The Effect of Environmental Dynamism Due to Covid-19 on Sustainable HRM: A Systematic Literature Review

Ratri Buda Nugrahanti[✉], Armanu, Dodi Wirawan Irawanto, and Djumilah Hadiwidjojo

Dept. of Management, Faculty of Economic and Business, Brawijaya University, Malang, Indonesia
ra3buda@student.ub.ac.id

Abstract. The study tries to address the effect of environmental dynamism due to COVID-19 on Sustainable HRM and learn the strategies implemented during the crisis to be adopted in post-COVID-19 and other turbulent times. 19 peer-reviewed articles published during the COVID-19 pandemic for the period of 2020–2022 were analyzed. The study revealed that the dynamism caused by COVID-19 has exposed both challenges and advantages. The strategies on sustainable HRM during the COVID-19 that can be learn on post-COVID-19 or other turbulence times, such as providing work flexibility, focus on employees' well-being, promote employee participation and engagement, promote innovation and the use of innovative methods, and provide leadership commitment. We also found geographical imbalance on African context in terms of research on sustainable HRM. However, due to the nature of the study, which is systematic literature review, we therefore encourage and advocate future scholars to further investigate the relationships between the environmental dynamism to sustainable HRM empirically.

Keywords: Sustainable HRM · Environmental Dynamism · COVID-19 · SLR

1 Introduction

The concept of sustainability has emerged as old as Aristotle's era, but it has gained its prominent since the "Brundtland Commission" in 1987. Since then, the idea of sustainability has been incorporated into business practices. The ecological perspective of sustainability has been incorporated into the business perspective which mostly uses the term "Green". While the social dimension of sustainability has been adopted into "Corporate Social Responsibility". In short, the idea of sustainability in business practice and perspective is mostly linked to sustainable competitive advantage [1].

Sustainability is the long-term goal of every business and is the condition to force firms to possess routine capabilities that would give them a competitive advantage during stiff rivalry for resources, market share, and profitability. The quest for sustainability drives the agenda for businesses to become different with unique characteristics distinct

from others to stay profitable. In the middle of a dynamic environmental challenge, firms were able to utilize resources and capabilities at a given time to engage in the changes to register some level of control and success in the market. Businesses evolve from profit-making to growth and sustainable competitive advantage which is possible through the internal efforts in the hands of employees. The essence of sustainability of the firm depends to a large extent on its ability to withstand environmental pressures and to become proactive to engage to its advantage. In essence, sustainability is to strengthen the ability of the firm to stay relevant, make a profit when it matters but able to overcome environmental challenges to stay in existence. The firm's sustainability exploits translate into a sustainable competitive advantage largely based on internal resources according to the views expressed by the proponents of the resource-based theory [2–5]. To be specific, intangible resources are dupped as the core assets or core capability of the firm responsible for its existence. The sustainability of the firm, which is induced by the employees, defines its long-term capability to stay in business. It is the routine core capabilities of the firm that also define the sustainability of human resource management. The key to the sustainability of the firm largely depends on or relates to how sustainable the intangible assets (employees) of the firm are utilized to help serve the current strengths of the organization's competitiveness and yet have the capacity to position for the long run function of the firm.

Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM) is today gaining more prominence than ever before. This is due to the sheer and sharp transformation of the nature of work and employment practice. Basically, sustainable human resource management takes credence from strategic human resource management. Which involves integrating human resource strategy with the business or corporate strategy of the organization as the driver to define long term sustainability of human resources as core intangible assets to predict the outcome of the firm for a long haul. The thoughts of sustainable HRM stood out as an alternative approach that combines the ideas of strategic human resource management to help organizations stay relevant in the long haul to serve their purpose. The thought of SHRM involves multiple different approaches with initial ideas connected to environmental issues in defining the future of work and organization. The second idea relates to the concern about how advancement in technology is rapidly changing the nature of work, the physical structure of organization and defining relationship in the organization.

Most of the research on sustainability approach recognizes three related concepts of economic, social, and environmental with a triple bottom line value in helping the organization for long-term existence. The most dominant view about SHRM emphasizes the desire for SHRM to invest in employees as the single most important basic resource capable of powering organizations to become relevant and sustainable in the hit of threats and challenges. According to Van Buren [6], sustainable HRM is defined in line with giving prominence to the outcomes for social and human which contribute to the continuation of the organization in the long term to sustain the organization.

SHRM is centrally focused on many research papers as discussions that profess the diminishing role of human resources (employees) in the organization in the foreseeable future. Technology is indeed the single most important force that has transformed the nature of work and workplace engagement. Technological breakthroughs in robots are

gradually replacing blue-collar jobs while artificial intelligence is also replacing white-collar jobs. Notwithstanding, human resources remain the most important asset of the organization in the moment of unrecognized environmental changes. The recent environmental dynamism caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is the living reality of the role played by most organizations' employees to help stay relevant. Robots and artificial intelligence are indeed tools of performance with great efficiency and effectiveness for the firm. But robots and AI lack the routine capabilities or ability to detect and take notice of environmental uncertainties to adopt and adapt to help the firm survive the shock. Robots and AI must be re-programmed to enable them to re-engage in the current environmental changes. Another major challenge which is active and seemingly looming is the effect climate change on all businesses where employees are at the receiving end but proactively participating to play a major part to addressing the problem or lessen its impact on man and business. The full wrath of climate change is yet to hit the ground and all businesses are preparing for Armageddon. However, evidential the threats of climate change are clear, many doubt its reality and the politics of climate change is also creating uncertainty for businesses.

COVID-19 exacerbated the circumstances of the changes as there was a heavy reliance on automation and technology during the periods of the total lockdown. Many predicted that jobs that were lost during the pandemic may never recover and some of the changes in the nature of work induced by the pandemic may remain for long at the comfort of the employer and the organization. According to Lund et al. [7] survey of global executives, 66% emphasized the potential skills gaps related to automation and digitization exist in most organisation. McKinsey [7] survey, a third of the respondents said that a shift to digitization has accelerated during the pandemic. In the same survey, 70% of the executives said too, from now on, they will move away from traditional full-time jobs to temporary workers or contractors than they did before the COVID-19 crisis. According to Komm et al. [8], during the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations have come together to utilize talent with transferable skills in a way to a manage work and make it more flexible to help create acceptable outcomes.

SHRM is a force for hope for the organization in the future. The next test for sustainable HRM is the post-covid-19, whether gains registered by most organizations and institutions during the pandemic with help of employees will become major lessons for the long-anticipated impact of global warming caused by climate change. The environmental dynamism caused by COVID-19 is a true test of the reliability and role played by employees internally to help define and translate the external changes imposed upon the organization into strengths for the organization to survive the pandemic and others seizing upon the opportunities that came along with the pandemic.

The open dilemma of the crisis is the continuous threat to work and work-life activities as every major human activity grind to a halt except the health institutions. Many organizations either temporarily or permanently closed-down operations while other businesses were forced to cut down numbers or operations stay relevant. This places the organization in a critical situation, and a threat to the sustainability of human resource management is imminent. For most of the strategies adopted by many businesses during COVID-19, a lean approach to human resources is predicted to continue to the post-COVID-19 era. The survival and sustainability of the HRM functions have been debated

well before the outbreak of coronavirus with the evolution of the industry 4.0 concept as to the future viability of HRM within the influence of automation of jobs and artificial intelligence. Thus, how the dynamism of COVID-19 will affect sustainable HRM?.

In this paper, COVID-19 is synonymous with environmental dynamism and as such, it created environmental conditions of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity for both businesses and people alike. However, only a few research focuses on the linkage between the effect of environmental dynamism due to COVID-19 and sustainable HRM [9]. Thus, the study wants to address the following research questions:

- What is the orientation or design of most research that discusses the effect of environmental dynamism due to COVID-19 on Sustainable HRM?
- Where is the research addressing the effect of environmental dynamism due to COVID-19 on Sustainable HRM mostly done?
- What theories and variables are mostly used in capturing the relationships between environmental dynamism due to COVID-19 on Sustainable HRM?
- What strategies during the dynamism of COVID-19 that can be learnt to adapt to post-COVID-19 or any other turbulence time?

2 Methodology

The objective of SLR for this research investigation is to gather data from articles in major journals of scientific work relating to sustainable human resource management, business, management, and the dynamism caused by COVID-19 published in the English language from the period 2020 to 2022. Additionally, suitable papers published well before the time frame would be engaged in addressing the theoretical argument of the study. The goal of two years of coverage relates to the fact that COVID-19 or commonly knowns as Coronavirus affected the world and 2022 is the predicted timeline to slow down the spread or eradicate the COVID-19 pandemic. The two-year timeline helps to focus the research agenda and helps gather a large sample of literature materials across many countries, especially most pandemics ravaging parts of the world by COVID-19, such as Asia, the Americas, and Europe.

The study conducts searches using "Publish or Perish" software using the searching key 'Scopus' which is one of the most widely used and recognized academic databases in the field of business and management. Some articles were also traced from the references of identified articles found in the software. The literature will be limited to peer-reviewed journals only.

For this study, some combination of terms related to Sustainable HRM, environmental dynamism, and COVID-19 were used to identify relevant peer-reviewed journal articles from Scopus database. The search was using the combination of the following keywords: 'sustainable human resource management'; 'environmental dynamism'; 'environmental management'; 'human resource management'; 'coronavirus'; COVID-19'; 'human resource management sustainability'; 'human resource flexibility'.

During the search and selection process, inclusion or exclusion criteria were applied as follows:

1. The inclusion criteria were:

- Sustainability should be discussed in the articles within the context of business or management, most specifically HRM
- COVID-19 or environmental dynamism should be discussed in the articles within the business or management context
- The articles should have full text available and published in the English language.
- The articles should be published on /or after January 2020
2. The exclusion criteria were:
- Articles discussing COVID-19 or environmental dynamism but in a non-business or management context
- Articles which are categorized as non-peer-reviewed, such as abstract papers, case studies, editorial, book chapters, short surveys, commentary, and correspondence.
- Full-text articles not available
- Articles were not written in English

Furthermore, a total of 1418 articles were extracted from the database. After removing duplicates, 934 articles were selected and screened whether they were peer-reviewed or not. Thus, 859 articles were reviewed by their titles and abstracts based on the inclusion or exclusion criteria. After screening the title and abstract of the articles, 833 articles were non-business or management context, 13 full text articles were not accessible, and 2 articles were published in a non-English language. Finally, 11 articles were included in the study. Then, using researchrabbit application the relationships between dependent and independent variables were traced and 9 articles that have not been included in the previous screening using "Publish or Perish" software were added for analysis to the study. Figure 1 shows a flowchart that briefly explains the steps in searching, screening, and extracting the articles for the study.
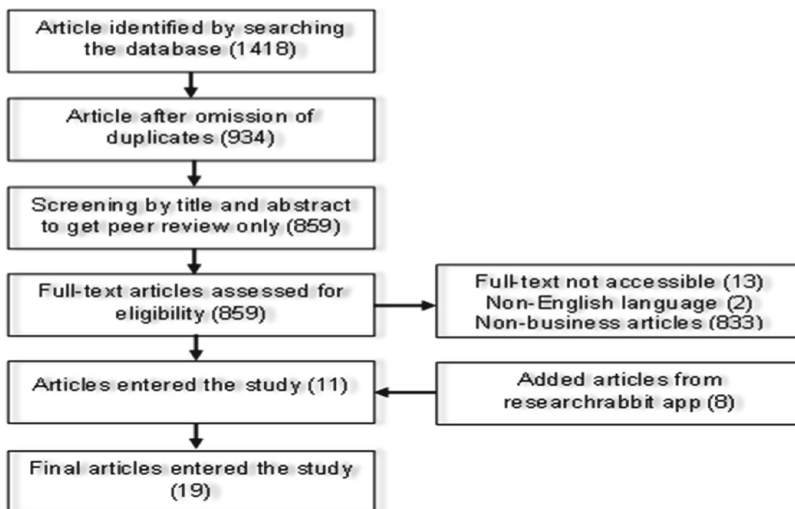

Fig. 1. The searching, screening, and extracting articles for the study.

3   Result and Discussion

The review demonstrates that the majority of articles are qualitative in nature (14 from 19 articles – 6 concept paper, 5 systematic literature review/SLR, 2 semi-structured interviews, and 1 literature review), 3 articles are empirical or quantitative, and 2 are mix both quantitative and qualitative (see Fig. 2).

The geographical focus provides insights into regions and countries which show the most and the least research activities on sustainable HRM. Since the majority of the articles are qualitative in nature and most of them do not provide scope or location of the study, the information about geographical focus somehow derived from the homebase country of the author(s) and co-author(s). The geographical focus in this study highlight the gap presented by Anlesinya and Susomrith [10] where no article on sustainable HRM came from the African context. The information about the geographical focus of this research is summarized in Table 1. And Fig. 3.

Furthermore, the summary of the article review can be seen in Table 2.

The purpose of this study is to mitigate the relationship between environmental dynamism due to COVID-19 pandemic on sustainable human resource management. The study revealed that the dynamism caused by COVID-19 pandemic even though has exposed many challenges, it still has some advantages. The organizations that are able to apply proper strategies regarding the management of human resources in responding to the dynamism caused by COVID-19 were able to survive during the crisis. Those strategies include providing work flexibility, focusing on employees' well-being, promote employee participation and engagement, promote innovation and the use of innovative methods, and provide leadership commitment.

COVID-19 is characterized as creating conditions of VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) resulting in a dynamic environment. The situation has created new phenomenon such as remote working, working from home, virtual work, hybrid work, 50/50 work arrangement. These new ways of working provide flexibility for employees where they can fulfil their obligation to their employer while balancing their time with the family. Despite their flexibility in terms of where and when to work, the working from home phenomenon revealed the fact that it also has negative impact on work-life balance and work stress which if not addressed properly, can reduce job
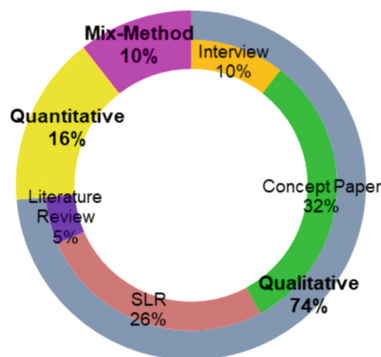

Fig. 2. Research approach and types of articles.

Table 1. Geographical focus of the articles.

No	Year	Author	Co-author	Geographical focus
1	2021	Hanna Kinowska	-	Poland
2	2021	Vaida Jaskeviciute	-	Lithuania
			Asta Stankeviciene	Lithuania
			Danuta Diskiene	Lithuania
			Julija Savicke	Lithuania
3	2022	Mo Chen		China
			Rabia Bashir	Pakistan
4	2022	Afriyadi Cahyadi		Indonesia
			József Poór	Hungary
			Katalin Szabó	Hungary
5	2021	Omar Rabeea Mahdi		Bahrain
			Islam A. Nassar	Bahrain
6	2021	Olivier Boiral		Canada
			Marie-Christine Brotherton	Canada
			Léo Rivaud	Canada
			Laurence Guillaumie	Canada
7	2022	Pavla Vrabcová		Czech Republic
			Hana Urbancová	Czech Republic
8	2021	Felisa Latorre		Spain
			Amalia Raquel Pérez-Nebra	Brazil
			Fabiana Queiroga	Spain
			Carlos-María Alcover	France
9	2021	Diep Ngoc Su		Vietnam
			Diep Luc Tra, Hanh	Vietnam
			My Thi Huynh	Vietnam
			Hai Hong Thi Nguyen	UK
			Barry O'Mahony	UAE
10	2022	Jue Wang		Korea
			Hyun-Jeong Ban	Korea
			Hyun-Woo Joung	USA
			Hak-Seon Kim	Korea
11	2021	Salima Hamouche	-	UAE

Table 1. (*continued*)

No	Year	Author	Co-author	Geographical focus
12	2022	Xiaoyan Liang		China
			Xiwei Zhang	Australia
			Renee Paulet	Australia
			Leven Jianwen Zheng	Hongkong
13	2021	Mohammad Reza Azizi		Iran
			Rasha Atlasi	Iran
			Arash Ziapour	Iran
			Jaffar Abbas	China
			Roya Naemi	Iran
14	2020	Joel B. Carnevale		USA
			Isabella Hatak	Switzerland
15	2021	Dodi Wirawan Irawanto		Indonesia
			Khusnul Rofida Novianti	Indonesia
			Kenny Roz	Indonesia
16	2020	Ankita Saxena		India
			Shashi Shekhar Gautam	India
17	2020	Jane F. Maley		Turkey
			Miriam Moeller	Australia
			Alina F. Ting	Australia
18	2020	Stefan Jooss		Ireland
			Anthony McDonnell	UK
			Kieran Conroy	UK
19	2020	Robert Yawson		USA

satisfaction. Therefore, HRM needs to recreate, and restructure working conditions and workplace design and execute the use of technology and the internet in work [21, 24, 25].

The lockdown and restrictions make such people lose their social and human connections only attainable at the organization, a psychological and physical employee well-being issue for HR function and leadership [26]. The pandemic has alerted and awakened business leaders to identify, optimize, re-assess, and re-access existing technologies and business models in light of the volatility and uncertainty created by the virus. The COVID-19 pandemic has re-engaged organizations to re-imagine their current state for future prospects. For the organizations to continue to be relevant, organizations need to match their core talent to business strategy around identity, agility, and scalability for the future. Core the concerns of the HR function are employee health and well-being

Fig. 3. Geographical focus of the articles.

during the crisis, with a strong emphasis on organizational values and culture, employee motivation, and other HR outcomes. The organization's leaders have empowered HR leaders to take proactive actions to ensure employee physical and emotional stability [16, 22, 27–29].

During the crisis it is important to sustain the relationship between employee and employer in order to give assurance that they will remain with the organization in the long term. Because as humans, employees need to feel that they belong somewhere, respected, and recognize their existence, capability, and support to the organization. Employers through the leaders, acknowledge and recognize challenges that are faced by the employees then be supportive and able to provide solutions. The promotion to employee engagement by employer, sustain the trust of employees which then maintain or even improve their performance [15, 18–20, 23].

The COVID-19 crisis has boosted the adoption of new technology farther to the future. Businesses have been forced to adapt, adopt, and embrace the new way of doing business in order to stay relevant. The crisis not only has pushed innovation to thrive but also promoted the adoption of new methods and ideas to inspire invention of new technology. During turbulent times, many businesses have been forced to embrace the innovative mindset which points to hybrid model which allows to continue to innovation [13, 26, 27, 30].

The study revealed the importance of organizational support during turbulence time especially through strategic leadership commitment and capabilities to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. The behaviour of the leader, which is emphatic, could develop trust from employees which positively influence employee's satisfaction and performance. Leaders who promote ethics, transformation, responsibility, collaboration,

Table 2. Literature review on the relationship between environmental dynamism due to COVID-19 and sustainable HRM.

Author (Year)	Theoretical underpin	Dependent variable(s)	Independent variable(s)	Mediating variable(s)	Moderating variable(s)
Liang et al. [9]	work-life conflict, HRD approach, SDG, Sustainable Human Capital Development, JD-R model, JDCS model, system perspective, value creation, value destruction, International HRM, global work, health & safety, P-E fit	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Kinowska [11]	Remuneration Systems	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Jaskeviciute et al. [12]	Well-being concept, the concept of trust	Employee Well-Being	Sustainable HRM Practice	Organizational Trust (trust in co-workers, trust in managers, & trust in the organization)	Organizational Trust
Chen and Bashir [13]	E-commerce	Covid-19 prevention, economic resuscitation	Economic Recovery, Resource Utilization, E-commerce, Environmentalism, Sustainability, Covid-19 Aid, Manufacturing, Loss due to Lockdown, household Consumption	n/a	n/a
Cahyadi et al. [14]	Leadership styles	Consultant Performance	Sustainable Leadership Styles, Sustainable HRM Practices, Consultant Job Satisfaction	Consultant Job Satisfaction	n/a
Boiral et al. [15]	Organisational Practices	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

(*continued*)

Table 2. (*continued*)

Author (Year)	Theoretical underpin	Dependent variable(s)	Independent variable(s)	Mediating variable(s)	Moderating variable(s)
Latorre et al.[16]	Sustainable Well-Being at Work, Idiosyncratic Deals (I-Deals), Conservation of Resources Theory (COR)	Sustainable Well-Being (**Eudaimonic**/Meaning of Work in role performance & **Hedonic**/Wellbeing-Emotions in role performance)	Flexibility I-deal	n/a	Recovery (detachment, relaxation, mastery, control)
Ngoc Su et al. [17]	Organizational Resilience & HRM in crisis	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Wang et al. [18]	Hospitality HRM	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Hamouche [19]	Strategic HRM	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Azizi et al. [20]	HRM Strategy	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Irawanto et al. [21]	Work From Home, Work-Life Balance, Work Stress & Job Satisfaction	Job Satisfaction	Work From Home (WFH)	Work Life Balance (WLB), Work Stress	n/a
Saxena and Gautam [22]	Employee's Mental Health	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Maley et al. [23]	Social Exchange Theory & Real Option Theory	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Jooss et al. [24]	Flexible global working arrangement	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Yawson [25]	Strategic Flexibility Framework (SFF)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Mahdi and Nassar [26]	Resource-based view, knowledge-based view, knowledge creation theory	Sustainable Competitive Advantage	Strategic leadership Capabilities & Knowledge Management Process Capabilities	Knowledge Management Process	n/a
Vrabcová and Urbancová [27]	Sustainable HRM	Sustainable Business	Implementation of Age Management	n/a	n/a
Carnevale and Hatak [28]	Person-Environment Fit (P-E fit) theory	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

inclusivity, effective communication, supervision support, high involvement and commitment can promote HRM sustainability, [14, 15, 25, 26, 29]. Sustainable HR practices help to improve employee's skills especially the digital execution in daily operations during the pandemics.

4   Conclusion

This research will enrich the information and reference on Sustainable HRM during and post COVID-19, and the relationship between environmental dynamism and sustainable HRM. The other important contribution from the research is the strategies on sustainable HRM during the COVID-19 that can be learn on post-COVID-19 or other turbulence times, such as providing work flexibility, focus on employees' well-being, promote employee participation and engagement, promote innovation and the use of innovative methods, and provide leadership commitment that will usher in a new era in the lives of businesses to create short-term as well as long-term sustainable organization-employee relationships that will translate into greater value for employees and the organization.

19 peer-reviewed articles both conceptual and empirical published during the COVID-19 pandemic for the period of 2020 - 2022 were analyzed. However, this study has some limitations, which only focus on Scopus-indexed journal articles published in English, we recognize that we may missed some relevant and important studies presented in other outlets or languages. Thus, we encourage and advocate future scholars to investigate the relationships between environmental dynamism to sustainable HRM especially in the African context where we found geographic imbalance in that area.

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