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Beyond Sustainable Human Resource Management: Regenerative Human Resource Management as a Pathway Towards Organisational Sustainability

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Abstract: The growing complexity of the environmental, social and economic issues has compelled organisations to rethink conventional ways to sustainability. The available literature on Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) and Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM) has significantly helped to realise how human resource practices support environmental responsibility and sustainable organisational performance. Nevertheless, a significant part of the current literature is centred on mitigating adverse effects and enhancing performance as well as motivating employees to engage in sustainability efforts. The emerging literature on sustainability indicates that it is time to shift the sustainability-focused strategies to regenerative views that seek to repair, replenish and generate a positive value to both human and ecological systems. This literature review is systematic and discusses the new concept of Regenerative Human Resource Management (RHRM) and how human resource systems can play a role in transforming organisational sustainability. Based on the PRISMA approach, the literature review examines literature available concerning regenerative sustainability, sustainable organisations, human resource management, employee capability development, and organisational renewal. The results reveal that regenerative approaches are an extension of traditional HRM that focuses on employee renewal, organisational learning, stakeholder value creation and environmental responsibility. The review suggests a research framework in the future that Regenerative Human Resource Management Capability will impact Organisational Regenerative Capability, which in turn will drive Sustainable Value Creation Performance. The proposed study will add to the literature on sustainability and HRM as it brings a human-focused regenerative approach and offers future empirical research opportunities to the researchers interested in exploring how organisations can shift their focus on sustainability compliance to long-term regeneration. By doing this, it provides the practitioners with a better justification to invest in employee-focused renewal procedures in addition to the traditional sustainability programmes.

Keywords: Regenerative Human Resource Management, Sustainable HRM, Organisational Sustainability, Human Capability, Regenerative Capability, Sustainable Value Creation.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Background study

The sustainability pressures are mounting up on organisations due to the effects of climate change, scarcity of resources, inequality in society, and evolving stakeholder demands. Sustainability has ceased to be a very limited environmental issue but rather a wide organisational issue of economic sustainability, social responsibility, workers welfare and long-term value creation (Yang & Lu, 2024). Consequently, not only are organisations supposed to do their best to limit the negative impact on the environment, but also build the ability to constantly adjust and contribute to society and ecological processes positively.

Human resources are considered one of the most valuable pillars of sustainability change since employees contribute to organisational decision making, innovation, operational practices and relationships with the stakeholders. In that regard, functions of HR act as a strategic interface between organisational strategy and daily action of employees by converting the general commitments to sustainability into specific behaviours and decisions throughout the organisation (Sarma & Rao, 2020). Earlier studies have established that human resource management (HRM) can help in ensuring sustainability by addressing such practices as green recruitment, environmental training, sustainability-filled performance evaluation, and employee engagement (Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013). The literature on Green Human Resource Management has grown especially in terms of how HR practices can influence environmental behaviour of employees and facilitate environmental management goals (Ren, Tang, & Jackson, 2018). As Renwick, Redman and Maguire pointed out, Green HRM incorporates green issues into the HR practices such as the ability of employees, their motivation and development of opportunities (Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013).

Despite the fact that Green HRM and Sustainable HRM have made a significant contribution to the development of the field, there are still key shortcomings (Kramar, 2014). To begin with, the current strategies tend to focus on minimising the damage to the organisation, instead of generating beneficial social and ecological value. Second, a lot of research assumes that employees are the recipients of sustainability policies and not the contributors who bring about organisational change. Third, the environmental performance indicators of sustainability outcomes are often quantified, and less developed are the underlying processes by which organisations rejuvenate human capability and generate sustainable value.

Recent research on sustainability has proposed the notion of regeneration as a substitute lens (du Plessis, 2012). Regenerative approaches to sustainability, in contrast to more traditional sustainability which tends to maintain the status quo or mitigate its adverse effects, focus on restoration, renewal, and the generation of positive effects on an interrelated social and ecological system. Regenerative organisational thinking implies that companies must generate value to shareholders, as well as to employees, communities, stakeholders, and natural ecosystems.

But the human aspect of regeneration has not yet been developed. Although the regenerative business models and regenerative sustainability concepts are getting more attention (Hahn & Tampe, 2021), there is a lack of research on how organisations can build the human capacity needed to realise regeneration. Human resources are hence a missing linkage of regenerative strategies and organisational implementation.

This paper will suggest that a change in the concept of Sustainable HRM to a new concept of Regenerative Human Resource Management (RHRM) is a new way of theory. RHRM builds upon the current HR sustainability views and aims at the renewal of employee capabilities, organisational learning, sustainability-oriented identity and positive stakeholder value creation. This view is more dynamic in its explanation of how HR practices can facilitate long-term organisational change by foregrounding renewal instead of maintenance.

Hence, this is a systematic literature review based on the following research questions:

1. **RQ1:** What has the literature conceptualised about the relationship between human resource management and organisational sustainability?
2. **RQ2:** What are the theoretical underpinnings of the emergence of regenerative approaches in the sustainability of organisations?
3. **RQ3:** What can Regenerative Human Resource Management bring to the organisational sustainability studies in the future?

The research has three contributions. First, it integrates the fragmented literature relating to HRM, sustainability and regeneration. Second, it proposes a new theoretical extension of Green HRM and Sustainable HRM called Regenerative Human Resource Management. Third, it suggests a research agenda and conceptual framework to be used in empirical testing in the future.

Theoretical Background

The Sustainability of Organisations and the Regenerative Perspective

Sustainability of organisations has long been perceived as the capacity of companies to strike a balance between economic goals and the environment and social responsibility. The Triple Bottom Line approach developed by Elkington (1997) has broadened the organisational performance beyond financial results and has focused on integrating people, planet and profit. This view had an impact on the sustainability research by making organisations more likely to take into account the larger stakeholder interests and longer-term value creation.

Nonetheless, sustainability practices in most organisations have tended to emerge based on a risk-reduction orientation. Companies often implement sustainability programmes to cut down on emissions, enhance efficiency, meet regulatory standards, or address the pressure exerted by stakeholders. Although these measures are significant, they might not go all the way to the issue of developing organisations that can be continuously renewed. The new regenerative sustainability approach claims that organisations must shift away from sustaining current systems to actively rebuilding and enhancing social and environmental environments (du Plessis, 2012; Hahn & Tampe, 2021). Regenerative thinking considers organisations as interrelated systems where human capabilities, organisational processes, communities and natural environments interact with one another. Thus, sustainability transformation is not only about the implementation of new technologies and new operations but the building of human capabilities that enable uninterrupted regeneration.

This view presents a valuable research opportunity in the field of Human Resource Management (HRM) since the employees are the key players who understand the goals of sustainability, generate new knowledge, invent new processes and introduce sustainability values as part of organisational practices. The question of how regenerative sustainability thinking can be developed by understanding how HR systems can help in this interpretive and generative role is therefore critical. The paragraphs below discuss the development of HRM scholarship to respond to this opportunity.

The Future of Human Resource Management towards Sustainability

The connection between HRM and sustainability has undergone a number of steps. The individual stages represent a larger change in the way organisations perceive the contribution of employees to the attainment of sustainability results. Following this development can be used to explain the theoretical bases on which Regenerative Human Resource Management can be developed. Traditional HRM was mainly concerned with the efficiency of the organisation by planning the workforce, employee performance, motivation, and talent management (Wright & McMahan, 1992). Employees have been primarily treated as resources which bring about competitive advantage. Sustainability concerns were not a major factor in the stage since

HR priorities revolved around operational effectiveness as opposed to the overall social or environmental results. The Resource-Based View (RBV) is a perspective that the success of organisations is based on the value of resources that are rare, valuable, and difficult to copy. Human knowledge, skills and capabilities thus are strategic resources that determine the performance of an organisation (Barney, 1991). This theoretical basis subsequently provided forward-looking HRM views that attempted to connect the abilities of employees with the results of sustainability more directly. The emergence of Green Human Resource Management came when the issue of green issues came to be incorporated into HR practices. Green HRM is defined as the correlation of HR practices with the environment goals such as green recruitment, green training, environmental performance appraisal, and employee involvement in the environmental programmes (Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013). This integration was a significant change as it placed HR as an active participant of organisational environmental strategy as opposed to administrative role.

Studies have demonstrated that Green HRM can affect the environmental performance by creating awareness of the employees and promoting environmentally friendly behaviours (Ren, Tang, & Jackson, 2018). Nonetheless, the prevalent emphasis is on ecological impact reduction. Consequently, Green HRM has been criticised as having a little concern to the wider social and economic aspect of sustainability. Sustainable HRM goes beyond environmental issues by incorporating economic, social and employee-related sustainability aspects (Kramar, 2014). Ehnert (2009) made the argument that sustainable HRM is concerned with the maintenance and development of human resources over the long-term and is concerned with organisational needs and the wellbeing of employees. Sustainable HRM emphasises on employee development, sustainable workforce over the long term, ethical employment, and organisational responsibility (Kramar, 2022). Although this development has occurred, most Sustainable HRM studies continue to be aimed at ensuring organisational sustainability as opposed to developing regenerative results.

To Regenerative Human Resource Management

The other theoretical extension of sustainability-oriented HRM is Regenerative Human Resource Management. It is based on the premises of Green HRM and Sustainable HRM but it is moving to the sphere of renewal, restoration, and positive value creation (Shriprasad Kulkarni & Padma, 2024). This extension is a reaction to the constraints discovered in existing sustainability-oriented HR studies. A strategic approach to people management that builds capabilities (both employee and organisational) to restore, renew and generate positive social, organisational, and ecological value. RHRM is based on renewal mechanisms, as opposed to the conventional HR sustainability approaches. The mechanisms put stress on the constant building of the capabilities of employees instead of preserving the existing practices. This differentiation makes RHRM an extension of sustainability-based HRM that is forward-looking (Saxena, 2025). The main point is that regenerative human capabilities are essential to attaining regenerative sustainability in organisations. Human abilities thus act as the catalyst that facilitates the sweeter organisational and ecological rejuvenation. In the absence of this human aspect, regenerative strategies may still just be on paper, and not a working concept. There are four possible dimensions of regenerative HRM:

Organisations are constantly building employee understanding, skills, wellness and flexibility. Instead of considering employees as resources that need to be optimised, employees are perceived as developing sources of organisational renewal. This change of mindset is motivating organisations to invest in long-term employee growth and not just on short-term performance benefits. Regenerative organisations must have continuous learning systems in which employees learn to comprehend sustainability issues and devise creative solutions (Lemmetty & Collin, 2020). These learning systems are not only limited to formal training

programmes, but also to a continuous knowledge sharing and reflective practice. In the long term, they allow employees to react proactively to the arising sustainability problems instead of reactively addressing them.

HR systems have a bearing on the organisational capacity to adapt, innovate and transform in case of sustainability challenges. This impact is achieved via recruitment, development and performance systems that appreciate flexibility and problem solving. Through this, HR functions are at the centre stage of developing organisational capacity required to renew the organisation in the long term (Nukala & Maddula, 2025). The regenerative HRM promotes employees to think about the wider implications of organisational activities to communities, customers, and ecosystems. The orientation takes employees out of a narrow role-based thinking into a broader organisational responsibility. It also supports the notion that the concept of sustainable value creation goes beyond the limits of the organisation itself.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Regenerative HRM

Dynamic Capability Theory is used to explain how organisations develop, combine, and re-align internal resources in response to new environments (Teece, Pisano, and Shuen, 1997). The issue of sustainability compels organisations to replenish their competences on a regular basis. In this view, Regenerative HRM may be considered as a human-oriented dynamic capability which facilitates the conversion of sustainability intentions into organisational action. The Stakeholder Theory suggests that organisations need to generate value to various stakeholders and not just shareholder (Freeman, 1984). The regenerative HR approach is in line with this perspective as it focuses on the creation of value to the employees, communities, customers, society and natural systems. This correspondence supports the notion that regenerative HRM is an expansion of organisational responsibility beyond internal performance measures towards a wider stakeholder wellbeing. Organisational learning is a way in which organisations learn and enhance themselves by experience (Senge, 1990). The transformation of sustainability needs learning mechanisms to enable employees and organisations to continually adapt. That is why, regenerative HRM can serve as the process which transforms personal learning into capability of organisational sustainability.

METHODS

Research Design

The proposed study uses a methodology of a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to locate, evaluate, and synthesise the current research concerning the management of human resources, sustainability, and regenerative organisational practices. To enhance transparency and methodological rigour, the review is based on Preferred Reporting Items to Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. This will make the process of review systematic, replicable and based on known academic standards.

Database Selection

Two large databases of academic literature have been chosen: Scopus and Web of Science Core Collection. These databases were selected due to offering quality peer-reviewed management and sustainability research. They also have wide indexing coverage that enhances their chances of retrieving relevant interdisciplinary research relating HRM and sustainability.

Search Strategy

The search strategy was formulated based on three overriding concepts namely: Human Resource Management, Sustainability and Regenerative/renewal approaches.

Search string:

("human resource management" OR HRM OR workforce OR employee*)
AND
(sustainab* OR ESG OR sustainable organisation* OR sustainability performance)
AND
(regenerative OR renewal OR restoration OR regeneration OR adaptive capability).

Table1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Included	Excluded
Publication type	Journal articles	Conference papers, books
Language	English/ Indonesia	-
Field	Business, management, sustainability, HRM	Marketing, Entrepreneurship
Focus	HR, employees, sustainability	Pure environmental studies
Quality	Peer-reviewed	Non-peer-reviewed

Data Analysis Procedure

The review process consists of identification of relevant studies, removal of duplicates, title and abstract screening, full-text assessment, and thematic synthesis. The extracted information includes author and year, theoretical foundation, research method, key variables, sustainability outcomes, and identified research gaps. This structured extraction process supports consistent comparison across studies and underpins the thematic synthesis presented in the following section.

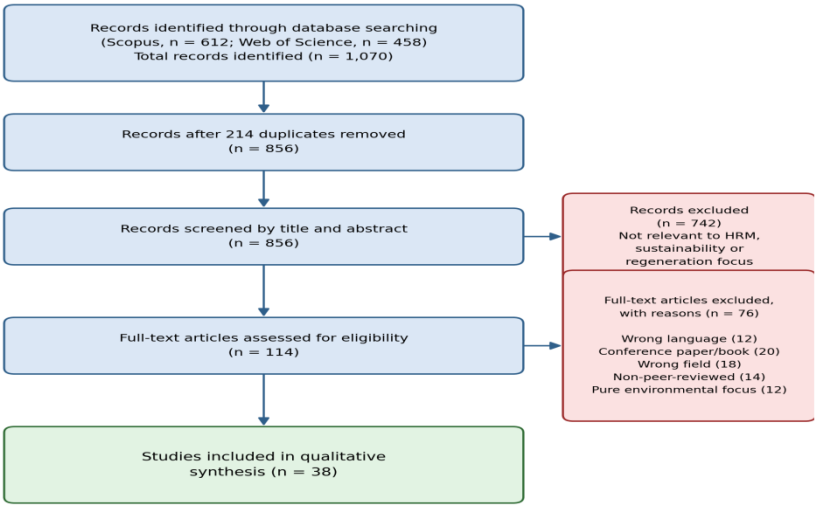


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Study Selection Process

Findings and Thematic Synthesis

The systematic review reveals that the connection between human resource management and organisational sustainability has evolved in a number of conceptual phases. Despite the valuable contribution made by the existing studies, the literature is still disjointed on how human resources could benefit organisations to regenerate outcomes. This disintegration underscores the fact that a more holistic framework is required to bridge individual, organisational and ecological levels of analysis. Four key streams of research were identified through the thematic synthesis. These streams represent very different yet related elements of

the shift between sustainability and regeneration in the HRM scholarship. They jointly give the framework of the findings presented in the subsequent subsections.

Theme 1: Sustainability Compliance to Sustainability Transformation

The former theme shows a progressive shift to sustainability based on transformation as compared to a compliance-based sustainability. The initial HR studies pertaining to sustainability were mainly aimed at introducing environmentally friendly measures, such as green recruitment, green training and employee involvement (Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013). These activities enhanced the environmental awareness of the employees and helped in organisational environmental goals. Nonetheless, this practice tends to regard employees as means to execute sustainability practices instead of being agents of change. The weaknesses are that sustainability is a programme and not a capability within an organisation. The regenerative approach resolves this drawback by suggesting that employees ought to not only adhere to sustainability but to also be involved in the renewal of organisational systems. Therefore:

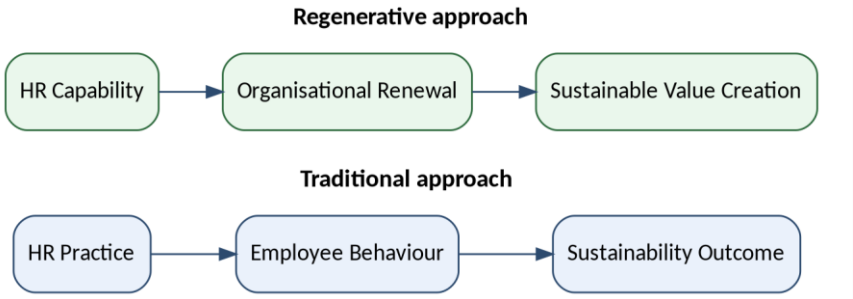


Figure 2. Comparison Between Regenerative and Traditional Approaches in HRM

Theme 2: Human Capability Renewal as the Foundation of Regeneration

The second theme underscores the fact that the transformation of sustainability needs a constant refreshment of human capabilities. Available literature on Sustainable HRM focuses on the development of employees and the sustainability of workforce in the long-term (Kramar, 2022). Nevertheless, regeneration brings in a more powerful outlook as it is concerned with constant enhancement and renewal.

Human capability renewal entails:

Sustainability Competence

Workers gain knowledge and skill needed to respond to sustainability challenges. Examples are sustainability problem-solving, environmental knowledge, and ethical decision making. These skills will equip employees to deal with the complex sustainability challenges as they come in everyday organisational practice.

Adaptive Capability

Staff develops the ability to be responsive to uncertainty, technological change and pressures on sustainability. This adaptability enables organisations to make changes to their practices without derailing them on the path to sustainable practices over the long term. It also decreases the vulnerability to disruption in case of changing external conditions at high speeds.

Purpose and Meaning

Organisational sustainability goals are linked to personal values by employees. This alignment enhances intrinsic motivation and promotes long-term commitment to sustainability efforts. Employees are likely to be more committed to organisational renewal when they see a

real intent in what they are doing. This implies that regenerative HRM can help in building employees that are capable of actively developing solutions to sustainability. Instead of merely adhering to the sustainability policies, these employees get to be active participants of organisational renewal. This change of compliance to contribution is one of the main distinguishing characteristics of the regenerative perspective.

Theme 3: Organisational Regenerative Capability as a Lost Mechanism

One of the biggest gaps that can be determined based on the literature is that the mechanism between the HR practices and sustainability performance is not much explained. This is despite the increasing number of studies that have tested and established the connection between HR practices and organisational sustainability outcomes (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). Numerous studies investigate direct relations:



Figure 3. Direct Relationship Between HRM and Sustainability Performance

However, organisational transformation rarely occurs directly. This review proposes that HR influences sustainability through a capability-building process. Regenerative HRM develops learning systems, innovation capacity, adaptation ability, and sustainability-oriented decision-making (Senge, 1990; Hahn & Tampe, 2021). These capabilities allow organisations to regenerate their systems. Therefore:

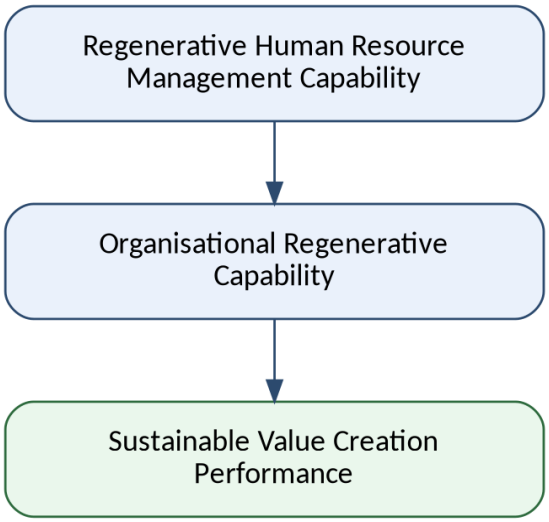


Figure 4. Conceptual Model of Regenerative HRM, Organisational Capability, and Sustainable Value Creation

Theme 4: Moving from Sustainability Performance Towards Sustainable Value Creation

The other significant result is that sustainability measurement should not be limited to environmental indicators (Elkington, 1997). The measures in place often incorporate carbon reduction, resource efficiency, and environmental performance. This tunnel vision is hard to appreciate the wider economic and social good that regenerative HR practices could bring.

A renewal viewpoint implies larger consequences:

Economic Value encompasses long term competitiveness, innovation and resilience. The above are achieved as organisations invest in human capabilities that will aid them in ongoing adaptation. This investment can eventually translate into a sustained competitive standing as compared to strategies that only looked at cutting costs. Social Value encompasses the wellbeing of the employees, contribution to the community and stakeholder relationships. These are the results of the larger social roles that are anticipated of regenerative organisations. The improvement of these relationships can also lead to the improvement of organisational reputation and trust of stakeholders over a long period. Ecological Value incorporates environmental restoration and good use of resources (Jankalová et al., 2024). These are not only the results of reducing environmental degradation but also directly enhancement of ecological conditions. Such proactive restorative attention makes regenerative practices different to traditional environmental management practices. Hence, it should be conceptualised as: Sustainable Value Creation Performance and not just sustainability performance (Freeman, 1984; Hahn & Tampe, 2021). This more inclusive conceptualisation embraces economic, social, and ecological outcomes in a single notion. It also presents a more in-depth foundation on how HR practices can foster long-term organisational and ecological renewal.

Gap in Research and Future Research Framework

According to the systematic review, there are three significant gaps.

Gap 1: Conceptual Gap

The Green HRM and Sustainable HRM are the leading research in the current HR sustainability studies. The little literature describes the way in which HR systems generate favourable renewal capabilities. To fill this conceptual gap, it is essential to develop theories that clearly implement the principles of regeneration into HRM scholarship.

Gap 2: Mechanism Gap

Direct relationships are frequently tested in previous studies. The mechanism by which HR will bring about change to sustainability is not clear. Explaining this process would assist clarify how HR practices are converted into larger organisational and ecological results in the long run.

Gap 3: Measurement Gap

The current sustainability results are mostly centred on environmental indicators. Human, organisational and ecological value creation should be part of future research. Such an extension of the scope of measurement would give a more comprehensive picture of the role of regenerative HR practices in creating sustainable value.

Proposed Conceptual Framework

Based on the identified gaps, this study proposes:

1. Regenerative HRM Capability (Independent Variable)
2. Organisational Regenerative Capability (Mediator)
3. Sustainable Value Creation Performance (Dependent Variable)
4. Moderating variable: Sustainability-Oriented Leadership

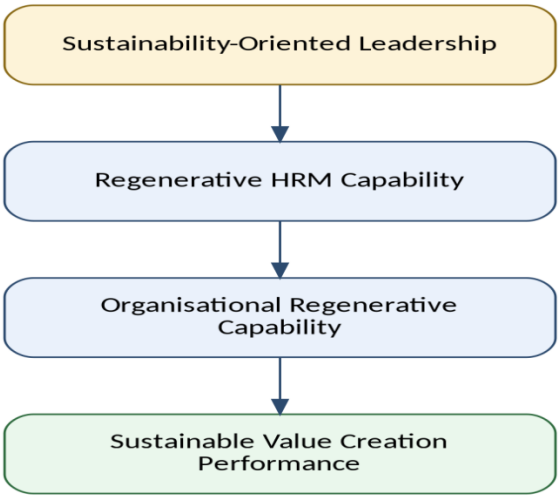


Figure 5. Future research agenda

Future Empirical Testing Hypotheses

H1: Regenerative Human Resource Management Capability has a positive impact on Organisational Regenerative Capability.
Rationale: The HR systems fostering employee renewal, sustainability learning, and stakeholder orientation will increase the organisational regeneration capability.

H2: Organisational Regenerative Capability is positively related to sustainable value Creation Performance.
Explanation: Organisations that have greater renewal ability are in a position to continually adapt, innovate and generate sustainability value.

H3: Regenerative Capability of organisations mediates between Regenerative HRM Capability and Sustainable Value Creation Performance.
Explanation: HR does not produce sustainability outcomes per se, it builds organisational capabilities that produce sustainability value.

H4: Sustainability-Oriented Leadership enhances the relationship between Regenerative HRM Capability and Organisational Regenerative Capability.
Rationale: Leadership offers guidance and resources to make regenerative HR practices organisational capabilities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The review builds upon existing research in sustainability of HR by providing a new theoretical line of research in Regenerative Human Resource Management (Kramar, 2022; du Plessis, 2012). It is not merely a matter of renaming Green HRM to a new name. Rather, the regenerative approach alters the basic premise on the position of employees. Conventional sustainability rationale: "Employees can assist organisations to lessen adverse effects. Regenerative logic: "Employees aid organisations in developing new and positive value. This change has significant implications to researchers and practitioners. To the researchers, the framework offers a new perspective of examining sustainability transformation by utilising human capabilities. The regenerative approach to Human Resource Management (HRM) fundamentally redefines the role of employees within sustainability frameworks by shifting from a defensive to a proactive and value-creating stance. Unlike traditional Green HRM, which primarily focuses on minimizing harm and mitigating negative environmental impacts through employee involvement (Sharma, 2025). Regenerative HRM positions employees as

active agents in fostering innovation and continuous organizational renewal. This paradigm emphasizes leveraging human capabilities not just to comply with sustainability policies but to drive transformative change that generates new, positive outcomes for both the organization and its broader ecosystem. This shift challenges researchers to explore sustainability through a lens that integrates human potential as a core driver of systemic regeneration rather than mere resource conservation (Saxena, 2025)

For practitioners, this framework advocates a more holistic approach to sustainability strategies, urging managers to move beyond policy implementation and system adjustments toward cultivating employee development that supports long-term resilience and adaptability. It underscores the importance of nurturing skills, mindsets, and behaviors that empower employees to contribute meaningfully to sustained organizational renewal. By doing so, organizations can embed sustainability into their culture and operations in a way that is dynamic and regenerative, ensuring that sustainability efforts evolve in response to emerging challenges and opportunities. This perspective not only broadens the scope of HRM's contribution to sustainability but also aligns organizational goals with a regenerative ethos that benefits people, the planet, and performance simultaneously. To managers, the framework says that sustainability strategies must not merely concentrate on policies and systems, but they should also aim at developing employees who would enable sustained organisational renewal.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review advances the emerging discourse on the intersection of regenerative sustainability and human resource management by synthesising existing knowledge and identifying key directions for future research. The findings suggest that while Sustainable Human Resource Management (Sustainable HRM) provides a valuable foundation for aligning human resource practices with sustainability objectives, it remains primarily focused on minimizing negative impacts and maintaining organizational continuity. Comparatively, limited attention has been devoted to understanding how human resource management can actively contribute to organizational renewal, the regeneration of human capabilities, and the creation of long-term sustainable value.

To address this gap, this review proposes the concept of Regenerative Human Resource Management (Regenerative HRM) as an extension of the Sustainable HRM paradigm. Regenerative HRM shifts the emphasis from sustaining existing resources to continuously restoring, developing, and enhancing human and organizational capabilities that support long-term resilience, innovation, and value creation. By integrating regenerative principles into human resource management, organizations may move beyond compliance-oriented sustainability initiatives toward strategies that foster continuous renewal and enduring competitive advantage.

Given that the proposed framework is conceptual, further empirical research is necessary to validate its theoretical propositions. Future studies should examine the relationships among the proposed constructs across different industries, organizational settings, and national contexts using quantitative approaches such as structural equation modelling. Comparative and cross-country studies would be particularly valuable in determining whether the proposed relationships remain consistent across diverse institutional and cultural environments. In addition, longitudinal research could provide deeper insights into how regenerative HRM capabilities evolve over time and contribute to sustained organizational renewal and performance.

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