

Impact of Sustainable Human Resource Management on Employee Sustainable Performance

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Abstract

Organizational sustainable performance is measured through the aggregate sustainable performances of its workforce. Hence, employee sustainability performance is the central to achieve organizational sustainability performance. Again, employee outcomes are to a greater extent influenced by human resource management (HRM) practices of organizations. Based on such prominent role of HRM, the current study examines the relationship between two dimensional sustainable HRM practices (competency development and employee relation) and three-dimensional employee sustainable performance (environmental, economic and social) focusing on the perceptions of managers of private banking organizations of Bangladesh following the notion of the social exchange theory. The current research employs purposive judgmental sampling and gets responses from a sample size of 150. Questionnaire survey is used to collect data that are analyzed using partial least square-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicate that sustainable HRM practices have significant impact on all three dimensions (economic, social and environmental performance) of sustainable performances. Therefore, this study recommends the organizations to use sustainable-focused HRM practices to achieve sustainable targets through enhancing employee sustainable performances. It is further recommended that future researcher can incorporate mediating and moderating variables to explain how sustainable HRM influences sustainable performances of employees.

Keywords: *Sustainable human resource management, employee sustainable performance, private banking organizations, Bangladesh.*

Research type: Empirical study

Introduction

Bangladesh Government has shown its true commitment in achieving United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs) as reflected in SDGs progress report published in 2020. Such remarkable progress could not be possible if all organizations either in formal organizational settings or informal social settings align their own sustainability related targets with government targets in relation with SDGs. In this line of encouragement, private banks of Bangladesh have proven their sincere support in facilitating government's sustainability target achievement by being more environment focused. Bangladesh Central Bank has its own green banking guidelines which are followed by all scheduled banks among which private banks are leading in maintaining green policies in banking activities. Undoubtedly, human resources are the backbone of the successful implementation of any organizational vision and policies (Shedid and Russell, 2017).

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Accordingly, organizations are constantly looking for the paths to improve human competencies and effectiveness for securing their maximum performance levels (Chiang et al., 2011). Since banking organizations are offering similar types of services, the way how their people are serving their customers can make a difference. Hence, it is argued that their sustainability-oriented performances are more likely to attract even more customers. In achieving so, sustainable human resource management (HRM) might play a critical role.

Sustainable HRM is defined as the “adoption of HRM strategies and practices that enable the achievement of financial, social and ecological goals, with an impact inside and outside of the organization and over a long-term time horizon while controlling for unintended side effects and negative feedback” (Ehnert et al., 2016, p. 90). Being recognized as a unique approach to HRM, sustainability in HRM is capable enough to attract heightened attention in contemporary times (Ehnert et al., 2014). Since different external pressure groups are creating demands as well as organizations are realizing their environmental responsibilities, current organizations have begun to include corporate social responsibility (CSR) elements containing sustainability-focused actions into their business strategies and policies. Moreover, now a day’s sustainability disclosure database is available that publish sustainability report of several organizations providing information on administrative exertions to manage employees responsibly. In parallel, scholarly articles either review-based or empirical study linking HRM with triple goals (economic, social and environmental) of sustainability are published in leading journals. Moreover, research interests are also shown to discover sustainability impact of individual and group performance (Ehnert et al., 2016; Järlström et al., 2018; Kramar, 2014; Mariappanadar, 2020). In line with these studies, the present motive is to contribute to sustainable HRM and sustainability performances of employees from the context of private banking employees of Bangladesh.

Following the thought of the social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964), the presents study contends that sustainable HRM would encourage employees’ positive behaviors as it could smoothen the growth of positive perceptions at employees’ level about how organizations take care of and show respect to them and thus, realize those positive employee outcomes which would justify the reciprocal relation between employees and organization. Sustainable HRM would represent organizational sustainable policies and practices to enhance employee capabilities in sustainable performances. It is expected that employees would respond to such policies as these are relevant to their sustainable performance enhancement. Here a reciprocal interaction works in the forms of organizational policies that support expected employee behaviors and accordingly, employees react to signify organizational supportive policies for them. The study believes that employee perceptions of getting support, respect and care from the organization would influence them to give back organizational favors by exposing more constructive solutions facilitating the organization (Rubel, Kee & Rimi, 2021). Thus, SET clearly describes the impacts of sustainable HRM within organizations, as employees have sustainable job-specific organizational supports generating a reciprocal outcome that yields sustainable performance results (Almarzooqi et al., 2019).

Therefore, from practical perspective, the present attempt tries to reconcile the theoretical and practical thought of HRM function by searching sustainable HRM’s connection with sustainable performances of employees and finds pragmatic evidence to sustain previous beliefs. The three-

fold impacts of this study include first, the introduction of sustainability rationale into HRM works in the context of Bangladesh to expand the knowledge base of this particular topic (Ehnert & Harry, 2012). Next, it adds to the existing body of studies authentication the positive impact of sustainable HRM on employee outcomes. Lastly, it spotlights how employee perceptions affect organizational sustainability HRM policies shaping their sustainable performances.

For structuring the write-up, contents have been grouped under four main parts. The following section is about reviewing the extant literature on sustainable HRM and employee sustainable performance to describe how these two are related and to form present research hypotheses. Next section offers an explanation on the methodology used for testing the hypothetical relations. 3rd section presents the study results through reporting analysis. Finally, the last part concludes the study, discusses the contributions, points out the implications, admits its limitations and provides direction for potential study in this field.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Sustainable HRM

The notion of sustainable HRM is comparatively new and hence, it lacks a standard definition. Ehnert and Harry (2012) mentioned Sustainable HRM as the form of planned or evolving strategies of human resource and practices required to enable organizational goal accomplishment while concurrently rejuvenating sustainable-minded HR base. In the same way, Kramar (2014) explains sustainable HRM as a novel pattern of HR policies and applications required to the attainment of social, ecological and financial targets while concurrently retaining the workforce over long term. Ehnert et al. (2014) has considered sustainable HRM as a viable option regarding sustainable employment relationship as well as contribution towards sustainable corporate development. They proclaim that organization should be both environmentally and economically sustainable. In addition, sustainability incorporates employee aspects like employee competency development, employee participation, employee health and wellbeing, justice, and overall employability.

Sustainable HRM focuses on the significance of HRM functions that result something more valuable than making money (Kramar, 2014; Ehnert et al., 2014; Järlström et al., 2016; Ehnert et al., 2016). In a prior study, Hobelsberger (2014) mentions that if organizational goals and effectiveness consist of social, environmental and economic norms, sustainable HRM serves dual purposes: firstly, delivering HR strategies founded upon a complete long-term perspective for stimulating and supporting sustainability energy of organization and secondly, contributing to survival of organization by appealing, retaining and developing staffs for preserving quality HR base. Sustainable HRM moves around soft matters like portraying sincerity towards staffs, including giving satisfactory work conditions and environment, supporting development prospects as well as being considerate about psychosocial and physical well-being of employees at work. In consistent with this thought, this study follows that sustainable HRM is employee management side of organizational efforts towards engaging them into corporate social responsibility (CSR). This emerging concept points out to a group of tasks inherent in HRM for successfully managing work people in securing their learning and development as well as well-being so that they could contribute to the effective accomplishment of organizational sustainable goals simultaneously.

Employee Sustainable Performance

The thought of sustainable development emerges from Brundtland Report of the United Nations that mentioned it as a progress in fulfilling the needs of both current and future generations (Brundtland, 1987). Sustainable development is simultaneous improvement of economy, society and environment (Strange & Bayley, 2008). Maximum sustainability study is concerned with ecological sustainability and related to organizations' CSR efforts. Few efforts are taken to make a link between HRM and in-house green issues like greening of organization culture (Jabbour, 2011), greening people (Moktadir et al., 2019), greening the workplace (Islam et al., 2020) and greening of strategic HRM (DuBois & DuBois, 2012). The present focus is to add to this line of studies by exploring sustainable HRM contributions to employee sustainable performances. An employee performance has continually been regarded as an enabler of performance of organization (Alfes, Shantz, & Truss, 2012) and as a precondition to achieve and sustain overall performance of organization (Melián-González, 2016). So, organizational performances depend greatly upon how their individual as well as collective employee performances are managed (Ahmad, Farrukh, & Nazir, 2015). Not surprisingly, in this case HRM role is sought. Subsequently, understanding how sustainable HRM is playing the vital role for establishing the basis of effective sustainable performances of organizations needs to be further examined. Though developed countries have few experiences, less is seen within developing countries (Almarzooqi et al., 2019). In spite of the substantial study effort towards comprehending the role of HRM to influence performances of employees (Akhtar et al., 2016; Jibrin-Bidaet al., 2017; Petros, 2014), well-defined evidence is to be yet required for proving the significant positive relations between sustainable HRM and employee sustainable performances (Mariappanadar & Kramar, 2014). Hence, this study expects to provide evidence of meeting such requirement.

Sustainable HRM (competency development) and Sustainable Performance

In the current focus, employee performance indicates individual capability for performing their given tasks most efficiently and effectively to yield the greatest benefits for the organization (Elnaga & Imran, 2013; Anitha & Kumar, 2016). These particular tasks referring employee performances include three central dimensions of their sustainable performances that are environmental, social and economic, where all three dimensions are counted to be achieved and sustained at the highest level always (Fernando et al., 2019). Thus, sustaining and motivating high performances of employees would depend upon multiple aspects and their impacts constructively interact towards overall performances of employees. Hence, identifying the aspects influencing sustainable performances of employees is vital to understand what organizational policies could permit and nurture such performances. Existing body of knowledge on employee and organizational performances is exploring the perceptions of both employees and management to find the standard interfaces among influential facets and mostly those connected to HRM. For instance, employee training plays the vital role in promoting the adoption of sustainable performance model in the workplace (Aragão & Jabbour, 2017). Training and development are found important HRM functions to influence employee economic and environmental performances (Arulrajah et al., 2015; Guerci, Decramer, Van Waeyenberg & Aust, 2019; Zaid, Jaaron & Bon, 2018; Mousa & Othman, 2020). Therefore, this study targets extending the extant literature by exploring

employee perceptions of interactions between sustainable HRM (competency development) and sustainable performance attainment.

Thus, the current study develops the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1a. Sustainable HRM (competency development) has a positive impact on environmental performance.

Hypothesis 1b. Sustainable HRM (competency development) has a positive impact on economic performance.

Hypothesis 1c. Sustainable HRM (competency development) has a positive impact on social performance.

Sustainable HRM (employee relations) and Sustainable Performance

Ehnert and Harry (2009) mention that sustainable HRM entails both appealing and maintaining talented and motivated employees and ensuring them a satisfactory work setting and prospects to develop. Researchers (Ehnert et al., 2016) also state that sustainable HRM is concerned with developing mutually regenerative and beneficial relationships between external and internal resource providers (like employees, their families, natural environment, education system). In another study, Baum (2018) explains sustainable HRM as a proactive approach within employment relationship which can aid companies legitimize their business procedures within society. Regarding influence of sustainability within HRM on the performances of organizations, Hobelsberger (2014) underlines that integration between employee management and creation of good reputation are the focuses of sustainable organizational performances. According to Hobelsberger, HRM sustainability begins with HRM sustaining organization's own HR base. From the literature study, it is evident that sustainable HRM plays a key role in understanding, designing and implementing organizational responsibility initiatives and that organizations' interpretations of sustainable responsibilities have repercussions on how they relate them with their employees. Therefore, based on these arguments, following hypotheses have been proposed:

Hypothesis 2a. Sustainable HRM (employee relations) has a positive impact on environmental performance.

Hypothesis 2b. Sustainable HRM (employee relations) has a positive impact on economic performance.

Hypothesis 2c. Sustainable HRM (employee relations) has a positive impact on social performance.

Methodology

Sample and Data collection

This cross-sectional research uses data collected at a particular point of time from the branch managers of the private commercial banks of Bangladesh operating in Dhaka. As Bangladesh central bank has sustainable policy directives (green banking) for banking policies as well as in-

house operations, their sustainable practices would facilitate them to create a sustainable culture to practice sustainable initiatives that might be exemplary for other organizations. The population of the current research is all managerial level employees working in the private banking organizations in Bangladesh. Currently there are 57 private commercial banks (PCBs) operating in Bangladesh and where Dhaka is chosen as all the head offices of the PCBs operate here that put the researcher at ease to communicate with all the banking organizations. Due to COVID 19 crisis the researcher distributed the questionnaires through online. Initially the researchers contacted with 20 banking organizations through email and after getting the approval from 14 organizations, 210 questionnaires were sent equally to all responding banking organizations. Among these distributed questionnaires 170 questionnaires were returned where 20 were removed due to incomplete information. Finally, 150 questionnaires were found usable for data analysis and hypotheses testing with a response rate of 71.43%. In the context of Bangladesh Rubel and Kee (2015) find significant results using 129 respondents in RMG industry. Hair et al. (2019) recommended that for partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), 100 cases is sufficient for data analysis and interpretations. Sekaran and Bougie (2010) suggest taking minimum sample of at least 10 times (preferably more) the number of variables in the study. Therefore, in this case 150 responses can be considered acceptable for data analysis applying PLS-SEM.

The current study employed purposive judgmental sampling, a part of non-probability sampling design. Because of the absence of full list of branch managers, judgmental sampling was used. Branch managers were intentionally selected as they were better aware of bank sustainability policies and their internal management practices. This study admitted the possibility of having Common Method Variance (CMV). For minimizing the negative effect of CMV this study employed Harman Single Factor test suggested by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, (2003). Podsakoff and colleague noted that CMV creates problem when a single factor explains much of the variance. In this research, first factor explained only 21.73% of the total 63.21% variance and thus CMV was not a serious problem in this research.

Measures

Independent variable of the current study is two-dimensional sustainable HRM (competency development and employee relation) whereas, dependent variable is the three-dimensional sustainable performance (environmental performance, economic performance and social performance). Two dimensional sustainable HRM was adapted from Wikhamn (2019) and was measured by five and four items respectively. On the other hand, three-dimensional environmental performance was adapted from the work of Fernando et al. (2019). 12 items were adapted for measuring these three dimensions. All items of the independent and dependent variables were measured by 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The study used both Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) v.22 and Structural Equation Modeling- Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS 3.2.7). SPSS was used to conduct the descriptive analysis and SEM-PLS to test the hypothesized relationship.

Results

Measurement Model

Both convergent and discriminant validity were assessed to measure the measurement model of the current framework based on the guideline of Hair et al. (2019). In convergent validity factor loading, average variance extracted (AVE) and the composite reliability (CR) were checked. As exhibited in Table 1 factor loading of all items and AVE of all the variables were higher than 0.60 and 0.50 respectively. Thus, the measurement employed in the current research showed enough convergent validity. Furthermore, Hair et al. (2019) also recommended that the value of CR should be equal or higher than 0.07. In this research CR for all the variables was found higher than the suggested value.

Table 1. Measure Model Table

Constructs	Items	Loading	AVE	CR
Competency Development	COMP1	0.729	0.525	0.846
	COMP2	0.731		
	COMP3	0.740		
	COMP4	0.755		
	COMP5	0.664		
Economic Performance	ECOP1	0.776	0.626	0.893
	ECOP2	0.861		
	ECOP3	0.783		
	ECOP4	0.783		
	ECOP5	0.748		
Employee Relations	EMPR1	0.880	0.657	0.884
	EMPR2	0.836		
	EMPR3	0.803		
	EMPR4	0.712		
Environmental Performance	ENVP1	0.911	0.692	0.869
	ENVP2	0.897		
	ENVP3	0.663		
Social Performance	SOC1	0.875	0.692	0.899
	SOC2	0.770		
	SOC3	0.818		
	SOC4	0.860		

Note: COMP1= Competency development; ECOP= Economic performance; EMPR= Employee relations; ENVP= Environmental performance and SOC1= Social performance.

Furthermore, for discriminant validity, the correlations between the measures of potentially overlapping constructs were scrutinized. The main constructs were more strongly correlated with their measures (the diagonal elements presenting the square root AVE) than with the others (off-diagonal elements), indicating good discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981).

Table 2. Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Method)

	COMPD	ECOP	EMPR	ENVP	SOCP
COMPD	0.724				
ECOP	0.338	0.832			
EMPR	0.291	0.352	0.810		
ENVP	0.301	0.497	0.333	0.791	
SOCP	0.280	0.474	0.382	0.642	0.832
Mean	3.54	4.21	3.65	4.67	4.89
SD	0.67	0.97	0.72	0.96	1.03

Note: COMPD= Competency development; ECOP= Economic performance; EMPR= Employee relations; ENVP= Environmental performance and SOCP= Social performance.

Structural Model

In analyzing the structural model, a bootstrapping method with 500 re-samples was deliberated to test for path significance (Chin, 1998). Table (3) and figure (2) explain all the path relationships of the framework. To examine the hypothetical relationship among the constructs the current study developed a structural model where two dimensions of sustainable HRM practices considered the independent and three dimensional sustainable performance are the dependent variable. In this study, the R^2 value of all three dimensions of sustainable performance found substantial based on the guideline of Cohen (1988) such as, environmental performance ($R^2 = 29.5\%$), economic performance ($R^2 = 33.1\%$) and social performance ($R^2 = 28.9\%$). As shown in Table 3 and figure 2, the path from competency development to all three dimensions found significant positive relationship such as, competency development to environmental performance ($\beta = 0.224$, $p < 0.01$), competency development to economic performance ($\beta = 0.258$, $p < 0.01$) and competency development to social performance ($\beta = 0.184$, $p < 0.01$). On the other hand, the other dimensions employee relations also found positive significant relationship with three dimensional sustainable performance.

Table 3. Results of the Hypotheses

Hypotheses	Std. Beta	Std. Error	t-Value	P Values	Decision
Comp. Development>Envt. Performance	0.224	0.055	4.10**	0	Supported
Comp. Development>Eco. Performance	0.258	0.046	5.56**	0	Supported

Comp. Development>Soc. Performance	0.184	0.052	3.55**	0	Supported
Emp. Relations>Envt. Performance	0.268	0.053	5.04**	0	Supported
Emp. Relations>Eco. Performance	0.277	0.045	6.15**	0	Supported
Emp. Relations>Soc. Performance	0.329	0.044	7.54**	0	Supported
Note: *p<0.05, **P<0.01 (based on one-tailed test with 1000 bootstrapping)					

5. Discussion

The main purpose of this research is to examine the contribution of sustainable HRM to generate positive employee sustainable performances. The reciprocal norm of the social exchange theory represents the hypothetical connection between sustainable HRM as organizational input and employee sustainable performances as return in an exchange process. Reciprocal expected performances of employees in response to supportive sustainable HRM, equip the organizations with their capability to shine as well as flourish. This notion is significantly established by this study findings showing the substantial influence of sustainable HRM on employee sustainability performances. Furthermore, sustainable HRM would benefit in forming and enduring a perception of employee development and quality relations that employees value as reflected in their superior performances, leading to positive reciprocity.

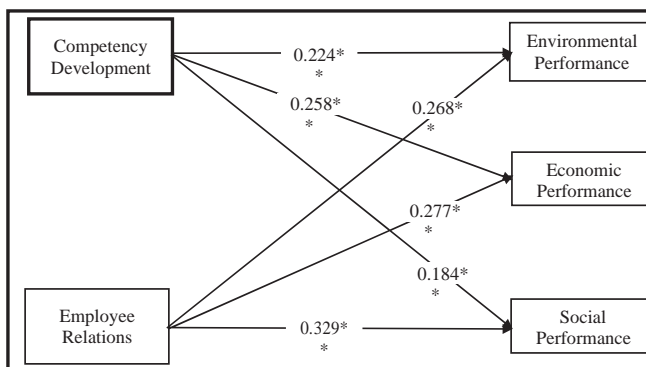


Figure 2. Outcome of Structural Model

From this study, several implications at the theoretical and practical levels could be drawn. These implications highlight how the present study would contribute to the expansion of the specific research area of sustainable HRM. The main contribution is introducing Bangladesh as a novel study context for exploring sustainable HRM. This research might provide a stimulus to the sustainable researchers by offering a new insight from a developing country context. Another value adding aspect is confirming the positive impact of sustainable HRM on employees. Even bank employees of Bangladesh perceive sustainable HRM is essential for improving their sustainable performances, as they are also the central of achieving sustainable targets of banks

which are aligned with Bangladesh government's sustainability aims. Finally, this study claims its contribution regarding the use of employee perceptions to measure the study variables. HRM researchers (Rube et al., 2021) argue that employees measure the implementation of HRM through their perceptions developed from their observations and experiences, hence, are very much important. Employee self-reporting responses indicate the reality of HRM performance in an organization. Having such practices in a written policy form is important, but more important is having those prescribed policies being implemented and evaluated as real and successful in attaining expected outcomes by the employees (Rubel et al., 2018). Moreover, the interactional effects of sustainable HRM and achievement of positive employee outcomes validates the exchange norm of the social exchange theory defined by Blau and the later findings of Rubel, Rimi and Walters (2017). The significance of the direct relationships between sustainable HRM and positive employee outcomes are in line with earlier work of Wikhamn (2019), Diaz-Carrion, López-Fernández, and Romero-Fernandez (2018) and Stankeviciute and Savaneviciene (2019) in supporting positive outcomes of sustainable HRM.

In support of previous studies, the current effort validates that if employees perceive and experience sustainable HRM, it will eventually result expected employee outcomes. Organizational context, vision and objectives define the focal points, combinations of HRM practices and expected results of sustainable HRM. Regarding this analysis, private banking organizations are selected as these organizations are operating in a competitive environment and they require to be compliant with government's sustainability targets. They should follow sustainability directives in both in-house management and in external lending policies. Their customer will find green lending policies logical if their in-house management comply with sustainability issues. These organization would enjoy the impacts of sustainable HRM practices in the form of sustainable employee performance. In a sustainable organization, employees would feel safe and secured and have a mental peace in doing something for the organization, society and environment. Therefore, managers should play the role of sustainable leaders to develop and implement sustainable HRM aligned with the specific requirements of the organization vision, mission and objective. Moreover, they should be committed to pledge that organization gives value to sustainability targets and its people are at the heart of achieving those targets. Sustainability in HRM develops employees and nurture their long-term relations so that they can observe, perceive and experience sustainability supporting employee management process as beneficial and value-adding.

Limitations and Future Study

Three key points can be noted to summarize the present study limitations. First, the inferences drawn from a study on a single industry restricts the generalizability of the findings applicable to different other industries, particularly those working in distinct business environments. Thus, more research should be conducted to focusing on other industries or sectors replicating the present model to connect the present findings and accept as general interactional outcomes between sustainable HRM and employee sustainable performances. Second, this type of statistical analysis does not fit for defining causal relationship hence, longitudinal study is recommended to justify sustainable HRM impact on sustainable performances. Third, the present direct relationship ignores the effect of other factors that cause sustainable HRM to impact sustainable performances therefore, future studies might include mediating and moderator variables to make a robust study on sustainable HRM outcomes.

Conclusion

This study concludes with the confirmation that sustainable HRM has significant role in generating constructive employee behaviors as well as promoting reciprocity exhibited by the responses of employees toward their employing organizations. The workplaces practicing sustainable HRM can better maintain high employee sustainability performances. Organizations should meticulously develop their sustainable HRM system within their sustainability responsibility framework. The findings of the current study could further the knowledge of the centrality of sustainable HRM and hence, offer sustainable oriented organizations with a clearer insight of what constitutes sustainable HRM and what it can achieve.

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