

Linking Job Demands–Resources and Social Exchange Theory to Employee Well-Being: A Conceptual Model for Sustainable HRM in the Indian Automotive Sector..

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Abstract: Rapid digital transformation, pressure from competing interests, changes in the labour market, rapid developments in the way we produce goods (Industry 4.0), the rise of globalisation, and the changing expectations of workers, have prompted changes in the automotive industry in India. In response to these changes, the automotive industry has had to change the way that it meets the job demands placed on its workers, the amount of time that they need to devote to work and their family, and how the workplace interacts with employee wellness. Sustainable HRM is emerging as a key strategy for organisations; however, the literature has not adequately explained how Sustainable HRM affects an employee's ability to be healthy and to balance their work and family responsibilities in emerging economies, where companies often focus on efficiency and productivity over the sustainability of their employees. This study provides an integrated conceptual framework for understanding how an employee's access to organisational resources and their perceived level of support combine with the exchange processes between the organisation and employee to support sustainable employee outcomes. To develop this framework, the study systematically reviews the published literature between 2000 and 2024 and synthesises this research by identifying the key concepts, mediating mechanisms, and contextual moderators of sustainable employee outcomes in the Indian automotive sector. By providing insight into the synergy between job resources and the quality of social exchange to enhance employee well-being and work-life balance, the proposed conceptual framework advances theoretical knowledge. Therefore, Sustainable HRM is expected to positively affect the sustainability of an organisation through these two mechanisms. At the conclusion of this article, we outline the theoretical and practical implications of these findings on future research and practice, including the need for resource-enhancing HR systems, the creation of relationship based organisational climates, and the equitable distribution of flexibility in order to build employee resilience and adaptability in a rapidly evolving, technology-intensive environment..

Keywords: Sustainable HRM, JD–R Model, Social Exchange Theory, Employee Well-being, Work–Life Balance, Indian Automotive Industry, Industry 4.0..

Introduction

In the last ten years, a lot has changed in the Indian automotive market, which is one of the fastest-growing automotive markets in the world. There are many technological changes happening in this market right now, including automation, artificial intelligence-based manufacturing, electric vehicles, and digital supply chains; these new technologies are creating new possibilities and challenges for organisations by providing new kinds of jobs and requiring different types of workers. Industry 4.0 technologies have also required organisations to provide better training for their employees, shorten their time to market, increase the number of competitors, and change how companies are structured (Budhwar & Bhatnagar, 2022). As a result, companies have created new positions with greater

responsibilities, which has resulted in a higher number of job demands on workers, increased their workload, and created increased stress levels at work (Bal et al., 2013). At the same time that there have been changes in the workforce demographics, the rising number of dual career families, and changing attitudes towards the work/life balance in the automotive industry have all created additional challenges for automotive companies with regards to their traditional ways of operating. As such, these changes have caused a number of issues for automotive companies that are attempting to stay competitive and innovative, as highlighted by the current levels of employee burnout, high levels of employee turnover and reduced Levels of employee engagement (Baral & Bhargava, 2010).

In this context, Sustainable Human Resource Management (Sustainable HRM) has emerged as an important means through which to combine the goals of economic, environmental, and social sustainability via a human-centred approach (HRM). Sustainable HRM enhances the traditional HRM approach by focusing on the long-term welfare of employees, the fairness of the employment relationship, and the ongoing sustainability of an organisation's human capital (De Prins et al., 2014). However, despite the importance of Sustainable HRM, the theoretical framework for Sustainable HRM is still very fragmented and empirical evidence in the Indian automotive industry is limited (Brough et al., 2014).

Current HRM research provides useful but limited insights on the impact of HR strategies on employee outcomes. For example: The JD-R Model can be used to explain how job demands such as workload, automation pressure, cognitive stress deplete Employee's energy level and that job resources like autonomy, learning opportunities, and supervisor support will reduce Employee's stress and increase their ability to engage. The most recent empirical studies have shown evidence supporting the JD-R Model, which indicates that Job Autonomy and Psychological Well-Being are both related to increased In-Role and Extra-Role Performance, mediated by Employee Engagement (Lee & Jo, 2023, Demerouti et al., 2001)

On the other hand, social exchange theory (SET) provides a relational perspective that indicates that when employees believe their organisations care about their welfare over the long term employees are likely to return the benefit of being engaged, loyal, and trusting to their organisations by committing to discretionary effort. This reciprocal behaviour is essential for maintaining employee motivation and employee retention during changing and uncertain business environments. However, Human resource scholars have indicated the need for an integrated theoretical framework to better understand the complex interactions of resource-based and social exchange mechanisms in relation to human resource sustainability (Guest, 2017). Such integrated theoretical models allow HR professionals to develop holistic human capital systems that promote the well-being of their employees and the sustained performance of their organisations (Dhar, 2016).

In many developing countries, like India, organisations now see their economic priorities as a greater necessity than investing in worker-related areas. The next step is to integrate the job demands-resources model and social exchange theory as a better explanation of how organisations develop positive employee-related outcomes through sustainable human resource management (HRM) and develop long-term positive organisational performance (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

The intention of this research paper is to establish a strong conceptual structure to connect the job demands-resources model and social exchange theory together to demonstrate how sustainable HRM creates multiple positive employee-related benefits in order to support sustainable organisational performance (Eurofound, 2021).

Specifically, the framework aims to clarify the mechanisms through which Sustainable HRM impacts: (Gahlawat & Kundu, 2020, Kim & Qu, 2020)

Employee well-being (physical, psychological, and social),

Work–life balance (WLB),

Employee engagement, and

Sustainable organisational performance (i.e. retention, innovation, and long-term resilience).

The study addresses major gaps in contemporary HRM theory by constructing an integrative model, particularly concerning the generation and preservation of human sustainability in swiftly evolving industrial environments (Kooij & Boon, 2018).

Significance of the Study

The importance of this research lies in the global increase in recognition that employee's well-being is the core foundation, or pillar, of sustainability within an organization; which is very true in all industries that are undergoing rapid digital transformation or structural changes to their business. There have been a number of recent scholarly studies that have reaffirmed the idea that well-being is not just a function of HR, but that it is an actual strategic/environmental, social, and governance (ESG) imperative because an organization must have the ability to be sustainable over a longer term based on the overall organization. Additionally, many recent studies have shown the traditional patterns of HR practices that relate to employee's well-being are now being re-examined in a positive and proactive manner, indicating an overall interest in some of these practices but also that there has not been adequate research on those practices in order for them to be clearly and consistently theorized or applied across all business sectors with particular regard to large-scale manufacturing industries. With the current rapid increase in technology use through automation and AI, there is a rising concern that the implementation of poor technology related to job changes may lead to a decline in employees' trust, sense of psychological safety, sense of equity (equal treatment) and job security, all of which are critical to the concept of Human Sustainability. As a result of the aforementioned items, research that takes an overall focus toward employee's well-being and builds a strong theoretical framework around this is timely and necessary (Kowalski & Loretto, 2017).

This study makes an important addition to the growing body of knowledge about Sustainable HRM and its application in non-Western or developing economies like India as there is not a significant amount of research on Sustainable HRM in developing countries. A recent meta-analysis of papers published between 2020-2021 indicates that most sustainable HRM studies were conducted within Western and developed countries. Such a concentration leads to a lack of the development of Sustainable HRM Frameworks which recognise the unique cultural, institutional, and industrial contexts of developing nations (e.g., India). The rapid change and competition that the Indian automotive sector is currently experiencing create an immediate demand for Sustainable HRM conceptual models that reflect the day-to-day experiences of employees working within an industry undergoing rapid transformation. The present study seeks to develop the Framework for Sustainable HRM in a manufacturing industry and thus closes a gap in knowledge regarding the creation of Sustainable HRM in developing or non-Western countries by adding additional contextual richness to the overall discussion regarding Sustainable HRM practices worldwide (Lee & Jo, 2023).

The fragmentation of theories surrounding S-HRM is evident through recent literature reviews. Limited integrative studies have brought together the concepts of job resource(s), social exchange relationships between leaders and employees and long-term sustainability outcomes. The field of Green HRM, the well-being and engagement of employees is an area of research; however, few studies provide insights on how structural job resources (i.e. trust, support, fairness) work in combination to have sustainable outcomes for employees. The framework above will move toward addressing fragmentation of this field by integrating JD-R Model and Social Exchange Theory will represent a more thorough understanding of how employee well-being and work-life balance will be achieved in industries that are changing quickly due to technology advancements (Li et al., 2024).

Literature Review

Sustainable Human Resource Management

A foundational model of Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM), known as the ROC model (Respect, Openness, and Continuity), was introduced by De Prins et al. (2014), and continues to be used in research on factors contributing to SHRM today. Recent research shows that there is an increasing trend in HR systems incorporating Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) issues. The

recent 2024 systematic review of Employee Well-Being Based HR Practices (EWBHRPs) indicates that organisations see HRM increasingly as a strategic means of achieving Sustainability Outcomes including employee well-being; social equity and fairness; and environmental responsibility and ethical business Governance. The 2025 meta-analysis on Sustainable HRM showed that the application of Sustainable HRM leads to organisational resilience by creating psychologically safe work environments; improving employee retention rates; and increasing employee commitment (Parker et al., 2020).

Human Resource Management (HRM) is influenced by sustainable HRM Practices in many high-productivity sectors, such as the automotive and manufacturing industries (Ren et al., 2018).

Most of the employees in these industries operate continuously using their enduring strength and physical labor, with the majority of employees working on a scheduled basis as a result of the need to use technology for their job functions, which may require additional hours of work time. The following sustainable HRM Practices are found in these high productivity industries (Schaufeli, 2024):

Developing and implementing systems for occupational health and safety;

Fairly distributing workloads;

Continuously developing employees' skill sets;

Providing mental health services and/or mental health support;

Providing employees with assistance in achieving work-life balance

.Mehta and Maheshwari (2023) reviewed the effects of Sustainable HRM on Employee Well-Being (EWB) and Work-Life Balance (WLB), and concluded that these practices will improve employee performance and engagement, as well as decrease employee turnover intentions. In addition, the authors found that all three factors were mediators in influencing workplace performance and engagement, as well as employee turnover intentions.

In addition to Sustainable HRM Practices previously cited by Mehta and Maheshwari (2023), several studies of Human-AI Workplace models (2024) indicate that supporting an inclusive workplace environment and adopting Responsible Technology are key factors in developing sustainable human resource practices in manufacturing (Alfes et al., 2013).

In conclusion, Sustainable HRM is advancing from a people-based HRM philosophy to a comprehensive sustainability strategy where human capital is the primary driver of long-term organisational success (Ancarani et al., 2019).

Employee Well-Being

Workplace well-being includes workers' physical and mental well-being, social well-being, and their ability to effectively manage the boundaries between work and home life. Mental well-being is typically associated with stress, burnout, engagement with the work itself, finding meaning in work, and having emotional resilience. Physical well-being is usually related to fatigue, safety through ergonomics, safety through work-related health issues, and strain caused by physical exertion. Social well-being is represented through an employee's relationships, feeling of belonging, trust with co-workers, and overall supportive environment within the organization. Work-life well-being encompasses how well an employee is able to maintain a healthy balance between his or her work life and home life; how much control he or she has over his or her boundaries between work, marital and family duties; and how much conflict he or she is able to minimize through effective management of life roles (Arole & Arole, 2022).

Guest (2017) has indicated that organizational well-being is becoming a primary focus for organizations as a strategic priority. The events after 2020 have accelerated this emphasis on well-being. Hybrid workplace models, increased use of digital technology, and greater performance pressures on employees have increased the risk of employees suffering from burnout, role overload, and anxiety. In a review of current HR practices in the area of employee well-being performed in 2024 found that

although employee well-being has been talked about in detail, organizations still frequently do not have systems in place to deliver comprehensive support for an employee's psychological, physical, and social well-being; therefore, well-being will be increasingly important for the performance of organizations in the coming years. Additionally, a recent empirical research study completed in 2025 shows that well-being is a strong predictor of job satisfaction, safety at work, resilience, and long-term employability in hybrid and technologically advanced work environments (Bailey et al., 2017).

In the automobile industry, workers face a lot of stress at work, like long hours, strict timelines, ergonomic pain, and rising fear about automation. All of these things together lower mental and physical health, which shows how important it is for HR practices to improve resources to help people deal with stress and stay engaged.

Work–Life Balance (WLB)

Work-life balance refers to an employee's ability to manage both their professional and personal responsibilities without experiencing significant stress or conflict between the two. According to Kundu & Gahlawat (2018), WLB is influenced by structural job characteristics, organizational support, and boundary management strategies; however, newly emerging WLB trends are attributed to changes in workplace due to Covid-19, technology advancements and how people utilise technology, and shifts in family structures.

Sustainable HRM can help enhance WLB by allowing employees to have a variety of options for work schedules, have predictable work schedules, manage fatigue from work, balance workloads among employees, provide supportive supervisors, and have ways to manage boundaries between work and home. Furthermore, there is now evidence that employee WLB can mediate the relationship between sustainable HRM practices and employee engagement, retention, and outcomes (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2023).

Industry 4.0 and its Impact on Human Sustainability

One of the many significant changes in manufacturing is Industry 4.0. This massive transformation of how we make products involves increased use of automation, robotics, artificial intelligence, smart systems, and a digitalised supply chain to help make manufacturing easier. While many companies will benefit from these technologies by improving their productivity and efficiency, this increased efficiency presents challenges to the sustainability of Human Beings employed in manufacturing. Manufacturing employees' increased use of cognitive function, skill deterioration due to automation and robotics, artificial intelligence-induced employment uncertainty, and reduced autonomy as a result of "technological" regimented work systems.

As a result of rapid digital transformation, research conducted over the next five years has identified numerous concerns for humans' sustainability. A human centre for AI integration for workplace well-being warns that insufficient management of the way that AI is integrated into the workplace could result in undermining psychological safety, fairness, and trust leading to higher levels of stress, emotional exhaustion, and reduced commitment to the organisation.

In 2025, another review released will document that along with increased job demands, the level of technical volatility will require workers in the automotive and other manufacturing industries to develop their learning abilities, be adaptable, and demonstrate resiliency.

These pressures make it even more important for HR methods that improve resources, such as training, psychological safety, open communication, participatory redesign of work, and supportive supervisory relationships, to promote long-term employee well-being and work-life balance. Sustainable HRM is therefore a key factor in helping people in technology-heavy businesses be flexible and resilient.

Theoretical Foundations

This study is contributed to by two separate contributions in the study of how sustainable human resource management (HRM) can have a positive effect on both employee well-being, and the balance

between an individual's personal and work life. The JD-R Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; 2017) gives a structure to understand the work environment, and the premise of all job characteristics being separated into two categories of job demands and job resources. The job demand component represents anything in the job that requires physical and/or mental effort over a long period of time, including, for example, workload, pressure of time, and confusion on how to do your job; therefore, these are all potential costs to an employee's health and work performance. There has been recent research showing that the technologies used in automated manufacturing and automotive have caused the previous job demands to increase due to the increasing number of cognitive workloads, pressures to perform at high levels, and techno-stress (Wang et al., 2024). The job resource component, on the other hand, represents whatever in the workplace is beneficial to the employee in managing demands, achieving goals, and allowing for personal development, for example, autonomy, support from supervisors, providing feedback on performance, providing educational opportunities, and creating an environment of psychological safety. Recent research (Singh & Dutchak, 2023; Li et al., 2024) highlights the significance of these resources in reducing stress associated with AI-driven workflows and high-pressure manufacturing environments.

The Job Demands-Resource (JD-R) Model describes two key processes, the Health Impairment Process and the Motivational Process, which are regarded as strengths of this model. The Health Impairment Process explains that chronic and extreme demands placed upon employees will gradually diminish their energy reserves and leave them with nothing to offer, ultimately resulting in physical exhaustion and/or burnout. A growing concern following the COVID-19 pandemic is that there has been an increased incidence of burnout resulting from the demands of the workplace, especially in industrial sectors (Maruping et al., 2023). The Motivational Process explains how Job Resources can enhance employees' engagement and resilience, and overall proactive behaviours. Job Resources encompass such things as autonomy in respect to decision making, developmental opportunities and supportive management or leadership – all of which are necessary for maintaining employee engagement during the transition to Industry 4.0 (Kakar and Shah, 2024). When applied within the context of the Automotive Industry, the JD-R Model illustrates how the Human Resource Management (HRM) systems of Indian automotive manufacturers, which are rich with Job Resources, can help alleviate the stresses associated with long work hours, and the pressures created as a result of a lean production approach, as well as the challenges associated with and rapid advancement of technology, and thereby sustain its performance.

The JD-R model helps identify the opinions professionals have about their work based on both structural and psychological factors, whereas Social Exchange Theory looks at how people in organizations interact with one another through the concept of social exchange (Blau, 1964). In essence, Social Exchange Theory assumes that there exists a social norm of reciprocity, trust, and obligation, which is the guiding force for how individuals act toward one another within an organization's social exchange context. Through this lens of Social Exchange Theory, employees also form an opinion regarding the value of their contributions to an organization in addition to their understanding of how much organizations value employees' health and happiness; this is referred to as Perceived Organizational Support (POS). Perceived Organizational Support is derived from the perception of employees that they are being treated with respect by the organization and therefore are more likely to respond with higher levels of Affective Commitment, Loyalty, and Engagement (Agarwal & Gupta, 2023; Chen et al., 2024). Leader-member exchange (LMX), another important part of SET, shows how important it is for employees to have a good relationship with their bosses. LMX builds high-quality connections that make it possible for trust, psychological safety, and discretionary behaviour to develop. All of these things will be very critical for keeping up performance in a complicated industrial setting. Recent evidence suggests that supportive leadership is a key mediator linking sustainable HRM practices to the enhancement of employee resilience and adaptability in fast evolving technological industries (Park & Kim, 2025).

Combining both JD-R and SET theories will give us a more complete view of the concept of sustainable Human Resource Management than using either of them alone. JD-R helps us understand the way that the design of the job structure impacts how employees perceive their relationship with their job, while SET explains how the employees' perception of fairness and trust in their employer will

influence how they view the job structure. Recent studies have suggested that both of these components must be used in conjunction to develop an integrated model which addresses both the structural and social aspects of an organisation's work environment (Guest, 2023; Mehta & Maheshwari, 2023). It has been shown that HR strategies that focus on providing the employee with resources are not effective unless the employee also views those resources as true expressions of organisational concern. The combination of the JD-R and SET approaches to HR resource-based practices show that HR based resources can have the greatest impact when they are integrated into a positive environment and that relational investments in fairness and trust can have a greater effect when combined with tangible resources. Therefore, for sustainable HRM to promote employee well-being and maintain a healthy balance between personal and professional lives, it is necessary to address both aspects of the work environment simultaneously: the organisationally designed job structure, which consists of demands and resources, and the social relationships within that organisation. This dual-theoretical integration constitutes the basis of the conceptual framework offered in this study, providing a comprehensive explanation of how structural and relational forces interact to influence sustainable employee outcomes in India's fast developing automotive sector. This dual-theoretical integration constitutes the basis of the conceptual framework offered in this study, providing a comprehensive explanation of how structural and relational forces interact to influence sustainable employee outcomes in India's fast developing automotive sector.

Research Methodology

Through a combination of theory development and conceptual method(s), this study takes an integrative approach to support the development of the HRM integration framework. It incorporates a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and provides an opportunity for theoretical integration and development of sound theoretical conceptual frameworks for new areas of HRM research. A comprehensive search of the literature in Scopus database, using combinations of keywords associated with Sustainable HRM; Employee Sustainability; JD-R Model; Social Exchange Theory; Employee Well-Being; Work-Life Balance; Industry 4.0 Workforce; Automotive Sector; and HR Support, was conducted to identify all relevant studies. Techniques to optimise the search were implemented in accordance with the PRISMA-S guideline; this provided methodological rigor in the execution of the review. All included literature were peer-reviewed studies published during 2000 to 2025, addressed sustainable HRM, Job Demands and Resources, Social Exchange Theory, Employee Well-Being, Work-Life Balance, Organisational Sustainability, and in particular, in the manufacturing sector, Emerging Economies or Industry 4.0 contexts.

In accordance with current standards for designing human resource management (HRM) reviews, poor relevance, conceptual rigour and peer-reviewed quality led to the exclusion of studies from the earlier examination process. The systematic search process used the Protocols of PRISMA 2020 and PRISMA-C (2023) to generate 460 studies. From that group of studies, after completing full-text assessments, the final review included 52 studies that fulfilled all eligibility requirements. The review involved the use of iterative coding and thematic mapping, as suggested in the more current approaches to integrative HRM reviews. The results generated a total of five thematic categories. These include: (1) the increasing intensity of job demands created by, and in response to, the new technologies within certain manufacturing and technology based organisations; (2) job resources, organisational support and perceived psychological security are essential to enhancing employee "wellbeing"; (3) relational aspects of organisations including, P.O.S., trust, fairness and reciprocity, support the employee; (4) examples of environmentally and socially sustainable HRM practices comprise elements such as flexible work structures, equitable opportunities for employee development and well-being interventions; and (5) the impact of Industry 4.0 on job design, skills required, autonomy, and employee experience. These themes collectively contributed to the formulation of an integrative conceptual framework that links demand-resource dynamics with relational exchange processes to clarify employee well-being and work-life balance within the evolving context of India's automotive industry, in accordance with recent scholarship advocating for multi-theoretical, context-sensitive models in sustainable HRM research.

Proposed Conceptual Framework

The proposed conceptual framework (Fig. 1) integrates the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model and Social Exchange Theory (SET) to provide a comprehensive, multi-level explanation of how Sustainable Human Resource Management (Sustainable HRM) practices influence employee well-being and work–life balance (WLB), ultimately driving long-term organisational sustainability. The increasing importance of human sustainability — which includes psychological well-being, balance between work and life, Factor of health, and Factor of meaningful work — has been established to be a dominant force relative to organisation resilience and competitive advantage, particularly within fast-changing technological environments. Various studies indicate that HRM should not only focus on sustainable HRM, but rather, integrate through a number of different elements, including Job Design, Resource Distribution, a Relational Climate— these factors working collaboratively form the framework for the sustainable HRM model. The framework proposed here illustrates how the Structural Job Resources and Relational Exchanges can have a joint impact on the Sustainable Employee and Organisational Outcomes.

The framework posits that job demands, job resources, sustainable HR practices, and social exchange relationships all operate interdependently to influence significant employee results and, consequently, to contribute to the long-term sustainability of the organisation. Increased levels of job demands, as the result of the continued growth of high demanding jobs, worker anxieties related to automation, cognitive overload and increased production demand in the automotive industry, have exacerbated job demands and pose a direct threat to worker health. These demands (i.e. workload, time pressure, role overload and technological uncertainty) establish structural pressure points within the JD-R health impairment process, increasing the incidence of burnout, fatigue and work-family conflict. Balanced by these demands, are job resources, such as; autonomy, supervisory support, opportunities for learning, role clarity and decision making authority, all of which have been linked through empirical research to greater levels of engagement, resilience and psychological empowerment (Bakker and Demerouti-2017. In the context of Industry 4.0 manufacturing, the most recent research has highlighted that job resources will also need to provide “future resources”, i.e., the development of employees through digital upskilling, and the provision by companies of practices around AI Transparency in order to enable workers to mitigate their occupational insecurities and sustain their health and well-being. The framework therefore highlights the position of these resources as primary mediators to mitigate strain and to facilitate sustained engagement.

Sustainable Human Resource Management practices also provide the foundation of the organisation that enables human sustainability, in addition to job resources as critical factors supporting human sustainability. For instance, practices such as flexible work arrangements, psychological safety initiatives, equitable access to development opportunities, participatory decision-making processes, and equitable workload distributions are more often practices in organisations beyond job resources that supports human sustainability. Studies conducted post-pandemic indicate these practices provide significant positive impacts on employee happiness, organisational commitment, and well-being and establish these practices as critical components of modern-day HRM systems. The framework provides an institutional mechanism for distributing resources fairly and equitably; therefore, no one person determines what resources should be allocated or how to allocate those resources.

The relational aspect of the framework utilises Social Exchange Theory, which explains that employees will reciprocate the investment by the organisation with behaviours that benefit the organisation. Employees who have high-quality social exchange relationships with their supervisors in the form of POS, trust, fairness, psychological safety, and LMX develop a sense of obligation to the organisation and enhance their emotional connection to the organisation. Recent evidence from empirical studies also indicates that sustainable HRM practices are much more successful when they take place in a relational climate with transparent communication, fairness, and supporting leadership.

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The framework therefore recognises relational mechanisms not as optional supplements but as key amplifiers of the effectiveness of job resources and HR practices.

Through these structural and relational components, the core of what employees will achieve within their organisation will be identified as; employee well-being; work-life integration; employee engagement; organisational citizenship behaviour; and employee capability, as these five initiatives have been well established from many studies to be drivers of organisational performance via decreased employee turnover intentions; increased creativity; increased adaptive capacity; and increased organisational identification. Well-being and work-life balance are not an ancillary or welfare initiative, according to the employee engagement and sustainability framework; they are the major pathways in connecting HR practices with organisational sustainability.

Secondly, according to the employee engagement and sustainability framework, as a result of well-being, work-life balance, engagement, organisational citizenship behaviour, and employee capability, organisations will sustain themselves in less turnover with an employee retention rate; increased innovation performance; increased operational reliability; reduced absenteeism; and will build upon their employer brand. Recent research conducted in manufacturing and automotive industries has shown that companies that implement a system of sustainable human resource management outperform their competitors in employee retention and productivity measures, thus supporting the link between Human sustainability and organisational performance. For organisations in volatile, technology-intensive industries, sustaining employee well-being and capability is critical to delivering quality products, ensuring safety, and competing successfully against their competitors.

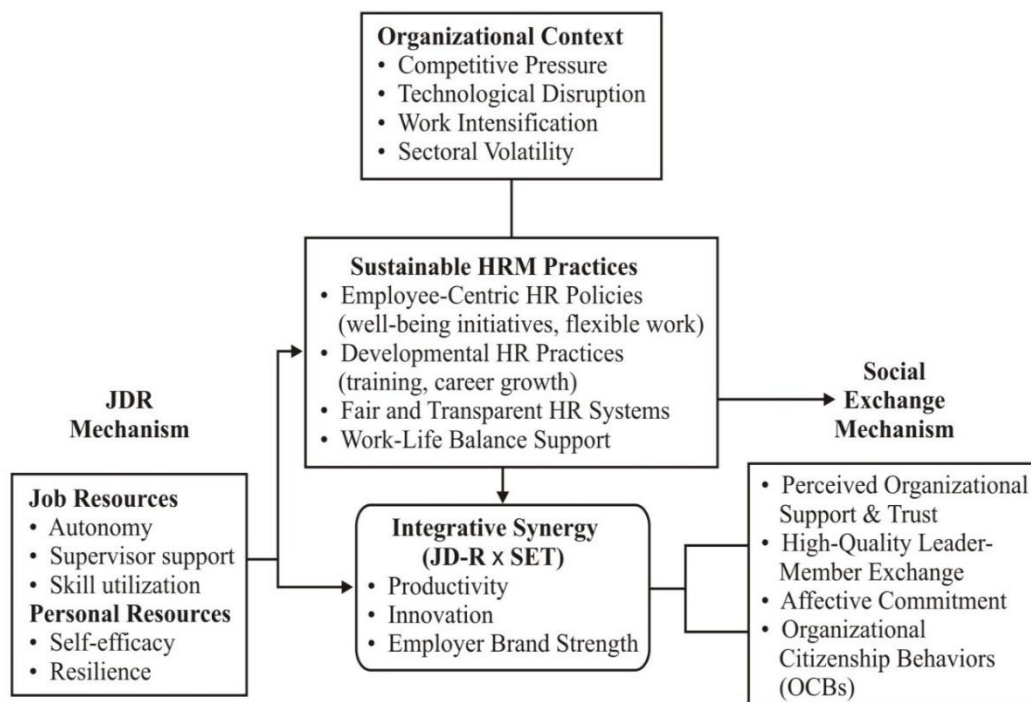


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework for Sustainable HRM

Source: Authors

Conceptual Propositions

The conceptual framework combines the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model and Social Exchange Theory (SET) to show how Sustainable HRM practices affect employee health, work-life balance (WLB), and the long-term health of an organisation. The nine propositions below explain these mechanisms in detail.

JD–R–Based Propositions (Resource–Demand Mechanisms)

P1: Job Resources as Moderators of the Job Demand–Burnout Relationship

In this proposition, job resources (i.e. high degree of autonomy, positively supportive supervisors, clearly defined work roles and tasks, and opportunities for developing skills) act as buffers against the negative impact of job demands on employee burnout in a more dynamic environment such as an automotive facility. In the automotive industry, employees face extreme physical and cognitive demands as a result of high production targets, shift-based operations, and technology-enabled performance monitoring. Sustainable HRM practices that provide employees with the resources they need will enable them to cope better with the job demands placed on them. Job resources help employees cope with job demands by supporting better coping strategies, enabling employees to have greater decision latitude, and providing task-related and psychosocial support, which will help to lessen employee exhaustion and emotional strain. In this way, job resources will act as a protective factor and reduce the link between excessive job demands and burnout.

P2: Job Resources as Drivers of Employee Well-Being through Engagement

According to Proposition 2, Job resources serve to reduce employee strain, but also provide an opportunity for employees to increase their overall quality of life through increased engagement. Data indicates that when employees have access to meaning associated with the job as well as job resources that provide ongoing developments, constructive feedback regarding performance, and basic empowerment, they report greater vigour, more sense of dedication, and increased absorption in the activity of work. Psychological processes that motivate employees to be engaged in work and assist in reducing negative emotional states and ill-being create a more productive workplace for all employees, and support employer support programs. Thus, human resource management practices focused on employee growth and development through learning opportunities and providing a positive management-employee relationship should result in an engaged employee base and positively contribute toward all employees' overall sense of wellness.

P3: Organisational Resources Enhance Work–Life Balance

Organisational resources which enable employees to better achieve their work-life balance by decreasing conflict between work and family include: flexible scheduling, control over organisational boundaries such as daily routines, clear expectations about work hours like predictable work hours, and policies that support recovery.

In industries characterised by high time pressure and rotational shifts, employees are frequently unable to manage their personal responsibilities. However, practices that focus on creating sustainable HRM practices that take into account the personal needs of employees and empower them with control over the boundaries of work/non-work help employees schedule their time, manage their multiple roles, and recover both physically and mentally. These resources help create emotional stability, family functioning, and full well-being.

Relational Mechanisms: Social Exchange based Propositions

P4: Perceived Organisational Support Enhances Affective Commitment

According to proposition 4, employees perceive their organisation positively when they see themselves as a part of a supportive environment created by an organisation with Fair Policies, Caring Leadership, and investing in employee Growth. Along with this experience of organisational support, employees respond positively by showing loyalty and emotional attachment to the Organisation that has provided positive support. In Fast Moving Industries that are facing Technology driven Reskilling and Performance Issues, employees experience the perception of Organisational Support as a strong signal that the Organisation Values the Employees. Thus, Organisational Support provides employees with Connectedness and Sense of Identity, both of which contribute to employees' Affective Commitment.

P5: High-Quality Social Exchanges Promote Organisational Citizenship Behaviours

As proposed in this model, Employees who have high-quality exchanges characterised by mutual respect, trust, fairness, and supportive leadership are more likely to exhibit OCB. OCB is a discretionary behaviour that includes behaviours like taking the initiative and helping a co-worker, and is the foundation of improving productivity, enhancing the quality of products and services, and

providing adaptability to changes associated with complex industrial systems. The OCBs and the enhanced sense of employee belongingness resulting from sustainable HRM practices based on respect and trust can create an environment in which employees go beyond job descriptions to fulfil their potential and achieve results for both their organisations and themselves.

P6: Well-Being Investment Builds Trust, Enhancing Engagement

As stated in Proposition 6, the critical mediating mechanism is trust. When employees perceive that their employer has invested in the well-being of their employees, trust in management will increase. This trust will enhance the credibility of the HR initiatives as well as promote employee engagement to a greater extent. In organizations experiencing the digital transformation process, trust lessens the uncertainty that employees may feel, lessens fear of technology change, and will help to create employees who are willing to put forth discretionary effort toward their organization's success.

Integrative Mechanisms: Job Demand-Resources and Social Exchange Theory based Propositions

P7: Synergistic Effects of Job Resources and Relational Support on Well-Being and WLB

According to the proposition, integrating both structural job resources and interpersonal relationships that enhance employee work responsibility performance would result in long-term favourable work results. Structural job resources such as access to tools and resources provide employees with the 'means' and autonomy to effectively perform their job duties. Relational support provides employees with psychological safety, self-confidence, and resilience. Structural job resources and relational support reinforce each other; when employees have access to job resources combined with relational trust from supervisors/other colleagues, job resources become much more effective to employees, and on the other hand, employee-employer relationships enhance the benefits employees obtain from job resources. The synergism between structural job resources (JD-R) and relational support (SET mechanisms) provides greater employee well-being and work-life balance than either mechanism on its own.

P8: Sustainable HRM Improves Organisational Performance through Well-Being and WLB

The proposition proposes that Sustainability-related Human Resources (SRHRM) through enhancing well-being and WLB (Work-Life Balance), indirectly influences workplace performance. Well-being enhances employee engagement, decreases absenteeism, increases focus/concentration, and increases innovation levels. The addition of WLB reduces employee turnover and retains skilled and experienced employees. These enhancements in the individual employee outcomes ultimately result in operational improvements; higher productivity, reduced error rates and increased employee resilience. Consequently, both well-being and WLB act as primary mediation pathways between Sustainable HR Practices and Long-Term Performance Sustainability.

P9: Sustainable HRM Has Stronger Positive Effects Under Volatility and Technological Disruption

Sustainable HRM is increasingly advantageous in dynamic and technology-oriented settings due to the additional uncertainty and cognitive stresses facing employees resulting from automated, digitized, unpredictable demand cycles, and extremely rapid obsolescence of skills. Due to the sheer volume of uncertainty that employees are exposed to, practices such as open communication, psychological safety, assistance with new skill acquisition, and equitable evaluations will enhance employee resiliency through decreasing levels of uncertainty regarding employment. Because of this, the beneficial influence on employee well-being and WLB of Sustainable HRM practices will be magnified within these challenging environments.

Discussion

In this study, we look at the ways in which employee wellness, balance between their personal and professional life, and overall quality of life coincide with the ability to provide opportunities for an ongoing, sustainable relationship with HRM practices, through a combined analysis of The Job

Demands & Resources Model and The Social Exchange Theory Models. The combination of both Models will result in the development of a greater understanding of how employees perceive their workplace. It has been shown through research that Job Resources such as, Autonomy, Supervisor Support, and Fair Workloads help employees to meet their job requirements but, by themselves do not provide for Employee Engagement or Wellness in order to support Sustainable HRM practices in the long term. Recent research demonstrates that the perceptions employees develop regarding their workplace are based on their views of Job Resource availability, and the Relationship Climate produced by Organizational Practices and Leader Behaviours. Critical factors that influence the way employees perceive HRM Systems include Perceived Organizational Support, Trust, Fairness and other Workplace Behaviours; therefore, a successful approach to Employee Management is one that combines Resource Building Job Design with Relationship Building Workplaces through Clear Communication, Supportive Supervision and Relationship Building Leadership practices.

Combining ways of increasing the workforce for the automotive industry, and possibly other industries that require a high level of physical exertion, to be able to protect the health and welfare of the employees. Research has found that an employee's welfare will have a direct relationship with the reduction of burnout; improved productivity based on their ability to make good decisions; increased levels of creativity; increased commitment to the organisation; and a decreased number of workplace safety-related incidents. Working within the Indian automotive industry presents many similar challenges as repetitive tasks, high deadlines in the delivery of products of the highest quality, and the continued introduction of more and higher-level automated and artificial intelligence technologies, increasing cognitive and physical demands placed on employees. Addressing the well-being of employees is, therefore, not only an issue of morality; it is also a requirement to ensure that employees are capable of producing quality products and to increase the overall resiliency of the organisation. Additionally, as the automotive industry continues to grow in the number of automation and AI technologies that it is using, there will be additional uncertainty regarding employment stability, due to the fact that research has shown that poorly managed transitions to new technologies have a negative impact on the psychological safety and trust levels within organisations. Therefore, it is critical for organisations to support their employees' well-being in order to ensure that the workforce can meet business demands and maintain their commitment to long-term success; therefore, it is crucial that organisations provide the resources necessary to support an employee's well-being as part of their Human Resource practices.

Both the sustainability of individuals and the sustainability of companies are increasingly becoming dependent upon workplace balance (WLB). A Review of Research results from India show a large impact of WLB on Psychological Well-being, Employee Engagement, Employee Retention and Employee Long term performance (Kundu & Gahlawat 2023). The Automotive Industry has historically had some of the most inflexible types of employment conditions, including extremely long work hours and highly regimented shift patterns. However, recently published research findings indicate that companies offering employees at least a moderate amount of flexibility with regards to work hours, i.e., predictable schedules and providing their employees with options to swap shifts, taking micro-breaks, or condensing the workweek into four, stress levels are significantly reduced and WLB is Improved. When organisations provide Supportive Human Resource Management (HRM) Practices, combined with Flexible Working Arrangements, they are building Employees' belief that organizations care for them, therefore incentivising Employees to reciprocate by being engaged with the organisation based on Social Exchange Theory. As organisations start to adopt Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) strategies, and measure Human Sustainability Indicators (HSIs), WLB will become a much more important factor for retaining employees and the long term performance of the organisation.

Through leadership it is possible to connect human resource (HR) practices with positive outcomes for employees. Not only does a leader provide job-related resources for the employee, but a leader's behaviours also create an environment of trust, fairness and psychological safety in their working relationships with their employees. Leadership behaviours also have a significant impact on how employee interprets their employer's HR policy (Wayne et al., 2024). Leadership behaviours that support or encourage employees to believe in healthy HRM practices and believe in their value to the employee's work life amplify the positive effects of the HRM practices that provide employees

additional resources (i.e., JD-R model). Through the chaotic workplace and rapidly changing technology (i.e., COVID-19), the leader that promotes open communication, an organisationally equitable workload and psychological safety ensures that there is continuity and resilience in their organisation. As a result of these behaviours, employees' motivation increases and the employee and employer's work relationship is strengthened through higher levels of employee engagement and employees engaging in discretionary behaviours toward their employer. Therefore, it is vital that the leaders in the automotive sector are trained on the behaviours related to relational competencies (RC), as well as emotional intelligence (EI) and the importance of fairness-based decision-making in relation to an employer's commitment to HRM and achieving sustainable HRM within their organisation.

This work has presented a comprehensive objective from which we can draw conclusions about how small to medium-sized manufacturers may require the implementation of sustainable HRM Practices/Retrieve, via the following combination of resources, relational mechanisms, supportive leadership, and policies in order to produce a human-centered eco-system that is effective in supporting employees' resiliency/well-being, promoting innovation and allowing organizations to sustain themselves for the long term, and through this framework, provides both theoretical approaches and practical pathways to help organizations navigate the changes necessitated by the advent of Industry 4.0 technology changes.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

This study makes several important contributions/theoretical advances to the emerging literature about Sustainable Human Resource Management. The duplication/dual-pathway component this study has created via the Job Demands/Resources (JD-R) model and the Social Exchange Theory (SET) represents a new way to understand how both the structural job resources component and the Social Exchange process together create a mechanism through which companies are able to enhance employee well-being and to help promote employee WLB. Additionally, this study satisfies the growing demand by numerous researchers to develop more integrative multiple-theory approaches to Sustainable HRM that include consideration of both the material/resource-based aspects of work and the psychological/social aspects of work. These integrated theoretical approaches support the increased focus of many research teams on the relationship between employee resources (e.g., autonomy, flexibility, and supervisor support) and employee well-being with the emphasis placed by multiple other researchers on the role of trust, perceived organisational support, and fairness in influencing how employees view and behave regarding sustainability. The theoretical framework created by this study incorporates elements of both resource-based and relational perspectives and provides a way to connect both of these lines of research to one another.

Sustainable HRM, Employee Well-being and Work-Life Balance are three key components that link Sustainable HRM practices to Long-term Organisational Sustainability. A recent study published in early 2024, shows that Employee Well-being is both an outcome of Sustainable HRM practices and an important mechanism by which Human Resources can assist with Long-term Resilience and Long-term Performance of Organisations. Furthermore, Emphasis placed on Employee Well-being & Work-Life Balance (WLB) supports Conceptual Framework and the changing Global Views about Organisations in the Future.

Additionally, the study includes Contextual Moderators related to Human Resources Management Practices such as Technology Disruption, Artificial Intelligence; Volatility and Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC). Numerous studies have provided evidence of NEW Psychological and Ethical Challenges like Technological Job Insecurity, Perceived Fairness Issues, Reduced Workplace Autonomy faced by Organisations that are engaged in AI and Automated Work Environments, and how these Challenges negatively affect the Effectiveness/Efficiency of HRM Systems. Including Contextual Moderators in the Conceptual Framework, allows the researchers to explore the Multiple Ways in which Sustainable HRM Functions and Relationships through the context of Sustainable HRM.

The model's nine propositions provide a clear and organized roadmap for future empirical findings to support the causal linkages between Sustainable Human Resource Management practices, Job Resources, Social Exchange Systems, well-being, and Organizational Sustainability across many industries and cultures. The model has the potential to provide empirical support as well as a theoretical and practical basis for researchers in under-studied areas, including the Global South.

Practical Implications

The findings of this research hold important implications for practitioners, particularly in the automotive and manufacturing industries, who are facing challenges from advancing technology, challenges associated with the changing labour market, and increases in employee expectations. The first consideration is that businesses need to create a work system that provides an adequate balance between the job's demands and the job's resources.

Second, Organisations must increase the provision of high-quality job resources to their employees. This includes improving employee access to training and career development opportunities, supervisor support, and job autonomy. Evidence shows that high-quality training and learning opportunities lead to employee resilience and adaptability in AI-augmented work environments. Further, supervisory support improves employee trust through perceived supervisory fairness and transparent employee evaluation practices. As the basis for Social Exchange Relationships, supervisor support, and improved trust through perceived supervisory fairness and transparency improves psychological contracts.

Third, Organisations must formulate and implement i.e., Institutionalise fair and transparent decision-making, allocation of work, and evaluation of performance by fellow workers. Studies conducted between 2023–2025 reveal that employee perceptions of fairness in decision-making processes, and the use of a fair process of evaluation by supervisors, improves Employee Affective Commitment, reduces Employee Turnover Intentions, and improves Employee Organizational Citizenship Behaviours - All of which are critical outcomes for organisations working in High-Demand Sectors.

Fourth, it is recommended that businesses provide comprehensive well-being programs, such as mental health, ergonomics, fatigue management, and stress reduction. Research conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic showed that manufacturing companies with mental health support programs have a significantly increased ability for employee performance, creativity and company loyalty.

Fifth, wherever possible it is also a good practice for employers to provide their employees with flexible working arrangements. This means allowing them to work from home, or change hours/shifts whenever possible. For example, even in manufacturing workplaces, which are often thought of as having no flexibility in their scheduling, there is now evidence from case studies that controlled flexibility in these workplaces has improved employee work/life balance, reduced absenteeism and increased morale of the workforce.

Sixth, the psychological safety of workers plays an important role in areas where technology is rapidly changing. This is especially true for employees in high-tech sectors who may be apprehensive about using and integrating new technologies due to feeling judged or penalized when making mistakes, learning or asking questions about new systems.

Lastly, businesses should have responsible and transparent AI development practices. Recent studies have shown that when organisations employ transparency while communicating AI-drive transformations, employees support and positively embrace these changes, thus improving employees' perception toward areas such as business objectives, limitations of AI, the effect of AI on job roles, and ethical safeguards. Additionally, AI solutions that are deployed transparently often result in reduced anxiety, increased trust, and enhanced positive engagement with the use of new technology.

In summary, these best practice strategies enhance employees' resilience, decrease employee turnover and burnout while optimising employee talent retention, and provide the ability for an organisation to continue to perform at a high level while sustaining technological disruption and competition. Over time, by implementing Sustainable HRM practices, automotive companies can

achieve a balance between human sustainability and business sustainability. Sustainable Human Resource Management practices will ensure organisations implement productive, ethical, inclusive, and future-ready workplaces.

Conclusion

A key finding from this research is that Sustainable Human Resource Management (Sustainable HRM) Practices in India's automotive industry help organisations achieve their Employee Well-being and Work-life Balance through Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model and through Social Exchange Theory (SET). This new region within this study provides a framework for understanding how Job Resources like autonomy, supervisor support, learning opportunities) interact with Relational Mechanisms such as trust, fairness, perceived organisational support) together affect Employees Outcomes. Also, there is a strong emphasis that Human Sustainability is an essential building block of Organisational Effectiveness, particularly in the age of Industry 4.0. In addition, the recent literature reflects the same conclusion by confirming that Employee Well-being and Psychological Safety are significant components of Organisational Resilience as the shift toward Digital and AI Technologies continues to redefine the way work is done. The Conceptual Model seeks to support modern HRM Studies by addressing fragmentation of theory that persists in Sustainable Human Resource Management (HRM) research. Meta-analyses conducted recently have identified a lack of Integrative Approach to linking Job Resources such as tasks, Relational Exchanges like trust) and Sustainable Performance Outcomes like well-being across Emerging Economies like India. Through grounding the framework within the context of India's Automotive Industry—characterized by technological disruptions, production volatility, and shifts in labour skills—this framework provides nuance to the Global HRM Theories and provides answers to the many recent calls for the development of non-Western-based HRM Theories with the intention to create an empirically validated Structured Set of Propositions intended to lead to a program of future quantitative and qualitative research. The research presented on this research paper was concrete evidence that there is a dramatic shift in the practices associated with Sustainable Human Resource Management. Rather than focusing on potential ethical or welfare-based initiatives, these Sustainable Human Resource Management Practices have migrated towards a Strategic Concept with the primary purpose of allowing organizations to create a Sustainable Competitive Advantage by implementing Employee Talent Retention Strategies and creating a Culture of Employee Innovation.

Organizational studies performed from 2023-2025 have shown that Organizations promoting Employee Well-being, creating Fair & Equal Workplaces and supporting a Psychological Safety & Trust Culture and offering Flexibility outperform Organizational Human Resource Management Systems based solely on Operating Efficiency where there is an increasing demand for organizations that provide this sort of support from Technology-Based Companies. Through Adapting to the Impact of Automation, Electrification & Digitization, Sustainable Human Resource Practices will lay the foundation for a Human-Centred approach that offers Employee Engagement, Employee Creativity & Employee Resiliency.

This paper contributes to the perceived/proposed theory, methodology, and practice of Sustainable HRM (SHRM). It provides an integrated foundation for the development of SHRM theories and clearly states hypotheses that can be tested experimentally and implemented in real-time. Furthermore, it offers HR leaders a framework to enable them to balance productivity, adapt to increasing technological demands, and develop human-centric values/behaviours. Therefore, with the increasing impact of AI, advanced manufacturing, and socio-economic volatility on our workforce, SHRM is fast becoming not only a responsibility of every organization but also an essential capability to provide long-term sustainable growth, innovation and competitiveness. Future empirical research that employs this framework may refine and validate the pathways to aggrandize the necessary evidence supporting SHRM practices in India and elsewhere.

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