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Reconceptualizing Sustainable Business Practices Through Strategic Management, and Human Resource Management: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

This study aims to reconceptualize sustainable business practices through the integration of Strategic Management (SM) and Human Resource Management (HRM) using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. The growing importance of sustainability in organizational contexts has led to increased scholarly attention; however, existing literature remains fragmented between strategic-level perspectives and human-centered HRM approaches. By synthesizing relevant studies, this review identifies key themes and conceptual linkages that explain how sustainability is embedded within organizational systems. The findings reveal that Strategic Management contributes to sustainability through dynamic capabilities, value configurations, and long-term strategic alignment, while HRM facilitates sustainability implementation through green HRM practices, employee engagement, and capability development. The interaction between both domains indicates that sustainable business practices are best understood as a multi-level system that connects organizational strategy with employee behavior. Despite this integration, the literature still lacks a comprehensive explanation of the mechanisms linking HRM systems with strategic sustainability outcomes. This study contributes to sustainability literature by bridging Strategic Management and HRM perspectives into a unified conceptual understanding. It emphasizes that sustainability is not only a strategic outcome but also a behavioral and organizational process co-created through human capital systems. The study provides implications for both theory development and managerial practice by highlighting the importance of aligning HRM systems with sustainability-oriented strategies

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Introduction

Sustainable business practices have increasingly become a central concern in contemporary management discourse as organizations face growing pressures from environmental degradation, social inequality, and governance challenges. In the context of global economic transformation, firms are no longer evaluated solely based on financial performance, but also on their ability to integrate environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles into their strategic and operational decision-making processes. This shift reflects a broader paradigm change in which sustainability is positioned as a core strategic imperative rather than a peripheral corporate social responsibility activity.

Within this evolving landscape, Strategic Management (SM) has gained prominence as a critical mechanism for aligning organizational goals with sustainability outcomes. Strategic management enables firms to design long-term value creation strategies that incorporate environmental and social considerations into core business models. In particular, the development of sustainability-oriented dynamic capabilities has been recognized as essential for enhancing organizational adaptability and competitiveness in uncertain and complex environments (Yi & Demirel, 2023). These capabilities allow organizations to continuously reconfigure resources and competencies in response to sustainability challenges, thereby fostering long-term resilience and growth.

In addition, strategic management literature increasingly emphasizes that sustainability is not merely an outcome of strategic planning, but a multidimensional system embedded in organizational structures,

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processes, and stakeholder relationships. Eriksson et al. (2022) highlight that organizational value configurations play a key role in maintaining strategic focus in collaborative environments, particularly in public-private and cross-sector partnerships. Similarly, sustainable business models are understood as systemic configurations that integrate innovation, stakeholder engagement, and long-term environmental responsibility into organizational logic (Nosratabadi et al., 2023). These perspectives collectively reinforce the argument that sustainability must be embedded within the strategic architecture of firms rather than treated as an external compliance requirement.

Parallel to strategic management developments, Human Resource Management (HRM) has emerged as a fundamental driver of sustainability-oriented organizational transformation. HRM contributes to sustainability not only through administrative functions but also by shaping employee behavior, organizational culture, and capability development. Green HRM practices, in particular, have been widely recognized for their influence on employee pro-environmental behavior and organizational sustainability outcomes. Dumont et al. (2017) demonstrate that green HRM practices significantly affect workplace green behavior through mediating mechanisms such as psychological green climate and employee green values, indicating that individual-level perceptions play a crucial role in translating HR policies into sustainable actions.

Recent literature further extends this understanding by highlighting the broader role of sustainable HRM in enhancing organizational resilience and long-term performance. Adhika (2024) emphasizes that green HRM practices in the hospitality sector contribute to organizational resilience by fostering environmentally responsible behavior among employees. Similarly, Banga and Gobind (2025) argue that the implementation of sustainability-oriented HRM practices is essential for embedding sustainability principles into organizational systems, particularly in contexts where environmental and social challenges are highly dynamic.

Moreover, sustainable HRM has been associated with improved employability, organizational outcomes, and competitive advantage. Martini et al. (2023) suggest that training for employability within sustainable HRM systems enhances organizational performance, particularly under conditions of competitive intensity. This indicates that HRM is not only a support function but also a strategic lever that directly influences organizational adaptability and sustainability outcomes. Miah et al. (2024) further reinforce this perspective by systematically reviewing green HRM literature and concluding that HRM plays a central role in achieving organizational sustainability objectives through the alignment of human capital strategies with environmental goals.

Despite the growing body of literature on both Strategic Management and Human Resource Management in the context of sustainability, existing studies remain largely fragmented. Strategic management research tends to focus on firm-level capabilities, structural alignment, and long-term strategic positioning, while HRM research predominantly emphasizes employee behavior, engagement, and organizational culture. This separation creates a conceptual gap in understanding how macro-level strategic sustainability initiatives interact with micro-level human resource practices to produce integrated sustainability outcomes.

This gap is particularly critical given emerging perspectives that conceptualize sustainability as a multi-level system involving interconnected organizational, behavioral, and environmental dimensions. McGuire et al. (2023) argue that sustainability should be understood as a stratified system operating across multiple levels, where interactions between institutional structures and individual behaviors shape overall sustainability performance. This perspective suggests that a more integrated approach is required to understand how strategic management and HRM jointly contribute to sustainable business practices.

Furthermore, empirical evidence indicates that the integration of HRM and strategic sustainability practices remains underdeveloped in current research. While studies such as Kutaula et al. (2025) highlight the mediating role of HRM systems in linking sustainability practices to performance outcomes, the underlying mechanisms—often referred to as the “black box”—remain insufficiently theorized. Similarly, Setyadi et al. (2025) demonstrate that digital transformation moderates the relationship between green HRM and sustainable operations, suggesting that contextual factors further complicate the integration of HRM and strategic sustainability initiatives.

In addition, Strielkowski et al. (2023) emphasize that human capital optimization is a critical determinant of organizational economic sustainability, reinforcing the strategic importance of HRM within sustainability frameworks. Wiyono et al. (2025) further support this argument by showing that ESG-driven HR practices significantly influence employee performance outcomes, thereby linking HRM systems directly to sustainability performance metrics. Zhang and Edgar (2022) also confirm that HRM systems enhance employee proactivity and capability, which are essential for implementing strategic sustainability initiatives effectively.

Given these developments, there is a clear need to reconceptualize sustainable business practices through an integrated lens that combines Strategic Management and Human Resource Management perspectives. Such integration is necessary to bridge the existing gap between macro-level strategic frameworks and micro-level behavioral mechanisms. Therefore, this study aims to systematically review the existing literature and develop a reconceptualized understanding of sustainable business practices as an interconnected system of strategic alignment and human capital development. This approach is expected to contribute to the advancement of sustainability literature by providing a more holistic and multi-level conceptual framework that reflects the complexity of contemporary organizational sustainability challenges.

Materials and Methods

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to critically examine and synthesize existing scholarly works on sustainable business practices through the integration of Strategic Management (SM) and Human Resource Management (HRM). The SLR method is considered appropriate for this study due to its rigor in identifying, evaluating, and interpreting relevant research findings in a transparent and replicable manner. By adopting this approach, the study aims to minimize bias while ensuring comprehensive coverage of the literature related to sustainability-oriented management practices.

The selection of SLR is grounded in the increasing complexity and fragmentation of sustainability research, particularly in the domains of strategic management and human resource management. Previous studies indicate that sustainability-related research spans multiple disciplines and theoretical perspectives, making systematic synthesis essential for developing an integrated understanding (Miah et al., 2024; Anlesinya & Susomrith, 2020). In this context, SLR enables the identification of dominant themes, theoretical gaps, and emerging research trends across both SM and HRM literature.

The literature search process was conducted using a structured keyword strategy derived from the core concepts of the study, namely "sustainable business practices," "strategic management and sustainability," "human resource management and sustainability," and "green HRM." These keywords were selected to ensure alignment with the conceptual focus of integrating macro-level strategic management perspectives and micro-level HRM practices in sustainability contexts. The inclusion of green HRM literature is particularly relevant, as it has been widely recognized as a key mechanism for promoting environmentally responsible organizational behavior and sustainability performance (Dumont et al., 2017; Yunaningsih et al., 2024).

The inclusion criteria for selecting literature were defined as follows: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles and high-quality academic publications, (2) studies focusing on sustainability within the context of strategic management, HRM, or their integration, (3) publications in English, and (4) studies that provide theoretical, conceptual, or empirical insights into sustainability-oriented management practices. In addition, studies published in recent years were prioritized to ensure the relevance of findings to contemporary sustainability challenges, particularly those related to ESG integration and organizational transformation.

Conversely, exclusion criteria were applied to eliminate non-relevant sources, including opinion-based articles, non-academic publications, and studies that do not explicitly address sustainability in relation to management practices. This filtering process is essential to maintain the academic rigor and validity of the synthesis process, particularly in ensuring that only high-quality and conceptually relevant studies are included in the analysis.

The selected literature was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. This approach enables the identification, categorization, and interpretation of recurring themes across the reviewed studies. Thematic coding was conducted to classify findings into three main dimensions: strategic management and sustainability integration, human resource management and sustainability practices, and the interaction between SM and HRM in shaping sustainable business outcomes. This categorization is consistent with prior literature that emphasizes the multi-level nature of sustainability systems (McGuire et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the analytical process also considered the role of mediating and moderating mechanisms in linking HRM practices and sustainability outcomes. For instance, Kutaula et al. (2025) highlight the existence of complex mediating processes—often referred to as the "black box"—that explain how HRM systems contribute to sustainability performance. Similarly, Setyadi et al. (2025) demonstrate that digital transformation acts as a contextual moderator in the relationship between green HRM and sustainable operational outcomes, indicating that sustainability integration is influenced by technological and organizational contingencies.

In addition, the study acknowledges the importance of human capital optimization and capability development as key analytical dimensions within the SM-HRM integration framework. Strielkowski et al.

(2023) emphasize that human capital is a central driver of organizational economic sustainability, while Zhang and Edgar (2022) highlight the role of HRM systems in enhancing employee proactivity and organizational capability. These insights support the analytical focus on linking micro-level HRM mechanisms with macro-level strategic sustainability outcomes.

Overall, the methodological framework of this study ensures a systematic, transparent, and theory-driven synthesis of existing literature. By integrating findings across SM and HRM domains, the SLR approach provides a robust foundation for identifying conceptual gaps and developing a reconceptualized understanding of sustainable business practices.

Results and Discussions

The systematic synthesis of the selected literature reveals that sustainable business practices are increasingly shaped by the interaction between Strategic Management (SM) and Human Resource Management (HRM), although both streams of research remain partially fragmented in their conceptual and empirical development. The results of this review are organized into three main thematic categories: (1) strategic management and sustainability orientation, (2) human resource management and sustainability practices, and (3) integration mechanisms between SM and HRM in sustainable business contexts.

Strategic Management and Sustainability Orientation

The literature indicates that Strategic Management plays a fundamental role in embedding sustainability into organizational systems through the development of dynamic capabilities and strategic alignment processes. Yi and Demirel (2023) emphasize that sustainability-oriented dynamic capabilities significantly contribute to firm growth by enabling organizations to integrate green supply chain management and environmental considerations into strategic decision-making. This suggests that sustainability is not merely an operational concern but a strategic asset that enhances long-term competitiveness.

In addition, Eriksson et al. (2022) highlight the importance of value configurations in collaborative settings, demonstrating that organizational focus in sustainability initiatives depends on the ability to manage inter-organizational relationships effectively. This reinforces the idea that sustainability is embedded within broader strategic ecosystems rather than isolated organizational actions. Similarly, McGuire et al. (2023) conceptualize sustainability as a stratified system operating across multiple organizational levels, thereby reinforcing the need for multi-layered strategic approaches in addressing sustainability challenges.

Nosratabadi et al. (2023) further support this view by arguing that sustainable business models require systemic integration of innovation, stakeholder engagement, and long-term value creation. Collectively, these studies indicate that Strategic Management provides the structural foundation for sustainability integration, particularly through capability development and systemic alignment.

Human Resource Management and Sustainability Practices

The findings also reveal that Human Resource Management plays a crucial role in translating sustainability strategies into organizational behavior and employee-level outcomes. Green HRM practices have been widely identified as key mechanisms for fostering environmentally responsible behavior among employees. Dumont et al. (2017) demonstrate that green HRM influences workplace green behavior through psychological green climate and employee green values, highlighting the importance of internal organizational environments in shaping sustainability outcomes.

Recent studies further reinforce the strategic importance of HRM in sustainability contexts. Adhika (2024) shows that sustainable HRM practices enhance organizational resilience in the hospitality sector, while Banga and Gobind (2025) emphasize that sustainability-oriented HRM implementation is essential for embedding environmental responsibility into organizational systems. Miah et al. (2024) also confirm through a systematic review that green HRM contributes significantly to organizational sustainability by aligning human capital management with environmental objectives.

Moreover, Martini et al. (2023) find that sustainable HRM practices related to training and employability improve organizational outcomes, particularly in competitive environments. Yunaningsih et al. (2024) further demonstrate that green commitment and organizational support mediate the relationship between HRM practices and innovation behavior, indicating the importance of psychological and structural enablers in sustainability implementation.

Integration Between Strategic Management and HRM

A key finding of this review is the emerging but still underdeveloped integration between Strategic Management and HRM in sustainability literature. Kutaula et al. (2025) highlight that HRM systems play a mediating role in linking sustainability practices to performance outcomes, although the internal mechanisms remain largely unexplained, often referred to as the “black box” of sustainability performance. This indicates that further theoretical refinement is required to fully understand how HRM contributes to strategic sustainability outcomes.

Setyadi et al. (2025) extend this discussion by demonstrating that digital transformation moderates the relationship between green HRM and sustainable operations, suggesting that technological readiness significantly influences sustainability integration. Similarly, Strielkowski et al. (2023) emphasize that human capital optimization is a key determinant of organizational economic sustainability, reinforcing the strategic importance of HRM in achieving long-term organizational goals.

Wiyono et al. (2025) further support this integration by showing that ESG-driven HR practices directly influence employee performance outcomes, thereby linking HRM systems with measurable sustainability performance indicators. Zhang and Edgar (2022) also confirm that HRM systems enhance employee proactivity and capability development, which are essential for the successful implementation of strategic sustainability initiatives.

Overall, the results indicate that while Strategic Management provides the structural and capability-based foundation for sustainability, HRM functions as a behavioral and cultural mechanism that enables the operationalization of sustainability strategies. However, the interaction between both domains remains insufficiently theorized, particularly in explaining how micro-level HRM practices translate macro-level strategic sustainability intentions into measurable organizational outcomes. This gap highlights the need for a more integrated conceptual framework, which is further addressed in the discussion section.

Discussion

The findings of this systematic literature review demonstrate that sustainable business practices are increasingly conceptualized as an outcome of the interplay between Strategic Management (SM) and Human Resource Management (HRM). However, despite the growing body of literature in both domains, the integration between strategic-level sustainability frameworks and HRM-driven behavioral mechanisms remains conceptually fragmented. This section discusses the implications of these findings in relation to theory development, organizational practice, and the evolving understanding of sustainability as a multi-level system.

The synthesis of the literature suggests that sustainable business practices should no longer be understood as isolated strategic initiatives or HR-driven behavioral interventions. Instead, sustainability emerges as a multi-level organizational system in which strategic structures and human resource processes interact dynamically. Yi and Demirel (2023) emphasize that sustainability-oriented dynamic capabilities enhance firm growth through the integration of green supply chain management and strategic adaptation. This reinforces the notion that sustainability is embedded in organizational capabilities rather than standalone initiatives.

At the same time, HRM literature highlights the behavioral foundation of sustainability. Dumont et al. (2017) demonstrate that green HRM practices shape employee behavior through psychological green climate and value alignment, indicating that sustainability outcomes are heavily influenced by individual-level mechanisms. When combined, these perspectives suggest that sustainability is co-constructed through both strategic design and human behavior, requiring an integrated analytical lens.

This interpretation aligns with McGuire et al. (2023), who argue that sustainability operates as a stratified system across multiple organizational levels. Accordingly, sustainable business practices must be reconceptualized as an interconnected system in which macro-level strategic decisions and micro-level employee behaviors are mutually reinforcing rather than independent processes.

A key theoretical contribution of this study lies in identifying the persistent divide between Strategic Management and HRM literatures. Strategic management studies tend to focus on firm-level capabilities, innovation systems, and long-term value creation (Nosratabadi et al., 2023), whereas HRM studies emphasize employee engagement, green behavior, and organizational culture (Miah et al., 2024). This separation limits the development of a holistic understanding of sustainability implementation within organizations.

Kutaula et al. (2025) provide an important contribution by highlighting the mediating role of HRM systems in linking sustainability practices to performance outcomes. However, their findings also reveal the existence of a "black box," indicating that the mechanisms connecting HRM and sustainability performance remain insufficiently theorized. This gap underscores the need for stronger conceptual integration between strategic and behavioral perspectives.

Furthermore, Setyadi et al. (2025) demonstrate that digital transformation moderates the relationship between green HRM and sustainable operations, suggesting that contextual factors significantly influence the effectiveness of sustainability integration. This finding implies that the SM–HRM relationship is not linear but contingent upon organizational readiness and technological capability.

The reviewed literature consistently positions human capital as a central driver of sustainability outcomes. Strielkowski et al. (2023) argue that human capital optimization is essential for organizational economic

sustainability, while Zhang and Edgar (2022) show that HRM systems enhance employee proactivity and capability development. These findings suggest that HRM should be understood not merely as an operational function but as a strategic asset embedded within sustainability-oriented organizational systems. Wiyono et al. (2025) further strengthen this argument by demonstrating that ESG-driven HR practices directly influence employee performance outcomes. This reinforces the view that HRM plays a critical role in translating sustainability strategies into measurable organizational performance.

Based on the synthesis, this study argues for a reconceptualization of sustainable business practices as an integrated framework combining strategic alignment and human capital development. In this framework, Strategic Management provides structural direction through dynamic capabilities and sustainability-oriented strategies (Yi & Demirel, 2023), while HRM functions as a behavioral mechanism that enables implementation through employee engagement, green behavior, and organizational support systems (Yunaningsih et al., 2024). Eriksson et al. (2022) further emphasize that value configurations in collaborative environments are essential for maintaining strategic coherence, reinforcing the importance of aligning internal and external sustainability processes. Therefore, sustainability effectiveness depends on the degree of integration between strategic intent and human resource execution.

This study contributes to sustainability literature by bridging SM and HRM perspectives and positioning sustainability as a multi-layered system. It extends prior research by emphasizing the interaction between structural and behavioral dimensions of sustainability, rather than treating them as separate domains. The integration of these perspectives provides a more comprehensive explanation of how sustainable business practices are formed, implemented, and sustained within organizations. Overall, the discussion highlights the need for future research to further explore the mechanisms that connect strategic management systems with HRM practices, particularly in explaining how organizational capabilities and employee behaviors jointly produce sustainability outcomes

Conclusion

This systematic literature review has examined the evolving discourse on sustainable business practices through the integration of Strategic Management (SM) and Human Resource Management (HRM). The study set out to reconceptualize how sustainability is understood within organizational contexts by synthesizing existing literature and identifying key thematic intersections between strategic-level frameworks and human-centered organizational practices. The findings demonstrate that sustainable business practices are no longer adequately explained by a single disciplinary lens, but instead emerge from the interaction between organizational strategy and human resource systems.

The review indicates that Strategic Management provides the structural and capability-based foundation for sustainability implementation. Through the development of dynamic capabilities, value configurations, and long-term strategic alignment, organizations are able to embed sustainability into their core operational logic. At the same time, HRM serves as the behavioral and cultural mechanism that enables the operationalization of these strategies. Practices such as green HRM, employee engagement, capability development, and organizational support systems play a critical role in translating strategic sustainability intentions into observable organizational behaviors and outcomes.

A key conclusion of this study is that sustainable business practices should be reconceptualized as a multi-level and interconnected system. This system integrates macro-level strategic decisions with micro-level human behaviors, creating a continuous feedback loop that shapes organizational sustainability performance. Rather than functioning independently, SM and HRM operate as mutually reinforcing domains that jointly determine the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives. However, the literature also reveals that this integration remains underdeveloped, particularly in explaining the mechanisms through which HRM practices contribute to strategic sustainability outcomes.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to a more holistic understanding of sustainability by bridging previously fragmented research streams. It highlights the necessity of moving beyond siloed approaches and toward a more integrated conceptual framework that captures the complexity of organizational sustainability. This reconceptualization provides a foundation for future research to further explore the interdependencies between strategy formulation, human capital development, and sustainability performance.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that organizations should adopt a more integrated approach in designing sustainability initiatives. Strategic sustainability goals must be aligned with HRM systems to ensure effective implementation at the employee level. Organizations are encouraged to strengthen internal capabilities through training, leadership development, and the cultivation of a sustainability-oriented organizational culture. In addition, managers should recognize that employee behavior is a critical determinant of sustainability success, requiring consistent alignment between strategic intent and human resource practices.

Furthermore, organizations operating in dynamic and competitive environments should consider sustainability as a continuous transformation process rather than a static objective. This requires the integration of strategic planning, human resource development, and adaptive organizational learning. The alignment between these elements enables organizations to respond effectively to environmental, social, and governance challenges while maintaining long-term competitiveness.

Finally, this study acknowledges several limitations, particularly the reliance on existing literature without empirical validation of the proposed integration framework. Therefore, future research is encouraged to empirically test the relationships between strategic management systems and HRM practices in shaping sustainability outcomes. Comparative studies across industries and regions are also recommended to enhance the generalizability of findings. Additionally, future research should explore micro-level behavioral mechanisms in greater depth to better understand how individual actions contribute to organizational sustainability performance.

Overall, this study concludes that the future of sustainable business practices lies in the integration of strategic and human-centered approaches, forming a cohesive system that enables organizations to achieve long-term sustainable value creation

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