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The Role of Strategic Human Resource Management Practices in Fostering Social Sustainability

International Business

Master's thesis

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Abstract

The focus of sustainability has been expanding beyond the economic and environmental aspects. The companies find it complex in balancing the economic performance with the ethical responsibility because of the popularity of the new norm which is social sustainability. Strategic human resources management (strategic HRM) depicts as a strategic driver of the company and plays an important role in supporting in integrating social sustainability into HR practices. This study explores how well the strategic HRM practices contribute as a key driver of social sustainability.

This study has been conducted in a qualitative approach, utilizing semi structured interviews. In order to elaborate strategic HRM, AMO framework was incorporated and studied under three core aspects, ability, motivation and opportunity. The ability enhancing aspect included recruitment and selection and training and development while motivation aspect compromised with compensation, performance evaluation and performance management. The opportunity aspect discusses about job design and job evaluation. Having successful implementation of strategic HRM practices on the key areas, depicts the societal outcomes such as trust, justice, wellbeing and participation, this study highlights on how such practices contribute to individual social sustainability outcomes.

The findings of this thesis reveal on how the ability, motivation and opportunity enhancing aspect of strategic HRM foster social sustainability across four pillars namely equity, social capital, participation and influence and well-being. It also provides a holistic view on how the AMO facets interdependent while providing results in terms of social sustainability. The right combination of strategic HRM practices inline with AMO framework provides a favourable environment for employees to work with. These practices not only create work life balance but also provide positive energy enhancing quality of work life and motivation. The results of these aspects tend to be visible strategically by achieving long-term organizational goals. Therefore, the findings suggests that strategic HRM plays a vital role supporting companies to build upon a workplace with wellbeing equity and employability while being a regenerative asset supporting the employees.

Keywords: Strategic HRM, Social Sustainability, Equity, Social Capital, Well-being, Participation, Social Justice

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

During the past few years, the concept of sustainability has gained attention both academically and in organizational practice (Chourasia et al. 2023, 76). Yet, the shift towards sustainability said to have enhanced the livelihood, but the progress of it resulted in unequal wealth distribution, raw material exploitation, greenhouse gas emission problems, and climatic changes (Maffie & Lakhani 2025, 1263). It was also a catalyst for the changes in the societies where rural populations migrated in search of employment, while the existing infrastructure started degrading by creating poor conditions and accelerating environmental problems (Bos-Nehles et al. 2023, 729–730). Therefore, despite the growth in the economy and technology, questions began to emerge about the need and the balance between progress and conservation. According to the world CO₂ emission data, the carbon budget for 2023 has exceeded 35 billion tons, posing a significant threat to the survival of the planet. (European Environment Agency 2023; Bos-Nehles et al. 2023, 729–730.) These challenges and problems were the root causes for the emergence of the solutions through sustainability and sustainable developments (Bos-Nehles et al. 2023, 729–730).

The primary goal of establishing the concept of sustainability was to minimize environmental degradation due to the issues in resource management during the period of the 1960s (Jiang et al. 2019, 23-40). In the twenty-first century, sustainability has elevated the importance and the interest of three pillars, which are environmental concerns, economic issues, and social aspects, irrespective of the sector (Bos-Nehles et al. 2023, 729–730). Eventually, sustainability was established as the blueprint of the connection between the above three facets environment, economic, and society by the World Commission on Environment and Development. The European region specifically has its own actions and policies, which monitors and measures through the European Environment Agency. (European Environment Agency 2023.) Overtime, the transition towards a sustainable future became a fundamental practice, which resulted in implementing different policies and practices cascaded down from the regions towards companies and individuals (Chourasia et al. 2023, 76). Hence, the global business environment has been transforming from a traditional stakeholder perspective towards a multidimensional stakeholder orientation, driven by the volatility in the global labour markets and social inequalities (Stahl et al., 2020, 21). Organizations therefore have been identified to have a significant role in shaping the societal outcomes as key social actors since the social pillar of sustainability has gaining much more attention being considered to be a critical determinant of the organization's long-term survival (Ajmal et al. 2018, 328).

Pertaining to the organization significance towards sustainability, Human Resources Management (HRM) is indispensable, because it directly involves people who is the key stakeholder. Within this landscape, the role of HRM has undergone a transformation too. Originally, HRM evolved as a support function in the organization, while lately it has shifted as a strategic contributor supporting the long-term goals of the organization. This has given rise to the field of strategic human resource management (strategic HRM), which is the integration of environmental and sustainable values into core HR functions such as recruitment, training, performance appraisal, compensation, and employee engagement in achieving long-term goals in the organization. (Amrutha & Geetha, 2019; Pham et al. 2019, 847.)

Strategic HRM provides value to the companies by acting as the bridge between the organization strategy and HR management (Dey et al., 2023, 408). At the same time strategic HRM focuses on the internal aspect which consists of the individual levels of knowledge, skills and capabilities (Banazılı 2024, 220). Yet, the subject strategic HRM is said to be still emerging and being developed with the potential pressures from the changes in the business environment (Banazılı 2024, 221). The attention towards strategic HRM has remained constant, over the last few decades because it has helped to strengthen the motivation and satisfaction of employees while maintaining a healthy relationship at the workplace. Corporate social responsibility mainly refers to as the policies that consider stakeholder interest along with social, economic and environmental impact of the organizations. Strategic HRM context has undergone numerous changes while it's context and focus have been shifted towards the economy, employees and their families and prioritizing community involvement. (Chowdhury et al., 2023, 9.) This shift has been resulted in strategic HRM combining with its policies in creating possible outcomes in social sustainability moving towards focusing on the human footprints (Westernman et al., 2020, 480).

1.2 Problem statement and research questions

At the beginning, strategic HRM field focused centrally on the implementation of bundles of practices of HR at organizational level rather than individual level (Kaur & Malik 2025, 919). Hence, there is a limited corporation of sustainability to strategic HRM principles within the research and practices of HR field, while it emphasizes there is an unexplored link between strategic HRM and social sustainability (Cooke 2025, 1387; Kaur & Malik 2025, 919). Examples such as strategic alignment, horizontal fit, considering human capital as an asset, high committed HR practices, and context sensitivity could be some of the strategic HRM principles (Westernman et al. 2020, 480). According to Kaur and Malik (2025, 919), strategic HRM has gained attention in the

studies related to Innovation, knowledge management and resource-based view. It has been proposed that strategic HRM has an impact on the outcomes of the areas and it play an important role. It shows that the dynamic research landscape has been evolving with strategic HRM. (Kaur & Malik 2025, 919.)

Sustainability and strategic HRM has gained an increasing attention specially on the dimensions concerning environmental aspect (Cooke 2025, 1387). According to Rosolen and Maclennan (2016, 68) the social aspect gained recognition and became an impactful dimension only during the recent years. The studies have focused on strategic HRM and its influence on the economic aspect, innovation, performance and sustainability only to elaborate the outcomes as achieving the organizational goals and objectives (Cooke 2025, 1387). Social sustainability inside the organization can also be translated as internal social sustainability and external social sustainability. External social sustainability tends to elaborate the same idea in terms of focusing of ethicality, community engagement and justice as a whole. While internal sustainability focuses mainly on employee safety, health, work life balance, development and career prospects. Hence, it can be elaborated that even though sustainability included social aspect, many unknowingly focuses only on external social sustainability stance, so that the employee voice has not been taken into consideration as a prominent research area. (Westernman et al., 2020, 485.) Therefore, in order to assess the above problem, this research focuses on using the AMO framework to examine how strategic HRM practices enhance individual capabilities to drive social sustainability while focusing on the stance of internal social sustainability aspect in a company. The ability motivation and opportunity framework (AMO) which compromises with three key aspects namely ability enhancing, motivation enhancing and opportunity enhancing has been utilized as the key framework of strategic HRM to assess the individual level aspect of the gap mentioned above. (Kaur & Malik 2025, 919.) Such study would provide ample opportunities in enhancing corporate social responsibilities by making contributions towards the society. Hence, the study may support in ensuring economic growth and may not be a factor for the social exploitation in society at large. Also, the study would contribute to addressing the workforce challenges which occur with the fast change and dynamic environment with remote work, automation and digitization affects. Last but not least, this would be a crucial part in the global sustainability goals where the adoption of strategic HRM driven social sustainability may help in achieving above goals. (Wijaya & Senen 2024,74.)

Strategic HRM is an approach that aligns Human Resources practices to improve the overall organizational performance and long-term goals in relation to the organization strategic objectives (Wijaya & Senen 2024,74).

This research is mainly focused on the question “**How does Strategic Human Resource Management influence social sustainability outcomes?**” seeking to gain and understand the relationship between SHRM and Social Sustainability with the below sub questions.

Sub-Questions

1. How does Ability enhancing SHRM practices foster social sustainability?
2. How does Motivation enhancing SHRM practices foster social sustainability?
3. How does Opportunity enhancing SHRM practices foster social sustainability?

This research study aims to find out the strategic HRM practices implemented and utilized in the relation to social sustainability in the organizations. The sub questions adopting AMO framework as mentioned above, aid in carrying out a detailed analysis on the initiatives of strategic HRM which support to achieve social sustainability, in terms of the three aspects ability, motivation and opportunity at an employee level. The sub questions would be studied in accordance with the literature relating them towards the real work life and organization context. Hence, the author utilizes primary data in assessing the sub questions. The researcher expects to address the main question of the research by finding the answers to the sub questions.

2 Literature review

2.1 The scope of strategic human resource management

HRM is one crucial aspect of management which involves in managing and dealing people, which is considered as the most important asset of an organization (Ahmad 2015, 2). According to Boxall and Purcell (2000 , 184), HRM deals with the activities associated in managing employee relations being one of the fundamental method of managing the organization. With the expansion of the strategic roles played by HRM in the organizations, it is accepted by both business institutions and academic institutions. Hence, HRM practices started to develop strategic policies in order to achieve competitive advantages in businesses. (Tawfig & Kamarudin 2021, 584). This phenomenon lead the evolution of the concept strategic HRM where the broad concept of HRM was empowered by the strategical aspect (Boxall & Purcell 2000 , 184). The topic strategic HRM come in to play by replacing the traditional HRM practices (Tawfig & Kamarudin 2021, 584). This grew up to an extent where strategic HRM became a vast territory in the area of academic literature (DuBois 2012, 803).

According to Li et al. (2022a, 454) strategic HRM can be defined as “the pattern of planned human resource deployments and activities intended to enable an organization to achieve its goals”. Many researchers also argue that the concept of strategic HRM is the bridge between HRM and business strategy (Catherine & Lynda 1994, 665; Li et al. 2022a, 454). According to Catherine and Lynda (1994, 665), bridging the gap between HRM and business strategy is identified as a goal of strategic HRM, and the author elaborate that the current strategic HRM focus has been vital in terms of managing employee turnover, productivity and financial performance. Broadly speaking on the strategic HRM, key features such as close fit between the business strategy and HRM, economic based logic, consists of various internal and external factors, presence of stakeholder influence and employee perceptions and theory oriented can be identified (Cooke 2025, 1383).

2.2 Models of strategic HRM

The below section discusses the central models of strategic HRM such as the matching model, the Harvard model, recourse-based view, social capital theory, social exchange theory and AMO framework. The latter part of the section elaborates the differences by comparing all the models in terms of strategic HRM focus and level of focus.

2.2.1 The matching model

The strategic HRM policies basically emphasize and represent the value of the organization and the key strategic activities. Researchers namely Formbrun et al. 1984, 453; Gado and Ulgen 2018, 4-7 have introduced models in order to provide a holistic view on the strategic HRM aspect. The below figure 1 illustrate the matching model which was formulated by Formbrun et al. (1984, 453).

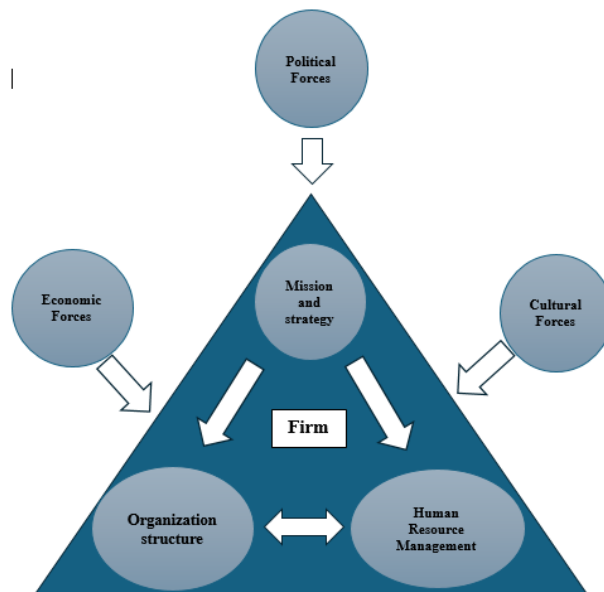


Figure 1: The Matching model of strategic HRM (adapted from Formbrun et al. 1984)

The first formulators of strategic HRM were said to be Formbrun et al. (1984, 453) where they introduced the matching model by identifying three core elements mission and strategy, organizational strategy and HR (Jain 2025, 166). The central principle of this model is related to 'fit' where HR systems and practices should be aligned and matched to the overall organizational strategy and structure. Therefore, it suggests that the HR policies should not stay in isolation but should support the business objectives. (Tiwari et al. 2019, 251.)

This model considers the business strategy to take the centre and quantify HR which is required to fulfil the business objectives (Gado & Ulgen 2018, 4-7). It is also referred as hard HRM due to the

reasons of which it is based on the strategic control, organization structure and the management of people. It emphasizes the importance of motivation, wellbeing and rewarding but stresses in managing and achieving strategic goals. (Gado & Ulgen 2018, 4-7.) This model also focus on the relationship between the management of the employees and the goals of the organization while laying the foundation for the strategic HRM models derived later on. (Jiang et al. 2019, 23-40.)

2.2.2 The harvard model

The harvard model was introduced by Beer et al (1984) is also known as the map of HRM territory. This model emphasizes more on the stakeholders along with the community emphasizing that the HR practices are not isolated but are effected by the stakeholders and environmental factors. This model compromises of four policy areas including HR flows, reward system, employee influence and work systems. This model focuses in adopting a humanistic approach compared to the matching model while emphasizing on the importance of the interests of stakeholders, situational factors and long-term approach in HR decision making. (Gado & Ulgen 2018, 4-7.)

The core components of the Harvard model illustrate that strategic HRM should balance the interests of various stakeholders while anticipating external and internal influences such as labour market conditions, technology and workforce characters (Cooke 2025, 1382-1385). This model emphasizes that the strategic HRM decisions possess long term aspirations in terms of sustainable development and ethical considerations (Jiang et al. 2019, 23-40).

2.2.3 Resource based view

Among the multiple theoretical aspects, the resource-based view (RBV) has received more attention. The RBV elaborates that strategically the firm's available resources main aspect is to generate sustainable competitive advantage. In order to create distinct competencies, the RBV suggests that the internal resources specifically the human capital should be effectively leveraged. One main understanding of RBV is that it emphasises the importance of human resources as one of the critical assets which ultimately enhances organization capability. (Cooke 2025, 1382-1385.)

According to Gunawan and Mikhail (2025, 220) it will aid in enhancing and being a catalyst towards employee engagement, productivity and innovation. Also, Banazili (2024, 224) argues that strategic HRM is essential in the view of RBV in order to understand and collaborate with stakeholders. On the other hand, studies have explored with the addition of sustainability to traditional strategic HRM, broadening the RBV by recognizing the social value rather than the organization values (Cooke, 2025, 1382-1385).

2.2.4 Social capital theory

Thirdly, the social capital theory (SCT) has the ability in recognizing the relationships that is critical for the organizational success. According to Gunawan and Mikhail (2025, 220) by developing social networks in the aspect of strategic HRM could maximize the employee engagement and foster a collaborative culture. This also highlights the importance of effective strategic HRM in building social capital. Another study elaborates adopting sustainability in strategic HRM would suggest focussing on social capital enhancement within the companies. (Cooke 2025, 1382-1385.)

This would ultimately enhance employee satisfaction and reputation of the organization (Cooke 2025, 1382-1385). The study of Wijaya and Senen (2024, 74) interprets the interplay between the social capital and business objectives. This model suggests that equal consideration should be given in maintaining connections and teamwork rather than depending only individual knowledge and technical skills. Yet, having strong connections internally may lead towards unequal opportunities and resistance to change, but should it should be carried out in a balanced way. This explains that social capital not only result in business objectives but ultimately reinforce the social mission. Also inspect how social capital could benefit the companies. (Jiang et al. 2019, 23-40.)

2.2.5 Social exchange theory

Social exchange theory is particularly relevant to the strategic HRM context where it supports in elevating the exchanges to contribute towards individual aspects such as employee engagement and commitment. One foundational insight of this theory is that it is related to the workplace dynamics. (Cooke 2025, 1382-1385.) The research study of Gunawan and Mikhail (2025, 220) also elaborates that strategic HRM are known to be fostering strong relationships by aligning the HR policies and procedures with the goals by creating value for employees so that they would feel a sense of belongingness, valued and motivated.

The exchange theory therefore supports in promoting a positive organizational culture. It also suggests in prioritizing employee wellbeing through job enrichment and resource allocation so that individual goals are fulfilled. (Cooke 2025, 1382-1385.) Moreover, Garrick et al. (2024) explains that social exchange theory articulates inclusivity and equality within the company which a significant aspect so that cultivation of a culture which is based on equality, so that employees are empowered and issues related to inequality is answered and with inclusivity. This will strengthen the social fabric of the companies. In summary, this theory provides a valuable lens in identifying and understanding the individual or employee dynamics which underline in strategic HRM. (Cooke 2025, 1382-1385.)

2.2.6 AMO framework

The AMO framework which is being discussed in the literature in relation to HRM or strategic HRM categorizes into three distinct dimensions with ability, motivation and opportunity (Kaur & Malik 2025, 919). Cooke (2025, 1382-1385) explains that the framework considers the overall performance of the employees as a key function of employees' ability, motivation and opportunity. The wide utilization of AMO theory in the literature suggested that when these three dimensions of strategic HRM are combined, enabled, motivated and opportunities are provided which in turn would enhance sustainability. (Wijaya & Senen 2024, 74.)

According to Cooke (2025, 1382-1385) it suggests that strategic HRM should focus on aligning HR capabilities in order to support the societal goals so that the perspective would support the adaptation of the AMO framework. AMO practices also said to be acting in a cohesive manner so that it significantly enhances the employee wellbeing. The below figure 2 illustrates an integrated model of strategic HRM with different theoretical foundations as discussed above. This was introduced by Jiang et al. (2019, 23-40) as a result of the studies related to the key models and theories of strategic HRM.

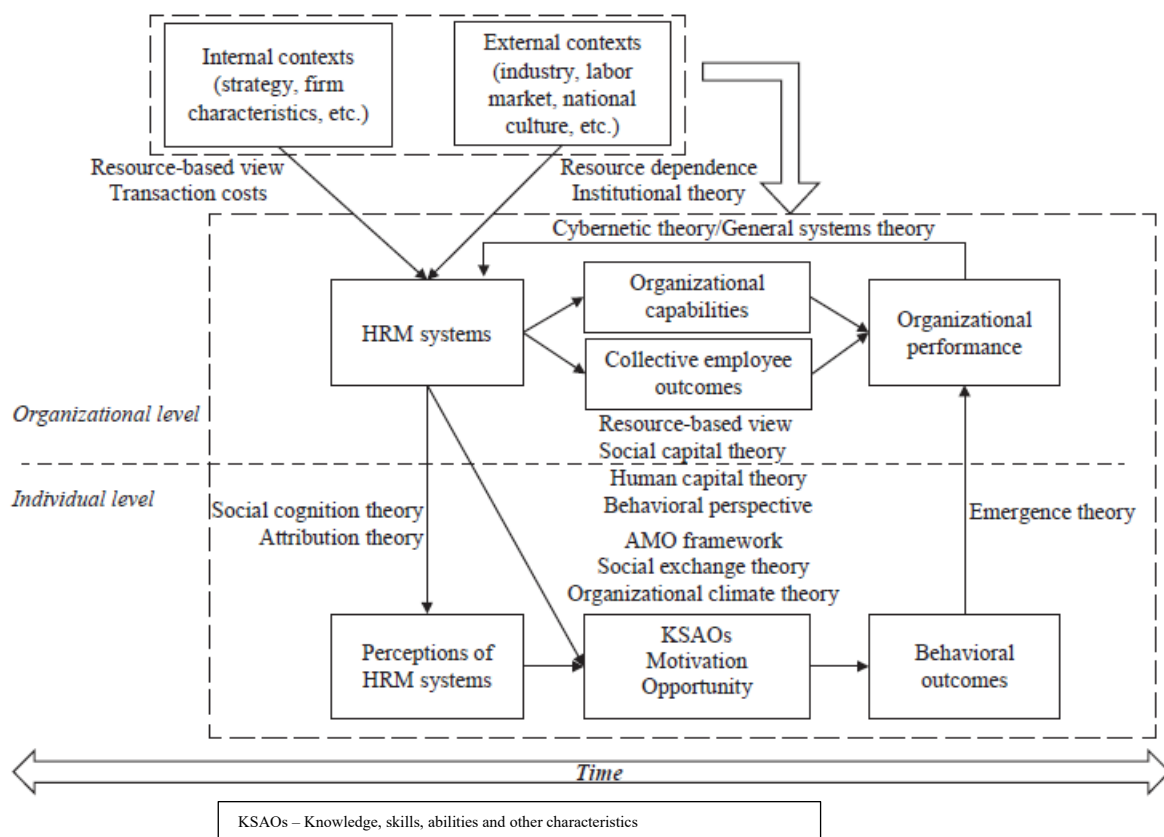


Figure 2: The Integrated summary of strategic HRM models (sourced by Jiang et al. 2019)

The above figure 2 depicts how different strategic HRM theories interrelate with each other while elaborating the focus and the outcomes of each theory. In order to provide a clear picture and to simplify the different aspect of the theories, the below table 01.

Table 1: Comparison between strategic HRM models

Model	Strategic HRM focus	Level of focus
Matching model	Focus on “fit” between strategic HRM and business	Organizational level
Harvad model	Balancing of stakeholder interest and long-term goals	Organizational level
Resource based view	Sustainable competitive advantage	Organizational level
Social capital theory	Focus of social networks	Organizational level
Social Exchange theory	Long term interrelationships based on mutual trust	Individual level
AMO Framework	Employee outcomes, performance via utilizing HR bundles	Individual level

As depicted in the above table 2, in order to study on the complimentary aspects within the subject strategic HRM, author have drawn the attention towards the ability, motivation and opportunity model which basically focuses on individual level and employee outcomes (Catherine & Lynda 1994, 665; Li et al. (2022a, 454). Even though the social exchange theory tends to focus on individual level, the main strategic focus lies on maintaining and building relationships based on trust. Therefore, AMO framework among other models stood out to be exceptional in order to conduct this research. Hence, the next section elaborates on how AMO is utilized in understanding the components of strategic HRM.

2.3 Components of strategic HRM from the lens of AMO framework

Strategic HRM research aspects focus mostly on how strategic HRM relates to organizational performance which is said to be one of the long-standing objectives of strategic HRM. Yet there are many diverse outcomes which remain unanswered or researched. Research identifies it as the ‘Blackbox’ of Strategic HRM. (Cooke 2025, 1382-1385.) The common usage of current Strategic

HRM reviews, focuses on the systems approach, elaborating the employee and organizational impact (Chourasia et al. 2023 , 67). In this context the AMO Framework which is widely called as ability, motivation and opportunity framework of strategic HRM is utilized in understanding the employee aspect (Chourasia et al. 2023 , 67). This model highlights the expected, actual and perceived strategic HRM practices, by incorporating an employee-based prospect (Mahdy & Alhadi 2021 , 1797). According to Uyargil and Ozcelik (2015, 291), the simple conditions of each of the AMO abbreviations are whether, employees pertain the abilities and skills required, whether employees are motivated in order to carry out with extra efforts and whether employees have opportunities to utilize their own skills and express themselves. Cooke (2025, 1382-1385) explains that the framework considers the overall performance of the employees as a key function of employees' ability, motivation and opportunity.

The AMO framework have been identified as an important framework used in identifying organizational psychology and AMO components are utilized in describing the resources needed by the employees to perform well (Nik Mat et al. 2021 , 2573). It explains that the three elements of the framework are interrelated and suggest that all three components are crucial in the workplace to maintain employee related policies and practices (Nik Mat et al. 2021 , 2573). Well-designed strategic HRM practices will not only enhance organizational performance but also act as a catalyst in driving competitive advantage and sustainability. The wide utilization of AMO theory in the literature suggested that when these three dimensions are combined, enabled, motivated and opportunities are provided which in turn would enhance sustainability. (Chourasia et al. 2023, 67.) According to Cooke (2025, 1382-1385) it suggests that strategic HRM should focus on aligning HR capabilities in order to support the societal goals so that the perspective would support the adaptation of the AMO framework. AMO practices also said to be acting in a cohesive manner so that it significantly enhances the employee wellbeing. This theoretical framework offers a holistic view on how different practices of Strategic HRM interplay together to create social sustainability in the workplace where it provides the view from individual talent and motivation aspect so that the company could customize the practices so that the three pillars are interconnected. (Ali et al., 2024, 3682-3686.)

2.3.1 Ability enhancing strategic HRM practices

In the literature, ability is defined as the physiological and cognitive capabilities which enables an individual to perform a task effectively (Bos-Nehles et al. 2023, 727). The ability enhancing dimension of strategic HRM refers to the HR practices support and involve in enhancing the skills,

knowledge and abilities of the employees considering long-term aspect and goals of the organization (Mahdy & Alhadi 2021, 1797). Also, it can be termed as the knowledge, skills, competencies and the proficiencies of the individuals. Ability is an essential factor for every individual in the day today life which basically has the foundation towards his or her behaviour and task performance. (Bos-Nehles et al. 2023, 727.)

Ultimately, according to Mahdy and Alhadi (2021, 1797) the factors that encompasses the ability dimension which is knowledge, skills and the attitudes could be grouped as learned capabilities. The natural skills for example, the employees' born talents or natural talents could assist them to perform effectively, while the knowledge they have gained via experience would make the employees' behaviour unique. (Bos-Nehles et al. 2023, 727.) The combination of the above elements is known to be the term competencies. On the other hand, ability in HR activities ensures that the employees could complete their responsibilities with minimal oversight by acquiring the expertise, experience and skills which are necessary c

The ability enhancing activities according to Mbukanma and Strydom (2022b, 367) are practices which enhance the individuals' competencies and skills so that organizational objectives are met. This, on the other side will identify employees who require more attention. In contrary, according to Ur Rehman and Ahmad (2015, 93) it is simply buying skills or developing the skills of the existing employees. According to the authors, recruitment and selection and training and development strategic HRM practices are said to be associated with the ability aspect of the AMO framework (Mahdy & Alhadi 2021, 1797; Mbukanma & Strydom 2022b, 367).

Recruitment and selection depict the first stage of the employee lifecycle. It simply refers to, getting hired into an organization where it can be considered as the initial stage of integration of sustainability and well-being (Cooke 2025, 1382-1385). According to Li et al. (2022, 459), this lays the foundation for the effectiveness of the emotional integration. Here, the staffing becomes more relevant, and organizations tend to develop its systems so that the organization could hire highly qualified and skilled candidates according to the requirement of the jobs (Ur Rehman & Ahmad 2015, 92.) The successful attraction of the best and right candidates will become an integral part of the Strategic HRM policies which will ideally utilized in enhancing attitudes of the employees while support in meeting the future expectations of the company (Mbukanma & Strydom 2022b, 370). The previous studies also elaborate on recruiting candidates with high energy levels in bringing greater resilience and enthusiasm (Mahdy & Alhadi 2021, 1797; Kaur & Malik 2025, 919). In other words, the correct match between competencies and the job is said to improve

employee wellbeing, since it would enhance job security and reduce stress (Ur Rehman & Ahmad 2015, 92). Conducting recruitment and selection as a transparent and merit-based process would enhance the long-term goals of the company. Also, adopting fair recruitment practices would promote equal employment opportunities among employees. (Ur Rehman & Ahmad 2015, 92.)

It is also necessary to maintain the green employer branding with a strong reputation in sustainability in order to attract top talent with passion about the social issues (Ali et al. 2024, 3682-3686). Sustainability screening is also another strategy which utilizes the knowledge, skills and the commitment towards sustainable practices where the right candidates will be attracted who could contribute to the long-term goals (Ali et al. 2024, 3682-3686).

Training and Development also play an integral party in the ability enhancing aspect of the AMO framework (Kaur & Malik 2025, 919). Numerous authors have depicted on the fact that investing in the strategic HRM practices that focuses on Training and development in terms of career growth tend to uplift the psychological resource element of the employees (e.g., Ur Rehman & Ahmad 2015, 92; Kaur & Malik 2025, 919). This will also elevate the sense of purpose.

For example, training programmes based on mindfulness will basically support in elevating positive emotions and aid in managing stress and improve problem solving skills. Also, cultivating resilience training will also increase the levels of resilience so that, it would enhance the ability to cope up in the adverse situations and perceive the working environment positively. (Kaur & Malik 2025, 919.) According to Mahdy and Alhadi (2021, 1797), training development has the obligation to focus on elevating employee capabilities and competencies. It is also mandatory to carefully design the training programs according to the needs of the employees (Ur Rehman & Ahmad 2015, 92).

Mentoring is another way of boosting self confidence and trust in their mentors while strong impact of mentoring would promote psychological safety among the employees (Kaur & Malik 2025, 919). Training incorporated with cross culture, cultural intelligence and trainings designed to promote spiritual wellbeing and workshops focused on enhancing acculturation would safeguard the psychological and emotional resource of the employees (Kaur & Malik 2025 , 919).

2.3.2 Motivation enhancing strategic HRM practices

Motivation aspect compromises of desire of employees which catalyses the performance (Marin-Garcia & Martinez Tomas 2016, 1042). Motivation can be defined as the extent to which an individual chooses to engage in specified behaviour (Marin-Garcia & Martinez 2016, 1064).

According to Mbukanma and Strydom (2022b, 370) the motivation component of the AMO theory boosts the performance of the employees and recognize appropriately we have performed beyond the expectations. According to Dastmalchian et al. (2020), motivation aspect elaborates on how employees are energized to insert more effort into their performance of the duties.

Motivation enhancing practices focuses on improving the motivation aspect of the employees (Marin-Garcia & Martinez 2016, 1042). Literature elaborates that they focus on the intrinsic and extrinsic aspect of the employees and are identified as the variables of individual motivation (Kaur & Malik 2025, 919). The intrinsic motivation is said to be related to the long-term commitment of an employee (Marin-Garcia & Martinez 2016, 1064). Meanwhile, literature state that intrinsic motivation can also be affected by the lack of extrinsic factors (Marin-Garcia & Martinez 2016, 1064). Therefore, in terms of Strategic HRM, motivation enhancing practices tend to foster the efforts of achieving the objectives and to deliver accelerated performance. The motivation enhancing bundle contain strategic HRM practices such as performance appraisals, along with financial or non-financial incentives. When employees are rewarded for their contribution, it could increase the satisfaction and motivation levels (Ur Rehman & Ahmad 2015, 92).

Performance management is in relation to the employee evaluation, recognition for the achievements and identifying poor performers to take corrective measures. Strategic HRM practices focuses on having structured systems in handling performance management and goal setting. Accordingly, companies tend to set clear and transparent performance goals which could be challengeable but attainable. AMO framework too focuses on providing clear expectations so that it involves specific, measurable and achievable targets. Continuous development feedback would also focus on the motivation upliftment while performance appraisals should be carried via multiple sources which assisted the employees to perform better such as team leaders, senior managers which could be 360-degree evaluation. (Chourasia et al. 2023, 76.) Quality performance appraisals may also boost employee confidence (Mbukanma & Strydom 2022b, 371).

Authors also have identified compensation and rewards as one of the motivations enhancing factor (Marin-Garcia & Martinez 2016, 1065; Chourasia et al. 2023, 76). Compensation and rewards refer to the financial and non-financial means of incentives which is provided to the employees in relation to the contribution towards the efforts of achieving corporate goals and objectives (Mbukanma & Strydom 2022b, 371). The organizations use financial and non-financial benefits in order to motivate employees and also plays an important role in employee engagement. Financial compensation in terms of pay for performance is a widely discussed type of compensation in terms

of both individual and group level. (Marin-Garcia & Martinez 2016, 1065.) Many studies have identified recognition, internal promotions or career development, job security, social activities and work life balance opportunities as non-financial forms of motivation which falls under extrinsic category (Marin-Garcia & Martinez 2016, 1065; Mbukanma & Strydom 2022b, 371). Yet, literature focuses more on extrinsic motivation while intrinsic motivation sources found to be very limited. But few examples might be, motivation to learn and willingness to perform. Collaborative culture, corporate sense and team satisfaction can also be identified as intrinsic factors. (Li et al. 2022, 459.)

The performance evaluations and incentives play a crucial in fostering work passion and engagement. It is also crucial in promoting and improving the emotional aspect of the employees. (Marin-Garcia & Martinez 2016, 1065.) Along with a fair procedure in performance evaluation, internal promotions and appealing procedures should also carry out to cater a fair atmosphere among employees. Promoting and adhering to open communication between the line managers and employees regarding the performance evaluations would display the freedom between the employees and managers. (Li et al. 2022, 459.)

2.3.3 Opportunity enhancing strategic HRM practices

The final aspect of the AMO framework emphasize on the opportunity aspect. It is simple termed as the access to opportunities that uplift the efforts of the individuals (Kaur & Malik 2025, 919). According to Marin-Garcia and Martinez (2016, 1065), opportunity is termed as a set of circumstances that makes it possible to do something. With the combination of ability and motivation, employees must be given the right opportunity to use their skills and motivation in their work. In real life, even though individuals have the right skills and motivation, if meaningful opportunities are not provided to contribute, they tend to suffer without any direction.

Therefore, the main goal of the opportunity enhancing practices are used to boost the employee opportunity to perform. (Bos-Nehles et al. 2023, 729–730.) Opportunity has several dimensions such as involvement in the decision-making process, sharing of knowledge, open communication, horizontal communication and job enrichment (Kaur & Malik 2025, 919). It is said that by minimizing the distance between employees and the management would foster participation (Kaur & Malik 2025, 919). Hence, the context of opportunity is directly linked with employee involvement in the decision-making process (Li et al. 2022, 459). Work autonomy and delegation is also identified as an opportunity enhancing strategic HRM practice (Li et al. 2022, 459).

Employee engagement is referred simply as encouraging the employees in order to participate in company initiatives where empowerment provides them the autonomy (Subramanian & Suresh, 2022, 482). Firms in terms of engagement, conduct practices which provide the opportunity for communication across organizational hierarchies, by creating policies and procedures to share knowledge within the organization (Ur Rehman & Ahmad 2015, 93). Therefore, decision making processes are decentralized so that employees get the chance to enjoy autonomy freely in order to perform their tasks (Mahdy & Alhadi 2021, 1797). According to Ur Rehman and Ahmad (2015, 93), this HRM practice is referred as employee participation, which encourage the employees to provide feedback in organizational decisions and through this practice, the employee feedback and suggestions could be evaluated, and the best suggestions could be rewarded. Quality circles, self-directed teams, problem solving teams and teamwork has been also identified under opportunity category (Mahdy & Alhadi 2021, 1797). Several authors agree that information exchange, employee voice and communication are also essential in improving the opportunity enhancement dimensions. On the other hand, employees should be informed regarding crucial policies and regulations which is also an opportunity enhancing HR practice in the companies. (Ur Rehman & Ahmad 2015, 93).

Job design is also identified as an opportunity enhancing HR practice. Basically, job design includes all arrangements of the company which ultimately enhances the experience. Effective job designs promote employees to get more involvement and opportunities when allocated with different tasks and levels if the job. Job rotation is also included under job design, where effective job rotation plans would provide employees with a flexible work environment and learning environment for employees. (Ur Rehman & Ahmad 2015, 92.)

Job enrichment which includes task variety, complexity and job crafting fosters and boost the work family in a positive manner (Ur Rehman & Ahmad 2015, 91). Job design or crafting in organizations is identified as a factor that boosts employee satisfaction. Job redesigning has been another strategy which is used widely in European countries. Redesigning should be done in an effective manner so that cultural fit is achieved throughout by creating harmonized relationships between collective cultures. (Mahdy & Alhadi 2021, 1797.) The below figure 3, illustrates the summary and the framework of the strategic HRM components.

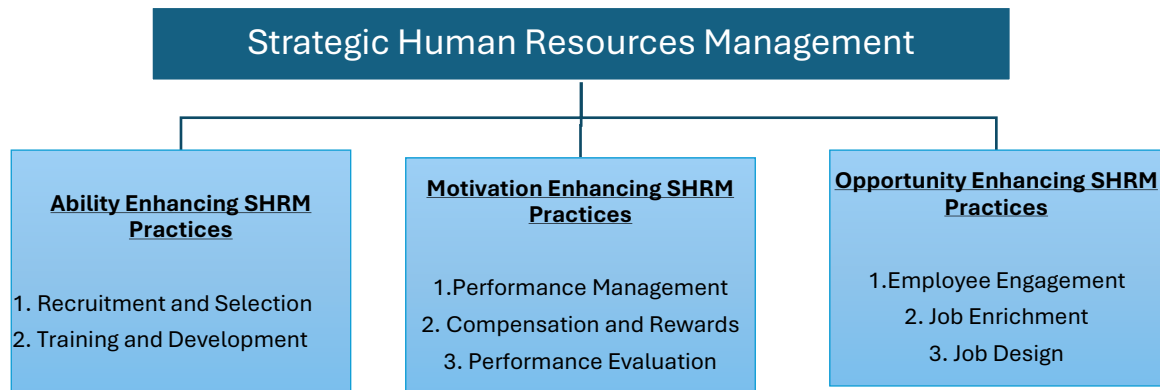


Figure 3: The model of the strategic HRM practices

The above figure 3, illustrates the summary of the strategic HRM practices, derived from the AMO framework. The strategic HRM practices related to recruitment and selection, training and development focus on elevating the abilities of the employees while, motivation aspect considers strategic HRM practices related to performance management, compensation and performance evaluation. Focusing on the strategic practices of employee engagement. Job design and enrichment would be a part of opportunity enhancement emphasizing that the AMO framework provide the components for the study related to strategic HRM in considering the employee level. The next section discusses on the inclusion of social sustainability pillars in the AMO framework in terms of the above strategic HRM practices.

2.4 Social sustainability

2.4.1 Conceptual understanding of social sustainability

The general term of sustainability encompasses environmental, economic and social dimensions where social dimensions itself specially focus on the equity in the society, Human rights, development of the community and quality of the life (Mukherji & Bhatnagar 2022, 2). During the last decades the term Social Sustainability has been gaining significant popularity making it a critical aspect specifically ensuring the well-being of the communities and also the generations of the future over the long-term (Mukherji & Bhatnagar, 2022, 2). It is said to be the third facet of Organizational sustainability which covers one of the sustainability development goals of year 2030 (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017, 68).

Social sustainability in this context includes the aspects of social equity, liveability, health equity, community development and social justice (Mukherji & Bhatnagar 2022, 2). Eizenberg and Jabareen (2017, 68) defines social sustainability, as to which supports in making the societal systems function effectively by the promotion of social justice, governance and resilience. This covers the healthy lives, wellness and well-being of each and every individual, which is being simply defined as social sustainability (Amrutha & Geetha 2019, 4). According to the Mukherji and Bhatnagar (2022, 2) Social sustainability is said to be the quality of the human system, based in values of the essential principles in ethicality. For example, fairness, trust, equity and engagement which are in need to foster well-being. It is also termed as the maintenance and development of the well-being and creating a pleasant living situation with quality of life for future generations. (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017, 68; De Fine & Folland 2025, 2030.) According to Zink (2013, 42) unlike other facets of sustainability, social sustainability is all about fostering inclusivity and societies which are cohesive. It emphasizes that it involves continuous investments happening towards ethical governance, social capital and community engagement in the long term (Roca-Puig (2018, 920). The important aspect is that social sustainability plays a vital role in the organizations which involves creating a work environment which is equitable, by fostering diversity, inclusion and ensuring that the fair labour practices are utilized and adhered (Subramanian & Suresh 2022, 480).

On the other hand, the studies highlight that social sustainability integrates with the employee wellbeing alongside with CSR which is to ensure the success in the business practices and to achieve broader social goals (Amrutha & Geetha 2019, 12; Subramanian & Suresh 2022, 480). Faeni et al. (2025, 5) argues that the workplace social sustainability is being achieved by utilizing the strategic human resources management practices which supports in the long run of the workplace and corporate sustainability. It is true that without strong policies frameworks and reliable commitments, achieving social sustainability is quite challenging.

2.4.2 Four pillars of social sustainability

In order to understand the aspects of strategic HRM practices in the context of social sustainability, four pillar social sustainability aspect is utilized. According to study conducted by Roca-Puig (2018, 918), a four-pillar social sustainability model was proposed, which consist of equity, wellbeing, participation and involvement and social capital as the most central and the foundation in addressing the societal challenges. These pillars also stated as the core components in achieving shared social goals effectively.

2.4.1.1 Equity and social justice

According to Roca-Puig (2018, 918) equity and social justice are said to be the backbone of social sustainability where elaborate as fair distribution of the resources, opportunities and the rights towards individuals, groups ensuring that every individual with different races, gender, economic status are ensured to gain everything in an equal manner. Subramanian and Suresh (2022, 475) emphasize that fair access to resources is one key aspect so that it ensures all individuals have the access to education, health care as well as employment opportunities and the benefits. The gender equality and inclusion which promotes the equal employee opportunities among the workplace and in leadership positions both for men and women (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017, 70). The companies should also take initiatives in implementing policies and procedures which are aligned with the protection of the human rights which also elaborated under the aspect of equity and justice (Lee & Ahn, 2024,10).

Social justice is said to be contributed to economic stability, societal well-being and equal labour practices which ultimately would promote workplace diversity and perform in the long-term (Chowdhury et al. 2023, 7-9). Ensuring equality also should be able to provide access to all vulnerable people including individuals with disabilities. In the area of gender equality, women empowerment is one critical facet where the focus is to eradicate discrimination and violence, and harassment against women specially in the workplace. (Missimer et al. 2017, 47.) The study conducted by Nilsson et al. (2024, 5929-5947) elaborate that inequality reduction plays a crucial role in maintaining societal stability and conflicts. The term social equity hence is said to be the linkage to social and distributive justice (Nilsson et al. 2024, 5929-5947).

The notion of social inclusion is in relation to distributional equity which encompasses fair distribution of the social, economic and environmental benefits among every member (Nilsson et al. 2024, 5929-5947). In contrarily, justice and equality being the characteristics of social sustainability, which ensures that nobody is left out or excluded while fulfil the lives in freedom. Missimer et al. (2017, 47) argues that social capital is one of the functions of trust and network and trust becomes one of the main variables of social capital. The author expresses trust is also a key element of social life which binds the society together.

2.4.1.2 Participation and influence

Participation and influence are basically viewed as the active engagement and involvement of individuals with the communities. Additionally, it becomes a part of the decision-making process which has a chance to influence the decisions. (Nilsson et al. 2024, 5929-5947.)

Job satisfaction and engagement which ensures meaningful work with fair pay and opportunities for growth of the career ultimately leading towards a supportive work environment encouraging collaborative culture with strong leadership along with open communication (Subramanian & Suresh, 2022, 475; Lenart-Gansiniec et al. 2023, 30). At the end, organizations invest in employee wellbeing so that it would ultimately result in workplace morale and innovation with low absenteeism rates (Nilsson et al. 2024, 5929-5947). Sense of belongingness emphasizes being a part of the workplace or the team. It is crucial that an environment is created where the employees feel a sense of belongingness along with connections to enhance the social cohesion. (Nilsson et al. 2024, 5929-5947.)

Establishing collaboration and coexistence with stakeholders is highlighted as a crucial cooperation promoting the coexistence between the employees and the stakeholders (Missimer et al. 2017, 47). Collaboration can be identified as an approach that most effective participation and in conflict mitigation. Trust and reciprocity have a vital role in binding the societies together so that participation of every individual becomes a success. (Missimer et al. 2017, 47.) The ability of trust and trustful environment is stated as a crucial factor contributing sense of belongingness to thrive. On the other hand, providing individuals the freedom required to have his or her own control towards the resources will greatly support the aspect of participation and indirectly sense of feeling free to express ideas, disagreements without fear. (Nilsson et al. 2024, 5929-5947.)

2.4.1.3 Well-being

The community well-being simply refers to the overall quality of life which is experienced by the individuals in society. Eizenberg and Jabareen (2017, 72) refers to quality of life as to physical, mental, social and economic stability along with environmental safety which enhances the job satisfaction, healthy work environment, career growth and opportunities. Organizations therefore tend to create a supportive workplace environment so that the productivity would be associated and turnover would be affected by enhancing overall job satisfaction and motivation (Nilsson et al. 2024, 5929-5947). Amrutha and Geetha (2019, 4) illustrate psychological wellbeing as one of the key aspects for quality of work Life where addressing work related issues and stress is critical along with mental health programs and having employee assistance programs and services.

According to Tariq et al. (2014, 255) work life balance refers to employees having a health balance of lifestyle between the professional as well as personal lives. This aspect has been a key aspect in the workplace now adays making it to be an important aspect in promoting job satisfaction and employee retention. Many organizations tend to utilize and adhere to key strategies on maintaining

work life balance by having flexibility in the working arrangements by having remote working facility, virtual teams' collaboration, flexible schedules and opportunities in job rotation and job sharing. (Amrutha & Geetha 2019,4-5.) On top of that it is visible that the laws and regulations have also enforced in terms of parental and family leaves providing maternity and paternity leave for the new mothers and fathers (Zink 2013, 48). Most of the companies also use the marketing aspect in promoting the work life balance in the organization whilst coordinating employee wellness event, programs by offering free counselling sessions, and stress management workshops (Subramanian & Suresh 2022, 485). At the end the research elaborates that the burnout from the heavy workload is being minimized whilst it has outcomes in the engagement and organizational performance (Ali et al. 2024, 3682-3686).

The holistic perspective of wellbeing compromises with the health and safety of the individuals. This includes various dimensions such as psychological and physical health ultimately leading towards social and emotional well-being. (Nilsson et al. 2024, 5929-5947.) The infrastructure and the resources come in to play inside this pillar (Nilsson et al. 2024, 5929-5947). Being safe and secured will ensure that individuals are able to live in an environment where they are protected from potential danger and risks which is a threat to their lives (Nilsson et al. 2024, 5929-5947).

2.4.1.4 Social capital

Social capital pillar of social sustainability is also elaborated as the social relationships and Network. The study of Nilsson et al. (2024, 5929-5947) mention that, social capital concept has been debated rigorously in the academic literature, while many authors often conceptualize the term into three key dimensions which is bonding, bridging and linking. Bonding refers to as social relationships which are homogenous, and bridging expresses the heterogenous relationships within a wider network. The ties between the institutions and decision makers are known as the linking. Social capital also includes features such as mutual trust, learning and knowledge, social norms and code of conduct. (Nilsson et al. 2024, 5929-5947.)

Skill development, being another fundamental aspect of social sustainability, refers to the process of which enhances the competencies, knowledge, growth opportunities, and career prospects of employees in the organization which falls under social capital (Amrutha & Geetha, 2019, 8). Longterm workforce sustainability can be achieved by prioritizing skill development (Zink, 2013, 45). The existing literature explores key dimensions for skill development. Training and development are identified as the core component of skill development by utilizing several types of training such as on-the-job training, workshops, seminars which would allow employees to learn

practical skills while performing their job function. This would ensure that the employees remain competitive in the rapidly changing business context as well. (Eizenberg & Jabareen 2017, 70; Pham et al. 2019, 850.) The authors identify upskilling which refers to improving the existing skills of the employees while reskilling is to change and train for an entirely new set of skills as the secondary key dimensions for skill development. These techniques would provide adaptability to changes, employee satisfaction and job security so that it allows employees to learn continuously with career growth. (Roca-Puig 2018, 920; Lenart-Gansiniec et al. 2023, 15.) Therefore, by utilizing and investing on the above along with leadership development, career advancements may be few methods in optimizing the workforce. The below figure 4, illustrates the four pillars of social sustainability in a snapshot.

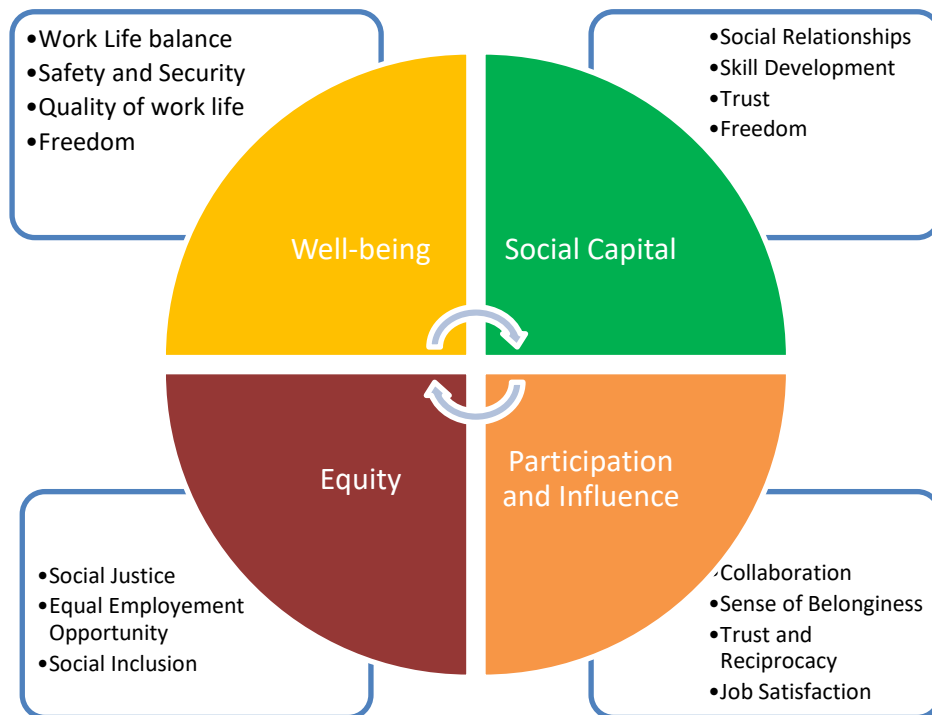


Figure 4: Four pillars of social sustainability

As illustrated above, social sustainability can be classified under four pillars namely wellbeing, social capital, equity and participation and influence. The next section elaborates how strategic HRM components and four pillars of social sustainability synthesize.

2.5 Synthesis of strategic HRM and social sustainability

The integration of strategic HRM into social sustainability has represented an evolving landscape of a humancentric approach. The synthesis of these two domains would support in creating a foundation compromising resilience building upon the social sustainability pillars. (Amrutha & Geetha, 2019, 8.) In terms of ability perspective of socially sustainable strategic HRM, it suggests that development of employee skills, competencies, development and knowledge should be carried out in ways that both organizational goals and individual growth is achieved (Pham et al. 2019, 850). Also, training and development should not only target in productivity, but it can also be treated as a catalyst in enhancing employability and career progression (Nilsson et al. 2024, 5929-5947). The study also suggest that the focus should be moved towards attaining and fulfilling the competencies required for the future. In an aspect of socially sustainable strategic HRM, training cost is not considered as a cost but considered as a long-term investment. (Amrutha & Geetha, 2019, 8.)

When it comes to the motivation aspect, the combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors suggests moving towards a philosophy of total rewards that prioritize work life balance as well as psychological safety of the individuals (Nilsson et al. 2024, 5929-5947). Also, elaborate that identify an employee as a member of a family and the community, in the first instance would help to adapt flexible work arrangements align with health and mental support (Amrutha & Geetha, 2019, 8). This suggests in minimizing the social leakage of stress into the community of which the employee is attached to (Nilsson et al. 2024, 5929-5947). Having social sustainability linked into strategic HRM would foster trust, participation, commitment and would encourage employees to positively contribute towards the organization (Pham et al. 2019, 850).

Opportunity aspect suggests focusing mainly on proving employee space and autonomy in decision making. Such would support in promoting an inclusive work environment. (Pham et al. 2019, 850.) Employees will then focus on raising their opinions significantly because the feeling of being heard would make them confident. According to literature workplaces with organizational justice enhances positive social cohesion. This will also encompass diversity and inclusion. (Amrutha & Geetha, 2019, 8.)

Therefore, AMO framework illustrates how strategic HRM could result in a coherent system of practices in motivating the employees through trust, fairness, and opportunities of active engagement. This will also provide a new era of which the high performance is also recognized fruitfully and fuelled by the correct motivators. Hence, the conclusion is that the correct use of

strategic HRM practices helps in creating a legacy of values that is not monetary, but in sustaining the existence of the people that are employed in the company. Finally, strategic HRM practices contribute maintaining employee aspect while enhancing a socially sustainable organizational culture.

3 Methodology

This chapter illustrates the methodology and the research design which has been utilized in the study. This contains philosophical understanding, choice of methodology which is the qualitative approach and data collection method including semi structured interviews. This research is based on thematic analysis which is being utilized to analyse data. Finally, the chapter discusses the ethical considerations in the research while handling data and analysis.

3.1 Research approach

Empirical research can be conducted by using three main methods namely, qualitative, quantitative or mix method. The positives and negatives of each approach differ, and the choice should be made based on the research questions, objectives, and the type of data. For example, the quantitative technique would be useful if the data were analysed by testing the hypotheses and forecasting the outcomes. (Creswell 2018, 50.) When it comes to the qualitative technique, it basically focuses on real life experiences and run through in-depth research by providing a wide context of the individual experience as a collection rather than being quantified. (Dehalwar & Sharma 2023, 14.)

This research is based on the qualitative approach which focuses on being subjective and humanistic by considering the phenomenological aspect rather than traditionalist aspect. A qualitative research is defined as "the study of the nature of phenomena, which includes their quality, different manifestations, the context in which they appear, or the perspectives from which they can be perceived, but excludes their range, frequency, and place in an objectively determined chain of cause and effect" (Dehalwar & Sharma 2023, 14). The main reason for the above approach is that, it provides an in-depth study of the social and cultural phenomena and real time research issues (Bitsch 2005, 79). Qualitative research type involves in generating the questions and procedures while the study is conducted and developed. The data is collected directly from the participants and their environment and utilizes an inductive approach to interpret data providing a broader insight. (Creswell 2018, 50.) Also, the main focus of the qualitative research lies on text rather than numbers. This approach is ideal since this suit for research questions of "How" and "Why" which relates to social phenomena such as role of strategic HRM in social sustainability. This lens of interpretation is well suited in enabling the researchers to examine the interplay between the organizational practices, employee perceptions and societal values making it more logical. (Bitsch 2005, 79.)

Selection of the suitable research approach and research design play a crucial role. Once the research approach is considered, the suitable research design needs to be adopted. Research design consists of four primary types namely exploratory, descriptive, predictive and explanatory. An exploratory research design has been selected in relation to the nature and the research questions of this study. This type of research consists of open-ended questions so that the main goal is to gain an understanding of the environment while clarifying the nature of the issue. This also is useful in gaining insights and understanding about a problem or a topic. (Collis & Hussey 2022.)

Therefore, the topics of strategic HRM and social sustainability takes an exploratory investigation rather than creating predefined hypothesis and numerical value generations. Also, exploratory research can be useful in studies of which the nature of the study or problem is new or not precise. Hence, the adaptability and flexibility change the research direction with the new data and insights emerge within the study. Descriptive research also has a purpose in obtaining a precise and detailed account of individuals or circumstances, which also could either be followed or precede with exploratory research or more commonly seen in exploratory research. The details discussed in chapter 2 on strategic HRM and social sustainability pillars serve as a clear guideline for the author in order to proceed with data collection, where establishing a clear understanding on the phenomenon under investigation identified to be crucial. Here the author was able to carry out a detailed analysis on how the strategic HRM activities lead towards the social sustainability pillars with the utilization of open-ended questions.

3.2 Data collection

The qualitative research comprises data collection methods such as interviews, surveys, observations and information based on various documents (Gill et al. 2008,291). This approach requires a small sample yet are rich and subjective qualitative data. The research problem itself becomes a determinant for the selection of data collection methods. Utilization of primary data provides the researcher multiple opportunities towards understanding the phenomena revolves round the research questions whilst observing the participants in their own environment. (Malhotra & Birkis 2006, 84.) Also, when it comes to business-related topics, it would be ideal to go towards qualitative data collection methods because interviews have become a popular data collection form in terms of primary data in Finland (Eskola & Suoranta 1998). Interviews basically explore the experience of the individuals via series of questions and answers, so that individuals tend to provide their meaningful experiences (Gill et al. 2008,291). Therefore, interviews were utilized as the main form of the primary data collection method in this study.

There are three specific categories of qualitative interviews such as structured, semi structured and group interviews or unstructured interviews (Dehalwar & Sharma 2023,14). Structured interviews pertain an interview guide which is well structured and with pre-determined questions where no deviations are allowed. The structured and group interviews commonly not utilized since they are unable to provide an in-depth view when it comes to strategic HRM practices. Semi structured interviews are a combination of structured and unstructured interviews having pre-determined questions yet always available in potential follow-up questions. (Dehalwar & Sharma 2023,14.) Hence, semi structured interviews which are also known as thematic interviews were chosen to conduct this study because the interviewees views and opinions could take into consideration with the flexibility of the research and also to make it to be more comprehensive and in depth. This would also provide consistency across the interviews and support the emerging themes. The semi structured interviews also align with the AMO theoretical framework since it requires the individual level of experience, behaviours and perspectives which lacks in quantitative methods.

The primary data sources compromised with participants from different industries and from different sectors, which practices strategic HRM activities in different previews. The author was able to investigate four employees, which has been listed in the table 2, where the companies of which the individuals work operates in Finland. The interviewees were selected as a snowball technique and due to the time consideration and time duration taken for an interview seems to be quite high, only four interviewees were interviewed. The interviewees were informed about the possibility of staying anonymously in the study in order to get the most accurate data and all four interviewees confirmed their own intention to stay anonymous.

Table 2: Description of the Interviewees

Interviewee	Title of the Interviewee	Interview Date 2026	Duration	Interview method
A	General Manager – Facility Management	29 January	50 minutes	Semi-structured online interview
B	Software Engineer	31 January	30 minutes	Semi-structured online interview
C	Logistics Assistant	19 January	56 minutes	Semi-structured online interview
D	Sales Assistant	18 January	50 minutes	Semi-structured online interview

All for interviewees agreed to be interviewed via online platforms as listed in table 5. The interviews were carried out during the time between weeks 3-4 in 2026. Once the time for the interview was scheduled, an interview link was shared separately, and the video interviews were conducted. All four interviewees were asked with an interview guide, yet slightly different questions were also asked based on the industry and the responses provided by the interviewees which is a characteristic of the semi structured interview method. The interviews were conducted using Google meets where the interviews were planned to last between 30 to 40 minutes and all the interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees. The interviews were then transcribed carefully in order to avoid misinformation and misunderstanding. The language of the interviews was English, and both the interviewees and researcher spoke fluently in English.

The interviews were focused on exploratory questions in order to have a deep understating about the topics. For this study, the researcher utilized existing theories which could be observed whilst the interview questions have been designed mainly around the themes and constructs identified in the literature based in the AMO enhancing strategic HRM components and social sustainability outcomes. (Tariq et al. 2014, 255; Chowdhury et al. 2023, 9.) According to the interviewees expertise and experience open ended questions were also utilized so that it promotes the two-way communication very effectively making them to provide more information naturally and freely (Gill et al. 2008, 291). The semi structured interviews supported in order to gain the experience on how social sustainability is experienced by the interviewees allowing more quality information to flow through. The study would be focusing on individuals who experience strategic HRM practices.

Even though, the semi structured interviews serve the main purposes of the study, limitations were also available. For example, problems such as language barriers and communication problems may result in misinterpretation of the questions. Also, the participants may not be the experts in the

themes and concepts which will end up in having poor responses. The time consumption is also a definite problem which exists in the semi structured interviews. Yet, in order to minimize the above issues, a list of questions was created as the guidelines for the interview (appendix 1). An operationalization table was developed (referred in table 02) with the researched literature. It includes the main research question and questions related to the AMO framework and social sustainability aspect.

Table 3: Operationalization table

Research Problem	Sub Problems	Themes	Practices and Concepts	Interview Questions	
How does Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) influence social sustainability?	What are the Strategic HRM practices implemented in the organizations	Ability Enhancing Aspect	Recruitment and Selection	1,4,6	
			Training and Development	1,4,7	
			Performance Management	1,4,5	
			Performance Evaluation	1,4,5	
		Motivation Enhancing Practices	Compensation and Rewards	1,4,9	
			Opportunity enhancing aspect	Employee Engagement	1,4,11
				Job Enrichment	1,4,12
		Job Design		1,4,13	
		How does Ability, Motivation and Opportunity enhancing SHRM practices foster social sustainability	Equity	Social Justice	2,3,14
				Equal Employment opportunity	2,3,15
				Social Inclusion	2,3,14
			Social Capital	Social Relationships	2,3,16
	Skill Development			2,3	
	Trust			2,3,17	
	Freedom	2,3,19,22			
	Well-being	Work Life Balance	2,3,20		
Quality of Work Life		2,3,20			
Safety and Security		2,3,21			
Freedom		2,3,19,22			
Participation and Influence	Collaboration	2,3,18			
	Sense of belongingness	2,3,23			
	Trust and Reciprocracy	2,3,17			
	Job satisfaction	2,3			

The operationalization table in table 3 depicts the main research question and the sub questions have supported in identifying multiple themes in the literature review. With the help of the operationalization table, the researcher was able to develop an interview guide which acts as the framework for interview structure and in carrying out the interviews more effectively (Kaliio et al. 2026, 486).

3.3 Data analysis method

Data analysis can be said as one of the integral parts of research. Once the data is collected, the researchers start analysing so that the researchers could interpret, formulate and structure the data in order to match the research questions of the study. Qualitative research study utilizes data which is non numerical and non-quantified so that a detailed analysis of data should be carried out in order to make the collected data useful. (Saunders et al. 2009, 480-481.) Analysing data in that way would bring more meaning and clarity to the data so that it would be useful information for the study. Hence, data analysis in qualitative research is crucial and valuable yet it is the most challenging task or phase which would also bring additional value to the research study by finding new information. The researcher should start off with obtaining the complete interview transcripts to commence the data analysis phase. Yet, the transcribing of the interviews is a time consuming and a challenging task. (Saunders et al. 2019, 481.)

The primary method utilized in the analysis of qualitative research is content analysis. First, it is utilized to gain a concise and a general understanding of the phenomena which is under study. Secondly the study would use the thematic analysis following the six-phase approach suggested by Braun and Clarke which is a widely utilized method in qualitative research because it is said to be well suited for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The figure 5 illustrate the six-phase approach. This strategy supports both inductive and deductive coding which allows to integrate the literature driven themes and categories to be emerged and identified from the data.

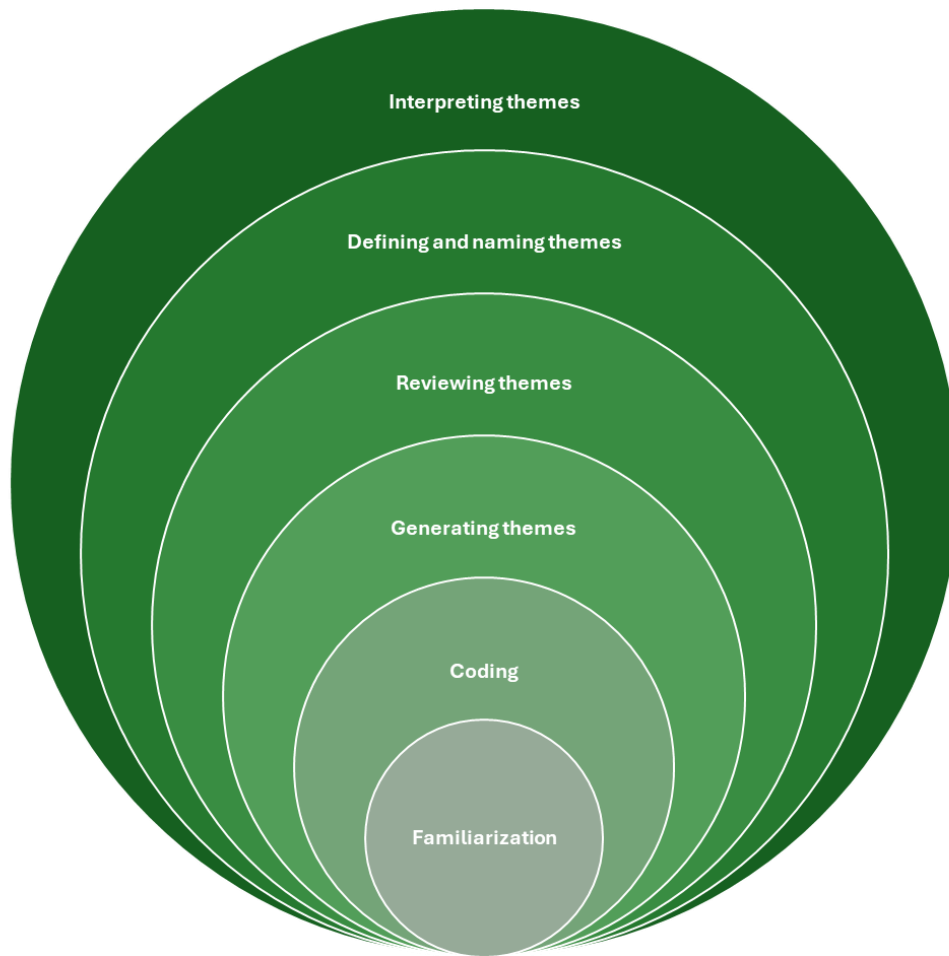


Figure 5: Six phased approaches of a thematic analysis

The first phase as illustrated in the above figure 5, is to be familiarizing the interviews and the collected material. Therefore, the researcher listened to the interview recordings multiple times and the transcripts of the interviews were read multiple times so that simple themes so that the whole idea. Also, this helped in making some notes and highlighting the main points in the transcripts.

The second phase is to start with the initial coding. The text could be systematically coded with the utilization of NVivo software. The gathered data which is the interview transcripts were imported to the data analysis software. Then the data was arranged systematically in relation to the research questions and was broken down into categories or namely to be the cases which in this case, sections related to SHRM practices and social pillars. With the help of the initial cases, the data was coded and organized in a way that they are grouped to create possible themes.

During the theme development phase, the codes were clustered together into broader themes, for example empowering through training and etc. which can be said as the preliminary themes generated by the deductive approach. The inductive ‘approach which was utilized in preparing the

semi structured interview guideline also played an important role in identifying key themes based on the literature.

In the theme review phase, the themes identified were reviewed for internal consistency, and the data extracts were compared and refined against the entire set of data. This also helped the researcher to check whether the themes overlap or whether there are any sub themes exists. The defining and naming of the themes were carried out in terms of the research question and the conceptual framework.

The final step is to write and interpret the themes as a narrative link towards the empirical findings and literature. The data therefore was analysed further to link towards each theme and to explain how the sub themes are linked towards the main themes along with their relationships. Finally, the results have been summarized in the findings chapter.

3.4 Evaluation of the study

It is crucial to ensure that trustworthiness and rigor is met in qualitative research in order to establish credibility, reliability and validity of the findings. Therefore, this study has been utilized in the framework suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) in order to assess the quality of the research utilizing four criteria *credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability*.

Credibility refers to confidence and the accuracy of the data or the interpretation. Also refers to as the equivalence of the research results with the reality. In order to enhance the credibility aspect, the study has defined the research topic, purpose and the questions clearly so that the theories and the literature have been collected via multiple sources and cross validated. This study also utilized the recommendations from the individuals who actually experience the subject area while the information was provided were insightful. The semi structured interview style which was used in this research provided the chance in rectifying or clarifying any doubts so that the responses would be truthful. Also, this study ensured the data to be accurate since the interviews were recorded with permission. However, the issue of recording would be having limitations in openness. The researcher also had a clear interview guideline so that the questions were covering the study area which can also be treated as a credibility enhancing factor. Yet, the time consumption and the time limitation was one general weakness of this type, since it was difficult to cover a huge study area within only 50 minutes.

Transferability means that the applicability of the findings to the other contexts. It is true that qualitative research have no route of utilizing statistical aspects, it provides an in-depth analysis. This allows the readers to make judgements about the relevance and the applicability of the findings for its own setting and environment. This can be achieved by the selection of a purposeful sampling which would provide dense and rich details. Social sustainability has become one of the rapidly growing topics around the world. The attention and the major problems now adays rise within the perview of the subject of employees, making the topic relevant in conducting a research.

Dependability speaks about the consistency of the research process. This is paralleling the concept of realibility. Also, it provides answers to the question whther the research results are the same or it has been replaced with similar partiicpiants or similar contexts. This research study followed a structured manner from the developing research questions towards the end which is data analysis. In order to address the above the data collected has been coded along with preserving the interview guides since qualitative context often contain features of emergent designs. This would enhance the consistency since it is being monitored documentarily.

Confirmability ensures that the findings are based on the data and not bound to be biased by the researcher. It goes parallery to objectivity. This will be depicted from the research approach since the data would be interpreted and would be based on the coding and the documents would be served as evidence. The integrity of a qualitative research always based upon the data and research process. This research ensure above since the study was conducted by having proper documentation. The systemic applicability of these strategies would enhance the standards of the qualitative research making the results trustworthy and methodologically rigorous.

3.5 Data Management

This study was conducted according to the ethical standards which are established for qualitative research with the involvement of human participants and all ethical problems are taken into account during all the stages of the research study. So that, prior to participation, all individuals were provided with the information sheet and were well informed regarding the goal of the research. As a result, each and every participant will have to provide a written consent prior to the interviews. The informed consent form is being reported in appendix 2. The ethical approval and all the participants were informed regarding the purpose of the study, their rights and the voluntary nature of the involvement.

The participant's privacy is being maintained where no details related to the name, company or personal attributes are mentioned. Yet they will be identified as a professional role. The anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained, and all identifiable information was removed from the reports and the notes. On the other hand, participants were assured regarding their right of withdrawal from study at any given point without any consequence. The participants consent form sample mentioned in appendix 2.

Also, the data privacy storage will be maintained with regards to the GDPR and University data management guidelines. A separate data management plan as mentioned in appendix 3 and privacy notice appendix 4 would explain how the personal data were gathered, utilized and handled. The study will also set up the process in order to achieve the qualitative research principles credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Hence the above measures ensured that the study is carried out in relation to the principles of respect, autonomy, and specially data protection throughout the research process.

The author fully committed towards the writing process in an ethical manner in the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The appendix 5 shows how the AI tools has been used which supported in enhancing the grammar and punctuality of the sentence. The work is totally based on the authors own work and AI would be utilized as a tool in assisting writing and professional writing.

4 Findings

This research was focused on the employee aspect where employees from four different organizations and sectors were selected. The four companies reflected different sectors such as IT, Facilities, Retail and Machinery. The companies are well known for their services and products in Finland. The reason for selecting employees from these sectors was because it will provide a holistic view on Strategic HRM practices the employees understand and experience in their sector of work and the companies are also known to support social sustainability. This section focuses on the empirical findings on Strategic HRM practices in the companies under the themes Ability enhancing, motivation enhancing and opportunity enhancing aspects. The academic theories are used, and evidence is gathered by the below findings, in order to support the importance of Strategic HRM practices for employees and elevate social sustainability goals.

4.1 Aspects of AMO framework through the lens of strategic HRM

4.1.1 Ability enhancing aspect of strategic HRM

The ability enhancing practices are basically involved and responsible in employees' skills, competencies, knowledge and development, while laying the foundation for strategic HRM within the companies. The companies utilize different ways in adopting strategic aspect towards the key practices of the ability aspect which includes recruitment and selection and training and development. Recruitment and selection, traditional and non-traditional methods are used where the methods are classified according to the level of the position that needs to be hired: General Manager – Facility Management (Interviewee A) states that, *“Hiring ground staff is mainly done through advertising positions in websites and mouth to mouth recruitment. Yet hiring middle level staff and above will be done through online job postings on social media, on recruitment sites and also sometimes by headhunting.”*

Most of the company's recruitment process is carried out with the help of online platforms such as online applications and virtual interviews. Once the applications are sorted out, the personality test and problem-solving tests are conducted in order to assess the traits and problem-solving skills of the candidates. Having a structured and specific approach for key positions may result in selecting the most suitable candidate for the respective position avoiding biasness. This could be the very first step in emotional integration since the company tends find the correct person to the most suitable position. (Li et al. 2022, 459.)

“Company follows a structured and role-specific approach to recruitment and selection. The interview process varies depending on the vacant position. For software engineering roles, candidates are typically evaluated through discussions about their previous experience, technical knowledge, and on-site coding examinations” (Interviewee B – Software Engineer).

Also on a positive side, having a simpler yet a fruitful recruitment process tends to make the processes less bureaucratic and accessible. Also, the issues and needs of the talent could be addressed while time taken in hiring can be also reduced. Also, simpler the application steps the candidate attraction would also be higher, avoiding unnecessary complex procedures and enhance organizational agility.

“About the recruiting process, that is not complicated in that sense.” (Interviewee C – Logistics Assistant).

Such practices would also act as ethical hiring standards where the candidates selected for the next round from the initial screening, goes through a standardized interview procedure. Recruitment and selection practices are also key practices towards diversity and inclusion. Attracting various candidates with different backgrounds act as a moral obligation while seen as a strategic objective on the other side. Such inclusive recruitment contributes towards organizational development, building strong teams and elevating social sustainability. (Ur Rehman & Ahmad 2015, 92.) Even though such practices are carried out by the companies, tensions between the short term and long-term objectives may create pressure influencing the hiring process or the decisions.

“So for recruiters, the implementation of strategic HRM is very challenging specially in providing equal opportunity and skill-based selection” (Interviewee D – Sales Assistant).

Training and development, emphasis on the continuous learning opportunity rather than on one skill at one time acquisition. Companies have designed there training needs to cater both current and future organizational needs reflecting a strategic orientation in HRM. This also reflect that the abilities of an employee must evolve and match the advancements in technology along with the market needs and organizational transformation. Therefore, companies have not undertaken training as a performance enhancing measurement but also consider as a long-term investment.

“Company offered trainings is a must for success and maintaining standards. Our company has monthly trainings to all ground staff at all locations. The team leader of that team is responsible to conduct this. Further, bi-annually some middle-level or senior level managers visit the sites and participate on these trainings. This ensures and brings a sense of commitment for the staff as senior

managers also take time in visiting them.” (Interviewee A – General Manager – Facility Management)

Yet the above consideration reveals to become effective when training and development opportunities are equally available among employees.

“The company provides access to a learning platform where employees can follow a wide range of pre-approved learning materials related to their roles and career development. In addition, if the available resources are not sufficient, employees are allowed to purchase external learning or study materials, which can be reimbursed with approval from the team manager.” (Interviewee B – Software Engineer)

Overall, the findings elaborate that ability enhancing practices which are designed in a strategical manner would provide a workforce which is competent, resilient and adaptable so that it would also promote the organizational perceptions towards fairness, support and equality of opportunity. The structured recruitment processes would perceive transparency and will be accountable towards the long-term growth illustrating fairness and mutual support. For example, having equal access to have training and development opportunities and hiring promptly based on potential rather than criteria that narrows down, would ultimately contribute towards inclusivity and equity. According to Boselie (2010, 118) such practices would invest towards employee development thereby strengthening the perceptions towards support and fairness. This study also supports the findings elaborating the support provided to human capital being crucial in maintaining social capital in sustainability.

4.1.2 Motivation enhancing aspect of strategic HRM

Motivation enhancing practices focuses on long-term engagement, commitment and sustaining employee efforts and morale. Basically, the practices such as compensation and rewards, performance evaluation and performance management become the foundation for the above outcomes.

Compensation and rewards, play a critical role in employee motivation. Employees wish that the HRM practices consist of clear and proper communication about the reward systems. Most of the interviewees experience the performance based rewarding system along with the rewarding system which is in the par of the market. Compensation and rewards do not need to be essentially tangible, but intangible rewards also strengthen the emotional level and connection towards the company while motivating them.

“ There is an allocated budget for each team, and it is divided on each team member based on the individual performance ” (Interviewee B – Software Engineer).

Performance evaluation, systems are found to be well structured and transparent. Utilizing clear and consistent methods will ensure that the company is fair in the evaluation process. The evaluation timelines might be different from sectors to sector and the level of the staff. Team based performance evaluations also a great example of motivation and achieving organizational goals and objectives.

“ The company ensures fairness in performance evaluation by assessing employees at all levels of the hierarchy using clear and consistent methods. Ground-level staff are evaluated monthly, even though they are dispersed across different work locations. Team-based evaluations help ensure that performance is measured against shared goals, keeping staff motivated and aligned with organizational objectives. Middle-level staff are evaluated based on their ability to manage teams, meet operational targets and support organizational goals ” (Interviewee A, General Manager – Facility Management).

During the structured process, it is necessary that the manager and the employee conduct the final evaluation so that the differences are discussed openly avoiding biases. The improvements and the long-term career plans and guidance will always be a motivating factor for professional growth and development.

“ In the final step, both the employee and the manager meet to compare their evaluations for each criterion. Any differences are discussed openly, and constructive feedback is provided. This discussion also focuses on identifying areas for improvement and setting future personal and professional goals. This transparent and participative approach helps ensure fairness, clarity, and mutual understanding in the performance evaluation process ” (Interviewee D – Sales Assistant).

Performance management comes in to play once the evaluation process is fully conducted. The performance evaluations ultimately lead towards the other areas such as promotion, increments and recognition. A standard level of evaluation and evaluation score is a key in minimizing biasness's. Because the companies tend to have a promotion and increment quota which always looks bad once implemented, due to the rules and regulations of the company. Yet some companies carry on the compensation growth if the defined performance expectations are met.

“ Company ensures that performance evaluations contribute to employee promotions and salary increments by linking them to minimum performance standards. Employees are required to achieve at least a 3 out of 5 performance rating to be eligible for a salary increment. This ensures that compensation growth is based on meeting defined performance expectations ” (Interviewee B – Software Engineer).

The findings illustrate that motivation aspect is being implemented with a dual aspect focusing on extrinsic and intrinsic motivators. Yet, the criticality lies in maintaining both motivators avoiding potential conflict. For example, excessive focus on external rewards, ultimately would result in diminishing employees’ interest in their own work. (Li et al. 2022, 459.) The adaptation towards the differentiation of recognition, would ensure that the high performers and average performers are recognised appropriately. Hence, the motivational tools should be adapted providing clarity and structure along with accountability where yet implementation of such will impact the results. (Nilsson et al. 2024, 5929-5947.)

4.1.3 Opportunity enhancing aspect of strategic HRM

The combination of the practices related to ability and motivation together makes opportunity component as an essential component as well. Even though the right skills and highest performer is identified, it is crucial that opportunities exist within the company so that employees could contribute their own skills and motivation actively. Practices such as empowerment, engagement, open communication, autonomy and job enrichment make ways in creating such conditions in the companies.

Employee Engagement is not only engaging in team activities. It emerges as one of the mechanisms in opportunity enhancements as well as an outcome. The findings elaborate that involving employees in the decision-making process and problem solving is an act of engagement. The middle level managers actively providing their employees with active feedback along with informal discussions make them recognized and valued in a way that employees are given a chance to share their own experience. This aspect differs from the way it is carried out focusing on different managerial levels. For example, the ground level staff at a facility management centre would be thrilled to see the manager having a short site visit rather than managerial level employees would prefer team gatherings and recognition. Yet it creates a sense of involvement which provoke psychological attachment to the employees work and the company.

“Team leaders closely interact with ground-level staff and encourage teamwork across different work sites. Monthly training sessions create engagement activities by allowing employees to share experiences and learn together. Site visits by middle-level and senior managers help employees feel recognized and valued. In addition, informal discussions, feedback sessions and team-based goal setting help strengthen relationships, improve morale and keep employees engaged with the company’s objectives ” (Interviewee A, General Manager – Facility Management).

Job enrichment is basically responsible in increasing the meaningfulness of work by providing more in-depth responsibilities and ownership. Job rotation can be identified as one of the ways in which Job enrichment could be achieved. It makes it simple, where adding an extra responsibility or rotating with the tasks so that repetitiveness and boredom is avoided. Ultimately, enriching in the employees’ roles provide them the feeling of involvement and interest in the work they carry on. (Gill et al. 2008, 291.)

“The company uses job enrichment and job rotation in a simple, practical way. Employees are sometimes given extra responsibilities or rotated between tasks, so work does not feel repetitive. This helps staff feel more involved, improves their skills and keeps them interested in their work, especially at the ground level ” (Interviewee D, Software Engineer).

Even though, it would be easy for certain companies which such availability as mentioned above, companies which possess specific roles with specific skills would find it difficult in implementing. Yet the evidence shows that for some extent the company has utilized the chance, so that it brings success in employee participation and employee learning along with providing ultimate freedom in their own working environment.

So, and the biggest thing is, Here in Nordic culture, we have flexible working arrangement. Which is very good for job enrichment.” (Interviewee C - Logistics Assistant).

Job design is another reinforcement providing opportunity with the proper structuring of the job roles by providing autonomy, clarity and collaboration. A well and clearly designed job would provide the employees with clear responsibilities and execution guidelines. (Gill et al. 2008, 291.) Yet, it is also required to provide a balanced approach in the autonomy. Having and setting clear boundaries and requirements will enable the employees to take ownership for their own work and themselves while supporting to achieve company goals and objectives. This type of autonomy guided under a professional manner could enhance employee competency levels and also decision-making abilities. Pointing out things to do, would lead towards inconsistency and inefficiency, yet

freedom requires to be restricted to a certain level so that it is not misused. (Nilsson et al. 2024, 5929-5947.)

“The company provides a reasonable level of autonomy, allowing employees to manage their tasks, make technical decisions, and plan their work within defined guidelines and project requirements”

(Interviewee B – Software Engineer)

“If I’m working in my department, nobody comes in micromanagement. do this, do this, do this, do this, because it’s my department, so I have the freedom. It helps to be engaged and also keep you motivated. You don’t feel the burden, you know? If you are flexible working arrangements. And you can balance your work life.” (Interviewee D – Sales Assistant)

Furthermore, the findings elaborate that having a proper designing and clear guidelines contributes towards responsiveness and adaptive work practices because the trust in themselves would make them to find solutions to act in a way changes are made quickly, and priorities are adjusted within the dynamic environment.

4.2 Social sustainability pillars through the lens of AMO influenced strategic HRM

4.2.1 Influence of ability enhancing aspect of social sustainability pillars

Ability enhancing Strategic HRM focuses on strengthening skills, knowledge and competencies of the employees. This basically includes the HRM practices, recruitment and selection and training and development. The employees of the selected companies experience the ability enhancing aspect supporting social sustainability using four pillars: Equity, Social Capital, Participation and Influence and Well-being. above via the four pillars of social sustainability.

In the equity pillar, companies ensure that the right talent is found while carrying out recruitment and selection fairly and inclusively. As it is more transparent from the beginning to the end, it enables equal employment opportunities while reducing discrimination. The selection criteria based on actual skills and the merits make the employees feel more equitable and promoting social justice. Also, providing training and development opportunities accessible for every employee promotes equality and supports long term employment opportunities. The development practices would also provide a chance in reducing the skill gap making them suitable for future career opportunities as well. Through embedding fair practices into ability enhancing practices, it can support the employees. (Amrutha & Geetha 2019, 8.)

“Job openings are advertised widely to reach diverse candidates, and selection is based on skills, experience, and qualifications rather than personal characteristics” (Interviewee B – Software Engineer).

When it comes to the social capital pillar, the companies carrying out recruitment and selection with the inclusion of personality assessment may support in identifying the right employees whose values and traits align with the culture of the organization. Ultimately, this will promote the interpersonal relationships and positive social interactions and cooperation and develop social capital. Training and development related to topics such as anti-discrimination, diversity and sustainability would support in maintaining social capital.

“Employees are required to complete annual training and study materials on topics like diversity, inclusion, and anti-discrimination” (Interviewee C – Logistics Assistant).

In the participation and influence pillar, having employees recruited based on the relevant competencies are more likely to get engaged as a team and collaborate in decision making. For this to happen the companies have set clear rules and standards in the hiring process so that it would eliminate any barriers related to favouritism and external influences. Training on the other hand, is a key area that enables participation. Having good internal communication and inter department collaboration supports shared learning and group learning so that employees could gain more confidence and contribute towards the ideas and influence the organizational goals. (Amrutha & Geetha, 2019, 8.)

Effectiveness in recruitment and selection practices would enhance the wellbeing of the employees by ensuring the fit between the employee skills and personality with the job requirement and company culture. The companies ensure that the employees are being hired based on technical competencies and the expectations of the specific role, which prevents them from extreme work stress and ambiguity. This way the employees feel more comfortable and confident in their job roles, enhancing job security. Training and development will ensure that the employee’s skills are enhanced continuously so that they could adapt for future changes. Receiving such will aid in reducing anxiety due to business environment changes and technological advancements. Hence, ability enhancing strategic HRM practices bridges the gap between the employees and the current practices making sure that employees are treated in a socially sustainable manner.

4.2.2 Influence of motivation enhancing aspect on social sustainability pillars

Motivation component within AMO framework refer to the effort and abilities that the employees utilize willingly to achieve organizational goals (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Boxall & Purcell 2016, 182). Motivation is said to be influenced by both extrinsic and intrinsic factors namely compensation, performance management, recognition and wellbeing. In relevance to SHRM, motivation can be practically achieved through practices such as performance management, performance evaluation and compensation and rewards.

Equity pillar of social sustainability plays a key role in ensuring the fair and consistency throughout the performance evaluation and performance management activities. First of all, having transparency in the performance criteria of which the employees are being appraised will also result in having clear and thorough appraisal systems which has justice equally distributed. This is because, subjective performance management will result in injustice and inequality. (Gado & Ulgen 2018, 4-7.) The performance evaluation could be identified as the central pillar in determining the rewards such as promotions, career opportunities. Having unbiased and merit-based performance evaluations will increase the trust about the organisation and make sure that fairness and accountability in decision making has been reinforced. According to Greenberg (1990) such systems are said to be catalysts in promoting non-discrimination and minimizing perceptions of biasness. The compensation and rewards being transparent and being with minimum pay disparities would ensure that the employees are fairly treated and equal treatment is provided for all employees within the organization. For example, the European and western regions salaries are mainly based on hourly rate while the Asian countries are mostly based on the market pay rates for the positions which has pay disparities and biasness towards attracting talents by raising the pay resulting in discrimination and demotivation which is very common.

“Clear rules are followed for recruitment, performance evaluation and promotions to avoid favouritism” (Interviewee D – Sales Assistant).

Motivated employees become the ultimate contribution towards the social capital aspect of the social sustainability pillars. Performance management in SHRM involves in influencing social capital by shaping the trust and the interpersonal relationships within the employees and the organization. Practices such as open communication along with regular and feedback will encourage in developing strong and positive relationship between the employees and the managers. This also includes having a collaborative goal setting as well. Companies perceiving performance evaluations in a fair and supportive manner shows results in trust towards the management and

organization. In contrary, having perceived biasness and lack of transparency will lead towards trust issues and weak relationships. Therefore, performance evaluations compromise with a role in shaping the quality of communication and trust in terms of social capital in an organization. Also, having a recognition-based compensation and rewards system which is implemented both financially and non-financially, it is most likely to elevate positive workplace behaviours such as cooperation, support and knowledge sharing. Yet, according to the Interviewees past experience, these kinds of activities are also being affected by the country aspect and the environment in which they are operated specifically driven by numerous external forces.

“By ensuring fair treatment, open communication and a respectful work environment, the company creates a workplace where employees feel included, valued and treated equally.” (Interviewee B – Software Engineer).

Motivation enhancing aspect in participation and influence is experienced with the active involvement and engagement of the employees of the company. Performance management systems which incorporate to way feedback along with performance discussions and authority in individual goal setting allow employees to participate actively in reshaping their own role and expectations. This result in sense of ownership and involvement while employees will have confidence in expressing their own views and idea. (Nilsson et al. 2024, 5929-5947.) This is typically creating a socially sustainable workplace dynamics also where employee input is valued. Performance evaluation steps such as individual or self-assessment prior supervisor assessment provide a chance to express and view their own mistakes and achievements, it will encourage them to be smarter in setting their own goals. The supervisor review afterwards which is done more in a transparent manner will also become a chance for the employees to express their thoughts, opinions and challenges making them to express them freely without hesitation. Fair compensation and rewards ultimately would increase in expressing individual views, psychological safety and sense of belongingness, making sure that employees abilities could influence the organizational outcomes. Having specific recognition for teamwork and innovation will also be contributors towards motivated participation and engagement. (Amrutha & Geetha 2019, 8.)

Employee wellbeing has a direct impact through a supportive performance management system. Reducing uncertainty and stress levels through positive support, continuous feedback and developmental support will eventually enhance job satisfaction of the employees. Performance evaluations and rankings are basically a stressful activity for employees as well has the supervisors especially due to the budget constraints and quotas. This process has a crucial role in the job

satisfaction, stress and psychological safety because having unclear and biased evaluation process which is also not transparent is degrading employee wellbeing and quality of work life. Work life balance of the employee also depends on the financial stress and burden which the employee has to undertake. Having adequate and fair compensation model in terms of both financial and non-financial aspect would provide stress free environment both physically and psychologically and also enhance employee quality of life. (Gado & Ulgen 2018, 4-7.) Some companies also provide non-financial benefits such as flexibility in working arrangements, healthcare and insurance, wellness programmes and engagement programmes which provide a sustainable working environment enhancing psychological wellbeing.

4.2.3 Influence of opportunity enhancing aspect on social sustainability pillars

Opportunity enhancing aspect of AMO framework typically focuses on the active participation of the employees in the organisational processes. It is also necessary so that it creates the environment suitable for employees to apply their own abilities and motivation into practice. Hence, according to literature, ability and motivation aspects alone are inadequate without opportunities as above to create better and meaningful outcomes for a socially sustainable environment.

Equity pillar of social sustainability requires the opportunities to be equally distributed among the organization. Such practices contribute towards equity is when the employees have authority and autonomy for decision making along with enriched roles. Most of the companies carry out employee engagement activities in order to build the bond between the employees and the relevant teams. Even though many social events and activities being organized, it is crucial to have their voice heard regardless of the position or background in the organizational environment. This becomes an opportunity to limit selective engagement, inequality and power imbalance while it promotes diversity and inclusion. Enriched roles also crucial to prevent highly concentrated meaningful work to be divided only among specific biased employees. (Gado & Ulgen 2018, 4-7.) This could be done with a proper job enriching schedule so that every employee can be given an additional responsibility to access the skills and responsibility, ensuring the organization roles are distributed fairly and equally. Job design also plays a key role in designing the roles equally so that all job roles are equally enriched. But some companies struggle in the above where some of the job roles are to remain routine, repetitive and restrictive. It creates a boring working environment where it promotes unfairness in accessing a meaningful and empowering workload leading towards dissatisfaction.

“I think trust and reciprocity within the company are built through everyday actions rather than formal rules. Employees are trusted to do their work responsibly and in return they show commitment and loyalty to the company.” (Interviewee D – Sales Assistant).

Social capital depicts the areas facilitating collaboration, trust and interaction. These aid in strengthening relationships and cultivate shared understanding which are the crucial fundamentals of social capital. Employee engagement plays a active role in enhancing trust, collaboration along with a positive workplace. Having engaged employees within the company will result in open communication, knowledge sharing, teamwork and supporting team members. Initiatives such as problem-solving activities, team interactions and discussions will directly link in contributing strong networking and mutual trust. (Gado & Ulgen 2018, 4-7.) Enhancing and Job designing, by providing additional tasks and responsibility often include problem solving activities, decision making and collaboration further reinforcing the networks within the teams and company.

“Team leaders regularly interact with staff and create a friendly, supportive work environment at different sites.” (Interviewee A – General Manager – Facility Management).

Participation and influence play as the strongest link between the opportunities and social sustainability where they are designed in enabling employees in contributing directly towards the organizational activities. According to the interviews, companies tend to adhere to employee engagement initiatives such as proactive feedback systems and several open communication channels specifically to express ideas and influence decision making. (Kahn, 1990.) Job enrichment creates structural conditions which enable active participation of employees and employees’ sense of voice along with organization commitment. It is evident that job designing involve in recognizing and identifying which roles involve in control and authority. And such identification would increase decision-making authority and enable employees the authority to influence the way of working and how outcomes are achieved. (Li et al. 2022a, 454.)

Wellbeing pillar ultimately provides the most important aspect where employee quality of work life becomes the most crucial element of a socially sustainable working environment. Experiencing positive employee engagement employees experience psychological safety, meaningfulness and recognition towards the roles. The feeling of being valued enhance job satisfaction and minimize ones stress level supporting long-term employee health. Practicing job enrichment with usage of Job characteristics model ultimately result in sense of responsibility and purpose, enhancing job meaningfulness, autonomy and intrinsic motivation. Job Designing mostly influence through the impact of autonomy, task clarity, balance between structure and flexibility and balance of workload

enabling well designed job roles enabling a quality work environment with a quality work life.
These also provide psychological well-being contributing towards a socially sustainable workplace.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Theoretical contribution

This study mainly focuses on the extension of the AMO framework to social sustainability and how it connects and its application which goes beyond the traditional focus related to organizational performance outcomes. The existing literature illustrates that the AMO framework is widely utilized as a model intertwining performance, productivity and effectiveness as a whole.

(Appelbaum et al., 2000; Jiang et al., 2012, 280). This thesis however demonstrates on how AMO framework could be utilized in explaining wellbeing of the employees, equity, social capital and participation in a individual level. The findings of the thesis elaborate that ability enhancing practices contribute towards inclusion and equality among individuals, motivation enhancing practices shape fairness, trust and build up individual wellbeing and opportunity enhancing practices enable individual confidence, voice and social cohesion. Hence, this thesis reconceptualizes the AMO framework as a socially oriented model rather than a performance framework. The figure 6 illustrates the integrated model of social sustainability and strategic HRM.

This study also elaborates social sustainability at an individual level while the existing literature conceptualizes it at a macro level. The findings elaborate on how employee centred impact is critical in the pillars of equity, wellbeing, social capital and participation. Also, suggests that social sustainability is relational which is changing and emerging within everyday interactions and social exchanges.

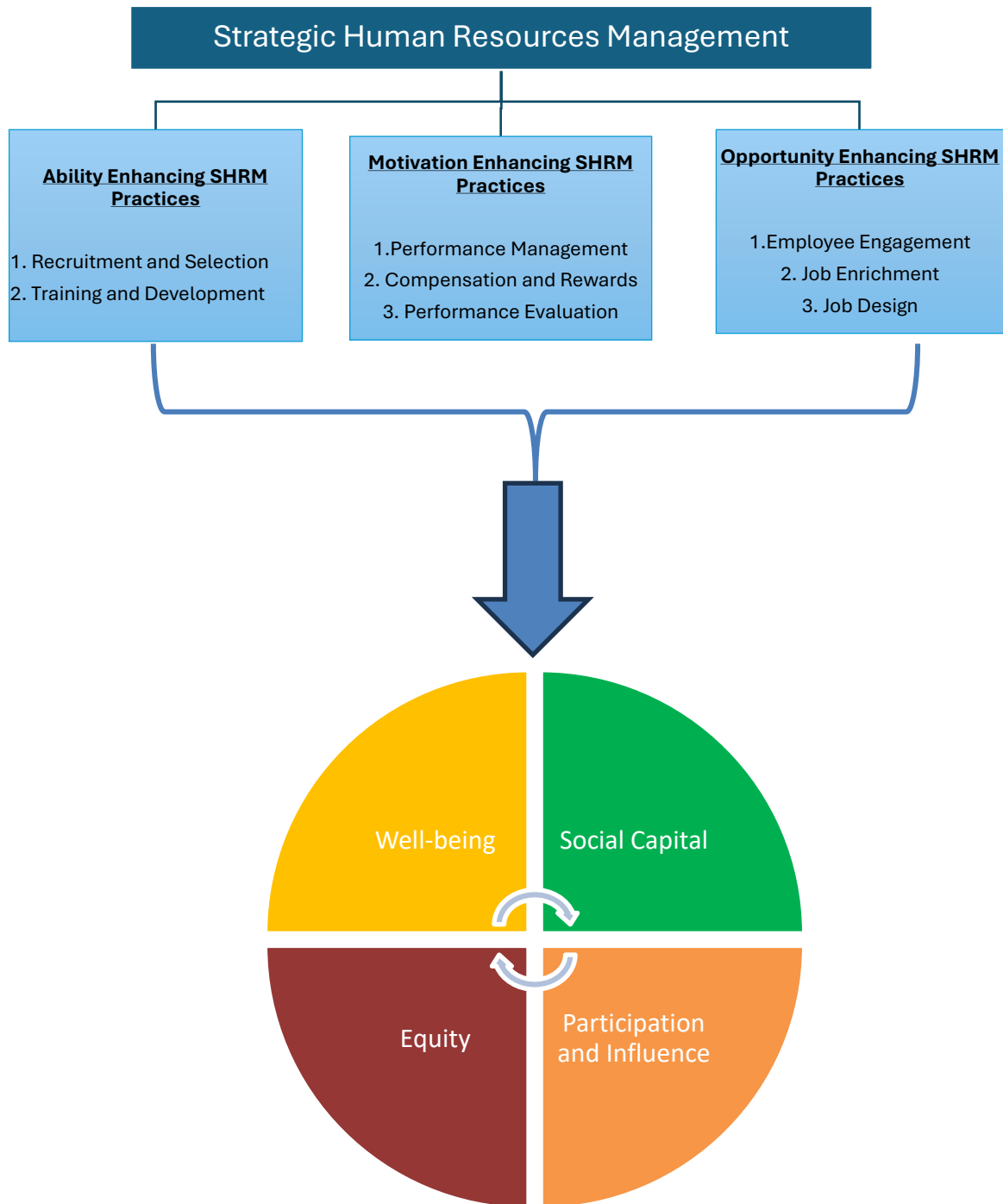


Figure 6: The model of strategic HRM influence on social sustainability pillars

This thesis also helps to understand the interdependence of the AMO dimensions. In general, the AMO framework itself suggests that the three facets ability, motivation and opportunity should coincide where it acts simultaneously. (Amrutha & Geetha, 2019, 8.) But the findings of the study

demonstrate that AMO facets are interdependent in the context of social sustainability. For example, the study shows that employee participation is limited if ability aspect acts without opportunity and motivation aspects. Also, without having both ability and opportunity aspects, it will reduce effective individual contribution and trust. Hence, it highlights that the social sustainability could be attained at an individual level when all the three AMO facets are aligned. Finally, the author believes that the findings of this thesis would support in addressing key gaps in literature in relation to the role of strategic HRM and social sustainability.

5.2 Managerial implications

The findings of this thesis offer important managerial implications for the immediate supervisors and HR managers. The study provides evidence on how AMO framework can be applied towards the SHRM practices which are used in daily basis, in order to enhance employee wellbeing, equity, social capital and participation. It provides insights on how to prioritize in designing strategic recruitment and employee development in a more transparent, competency based and inclusive manner. This study also suggest that every programme should be continuous and be accessible to employees by focusing both interpersonal and collaborative competencies. The study also illustrate that HR managers should design fair and supportive performance management and compensation systems so that it emphasizes on consistency, transparency and developmental feedback while aligning both performance and fairness in compensating and rewarding. The conclusions of the study suggest that having pay equity and clear criteria for rewards along with non-financial benefits and initiatives would be ideal practices on strengthening the motivation aspect. Managers also could establish an open communication channel and feedback systems so that the employee voice is heard and provide opportunities with task varieties and responsibilities so that employees could experience meaningful work.

The HR managers should consider in avoiding SHRM practices in isolation since the AMO framework could provide a holistic approach in aligning the three dimensions in achieving sustainable outcomes. The stakeholders namely employees, HR managers and immediate supervisors should take steps in fostering a culture which is fair and consistence. Hence HR Managers could ensure that the SHRM polices are consistent and unbiased providing diversity and equal employment opportunities while the immediate leadership could ensure that respectful and cheerful workplace interactions take place.

Overall, this study supports an integrated approach for SHRM along with social sustainability pillars while suggesting that HR managers and supervisors could play a crucial role in fostering social sustainability in a more strategical aspect within the AMO facets.

5.3 Limitations and recommendations for future research

Regardless of the contributions towards theoretical and managerial implications, it is crucial to address the limitations of the study. Firstly, the context is restrained into a specific geographical scope which diminish the dependability, confirmability and transferability of the research findings. Secondly, the context of SHRM and social sustainability outcomes are captured under a single point in time where the evolving nature and dynamics in the relationships have not been captured. Also, SHRM and social sustainability is said to be two broad concepts with different frameworks and models. Yet, the author has carried out the study utilizing very few theories mainly due to the time constraints. Also, the existing literature was found including various countries, but the author found it difficult in finding literature relevant to Europe and Finland.

The research was also carried out as qualitative nature which possess numerous limitations. The author had the chance to only conduct four interviews with the interviewees due to the time constraints and time taken for one interview was quite long. This may have resulted in narrowing the data collection ability which could have affected the quality of the analysis. Also, since the data is being self-collected there could also be response biasness as well.

Based in the above limitations, the author suggests several avenues for future research. First of all, the future research could be expanded by examining different countries, industries and organizations so that it would provide a deeper understanding on how cultural factors, leadership styles, external and internal stakeholder engagement would influence the SHRM practices and social sustainability outcomes. Secondly the researchers could focus on integrating multiple data sources such as organizational records, performance indicators and managerial perspectives. Thirdly, the workplace tends to evolve rapidly with the growing usage of artificial intelligence, automation and digitization showing how important is to study the digital tools and technologies. Therefore, future research could overlook on whether they tend to maximize or hinder to relationships, employee learning, employee engagement and performance.

To conclude, social sustainability is an evolving subject which receives global attention. Hence, this can be overlooked by considering different employee relation laws and sustainability regulations of different countries and comparing them utilizing a regional approach. This would provide the best

practices and common challenges while it would be useful in identifying the global values and what strategies to be adapted to thrive in the long run. These would also provide academic knowledge while supporting HR managers and organizations to build SHRM in a socially sustainable manner.

6 Summary

Social sustainability is said to be an emerging and a critical subject with the rise of social disputes and workplace challenges. This study focuses on examining the role of strategic HRM practices in fostering social sustainability outcomes in an individual level. The research has answered the main research question by focusing on how strategic HRM practices influence the social sustainability pillars by conducting a qualitative research study.

The main research question which has been addressed through this research is

“How does strategic human resource management influence social sustainability outcomes at an individual level?”

And the above has been answered by examining three other sub questions:

1. How does Ability enhancing SHRM practices foster social sustainability?
2. How does Motivation enhancing SHRM practices foster social sustainability?
3. How does Opportunity enhancing SHRM practices foster social sustainability?

The research has been carried out based on the AMO framework. A thorough literature review was carried out and as a result a clear structure and a guideline was provided in the study of strategic HRM in the aspect of the social sustainability pillars namely equity, wellbeing, participation and influence and social capital. This supported in developing a combined understanding on how strategic HRM practices contributes towards attaining societal sustainability.

Primary data was the main source of data where semi structured interviews were conducted in gathering data. The findings elaborated on how strategic HRM practices involve in the pillars of social sustainability. The findings emphasize that the ability aspect focuses on long-term capability development along with enhancing the learning potential rather than focusing on immediate skill aquisition and filling the vacant position. Motivating practices including performance management and rewards needs to focus on how to create and maintain the relevant threshold levels of high motivation yet adhering to a balanced approach. Opportunity enhancing practices are found out to be the bridge between the capabilities and performance. Yet findings shows that autonomy, freedom, fairness, participation and access to resources enable the employees to fully contribute in achieving the targets.

Moving towards the pillars of social sustainability, the findings suggest that equity or fairness can be linked with practices such as structured and transparent recruitment and performance evaluations. Also, equal access towards opportunities also contributes in elevating perceptions related to fairness and justice. The social pillar mainly targets towards practices linked to engagement, teamwork, collaboration, trust and sense of belonging since participation would enhance interrelationships and enhance cohesion. Wellbeing tends to be a crucial topic in terms of personal growth and quality of work life where strategic HRM practices at the end should prioritise on creating a work environment which promotes wellbeing and development.

Finally, this study also provides a key contribution in integrating both AMO framework and social sustainability pillars providing a holistic view on how strategic HRM could foster social sustainability so that the employees are considered in the first place. These findings would be very beneficial for the organizations in order to align strategic HRM practices so that the societal and individual outcomes are well positioned and understood.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Guideline

Can you tell me briefly about your background?

What is your understanding about social sustainability

General Questions

1. How would you define Strategic HRM and Its practices?
2. Can you share your view on current Strategic HRM practices and employee development
3. How important strategic HRM practices are to Social Sustainability?
4. Can you share any challenges in implementing strategic HRM practices in you field

Question related to SHRM practices

5. How do your company ensure fairness in performance evaluation?
6. How do your company ensure this performance evaluations contribute to the employee promotions
7. Can you explain your company approach on recruitment and selection?
8. What is your view on company offered training and development opportunities? Can you give some examples?
9. How does your company aim to enhance employees' skills and abilities?
10. What is your view on your company's compensation and rewards structure?
11. How effective do you think the SHRM practices focus on effective employee motivation?
12. How does your company carry out employee engagement activities?
13. How well do your company adopt to practices such as Job enrichment and job rotation to increase participation
14. How well your company provides autonomy to employees

Questions Related to Social Sustainability

15. Can you describe on how your company promote social justice, inclusion and fairness
16. How does the company ensure that equal employment opportunities exists?
17. How well your company support you to maintain positive social relationships with employees
18. What do you think about trust and reciprocity within the company?
19. How often do you work as teams and collaborate with others?
20. Are there any policies related to work life that support freedom?
21. How does your company support work life balance and what steps are taken to ensure that quality of work life is there?
22. How do your company ensure safety and security at the workplace?
23. Can you explain a situation where you were involved in decision making or expressing your views

Appendix 2: Informed Consent form for participation in scientific research

Informed Consent form for participation in scientific research

Research project title: The role of sustainable human resource management practices in developing sustainable innovation

Place of research: Turku, Finland

The person responsible for the research: Dharani De Silva

Thank you for taking your valuable time in taking part in the above-mentioned research. Your insights are very much crucial in understanding the above-mentioned subject. By providing your signature, you will provide the consent in participating in the research. It will confirm that you have read and understood the information given and agree in participating. And also understand the participation is voluntary and that you can at any point withdraw from participating in the research without any given reason or cancel the consent without any negative consequences. Also confirm that you have had the opportunity to ask questions from the researchers.

Yes No

I consent that my interview can be audio-recorded

Yes No

I consent that my interview can be video recorded

Yes No

I agree to be identified in the following way in the research outputs

[Pseudonym; alternative name/code chosen for the participant by the researcher]

Yes No

Impersonal attribution

[e.g. by profession: company official, firm official]

Yes No

Contact information

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Name of the interviewer	Date	Signature

Appendix 3: Data management plan

Research Data

Research data type	Contains personal details/information*	I will gather/produce the data myself	Someone else has gathered/produced the data	Other notes
Data type 1: Interviews	x	x		
Data type 2: Transcripts	x	x		
Data type 3: Notes	x	x		

* Personal details/information are all information based on which a person can be identified directly or indirectly, for example by connecting a specific piece of data to another, which makes identification possible. For more information about what data is considered personal go to the [Office of the Finnish Data Protection Ombudsman's website](#)

Processing personal data in research

I will prepare an email and give it to the research participants before collecting data

The controller** for the personal details is the student themselves the university

My data does not contain any personal data

** More information at the university's intranet page, [Data Protection Guideline for Thesis Re-search](#)

Permissions and rights related to the use of data

Data type 1: Interviews

- The collected data will be used for research purposes only and this will be recorded on my personal computer

Data type 2: Transcripts

- The collected data will be used for research purposes only and the recorded interviews will be used to get the transcripts

Data type 3: Notes

- The collected data will be used for research purposes only and the recorded interviews will be used to get the notes

Storing the data during the research process

In the university's network drive

In the university-provided Seafile Cloud Service

Other location: Researcher's personal computer

Documenting the data and metadata

To document the data, I will use:

A field/research journal

A separate document where I will record the main points of the data, such as changes made, phases of analysis, and significance of Variables

A readme file linked to the data that describes the main points of the data

Other, please specify:

Data arrangement and integrity

I will keep the original data files separate from the data I am using in the research process, so that I can always revert back to the original, if need be.

Version control: I will plan before starting the research how I will name the different data versions, and I will adhere to the plan consistently.

I recognise the life span of the data from the beginning of the research and am already prepared for situations, where the data can alter unnoticed, for example while recording, transcribing, downloading, or in data conversions from one file format to another, etc.

Metadata

Metadata is a description of your research data. Based on metadata someone unfamiliar with your data will understand what it consists of. Metadata should include, among others, the file name, location, file size, and information about the producer of the data. Will you require metadata?

I will save my data into an archive or a repository that will take care of the metadata for me.

I will have to create the metadata myself, because the archive/repository where I am uploading the data requires it.

I will not store my data into a public archive/repository, and therefore I will not need to create any metadata.

Data after completing the research

The researcher will store the data till the research is completed, approved and assessed. Data will be stored on the researcher's computer until destroyed.

Appendix 4: Privacy notice

Name of the register	
Data controller	Bentota Arachchige Dharani Shashika Anelene De Silva, +358417407853 dharani.s.bentotaarachchige@utu.fi Turku School of Economics, University of Turku, Rehtorinpellonkatu 3, 20500 Turku
Contact information of the responsible person	Bentota Arachchige Dharani Shashika Anelene De Silva, +358417407853 dharani.s.bentotaarachchige@utu.fi
Purpose and legal basis for the processing of personal data	The research focuses on the subject of social sustainability and data collected from individuals experiencing strategic HRM practices. The legal basis for processing personal data in Article 6 of the EU General Data Protection Regulation is: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Processing is necessary for scientific research (public interest, Point 1a of Article 6) Data subject has given their consent to process personal data (consent, Point 1e of Article 6) Other, what
Processes personal data	The following information of the data subjects is stored in the register: Name, contact number, position, experiences, and views on the research topic.
Recipients and recipient groups of personal data	The data will not be transferred or disclosed to parties outside the researcher or his supervisors.
Information on transferring data to third countries	Personal data will not be disclosed to parties outside the EU or the European Economic Area.
Retention period of personal data or criteria for its determination	The recorded interviews will be transcribed into text files, and the recordings will be automatically removed from the University MS Teams account after three months. Simultaneously, the research data will be anonymized by using some pseudonyms. The text files of the interviews will be kept stored till the research process ends.
Rights of the data subject	The data subject has the right to access their personal data retained by the Data Controller, the right to rectify or erasure data, and the right to restrict or object to the processing of data. The right to erasure is not applied for scientific or historical research purposes in so far as the right to erasure is likely to render impossible or seriously impair the achievement of the objectives of that processing. The realization of the right to erasure is assessed on a case-by-case basis. The data subject has the right to complain with supervisory authority.
Information on the source of personal data	In order to send the invitations to interviewees, email addresses were used. It will only be done after a primary contact and consent to participate

	have been given by the subject. The other data is collected directly from those who participate in the interviews for the study.
Information on the existence of automatic decision-making, including profiling	The data will not be used for automatic decision-making or profiling

Appendix 5: Use of AI

Tool	Purpose	Usage Description
Grammarly	Language and grammar check	To polish grammar and language
SciteAI	Summarization of Articles	Long and numerous research articles were summarized
ChatGPT	Academic writing support	For writing improvements and format Ex – Please provide subsection model for the literature review to conduct related to social sustainability and strategic HRM