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ALIGNING HRM WITH SUPPLY CHAIN SUSTAINABILITY GOALS: A CROSS-FUNCTIONAL APPROACH

P.S.V. Balaji Rao¹, Vishweswar sastry V N^{2*}, Praveendas K³, Vinayak Vishwakarma⁴,
Pavan V⁵, Raja Ambethkar Matta⁶

¹Professor and Head, Department of Business Administration, Vidyavardhaka College of Engineering, Mysuru – 570002, Karnataka, India, Email ID: psobalajirao@gmail.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8038-2835>

^{2*}Associate Professor, Department of Commerce, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, India, Email ID: vishweswar.sastry@manipal.edu, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2808-3173

³Assistant Professor, Central University of Karnataka, Kalburagi, Email ID: praveendask2@gmail.com

⁴Assistant Professor, Department of Operations and Decision Sciences, Jaipuria Institute of Management, Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India, Email ID: vinayakvishwakarma@gmail.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8803-9326>

⁵Assistant Professor of Law, Manipal Law School, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, India, Email ID: pavan.v@manipal.edu, ORCID ID: 0000-0003-0323-3988

⁶Associate Professor, Koneru Lakshmaiah Education Foundation, K L (Deemed to be) University, Green Fields, Vaddeswaram, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, India. Email ID: rajaambethkar@kluniversity.in

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Corresponding Author: Vishweswar Sastry V N
(vishweswar.sastry@manipal.edu)

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the strategic alignment between Supply Chain functions and Human Resource Management (HRM) in driving organizational sustainability initiatives. It seeks to understand how HR practices can aid in environmental and social performance within supply chains through cross-functional collaboration. A mixed-methods research design was employed. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with supply chain and HR professionals, and quantitative data from a structured survey of 120 respondents from diverse industry backgrounds. Thematic coding was utilized for the analysis of qualitative answers, while Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied to investigate the interrelations between HR practices and sustainability performance. The results indicate that HRM has a vast influence on supply chain sustainability when connected through shared goals, shared governance, and shared performance measures. Activities like green recruitment, training with a focus on sustainability, and performance measurement against environmental outcomes were common in high-performing companies. Challenges such as organizational silos and uneven leadership were also identified. The present study outlines a new model of cross-functional integration with emphasis on the contribution of HRM towards conditioning sustainable supply chain practices. It contributes to the economic and social dimensions of sustainability by highlighting internal mechanisms that influence external supply chain outputs. Common KPIs should be adopted, and investment in supply chain function-specific sustainability training should be made. Improving coordination among the HR and supply chain functions is the driving force behind long-term sustainable development.

KEYWORDS: Human Resource Management, Supply Chain Sustainability, Cross-Functional Integration, Sustainable Development, Organizational Alignment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainability has been the top priority of supply chain management worldwide in recent decades due to concerns like resource inadequacy, environmental degradation, and shifting expectations from stakeholders [1]. Companies are increasingly being compelled to reduce their carbon footprint, embrace circular economies, and make sure that their supply chains provide ethical employment conditions. Governments, investors, and consumers in the present times expect accountability, transparency, and measurable action steps towards achieving sustainable objectives [2]. As a result, supply chains are transforming essentially from cost-centered and efficiency-focused to value-creating, environmentally sustainable, and socially fair systems. Enterprises are now contemplating maintaining internal functions that can improve long-term sustainability in addition to operating models as a result of this evolution. Human Resource Management (HRM) has been a powerful, but underrated, force for long-term change among them. HRM plays an important role in company culture, employee development, and embedding sustainability thinking into all business processes [3]. Direct and indirect supply chain sustainability drivers can both be driven by HRM, ranging from greening recruitment practices to training in sustainable operation and performance management associated with environmental objectives. Supply chain management (SCM) and HRM have traditionally been isolated due to their strategic significance.

The organization's capacity to maximize its human capital in attaining sustainability objectives is violated by this fragmentation. Without effective interactions with HR departments, SCM teams prioritize the maximization of procurement, logistics, and supplier compliance. Similarly, the HR function tends to face internal workforce metrics with less oversight on how their policies impact sustainability performance and supplier chain actions. The outcome is a fractured strategy that prevents the two roles from delivering cross-functional, systemic sustainability outcomes [4].

Three pillars of sustainability, which are economic, social, and environmental, are well known in theory, but their operational application across organizational functions is still uneven [5]. The green supply chain technological know-how and the significance of sourcing, logistics, and regulation mechanisms come out prominently in the literature. Conversely, fewer studies have been conducted on how internal HR practices influence and improve

supply chain sustainability performance [6].

Operational gaps, waste of effort, and lost opportunities for long-term innovation emanate from the HR and SCM departments' failure to work systematically together [7]. Additionally, firms usually do not have one integrated platform that merges supply chain sustainability performance metrics with human capital building [8]. Green training programs can be implemented without necessitating changes to supplier relations or procurement processes. Similarly, performance appraisals can ignore how workers support sustainability objectives, and therefore undermine responsibility and incentives. Both parties are well-meaning, but this mismatch has a minimal long-term effect. Exploring the potential for HRM to step outside conventional parameters and become involved in sustainable supply chain governance on a strategic level is thus essential. As the value chains of the world become increasingly complex and vulnerable to social and environmental risks, an understanding of the connection between the two is critical in finding solutions that are both effective and scalable [9]. This research directly aligns with the social and economic aspects described in the journal's scope for Heritage and Sustainable Development. Economically, the research centers on human capital formation, labor economics, and sustainable business management. It considers the impact of HR policy on organizational resilience, employee motivation, and labor efficiency, all of which impact the long-term ability of supply chains to remain economically sustainable [10].

In terms of the social dimension, the study highlights how HRM is used to formulate ethical labor practices, workplaces that are inclusive, and empowered employees, all of which are vital building blocks for social sustainability [11]. It explores work-life balance, training and education, and stakeholder engagement, all of which relate very strongly to the journal's theme of sustainable policy implementation and community building. In addition, by integrating supply chain management, human resource strategy, and organizational behavior topics often partitioned in academic scholarship, the research facilitates interdisciplinary scholarship [12]. Sustainability's systemic dimensions and the necessity of complementary effort across organizational tiers can be comprehended through such an interdisciplinary perspective [13].

This research's focus on internal sustainability drivers redirects the dialogue from compliance-minded reaction to forward-looking integration,

consistent with the journal's mission to facilitate transformatory, cross-sectoral responses to sustainable development [14]. Through this action, it provides new insights to researchers, practitioners, and policymakers interested in maximizing organizational contributions to social responsibility and environmental stewardship through innovative human capital strategies [15, 16]. Notwithstanding extensive coverage in supply chain management and HRM literature, there are very few studies that offer an extensive examination linking the two. The current literature covers SCS and HRM as separate areas, with studies examining environmental performance or human capital development separately.

The internal organizational dynamics of the supply chain and human resources departments, such as communication, shared metrics, and collaborative decision-making, have also received less attention. This coupled analytical failure creates a critical information gap. In line with the *Heritage and Sustainable Development* journal's multidisciplinary focus on economic and social metrics, it requires a cross-functional strategy that connects strategic HR practices with measurable supply chain sustainability outcomes.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

Using a mixed-methods methodology, this study investigates how HRM facilitates cross-functional collaboration to achieve supply chain sustainability goals. While the quantitative component evaluates linkages and trends among a larger population, the qualitative component provides deep insights into strategic practice. A thorough grasp of HR-SCM integration in sustainable growth is ensured by this dual design.

2.2. Data Collection

Professionals from medium-to-large organizations participating in sustainability initiatives provided data in two phases. With a focus on HR's role in green training, policy enforcement, and cross-functional practices, 15 HR and supply chain professionals were interviewed using a semi-structured guide during the qualitative stage. The 45- to 60-minute interviews were conducted online. A survey was distributed to 120 participants in the quantitative phase, who came from sectors such as consumer products, manufacturing, and logistics. Likert-scale questions about supply chain sustainability performance, HR-SCM collaboration, and sustainable HR practices were included in the

survey. Data was gathered online through industry networks.

2.3. Analytical Methods

NVivo was used to code the qualitative data thematically. Open coding was used to identify concepts, and axial coding was used to develop patterns. This made it easier to see the role that HR plays in supply chain strategies that are sustainable. Using AMOS's Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), quantitative data were examined. Cronbach's alpha was used to confirm reliability, and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to confirm construct validity. To investigate the mediating function of HR-SCM cooperation in attaining supply chain sustainability results, path analysis was utilized.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

Every study activity complied with ethical guidelines. Participants willingly consented to participate after being informed of the study's goals. Only the lead researcher had access to the anonymised and protected data. To ensure confidentiality and research integrity throughout the process, the study complied with data protection regulations, such as GDPR.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Integration Models In Practice

Several recurrent integration models of supply chain sustainability initiatives with HRM were found using qualitative data. HR departments actively participated in creating rules that encourage social and environmental responsibility in companies whose business goals include sustainability. Having HR specialists on cross-functional sustainability committees was one of the recurrent models found. These teams were given the responsibility of creating training curricula, setting sustainability targets, and keeping an eye on supplier behavior from a human resources standpoint.

High-integration organizations often had strong internal communication systems in place where HR and supply chain departments shared information on ethical sourcing, worker development, and compliance. Aligning HR development goals with supply chain audit findings was one of the top methods for filling skill shortages in the workforce in operational contexts through methodical upskilling programs. One with departmental shared performance metrics was a second successful model. In this instance, supply chain managers had to assess the effects of procurement and logistical choices on people and the environment, and HR was required to

include sustainability goals in workers' performance reviews. With documented sustainability charters,

these integration models were mostly used in the manufacturing and logistics sectors.

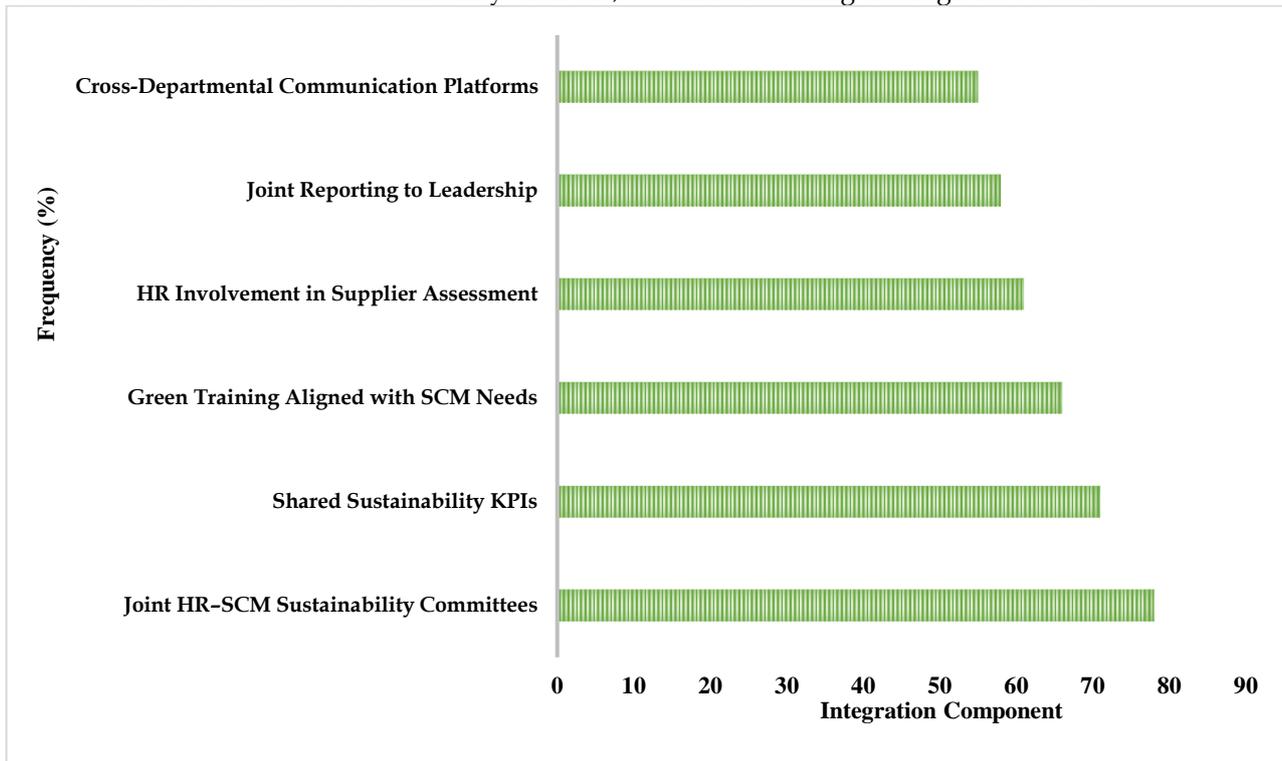


Figure 1: HR-SCM Integration Model In Sustainability Governance.

The frequency of implementation of important HR-SCM integration techniques among assessed firms is depicted in Figure 1. Structured communication platforms were the least reported, although joint committees and shared KPIs were the most prevalent. This suggests that sustainable governance needs better operational connectedness.

3.2. Hr Strategies Boosting Scs

The results of the survey, which identified specific HR practices that directly impacted supply chain sustainability (SCS), supported the qualitative findings. One important motivator was the hiring of green expertise. Businesses that prioritized employing staff with expertise in sustainable sourcing, environmental management, or circular economy principles were more likely to indicate that workforce competencies aligned with supply chain sustainability goals. Training and development also had their role. Companies reported that employees who were involved in supply chains showed better understanding and responsibility after customized sustainability training, both during induction and as continuous professional training. The compliance with environmental standards, waste minimization, and responsible purchasing were included under the training programs. Performance management systems were another crucial intersection.

Green performance metrics were embedded within measurement systems by HR functionals in more developed sustainability contexts. Employees who made proposals for sustainable process enhancements, reduced consumption of resources, or succeeded in engaging suppliers in environmental audits were rewarded. Besides encouraging ownership of sustainability initiatives, this instilled a culture of collective responsibility between departments. There is a consensus across Table 1 regarding the significance of green recruitment, education, and KPI alignment in the pursuit of supply chain sustainability.

Table 1: HR Strategies And Their Reported Impact On Supply Chain Sustainability.

HR Strategy	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Green skill-based recruitment	4.35	0.61
Sustainability-specific training	4.12	0.74
Inclusion of sustainability in KPIs	4.28	0.67
Employee engagement in SCM audits	3.89	0.81
Rewards for sustainability efforts	4.02	0.76

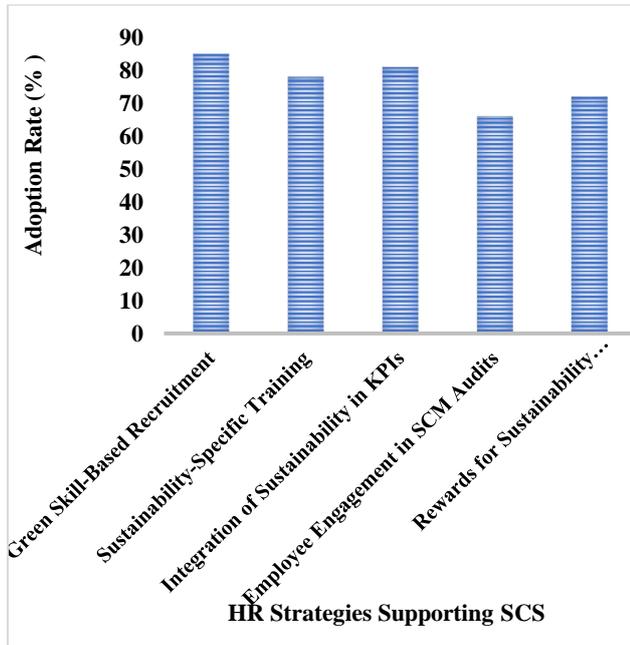


Figure 2: Adoption Rate Of HR Strategies Supporting Supply Chain Sustainability (SCS).

The adoption rates of important HR tactics meant to improve supply chain sustainability are depicted in Figure 2. The most popular strategies were green hiring and incorporating sustainability into performance evaluations, which were closely followed by customized training and incentive schemes.

3.3. Barriers And Enablers

Despite the notable advancements, some obstacles to integration were identified. Organizational silos were the most often cited problem, particularly in businesses where supply chain and human resources departments operated independently. This fragmentation frequently led to a lack of accountability, inconsistent sustainability messages, and redundant activities. Commitment from the leadership was also crucial. HR departments were unable to recoup expenditures in strategic personnel and green training in organizations whose top management prioritized short-term cost savings above long-term sustainability. However, HRM has greater power to create ecologically friendly supply chain management techniques in businesses with sustainability-focused leadership. Initiatives for training also have varying degrees of effectiveness. According to several respondents, supply chain employees' buy-in was low since sustainability training was neither sufficiently in-depth nor applicable to operational reality. However, employees in other businesses showed more motivation and a behavior change when training was

contextualized with reinforcement from real-life case studies. The study concludes that focused human capital initiatives, leadership support, and well-organized coordination are necessary for the successful integration of HRM into supply chain sustainability. These results support the journal's commitment to multidisciplinary work that enhances sustainability's social and economic dimensions. The main obstacles to HR's strategic contribution to supply chain sustainability are highlighted in Table 2.

Table 2: Key Barriers And The Percentage Of Respondents Who Identified Them As Significant.

Barrier	% Reporting as Significant
Lack of cross-departmental strategy	62%
Weak leadership commitment	58%
Inadequate sustainability training	53%
Short-term financial focus	47%
Resistance to change	42%

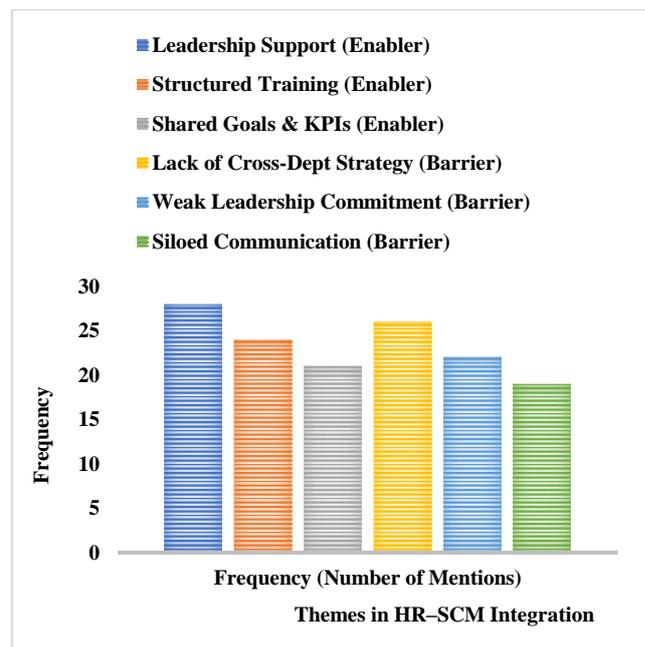


Figure 3: Thematic Frequency Of Barriers Vs. Enablers In HR-SCM Integration.

The frequency of constraints and facilitators mentioned in interviews about HR-SCM integration for sustainability is shown in Figure 3. The most frequently mentioned obstacles were departmental silos and a lack of strategy, whereas the most common enablers were leadership support and organized training.

4. DISCUSSION

The study's findings emphasize how Human Resource Management (HRM) plays a crucial role in advancing sustainable supply chain practices. According to the report, when HR is included in operational goals, it not only serves as a functional support but also stimulates innovation in sustainability [17]. The most powerful organizations impacting supply chain conduct in a positive manner are ones that integrate sustainability into their HR processes by means of aimed-for recruitment, competency building, and monitoring of performance. Recruits who possess experience in sustainable procurement, circular business models, and legislation are hired through green recruitment [18]. These human resources become an organization's intangible assets, bringing about the shift towards green logistics and ethical purchasing. Green training initiatives also provide existing employees with the capabilities and knowledge they require in order to achieve sustainability targets. By such interventions, employees are able to promote values like effective utilization of energy, ethical supplier relations, and reduced waste.

In addition, sustainability metrics enhance accountability and stimulate innovation once they are incorporated into employee performance frameworks [19]. Employees are taught that environmental and social responsibilities are part of their job, not extra work [20]. This integration enhances corporate culture and inspires employees to take ownership of sustainability goals. Longer-term commitment and not short-term compliance is guaranteed by HR departments that set and efficiently implement these regulations, making sure that sustainability becomes part of the business DNA [21]. It also points to HR practitioners needing to broaden their role outside conventional boundaries. HR needs to go into strategic discussions with executives within the supply chain so that they can agree on sustainable outcomes together, instead of concentrating solely on recruiting and keeping workers [22].

This involves creating training that mirrors supply chain circumstances, cooperating in the case of supplier audits, and exchanging KPIs. Due to these regulatory changes, HR's institutional function needs to evolve from being an administrative helper to becoming a strategic partner to sustainability [23]. Through the inclusion of HRM, cross-functional coordination turned into an important driver for achieving supply chain sustainability objectives [24]. Based on the findings, organizations with effective interdepartmental cooperation mechanisms, such as

common reporting systems and combined sustainability committees, functioned better in the sense that they experienced more integration and performance [25]. These systems encourage a common understanding of challenges, standards, and performance measures as well as ease of communication.

The value of collective sustainability governance models is a key achievement. Shared responsibility and transparency are enabled when HR and supply chain departments work together to develop, monitor, and analyze sustainability programs. The knowledge difference between operational implementation and people management is decreased through collaborative efforts. HR practitioners, for example, can evaluate the social externalities of procurement practices in addition to employee compliance when they apply supplier rating methods. Similarly, supply chain professionals can improve workforce talent to achieve environmental performance objectives. Even so, most companies have issues of functional silos, capricious leadership support, and an absence of connected data systems. These work against the collaborative development of strategies and limit communication. The study posits a strong governance model to circumvent such limitations. Cross-functional groups, routine strategy sessions, and synchronized performance dashboards tracking supply chain and human resource measures are all elements of this idea. Having formalized processes for collaboration guarantees that sustainability is everybody's responsibility and not an isolated departmental activity. It also enhances decision-making, eliminates effort duplication, and allows for resource efficiency. Ultimately, developing cross-functional synergies is a strategic necessity for companies pursuing integrated sustainability, rather than an operational requirement.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that for organizational long-term viability and environmental stewardship, it is not only possible but also essential that Human Resource Management (HRM) be synchronized with supply chain sustainability targets. HR practices such as green recruitment, training in a way that's sustainability-focused, and performance management linked to environmental goals support equitable sourcing, resource productivity, and regulatory compliance, the document adds. Organizations are in their best position to transform strategic sustainability goals into tangible results when such activities are part of a system for

collaboration with supply chain operations. In the study, the conclusions are as follows: cross-functional alignment enhances accountability, transparency, and innovation. Better performance in sustainability activities was supported by companies with stable KPIs, open lines of communication, and HR-SCM governance procedures in alignment. Companies that stayed in a silo approach, nonetheless, had a small impact and no integrated perspective. Due to these findings, the study offers two main suggestions. The first is for businesses to design a series of key performance indicators (KPIs) that capture the supply chain's and human resources' contributions to sustainability. Sharing responsibility

this way promotes coordinated goal-making and continued development. Second, staff commitment and competence across departments must be built through investing in continuous sustainability training for employees on a supply chain activity-specific basis. Lastly, to monitor the long-term impact of HR-SCM congruence on sustainability performance, longitudinal research methods need to be explored. In addition, cross-industry research can illuminate sector-specific models and challenges and generate further insight into the nature in which integration is affected by varied organizational environments.

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