



Achieving Sustainable Development Goals in Sports Organizations Through Socially Responsible Human Resource Management

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Abstract

The present study aimed to examine the role of socially responsible human resource management (SRHRM) in achieving sustainable development goals within sports organizations in Markazi Province. In terms of purpose, this was an applied research; in terms of data collection, it followed a descriptive–correlational design. The statistical population comprised all employees of sports organizations in Markazi Province (including the Department of Sports and Youth, municipalities, and sports federations). Using the accessible sampling method, 209 individuals were selected as the sample. Data were gathered through standardized questionnaires on socially responsible human resource management, person–organization fit, and sustainable development. The face and content validity of the questionnaires were verified by experts, and their reliability was confirmed using Cronbach’s alpha coefficients. Data analysis was conducted through descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, including structural equation modeling, using SPSS₁₆ and PLS₃. The results indicated that socially responsible human resource management had a significant positive effect on sustainable development ($\beta = 0.328$, $t = 4.769$, $p = 0.001$). Person–organization fit also showed a significant positive effect on sustainable development ($\beta = 0.166$, $t = 2.227$, $p = 0.026$). Moreover, person–organization fit significantly moderated the relationship between socially responsible human resource management and sustainable development ($\beta = 0.200$, $t = 3.579$, $p = 0.001$). Therefore, sports organizations can promote the attainment of sustainable development goals by adopting a socially responsible approach to human resource management in dealing with internal stakeholders and by considering person–organization fit in SRHRM practices.

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The findings of this study provide valuable insights for HR management and planning—from recruitment to compensation—in supporting sustainable organizational development.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

The concept of Sustainable Development (SD), defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, has been globally accepted for five decades. However, despite decades of research, a deep gap persists between the general theory of SD and its actual implementation within the core business processes of organizations. A key area for achieving SD goals is the sports industry, as sports act as a “global village” due to their extensive influence on social, economic, and environmental dimensions. The United Nations recognizes the critical role of sport in achieving SDGs. Consequently, sports organizations must adopt a comprehensive view of sustainability indicators and integrate them into their core strategies; failing to do so invites institutional and public pressure. The successful execution of any organizational strategy, especially SD goals, critically depends on the active commitment of employees, as they are the driving force behind policy implementation. In this context, Human Resource Management (HRM) plays a vital role in empowering employees, who are considered the organization’s most crucial asset. Employees stand on the front line of translating sustainability theory into practice. This necessity has led to the emergence of Socially Responsible Human Resource Management (CSRHRM), which focuses on an organization’s responsibilities toward its employees (the internal dimension of CSR). This internal focus is the foundation for the successful execution of the organization’s external social commitments (to the environment and society). Evidence suggests that CSRHRM creates competitive advantages by addressing employee well-being, fair recruitment, compensation, and equity, thereby engaging employees in external environmental and social sustainability efforts. Research confirms that integrating HR and CSR strategies institutionalizes a culture of sustainability and ensures long-term organizational viability. Achieving sustainability goals is impossible without the active effort and commitment of human resources, necessitating a deep understanding of these concepts by employees. Furthermore, the effectiveness of CSRHRM is contingent upon individual factors. Person-Organization Fit (P-O Fit), which measures the alignment of individual values with organizational culture, acts as a crucial moderator. High value congruence enhances job commitment and motivation, leading to improved job performance. This alignment reinforces employee acceptance and commitment to CSRHRM concepts and, subsequently, their effective effort toward achieving the organization’s secondary goals—sustainability. In conclusion, the performance of sports organizations concerning SD goals is directly dependent on their human resource function, making this dimension a strategic imperative. Given current environmental and economic pressures,

sustainability is no longer optional. Achieving these goals is unattainable without active employee participation, highlighting the necessity of integrating internal responsibility with external strategies. This research specifically focuses on sports organizations to address the research gap concerning the psychological mechanisms—namely, the moderating role of P-O Fit—in translating CSRHRM policies into sustainability outcomes within this industry.

Methodology

This current study is applied in terms of objective, and descriptive and correlational in nature and methodology. The statistical population comprised all employees of sports organizations in Markazi Province (including the Departments of Sports and Youth, Municipalities, and Sports Federations), totaling 421 individuals. Following Barclay et al.'s (1996) guideline, the required sample size was determined to be 209, selected using convenience sampling (Davari & Rezazadeh, 2018). Data were collected using electronic questionnaires designed to measure Socially Responsible Human Resource Management (CSRHRM), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and Value Person-Organization Fit (P-O Fit). The validity of the questionnaires was confirmed through expert review, and reliability was established using Cronbach's Alpha. Descriptive data analysis was performed using SPSS version 16 software. Testing the proposed model (hypothesis testing) was conducted through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using PLS-SEM software (specifically SmartPLS 3). This model testing involved three sequential steps: assessment of the measurement model, assessment of the structural model, and evaluation of the overall research model.

Results

The results of the measurement model fit indicated that all item factor loadings were above 0.40 (with $t > 1.96$), and both Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) were above 0.70, confirming the reliability of the measurement model. The validity of the measurement model was established through convergent validity and discriminant validity. Convergent validity was achieved by satisfying three conditions: 1) Composite Reliability (CR) exceeded 0.70; 2) Composite Reliability was greater than the Average Variance Extracted ($CR > AVE$), and 3) the Average Variance Extracted was greater than 0.50. Discriminant validity was assessed using two methods: 1) Cross-loadings: which demonstrated that the cross-loading of an indicator on its latent construct was greater than its cross-loading on other constructs, and 2) the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which showed that the AVE for each construct was greater than the shared variance between that construct and other constructs (i.e., the square of the correlation coefficients between the constructs).

The results of the structural model fit (inner model) were examined using three criteria: 1) Path Coefficients and t-values: which indicated that all path coefficients were statistically significant at the 95% confidence level ($t > 1.96$); 2) R^2 values, which, when compared against Henseler et al. (2009)

benchmarks, showed a desirable fit; and 3) the Stone-Geisser Q^2 values, which yielded positive figures, indicating predictive power (Table 1).

Table 1. Structural Model Fit Indices

	R Squares	Communality	Redundancy (Q^2)
SR-HRM	-	0.489	-
P-O Fit	-	0.364	-
SD Goals	0.394	0.514	0.228

Source: Research Results

The results of the hypothesis testing are also presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of Hypothesis Testing

		Path Coefficient	t-values	Result	
SR-HRM	→	SD Goals	0.328	4.769	supported
P-O Fit	→	SD Goals	0.166	2.227	supported
The Moderating Role of P-O Fit			0.200	3.575	supported

Source: Research Results

Conclusion

Since sustainable development goals must ultimately be achieved through human resources, HR management should act in a socially responsible manner toward employees. When employees perceive that SRHRM practices are irresponsible—such as unfair recruitment, inadequate training, inequitable compensation, or biased performance evaluations—they lose motivation and become disengaged from both general organizational objectives and specific sustainability goals. Therefore, organizations striving for sustainable development must begin with internal responsibility—by treating their employees fairly and responsibly. This internal alignment encourages employees to contribute fully to the organization's external aims, including sustainable development objectives. Individuals are naturally more committed to values that correspond to their personal beliefs; hence, a greater value fit between employees and the organization strengthens the relationship between SRHRM and sustainable development. When this value fit is high, employees identify themselves as integral members of the organization and demonstrate strong commitment to its goals and mission. Conversely, when the fit is weak, this relationship tends to weaken or break down.

Keywords: sports organizations, social goals, economic goals, environmental goals, human resources