

Sustainable Human Resource Management: Literature look over

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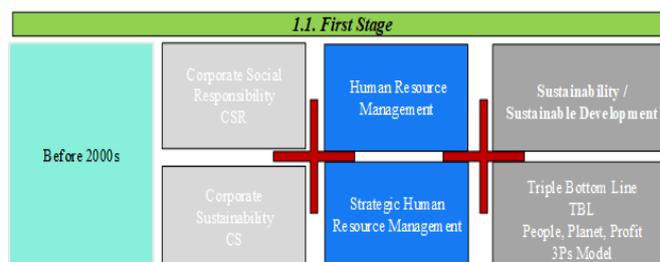
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Abstract: This study intends to review existing literature on sustainable human resource management (Sustainable HRM) with the plan of digging up in the literature for an improved perception of the current state of the research field and the research gaps, along with to propose future directions for the research. This paper provides a review of the discourse from pioneering stage to the current one. Sustainable HRM is a contemporary and an evolving discourse. Being an emerging field of study, it doesn't have a single definition as well as no definite set of practices. This field of study demands more research contributions from different contexts which will highlight its different understandings in different contexts, its different practices, different related problems, and their solutions. For better contribution, first there is a need to study the evolution of this field of study and then make progress. In this regard, this study contributes to this field of study by shedding light on the history of human resource management (HRM), discussing changing perspectives in HRM, talking about emergence of sustainability agenda in HRM, conferring beginning of a contemporary field, having a discussion on work done and future avenues in the field of Sustainable HRM

Keywords: HRM, Strategic HRM, Sustainable HRM, CSR, Sustainability, Sustainable Development

Introductory

Human resources (HRs) viewed as a source of competitive advantage in the organizations due to information communication technological (ICT) revolution and the mushrooming of industrialism. In the past era, the personal management discipline has experienced considerable changes. It suffered changes in its scope, focus, purposes, perspectives, and functions by stepping on the way to HRM and to Strategic human resource management (S-HRM) and subsequently to the contemporary Sustainable HRM. It is an extension of S-HRM. After 2000s, critique on S-HRM, increased interest in sustainability/sustainable development and the emergence of triple bottom line (TBL) model has preceded to the emergence of a contemporary research focus and a brand-new perspective in the field of HRM i.e., Sustainable HRM which shifted the focus of HRM from considering the pure economic perspectives only to be concerned about environmental and social perspectives as well. Sustainable HRM is a modern way of enhancing organizational efficiency and effectiveness by managing human resource strategically and sustainably. The focus of this study is on the emergence of the sustainable HRM which is divided in four stages (own interpretation shown in pictures 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4).



Human Resource Management (HRM)

To reach and understand contemporary and emerging concept of Sustainable HRM let's start from scratch of HR. With reference to the literature, HR demonstrated as a summative of a human's intrinsic and learned knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA). While in an organization the term HR referred to the personnel/staff/employees of the organization who run organizational affairs and it also signified as an organizational function which manages organizational employees and their related issues (Kumar, 2011; Gardia, 2018). The integration of HR with the management gave birth to the discourse of HRM which was considered as an approach to get competitive advantage (Storey, 1995), an organizational people development process (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2004; Collings & Wood, 2009), a processor an innovative and structured way of managing people in the organizations (DeCenzo, Robbins, & Verhulst, 2016), a managerial procedure to develop collective relationship between employer and employees (Joshy, 2015). In the past, HRM involved in developing and executing organizational level policies and agendas to achieve organizational goals by managing human resources (Bratton & Gold, 2007). The discourse of strategy which defined as an action plan entered in the literature of organizations and used as a pattern to bring into line organizational plans, goals, and activities to get competitive advantage (Hitt, Ireland, & Hoskisson, 2007). An organization adopts different strategies according to different levels like corporate, business, and functional level (Hofer & Schendel, 1978). The strategy discourse was also used as synonym to long-term planning in the literature (Barney, 2001). The field of strategic management emerges by mingling the discourse of strategy in the field of management and it evolved as a process of planning, executing, and evaluating organizational long- and short-term goals and related strategies by considering organizational resources and its operating environment (internal and external). It also connected with strategic planning (David, 2011).

Strategic HRM (S-HRM)

When the discourses of strategy, management, and HR blended the discourse of S-HRM came into being and it was late 1970s, and 1980s. S-HRM progressed as a more specific process, approach, or pattern of managing people to improve organizational performance (financial) and to procure organizational short- and long-term goals, and economic outcomes by aligning people management policies or HRM activities with organizational strategies. The S-HRM arose as an economic and shareholder centric approach in the literature of organizations. It worked on enhancing organizational productivity and financial outcomes, reducing organizational turnover and organizational costs. Further the development of the tools like 'HR scorecards', 'Indexing Best Practices', 'Benchmarking of operational efficiency', etc. were the evidence of the link between HRM activities and organizational financial outcomes. But it neglected perceptions, interests, and requirements of various other stakeholders, national contexts and environmental impact and it failed to address HRM complexities within organizations. In other words, it can be said that the discourse of strategy couldn't be able to bring real change by attaching with HRM (Becker & Huselid, 1998; Delery & Doty, 1996; Huselid, 1995; Huselid, Jackson & Schuler, 1997; Boudreau & Ramstad, 2003; Kramar, 2014).

Intersection

After 1980s, the discourse of sustainability entered in the field of S-HRM through strategic management and organizations that was defined with the lens of Jay Barney (1991), to obtain sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Kazlauskaitė & Buciuniene, 2008) and the attachment of the discourse of sustainability with HRM arose many expectations. Soon organizations took the version of WCED

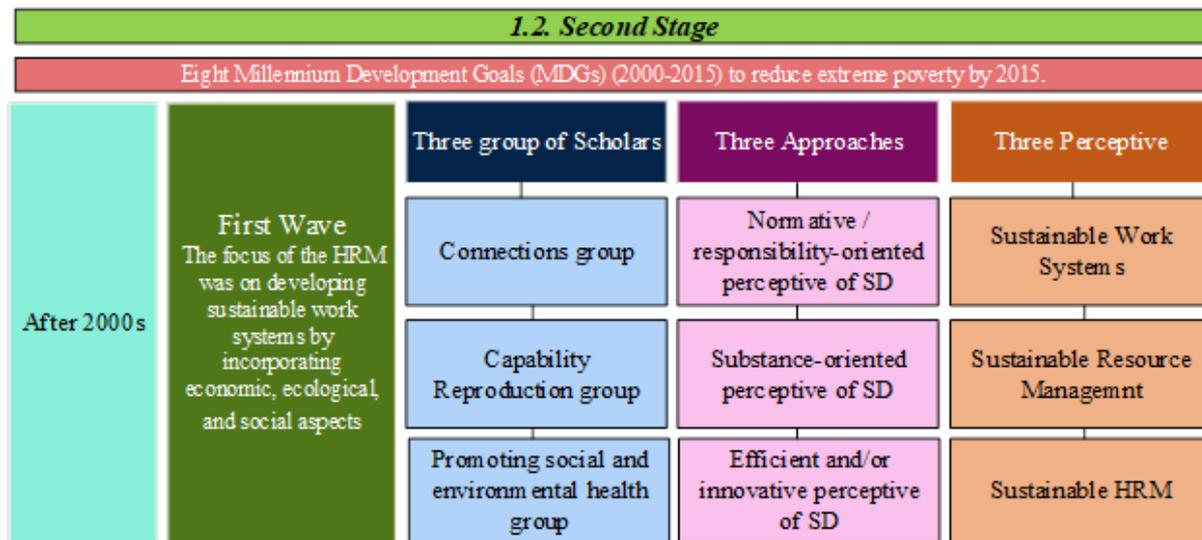
(1987) on sustainability/sustainable development (in literature the discourse of sustainability and sustainable development used interchangeably. in this study the discourse of sustainable development will be used), and it was being identified as an organizational goal and organizations incorporated it into their mission statements. Sometime later, the discourse of sustainable development (SD) elaborated further by the Elkington (1997) as TBL model which had its roots in WECD (1987) for corporate business level. It also replaced the concept of 'CSR's bottom line' with 'sustainability's triple bottom line' which was the prime focus of the organizations. The TBL became the part of the organizations' competitive strategy and progressed as a new way of getting competitive advantage. Organizations took that as corporate sustainable development / corporate sustainability (Aragon-Correa & Sharma 2003; Bansal, 2005). The discourse of corporate sustainability (CS) synonymously used with corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the literature (Christensen, Peirce, Hartman, Hoffman, & Carrier, 2007) and the discourse of CSR is considered as a subset of SD (Boudreau, 2003). CS was considered as a prerequisite for doing business (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002) and CSR characterized as the organizations' participation in sustainable economic development by working with its stakeholders. The mutuality of the organizations and the society in developing a better future were acknowledged and nurtured by rising common understanding and showing responsible behavior (The World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD), 2001; Holme & Watts, 2000). Organizations took the concept of SD either as a new way of getting competitive advantage with the lens of strategic management or as a volunteer task to incorporate the demands of stakeholders under the umbrella of CSR which also ultimately led the organizations towards getting competitive advantage and both were done with HRM (Boudreau, 2003).

Organizations used the discourses of S-HRM, CS and CSR to incorporate stakeholder's demands. The integration of the SD and TBL model in S-HRM and the emergence of CS and CSR couldn't be able to address the global challenges, national and international context, environmental degradation, social justice and equality, and HRM complexities within organizations in true sense. For the organizational success human resources and their management is crucial, which was done through the HRM in the organizations. In the past, human resources were strategically consumed, only, to enhance organizational performance and to get competitive advantage, no one focused to develop them for the future. Organizations exploited not only the natural resources but also the human resources as well without considering their reproduction (Storey, 1995; Thom & Zaugg, 2004; Guest, 2011). The evolution of S-HRM, CS, CSR and SD is beyond the scope of the study which will be discussed in another study. The focus of this study is on the emergence of the sustainable HRM.

After 2000s, the relationship between HRM and SD got considerable attention by the scholarly community, leading organizations, and worldwide policy development institutions. SD emerged as a multifaceted term and a mantra for the 21st century (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002) and to achieve the agenda of SD, organizations' support was conditional. Organizations started struggling to achieve SD with the help of management. Organizations tried to integrate the agenda of SD with in themselves at all levels and with all systems to pursue different goals and in this way the debate on the link between HRM and SD was started (Savaneviciene & Stankeviciute, 2014).

Different scholars used a lot of discourses to address that link, for example, 'HR Sustainability' by Gollan, (2000) and by Wirtenberg, Harmon, Russell, and Fairfield (2007), 'Sustainable Work Systems' by Docherty, Forslin, Shani and Kira (2002), Mariappanadar' 'Sustainable HRM' (2003), 'Sustainable Leadership' by Avery (2005), 'Corporate Sustainability' by Dunphy, Griffiths and Benn (2007) and

Ehnert' 'Sustainable Management of HR' (2006,2009,2011). In the literature the discourse of SD defined in numerous ways and linked it with HRM which will be elaborated under.



Three perceptive

In the past, the meaning of the SD was different for different people and for different organizations. Ehnert (2009) divided the literature, which link the SD with HRM, into three perceptive, which became very helpful in understanding the link between SD and HRM. First perceptive: some took the idea of SD as defined by the WECD (1987) and used it to respond to various needs of various stakeholders that was different from incorporating the only financial aspects of the organizations, it was normative/responsibility-oriented perceptive of SD. In that scenario HRM was used for the welfare of both the employees and for the community and to increase the quality of life by reducing the impact of work on life. Second perceptive: while some others took it as an innovative way for consumption of resources and used it in an economical way to reduce organizations' footprints on environment and people. And it was consistent with in Friedman's (1970) approach to sustainability and Carroll's (1991) pyramid of CSR. It was the efficient and/or innovative perceptive of SD. In that situation HRM was used for the efficient utilization of human resources and to reduce the impact on the human resources and was considered as 'win-win' situation. Third perceptive: while some others also took it in an economical way and promoted the idea of resource preservation by sustaining the balance between resource consumption and reproduction for a longer period and by doing investments in resource bases and it was the substance-oriented perceptive of SD. In that state HRM was used to promote the idea of HR preservation by sustaining the balance between HR consumption and reproduction for a longer period and by doing investments in HR bases e.g., higher education institutes, etc. (Müller-Christ & Remer, 1999; Müller-Christ, 2001; Hülsmann & Grapp, 2005; Ehnert 2009, 2011).

The discussed above three perceptive on the linkage between SD and HRM revealed that different organizations understood the SD differently and connected it with HRM differently. In the first perceptive the significance of the relationship between organizations and society highlighted but the needs of various stakeholders were not operationalized. In the second perceptive the importance of the

efficient use of the organizations' resources and the integration of their economic and social objectives highlighted but the question about development of resources remained unanswered. In the third perspective the value of the HR preservation highlighted but the tensions which may arise in doing that were not addressed. Further it also revealed that organizations tried to become sustainable by integrating social, economic, and environmental aspects due to external pressure and owing to internal pressure they tried to pursue human sustainability. So concludingly those perspectives highlighted some important aspects while some others were neglected by them which gave birth to various other conceptual attempts to elaborate the link between SD and HRM further (Stankeviciute & Savaneviciene, 2014).

Three Approaches

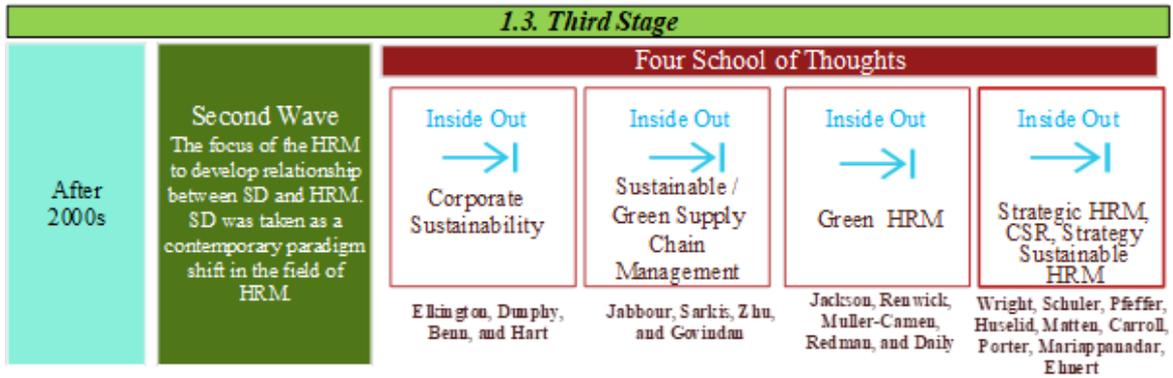
Later, the above discussed three perspectives which were linking the SD with HRM converted into three major literature streams which tried to answer those questions which arose in defining the link between SD with HRM. For example, the question about availability of HRs for future, prevention of HRs exploitation and the question about shouldering the responsibility of spreading the agenda of SD (Mariappanadar, 2003; Thom & Zaugg, 2004). The first perspective i.e., normative/responsibility-oriented perspective of SD converted into the approach of Sustainable Work Systems. That approach took the SD as a social responsibility and presented three levels of sustainability i.e., individual, organizational, and societal and emphasized the importance of stakeholders of an organization. It highlighted that to achieve sustainability at all levels there is a need to develop balance simultaneously between goals of different levels and the stakeholders' needs. That approach talked about organization's responsibility towards getting SD, promoted prevention of HRs exploitation, and directing HRs development by looking forward unwanted negative HRM effects and, showed concerns for the regeneration and development of human and social resources. (Docherty et al., 2002; Ehnert, 2006). Third perspective i.e., substance-oriented perspective of SD converted into the approach of the Sustainable Resource Management. That approach focused on involvement of stakeholders, mutual exchange relationships and investments in sources of resources because that had impact on the organizations' survivability, HRs' reproduction, and sustainability. That approach took the SD in an economic way rather than organizations' responsibility and promoted to put the investments into the sources of HRs to make sure their availability for future. Further that approach looked forward unwanted negative HRM effects by considering the involvement of stakeholders, mutual exchange relationships and investments in sources for resources (Ehnert, 2006). Efficient and/or innovative perspective of SD, that was the second perspective, converted into the approach of Sustainable HRM. That approach was the first one which struggled for addressing and maintaining balance between economic and social aspects at the same time. That approach took the SD as a way of getting mutual benefits for all stakeholders and considered Sustainable HRM as a long-term conceptual approach and understood as a cross-functional task. That approach defined the link between SD and HRM in a comprehensive way not only but also answered the arose questions in a better way. That approach promoted that organization, employees, and society were mutually responsible for achieving the agenda of SD, unwanted negative HRM effects could be avoided by putting HRM on decision making table in the organizations, by promoting employees' self-responsible behavior and by competently deployment of HRs and with the help of HR development and putting SD agenda in the organizations' goals the question about availability of HRs for future could be answered (Thom & Zaugg, 2004; Zaugg, Blum, & Thom, 2001).

Three Group of scholars

In the starting of the 21st century when the scholarly community was developing better understandings regarding the discourse of Sustainable HRM and trying to define it with their own different lenses, a lot of literature emerged in the field of Sustainable HRM. According to Kramar (2014), the discourse of SD was taken as a way of getting long-term and durable outcomes and linked it with HRM. In that way, in the literature, there were three prominent group of scholars can be seen. One group of scholars i.e., “Capability Reproduction” group were taking Sustainable HRM as a new way of people management in the field of HRM and considering Sustainable HRM as an extension of S-HRM. That group of scholars focused on organizations’ economic outcomes which could be enhanced with the help HRM, and sustainable competitive advantage could be achieved. That group of scholars was impressed by substance-oriented perceptive of SD. Second group i.e., “Promoting social and environmental health” group, which was impressed by efficient and/or innovative perceptive of SD, talked about organizations’ ecological, social, and human outcomes which could be influenced by HRM. The third group of scholars, who was impressed by the normative/responsibility-oriented perceptive of SD i.e., “connections” group, talked about organizations’ economic, ecological, and social outcomes which could be influenced by organizations’ management and HRM practices and that group also talked about interrelations between organizations’ management practices and organizations’ outcomes (Kramar, 2014).

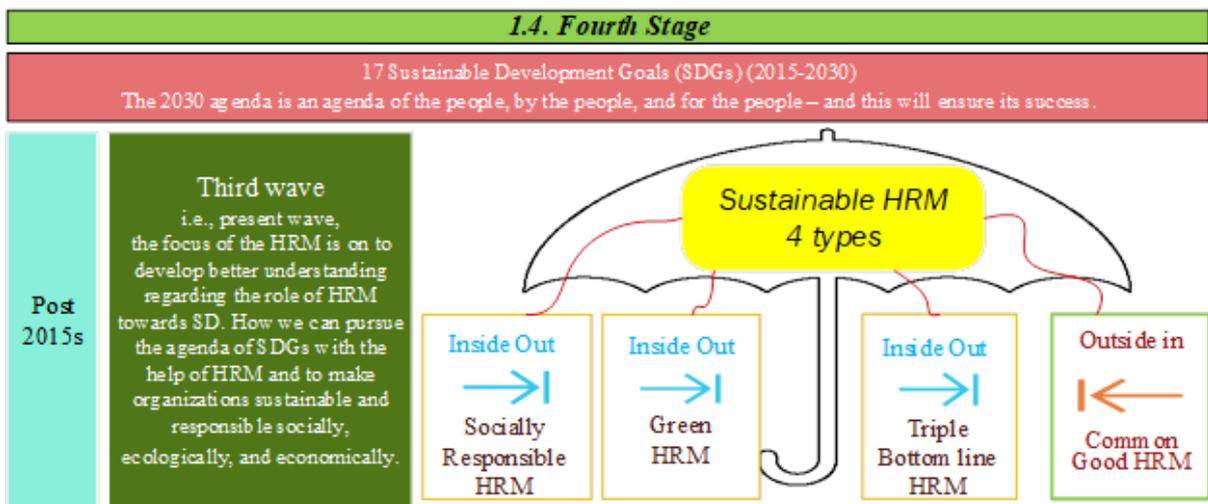
Three Waves

To develop better understanding regarding the evolution of the Sustainable HRM, its literature can be divided into three waves, in other words the field of Sustainable HRM passed through three waves (Ehnert & Harry, 2012). During the first wave, the field of Sustainable HRM was inspired by the field of environmental management, corporate sustainability, human relations movements, and the Harvard approach. Insufficient supply of scarce resources i.e., natural, and human resources, and resources exploitation and consumption rather than their development and reproduction were the major concerns of that time. Approaches of that time progressed around the efficient and effective use of resources in the organizations and to get competitive advantage. That’s why the focus of the field was on developing sustainable work systems by incorporating economic, ecological, and social aspects (Müller-Christ & Remer, 1999; Gollan, 2000; Zaugg et al., 2001) While the focus of the field shifted, during the second wave, to develop relationship between SD and HRM. SD was taken as a contemporary paradigm shift in the field of HRM. It was because, somehow, human sustainability was neglected in the past (Pfeffer, 2010). At that time, the importance of human sustainability in the overall system was highlighted and approaches were introduced to deal with HRs issues and to reduce harmful and negative effects on HRs (Mariappanadar, 2003; Boudreau, Ramstad, 2005; Pfeffer, 2010; Guerci, 2011). And now during the third wave i.e., present wave, the focus of the field is on to develop better understanding regarding the role of HRM towards SD. In other words, how we can pursue the international agenda of SD which is being pushed by the United Nations’ SDGs with the help of HRM and to make organizations sustainable and responsible socially, ecologically, and economically. Approaches are being presented to address the global challenges with the help of Sustainable HRM. Concludingly, it can be said that the field of Sustainable HRM is a diverse one and it is due to the influence of different other fields of studies, different perspectives, and different interpretations of SD (Cohen, Taylor, Muller-Camen, 2012; Mariappanadar, 2012; Kramar, 2014; Ehnert, Parsa, Roper, Wagner, Muller-Camen, 2016; Anlesinya&Susomrith, 2020).



Four School of Thought

In the literature there were four School of Thoughts can be seen who tried to link the agenda of SD with HRM with their own lens. First, Green HRM School of Thought who linked the organizations’ environment perspectives only with HRM. They considered employees as a vital resource for achieving those perspectives and they can pursue the organizations’ environment agenda with the help of HRM (Daily & Huang, 2001; Jackson & Seo, 2010; Renwick, Redman, Maguire, 2013; Jackson, Renwick, Jabbour, Muller-Camen, 2011). Second, sustainable supply chain management School of Thought which were used interchangeably with green supply chain management also did the same as First School of Thought did. They focused on only organizations’ environment perspectives and linked it with HRM. Employees/HR were considered as important to chase the organizations’ environment agenda and to make supply chain management sustainable. (Hart & Milstein, 2003; Zhu & Sarkis, 2004,2011; Sarkis, Gonzalez-Torre, Adenso-Diaz, 2010; Jabbour, 2012,2013,2016). Third, corporate sustainability School of Thought tried to bring SD in organizations with the lens of corporate sustainability and through HRM (Elkington, 1998; Hart & Milstein, 2003; Dunphy, Griffiths & Benn, 2007). Fourth, Strategic HRM/CSR/Strategy School of Thought was the one who contributed a lot conceptually and played an important role in shaping the field of Sustainable HRM. That school of thought tried to incorporate the agenda of SD in the organizations and linked it with HRM. Sometimes they did so with the help of Strategy, sometimes they did that with the help of CSR while sometimes they did that through S-HRM (Schuler & Jackson, 1987,2014; Carroll, 1991; Huselid, 1995; Porter, 1995,1996; Wright, Dunford & Snell, 2001; Porter & Kramer, 2002,2006; Preuss, Haunschild, & Matten, 2009; Pfeffer, 2010; Jackson, Schuler, & Jiang, 2014; Ehnert, 2009,2011,2012, 2014).



Definitions

With reference to the literature, the Sustainable HRM is an evolving discourse and it do not have any precise definition till yet. Many scholars have defined it. First, it was defined by Thom & Zaugg (2001,2004), later it was defined by Ehnert (2006,2009), Freitas, Jabbour, Santos, (2011), Cohen et al.(2012), Wagner (2013), Kramar (2014), Ehnert et al. (2016) and Järnlström, Saru, Vanhala, (2016) but the work of Ehnert (2006,2009,2016) in defining Sustainable HRM and applying SD as a concept for HRM were of great importance. It can also be said that her work became a steppingstone to the progress in the field of Sustainable HRM. With the help of her work Sustainable HRM got its types and became an umbrella term for other discourses in the management. Furthermore, her work became helpful in erasing confusions in the literature of Sustainable HRM. According to Ehnert et al. (2016), "Sustainable HRM can be 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." By defining Sustainable HRM, Ehnert et al. (2016), gave a contemporary, appropriate, and shared meaning to it, which is different from the separate meaning of SD i.e., long-term, and durable. It also altered the old concept of linking SD with HRM, which was taken as a long-term and durable way of achieving organizations' outcomes with the help of HRM. To make further progress in the field of Sustainable HRM, the work of Aust, formerly Ehnert (2020) became helpful because she described the types of Sustainable HRM (Aust, Matthews, & Muller-Camen, 2020).

Four Types

According to Aust et al. (2020) Sustainable HRM has four types: 1) Socially responsible HRM, 2) Green HRM, 3) Triple bottom line (TBL) HRM and 4) Common Good HRM. She did that division by keeping in view inside-out perspective and outside-in perspective that was presented by Dyllick & Muff (2016). According to inside-out perspective organizations just focus on itself and perform those activities by which they can enhance their shareholder value and reduce their risks. While the organizations who go with the outside-in perspective, their focus is on to solve SD and societal problems and make contributions towards common good. The organizations utilize their all resources to address big societal challenges i.e., economic, social, and environmental challenges (Dyllick & Muff, 2016; Shen & Benson, 2016). Aust et al. (2020) highlighted that the organizations who are pursuing inside-out perspective they are doing Socially responsible HRM, Green HRM, or TBL HRM and their prime focus is towards their economic concerns. She said that the organizations can contribute towards solving one of the grand challenges or SDGs by pursuing outside-in perspective only and it can be done with practicing Common Good HRM.

Eleven characteristics

As Sustainable HRM is a contemporary area of research comparatively that's why research is going on in this field of study. Right now, literature don't have a conclusive checklist for practices of Sustainable HRM as well as its measuring indicators. But the thing which the literature highlights are several fundamental attributes and concepts of Sustainable HRM, which can be seen in the SD reporting of the organizations (Ehnert et al., 2016). By keeping in view those attributes and concepts of Sustainable HRM and previous studies in this field, Stankevičiute and Savanevičiene (2018) introduced 11 characteristics of Sustainable HRM: 1) Long-term orientation, 2) Care of employees, 3) Care of environment, 4) Profitability, 5) Employee participation and social dialogue, 6) Employee development, 7) External partnership, 8) Flexibility, 9) Compliance beyond labor regulations, 10) Employee cooperation, 11) Fairness, and equality. By keeping in view those 11 characteristics organizations and

scholarly community can develop shared meanings, define significant practices, and expect substantial outcomes and make progress in the field of Sustainable HRM. But those cannot be generalized worldwide because Sustainable HRM is a contextual discourse and contextual contributions are required to make significant progress in the literature of sustainable HRM (Stankevičiute & Savanevičiene, 2018; Aust et al., 2020; Anlesinya & Susomrith, 2020).

Concluding Remarks

The aim of the paper has been to look over the existing literature on Sustainable HRM. After shedding light on the literature of the Sustainable HRM, discussing various perspectives in literature, studying different groups of scholars, drawing attention towards different perspectives, highlighting multiple schools of thoughts and by analyzing different waves in this field, it can be said that it is an evolving field of study which truly emerged and got considerable attention in the starting of twenty-first century. The agenda of sustainability pushed the organizations to redefine the role of HRM within them and it became a reason of a change in thinking in the field of HRM which led it towards Sustainable HRM. In the starting the discourse of Sustainable HRM was under the influence of different perspectives which gave birth to different descriptions of Sustainable HRM. But the work of Ina, Ehnert (2009, 2014) provided solid ground to Sustainable HRM to grow. After the emergence of the SDGs, the scholarly community gave a call to address global challenges which sparked the research work in the field of Sustainable HRM. To answer the call, a comprehensive definition of Sustainable HRM was given by Ehnert et al. (2016) which put a new energy in the field of Sustainable HRM. Stankevičiute and Savanevičiene (2018) introduced characteristics of Sustainable HRM and types of Sustainable HRM was presented by the Aust et al. (2020). Despite of having many definitions regarding that discourse, there is no consensus on its single definition by the scholarly community. Further it doesn't have definite and significant practices, highlighted hurdles, underlined benefits, any scale to measure.

With reference to the literature Sustainable HRM is a contemporary and a developing discourse in the field of HRM which is under the influence of Anglo-American-European perspective. It has a great potential for further research because it yet not to be fully explored. Future research is required in the field of Sustainable HRM from different contexts. Qualitative studies from different national contexts are required which put the light on its contextual practices, hurdles, and benefits and helpful in considering some measures to measure it.

This study adds in the literature of Sustainable HRM by offering an ample look over on the existing literature of Sustainable HRM. And it also provides a starting point as well as proposes support to the newcomers to develop better understanding in this field of research and to make progress. Considering and discussing all the related studies in this field of study was beyond the scope of the study and it may be a limitation of this study.

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