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FROM GREEN HRM TO HRM FOR THE COMMON GOOD – THE EVOLUTION OF THE SUSTAINABILITY-ORIENTED HRM CONCEPTS

Katarzyna PIWOWAR-SULEJ

Wroclaw University of Economics and Business; Katarzyna.piwowar-sulej@ue.wroc.pl,
ORCID: 0000-0002-4627-4344

Purpose: This article aims to provide an overview of sustainability-oriented human resource management (HRM) concepts, tracing their evolution from Green HRM (GHRM) and Socially Responsible HRM (SRHRM) to Sustainable HRM (SHRM) and HRM for the Common Good (CGHRM). It also synthesizes existing literature reviews on the HRM concepts and identifies key research gaps to guide future studies.
Design/methodology/approach: An umbrella review of 63 literature reviews was conducted, focusing on HRM approaches explicitly addressing sustainability. Scopus was searched using combinations of relevant terms.
Findings: The review shows that GHRM dominates the literature. Integrative analyses indicate that adopting multilevel and cross-concept perspectives can improve theoretical understanding of the links between HRM practices and sustainability across organizational and societal levels.
Research limitations/implications: The review captures the state of the literature at a specific point in time; therefore, as new studies continue to emerge, the conclusions may require updating.
Practical implications: The findings highlight the need for organizations to adopt comprehensive sustainability-oriented HRM systems that balance environmental, social, and economic objectives.
Social implications: The article highlights that strengthening collaboration between policymakers, practitioners, and researchers can support a broader understanding and implementation of CGHRM, contributing to more responsible organizational practices and long-term societal well-being.
Originality/value: This study provides a consolidated view of sustainability-oriented HRM research, clarifies conceptual distinctions among GHRM, SRHRM, SHRM, and CGHRM, and proposes directions for future research to advance theory and practice in this evolving field.
Keywords: umbrella review, review of reviews, green HRM, socially responsible HRM, sustainable HRM, common good HRM.
Category of the paper: Literature review.

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, sustainability has become a central concern in management research and practice, driven by escalating environmental challenges, social inequalities, demographic changes, and growing expectations toward organizations as responsible societal actors. Human resource management (HRM), traditionally focused on efficiency, performance and competitive advantage, has increasingly been reconceptualized through the lens of sustainability. This shift reflects the recognition that organizational sustainability cannot be achieved without sustainable approaches to managing people, whose knowledge, skills, values, and well-being constitute critical organizational resources. Therefore, only well-designed and coherent HRM practices, forming an integrated HRM system (Boon et al., 2019), enable organizations to balance economic, environmental, and social objectives and to contribute meaningfully to long-term sustainable development.

Since sustainability initially focused on ecological issues, early sustainability-oriented HRM approaches emphasized environmental goals, such as encouraging pro-environmental behaviors and reducing resource use. This led to the development of green HRM (GHRM), which aligns HR practices with environmental objectives but has been criticized for its narrow focus and instrumental view of employees. In parallel, socially responsible HRM (SRHRM) emerged, emphasizing ethical and social aspects of HRM, including fair employment practices, diversity, and employee well-being. However, this approach has also been criticized for prioritizing social goals only when they serve economic purposes. Recognizing that sustainability includes environmental, social, and economic dimensions, broader concepts such as sustainable/triple bottom line HRM (SHRM) have been developed. SHRM integrates long-term workforce viability, employability, work–life balance, and the tensions between short-term performance and long-term human sustainability (Guerci & Carollo, 2016). More recently, the concept of HRM for the Common Good (CGHRM) has evolved, framing HRM as a moral and societal practice. CGHRM emphasizes dignity, social justice, inclusion, and the broader societal impact of HRM, viewing organizations as responsible actors contributing to the common good (Aust et al., 2020).

Despite the growing body of literature on GHRM, SRHRM, SHRM, and CGHRM, existing research remains fragmented across conceptual frameworks, disciplines, and levels of analysis (Austen & Piwowar-Sulej, 2025a). There is still a scarcity of integrative studies that synthesize knowledge about the HRM systems analyzed within these frameworks, and clarify their similarities, differences, and underlying assumptions. Moreover, limited attention has been paid to identifying future research directions that could advance theory development and empirical inquiry in this rapidly evolving field.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this article is threefold. First, it seeks to present the evolution of sustainability-oriented HRM concepts, moving from GHRM through SRHRM and SHRM to HRM for the Common Good. Second, it provides a synthesis of the existing literature reviews on the HRM concepts. An overview of reviews (also known as a "umbrella review" or "review of reviews") collates multiple reviews with the aim to demonstrate conclusive evidence for decision making (Grant, Booth, 2009). Third, it identifies key research gaps and proposes directions for future research that can contribute to a more coherent, theoretically grounded, and socially relevant sustainability-oriented HRM agenda.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Green HRM

Although some authors consider SRHRM as the first sustainability-oriented HRM concept (Aust et al., 2020), there is also a strong argument for viewing GHRM as its earliest form. The idea of sustainability has long historical roots, with early civilizations practicing responsible resource management to avoid depletion (ACO Recycling, 2025). Long before the term was formalized, ecologists warned that unchecked development could cause severe environmental damage. After World War II, key publications raised concerns about the planet's ability to sustain the growing human population (Kidd, 1992). Consequently, environmental management systems in companies required supporting green HRM practices to be effective (Jabbour et al., 2008).

GHRM practices aim to promote eco-friendly behavior among employees. According to Aust et al. (2020), GHRM serves two main purposes: economic and environmental. However, the environmental dimension typically exists insofar as it supports economic goals, reflecting an inside-out organizational perspective. Scholars in the field of GHRM propose diverse sets of environmentally-oriented HRM policies and practices, ranging from traditional HR functions (Piwowar-Sulej, Austen et al., 2023) to employee participation and empowerment (Tariq et al., 2016).

2.2. Socially responsible HRM

Aust et al. (2020) argue that in its initial phase, sustainability-oriented HRM was primarily manifested through SRHRM practices. Rooted in the literatures on corporate social responsibility, ethics, and organizational behavior, SRHRM emphasizes organizations' responsibility toward employees and their role in supporting the implementation of CSR objectives through HRM policies and practices (Rubel et al., 2023). Zaugg et al. (2001) conceptualize SRHRM as a configuration of traditional HR policies and practices aimed at the

long-term, socially and economically efficient recruitment, development, retention, and separation of employees. Subsequent studies broadened this perspective. Jamali et al. (2015) highlighted the importance of incorporating occupational health and safety into SRHRM frameworks, while Barrena-Martínez et al. (2017) further expanded the scope to include employment relations management (e.g., employee participation), communication and transparency, social dialogue, diversity and equal opportunities, fair compensation and benefits, as well as work–family balance initiatives. Despite this broadening scope, Aust et al. (2020) argue that SRHRM largely represents an externally oriented organizational approach, in which social objectives are pursued insofar as they support economic goals, with the overarching aim of mitigating business risks and enhancing shareholder value.

2.3. Sustainable HRM

A broader perspective on sustainability within HRM practices led to the development of sustainable HRM being associated with triple bottom line HRM, which seeks to balance economic, social, and environmental goals in the short term and the long term (Kramar, 2022). Thus, key aspects of SHRM include (Piwowar-Sulej, Bąk-Grabowska, et al., 2023):

a) environmental sustainability – encouraging eco-friendly behaviors, reducing workplace environmental impact, and fostering a green organizational culture,
b) social sustainability – supporting employee well-being, health and safety, work–life balance, diversity and inclusion, fair labor practices, and ethical treatment of workers,
c) economic sustainability – ensuring that HR practices contribute to long-term organizational success while balancing short-term performance pressures.

Sustainable HRM emphasizes that employees are not just resources for profit, but key stakeholders whose competencies, needs, and well-being must be aligned with organizational goals in ways that also benefit society and the environment. Theoretically, SHRM should create a win-win scenario: healthy, motivated, and competent employees contribute to organizational success while promoting societal and environmental responsibility. However research shows that it may negatively impact employees by promoting employee role conflict and role ambiguity (Bush, 2020).

Considering SHRM practices, similarly to before presented sustainability-oriented concepts, there is no agreement in the literature, what constitutes the HRM system. In their literature review, Austen and Piwowar-Sulej (2025a) revealed that many studies claiming to examine SHRM often conflated it with other HRM approaches or were limited in scope. For instance, Jerónimo et al. (2020) operationalized SHRM by combining GHRM practices with SRHRM practices, missing the economic aspect of sustainability. Other authors (e.g., (De Prins et al., 2020)) researched SHRM but with the use of measurement scales with items reflecting only socially responsible HRM practices, while completely ignoring environmental and economic issues. Thus, the first problem is that previously examined HRM practices often failed to address the full spectrum of the triple bottom line (economic, social,

and environmental) inherent to SHRM. The second problem is that SHRM – similarly to GHRM and SRHRM – addresses mainly shareholders' needs. The motives for the implementation of them are external pressures for increased social and ecological responsibility, and avoiding penalties for non-compliance with legal regulations (Aust et al., 2020).

2.4. Common good HRM

Common good HRM emerged in response to the shortcomings of both traditional HRM approaches and the above-presented sustainability-oriented concepts. At its beginning, HRM focused primarily on maximizing organizational efficiency and achieving economic goals, treating employees mainly as a means to boost productivity and competitiveness (Paauwe, Boon, 2009). The emergence of strategic HRM approach over 35 years ago highlighted the role of HRM in contributing to a company's financial performance (Piwowar-Sulej, 2026). Even today, many organizations continue to prioritize the shareholder value model, measuring success through financial indicators and designing HRM systems to meet shareholder expectations. All three forms of SOHRM mentioned earlier have, to varying degrees, adjusted their traditional business-oriented goals of economic profit to align with external pressures for increased social and ecological responsibility, reflecting an 'inside-out' perspective (Aust et al., 2020). This narrow focus has contributed to a crisis of trust in business, which is essential for sustaining long-term organizational success (Hollensbe et al., 2014).

Within CGHRM the emphasis is on giving equal or even higher priority to collective interests compared to individual (including organizational) preferences, needs, and desires. In CGHRM, 'inputs' refer to the use of HRM competencies, skills, knowledge, and attitudes to actively contribute to the betterment of society and address the major challenges of our time. Thus, it can be regarded as the most advance sustainability-oriented HRM concept (Aust et al., 2020; Piwowar-Sulej, 2026).

3. Methodology of literature review

To ensure a comprehensive and systematic review of reviews on SOHRM concepts, a multi-step approach was employed (Grant, Booth, 2009). First, the scope and research questions were defined, focusing on HRM approaches explicitly addressing sustainability, including GHRM, SRHRM, SHRM and CGHRM. Second, the Scopus was selected as the primary database due to its extensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals, multidisciplinary scope, and reliable indexing of management and sustainability literature (Leydesdorff et al., 2015). Third, terms used in the search included combinations of the names of sustainability-oriented HRM concepts (including the notion of sustainability-oriented HRM) with the word "review". The search

focused primarily on publication titles, as titles generally highlight the central topic and main contribution of a study. The authors found 89 documents. Fourth, the additional inclusion criteria encompassed peer-reviewed journal articles written in English. In this way, the final basis of articles included 63 articles. Fifth, the author extracted data of the documents in the form of csv file. Then analyzed each article in terms of examined sustainability-oriented HRM concepts, methodological approaches and topics highlighted in a given study.

4. Main findings

42 out of 63 articles were devoted to the GHRM concept, only two – to SRHRM and none to CGHRM. Figure 1 also shows that GHRM issues prevail in the literature reviews. Secondly, even if the authors mentioned SHRM in the title of their work, the paper was often about SRHRM (e.g., (Elnakib, Gallego-Roquelaure, 2025)). Thirdly, some of the reviews focus on specific geographical areas or industries. Fourthly, the highest number of the reviews (i.e., 11) were published in *Sustainability* by MDPI, which is not a HRM journal.

As far as GHRM is concerned, the study by Gazi et al. (2025) explored GHRM's connection to organizational sustainable performance through increasing employee involvement and reducing environmental impact. The performance was evaluated at the individual level as well as the organizational level. Their findings indicate that GHRM plays a crucial role in supporting organizational sustainability by lowering ecological footprints, boosting employee morale, and enhancing corporate reputation. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of integrating green HRM practices into organizational strategies and operations to achieve long-term sustainability. Implementing such practices can lead to higher employee engagement, reduced turnover, and improved customer satisfaction, while also lowering costs through waste reduction and a strengthened brand image. Similarly, the study by Alrifae (2026) also linked GHRM to sustainable performance, however they focus on three elements of this performance: economic, environmental and social.

Only two literature reviews used SRHRM in the title. Omidi and Dal Zotto (2022) focused on the antecedents and outcomes of HRM system, whereas Somuah et al. (2025) provided a systematic review on the SRHRM's contribution to the creation of social value. They revealed that CSR-related pressures are the main impetus behind the adoption of SRHRM practices. Nonetheless, the social pillar of sustainability – particularly the human or "people" dimension – has received comparatively limited scholarly attention, making it the least developed aspect of sustainability research. In response, the study emphasizes the need for further investigations into how SRHRM influences social value creation.

Literature reviews with SHRM in the title, in fact, present different sustainability-oriented HRM concepts. They also did not always focused on HRM system. For example, Macke and Genari (2019) in their search criteria included also papers on sustainable leadership and sustainable organization. Kumar et al. (2020) searched for papers about SHRM and GHRM and link the concepts to sustainable performance (with its three dimensions). Ramgolam et al. (2024) focused on articles which include keywords linking "HRM" with "sustainability", however used only bibliometric analyses. They distinguished several dimensions of SHRM, including strategic–relational HRM (SRHRM), green HRM (GHRM), and combined green HRM (CGHRM), as well as efficiency-oriented HRM. In addition, they treated economic, social, and environmental sustainability as separate dimensions. However, this classification appears somewhat inconsistent, as it mixes HRM practices and orientations (e.g., SRHRM, GHRM, efficiency-oriented HRM) with sustainability outcomes or goals (economic, social, and environmental sustainability). As a result, the proposed dimensions do not represent a uniform level of analysis and may blur the conceptual boundaries between HRM systems and their intended sustainability effects. Gomes et al. (2025) also search in WoS for articles about SHRM and used bibliometrics.

Considering full integration of all sustainability-oriented concepts, the authors found three reviews that did it. The first one is by Anlesinya and Susomrith (2020). Although SHRM is highlighted in the title of the paper, the authors' search strategy included keywords such as SHRM, GHRM, SRHRM, sustainability in HRM, and HRM sustainability. They found that most of articles are GHRM oriented. They also showed that research on sustainability-oriented HRM drew on empirical data from only 27 countries. Among these, India accounted for the largest number of studies, followed by Malaysia and China. Regarding sectoral coverage, most empirical studies examined multiple industries, followed by the manufacturing sector, hospitality, education, and healthcare. The majority of the analyzed studies adopted the quantitative approach (mainly surveys and cross-sectional research design). They found only three articles that discussed sustainability-oriented concepts. Studies that considered a bundle of HRM practices were in the minority. Most of studies examined possible outcomes of HRM practices at the micro-level. The results further indicate that both internal and external determinants play a crucial role in the adoption and implementation of sustainability-oriented HRM. Internal drivers include managers' and owners' ethical leadership, organizational size, and anticipated benefits, while external influences encompass government regulations and policies, societal norms, employee-related negative externalities, customer demands, and regulatory pressure. However, research addressing micro-level determinants remains scarce.

The second integrative study is by Piwowar- Sulej (2021). Although the author used SHRM in the article title, she also explored GHRM and SRHRM. Her study was based on H-Score method, thus covered very limited sample of papers. The cited author focused on core HRM practices and revealed that HR training was the most explored practice in the

sustainability-oriented HRM research. Finally, Austen and Piwowar-Sulej (2025a) reviewed a total of 220 articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, focusing specifically on 125 that investigated sustainability-oriented HRM practices. They developed an integrative framework that unifies various variables and relationships into a coherent model of sustainability-oriented HRM. Their analysis highlighted not only the scarcity of multilevel approaches in this research area but also demonstrated how adopting a multilevel perspective enhances theoretical understanding of the connection between HRM and sustainability. In particular, their work illustrated how such a perspective can address sustainability challenges spanning multiple organizational and societal levels.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The findings of this review confirm and extend the observations outlined in the introduction and theoretical background. Consistent with prior discussions, GHRM remains the most extensively studied sustainability-oriented HRM concept, reflecting the historical emphasis on environmental objectives within HRM practices. In contrast, SRHRM, SHRM, and CGHRM are far less represented, highlighting the persistent underdevelopment of the social and holistic dimensions of sustainability in HRM research. In particular, research on HRM for the Common Good remains extremely limited, which is reflected in the lack of literature reviews synthesizing knowledge in this area. Consequently, there is a pressing need for empirical studies to examine how CGHRM practices are implemented, their outcomes for organizations and society, and the contextual factors that influence their effectiveness.

The results also underscore the fragmented nature of the field, with studies varying widely in theoretical framing, scope, and methodological approach. Many reviews labeled as SHRM, for example, conflate different HRM concepts or fail to capture the full triple bottom line, reflecting the conceptual ambiguities highlighted in the theoretical background. Moreover, the predominance of quantitative, survey-based empirical research and limited attention to micro-level determinants indicates that the employee perspective – the “people” dimension of sustainability – remains insufficiently explored, despite its recognized importance in SHRM frameworks.

The analyzed reviews provide some guidelines related to future research. For example, it is important to recognize employees' perceptions of the implementation of sustainability-oriented HRM practices in companies, as well as the impact of these practices on their attitudes and behaviors, taking into account the various HRM practices (Gomes et al., 2025). In turn, Anlesinya and Susomrith (2020) recommended future research to prioritize comparative studies across countries, sectors, and firm sizes to better understand the contextual factors that influence the adoption and effectiveness of sustainable HRM practices. In particular, empirical

investigations should include underrepresented contexts such as public sector organizations and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which have been largely neglected in existing empirical research. Such comparative analyses can reveal important boundary conditions, sector-specific dynamics, and cross-cultural differences, thereby providing more nuanced and actionable insights for the implementation of sustainability-oriented HRM practices. Chams and García-Blandón (2019) argued that research on SHRM emphasizes its impact on employee well-being, however there remains a shortage of HR practices that explicitly support the Sustainable Development Goals.

The analysis supports the notion that adopting integrative and multilevel perspectives can enhance theoretical understanding of the HRM–sustainability relationship. By linking internal and external drivers with organizational and societal outcomes, such perspectives would address key limitations identified in prior literature, including the narrow focus on environmental or economic objectives and the limited consideration of societal impacts (Austen, Piwowar-Sulej, 2025a). Overall, these findings reinforce the need for more comprehensive, ethically grounded, and contextually nuanced research that fully incorporates economic, environmental, and social dimensions into HRM practice.

Regarding practical implications, this study emphasizes that HR managers should expand their sustainability-oriented practices beyond environmental concerns. Participation with academics in the implementation of CGHRM can help organizations balance economic, social, and environmental objectives while developing the theory of this HRM concept. Additionally, HR practices should be designed with consideration of organizational context, sector, and geographic location, including public sector organizations and SMEs, to ensure their effectiveness and contextual fit. Educational programs should introduce HR managers to the full spectrum of sustainability-oriented HRM concepts. Training should also develop the ability to apply multilevel perspectives and make decisions that consider impacts on employees, organizations, and society. Finally, HR education should emphasize practical methods for assessing the effects of sustainability-oriented HRM practices on employee well-being and organizational performance, including comparative analyses across countries, sectors, and types of organizations.

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