



Administrative Systems as Strategic Drivers of Sustainability and Competitiveness in Logistics Operations

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Originality: 100% • Grammarly: 95% • Plagiarism: 0%

ABSTRACT

Article History

Received: 15 Sept 2025

Revised: 23 Jun 2026

Accepted: 15 Jul 2026

Published: 30 Jul 2026

Keywords— Administrative Systems, Logistics Management, Narrative Literature Review, Southeast Asia, Sustainability Performance

Sustainability has become a central priority in logistics, shaped by global regulations, stakeholder expectations, and the need for resilience. Administrative systems—covering organizational structures, policies, management information systems (MIS), and governance mechanisms—are increasingly recognized as strategic drivers of sustainable logistics performance. This narrative literature review synthesizes studies published between 2020 and 2025 to examine four propositions: (H1) effective administrative systems enhance sustainability



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outcomes; (H2) environmental impacts are more directly influenced than social and economic dimensions; (H3) globally benchmarked, digitally integrated systems outperform traditional/manual approaches; and (H4) alignment of administrative systems with sustainability goals mediates the relationship between logistics efficiency and long-term competitiveness. The review employed a narrative synthesis approach, integrating theoretical perspectives (RBV, Institutional Theory, Dynamic Capabilities) with empirical evidence from global and Southeast Asian contexts. Findings indicate that administrative systems contribute to sustainability through measurement, coordination, compliance automation, and accountability. Environmental outcomes are most strongly affected due to measurability and regulatory pressure, while social and economic impacts remain indirect. Firms adopting digital integration and benchmarking achieve superior performance, and alignment with sustainability goals transforms efficiency gains into durable competitive advantage. The study highlights gaps in causal evidence and SME-focused research, offering contextual insights for Southeast Asian logistics firms.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era of globalization, digital transformation, and heightened sustainability concerns, logistics operations have emerged as a critical sector shaping economic growth, environmental stewardship, and social responsibility. Logistics firms, whether multinational carriers or small customs brokerage companies, operate within increasingly complex environments characterized by regulatory pressures, customer expectations, and technological disruptions. Within this context, administrative systems—defined as the organizational structures, policies, routines, management information systems (MIS), performance measurement frameworks, and governance mechanisms that coordinate logistics activities—have become indispensable. They are no longer viewed merely as operational support tools but as strategic enablers that determine how effectively logistics firms can align efficiency with sustainability and competitiveness.

The growing importance of sustainability in logistics is driven by multiple forces. International agreements on climate change, stricter environmental regulations, and rising consumer awareness have compelled firms to reduce their ecological footprint. At the same time, social sustainability—covering labor practices, safety, and community engagement—has gained prominence as stakeholders demand ethical and transparent supply chains. Economic sustainability, encompassing cost efficiency, profitability, and resilience, remains

a foundational concern, especially in volatile global markets. Achieving balance across these three dimensions requires robust administrative systems that embed sustainability into everyday logistics operations.

Globally, firms that invest in advanced administrative systems such as Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), Transportation Management Systems (TMS), Warehouse Management Systems (WMS), and Sustainability Performance Measurement Systems (SPMS) report significant improvements in operational outcomes. These include reduced errors, faster processing times, enhanced compliance, and measurable reductions in emissions and waste. Studies by Vitale et al. (2025), and Al-Okaily et al. (2024) highlight that administrative systems act as both operational and strategic levers, enabling firms to institutionalize sustainability practices while maintaining efficiency. The Resource-Based View (RBV) positions these systems as valuable, rare, and inimitable resources that provide competitive advantage, while Institutional Theory emphasizes their role in helping firms respond to external pressures such as regulations and societal expectations.

In Southeast Asia, and particularly in the Philippines, logistics firms face unique challenges. Fragmented documentation, manual processes, and regulatory bottlenecks often hinder efficiency and sustainability performance. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which dominate the logistics landscape, may lack the resources to implement comprehensive digital systems. Yet, firms like BECA Logistics illustrate how administrative systems, even when constrained by resource limitations, can be leveraged to achieve sustainability outcomes. By adopting digital customs brokerage, eco-friendly warehousing, and compliance automation, such firms position themselves closer to global benchmarks and enhance their competitiveness in regional and international markets.

This literature review synthesizes theoretical perspectives, empirical evidence, and practical mechanisms to explore four interrelated hypotheses. First, **H1** posits that effective administrative systems positively influence sustainability performance in logistics operations. This hypothesis is grounded in evidence that robust MIS, standardized procedures, and governance structures enable accurate measurement, coordination, and accountability, translating sustainability goals into operational practices. Second, **H2** suggests that administrative systems exert a stronger impact on environmental sustainability outcomes compared to social and economic dimensions. This reflects the measurability of environmental indicators, the immediacy of administrative levers such as routing and resource allocation, and the strong regulatory pressures focused on ecological performance. Third, **H3** argues that firms with globally benchmarked administrative systems—characterized by digital integration, compliance automation, and standardized

workflows—achieve higher sustainability performance than firms relying on traditional/manual systems. This hypothesis highlights the transformative impact of digitalization and international benchmarking in elevating sustainability outcomes. Finally, **H4** proposes that the alignment of administrative systems with sustainability goals mediates the relationship between logistics efficiency and long-term competitiveness. This underscores the idea that efficiency alone is insufficient; only when embedded within sustainability frameworks do efficiency gains translate into durable competitive advantage.

The significance of these hypotheses lies in their ability to bridge global theory with local practice. While international literature provides extensive evidence of the role of administrative systems in sustainability, there remains a gap in contextualizing these findings within Southeast Asian logistics operations. Philippine firms, often resource-constrained yet strategically positioned in global supply chains, offer fertile ground for testing these propositions. By examining how administrative systems function as enablers of sustainability and competitiveness in this context, the review contributes to both academic discourse and practical strategy.

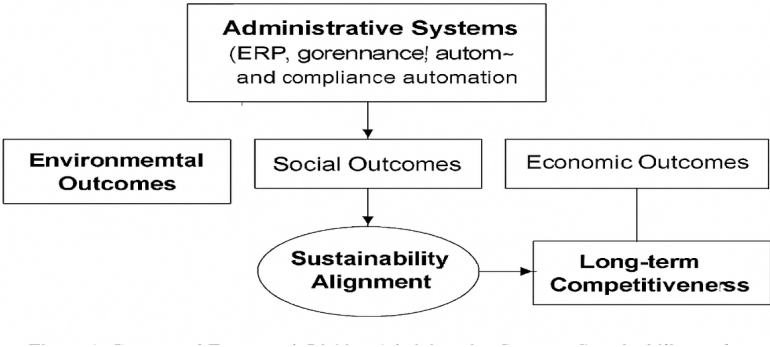
Moreover, the narrative approach adopted in this review allows for a holistic synthesis of diverse perspectives. Rather than cataloguing studies in isolation, the review weaves together theoretical rationales, empirical findings, and practical mechanisms into a coherent story. It highlights not only the positive associations between administrative systems and sustainability but also the contingencies, boundary conditions, and gaps that shape these relationships. For instance, technology readiness, top-management commitment, regulatory environments, and firm size all moderate the effectiveness of administrative systems. Similarly, while environmental outcomes are most directly influenced, deliberate design of triple-bottom-line KPIs can extend benefits to social and economic dimensions.

In conclusion, administrative systems are emerging as decisive levers for sustainability performance and competitiveness in logistics. Their effectiveness is amplified when digitally integrated, globally benchmarked, and strategically aligned with sustainability goals. The four hypotheses explored in this review provide a structured framework for understanding how administrative systems influence logistics operations across environmental, social, and economic dimensions. By situating these hypotheses within both global literature and the Philippine context, the review underscores the critical role of administrative systems in future-proofing logistics firms against regulatory, market, and societal pressures.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a narrative literature review methodology, which emphasizes synthesis, interpretation, and contextualization of existing research rather than exhaustive systematic searching. The narrative approach is particularly suited to logistics and sustainability research, where diverse theories, practices, and empirical findings intersect and require integration into a coherent framework.

Figure 1
Administrative framework of systems as strategic drivers of sustainability and competitiveness in logistics operations. Note. Adapted from Vitale et al. (2025).



PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The review was designed to explore the role of administrative systems in shaping sustainability performance and competitiveness in logistics operations. Four hypotheses guided the analysis:

SEARCH STRATEGY

Relevant literature was identified through academic databases such as **Scopus, Web of Science, Emerald Insight, ScienceDirect, MDPI, and ResearchGate**. Keywords included *administrative systems, sustainability performance, logistics efficiency, green logistics, Industry 4.0, ERP, compliance automation, and benchmarking*. Both global and Southeast Asian contexts were considered to ensure breadth and relevance.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Studies were included if they: (1) Addressed administrative systems in logistics or supply chain management. (2) Examined sustainability outcomes (environmental, social, economic). (3) Provided theoretical or empirical insights relevant to the hypotheses. (4) Were published between 2020 and 2025 to capture contemporary developments in digitalization and sustainability.

EXTRACTION AND ORGANIZATION

Selected studies were annotated and categorized by themes: (1) **Theoretical perspectives** (RBV, Institutional Theory, Dynamic Capabilities). (2) **Empirical evidence** (case studies, systematic reviews, industry analyses). (3) **Mechanisms of impact** (measurement systems, compliance automation, digital integration). (4) **Boundary conditions** (firm size, regulatory environment, technology readiness).

SYNTHESIS APPROACH

The narrative synthesis involved weaving together theoretical rationales, empirical findings, and practical mechanisms into a coherent discussion. Rather than listing studies individually, the review integrated insights to highlight convergences, contradictions, and gaps. This approach allowed the development of a conceptual framework linking administrative systems, sustainability outcomes, and competitiveness.

LIMITATIONS

As a narrative review, the methodology does not claim exhaustive coverage of all studies. Instead, it prioritizes interpretive depth and contextual relevance. Potential biases include selective emphasis on recent literature and limited availability of empirical studies in Southeast Asian logistics contexts.

This methodology positions the review as an interpretive synthesis that integrates global benchmarks with local realities. By focusing on narrative flow, thematic organization, and hypothesis-driven analysis, the study provides a structured yet flexible framework for understanding how administrative systems enable sustainability and competitiveness in logistics.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Resources Underpinning the Review

Theoretical Resources

Several theoretical frameworks provide the intellectual foundation for understanding the relationship between administrative systems, sustainability performance, and competitiveness in logistics:

Resource-Based View (RBV): Positions administrative systems as strategic resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. Effective systems—such as ERP, compliance automation, and sustainability performance measurement systems—enable firms to embed sustainability into operations, creating competitive advantage (Vitale et al., 2025).

Institutional Theory: Highlights the role of external pressures—regulatory mandates, customer expectations, and societal norms—in shaping administrative responses. Firms with robust administrative systems are better equipped to meet sustainability demands and enhance legitimacy (Stupak et al, 2021; Wang, 2013).

Dynamic Capabilities Theory: Suggests that firms must continuously adapt administrative systems to reconfigure resources and processes in response to changing sustainability challenges. This theory explains how alignment with sustainability goals mediates efficiency and competitiveness (Al-Okaily et al., 2024).

Socio-Technical Systems Theory: Emphasizes the integration of technical efficiency measures (e.g., route optimization, automation) with social and managerial controls (KPIs, training, supplier contracts). This coupling ensures that efficiency gains are sustainable and socially responsible.

Empirical Resources

Empirical studies across logistics and supply chain management provide evidence supporting the hypotheses:

Systematic Reviews: Arekrans et al. (2025) demonstrate that planning, control, and management systems—especially when combined with digital enablers—reduce emissions and improve resource efficiency.

Performance Measurement Systems: Vitale et al. (2025) shows that sustainability performance measurement systems (SPMS) enhance transparency and accountability, leading to measurable sustainability improvements.

Industry 4.0 Studies: Al-Okaily et al. (2024) highlight that integration of digital platforms (cloud/MIS) and formal management practices improves environmental and operational performance when governance supports adoption.

Green Logistics Practices: Ebinbritto and Subburaj (2025) reports that

green logistics practices, operationalized through administrative systems, positively affect sustainability performance, mediated by green innovation and organizational practices.

Regional Evidence: Studies in Southeast Asia show that firms adopting eco-friendly warehousing and digital customs brokerage achieve measurable sustainability gains, though resource constraints remain a challenge for SMEs (IJSRM, 2024).

Practical Resources

Practical mechanisms observed in logistics operations include: (1) **Measurement and Targeting:** SPMS track fuel and emissions, enabling routing and vehicle utilization improvements. (2) **Coordination and Scheduling:** Shared MIS reduce duplicated trips and empty miles. (3) **Governance and Incentives:** Procurement rules requiring environmental criteria lead to greener carrier selection. (4) **Training and SOPs:** Formalized procedures for packing, reverse logistics, and hazardous material handling lower waste and non-compliance incidents.

Table 1
Summary of hypotheses and supporting evidence

Hypothesis	Proposition	Supporting Evidence	Key Sources
H1	Effective administrative systems enhance sustainability performance	ERP, MIS, compliance automation improve measurement, coordination, accountability	Vitale et al. (2025)
H2	Environmental outcomes more directly influenced than social/economic	Measurability, regulatory pressure, operational linkage	Saeed & Kersten (2020)
H3	Globally benchmarked, digitally integrated systems outperform manual	ERP, TMS, WMS, IoT integration; ISO 14001 benchmarking	Al-Okaily et al. (2024)
H4	Alignment mediates efficiency → competitiveness	Sustainability KPIs transform efficiency into durable advantage	Saman et al. (2025); Roy & Mohanty (2024)

Administrative Systems as Strategic Enablers (H1)

The literature consistently supports the hypothesis that effective administrative

systems positively influence sustainability performance. Administrative systems provide the backbone for embedding sustainability into logistics operations by enabling measurement, coordination, and accountability. Firms with robust MIS and governance structures can monitor emissions, optimize resource use, and ensure compliance with environmental regulations.

For example, ERP systems integrate data across logistics functions, allowing managers to identify inefficiencies and implement targeted sustainability actions. Compliance automation reduces human error and ensures adherence to environmental standards. SPMS translate abstract sustainability goals into measurable KPIs, fostering continuous improvement.

The evidence suggests that administrative systems influence all three dimensions of sustainability—environmental, social, and economic. However, the strength of the impact varies, with environmental outcomes being most directly affected.

Stronger Environmental Impact (H2)

Administrative systems exert a stronger influence on environmental sustainability outcomes compared to social and economic dimensions. This is due to three factors:

Measurability: Environmental indicators such as fuel consumption, emissions, and waste are easily quantifiable and can be integrated into administrative dashboards.

Regulatory Pressure: Governments and international organizations impose stricter environmental regulations, compelling firms to prioritize ecological performance.

Direct Operational Linkage: Administrative controls such as routing rules, load consolidation, and procurement specifications have immediate effects on resource use and emissions.

In contrast, social outcomes (e.g., labor conditions, community engagement) depend more on organizational culture and stakeholder relations, while economic outcomes are influenced by broader market dynamics. Nonetheless, deliberate design of triple-bottom-line KPIs can extend administrative influence to social and economic dimensions.

Digital Integration and Benchmarking (H3)

Globally benchmarked administrative systems—characterized by digital integration, compliance automation, and standardized workflows—outperform traditional/manual systems in sustainability performance. Digital technologies such as ERP, TMS, WMS, IoT, and AI enable precise data collection, real-time

monitoring, and predictive analytics. These capabilities reduce fuel consumption, optimize inventory management, and enhance compliance reporting.

Benchmarking adds value by aligning administrative systems with international standards (ISO 14001, GRI reporting frameworks). This ensures process discipline, comparability of KPIs, and credibility in sustainability reporting. Firms adopting globally benchmarked systems achieve stronger environmental, social, and economic outcomes, though implementation quality and resource availability remain critical.

In the Philippine context, firms like BECA Logistics are transitioning from manual to digital systems. By adopting digital customs brokerage and eco-friendly warehousing, they position themselves closer to global benchmarks, enhancing sustainability performance and competitiveness.

Alignment as Mediator of Efficiency and Competitiveness (H4)

Logistics efficiency—measured by on-time delivery, asset utilization, and cost per unit—does not automatically translate into long-term competitiveness. Without sustainability alignment, efficiency gains may be undermined by regulatory penalties, reputational risks, or stakeholder dissatisfaction.

Administrative alignment with sustainability goals mediates this relationship by embedding environmental, social, and economic considerations into efficiency processes. For example, route optimization reduces emissions as well as costs, while eco-friendly procurement enhances both compliance and brand reputation. Alignment ensures that efficiency gains are institutionalized, resilient, and strategically valuable.

The literature suggests that aligned administrative systems enable firms to attract green financing, build customer loyalty, and anticipate regulatory changes. This transforms operational efficiency into durable competitive advantage.

Boundary Conditions and Gaps

The effectiveness of administrative systems is moderated by several factors:

Technology Readiness: Digital platforms amplify administrative reach, but firms lacking technological infrastructure may struggle to implement advanced systems.

Top-Management Commitment: Leadership support is essential for embedding sustainability into administrative systems.

Regulatory Environment: Firms in regulated markets show stronger administrative responses, while those in less regulated contexts may lag.

Firm Size and Resources: SMEs face resource constraints but can benefit from tailored, lean administrative systems.

Gaps in the literature include the need for causal studies, granular analysis of administrative components, and exploration of SME-focused solutions. Research in Southeast Asia remains limited, underscoring the importance of contextual studies in the Philippine logistics sector.

CONCLUSION

The resources and discussion presented in this review highlight the critical role of administrative systems in shaping sustainability performance and competitiveness in logistics operations. Effective administrative systems act as strategic enablers, embedding sustainability into daily practices and aligning efficiency with long-term competitiveness.

The evidence supports four key propositions: (1) Administrative systems enhance sustainability performance (H1). (2) They exert stronger impacts on environmental outcomes due to measurability and regulation (H2). (3) Globally benchmarked, digitally integrated systems outperform manual systems (H3). (4) Alignment with sustainability goals mediates the efficiency–competitiveness relationship (H4).

For firms like BECA Logistics, strengthening administrative systems offers a pathway to align with global benchmarks, enhance sustainability performance, and secure long-term competitiveness. Future research should focus on causal evidence, SME contexts, and regional studies to deepen understanding and inform tailored strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Administrative systems are proven to be strategic enablers of sustainability in logistics operations. The literature consistently shows that when firms adopt robust systems—such as ERP, MIS, compliance automation, and sustainability performance measurement frameworks—they achieve measurable improvements in environmental, social, and economic outcomes. Among these, environmental performance benefits are the most immediate and quantifiable, driven by regulatory pressures and the ease of integrating ecological indicators into administrative dashboards.

Globally benchmarked and digitally integrated administrative systems outperform traditional/manual systems in advancing sustainability and competitiveness. Alignment of these systems with sustainability goals ensures that efficiency gains are not short-lived but institutionalized into long-term

competitive advantage. This mediation effect highlights that efficiency alone is insufficient; only when embedded within sustainability frameworks do logistics firms secure resilience, reputation, and stakeholder trust.

SME-Centered Administrative Innovation Future discussions should explore how small and medium-sized logistics firms, particularly in Southeast Asia, can adopt lean, cost-effective administrative systems tailored to their resource constraints. This includes examining scalable digital solutions, cloud-based platforms, and modular sustainability performance measurement systems that can deliver measurable gains without requiring large capital investments.

Causal and Longitudinal Evidence Further research should focus on establishing causal relationships between administrative reforms and sustainability outcomes. Longitudinal studies and quasi-experimental designs can provide deeper insights into how administrative alignment evolves over time and how it mediates efficiency and competitiveness across different regulatory and market contexts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the **Polytechnic University of the Philippines – Graduate School of Business** for providing academic guidance, methodological insights, and research support throughout the preparation of this study. The institution's emphasis on academic rigor and sustainability-focused scholarship greatly influenced the framing of our hypotheses and the overall direction of this review.

We also acknowledge the valuable operational perspectives and industry-specific knowledge contributed by **BECA Logistics, Arthaland Corporation, Insight Direct Philippines, LLC, and RCBC Realty Corp.** Their willingness to share practical experiences in logistics operations, administrative systems, and sustainability practices enriched the contextual analysis and ensured that the study bridged theoretical frameworks with real-world applications.

Special thanks are extended to colleagues and mentors who offered constructive feedback during manuscript development. Their comments helped refine the arguments, strengthen the methodological approach, and improve the clarity of presentation.

Finally, the authors are deeply grateful to their families for their encouragement, patience, and unwavering support. Their understanding made it possible to dedicate the time and focus required to complete this research, and their inspiration continues to motivate our pursuit of knowledge and professional excellence.

Juvelyn C. Clenuar (Corresponding Author) – Conceptualization, literature review design, synthesis of theoretical and empirical resources, drafting of the manuscript, and overall editorial coordination.

Roland B. Aquino – Provided industry insights from engineering and corporate logistics operations, contributed to the discussion on sustainability alignment, and assisted in refining the practical implications.

Michaela A. Calbitaza – Conducted database searches, organized empirical evidence, and contributed to the methodology and data extraction sections.

Roel S. De Sotto – Supported the analysis of administrative systems in real estate and logistics contexts, contributed to the recommendations, and assisted in manuscript review.

Conflict of Interest Statement The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Funding Statement This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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