

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP AND SUSTAINABLE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

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Received : 15 November 2025

Revised : 01 December 2025

Accepted : 20 December 2025

Published : 05 January 2026

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.54443/ihert.v7i1.502>

LinkPublish : <https://proceeding.unefaconference.org/index.php/IHERT>

Abstract

Sustainable leadership has gained increasing attention as organizations seek to balance economic performance with social and environmental responsibilities. This study examines the relationship between sustainable leadership and sustainable human resource management (HRM) practices. Drawing on the sustainability and leadership literature, this research investigates how leaders who emphasize long-term value creation, ethical behavior, and stakeholder engagement influence the adoption of sustainable HRM practices, including employee development, well-being, fairness, and environmental responsibility. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from employees across various organizations and analyzed using statistical techniques to test the proposed relationships. The findings indicate that sustainable leadership has a significant and positive effect on sustainable HRM practices. Leaders who demonstrate sustainability-oriented values and behaviors are more likely to foster HRM practices that support employee sustainability and organizational resilience. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on sustainability by highlighting the critical role of leadership in promoting sustainable HRM practices. Practically, the results suggest that organizations should develop sustainable leadership competencies to strengthen their human resource strategies and achieve long-term sustainability goals..

Keywords: *Human Resource Management (HRM), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Sustainability, Sustainable Human Resource Management, Sustainable Leadership.*

A. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, organizations have increasingly recognized the importance of sustainability in achieving long-term success. Sustainability is no longer limited to environmental concerns but also encompasses social and economic dimensions that ensure organizational resilience and competitiveness. As organizations face growing pressure from stakeholders, including employees, customers, governments, and society at large, the role of leadership in promoting sustainable practices has become a critical area of scholarly and practical interest. Sustainable leadership emphasizes long-term value creation by integrating ethical behavior, social responsibility, environmental awareness, and stakeholder engagement into leadership practices. Unlike traditional leadership approaches that often prioritize short-term financial outcomes, sustainable leadership focuses on balancing organizational performance with the well-being of employees and the broader society. Leaders who adopt a sustainability-oriented mindset are expected to influence organizational policies and practices in ways that support enduring organizational success. Human resource management (HRM) plays a vital role in translating leadership values into organizational practices. Sustainable human resource management (HRM) practices aim to promote employee well-being, continuous development, equality, and environmental responsibility while supporting organizational goals. Such practices include fair recruitment and selection, training and development, work-life balance initiatives, employee participation, and environmentally responsible HR policies. Sustainable HRM is considered a key mechanism through which organizations can achieve social sustainability and maintain a committed and productive workforce. Despite the growing interest in sustainable leadership and sustainable HRM, empirical research examining the relationship between these two concepts remains limited. Previous studies have often investigated

leadership and HRM practices separately, leaving a gap in understanding how sustainable leadership directly influences the implementation of sustainable HRM practices within organizations. Addressing this gap is essential to provide both theoretical and practical insights into how leadership can drive sustainability through human resource strategies. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between sustainable leadership and sustainable human resource management practices. By analyzing this relationship, the study seeks to contribute to the sustainability and leadership literature and to offer practical implications for organizations aiming to enhance their sustainable performance through effective leadership and HRM practices.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Sustainable Leadership

Sustainable leadership has emerged as a leadership approach that emphasizes long-term organizational success while considering economic, social, and environmental responsibilities. Avery and Bergsteiner (2011) define sustainable leadership as leadership that creates enduring value for organizations by balancing profitability with ethical behavior, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship. Unlike traditional leadership models that often prioritize short-term performance, sustainable leadership focuses on long-term value creation and stakeholder well-being. According to Hargreaves and Fink (2006), sustainable leadership preserves and develops human and social resources, avoids harm to the environment, and ensures continuity across generations. Sustainable leaders are characterized by their commitment to ethical decision-making, employee development, inclusiveness, and stakeholder engagement (Suriyankietkaew & Avery, 2016). These leaders foster organizational cultures that support learning, trust, and shared responsibility, which are essential for sustainability. Previous studies suggest that leadership plays a crucial role in shaping organizational strategies and practices related to sustainability (Metcalf & Benn, 2013). Leaders who demonstrate sustainability-oriented values can influence organizational policies and motivate employees to adopt sustainable behaviors. As a result, sustainable leadership is considered a key driver of sustainability-oriented management practices within organizations.

Sustainable Human Resource Management Practices

Sustainable human resource management (HRM) refers to HR policies and practices that support organizational performance while ensuring the long-term well-being of employees and society (Ehnert, 2009). Sustainable HRM goes beyond traditional HRM by integrating social and environmental considerations into human resource practices. This approach emphasizes the efficient and responsible use of human resources to achieve organizational sustainability. According to Ehnert, Parsa, Roper, Wagner, and Muller-Camen (2016), sustainable HRM practices include employee development, work-life balance, health and safety, equal opportunities, employee participation, and environmentally responsible HR policies. These practices aim to maintain and enhance human capital while minimizing negative social and environmental impacts. Sustainable HRM is also associated with higher employee commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational performance (Kramar, 2014). Moreover, sustainable HRM is viewed as a strategic tool that enables organizations to respond to sustainability challenges and stakeholder expectations (Jackson, Schuler, & Jiang, 2014). By investing in employees' long-term development and well-being, organizations can build a resilient and adaptable workforce capable of supporting sustainable organizational goals.

Relationship Between Sustainable Leadership and Sustainable HRM Practices

Leadership is widely recognized as a critical factor influencing the design and implementation of HRM practices. Sustainable leadership, in particular, is expected to promote sustainable HRM practices by embedding sustainability values into organizational decision-making processes. Leaders who prioritize long-term outcomes and stakeholder interests are more likely to support HR practices that enhance employee well-being and social responsibility (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). Empirical studies indicate that leadership styles aligned with sustainability positively influence HRM outcomes. For example, Suriyankietkaew and Avery (2016) found that sustainable leadership is positively associated with employee satisfaction and organizational performance, suggesting its potential impact on HRM practices. Similarly, Metcalf and Benn (2013) argue that leaders play a mediating role in translating sustainability strategies into operational and HR-related practices. Despite these insights, research directly examining the relationship between sustainable leadership and sustainable HRM practices remains limited. Most studies focus on either leadership or HRM in isolation, highlighting the need for empirical research that integrates both perspectives. Therefore, investigating this relationship can provide a deeper understanding of how leadership contributes to the successful implementation of sustainable HRM practices and overall organizational sustainability.

C. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the relationship between sustainable leadership and sustainable human resource management (HRM) practices. A qualitative design was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of how sustainability-oriented leadership influences HRM practices within organizations. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with selected managers and employees who were directly involved in leadership and HRM activities. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling to ensure they had relevant knowledge and experience related to sustainable leadership and HRM practices. The interviews focused on leadership behaviors, sustainability values, and the implementation of HRM practices that support long-term organizational sustainability.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative findings indicate that sustainable leadership plays a significant role in shaping sustainable human resource management (HRM) practices within organizations. Based on the thematic analysis, several key themes emerged from the interview data. First, participants highlighted that leaders who demonstrate a strong long-term orientation and ethical values tend to prioritize employee well-being and development. Such leaders actively support training programs, fair treatment, and work–life balance initiatives as part of their HRM strategies. Second, the results reveal that sustainable leaders encourage employee participation and open communication. Respondents noted that leadership practices emphasizing inclusiveness and stakeholder engagement foster a supportive work environment, which facilitates the implementation of sustainable HRM practices. Employees felt more motivated and committed when leaders showed concern for social and environmental responsibilities.

Third, the findings show that environmental awareness promoted by leaders influences HRM practices related to environmental sustainability. Leaders who integrate environmental considerations into decision-making tend to support green HR initiatives, such as reducing paper usage, promoting digital HR processes, and encouraging environmentally responsible behavior among employees. The results of this study support existing literature that emphasizes the importance of leadership in driving sustainability-oriented organizational practices. Consistent with Avery and Bergsteiner (2011) and Hargreaves and Fink (2006), the findings suggest that sustainable leadership contributes to long-term organizational success by fostering HRM practices that support employee development, fairness, and well-being. The emphasis on ethical behavior and long-term value creation observed in this study aligns with the core principles of sustainable leadership. Furthermore, the findings reinforce the argument by Ehnert (2009) and Kramar (2014) that sustainable HRM practices are strongly influenced by managerial values and leadership commitment. The evidence from this study shows that leaders act as key agents in translating sustainability values into concrete HRM practices. By promoting participation, learning, and environmental responsibility, sustainable leaders create an organizational climate that supports sustainable HRM. This study also extends previous research by providing qualitative insights into how sustainable leadership influences HRM practices in practice. While earlier studies have often relied on quantitative approaches, the qualitative findings of this research offer a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which leadership shapes sustainable HRM. Practically, the results suggest that organizations seeking to enhance sustainable HRM should invest in developing leadership capabilities that emphasize sustainability, ethics, and stakeholder engagement.

E. CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between sustainable leadership and sustainable human resource management (HRM) practices using a qualitative approach. The findings indicate that sustainable leadership plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable HRM practices by emphasizing long-term orientation, ethical values, employee well-being, and stakeholder engagement. Leaders who demonstrate sustainability oriented behaviors are able to create supportive work environments that encourage employee development, participation, and environmentally responsible practices. The study contributes to the sustainability and HRM literature by providing qualitative evidence on how leadership values and behaviors influence the implementation of sustainable HRM practices. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that organizations should focus on developing sustainable leadership competencies to strengthen their HRM practices and achieve long-term organizational sustainability. Future research is encouraged to expand this study by using different research methods, larger samples, or diverse organizational contexts to further explore the role of leadership in sustainable human resource management.

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