



UHASSELT

KNOWLEDGE IN ACTION

Faculty of Business Economics

Master of Management

Master's thesis

Sustainable leadership

Zeeshan Ahmad Butt

Thesis presented in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management, specialization Data Science

SUPERVISOR :

Prof. dr. Dave STYNEN



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www.uhasselt.be
Universiteit Hasselt
Campus Hasselt:
Martelarenlaan 42 | 3500 Hasselt
Campus Diepenbeek:
Agoralaan Gebouw D | 3590 Diepenbeek

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Preface:

This master's thesis is written as part of obtaining my master's degree in management & data science at the University of Hasselt.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, promoter Professor Dr. Dave Stynen, for his invaluable guidance, expertise, and patience. His insightful feedback and mentorship have been critical in shaping the direction of my research and refining my academic skills. I am truly fortunate to have had the opportunity to work under his supervision.

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The Impact of Sustainable HRM Practices on Employee Performance: Moderation Analysis of Sustainable Leadership

Abstract

Organizations are increasingly embedding sustainability principles into their HRM and leadership practices in response to growing concerns for sustainability. The main aim of this study was to examine how sustainable HRM practices relate to employee performance, and explore whether sustainable leadership moderates this relationship. Drawing on the AMO framework this study developed a conceptual model linking sustainable HRM and two key dimensions (task and conceptual) of employee performance, while considering the conditional role of leadership.

The data for this study were collected through an online survey from 129 full-time employees working across various industries in Pakistan. The results of regression analysis revealed that sustainable HRM practices are positively associated with both task and contextual performance. Similarly, sustainable leadership also demonstrated a significant direct association, particularly with contextual performance. The interaction term between sustainable HRM practices and sustainable leadership was also significant, suggesting that the positive relationship between sustainable HRM practices and performance outcomes amplifies in presence of high sustainable leadership.

The study contributes to the sustainable HRM literature by highlighting the synergetic effects of policy and leadership alignment. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed, along with limitations and recommendations for future research.

Keywords: Sustainable HRM practices; Sustainable Leadership; Employee Performance; AMO framework; Sustainability.

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1. Introduction

The increased focus on sustainability in modern-day business world has reformed the organizational strategies across different industries. Adoption of UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 has amplified the attention of the economies and economic entities worldwide towards sustainability. The SDGs, by setting measurable targets, are intended to guide governments, businesses, and societal decision making across a broad range of sustainability challenges, including but not limited to climate change, poverty, social inclusion, justice, and environmental protection. (Choi et al. 2016). The first turn towards sustainability developed in the 1960s, and can be understood as a process which connects economic and social aspects, while considering environmental protection (Katarzyna Piwowar-Sulej, 2021). The problem of environmental protection was initially highlighted by "The Limits to Growth" report, which presented a gloomy vision of the Earth (Meadows et al., 1972). The concept gained further attention after the publishing of Brundtland Report, that described sustainable development as "referring to the action and development of organizations so that, when meeting the needs of the present, they do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, pp.43). Elkington (1997) further enriched the concept of sustainability, he suggested that it is based on three principles commonly known as Triple Bottom Line (TBL): People, Planet, and Profit. Where people refer to right of all stakeholders to access resources, planet refers to its limited regeneration capacity, and profit refers to quality of life achieved through productive capacity of a system. Sustainability is not a concern of any single entity, rather it has been stressed to be integrated at various levels, global, national, regional, and organizational. For the organizations/firms it is defined as "meeting the needs of a firm's direct and indirect stakeholders (such as shareholders, employees, clients, communities, etc.), without compromising its ability to meet the needs of future stakeholder as well" (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002, pp. 131). Elkington (2004, pp.3) described it as "encouraging in this way firms to focus on not just economic value they add, but also on environmental and social value they add-or destroy". The significance of sustainability for organizations has been spiralling, acknowledging the pivotal role these entities can play in sustainable development (Nicolò et al., 2023). Hence, firms act as a critical contributor to sustainable development by considering social, ecological, and economic concerns throughout decision making (Emas, 2015).

Over the past few decades, various interrelated factors have motivated firms to adopt sustainability-oriented strategies. Due to growing stakeholder expectations, legislative pressure, and shifting societal values, an unprecedented imperativeness regarding sustainability has emerged. Broader global business transformations, rising sustainability awareness, and increasing trend of sustainable investment has led to the above-mentioned changes (Hirsig et al., 2014), and now firms are seen as responsible for not only profit generation but creating shared value for the society (Latapí Agudelo et al., 2019). Furthermore, regulatory bodies have also pushed firms to reveal environmental and social outcomes together with financial performance through frameworks like Global Reporting Initiatives (GRI) and Integrated Framework (IRF). The expectation that firms must be accountable for their environmental and societal impacts has been further pushed by increased legislative attention to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Leyens, 2018; Lin, 2020). All these factors and forces have led to shift in corporate focus, aligning business operations with the Tripple

bottom line; Social, Ecological, and Economic sustainability (Ehnert et al., 2014). Going above and beyond regulatory compliance, many firms willingly adopt sustainable practices acknowledging the strategic value these practices bring. Particularly, integrated reporting that presented a comprehensive view of organizational performance augments transparency for both internal and external stakeholders (Crous et al., 2022). These practices are more and more perceived as opportunities for competitive advantage and long-term success rather than obligations (Samant & Sangle, 2016).

While sustainability practices are generally adopted by large enterprises, evidence shows that SMEs also significantly benefit from such initiatives (ISTAT, 2023). Companies with high CSR and ESG ratings usually enjoy stronger market performance, higher long-term shareholder returns, and lower financing costs (Deutsche Bank, 2012; Accenture, 2020). According to IBM (2022), financial benefits of sustainability practices are not just short-term rather it is believed by majority of the executives that investment in these practices will yield better financial outcomes over the next five years. Similar views are shared by the investors those expect that ESG programs will enhance shareholder values (McKinsey, 2020). Based on all these insights, it can be concluded that sustainability is no longer a niche, it has turned into an essential element of corporate strategy, having wide-ranging impacts on decision making from product development to workforce management.

As a firm's performance is linked to first of all its employees, Human Resource Management (HRM) has attracted great attention as a critical lever for leading long-term sustainability within firms. The significant role played by HR in sustainability by creating and implementing sustainable business strategies has been widely recognized by the researchers (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005; Jamali et al., 2015; Cohen et al., 2012). According to Ehnert and Harry (2012), HRM professionals are principal actors in advancing "sustainability mindset" in business organizations. Conventionally, the primary job of the HRM was to manage workforce to enhance productivity and reduce cost. However, the increased awareness of social, ecological, and economic sustainability has enforced integration of sustainability with HRM practices. When HRM practices support sustainability, they contribute to organizational resilience, employee well-being, and overall performance (Kramar, 2014). This shift towards amalgamation of sustainability into human resource management practices has led to introduction of new HRM concepts such as "Green HRM", "Corporate Social Responsibility", "socially responsible HRM", "common good HRM", "triple bottom line HRM", and "Sustainable HRM".

In the last decade, an approach which has gained significant attention is Sustainable HRM (SHRM). SHRM as strategic HRM, clearly recognizes the impact that policies related to people management may have on economy and human lives, and in addition also the adverse impacts on social, financial, ecological outcomes (Kramar, 2014). By integrating ecological, social, and financial considerations into HR Strategies, enterprises can support their employees by encouraging their involvement, efforts, and satisfaction (Jabbour & Jabbour, 2016; Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002). Furthermore, adoption of SHRM practices by organizations is seen as crucial for driving competitiveness and securing a sustainable future (Singh et al. 2019). For boosting sustainable performance and implement policies and practices HRM is regarded as a principal success factor (Sheehan, 2014). HR is also considered as a competitive advantage for organizational success

because it can lead to novelty and sustainable performance as well as efficient use of organizational resources (Singh et al., 2019). In fact, several leading corporations have adopted innovative SHRM practices for long-term success. For example, SAP introduced social sabbatical program (Desai & Donovan, 2022), Patagonia employees can get two months' off with full pay for taking part in environmental internship (Chiu, 2022), and Unilever set up sustainable living plan academy (Lawrence et al., 2019).

Despite the significance of employee performance for organizational success conventional HRM practices fail to address the holistic need of the employee in fast changing and resource-constrained world. Sustainable HRM practices are believed to have a potential to enhance employee outcomes by creating inclusive and supportive work environment (de Prins et al., 2014; Elsayy, 2022). Jabbour and Jabbour (2016) have pointed that, organizations failing to adopt green HRM (SHRM) often struggle with employee retention, commitment, and performance. SHRM practices, such as GHR initiatives, "green recruitment", "training and development", "employee well-being programs", "performance management", and "ethical HR", have been found to enhance employee performance by promoting a culture of sustainability and responsibility (Nagi et al., 2024). For example, Amjad et al. (2021) described that GHRM have a positive impact on sustainability of the organization. Furthermore, previous studies have shown that SHRM practices are positively associated with employee's professional development, that leads to better job satisfaction and performance (Hassaan & Bibi, 2023). SHRM practices such as open communication by supervisors, a reasonable workload, and career opportunities contribute to create a work environment that support alignment of individual goals with organizational goals (Janssen, 2000; Lee, 2019; Prieto and Pérez-Santana, 2014; Diaz-Carrion et al., 2018).

Though the literature on sustainable SHRM practices and organizational and employee outcomes has grown rapidly in the past few years, still there are several gaps those need to be addressed. For example, several researchers have explored the independent effect of sustainable HRM (Shen & Benson, 2016; Lu et al. 2023) on different organizational outcomes, there is unclarity on when and how SHRM process and practices influence employee performance. The existing literature on Sustainable HRM practices-employee performance relationship is at its budding stage with inadequate understanding of the mechanism through which SHRM practices impact employee performance. For instance, while some scholars have suggested that sustainable HRM practices have a sportive influence on employee commitment and productivity (Zaug et al. 2001), others have argued that effectiveness of the relationship depends on organizational culture and leadership support (Ehnert, 2009). Therefore, without a clear understanding, organizations may struggle to implement sustainable HRM practices that deliver tangible performance outcomes. Additionally, the role of sustainable leadership in this relationship is mainly unmapped. Considering that leadership style has a significant impact on employee behavior and organizational culture (Iqbal & Piwowar-Sulej, 2022), it is pertinent to explore the effect of sustainable leadership on the relationship between SHRM practices and employee outcomes.

Sustainable HRM and employee performance has been linked in the past studies on the basis of rationale that prioritizing sustainability in HRM strategies tend to have more committed, satisfied,

and productive employees for the organization (Aust et al., 2020). However, there is continuing discussion on the effectiveness of SHRM and the role of leadership in strengthening or changing their impact (Renwick et al., 2016). Schoemaker et al. (2021) argued that effectiveness of SHRM practices in employee performance is conditional on the presence of sustainable leadership. Sustainable leadership, goes beyond traditional leadership by incorporating long-term thinking, ethical decision-making, and social accountability into managerial practices (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). In other words, a leader who pays equal attention to present and future goals of the firms (Hargreaves & Fink, 2011) is a sustainable leader. Although, SHRM practices are designed in such way that they boost employee performance in the organization, however their effect may be conditional on the extent to which the leader promotes sustainability values (Aust et al. 2020). Hence, the role of leadership is crucial in shaping organizational culture and effective implementation of the SHRM practices is depends on the leaders. For instance, sustainable leaders are more plausibly to introduce GHRM initiatives, including energy efficiency, waste reduction, sustainable commuting, and these initiatives contribute to environmental sustainability and employee satisfaction (Renwick et al., 2016). Furthermore, these leaders also presumptively prioritize employee development, diversity, and inclusion, those are key determinants of the SHRM and may lead to enhanced employee performance (Aust et al., 2020). Therefore, it is plausible that effectiveness of SHRM practices in effecting employee performance is influenced by the degree to which leaders promote sustainability values within the organization. The impact of SHRM practices can be strengthened if the leader is committed to the sustainability and communicates sustainability values to employee (Aust et al., 2020).

Despite the budding literature on the sustainable HRM-employee performance relationship, significant gap exists. Firstly, while researchers have investigated the impact of sustainable HRM on organizational outcomes, direct effect of sustainable HRM practices on employee performance is underexplored. Secondly, little is known about the moderating role of sustainable leadership in this relationship. Thirdly, while the existing literature provides valuable insights, they have studied the impact of SHRM and leadership in isolation. Literature analysing the combined effect of both on employee performance is limited. Therefore, the present study seeks to fill the gap by exploring the relationship between sustainable HRM practices and employee performance and investigating whether sustainable leadership strengthens this relationship. Thus, the primary objective of this research is to study the relationship between SHRM practices, sustainable leadership, and employee performance. The specific objectives of the study are as follows;

- **To examine the relationship between sustainable HRM practices and employee performance.**
- **To investigate the moderating role of sustainable leadership in the relationship between sustainable HRM practices and employee performance.**

The present study is important for several reasons. Firstly, while SHRM and sustainable leadership are gaining growing attention in organizational research, empirical evidence on their direct and interactive effect remains unexplored. Past studies have mainly emphasized on traditional HRM or

leadership, leaving a critical gap in understanding the sustainable HRM practices-performance relationship. The present study fills this gap by offering rigorous empirical evidences on the (i) direct association between sustainable HRM practices and employee performance, (ii) the relationship between sustainable leadership and employee performance, (iii) and moderating role of sustainable leadership in first relationship. In this way, it contributes primarily to theoretical advancement in sustainability HRM literature. Secondly, the study will help practitioners understand the conditions under which sustainable HRM practices can be effectively implemented to attain long-term organizational sustainability.

Based on this foundation, the study also provides practical relevance for organizations that aim to enhance employee performance through sustainability-aligned HRM strategies. The findings can help HR professionals and business leaders in understanding how sustainable HRM practices such as inclusive decision making, long-term development initiatives, and fair work environment can be linked to better performance outcomes. Moreover, the moderating role of sustainable leadership highlights the importance of leadership that supports ethical values, long-term thinking, and employee well-being. The findings are particularly valuable in contexts where organizations are aiming to align their internal practices with broader sustainability goals. By offering this evidence on these relationships, this study supports more informed decision-making for practitioners and contributes to the growing literature on sustainable management practices. Ultimately, it provides both scholars and practitioners clearer understanding of how HRM and leadership can work jointly to support employee and employee outcomes.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sustainable human resource management

Sustainable HRM is being widely studied and discussed due to its potential benefits for firms and their stakeholders (employees, customers, and external environment). Unlike Traditional HRM, SHRM is a composite concept that includes an array of strategies and practices to achieve both long-term sustainability of employee and social, financial, and ecological goals (Kramar, 2014). Human Resource Management concept traces back to 20th Century and is used by SMEs to multinational corporations nowadays (Obedgiu, 2017). Traditionally, HRM has been viewed as a broad and planned ways to manage people of an organization so that they aid in gaining competitive advantage (Collings et al., 2018). Though before that HRM was seen as just hiring and firing of the employees, what led managers to be concerned with potential and role of HRM in achieving organizational success and departing from seeing it as a simple administrative function (Beer et al., 1984). In 1978, Walker suggested for a need to create a link between human resource planning and firm's strategy, consequently a new approach to HRM called strategic human resource management emerged, and its role was to manage employees in a turbulent and dynamic environment (Kramar, 2014). This field was further advanced by Devanna et al. (1981), they deeply explored the relationship between HRM and organizational strategy. More recently, strategic HRM was described by Wright et al. (2001) as "not only devoted to exploring HR's role in supporting business strategy, but simultaneously concerned with creating firm-specific HRM practices that are adapted to the circumstances of an organization".

Therefore, the strategic HRM concept led to studies and approaches aimed at exploring the link between HRM and its potential contribution to financial performance and productivity. The link between HRM practices and productivity, revenue, and overall financial performance has been explored by many researchers for long-time (Huselid, 1995; Lee et al., 2017). That means the strategic HRM concept only focused on the contribution of HRM system to overall financial performance merely for purpose of maximizing shareholder's returns (Beer et al., 2015). In other words, the adoption of strategic HRM was focused on adoption and design of HR strategies in order to assess their influence on the firm's economic performance (Boxall et al., 2007), while disregarding the welfare of society and employee, and also environmental concerns (Beer et al. 2015). From 1980s, the principles of strategic HRM have dominated the HRM literature (De Prins et al., 2014). In past two decades, growing concern of sustainability at business level has motivated researchers to link sustainability to HRM system (Stankeviciute et al., 2020), Which has led to emergence of Sustainable HRM from strategic HRM (Kramar, 2014).

Contrary to strategic HRM, sustainable HRM not only acknowledges the influence of HR policies on human and financial outcomes, but also prospects of the adverse impacts on human, social, and environmental outcomes. While, there is no unanimous definition of the SHRM (Fei and Wang), particularly due to newness of the concept, according to Kramar (2022) SHRM departs from

the strategic HRM objective of financial outcomes to more comprehensive goals. For example, as discussed above the focus of strategic HRM have been on planning and adoption of HRM policies to enhance organizations' economic efficiency and effectiveness thereby contributing to economic success of the organization through HRM practices (App et al., 2012). Hence, in Strategic HRM "people management policies and practices were design to achieve organizational outcome from the perspective of financial performance to increase shareholders' value (Kramar, 2014). On the other hand, SHRM approach aims to accomplish complex goals than strategic HRM. According to Giraldo-Giraldo et al. (2025) SHRM seeks to balance financial performance with social equity and environmental stewardship, ensuring that HR practices contribute to sustainable development goals. SHRM is broadly defined as introduction and adoption of HR policies and practices those advance long-term financial, social, and ecological sustainability of the organization and society at large (Kramar, 2014; Ehnert, 2009). In this way, positive achievements are not linked to just increased financial performance (De Prins et al., 2014), rather it clearly recognises the role of HRM practices in advancing a broader range of outcomes (Kramar et al., 2014). According to Ehnert (2009) sustainable HRM has a multidimensional focus that consider the influence of HRM practices on internal stakeholders (employees & managers), external stakeholders (communities & governments), and the broader environmental system. Similarly, Kramar (2014) differentiated SHRM and strategic HRM by highlighting normative orientation of the SHRM. He stated that SHRM is not just concerned with financial performance of the organization but also with social justice, ethical labor practices, and environmental stewardship.

This new sustainable HRM approach has been operationalized in the literature in several different ways according to the importance attached to different internal and external outcomes; such as "socially responsible HRM", "Green HRM", "Triple Bottom Line HRM", and "common good HRM" (Kramar, 2014; Stahl et al, 2020; Aust et al., 2020; Piwowar-Sulej, 2021). These types of sustainable HRM, while diverse from each other in their primary focus and strategies, are grounded in one common concept: "sustainability". Hence, they are not inharmonious but rather epitomise different dimensions of the principal concept of SHRM.

Socially responsible HRM has its roots in corporate social responsibility (CSR). Socially responsible HRM has been described as an approach integrating social responsibility into an HR practice, creating social value through HR behaviour, policies, and practices (Gahlawat Kundu, 2021; Lu et al., 2023). Scouarnec (2005) further described that socially responsible HRM is about enhancing organizational influence on the people. Looking at people inside of the organization (employees, executives & management) and also at people outside (customers, suppliers, in short whole society) from the perspectives of health, safety and quality. Socially Responsible HRM focuses on social dimensions while still serving the financial purposes, as it tries to diminishes the adverse impacts of the firm (Dyllick and Muff, 2016). While, it clearly leaves out of focus the environmental dimension, it harmonises with TBL HRM and common-good HRM on social dimension (Liang and Li, 2024). The second main type of SHRM dominating the literature is Green HRM (GHRM). GHRM enlarges the scope of the previously discussed HRM approach by including sustainability related issues into HRM systems (Renwick et al., 2013). Green HRM emphasizes on the financial and ecological outcomes (Liang & Li, 2024). According to Lu et al., (2023) and Renwick et al., (2016),

GHRM seeks to produce environmental value and reduce costs by employing environment-friendly policies and practices, such as green recruitment, training, and rewards. In other words, GHRM promotes the sustainable use of resources of a firm to accomplish the goal of environmental sustainability (Amjad et al., 2021). As a result, it shares commonalities with TBL and common-good HRM on environmental dimension with a narrower scope (Liang & Li, 2024), and leaves out one important dimension "social".

The third approach to SHRM- "Triple bottom line HRM" is different from previously discussed approaches, as it is not merely concerned with environmental dimension of HRM or just social, rather it comprehensively focuses on all three dimensions (Economic, environmental, and social) (Aust et al. 2020). TBL is based on the idea of accomplishing a "triple win" scenario, here the organization tracks social equity, economic well-being, and environmental quality at the same time (Piowar-Sulej, 2021). TBL-HRM captures the spirit of both socially responsible HRM and GHRM at one hand, and on other hand it aligns with the wider goal of common-good HRM. In this way, it is commonly referred as "general sustainable HRM" (Aust et al., 2020; Piowar-Sulej, 2021). Common good HRM is a recent approach, which beyond economic target encapsulates common-good value into all aspects of HR policy (Liang and Li, 2024). In conclusion, while all these approaches have different primary focus, environment for GHRM, social for Socially responsible HRM, and balancing three goals for TBL-HRM, and Common good HRM for global challenges- they all have a common goal of sustainability contributing to strategic approach of SHRM.

The sustainable HRM has been described with help of several models and framework in the literature. For example, Sustainable HRM model of Kramar (2014) that was built upon Ehnert (2009)'s work. Another model developed by De Prins et al. (2014) is referred as ROC model. The development of ROC model is based on Kramar (2014)'s definition of SHRM. Kramar (2014) defined SHRM in three concrete building blocks-Respect, openness, and continuity, those were earlier described by De Lange & Koppens (2007), and initially derived from the Elkington (1994)'s Profit, people, and planet. ROC model of De Prins et al. (2014) divides sustainable HRM practices in three different dimensions; "respect", "openness", and "continuity". Respect embodies treating employees with dignity, fairness, and ethical consideration. It implies that sustainable HRM practices should protect employee rights, ensure active listening-problem solving and fair treatment, promote diversity and open communication, and support well-being (De Prins et al., 2014; Carmeli et al., 2015).

Openness refers to transparency, participation, and trust within an organization's system (De Prins et al., 2014). De Prins et al. (2019) suggested that the link between HRM and outside environment is highlighted by addressing labour market challenges such as diversity, significance of work-life balance, and aging society. Finally, Continuity represents a long run outlook from both organizations and employee relationship perspective. Every organization aims for prolonged survival and sustainable HRM can be potential contributing factor in this ambition (De Prins et al. 2019). Continuity denotes organization's commitment to investing in employee capabilities, ensuring employability, and creating secure career pathways that contribute to both organizational and societal sustainability. Hence, organizations those adopt the practices promoting respect, openness, and continuity, are implementing SHRM. In this stream, literature has identified some more tangible

HRM practices for firms, such as transparent communication by supervisors (Prieto and Pérez-Santana, 2014), diversity management (H.-W. Lee, 2019), facilitating work-life balance by providing a rational workload (Stankevičiūtė and Savanevičienė, 2018) employee training and development by offering mentoring programs, & performance management by providing career opportunities (Diaz-Carrion et al., 2019).

In this study SHRM is operationalized using the multidimensional framework presented by De Prins et al. (2020). This framework focuses on integrating sustainable values into HR practices those promote organizational effectiveness and employee well-being. These include: promoting fair and transparent reward system; balancing jobs with employees' potential and interests; fostering employee autonomy and voices; driving employee participation in decision making; eliminating hierarchical barriers, and awarding learning opportunities for long-term employability. Hence, SHRM practices in this study consists of the initiatives that are value based such as equal treatment, open communication, employee well-being, development support. All of these initiatives are embedded within a long-term perspective that align with sustainability goals.

In conclusion, this study used the ROC-model presented by De Pins et al. (2024) as a normative framework to conceptualize SHRM practices. The ROC model postulates that SHRM should be designed around the values of respect, openness, and continuity, that serves as a key principle for applying sustainability at human resource level. These values offer basis for implementing ethical, inclusive, and long-term employment practices that are consistent with the sustainability goals. Though, the ROC model provides a meaningful way to define and operationalize SHRM, but it does not directly explain how SHRM leads to improved employee performance. The following sections entails theoretical explanation of the relationship between sustainable HRM practices, employee performance, and moderating role of sustainable leadership.

2.2 Sustainable leadership

The notion of Sustainable Leadership in Organizational behavior introduced by Avery (2005) in 2005, before that Hageaves and Fink (2004) defined sustainable leadership model in the educational organization as the ability to foster deep learning, promote diversity, justice, shared decision making, and ensure long term development. The model basically emphasized on building a better future through resource sharing, talent development, and learning from past experiences. Similarly, in organizational behavior, Avery (2005) defined sustainable leadership as "a leader that owns long-term decision-making skills, promotes systematic innovation, develops a loyal employee, and delivers high end products and services, through suitable management practices to achieve long term organizational sustainability". Suriyankietkaew and Avery (2016) suggested that if the organization doesn't have better performance, sustainability becomes harder to achieve. According to Gerard et al. (2017) embedding the idea of sustainable development into leadership has the potential to change and shape a sustainable organization. Increasing number of studies have examined sustainable leadership due to its potential to foster organizations to further towards sustainable development (Dalati et al., 2017; Piwowar-Sulej et al., 2021). The concept is usually considered to be related to TBL and it is conceptualized as a strategic orientation that emphasize on present and future financial outcomes for the organization while at the same time improving the lives of all stakeholders (McCann & Sweet, 2014).

The sustainable leadership is different from other forms of leaderships, such as green transformational leadership, ethical leadership, and responsible leadership. While green transformational leadership is described as a behavior that motivates the subordinates to accomplish environmental goals and surpass the expected level of environmental performance (Cheng and Chang, 2014), its essence is still transformational leadership and it lacks the breadth of sustainable leadership (Liao, 2022). Similarly, Ethical leadership that refers to demonstrating appropriate conduct through personal action and relationship, and inspiring followers to adopt and ethical behavior by interactions and communications with them (Brown et al., 2005) lacks breadth of sustainable leadership. According to Liao (2022), the focus of ethical leadership is limited to only binary relationship between leaders and their follower, but sustainable leadership while also practices ethical principles it goes beyond this scope by emphasizing moral principles focused on environmental and community as well. Finally, the responsible leadership concept introduced by Maak and Pless (2006) share the commonality of considering social responsibility with sustainable leadership. However, the responsible leadership focuses that organizational development can be achieved if leaders pay attention to social responsibility and business ethics. On the other hand, sustainable leadership is not limited to social and ethical considerations, it extends to economy, society and environment (Liao, 2022). According to Avery and Bergsteiner (2011) sustainable leadership surpasses all other forms of leadership, because it focuses on balanced development of economy, society, and the environment, along with supporting organizations to achieve sustainability and profitable growth.

2.3 Employee performance

Employee performance has been linked to HRM, since the introduction of HRM as a field. However, in recent decades, employee performance construct has updated from mere being defined by task efficiency to broader definition encompassing behavioral, contextual, and adaptive dimensions (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). Employee performance indicates the efficiency with which job-holders perform activities those contribute to the companies' goals. Employee performance encompasses various forms such as task performance, contextual performance, and adaptive performance, and it denotes estimated value of an individual's action to an organization (Campbell, 2000).

Task performance relates to the effectiveness of employee in completing job-specific responsibilities, that is assessed based on the proficiency of employees in finishing their job responsibilities and measured in both quality and quantity perspectives (Sverke et al., 2019; Liang and Lee, 202; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000). Task performance is also often referred as task proficiency, technical proficiency, and job-specific competence (Sverke et al., 2019; Liang and Lee, 2024). Whereas, contextual performance encompasses voluntary behaviors that contributes to the organizations' goals, by positively influencing the work environment, such as supporting coworkers or promotion organizational goals (Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000; Carpinini et al., 2017; Liang and Lee, 2024). Contextual performance has been described as non-job specific task proficiency, interpersonal relations, extra-role performance, and organizational citizenship behavior in the literature (Koopmans et al., 2011; Carpinini et al., 2017). Finally, adaptive performance means the ability of an

employee to respond effectively to change and novelty (Pulakos et al, 2000; Charbonnier-Voirin & Rousse, 2012). Jointly, all these factors define the degree to which employee contribute to the organizational goals.

2.4 Sustainable HRM practices and employee performance

High employee performance is critically important for organizational success, because it leads to productivity, quality and customer satisfaction (Armstrong, 2023). Performance is shaped by several factors, such as an individual's attributes (motivation, skill, personality, emotional intelligence etc.), organization related factors (leadership style, work environment, organization culture), and human resource management practices (Guest, 1997; Sonnentag & Frese, 2000).

Resource Based Theory (RBV) proposed by Barney (1991) suggests that "possession of essential resources enable a firm to create competitive advantage and enhanced performance. Among these resources, human capital is often considered as one of the most critical. Sustainable HRM practices, such as recruitment, training, development, employee well-being, and participative decision making are mechanisms through which organization invest in, develop, and retain valuable human capital. According to Resource Based View, when sustainable HRM practices are implemented consistently and aligned with organizational goals, they contribute to enhance employee capabilities, and motivation, eventually leading to superior performance outcomes. Hence, sustainable HRM practices can be seen as strategic enablers that shape the human resource into a source of sustained performance advantage.

Another theory, commonly known as AMO (Ability-Motivation-Opportunity) framework suggests that employee performance results from three key drivers; individual abilities (skill and competencies), motivation (desire and willingness to perform), and opportunities available to them (Appelbaum et al., 2000). In the context of Sustainable HRM practices, sustainability-oriented training and development programs can improve employee abilities (Renwick et al., 2013). Ethical performance appraisal, fair compensation, and recognition systems can promote motivation (Jabbour and Santos, 2008). Furthermore, HRM practices such as, employee involvement in sustainability initiatives, participative decision making, and open communication can create opportunities for employees (Dumont et al., 2017). Studies extend support to this alignment between sustainable HRM practices and AMO by exhibiting that HR systems tailored to strengthen abilities, motivation, and opportunities contribute positively to employee performance outcomes. For example, Dumont et al. (2017) suggested that GHRM practices, such as green involvement and communication, enhance employee task performance through increased engagement. Moreover, Guerci et al. (2016) found that SHRM practices significantly predict individual and team-level performance by fostering a climate of trust and responsibility. A study by Jabbour and de Oliveira (2010) in the Brazilian manufacturing sector showed that organizations with environmentally aligned HRM practices observed higher productivity and employee satisfaction. These findings are mirrored in European contexts as well; for instance, Dumont et al. (2017) found that Green HRM practices enhance employees' voluntary workplace green behaviors (VWGB), which are positively associated with task performance and organizational citizenship behaviors. Therefore, by systematically, enhancing employee abilities, motivation, and

opportunities, sustainable HRM practices can play a critical role in enhancing employee outcomes. Based on this explanation and literary evidence, it is hypothesized that:

H1a: Sustainable Human Resource Management practices are positively related to employee task performance

H1.b: Sustainable Human Resource Management practices are positively related to employee contextual performance

2.5 Sustainable leadership and employee performance

The social exchange theory (SET) presented by Blau (1964) proposes that relationships at workplaces are dependent on social exchanges that involve rewards and costs experienced by the people involved in these exchanges (Do et al., 2024). According to SET when employee feel that their leaders care about employee well-being, show commitment to ethical perspectives, and maintain sustainability values, they are likely to reciprocate it with positive attitude and behavior, such as higher job involvement and better performance (Blau, 1964; Casimir et al., 2014). The patience and care demonstrated by the leaders can also promote a conducive and resource-laden work environment that contributes towards performance of the employees (Casimir et al. 2024). This theoretical explanation is supported by a growing body of literature. The researchers have discussed that sustainable leadership promotes an inclusive, ethical, and participatory work culture, that leads to employee satisfaction, motivation, trust, and eventually performance (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Suriyankietkaew and Avery, 2014; Metcalf & Benn, 2013; Dalati et al., 2017; Burawat, 2019; Iqbal et al., 2020; Kantabutra and Thepha-Aphiraks, 2016; Suriyankietkaew and Avery, 2016; Avery and Bergsteiner, 2011). Furthermore, Saha et al. (2020) found that sustainable leadership has a significant positive impact on team creativity, well-being, and task performance. Sustainable leaders influence self-efficacy and resilience of the employees, and these factors are crucial for high performance in dynamic environment. Leaders that demonstrate sustainability values can influence employee attitude by serving as a role model. Javed et al. (2021) argued that sustainable leadership help their employees achieve their work goal, instigating them to demonstrate positive outcomes. In another study, it was found that sustainable leadership is positively associated with employee well-being and long-term performance outcomes (Avery and Bergsteiner, 2011). Moreover, sustainable leaders tend to empower their employees by delegating responsibilities and promoting autonomy, those are the key factors for intrinsic motivation and performance (Ng & Burke, 2010).

Sustainable leadership practices are believed to enhance satisfaction of the employees. Since employees have been long discussed as most valuable asset of an organization, their satisfaction is critical factor of organizational performance (Al-Swidi et al., 2012). Sustainable leaders manage their employee as part of diverse group of stakeholders. Through their actions sustainable leaders enhance employee engagement and commitment (Berthon et al., 2008). Employee engagement, commitment, and satisfaction drives them to improve their performance. Leadership has also been linked to employees' OCB; employees are likely to follow the approach demonstrated by their leader as they view leader as role models. Hence, a leader exhibiting sustainability causes employee to

show heightened feeling of belonging and responsibility (Iqbal & Piwowar-Sulej, 2023; Iqbal & Ahmad, 2021; Liao, 2022). When employees believe that they are essential to the organization, they do efforts to meet the expectations of the organization (Teng et al., 2020). Therefore, sustainable leadership can inspire employees to go beyond their formal job roles and demonstrate high performance.

While the relationship between SHRM practices and sustainable leadership, and employee performance has been frequently discussed in the recent literature. There is a need to further integrate these concepts conceptually and empirically. As Leroy et al. (2018) argued that aligning HRM systems with leadership behavior is critical to enhance employee outcomes, yet the intersection of these two concepts in the context of sustainability remains underexplored. The HRM-Leadership Congruence Theory presented by Leroy et al. (2018) posits that, the effectiveness of HRM practices is not determined in isolation but is conditional on how well they align with leadership behaviors. A leadership behavior that reinforces the values and intent of HRM systems increases the probability of desired employee outcomes. Sustainable leadership, with its focus on long-term thinking, ethics, and employee well-being, can enhance the relationship between sustainable HRM practices and employee performance.

As far as success of SHRM practices is concerned, leadership plays an essential role in determining whether these practices are adopted or resisted by the employees. According to Aust et al. (2020) leaders are the principal communicators of values and norms within an organization. If leaders actively promote sustainability, it enhances the legitimacy of the SHRM initiatives. In contrast, if leaders fail to back sustainability initiatives, even the very well-designed HRM system may fail to influence employee behavior. Renwick et al. (2013) argued that GHRM practices should be embedded into the culture of an organization that is supported by top management. If the employees perceive that leadership rhetoric and actual HR practices are not aligned, they are likely to become disconnected. Additionally, employee attitude and behavior towards SHRM initiatives is influenced by the actions of leader because leader serves as behavioural role model for them. According to Bandura (1977), individuals learn by observing credible and respected other, in the context of this study "sustainable leaders". When employees observe that their leaders are engaging in sustainability behaviors, they are likely to respond positively to SHRM systems by internalizing these values. This results into improving effectiveness of SHRM and fosters proactive performance behavior. The literature has supported the notion that relationship between sustainable HRM practices and employee performance is contingent upon leadership. For example, Zientara and Zamojska (2018) discussed that the influence of GHRM practices on employee engagement was stronger when perceived organizational leadership was devoted to sustainability. Similarly, another study proved that transformational leadership strengthens the relationship between CSR-driven HRM and job satisfaction and performance. Based on the above evidences it is hypothesized that:

H2a: Sustainable Leadership is positively linked to employee task performance.

H2b: Sustainable Leadership is positively linked to employee contextual performance

H3: Sustainable Leadership moderates the relationship between SHRM practices and employee performance in such a way that this positive relationship is strengthened when sustainable leadership is high (vs. low).

3. Method

3.1 Study design

To examine the relationship between SHRM practices and employee performance, and the moderating role of Sustainable leadership a quantitative research approach, i.e. structured, online survey was used in this study. This approach is suitable for hypothesis testing and assessing a relationship between clearly defined variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, the data used was cross-sectional offering a picture of the present practices and perceptions in organizations regarding SHRM and leadership. An online questionnaire was employed due to their cost-effectiveness, scalability, and ability to reach a wide geography in a short period (Evans & Mathur, 2005). The increased digital literacy among the working professionals and flexibility offered by the online questionnaire further justified the use of online medium for the purpose of data collection (Regmi et al., 2016). To this end, Qualtrics was considered the appropriate tool for the data collection purpose due to its robust design capability and data security feature. Another advantage of online survey over face-to-face or paper-based surveys is their capability to reduce logistical and financial burdens. Additionally, it lets quick data consolidation and facilitates application of statistical software for consequent data analysis.

Regardless of the several benefits of the online method it is not without limitations. A downside of the method is lack of control over who completes the survey, that cause sample representativeness issues (Wright, 2005). Moreover, unlike qualitative interviews, online surveys don't provide any opportunity to clarify ambiguous responses or exploring participants reasoning in depth (Bryman, 2016). Despite these limitations of the online method, several measures were taken to enhance reliability and validity in the data collection process. To enhance content validity, instruments of the survey were developed based on well-established scales from the relevant existing literature. Before actual data collection a pretesting was performed to test the clarity and reliability of the questionnaire items. Participants were assured of the anonymity, and they were informed about the voluntary nature of their participation in the survey and possibility to withdraw at any time without facing any consequences. In this way ethical considerations were taken into account and an environment of confidence and trust was created. To get rigorous and generalizable insights that make study methodological sound a combination of a robust research design, established measurement tools, and a practical data collection strategy were used.

3.2 Sample and data collection

The target population of this study were employees working in different private organizations across various sectors in Pakistan. The employees were chosen as a target population because this study focuses on examining the perceived impact of SHRM practices on employee performance along with moderating role of sustainable leadership. Hence, employees are best suitable to provide direct

insights on the application and effectiveness of SHRM practices in their respective workplaces. The sample size of the study was determined through a power analysis using G power software. The minimum required sample size was estimated at approximately 100, to account for potential incomplete or inconsistent responses, a larger sample size was targeted. Eventually, a total of 145 responses were collected, out of which 129 were found valid after cleaning data and removing incomplete and inconsistent responses. Non-probability convenience sampling was deemed fit for this study, because this sampling approach is appropriate for the studies that require data from specific respondent with relevant knowledge or experience (Etikan et al., 2016).

Accordingly, an inclusion criterion was set, the participant for the survey needs to be full-time employee aged 18 years or above and having at least one year of work experience in that organization. The criterion was set to ensure that the respondents have adequate knowledge about the HRM practices and leadership dynamics in their organization. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was used, and participant were recruited primarily through the researcher's personal and professional network, including LinkedIn and academic contacts. This approach facilitated the collection of data from a diverse and relevant group of employees. To further improve diversity and representativeness, sample was drawn from multiple sectors, including banking, manufacturing, education, services and others. At the beginning of the questionnaire an introductory section about the purpose of the study, estimated time to complete, assurance of anonymity and confidentiality was provided. To comply with research ethics and protect respondent privacy no personal identifiers such as name, email address or contact details were collected. Participation in the survey was fully voluntarily, and an informed consent was also obtained.

The survey consists of four parts: (i) background information, (ii) item measuring SHRM practices, (iii) items relating to employee performance, and (iv) questions related to sustainable leadership. Except background section, all constructs were measured using a validated scale from previous studies, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

3.3 Measures

3.3.1. Control variables

In addition to the main variables of interest, a set of demographic variables were included in the regression model as control variables to account for their potential impact on employee performance. The selection of the control variables included in the regression analysis was done based on their theoretical and empirical relevance in prior research examining employee performance, HRM practices, and leadership (Guest, 1997; Jiang et al., 2012). The study specifically controlled for gender, age, education, job role, industry type, and work experience. The demographic data were gathered in the first section of the questionnaire. Age of the respondents' and their work experience in years were treated as ordinal variables, while the other variables were treated as nominal and were dummy coded for the regression analysis. One category was selected as a reference category, for each categorical variable, and binary dummy variables were created accordingly. The coding and reference categories are given below:

Table 1. Control variables and their coding scheme

Variables	Reference category	Other
Gender	Female	Male
Age	18-25	26-35, 36-45
Educational Qualification	Bachelor's Degree	Master, PhD, other
Job Position	Entry-Level	Mid-level, Senior-level, Executive
Industry Type	Services	Manufacturing, Public Sector, Not-for-profit
Work Experience	Less than a year	1-3 years, 4-6 years, 7+ years

3.3.2. Sustainable human resource management (SHRM) practices

Sustainable HRM practices construct was measured based on the scale developed by De Prins et al. (2020). Thus, our questions were adapted from previous studies those use 9-items to measure sustainable human resource management practices. The respondents were asked to state the extent to which they agree to following statements: "Jobs in this organization reflect what employees are good at and enjoy doing"; "Employees are largely able to manage their work independently"; "This organization genuinely cares about the well-being of its employees"; "Employees are rewarded fairly and equitably based on the effort they put into their work"; "The organization operates without unnecessary hierarchical levels"; "Decision-making in this organization is highly centralized"; "Bottom-up communication and employee voice are encouraged"; "Managers value and anticipate suggestions and ideas from employees"; "The

organization provides a wide range of training and learning opportunities for all employees". All these statements were ranked by the participants of the study on a 5-Likert scale, from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". Previous studies have shown the internal consistency of the scale to be highly reliable (Cronbach's Alpha > 0.85). In this study, the SHRM scale also demonstrated strong reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.872, substantiating its internal consistency.

3.3.3. Employee performance

Employee performance was measured using a 23-item scale developed by Pradhan & Jena (2017), which measures individual task performance, adaptive performance, and contextual performance. This scale was used due to its wider range and empirical support. Sample items include: "I use to maintain high standard of work" and "I am capable of handling my assignments without much supervision" from task performance ($\alpha=0.806$) ; "I use to perform well to mobilize collective intelligence for effective teamwork" and "I could manage change in my job very well whenever the situation demands" from adaptive performance ($\alpha=0.523$); "I used to extend help to my co-workers when asked or needed", "I love to handle extra responsibilities", and "I extend my sympathy and empathy to my co-workers when they are in trouble" from contextual performance ($\alpha=0.839$). This self-rated performance scale has been widely used in HRM studies and has higher reliability (Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.80).

3.3.4. Sustainable leadership

Sustainable leadership was measured using the scale developed by Iqbal et al. (2021) having 14-items, which emphasize principles such as long-term orientation, staff development, ethical behavior, innovation, and social responsibility. The respondents were asked to show their agreement to following statements: "My organizational leadership acts in a sustainable socially responsible manner"; "My organizational leadership acts in a sustainable environmentally responsible manner"; "My organizational leadership acts in a sustainable ethically responsible manner"; "My organizational leadership's decisions are made while considering the entire organization"; "My organizational leadership's management officially recognizes when a mistake is made that affects sustainability"; "My organizational leadership is willing to correct mistakes that affect sustainability"; "My organizational leadership attempts to use unique innovative methods to resolve sustainability issues"; "My organizational leadership attempts to create wealth through sustainable efforts"; "My organizational leadership puts purpose before profit" ; "My organizational leadership balances sustainable social responsibility with profits" ; "My organizational leadership demonstrates sustainability by persevering through all types of changes" ; "My organizational leadership is concerned how sustainability affects employees"; "My organizational leadership communicates sustainability decisions to all involved"; "My organizational leadership attempts to build a culture of sustainability through its communication effort". Respondents rated each statement on five-point Likert Scale (1= Strongly disagree to 5= Strongly agree). The Sustainable Leadership scale demonstrated an excellent internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha=0.941.

The internal consistency of the measurement scales used in this study was assessed through Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The sustainable leadership scale showed excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.941$) indicating that 14 items measuring the construct were highly consistent. The SHRM practices scale also demonstrated strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.872$). Likewise, task performance ($\alpha = 0.806$) and contextual performance ($\alpha = 0.839$) scales also showed good reliability. Only adaptive performance scale exhibited low reliability and yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.523. Consequently, adaptive performance was excluded from further analysis in following the recommended practices (De Vellis, 2017). Rest of the whole constructs showed a strong reliability, as a value above 0.8 is considered good and above 0.90 as excellent (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). Hence, reliability analysis results confirmed that all scales used in this study are internally consistent and appropriate for further factor analysis and hypothesis testing, except adaptive performance. Next, the dimensional structure and construct validity of the main measurement instrument of the study for each variable was evaluated through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). As recommended by Hair et al. (2019) Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity were employed to test sampling adequacy.

The SHRM practices scale demonstrated a good sampling adequacy (KMO= 0.861) and Bartlett's test was significant ($P < 0.001$), suggesting suitability for factor analysis. The theoretical expectation of a unified construct was supported by emergence of only one factor with an eigen value greater than 1. Similarly, sustainable leadership scale also exhibited excellent sample adequacy KMO=0.860, and a significant Bartlett's test $p < 0.001$, indicating appropriateness for further factor analysis. Only one factor emerged as with eigen value above 1, verifying the unidimensionality of the construct. All 14 items strongly loaded on the one factor. Regarding dimension of employee performance, task performance scale showed strong sample adequacy and Bartlett's significance (KMO=0.820, $p < 0.001$). All the 5 items loaded strongly on one factor confirming unidimensionality of the construct. The contextual performance scale also yielded one factor solution (KMO=0.860, $p < 0.001$). However, adaptive performance showed low sample adequacy (KMO=0.630), but Bartlett's test was significant ($p < 0.001$), but the reliability of the construct was low ($\alpha = 0.523$). Furthermore, EFA indicated low factor loadings as well, consequently, this construct was excluded from hypothesis testing, consistent with prior reliability findings.

Thus, the EFA results confirm the unidimensionality and construct validity of the retained constructs and support their use in composite score creation and regression analysis.

3.4 Data analysis

The data of the study was analyzed through descriptive statistics, reliability, correlation, and regression analysis in IBM SPSS. To examine distribution properties of the variables descriptive statistics were computed, this provided insights into the variability of response across key constructs and central tendencies. After that, internal consistency of each construct was measured through Cronbach's alpha. A value of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ was considered acceptable for internal consistency of the construct as suggested by Nunnally & Bernstein (1994). Sustainable leadership, SHRM practices, Task performance, and contextual performance's constructs showed a strong reliability ($\alpha > 0.80$), while

adaptive performance construct demonstrated low reliability (Cronbach's alpha of 0.52) and was excluded from further analysis. To examine the dimensional Structure of each construct exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed individually. EFA is suitable for exploring the factor structure Principal axis factoring with oblique rotation was used and the items having factor loadings less than 0.5 were removed. Kiaser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measures of sample adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity were employed to evaluate the suitability of each dataset for factor analysis, and both tests indicated acceptable conditions for all retained constructs. Afterwards, composite scores were calculated by averaging the retained items of each construct. This approach has been recommended in a situation where individual items load on a single factor and when limitation of the sample size restrict use of latent variable modelling through confirmatory factor analysis (Hair et al., 2019). Therefore, composite scores were used in successive regression analyses.

To examine the relationship between all variables of the study, we used a correlation analysis. Afterwards, the hypotheses of study were tested using multiple and hierarchical regression analysis. The direct relationship between SHRM practices, Sustainable Leadership, and task and contextual performance were tested using multiple linear regression. Moderating effect of sustainable leadership was assessed using hierarchical regression, that allows the interaction term between SHRM practices and sustainable leadership to be entered after the main effects. Following Aiken and West (1991), to reduce multicollinearity all predictors involved in the interaction terms were mean-centred. To examine the presence of moderation the significance of interaction terms was interpreted and changes in R-squared were observed to assess the improvement in model explanatory power when Interaction effects were added.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive results

We gathered total 145 responses, out of which 16 incomplete or inconsistent responses were dropped. As a result 129 complete responses were retained for further analysis, resulting in a fairly large sample of respondents. Descriptive analysis of the sampled population is given in Table 2. Out of 129, 88 were identified as male making 68.2% of the sample, while females are 31.8% of the sampled population. Overall sample, has a balanced presentation of both genders, male being slightly more which also reflects workforce composition of Pakistan economy. The "age" was recorded in three groups, 18-25, 26-35, and 36-45. The first group (18-25 years old accounts for 23.2% of the sampled population, second group (26 to 35 years old) has most representation in the sampled population (62.80%), while the age group 36-45-year-old included 18 respondents making 14% of the total sample. Majority of the respondents reported Master level qualification (50.4%), second largest category have bachelor qualification (42.6%), while only 8% of the respondents reported PhD and 6% other qualifications.

Job position data showed that 43.4% of the respondents are at mid-level positions, while 32.6% are in senior-level roles. Entry-level employees accounted for 18.6% of the sampled population, while only 5.4% held executive roles. This distribution suggests that the majority of the sampled population held positions that have moderate to high levels of responsibilities. Industry-wise, most prevalent industry group among the respondents was services, representing 56.6% of the sample. The other groups like manufacturing, education, and public sector have 16.3%, 11.6%, and 11.6%, representation, accordingly. This demonstrates the findings are particularly relevant for services-based organizations, but still representing the perspective of the other sectors. Regarding respondents work experience at current organization, majority of them (40.3%) have been work experience of 1-3 years, second largest category (25.6%) is of those having work experience less than one year, followed by employee having experience of 4-6 years (18.6%), and more than 7 years (15.5%), indicating a predominantly mid-career sample.

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of the sampled population

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	88	68.2
Female	41	31.8
Age (years)		
18-25	30	23.2
26-35	81	62.8
36-45	18	14.0
Qualification		
Bachelor	55	42.6
Master	65	50.4
PhD	1	8

Other	8	6.2
Job Position		
Entry Level	24	18.6
Mid-Level	56	43.4
Senior Level	42	32.6
Executive	7	5.4
Type of Industry		
Manufacturing	21	16.3
Services	73	56.6
Education	15	11.6
Public Sector	15	11.6
Non-profit	5	3.9
Work Experience (years)		
< 1	33	25.6
1-3	52	40.3
4-6	24	18.6
7+	20	15.5

Note: N=129

4.2 Correlational analysis

The results of correlational analysis are presented in Table 3. In order to check the association between independent (Sustainable HRM practices), dependent (dimensions of Employee performance), and moderating (Sustainable leadership) variables, multiple correlation was calculated. Sustainable HRM practices exhibited a significant positive correlation with sustainable leadership, Task performance, Adaptive performance, and contextual performance ($r=0.550$, $p<0.01$, $r=0.26$, $p<0.01$, $r=0.44$, $p<0.01$, and $r=.32$, $p<0.01$, respectively), indicating that sustainable HRM practices are positively associated with employee performance. Sustainable leadership also showed a significant positive correlation with adaptive performance ($r=0.29$, $p<0.01$), and contextual performance ($r=0.26$, $p<0.01$). While sustainable leadership was not found to be significantly correlated with task performance (0.16 , $p=0.11$). overall, the correlation results reveal valuable insights regarding the relationship between all variables of the study.

Table 3. Means, standard deviations and correlations of study variables.

	Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1.	Sustainable Leadership	49.21	1.044	1				
2.	Task Performance	24.34	3.13	.164	1			
3.	Adaptive Performance	26.62	2.79	.29**	.49**	1		
4.	Context Performance	40.74	4.43	.260**	.59**	.41**	1	

5.	Sustainable HRM Practices	35.38	6.78	.550**	.26*	.44**	.32**	1
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**= Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

4.3.1. Task performance

Prior to testing the main hypotheses, control variables (gender, job position, and work experience) were entered in the model. Control variables were selected based on prior literature indicating their relevance to employee performance outcomes. Furthermore, dummy variables were generated for each categorical variables, using female, entry-level, and <1 year of experience as the reference categories. These control variables were included to separate the effect of sustainable HRM practices and sustainable leadership on task performance.

The results of step-wise multiple regression analyses are given in Table 4. In step 1, control variables including gender, work experience, and Job position were entered. The model explained almost 7% of the variance in Task performance ($R^2 = 0.074$, $p = .024$). Being male ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$), having work experience 4-6 years ($\beta = .14$, $p < .05$), were found to be significant predictors. In second step, main constructs (SHRM and SL) were added that resulted in increase in total variance explained to 17.2%. Both SHRM practices and Sustainable leadership demonstrated a significant positive relationship with task performance ($\beta = .26$, $p < .01$, and $\beta = .21$, $p < .01$, respectively), therefore supporting Hypothesis 1a and Hypothesis 2a. In the last step, the interaction term (SHRM x SL) was added to the model and results indicated that sustainable leadership positively moderates the relationship between sustainable HRM practices and task performance ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$). Thus hypothesis 3 was supported based on these findings.

4.3.2. Contextual performance as dependent variable

Same process was repeated with contextual performance as the dependent variable. The control variables explained 6.9% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.069$, $p = .031$) in the step 1. In this model, senior-level position ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$) was found to be a significant predictor. In second step, after inclusion of SHRM and SL a substantial change in R^2 ($\Delta R^2 = .111$, $p < .001$) was observed, increasing total explained variance to 18.0%. The results revealed that both Sustainable HRM practices ($\beta = .29$, $p < .01$) and sustainable leadership ($\beta = .22$, $p < .01$) significant positive effects, lending further support to H1.a and H2.a in the context of contextual performance. In the last step, the interaction effect was also found to be significant ($\beta = .16$, $p < .05$), explaining an additional 2.5% of the variance. The final model explained 20.5% of the variance in contextual performance, providing strong support for H3.a and suggesting that the positive relationship between SHRM and contextual performance is strengthened in the presence of sustainable leadership.

Overall, the findings provide empirical support for all six hypotheses. Sustainable HRM practices and sustainable leadership independently contribute to enhancing employee performance (both task and

contextual), and sustainable leadership significantly moderates the relationship between sustainable HRM practices and employee performance.

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression Results

<i>Control variables</i>	Model 1 (Task Performance)			Model 2 (Contextual Performance)		
	Step 1 B (S.E)	Step 2 B (S.E)	Step 3 B (S.E)	Step 1 B (S.E)	Step 2 B (S.E)	Step 3 B (S.E)
Gender Male (ref. female)	0.13* (0.06)	0.11* (0.06)	0.11* (0.06)	0.10 (0.06)	0.09 (0.06)	0.09 (0.06)
Mid-level (ref. entry-level)	0.07 (0.07)	0.06 (0.07)	0.06 (0.07)	0.08 (0.07)	0.07 (0.07)	0.07 (0.07)
Senior-level	0.16* (0.08)	0.15* (0.08)	0.15* (0.08)	0.15* (0.07)	0.14* (0.07)	0.14* (0.07)
Executive	0.12 (0.09)	0.11 (0.09)	0.11 (0.09)	0.11 (0.09)	0.09 (0.09)	0.09 (0.09)
Work Experiences: 1-3 years (ref. <1 year)	0.09 (0.07)	0.08 (0.07)	0.08 (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)	0.09 (0.07)	0.09 (0.07)
4-6 years	0.14* (0.07)	0.12* (0.07)	0.12* (0.07)	0.12 (0.07)	0.11 (0.07)	0.11 (0.07)
>7 years	0.11 (0.08)	0.10 (0.08)	0.10 (0.08)	0.13 (0.08)	0.11 (0.08)	0.11 (0.08)
Main Constructs						
Sustainable HRM practices		0.26** (0.07)	0.25** (0.07)		0.29** (0.07)	0.28** (0.07)
Sustainable leadership		0.21** (0.07)	0.20** (0.07)		0.22** (0.07)	0.21** (0.07)
Interaction Term						
Sustainable HRM Practices X Sustainable Leadership			0.18* (0.07)			0.16* (0.07)
R ²	0.074	0.172	0.200	0.069	0.180	0.205
ΔR ²		0.098**	0.028*		0.111**	0.025*

Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

In summary, the results indicate the harmonious role of Sustainable HRM Practices and leadership practices in driving employee behavior. Though SHRM practices provide structural and motivational support, their effectiveness in converting into performance outcomes is conditional on the leadership climate. When leaders in the organization exhibit sustainable, ethical, and supportive behavior, HRM practices are more likely to be perceived as genuine and empowering, leading to better performance outcomes.

5. Discussion

There has lately been a growing desire to know how sustainability can be practiced in Human Resource Management and during leadership. As firms are progressively pursuing long-term value creation and employee-focused strategies, the need for exploring there is now a clear link between sustainable HRM practices and how well employees do. This research was designed to examine the connection between Sustainable HRM and employee work outcomes and find out if this association gets improved when leaders are also sustainable. An online survey was conducted and responses were collected from 129 full time employee across different various sectors in Pakistan. By empirically testing how Sustainable HRM practices and sustainable leadership interact to shape employee's task performance and contextual performance, this study contributes to the growing literature on sustainable people and performance management. Drawing upon the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity framework, and conceptually guided by the normative ROC model (De Peins et al., 2014), the findings demonstrated that sustainable HRM practices are significantly linked to better results in both what is done and how it is done. In addition, it is shown that strong sustainable leadership reinforces the positive way sustainable HRM helps performance and supporting the hypothesized moderating effect.

The study showed that sustainable HRM and performing tasks successfully are closely linked. These findings are aligned with previous research indicating that human resource management systems that are sustainability centred, such as those emphasizing inclusivity, fairness, long-term development, and employee well-being, leads to employee motivation, engagement, and productivity (Aust et al., 2020; Guest, 2017). These practices are likely to foster employee capacity via training and skill development, enhance motivation through recognition and well-being initiatives, and create opportunities through employee involvement and autonomy, all these are consistent with the dimensions of AMO framework (Jiang et al., 2012).

A similar relationship of sustainable HRM practices was found with contextual performance, indicating that these practices can also promote behaviors that go beyond formal job descriptions. It suggests that when employees perceived that their organization employ sustainable HRM practices, they were more likely to report helping colleagues and volunteering for tasks. Furthermore, the findings reinforce the idea that sustainability centred HRM not only contributes to individual productivity but also to collective functioning of the workplace (Mujtaba & Cavico, 2013; Ehnert et al., 2016). Contextual performance has been viewed as critical in dynamic and collaborative organizational environments, and SHRM by creating a supportive and ethical work climate is seen as well suited.

Additionally, this study also found that sustainable leadership is significantly associated with both task and contextual performance. These findings indicate that when managers act in alignment with sustainability principles, employee tend to perform better. This effect was stronger with contextual performance, implying that leaders' ethical behavior and participatory style inspires prosocial behavior in employees. These findings are aligned with the literature describing that sustainable leadership promotes a culture of trust, shared purpose, and long-term commitment, that enhances

not only performance but also social cohesion with organization (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011; Iqbal & Piowar-Sulej, 2022). The findings are further aligned with the prior studies that values-based and sustainable leadership fosters intrinsic motivation, which is a strong predictor of discretionary behaviors (Iqbal & Piowar-Sulej, 2022; Elkington & Brebbia, 2020).

Lastly statistically significant moderating role of sustainable leadership between the sustainable HRM practices and both dimensions of employee performance were found. This indicate that performance-enhancing effect of sustainable HRM practices are stronger when employees perceive their leaders as sustainability-oriented. The moderation results underscore the importance of leadership well-structured HRM policies may not translate into their full impact unless they are supported and reinforced by leaders. These findings are consistent with prior research underscoring the importance of alignment between HRM systems and leadership behavior (Browning, Jackman, & Gerbasi, 2020; Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017). The moderation effect was more pronounced for contextual performance, suggesting that extra-role behaviors are more sensitive to the interpersonal and value-driven signals sent leadership (Podsakoff et al., 2009; Newman et al., 2020).

These results contribute to a deeper understanding of how sustainable HRM practices and sustainable leadership together impact employee outcomes. Together, these elements create what Purcell and Hutchinson (2007) referred to as a "positive HRM-performance chain," where the alignment between people practices and leadership amplifies employee effectiveness. While prior studies have worked on to investigate these constructs independently, present study provides fresh empirical evidence for their combined effect and interactive potential. It proposes that neither sustainable HRM practices nor leadership alone is sufficient, it is their synergy that creates an amplified effect on employee behavior. This synergy confirms the underlying assumptions of the ROC model, that for a meaningful outcomes, respect, openness, and continuity must be embedded both in policy and practice. By validating all the hypotheses, this study provides theoretical support to the AMO framework and its application within a sustainability context. It validates that employee abilities, motivation, and opportunities can be developed through sustainable HRM; however, their impact is contingent on contextual support from leadership.

5.1 Theoretical and managerial implications

This study provides multiple important theoretical implications. First, by exploring the direct relationship of sustainable HRMs with employee performance and its interactive effect, it contributes to the growing literature on the subject. Though, the literature has linked sustainable human resource management to organizational-level outcomes (Aust et al., 2020; Guerri et al., 2022), present study advances this work by emphasizing on the employee level and identifying task and contextual performance as key outcomes. This pivot allows for a better understanding of how sustainability-driven HRM policies translate into individual behavioral outcomes, and highlights the relevance of SHRM in day-t-day work practices. This study contributes to the theoretical advancement of sustainable HRM by extending the AMO framework into the field of sustainability. Though, AMO framework has been widely used in traditional human resource research, its application to sustainable HRM practices is underdeveloped. The results of this study indicate that HRM initiative

such as training and development (ability), well-being and recognition (motivation), and participative decision making and autonomy (opportunity), when aligned with sustainability, may jointly enhance employee performance. This fortifies the AMO model's relevance as a guiding framework for understanding sustainable HRM practices-employee performance relationship. Though the present study did not directly test the three dimensions of AMO, the alignment between sustainable HRM practices and improved performance outcomes suggest that the AMO lens is empirically valuable for structuring SHRM interventions in organizations seeking long-term value creation.

Secondly, this study contributed by integrating sustainable leadership into the sustainable HRM practices-employee performance framework, both as a predictor of employee performance and as a moderating variable influencing the effectiveness of sustainable HRM practices on employee outcomes. The findings of the study support Social Exchange theory's view, by exhibiting that sustainable leadership is not only directly associated with employee performance but also strengthens employee performance relationship with sustainable HRM practices. According to SET, when leaders demonstrate ethical conduct, long-term vision, and care for employee well-being, employees are more likely to reciprocate this behavior by enhancing performance. In this way, this study extends the use of SET in the field of sustainability and strengthens the conceptual integration of HRM practices and leadership.

Previously, sustainable leadership has been studied in isolation (Iqbal & Piwovar-Sulej, 2022), however, findings of this study contribute to the growing body of literature that emphasizes the importance of aligning HRM systems with leadership behavior. This study offers empirical support to the idea that leadership can shape employee response to HRM initiatives by studying the moderating role of sustainable leadership in the sustainable HRM practices and employee performance relationship. The findings are consistent with the calls from researchers such as Leroy et al. (2018), who recommended for an integrated approach to studying HRM and leadership, acknowledging that their joint effects are stronger than when considered in isolation. The results extend the theoretical understanding by demonstrating that sustainable leadership acts as a situational amplifier, strengthening the effectiveness of SHRM systems in delivering positive employee outcomes. This also fortifies the idea that congruence between leadership values and HRM practices is vital for promoting sustainability-driven performance improvements.

Concerning managerial implications, the findings underscore the significance of implementing HRM practices that are not only performance-driven but also sustainability-oriented. Organizations aiming to improve both task efficiency and prosocial behavior among employees must ensure that their HR systems support long-term well-being, learning, autonomy, and fairness. Managers should prioritize policies that produce inclusive, engaging, and ethically grounded work environments. Importantly, sustainable HRM practices should not be treated in isolation, rather as part of integrated strategy aligned with leadership values. The study also highlights the crucial role of leadership in the effective implementation of sustainable HRM. Though policies provide structure, basically it is leader behavior that determines whether employees perceive those policies as authentic and supportive. Leaders those exhibit sustainability principles are more likely to motivate employees to adopt behavior that

benefit both organization and society. Therefore, managers should be trained and encouraged to internalize sustainability values and utilize them into everyday decisions and interactions with staff.

Additionally, interaction effect indicates that simply introducing sustainability practices may not be enough to enhance performance. So, manager should ensure that their leadership approach is perceived as aligned with these practices. This requires promoting transparency, bottom-up communications, and maintaining a developmental focus in leadership. Finally, in organizational settings like Pakistan and similar developing countries, where organizational systems are less formalized, the strategic alignment between sustainable HRM and sustainable leadership is even more important. This study offers a template for how sustainable practices and leadership can be combined to address challenges of retention, engagement and performance in resource-constrained environments. In such context, managers can leverage sustainable HRM and sustainable leadership not only as compliance tools, but as strategic levers to create resilient, motivated, and high performing workforce.

5.2 Conclusion, limitations and future research

This study contributes to growing body of literature on sustainable people management practices by examining the combined influence of sustainable HRM practices and sustainable leadership on employee performance. We conceptualized and empirically tested the hypothesized relationship between sustainable HRM practices and dimensions of employee performance (task and contextual) and explored the moderating role of sustainable leadership drawing upon the AMO framework. The study population was drawn from 129 employees working in diverse sector across Pakistan, reflecting a range of industries, job roles, and experience levels. The results reveal that sustainable HRM practices are positively associated with both task and contextual performance, confirming the role of sustainability oriented HRM in supporting individual employee outcomes. Additionally, sustainable leadership was also found to be positively associated with higher levels of performance, especially contextual performance. Notably, moderation analysis indicated that the presence of strong sustainable leadership enhanced the effectiveness of sustainable HRM practices in fostering employee performance. These findings provide valuable guidelines on how organizations can align people management and leadership strategies to promote both operational excellence and socially responsible workplace behaviors.

Despite several contributions, this study has several limitations. One key limitation of the study is cross-sectional nature of the data, which limits our ability to draw causal conclusions. While the findings suggest associations between variables, future longitudinal studies are needed to assess how Sustainable HRM practices and leadership can influence over-time performance outcomes. Moreover, while the conceptual framework was grounded in established theories such as AMO framework and supported by the past empirical work, it mainly relied on self-reported data. Future studies can operationalize and test theory driven mediators such as A, M, and O, to more explicitly investigate the mechanism through which sustainable HRM practices influence employee outcomes. This may introduce common method bias and the potential for overblown relationships due to social desirability effects or self-perception errors. One more limitation is the constrained generalizability

of the sample. Although the participants were from diverse industries and job levels, the study was focused on single country with specific cultural and institutional dynamics. Future studies can extend this work by conducting comparative cross-cultural studies to investigate whether the relationships observed here hold true in different national or regional contexts. For example, exploring sustainable HRM practices and sustainable leadership in countries with stronger institutional frameworks for sustainability.

Furthermore, while this study incorporated Sustainable Leadership as a moderator, other potential moderators and mediators remain underexplored. Future research could explore whether constructs such as organizational climate, psychological empowerment, or employee engagement further influence the Sustainable HRM–performance relationship. Exploring these variables would allow researchers to unearth the fundamental mechanisms that enlighten how sustainable practices translate into employee-level outcomes. Additionally, the reliability of one subscale of employee performance (adaptive performance) was significantly lower than others, despite being based on an existing validated scale. Though adaptive performance was not the principal dependent variable in this study, this limitation suggests the need for future studies to re-examine or refine the measurement of this construct, mainly in non-Western contexts where certain performance dimensions may be interpreted differently. Another methodological limitation is related to sample size in the context of item-to-response ratio. While the sample size was consistent with the minimum recommendations provided by power analysis, a larger sample could improve the generalizability and robustness of results. This is mainly relevant when multiple predictors and moderators are involved, which can increase the intricacy of the model.

In conclusion, this study shows that integrating sustainability in HRM practices and leadership is not only ethically and socially desirable but also functionally effective in enhancing employee performance. However, enhancing this influence requires strategic alignment between HRM practices and leadership behaviors. Future researchers are encouraged to build upon this foundation, exploring other contextual, cultural, and psychological variables that shape the influence of Sustainable HRM and sustainable leadership in diverse organizational settings. Such kind of efforts will not only improve theoretical models of sustainable management but also support practitioners in designing human-centred, sustainability-aligned organizations that deliver both performance and purpose.

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Appendix:

Model of questionnaire:

Section 1: Background Information

I. Age (years):

- 1) 18–25
- 2) 26–35
- 3) 36–45
- 4) 46–55
- 5) 56+

II. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other

III. Educational Qualification: ☐ Bachelor's ☐ Master's ☐ PhD ☐ Other

IV. Job Position: ☐ Entry-Level ☐ Mid-Level ☐ Senior-Level ☐ Executive

V. What industry does your organization belong to?

- 1. Manufacturing
- 2. Services (e.g., IT, finance, healthcare)
- 3. Education
- 4. Government/Public Sector
- 5. Non-Profit
- 6. Other (please specify): _____

VI. How long have you been working at your organization?

☐ Less than 1 year ☐ 1-3 years ☐ 4-6 years ☐ 7+ years

Sustainable Leadership

The next question concerns the degree to which the leadership (so, in general) in your organization is concerned with sustainability. Please answer the following statements on a scale that ranges from (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

- 1. My organizational leadership acts in a sustainable socially responsible manner
- 2. My organizational leadership acts in a sustainable environmentally responsible manner.
- 3. My organizational leadership acts in a sustainable ethically responsible manner.
- 4. My organizational leadership's decisions are made while considering the entire organization
- 5. My organizational leadership's management officially recognizes when a mistake is made that affects sustainability
- 6. My organizational leadership is willing to correct mistakes that affect sustainability

7. My organizational leadership attempts to use unique innovative methods to resolve sustainability issues.
8. My organizational leadership attempts to create wealth through sustainable efforts
9. My organizational leadership puts purpose before profit.
10. My organizational leadership balances sustainable social responsibility with profits
11. My organizational leadership demonstrates sustainability by persevering through all types of changes
12. My organizational leadership is concerned how sustainability affects employees
13. My organizational leadership communicates sustainability decisions to all involved.
14. My organizational leadership attempts to build a culture of sustainability through its communication effort

Employee Performance:

The next questions concerns your own performance (Task Performance 1-6 & Adaptive performance 7-14) as an employee in your organization. Please respond to the following statements based on your personal experience, using a scale that ranges from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)

Task Performance

1. I use to maintain high standard of work
2. I am capable of handling my assignments without much supervision
3. I am very passionate about my work
4. I know I can handle multiple assignments for achieving organizational goals
5. I use to complete my assignments on time
6. My colleagues believe I am a high performer in my organization

Adaptive Performance

1. I use to perform well to mobilize collective intelligence for effective teamwork
2. I could manage change in my job very well whenever the situation demands
3. I can handle effectively my work team in the face of change
4. I always believe that mutual understanding can lead to a viable solution in the organization
5. I use to lose my temper when faced with criticism from my team members
6. I am very comfortable with job flexibility
7. I use to cope well with organizational changes from time to time

The following questions are about your performance(Contextual Performance) as an employee in your organization. Please respond to the following statements based on your personal experience, using a scale that ranges from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Contextual Performance

1. I used to extend help to my co-workers when asked or needed

2. I love to handle extra responsibilities
3. I extend my sympathy and empathy to my co-workers when they are in trouble
4. I actively participate in group discussions and work meetings
5. I use to praise my co-workers for their good work
6. I derive a lot of satisfaction nurturing others in the organization
7. I use to share knowledge and ideas among my team members
8. I use to maintain good coordination among fellow workers
9. I use to guide new colleagues beyond my job purview
10. I communicate effectively with my colleagues for problem-solving and decision-making

Sustainable HRM Practices:

The following statements relate to your experience with Human resource practices in your organization. Please respond to each statement using a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

1. My organization truly cares about the well-being of employees.
2. My organization helps employees to maintain long-term employability and agility.
3. Managers in my organization can be counted on to help with a difficult task at work.
4. My job allows me to make job-related decisions on my own.
5. I am provided with the opportunity to suggest improvements in the way things are done.
6. Managers in my organization keep open communication with me on the job.
7. I am often asked to participate in decisions.
8. Employees are rewarded fairly and equitably according to the effort they put into their work in my organization