present review article comes against the drops of the traditional management scholarship, as they regarded manufacturing organizations as primary discursive sites. That is to say, these discursive sites represent competing discourses addressing conflicting issues such as quality, value, stakeholders, and sustainability. The core issue of the current review is no longer focused on the possibility of integrating TQM and SDG; it, however, investigates critically how they are integrated discursively. In other words, this review analyses the language used to explain the integration of TQM and SDG, how that language shapes stakeholders' perceptions of the material outcomes resulting from this integration, and whether the integration is merely discursively prescribed or has practical applicability in reality. It examines whether such adopted discourse could contribute to either advancing or undermining the transformative potential of the SDGs. In other words, this reviews aims to:

1. Address the prevailing discursive frameworks that map out the humanistic values, TQM, and the SDGs in the workplace.
2. Discuss how discourse contributes to enabling or constraining SDG-TQM alignment.
3. Suggests a framework for critical discourse praxis engulfing the gap between humanistic values and sustainability.

As such, the present review argues that workplace and manufacturing organizations need more than technical integration; they require a discursive transformation that could be constituent to aligning TQN with people-centric ambitions of the SDG era.

This review discusses this gap in connection with humanistic discourse analysis, which is an interpretative, sociological, linguistic, and cultural methodological approach rooted in critical traditions that addresses how language contributes to constructing organizational reality, ethical positions, and power relations (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000). Unlike traditional management reviews, this systematic review addresses manufacturing and businesses not only as technical systems but also as discursive plants where competing visions of humanistic values, organizational purpose, and sustainability are articulated, negotiated, and contested.

1.1 Research Questions

This research aims to address the following questions:

- What discursive prototypes do map out the relationship among humanistic values, TQM, and SDGs in manufacturing and workplace literature?
- How can workplace and manufacturing organization linguistically overcome tensions between effectiveness and efficiency in workplace, human dignity and sustainability?
- What critical visions does critical discourse analysis offer about the potential and limitations of SDG-aligned TQM?

1.2 Theoretical Pillars of the Framework: Why Humanistic Discourse Analysis?

Humanistic discourse is essential to be used in workplace and manufacturing organizations because it contributes to putting the ethics and language prevailing over workplace environments into practice. Humanistic discourse analysis covers four important critical aspects, which are overlapped and intertwined at different aspects, reframing the existing connections between TQM and SDGs in manufacturing organizations, which are as follows:

1.2.1 Pillar 1: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

It explains how language is used to reflect power structures inside the workplace and the ideological frames of reference, as language is no longer perceived as innocent signs but is a vehicle of socio-economic realities, cultural values, and ideologies whose main function is to produce truth rather than describe it. Therefore, in the

workplace, language is used on purpose to convey the ideology and culture of the organization and implicitly achieve its goals. This approach exposes how language sustains power structures and ideological positions. Drawing on Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional model, this pillar provides the tools for fine-grade textual mode analysis:

- **Text analysis:** the textual analysis is conducted by examining the linguistic features in corporate reports, quality manuals, and internal communications and correspondence in the company. The linguistic analysis includes nominalizations—such as “workforce optimization” obscuring agency—passive constructions (omission for reducing or concealing responsibility), and metaphor (“human capital,” “green growth”).
- **Discursive practice:** it explains how texts are brought to reality, disseminated, perceived, and received by audiences.
- **Social practice:** discourse is connected to power and ideology through dominating social practices in a community. It examines how discursive practices support or challenge managerial domination and growth ideologies.

1.2.1 Pillar 2: Organizational Discourse Studies.

It explains that the ideology, plans, and structure of any given organization are reflected through its language, which is not necessarily corresponding to the direct interpretations of the addressed language and speech in the work, as what is implicitly communicated might be the intentional meaning of the speakers or the administration in the workplace (Grant et al., 2004).· Investigates how master narratives such as quality journey, sustainability leadership, and so on could contribute to making organizational identity and provide legitimacy to the adopted strategies.· This research searches for intertextuality and external links that may be invisible, connecting SDG language with TQM discourse to create a new organizational discourse.

1.2.3 Pillar 3: Humanistic Management Philosophy:

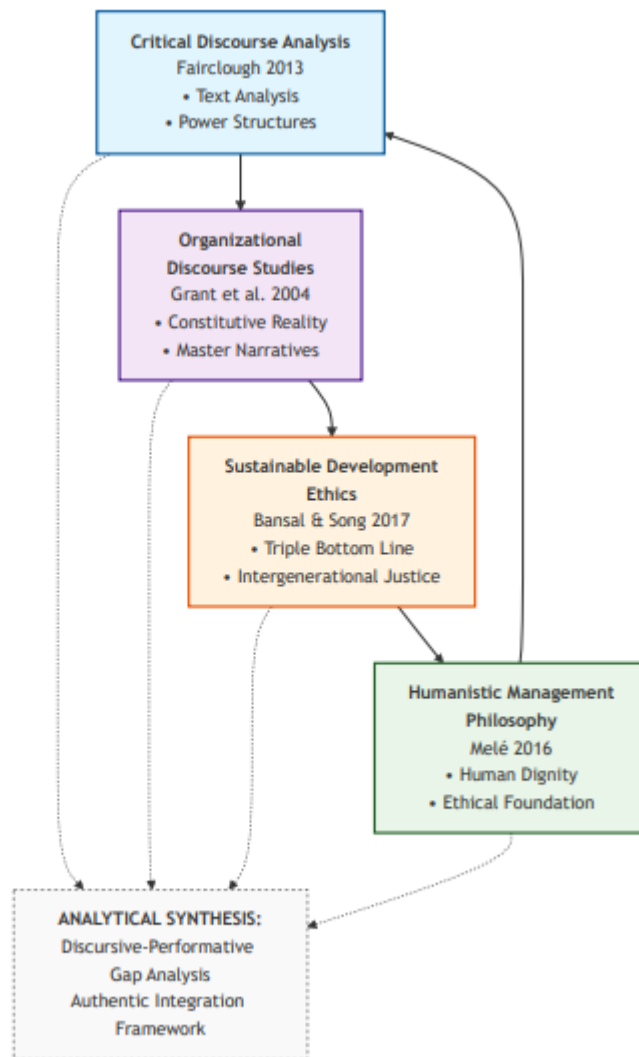
It is such a kind of philosophy that attempts to reconcile the purely materialistic goals of the organization with human dignity, flourishing, and ethical responsibility. It is a method to put the superficially beautiful and humanistic discourse prevailing in the organization into practice, trying to provide a more reliable humanistic interpretation that maintains the rights of the workers without affecting the interests of the company (Melé, 2016) through the following:

- Investigates whether the adopted discourse in the workplace environment is used to relegate employees to a lower status by regarding them as means to operational ends or as ends in themselves and whether this discourse strips employees of their humanity and instead treats them as cogs in machines.·
- Evaluate whether the hegemonic discourse in the workplace is used to foster human flourishing, respect the dignity of workers and protect their internal peace and regard them as an effective partner in the workplace whose views and opinions should be treated with respect and honour, or whether he is treated exclusively in terms of their efficiency and contribution to the workplace regardless of any shared humanistic values.

1.2.4 Pillar 4: Sustainable Development Ethics

This pillar evaluates the dominant forms of discourse in relation to achieving and integrating sustainability goals within the workplace. (Bansal & Song 2017, Hahn et al. 2018),· Evaluating the harmony or lack of harmony between economic, social, and environmental goals. Verifying commitment to such integrative approach allows us to interrogate how manufacturing organizations talk about quality and sustainability, revealing contradictions between proclaimed values and operational realities. This approach also addresses intergenerational justice and ecological integrity by distinguishing between “eco-efficiency” and “sufficiency” narratives. See figure

The circular logic of integration



1.3 The Circular Logic of Integration

The circular visualization describes the dynamism of the framework, deriving its validity from its non-linear logic through the following circular steps:

1. CDA dismantles the linguistic structures, speech acts, tone etc. characterizing the organizational communications, highlighting the implicit power structure and embedded ideological structures in TQM-SDG discourse.
2. ODS contextualizes these linguistic patterns within a wider organizational hierarchical system, demonstrating how such types of discourse could shape realities, identities, ideologies, and values and the grand narratives
3. SDG Ethics evaluates these discourse against the macro-and micro-ethical frameworks of sustainability, evaluating their coherence and harmony with the ecological system and intergenerational justice.
4. Humanistic philosophy offers the basic norms, posing the existential question: does the prevailing modes of discourse used in the workplace venerate human dignity and promote flourishing?
5. The cycle repeat itself in cyclic style as humanistic norms informs new critical analysis, leading to a continuous repetitive practice as each pillar repeatedly interrogates and enrich the others in the form of endless dialogue.



2. Methodology: Systematic Review Protocol

2.1 Search Strategy and Databases

The present review has conducted a systematic review across We conducted systematic searches across Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, and JSTOR databases for articles published between January 2010 and December 2023. The search style has mainly focused on the following three conceptual domains:

- **Humanistic Discourse:** «humanistic discourse,» «ethical discourse,» «organizational rhetoric,» «corporate narrative,» «linguistic analysis,» «critical discourse analysis»
- **Quality Management:** «total quality management,» «continuous improvement,» «quality culture,» «lean manufacturing,» «operational excellence»
- **Sustainability/SDGs:** «sustainable development goals,» «SDG,» «corporate sustainability,» «sustainable manufacturing,» «triple bottom line»

Boolean operators ensured comprehensive coverage while maintaining conceptual relevance.

2.2 Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria have focused on the following:

Peer-reviewed articles in English are indexed in the Scopus and WOS databases.

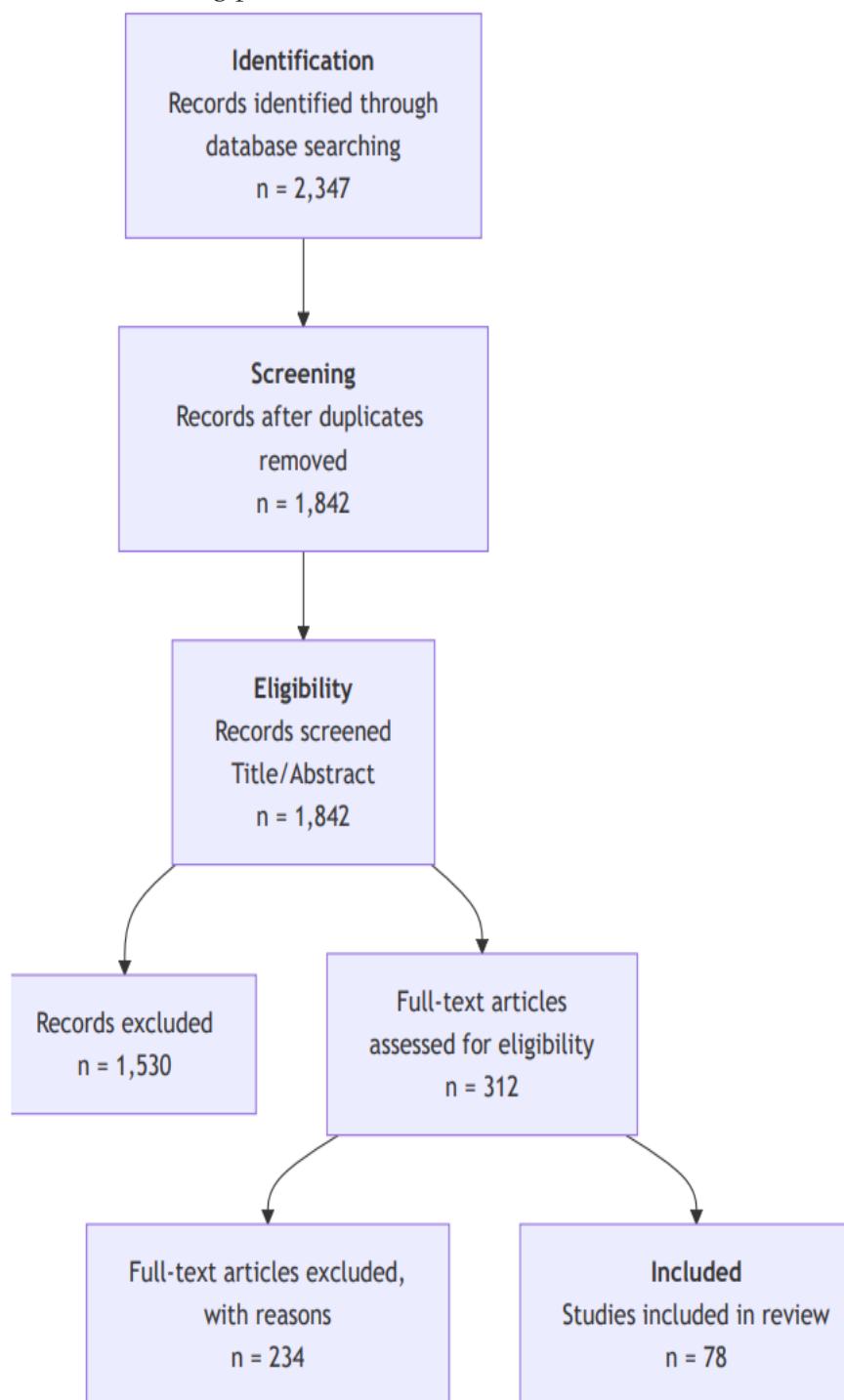
- Addressing issues mainly concerned with manufacturing and business organizations.
- Focusing on studies applying CDA addressing mainly workplace and business organization,
- Focusing on studies addressing rhetorical analysis or narrative analysis
- Tackling studies advocating humanistic values (justice in the workplace, human dignity, flourishing, ethics)
- Focusing on studies associated with the values and principles of TQM and/or SDGs
- Empirical, theoretical, or conceptual studies

Exclusion

- Technical or engineering studies focused studies that have no focus on discourse analysis
- General management literature without addressing TQM, workplace ethics and humanistic discourse employed in the work place.
- Non-peer-reviewed sources

2.3 Screening Process (PRISMA)

The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram (Figure 1) illustrates our screening process:



- Initial identification: 2,347 records
- After duplicate removal: 1,842 records

- Title/abstract screening: 312 records
- Full-text assessment for eligibility: 78 studies included

2.4 Analytical Framework

The present systematic review adopts a critical thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008) to systematically analyze the discursive construction of the TQM-SDG-humanism nexus. It develops the methodology of Thomas and Harden (2008) by integrating it with the theoretical principles of CDA. This holistic approach enables the shift from the descriptive amalgamation of themes to an explanatory analysis addressing the ideological function of language within workplace organizations and manufacturing. The systematic review selects the studies in terms of three classifications: descriptive coding, interpretive coding, and synthetic coding, which serve the purpose of the study by bridging the gap between TQM values and SDGs through critically analyzing the discursive forms used in these studies.

2.4.1 Descriptive coding: Extracting discursive features, rhetorical strategies, and explicit linguistic patterns, which involves the following process:

- **Lexical choices:** Prevalent terminology (e.g., “human capital” vs. “human dignity,” “eco-efficiency” vs. “regeneration”).
- **Rhetorical Strategies:** Using argumentative patterns (e.g., business case justifications, moral imperatives, systemic critiques).
- **Metaphorical clusters:** it is a collection of metaphors that serve a similar purpose collected together under a specific metaphorical category conveying a specific idea (e.g., manufacturing as “machine,” “journey,” or “ecosystem”).

2.4.2 Interpretive coding: CDA is an efficient interpretative tool that employs assumptions, context, social realities, speaker’s intentions, and ideology to identify *implicit presuppositions and power implications*. Descriptive data is interrogated to reveal power dynamics and assumptions:

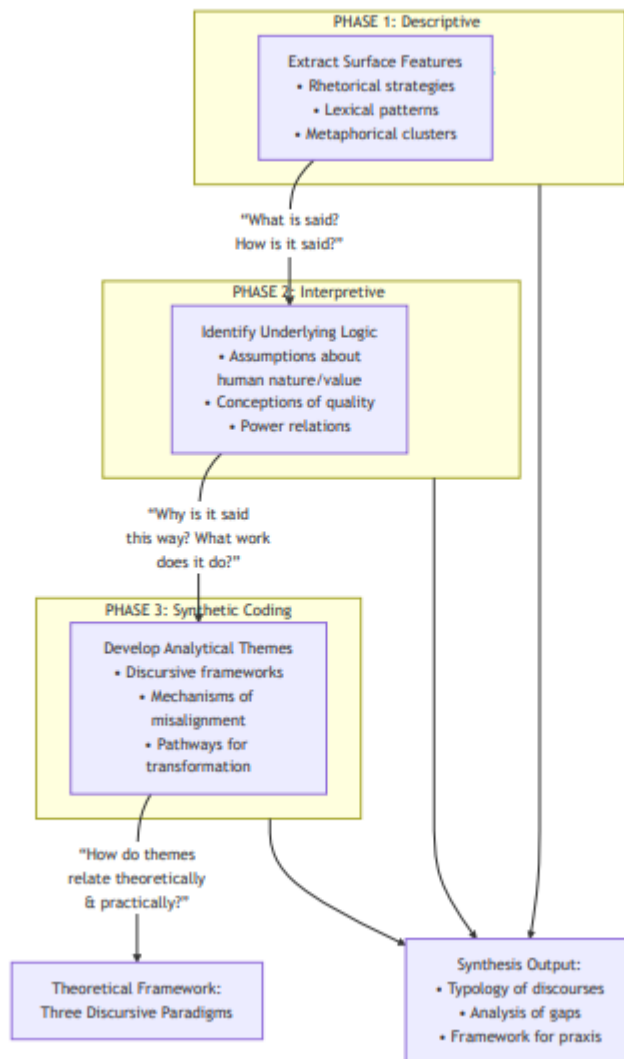
- **Ideological positions:** in most cases, ideologies are implicit and are concealed; however, using CDA and power implications helps reveal such concealed ideologies, as critical discourse analysis uses different interpretative tools that reveal implicit thoughts, values, and beliefs about the purpose of manufacturing, the value of workers, and the relationship between business and society.
- **Power implications:** CDA is used to reveal power interpretations through analyzing linguistic forms and structures employing several discursive tools taken from pragmatics and sociolinguistics, providing analysis of the bodies and organizations that benefited from specific discursive constructions, whose voices are respected and considered or marginalized, and how discourse legitimizes certain managerial practices.
- **Epistemological stances:** this is related to examining knowledge to identify various concepts relating to “quality” and “sustainability” itself, which can be used as conceptual frameworks.

2.4.3 Synthetic analysis, building theoretical insight:

Developing analytical themes and theoretical insights across the corpus. This involved:

- **Comparing and contrasting** different discursive patterns across various studies to constitute coherent frameworks
- **Contextualizing** findings with complicated and developed theoretical debates and argumentations in critical management studies, humanistic philosophy, and sustainability
- **Designing a typology** of discourses that addresses the differences and contradictions in the literature, moving toward a novel theoretical contribution.
- The synthesis proceeded through three iterative, non-linear coding phases, visualized

below:



3. Findings: Discursive Frameworks in SDG-Aligned TQM

3.1 Three Dominant Discursive Frameworks

The current analysis reveals three distinct discursive frameworks through which manufacturing organizations articulate the relationship between humanistic values, TQM, and SDGs: They present a systematic review that determines three major discursive frameworks that explain how humanistic values are expressed within TQM praxis in connection with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These frameworks often epitomize unique but competing philosophies of organizational purpose and value creation.

3.1.1 Instrumental Humanism

The instrumental humanism represents the instruments through which humanistic thinking can be reinforced and put into practice. 42% of the dominating discourse screening by the current study frames humanistic elements and visions as means to improved quality and efficient workplaces. Characteristics include:

- **Utilitarian lexicons;** reframing the reality by a selective choice of lexical items that fit well with the purpose of humanism, despite the fact that such terms may bear within themselves a striking contrast between the meaning themselves and the practices of such meanings and concepts. For example, specific lexical items like “human capital development,” “employee engagement,” and “stakeholder value” are used extensively.
- **Conditional ethics:** The ethical values are only taken into consideration if they lead to materialistic and concrete benefits; otherwise, they are meaningless and useless, which represents a sharp contrast between the core meanings of ethical values and their use by many organizations. For example, focusing on human dignity respected insofar as it contributes to quality outcomes
- **Selective SDG adoption:** Many industrial organizations across the world search only for their interests

and benefits. Therefore, they are highly selective when adopting any SDGs as such choice must match their interests in the market. These organizations are utilitarian in their selections of sustainability goals that only serve their purposes and goals. they emphasize SDG 8 (Decent Work) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation) as productivity enhancers. Choosing decent work SDG8 can accelerate their production rate. In the same vein, selecting SDG 9 industry and innovation will also play a major role in increase the productivity and create efficient work environment

- **Rhetorical patterns:** the organization are so deeply interested using rhetoric patterns that reflect their values and principles which are mostly described as bombastic such as frequent use of business case arguments, return-on-investment framing

3.1.2 Ethical Humanism

Around 35 % percent of the studies are used to highlight the importance of human dignity in workplace and how many companies across the world adopt such values.Characteristics include:

- **Deontological language:** the concept of deontological language includes linguistics model such as claiming for the rights, ideas related to dignity and honour, ethical and moral responsibilities, “
- **Expanded stakeholder consideration:** they consider the interests and conditions of the stakeholders, and how to protect his rights and search for their satisfaction.
- **Holistic SDG engagement:** To achieve sustainability goals, companies and organizations should adopt a holistic vision targeting the integration of SDG into their framework. This integrative approach should take into consideration that engagement process should be comprehensive that cover various aspects of sustainability goals and such integration must not be superficial. However, it should be also realized on the ground of reality with tangible results. Recognition of interconnectedness across goals, particularly social dimensions
- **Rhetorical patterns:** The rhetorical patterns are used widely in workplace and they most cantered around SDG 15 of (peace and justice). These patterns are presented in the mission and vision statements based on explicit and definite ethical commitments, narratives of organizational purpose

Example: Research on employee participation in TQM that centers worker voice as a right rather than an efficiency tool, connecting to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice) through democratic workplace practices.

3.1.3 Transformative Humanism

3.1.4. Ethical Humanism and the Discourse of Intrinsic Value

A few studies—approximately one third—address TQM from an ethical humanistic perspective, which treats supreme humanistic values like dignity, well-being, prosperity, and so on not as an instrumental concern but as inherent values deserving protection. Thus, it employs distinct moral language and selects moral lexical items evoking concepts like *rights*, *dignity*, *moral responsibility*, and *ethical obligation*. Such moral lexical items demonstrate deontological orientation, often linked with Kantian moral philosophy. Therefore, the ethical commitments are reframed as duties rather than as means to organizational ends (Bowie, 2017).

This ethical discourse includes a range of morally relevant factors that transcend the limits of the shareholders and customers. Shareholders range from employees, local communities, and future generations to employers, who are framed as legitimate ethical stakeholders whose interests carry a good weight. Instead of being addressed as resources or inputs, such groups of stakeholders are characterized by inherent moral value, demonstrating stakeholder theories that favor responsibility over utility. (Freeman et al., 2010).

Ethical humanist studies address the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a holistic style. These studies integrate economic performance with social and environmental concerns. To illustrate, they map social sustainability and justice-related goals (Gladwin et al., 1995). In terms of language, the systematic literature review often uses mission statements and value-based expressions to ventilate ethical responsibility that goes beyond legal compliance.

Total quality management models provide crystal-clear examples that regard employee involvement in the workplace as a democratic right rather than a way for proliferating productivity. This research directly connects transparency and inclusive decision-making to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), presenting governance as an ethical responsibility rather than a purely technical process (Greenwood, 2022).

3.1.4. Transformative Humanism as a Critical Counter-Discourse

The most arguably radical humanism representing around 25% of the reviewed studies draws heavily on a transformative hemistich position. The humanistic discourse calls for reconsidering workplace under the umbrella of the social and ecological systems.

In this respect, the systematic review focuses on the lexical items relating to the critical management studies and political ecology, using terms hegemonic practices, counter –narratives, paradigm shifts (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992). Such language epitomizes a crystal-clear departure from the conservative and orthodox systems of the traditional management. The purpose of the language is to dismantle the ideological foundations of quality frameworks.

Such a type of deconstructive discourse is known for its reflexive stance toward latent assumptions about development, improvement, technological inevitability. Authors interested in such a tradition try to reveal whether industrial effectiveness and permanent expansion can remain normative goals in the context of planetary limits and social inequalities. Banerjee, 2011). The adopted discourse in the current study does not address SDGs as a coherent and a harmonious checklist; however, it seeks to highlight contradictions existing between economic growth requirements and ecological sustainability, exploring alternative models such as regenerative production, and circular economic systems. They use of regenerative metaphors in rhetorical analysis of transformational humanist literature is common, with an emphasis on rebirth, restoration, and reciprocity. Simultaneously, they voice clear opposition to extractivist “business-as-usual” paradigms that push the costs of social and environmental issues onto others. Rather than focusing on maximizing production logics, representative studies argue that in order to achieve real alignment with the SDGs, we must dismantle neo-colonial and exploitative logics (Bansal & Knox-Hayes, 2013).

3.2. Linguistic Mechanisms of (Mis)Alignment

3.2.1. Semantics Decoupling

The systematic literature has tackled several linguistic methods that can provide companies and firms the ability to integrate the principles of humanistic discourse into Sustainable Development Goals while maintaining substantially unchanged inherent behaviors. (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The type of discourse used by such organizations is known for its ambiguity and ambivalence. These companies resort to using vague, ambivalent declarations and promises to their employees. For example, they always use expressions like “people and plane” without explaining their real intentions behind such expressions and terms. These companies are much more interested in easily measurable discursive language, which is deeply related to rather concrete and calculable data, such as training hours and compliance measurements, while complicated social and humanistic aspects remain ignored and ambivalent. Each discourse pattern has its own distinct rhetorical characteristics. That is to say, the initiatives of the Sustainable Development Goals often entail organizational social responsibility, which is different from the business and managerial goals of the organization. (Meyer & Rowan, 1977)

3.2.2. Discursive opposition

There are several studies addressing strategies and evident methods adopted by organizations to resist TQM’s integration of sustainability-focused and humanistic considerations into its core concepts. Such a unique case of resistance to the incorporation of humanistic discourses and sustainability goals is due to many factors, the most important of which is that quality management is a purely technical profession that has nothing to do with political, humanistic, or ideological factors, as it is a business world that is governed by purely quality management regulations, which are mostly mathematical.

3.2.3. Emerging Integrative Discourses

Despite the numerous issues, the study identifies certain favourable discourse trends that indicate true integration. Several studies have used circular economy narratives to integrate lifecycle analysis and quality management, enhance material flow, and achieve zero waste goals (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017).

3.2.2. Discursive Opposition

The literature also records more overt forms of opposition to incorporating humanistic and sustainability-

focused considerations into the fundamental identity of TQM. One manifestation is quality purism, when quality management is upheld as a neutral, technical profession that ought to stay detached from perceived political or ideological goals.

Similarly, pragmatic narratives frequently regard SDG commitments as secondary luxuries—appealing in theory but unfeasible in the context of economic competitiveness or financial limitations. These discourses are bolstered by institutional isomorphism, as organizations embrace trendy sustainability language to preserve legitimacy, without actual changes in principles or practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

3.2.3. Emerging Integrative Discourses

Despite of these conflicts, the systematic review has also presented encouraging discursive vision marking a significance movement toward more effective integration. Specific studies have used viral economy narrative discourse that conceptually incorporate quality management with lifecycle analysis, material flow optimization, and zero-waste objectives (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017).

A number of studies adopts capability-based frameworks that links Total Quality Management (TQM) to the improvement of human living conditions instead of excluding it to workplace performance (Sen and Nussbaum, 2001). An additional aspect presents regenerative language that transcends harm reduction to actively restore social and natural systems.

4. Discussion: Advancing a Critical Discursive Praxis

4.1. Contributions to Organizational Humanities

The present systematic review tackles studies focusing on humanistic discourse embedded in TQM scholarships in three key areas: First of all, it addresses how the management and industrial discourse actively affect the ethical values in the workplace. To illustrate, concepts such as continuous improvement, zero defects, and so on not only identify functional objectives but also bolster certain ethical and humanistic perspectives that favour calculation, effectiveness, and control over the real-life human experience. (Shore, 2008). There are grave ethical considerations at stake when choosing between discourse that focuses on the dignity of workers and that which focuses on the capital of the companies.

Second, such analysis indicates the styles of manipulating and distorting the sustainability agenda by controlling its instrumental logics. To illustrate, the language of SDGs is vulnerable and can be taken away from its goals and evacuated from its core issues, thereby stripping it of its critical force (Spicer et al., 2009).

Third, the present systematic review advocates the notion of discursive consciousness as a kind of organizational competency. To achieve the optimum alignment between Total Quality Management and the Sustainable Development Goals, the organizations need to cultivate reflective and critical knowledge that is used as an instrumental tool for analysing how the language system, including metaphors, narratives, and omissions, could contribute to shaping actions and limiting possibilities (Hardy & Thomas, 2015).

4.2. Advancing a Humanistic Discursive Praxis

The present systemic review presents a holistic framework for patterns of discursive transformation. Such a holistic framework is designed mainly in connection with a number of factors. First, discursive awareness is realized through mapping stakeholders' narratives to find systematically the discrepancies in the official messaging.

Second, at the intermediate level, reconstructing the discourse necessitates rebuilding the organizational purposes and goals through adopting cohesive narratives, replacing mechanistic metaphors with ecological and environmental ones and disseminating dialogic environments targeting the development of notions of excellence and sustainability.

Third, at the functional level, the process of discourse integration includes incorporating holistic performance narratives that link quality measures to well-being indicators, institutionalizing ethical accountability, and normalizing constructive critique within organizational dynamics.

4.3. Practical Implications

For corporate leaders, this translates to concrete actions: audit not just operations, but the language used in

reports and meetings. Pair deep technical expertise with a commitment to humanistic literacy—the ability to understand the ethical and social dimensions of your work. Most importantly, create protected spaces where teams can safely imagine and articulate fundamentally different visions for the future of manufacturing.

Quality professionals have a pivotal role to play. They must expand their traditional vocabulary to engage meaningfully with ethics and ecology. This also means developing a keen sensitivity to how power shapes conversations about quality—who gets to speak, and whose definitions stick. By acting as interpreters and integrators, they can bridge the often-separate worlds of quality management and sustainability strategy.

For sustainability practitioners, the challenge is twofold. First, they must guard against the dilution of transformative goals like the SDGs into mere instrumental tools for reputation or efficiency. Second, they need to build durable discursive bridges between the technical departments and the human-focused functions within the organization. Their most crucial task may be to facilitate the difficult, honest conversations about the real trade-offs and systemic contradictions that sustainable transformation inevitably entails.

5. Limitations and Future Research

It is important to be upfront about what this review can't tell us. First, most of the research we analyzed comes from Western, high-income countries and is published in English. That means perspectives from the global South and from smaller, local businesses are largely missing. Those voices could completely change the conversation. Also, let's be honest—the world isn't standing still. The conversations around sustainability and work have been massively reshaped by the COVID-19 pandemic and the worsening climate crisis, so any snapshot we take today is going to feel a bit outdated tomorrow. So, where should researchers look next? We need fewer one-off studies and more long-term tracking of how companies actually weave SDG language into their quality management over years, not months. We'd learn a lot from comparing how these ideas play out in different cultural contexts, say, between Germany and Vietnam. And nothing beats getting on the ground—ethnographic work that observes the everyday meetings and documents where people either bridge or widen the gap between quality talk and sustainability talk. Theoretically, the field feels ripe for some fresh thinking. What would a post-humanist take on TQM look like, one that decentres the human? Or a de-colonial approach that questions the Western assumptions baked into “best practices”? We probably need to go back to basics and ask: what does “quality” even mean in the age of the Anthropocene? Method-wise, the toolbox is expanding. It's not just about written reports anymore; analyzing visual data, factory layouts, and corporate videos (multimodal analysis) could reveal a lot. Computational tools can help us process the sheer volume of corporate discourse at scale. But we shouldn't leave it all to outside analysts; participatory action research, where academics and practitioners co-design changes, might be the best way to turn critical insights into real-world progress.

6. Conclusion

At its heart, this review argues that bringing together TQM, humanistic values, and the SDGs is less about technical blueprints and more about a struggle over meaning—what is manufacturing for? The three discourses we identified (instrumental, ethical, and transformative) aren't just different ways of talking; they represent deep, philosophical splits about value and purpose, and those ideas have real-world consequences. Right now, the instrumental view—where people and planet are framed as tools for efficiency—still dominates the boardroom. But the emerging languages of ethical and transformative humanism offer a vital counterpoint. They provide the vocabulary needed to imagine a manufacturing sector that is genuinely aligned with broader societal flourishing. Ultimately, we believe that for manufacturing to play a credible role in a sustainable future, companies need to commit to a profound shift in how they talk about themselves. It's not about bolting SDG keywords onto existing mission statements. It's about slowly, carefully rewriting the core story of the organization from the inside out. The future will be shaped not only on the factory floor but in the stories a company tells itself about quality, dignity, and its responsibility to the world.

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