ISSN 3164-1709
https://doi.org/10.61401/kmrj.v1i4.782

Volume 1 Number 4, 2026
Krakatoa Management Research Journal

Sustainable Human Resource Management Practices and Their Contribution to Corporate Social Responsibility

Akaliduwa Akpevwe Miracle[1*], Agare Oghenerume[2], Oghenochuko Richard Ohwona[3]
Southern Delta University, Ozoro, Nigeria[1,2,3]
akaliduwama@sdu.edu.ng[1*], agareo@sdu.edu.ng[2], ohwonao@sdu.edu.ng[3]

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 24 September 2026;
Revised: 7 October 2026;
Revised: 19 October 2026;
Accepted: 6 November 2026;
Volume 1, Number 4
2026, pp 227-244
https://doi.org/10.61401/kmrj.v1i4.782

Corresponding author:
Akaliduwa Akpevwe Miracle
Southern Delta University, Ozoro, Nigeria
E-mail: akaliduwama@sdu.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This article examines how and under what conditions sustainable Human Resource Management (HRM) practices contribute to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), given that the HRM and CSR literatures have largely developed in parallel.
Methodology: An integrative literature review synthesizes research on sustainable, socially responsible, green, and common-good HRM, CSR, and micro-CSR, drawing on stakeholder theory, the resource-based view, social identity and signaling, organizational justice, paradox theory, and institutional theory.
Results: Sustainable HRM contributes to CSR through two pathways. It constitutes internal CSR by protecting employee well-being, developing employability, and ensuring fair, inclusive, and voice-based employment. It also enables external CSR by shaping employee perceptions of CSR authenticity, identification, justice, and green climate, and by building organizational CSR capability, legitimacy, and employer attractiveness.
Conclusions: These contributions are strongest when HR is integrated into sustainability governance and supported by top management, while mandatory social reporting can drive both substantive change and symbolic decoupling.
Limitations: The review relies on purposive source selection, and its framework and maturity model remain conceptual and untested.
Contributions: The article offers a comparative typology of HRM approaches, an integrative framework with eight propositions, a maturity model, reporting indicators aligned with international standards, and a research agenda for scholars and practitioners.

Keywords: *Corporate Social Responsibility, Employee Well-Being, Green HRM, Stakeholder Theory, Sustainable HRM*

How to Cite: Miracle, A. A., Oghenerume, A., & Ohwona, O. R. (2026). Sustainable Human Resource Management Practices and Their Contribution to Corporate Social Responsibility. *Krakatoa Management Research Journal*, 1(4), 227-244.

1. Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is no longer a philanthropic extra that companies add once the real business is done. Investors, regulators, customers, and employees now judge organizations

by their social and environmental performance as well as by their financial results (Aguinis, & Glavas, 2012; Bansal, & Song, 2017). Carroll (2021), looking back on seven decades of CSR thinking, describes a field that has moved from the margins of management to its center. Human development and decent work sit at the heart of the global sustainability agenda, and sustainable HRM has been identified as a practical route through which firms can contribute to these goals (Chams & García-Blandón, 2019). In Europe, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive now requires large companies to disclose information about their own workforce under a double materiality principle (Baumüller & Sopp, 2022). As a result, the way organizations manage people has become a visible test of their social responsibility.

Human Resource Management (HRM) matters to CSR for two reasons. Employees are a primary stakeholder group, so the way they are recruited, paid, developed, protected, and given voice is itself part of CSR (Shen, & Zhu, 2011; Voegtlin, & Greenwood, 2016). CSR strategies are also carried out by employees. Environmental targets, community programs, and ethical standards all depend on employee knowledge, motivation, and behavior, which HRM shapes (Jamali, & Harwood, 2015; Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013). Yet the HRM and CSR literatures have grown largely side by side. CSR research has often treated employees as one stakeholder among many, while mainstream strategic HRM has concentrated on how HR practices improve firm performance (Aguinis, Rupp, & Glavas, 2024).

Sustainable HRM has emerged as a bridge between these literatures. It extends strategic HRM by stressing the long-term regeneration of human, social, and ecological resources, by recognizing multiple stakeholders, and by accepting that efficiency and responsibility are often in tension (Kramar, 2022). Related streams examine socially responsible HRM, green HRM, and common-good HRM (Shen and Zhu, 2011; Aust, Matthews, & Muller-Camen, 2020; Ren, Tang, & Jackson, 2018; Renwick et al., 2013). Reviews have documented the rapid growth of this field (Macke, & Genari, 2019; Piwowar-Sulej, 2021), and bibliometric work has begun to map how the green, sustainable, and socially responsible strands relate to one another (Murillo-Ramos, Huertas-Valdivia, & García-Muiña, 2023). Even so, there is still limited integration of how and when sustainable HRM practices actually improve CSR performance.

This article addresses that gap through an integrative review (Cronin, & George, 2023; Snyder, 2019). It seeks to clarify the conceptual relationship between sustainable HRM and CSR, to synthesize theoretical and empirical insights on the mechanisms that link them, to develop an integrative framework with research propositions, and to derive implications for measurement, research, and practice.

The article makes three contributions. It distinguishes two pathways through which sustainable HRM contributes to CSR, namely as internal CSR toward employees and as an enabler of external social and environmental CSR, and it specifies employee-level and organization-level mechanisms for each. It brings paradox and institutional perspectives together to explain why the contribution of HRM to CSR is often weaker than expected, including the risk of symbolic decoupling under reporting pressure. It also offers practical tools in the form of a maturity model of HRM contribution to CSR and a set of indicators aligned with international reporting standards.

2. Literature Review

2.1 From Strategic to Sustainable HRM

Strategic HRM treats HR practices as a means to reach organizational goals, especially financial performance. It has produced a large body of evidence linking HR systems to performance outcomes, but critics argue that it neglects employee interests and the long-term consequences of HRM for people and society (Beer et al., 2015; Pfeffer, 2010). Pfeffer (2010) observed that organizations pay far more attention to their environmental footprint than to their effect on the health and well-being of their own workforce, even though the human side of sustainability is just as important. Employee-centered critiques go further. Richards (2022) argues that sustainable HRM has largely remained an employer-driven project aimed at raising productivity, and Van Buren

(2022) calls for a pluralist view that treats employees as parties with legitimate interests of their own rather than as resources to be optimized.

Table 1. Comparison of HRM approaches relevant to CSR

Approach	Primary goal	Main stakeholders	Time horizon	Typical emphasis
Strategic HRM	Firm performance and competitive advantage	Shareholders, management	Short to medium term	Huselid-type HR-performance logic; employees as means
Socially responsible HRM	Employees' rights and support for CSR	Employees, wider society	Medium term	Legal compliance, employee-oriented and CSR-facilitating HRM
Green HRM	Environmental performance	Environment, regulators	Medium to long term	Green recruitment, training, appraisal and rewards
Sustainable HRM	Long-term regeneration of human, social and ecological resources while achieving business goals	Multiple stakeholders	Long term	Paradox of efficiency vs substance; well-being and employability
Common-good HRM	Contribution to grand societal challenges beyond the organization	Society and planet	Very long term	HRM as a societal actor; systemic responsibility

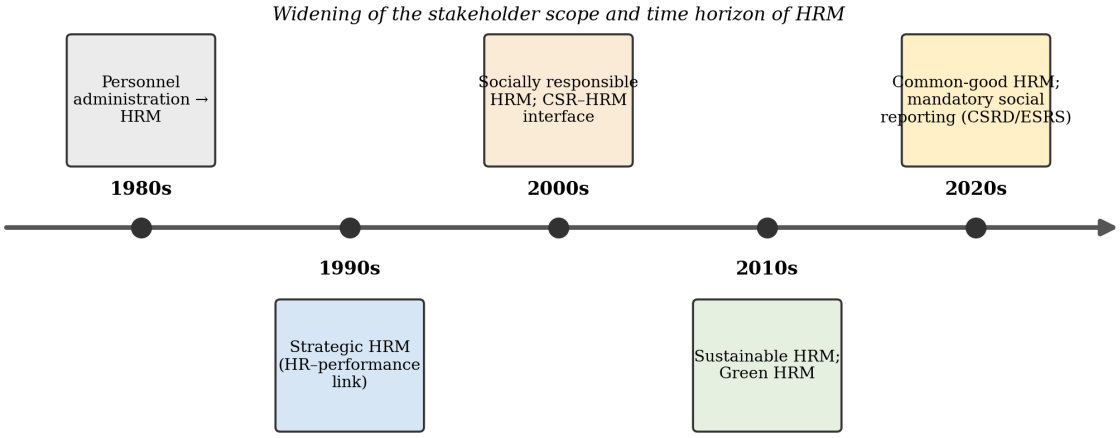


Figure 1. Evolution of HRM approaches toward sustainability and social responsibility.

Sustainable HRM responds to these critiques. In its widely used formulation, it refers to HR strategies and practices that help an organization reach its goals while reproducing its human resource base over a long period (Kramar, 2014). Kramar (2014) argued that sustainable HRM differs from strategic HRM because it acknowledges outcomes beyond the financial, adopts a

longer time frame, and recognizes multiple stakeholders. Kramar (2022) later identified six defining characteristics of the approach, including its broad organizational goals and its explicit link to sustainable development. The Respect, Openness, Continuity model, developed by De Prins and colleagues, highlights respect for employees, openness to the wider environment, and continuity of employability, and has since been applied to show that sustainable HR practices and a cooperative industrial relations climate reduce employee harm (De Prins et al., 2020). Aust et al. (2020) went a step further and called for common-good HRM, in which HRM contributes to grand societal challenges that lie beyond the boundaries of the organization. Table 1 compares these approaches, and Figure 1 shows how they have evolved over time.

2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility

CSR refers to context-specific organizational actions and policies that take account of stakeholder expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Carroll pyramid distinguishes economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities, a framework that continues to anchor much of the field (Carroll, 2021). Stakeholder theory adds that organizations should create value for all groups affected by their activities, not just for shareholders (Freeman, Dmytriyev, & Phillips, 2021). Bansal and Song (2017) separated corporate responsibility, rooted in ethics and the normative obligations of firms, from corporate sustainability, rooted in systems thinking about the carrying capacity of natural and social systems. Both views matter for HRM. The first stresses fair treatment and rights, while the second stresses the long-term regeneration of resources.

A useful distinction can be made between internal CSR, directed at employees, and external CSR, directed at communities, the environment, and other outside stakeholders. Micro-level CSR research shows that employees perceive and respond to both forms and that their responses shape attitudes and behavior (Gond, Swaen, & Babu, 2017; Rupp, Ganapathi, Aguilera, & Williams, 2006). Recent integrative work has called for psychological and sociological approaches to micro-CSR to be brought together, and meta-analytic evidence confirms that perceived CSR is related to commitment, job satisfaction, and citizenship behavior, with organizational identification as a key mediator (Gond et al., 2017; Paruzel, Klug, & Maier, 2021).

2.3 Sustainable HRM Practices

Building on the literature, five bundles of sustainable HRM practices can be distinguished. Well-being, health, and decent-work practices protect employees from harm and promote physical and psychological health (Guest, 2017). Development and employability practices invest in skills that keep their value inside and outside the organization (De Prins et al., 2020). Fairness, diversity, and voice practices ensure equitable pay, inclusion, and participation. Green HRM practices recruit, train, appraise, and reward employees for environmental performance (Jackson et al., 2011; Renwick et al., 2013). Stakeholder and community engagement practices extend HRM responsibility to future workers, local communities, and workers in the supply chain (Stahl et al., 2020). Together, these bundles put into practice the multi-stakeholder and long-term orientation of sustainable HRM.

Each bundle links HRM to specific CSR responsibilities. Well-being and decent-work practices include occupational health and safety systems, manageable workloads, flexible working arrangements, and support for mental health. They fulfill the legal and ethical responsibilities of employers toward their workforce and are increasingly treated as material topics in sustainability reporting (Baumüller & Sopp, 2022; Guest, 2017). Leadership also matters here. In the Indonesian public sector, inclusive leadership has been found to strengthen employee well-being and task performance in hybrid work settings by creating psychological safety (Hendrarso et al., 2025). Development and employability practices include continuous learning, career guidance, and support for internal and external mobility. They reflect the long-term orientation of sustainable HRM by preserving the value of human capital in the face of technological and structural change and by protecting employees' future labor market prospects (Kramar, 2014; Piwowar-Sulej, 2021).

Fairness, diversity, and voice practices include transparent and equitable pay systems, inclusive recruitment and promotion, and channels for employee participation and social dialogue. They address the ethical responsibilities of CSR and the procedural and distributive justice that shape how employees see their organization (Rupp et al., 2006). Inclusive and responsive HR strategies have also been linked to national human resource development goals in emerging economies such as Indonesia (Tahier et al., 2026). Green HRM practices build environmental objectives into recruitment, training, performance management, and rewards, and they encourage voluntary pro-environmental initiatives by employees (Renwick et al., 2013). Stakeholder and community engagement practices reach beyond the organization's boundaries through local hiring and apprenticeships, employee volunteering, partnerships with educational institutions, and attention to labor standards among suppliers (Stahl et al., 2020). These bundles depend on one another. Development practices support green competences, voice practices allow employees to help design CSR, and well-being practices sustain the energy employees bring to CSR initiatives.

2.4 Theoretical Lenses

Table 2. Theoretical lenses integrated in the framework

Theory	Core logic	Contribution to the framework	Key sources
Stakeholder theory	Organizations are accountable to all groups affected by their activities	Defines employees and society as legitimate beneficiaries of HRM (P_1, P_6)	Freeman et al. (2021); Beer et al. (2015)
Resource-based view / human capital	Valuable, hard-to-imitate human resources sustain advantage	Sustainable HRM regenerates the human-capital base on which CSR and performance depend (P_5)	Freeman et al. (2021); Pfeffer (2010)
Social identity and signaling	CSR signals values that attract and bind employees	CSR-oriented HRM raises identification and attractiveness (P_2, P_5)	Turban and Greening (1997); Shen and Benson (2016)
Organizational justice	Employees judge CSR by how they and others are treated	Fair HRM makes CSR credible internally (P_3)	Rupp et al. (2006)
Paradox theory	Competing demands (profit vs people vs planet) must be held in tension	Explains tensions and the need for integrative HRM (P_7)	Smith and Lewis (2011); Hahn et al. (2018)
Institutional theory	Regulation and norms shape organizational practices and disclosure	Reporting rules push HR data into CSR accountability; risk of decoupling (P_8)	Ehnert et al. (2016); Baumüller and Sopp (2022)

Six theoretical perspectives explain how sustainable HRM contributes to CSR, as summarized in Table 2. Stakeholder theory establishes that employees and society are legitimate beneficiaries of HRM and not merely a means to financial ends (Beer et al., 2015; Freeman et al., 2021). The resource-based view suggests that human capital is a source of sustained advantage when it is valuable and hard to imitate. Freeman et al. (2021) argue that the resource-based view becomes more complete when it takes on board the stakeholder view of people, cooperation, and sustainability. Sustainable HRM protects and renews this base, which makes CSR and performance mutually reinforcing over time (Pfeffer, 2010).

Social identity and signaling theories explain how CSR affects employees and job applicants. Organizations with strong social performance are more attractive to prospective employees, and employees identify more strongly with organizations whose values they share (Turban & Greening, 1997). Socially responsible HRM increases identification and positive work behavior (Shen & Benson, 2016). Organizational justice theory proposes that employees judge CSR by how they and others are treated, so internal fairness determines whether external CSR is seen as authentic (Rupp et al., 2006).

Paradox theory highlights that sustainable HRM involves persistent tensions, for instance between short-term efficiency and long-term regeneration or between shareholder and employee interests. These tensions cannot be resolved once and for all and must instead be managed over time (Hahn et al., 2018; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Institutional theory explains how regulations, reporting standards, and social norms push organizations to adopt and disclose responsible HR practices, while also opening the door to symbolic adoption without real change (Christensen et al., 2021; Ehnert et al., 2016).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Review Design

An integrative review was chosen because the topic spans several literatures with different concepts and methods, and because the aim was to develop a new integrated perspective rather than to pool effect sizes (Snyder, 2019; Torraco, 2016). Integrative reviews are well suited to mature but fragmented topics, where the main task is to connect ideas that have grown in separate communities and to generate new theory from that synthesis (Cronin & George, 2023).

3.2 Source Selection and Analysis

The review drew on peer-reviewed research in HRM, management, business ethics, and sustainability published in leading journals, including Human Resource Management Review, The International Journal of Human Resource Management, Human Resource Management, the Journal of Management, the Journal of Organizational Behavior, and the Journal of Business Ethics. Key regulatory and reporting developments were also considered. Sources were included if they conceptualized sustainable, socially responsible, green, or common-good HRM, examined relationships between HR practices and CSR or sustainability outcomes, or provided theories relevant to these relationships.

The material was coded by HRM approach, practice area, CSR dimension, mechanism, outcome, and boundary condition. The resulting themes were then integrated into the framework presented in Section 4. As with all integrative reviews, the selection involved judgment and does not claim exhaustive coverage. The propositions that follow are therefore offered for empirical testing rather than as settled conclusions. No new data were created or analyzed in this study.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Sustainable HRM as Internal CSR

The most direct contribution of sustainable HRM to CSR comes through the treatment of employees themselves. Shen and Zhu (2011) conceptualized socially responsible HRM as made up of legal-compliance HRM, employee-oriented HRM, and general CSR-facilitation HRM, and they found that these dimensions were related to employees' organizational commitment. Guest (2017) argued that HRM should put employee well-being at its center by investing in employees, providing engaging work, ensuring a positive social and physical environment, offering voice, and providing organizational support. From a CSR perspective, such practices fulfill the legal and ethical responsibilities owed to employees and form a large part of the social dimension of sustainability (Pfeffer, 2010; Carroll, 2021).

Internal CSR is also increasingly subject to accountability. Ehnert, Parsa, Roper, Wagner, and Muller-Camen (2016) analyzed the sustainability reports of the world's largest companies and found that HRM-related reporting was selective and varied widely across firms and regions. Workforce disclosure standards under the European reporting regime now make HR data part of formal CSR

accountability (Baumüller & Sopp, 2022). Research on mandatory CSR reporting more broadly suggests that such rules can change real behavior, but that their effects depend on enforcement and on how much discretion firms keep over what they disclose (Christensen, Hail, & Leuz, 2021). Building the literacy needed to read and use such disclosures is itself part of the agenda, and recent higher education initiatives in Indonesia show growing efforts to strengthen awareness of environmental, social, and governance issues among future managers (Ningtyas & Rumefi, 2026).

4.2 Sustainable HRM as an Enabler of External CSR

Sustainable HRM also enables CSR directed at the environment and society. Green HRM research shows that recruiting, training, appraising, and rewarding employees for environmental performance increases pro-environmental behavior and environmental performance (Ren, Tang, & Jackson, 2018; Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013). Dumont, Shen, and Deng (2017) found that green HRM was related to employees' in-role and extra-role green behavior through psychological green climate. Guerci, Longoni, and Luzzini (2016) showed that green HRM practices mediated the effect of stakeholder pressure on environmental performance. Later studies point the same way. Green HRM has been linked to green behavior through employee engagement and to green service behavior through knowledge sharing (Rubel, Kee, & Rimi, 2021; Ababneh, 2021). Ethical leadership has been found to strengthen the effect of green HRM on environmental performance, and in international organizations, green HRM and ethical leadership together support the implementation of sustainable human resources (Ernawati, Kadir, Badrian, Naimah, Jahra, & Wahdi, 2026; Ren et al., 2018). These findings show that HRM translates external CSR commitments into everyday behavior.

At the employee level, CSR is experienced through HR practices. Socially responsible HRM increases organizational identification, which in turn is associated with task performance and helping behavior (Shen & Benson, 2016). It has also been found to encourage organizational citizenship behavior toward the environment (Zhao, Zhou, He, & Jiang, 2021). CSR can raise engagement by allowing employees to bring more of their values to work, and micro-CSR research shows that employees' perceptions of CSR influence their attitudes and behavior through identification, justice, and meaningfulness (Aguinis, Rupp, & Glavas, 2024; Gond, Swaen, & Babu, 2017; Glavas, 2016). Employees are more likely to support external CSR initiatives when they see their own treatment as fair. Otherwise, external CSR may look hypocritical.

At the organizational level, HR functions play several roles in CSR. Jamali and Harwood (2015) described a CSR-HRM co-creation model in which HR acts as a partner in designing CSR strategies, embedding CSR values in culture, and evaluating CSR outcomes. Stahl, Brewster, Collings, and Hajro (2020) proposed a multi-stakeholder, multidimensional approach in which HRM contributes to corporate sustainability not only through internal practices but also through its influence on outside stakeholders such as communities and supply-chain workers. Voegtlin and Greenwood (2016) reviewed the CSR-HRM interface and identified a reciprocal relationship in which HRM implements CSR and CSR in turn shapes HRM. Employer attractiveness is a further benefit, since firms with stronger social performance attract more and better applicants (Turban & Greening, 1997). Figure 2 summarizes the stakeholders to whom sustainable HRM contributes through CSR, from employees and their families to communities, supply-chain workers, investors, and the natural environment.

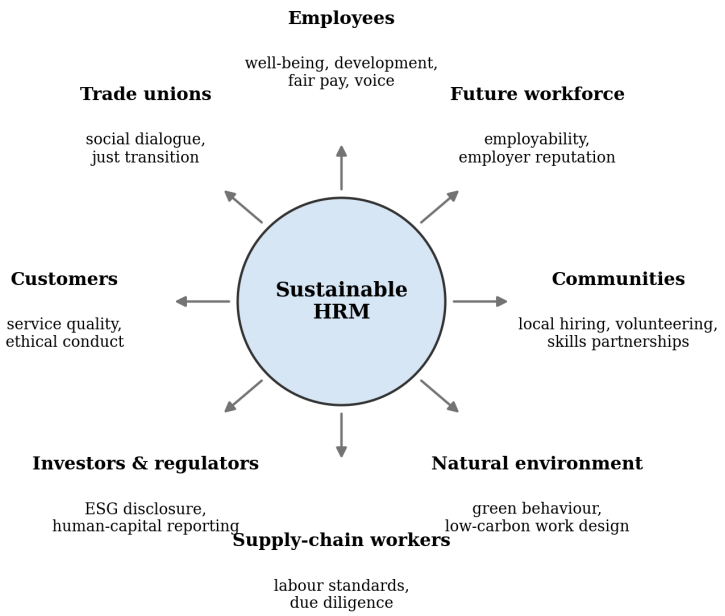


Figure 2. Stakeholders to whom sustainable HRM contributes through CSR.

4.3 Business Outcomes

The business case for CSR is supported by meta-analytic evidence of a positive association between corporate social and financial performance (Orlitzky et al., 2003). For HRM, this suggests that sustainable practices need not conflict with economic goals. By protecting and developing human capital and strengthening legitimacy, they contribute to the long-term viability of the organization (Kramar, 2014; Pfeffer, 2010). The relationship between CSR and financial performance does, however, vary across contexts. A purely instrumental justification also risks undermining the normative foundation of sustainable HRM (Aust et al., 2020; Hahn et al., 2018).

4.4 Tensions and Contradictions

The literature also documents real tensions. Podgorodnichenko et al. (2020) argued that HRM ability to contribute to sustainable organizations is limited by the dominance of short-term performance pressure and by HR weak strategic influence. Paradox research shows that tensions among economic, social, and environmental goals are persistent and call for integrative rather than trade-off thinking (Hahn et al., 2018; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Institutional pressure to report on human capital may also lead to symbolic compliance, in which organizations disclose policies without changing practice (Christensen et al., 2021). Table 3 summarizes selected empirical evidence on the HRM-CSR relationship, showing the design, main findings, and implication of each study.

Table 3. Selected empirical evidence on the HRM-CSR relationship

Study	Design	Main findings	Implication
Shen and Zhu (2011)	Survey of employees in Chinese firms	Socially responsible HRM (legal compliance, employee-oriented and CSR-facilitating HRM) related to employees' organizational commitment	HRM is a channel of internal CSR

Study	Design	Main findings	Implication
Shen and Benson (2016)	Multilevel survey	Socially responsible HRM related to task performance and extra-role helping through organizational identification	CSR-oriented HRM shapes employee behavior
Dumont et al. (2017)	Employee survey	Green HRM related to in-role and extra-role green behavior through psychological green climate; green values moderated extra-role effects	Green HRM enables environmental CSR
Guerci et al. (2016)	Survey of firms	Green HRM practices mediated the effect of stakeholder pressure on environmental performance	HRM translates external pressure into CSR outcomes
Turban and Greening (1997)	Applicant study	Firms with higher corporate social performance were rated as more attractive employers	CSR builds employer attractiveness
Orlitzky et al. (2003)	Meta-analysis	Corporate social performance was positively associated with financial performance	CSR need not conflict with profit
Ehnert et al. (2016)	Content analysis of sustainability reports of the world's largest companies	HRM-related sustainability reporting was selective and varied considerably across firms and regions	Accountability for internal CSR is uneven
Jamali et al. (2015)	Qualitative study	HRM and CSR co-create value; HR plays roles across CSR design, implementation and evaluation	HR as CSR partner and enabler

4.5 An Integrative Framework and Propositions

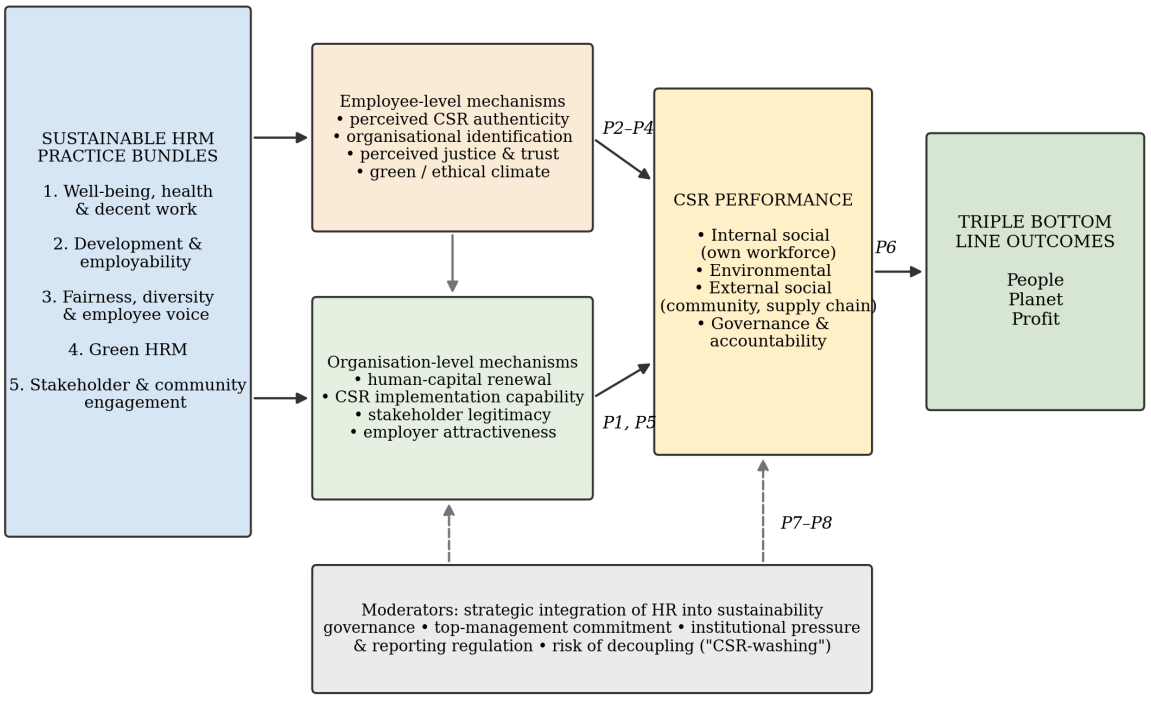


Figure 3. Integrative framework of the contribution of sustainable HRM practices to CSR.

Figure 3 brings these insights together. Five bundles of sustainable HRM practices influence CSR performance through employee-level mechanisms, namely perceived CSR authenticity, identification, justice, and climate, and through organization-level mechanisms, namely human-capital renewal, CSR implementation capability, legitimacy, and attractiveness. CSR performance spans internal social, environmental, external social, and governance dimensions and contributes to triple-bottom-line outcomes. Strategic integration, top-management commitment, and institutional pressure moderate these relationships.

4.5.1 Internal CSR Pathway

Practices that protect well-being, develop employability, and ensure fairness are not only antecedents of CSR but also constitute CSR toward employees (Guest, 2017; Shen & Zhu, 2011). Reporting standards increasingly treat these practices as indicators of social performance (Baumüller & Sopp, 2022).

P₁: Sustainable HRM practices that protect well-being, develop employability and ensure fair treatment constitute internal CSR and directly improve CSR performance toward the organization's own workforce

4.5.2 Employee-Level Mechanisms

When employees experience responsible treatment, they are more likely to see the organization's CSR as authentic rather than as window dressing, to identify with the organization, and to support its CSR initiatives (Gond et al., 2017; Paruzel et al., 2021; Shen & Benson, 2016). Justice perceptions provide a further mechanism, because employees who feel fairly treated reciprocate by engaging in CSR-related behavior (Rupp et al., 2006). Green HRM practices create a climate that supports pro-environmental behavior (Dumont et al., 2017).

P₂: Sustainable HRM practices increase employees' perceptions of CSR authenticity, which strengthen organizational identification and support for CSR

P₃: Perceived organizational justice mediates the effect of sustainable HRM on employees' engagement in external CSR initiatives

P₄: Green HRM practices foster a green climate that increases employees' pro-environmental behavior and the organization's environmental performance

4.5.3 Organization-Level Mechanisms

At the organizational level, sustainable HRM renews human capital, builds the competences needed to implement CSR, strengthens legitimacy, and attracts applicants who value responsibility (Jamali et al., 2015; Stahl et al., 2020; Turban & Greening, 1997). Through these mechanisms, CSR becomes embedded throughout the organization rather than sitting in a separate department.

P₅: Sustainable HRM builds organizational CSR capability and employer attractiveness, which enhance the implementation and credibility of CSR strategies

P₆: CSR performance generated through sustainable HRM contributes to triple-bottom-line outcomes, including long-term financial performance

4.5.4 Boundary Conditions

The contribution of sustainable HRM depends on HR position in the organization. When HR takes part in sustainability governance and top managers are committed, HR practices are aligned with CSR goals and receive the resources they need (Jamali et al., 2015; Podgorodnichenko et al., 2020). Leadership quality also shapes how far green and sustainable HR practices take hold (Ernawati et al., 2026; Ren et al., 2021). Regulatory reporting increases transparency and pressure for improvement but may also encourage symbolic disclosure (Christensen et al., 2021; Ehnert et al., 2016).

P₇: The contribution of sustainable HRM to CSR is stronger when HR is strategically integrated into sustainability governance and top management is committed to CSR

P₈: Mandatory human-capital and social reporting strengthens the link between sustainable HRM and CSR performance but increases the risk of symbolic decoupling when HR

systems are not substantively changed

Table 4. Summary of research propositions

No	Proposition
P_1	Sustainable HRM practices that protect well-being, develop employability and ensure fair treatment constitute internal CSR and directly improve CSR performance toward the own workforce.
P_2	Sustainable HRM practices increase employees' perceptions of CSR authenticity, which strengthens organizational identification and support for CSR.
P_3	Perceived organizational justice mediates the effect of sustainable HRM on employees' engagement in external CSR initiatives.
P_4	Green HRM practices foster a green climate that increases employees' pro-environmental behavior and the organization's environmental performance.
P_5	Sustainable HRM builds organizational CSR capability and employer attractiveness, which enhance the implementation and credibility of CSR strategies.
P_6	CSR performance generated through sustainable HRM contributes to triple-bottom-line outcomes, including financial performance in the long term.
P_7	The contribution of sustainable HRM to CSR is stronger when HR is strategically integrated into sustainability governance and top management is committed.
P_8	Mandatory human-capital and social reporting strengthens the link between sustainable HRM and CSR performance but increases the risk of symbolic decoupling when HR systems are not substantively changed.

Table 4 summarizes the eight propositions in line with the logic of Figure 3. P_1 reflects the internal CSR pathway, P_2 to P_4 capture the employee-level mechanisms, P_5 and P_6 cover the organization-level mechanisms, and P_7 and P_8 set out the boundary conditions. Together, they form a testable chain from HR practices to CSR performance.

4.6 A Maturity Perspective

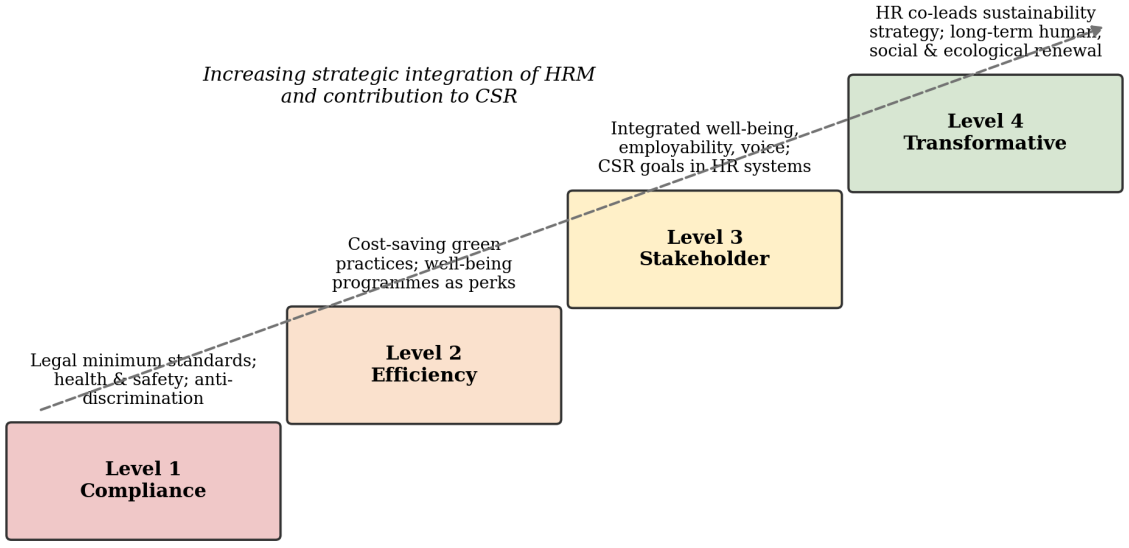


Figure 4. Maturity model of HRM's contribution to CSR.

The framework implies that organizations differ in how far HRM contributes to CSR. Figure 4 presents a four-level maturity model. At the compliance level, HRM ensures that legal minimum standards are met. At the efficiency level, organizations adopt sustainable practices mainly to save

costs or as employee perks. At the stakeholder level, well-being, employability, and voice are built into HR systems and linked to CSR goals. At the transformative level, HR co-leads sustainability strategy and contributes to long-term human, social, and ecological renewal, in line with common-good HRM (Aust et al., 2020). The model can be used to diagnose current practice and to plan the next steps of development.

4.7 Measurement and Reporting

Table 5. Indicators of sustainable HRM aligned with reporting frameworks

Dimension	Example indicators	Framework
Employment and turnover	New hires, turnover rate, parental leave	GRI 401; ESRS S1
Health, safety and well-being	Injury rates, work-related ill health, well-being programs and coverage	GRI 403; ESRS S1
Training and employability	Training hours per employee, skills programs, career reviews	GRI 404; ESRS S1
Diversity, equity and pay	Workforce and board diversity, gender pay gap, adequate wages	GRI 405; ESRS S1
Voice and social dialogue	Collective-bargaining coverage, worker representation	ESRS S1
Green HRM	Share of employees trained in environmental topics; green targets in appraisal	Organization-specific indicators

Testing the framework and managing sustainable HRM both require valid indicators. Table 5 maps the key dimensions of sustainable HRM onto indicators used in international reporting frameworks, specifically the GRI standards and the European Sustainability Reporting Standards on own workforce (ESRS S1). Using standardized indicators makes it easier to compare organizations and to track change over time, and it links HR data to CSR accountability (Baumüller & Sopp, 2022; Ehnert et al., 2016). Researchers should complement disclosed indicators with employee-reported measures, such as perceived well-being, justice, and CSR authenticity, in order to detect any gap between reported policies and the practices employees actually experience.

4.8 Agenda for Future Research

Table 6. Agenda for future research

Theme	Key questions	Suggested designs
Construct clarity	How can sustainable HRM be measured as a multidimensional construct distinct from strategic HRM?	Scale development and validation across countries
Causality	Does sustainable HRM improve CSR performance, or do CSR leaders adopt sustainable HRM?	Panel data; difference-in-differences around regulatory change
Mechanisms	Which employee and organizational mechanisms dominate?	Multilevel mediation; experience sampling
Decoupling	When does HR-related CSR reporting reflect substantive change?	Matched report-survey designs; text analysis
Context	How do institutions and firm size shape sustainable HRM?	Comparative and SME studies, emerging economies
Supply chains	How can HRM extend responsibility to workers beyond the firm's boundaries?	Case studies; supplier audits linked to HR practices

Theme	Key questions	Suggested designs
Trade-offs	How are tensions between efficiency and sustainability managed over time?	Longitudinal qualitative and paradox-based studies

Several avenues for future research follow from the framework, and Table 6 links each theme to its key questions and suitable research designs. The construct of sustainable HRM still needs a validated, multidimensional measure that separates it from strategic HRM and captures well-being, employability, fairness, green, and stakeholder practices (Piwowar-Sulej, 2021). Causal evidence remains scarce, so panel studies and quasi-experimental designs built around regulatory changes, such as the arrival of mandatory social reporting, could help identify real effects (Christensen et al., 2021). Multilevel designs are needed to test the employee-level and organization-level mechanisms proposed here.

Research should also examine decoupling by comparing disclosed HR policies with what employees actually experience. Studies need to move beyond large Western firms toward small and medium-sized enterprises and emerging economies, where institutions and resources differ (Tahier et al., 2026). The responsibility of HRM for workers in supply chains and on digital platforms deserves closer attention (Stahl et al., 2020). Longitudinal qualitative research can show how organizations manage the paradoxes of sustainable HRM over time (Hahn et al., 2018).

4.9 Theoretical Implications

The framework carries several implications for theory. It reframes the HRM-CSR relationship as two-way and multilevel. HRM is not merely a tool for carrying out CSR decided elsewhere. Through its treatment of employees, it forms a core part of CSR, and through its influence on employee perceptions and behavior, it decides whether external CSR commitments become organizational reality (Jamali et al., 2015; Voegtlin & Greenwood, 2016). Studies that examine CSR without considering HRM, or HRM without considering CSR, therefore risk attributing outcomes to the wrong causes.

The framework also integrates instrumental and normative perspectives. Instrumental arguments hold that sustainable HRM improves performance through human capital and legitimacy (Orlitzky et al., 2003; Pfeffer, 2010). Normative arguments hold that employees and society are ends in themselves (Aust et al., 2020; Beer et al., 2015; Van Buren, 2022). Paradox theory suggests that organizations do not have to choose between these logics but should hold them in productive tension (Hahn et al., 2018; Smith & Lewis, 2011). The propositions on employee-level mechanisms imply that the instrumental benefits of sustainable HRM depend partly on its normative credibility. Practices that employees see as purely instrumental are less likely to generate identification and genuine support for CSR.

The framework further highlights the institutional embeddedness of sustainable HRM. Mandatory reporting and stakeholder pressure can spread sustainable HR practices, but they can also produce symbolic adoption. Distinguishing substantive from symbolic sustainable HRM, and identifying the conditions under which reporting leads to real change, is a key theoretical challenge that connects HRM research with institutional theory and accounting research (Christensen et al., 2021; Ehnert et al., 2016).

4.10 Practical Implications

For HR leaders, the analysis points to three priorities. Internal CSR should be treated as a core part of the organization's CSR strategy rather than as a separate HR matter, which means that employee well-being, employability, and fair treatment should be measured, reported, and linked to sustainability targets. HR systems should also be aligned with external CSR goals. Green competences can be included in recruitment and training, environmental and social objectives can be written into performance management and rewards, and employees can be involved in designing CSR initiatives (Ababneh, 2021; Ren, Tang, & Jackson, 2021). In addition, HR should seek a seat in sustainability governance and work with the sustainability, finance, and risk functions to bring human-capital data into CSR reporting (Baumüller & Sopp, 2022).

Small and medium-sized enterprises face particular constraints, such as limited HR expertise and resources, but they often enjoy closeness to employees and local communities. For them, sustainable HRM can start with a small number of high-impact practices, such as health and safety, fair pay, development conversations, and employee involvement in environmental initiatives, combined with simple indicators drawn from Table 5. Networks of firms, industry associations, and public programs can help SMEs share practices and reporting tools, so that the growing expectations of large customers and investors about social performance do not become a barrier for smaller suppliers.

Senior managers should recognize that external CSR commitments are credible only if employees experience responsible treatment. Investment in sustainable HRM therefore protects the legitimacy of the organization's CSR (Aguinis, Rupp, & Glavas, 2024). Policymakers and standard setters can support these developments by refining human-capital reporting standards, by encouraging social dialogue on sustainability transitions, and by supporting education that builds sustainability literacy among future managers (Ningtyas, & Rumefi, 2026; De, Stuer, & Gielens, 2020).

5. Conclusions

5.1 Conclusion

Sustainable HRM is not merely compatible with CSR. It is one of its foundations. By protecting well-being, developing employability, ensuring fairness and voice, and engaging employees in environmental and social initiatives, sustainable HRM constitutes internal CSR and makes external CSR possible. Its contribution works through employee-level mechanisms, such as perceived authenticity, identification, justice, and green climate, and through organization-level mechanisms, such as human-capital renewal, CSR capability, legitimacy, and employer attractiveness. How strong this contribution turns out to be depends on strategic integration, leadership commitment, and the quality of accountability mechanisms. Mandatory reporting can push organizations toward real change, but it can also invite symbolic disclosure when HR systems stay the same. The typology, framework, propositions, maturity model, and indicators presented here are intended to guide research and to help organizations turn HRM from a support function into a driver of responsible and sustainable business.

5.2 Research Limitations

This review has limitations. As an integrative review, it relied on a purposive selection of sources and on the authors' interpretation, and it did not report systematic database searches. The empirical evidence on several of the proposed mechanisms is still limited and is concentrated in particular countries and sectors, especially large firms in Western and East Asian economies. The framework and the maturity model are conceptual and have not yet been validated with data.

5.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

Future studies should develop and validate a multidimensional measure of sustainable HRM that clearly separates it from strategic HRM. Longitudinal and quasi-experimental designs, especially around the introduction of mandatory social reporting, would help establish whether sustainable HRM causes better CSR performance or whether CSR leaders simply adopt it more often. Multilevel research is needed to test the employee-level and organization-level mechanisms and to compare disclosed HR policies with employee experience in order to detect decoupling. Researchers should also study small and medium-sized enterprises and organizations in emerging economies, including Nigeria and Indonesia, where institutions and resources differ from those in large Western firms. Finally, the responsibility of HRM for supply-chain and platform workers and the ways organizations manage the paradoxes of sustainable HRM over time deserve sustained attention.

Acknowledgement

The authors thank Southern Delta University, Ozoro, for institutional support during the preparation of this article, and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments.

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