

# SUSTAINABLE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, JOB CRAFTING, AND EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL

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## ABSTRACT

The past decade has witnessed a surge of interest in sustainable human resource management from both academics and practitioners. However, research on the interplay between sustainable human resource management, job crafting, and employee experience remains scarce, with little to no existing studies. This study aims to bridge this gap by conceptualizing the interrelationships between these three concepts and proposing a research model. A comprehensive literature review was conducted on current research in sustainable human resource management, job crafting, and employee experience. The proposed model integrates sustainable human resource management, emphasizing its focus on long-term ecological, financial, and social gains. Job crafting is positioned as a mediating variable between sustainable human resource management (independent variable) and employee experience (dependent variable). This model offers a holistic understanding of how sustainable human resource management can facilitate employee job crafting, ultimately leading to an improved employee experience. This study contributes to the existing literature by introducing a novel model that integrates these three crucial aspects of the modern workplace, paving the way for future validation.

**Keywords:** Sustainable HRM, job crafting, employee experience, stakeholder theory

**Paper Type:** Conceptual paper

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of employee experience has become a critical determinant in shaping organizational culture and promoting overall business success. Employee experience encapsulates the journey of an employee within a firm, from encountering the experiences of recruitment to departure (Batat, 2022; Yohn, 2018). It is a firm-wide initiative which emphasizes that employees are healthy, engaged, and productive (Bersin, 2021; Pillai et al., 2024). Notably, it is a people-centric management philosophy that focuses on factors that significantly influence employees' behaviors (Plaskoff, 2017). Overall, the employee experience is the sum of the

interactions an employee has with an organization, which influences their overall image of the organization.

According to a recent Withe report, a staggering 72% of candidates have reported that their decision to accept the job is dependent on the overall interview process (Withe Team, 2024). Additionally, it outlines that 60% of candidates have reported having poor experiences, while 49% have turned down job offers as a result of negative experiences. Likewise, another survey highlighted that 69% of employees are more inclined to remain with the firm for three years if they have a great onboarding experience (Click Boarding, 2021). Following the onboarding process, continuous support is pivotal, as 68% of employees would consider leaving if they did not feel supported by senior staff (PerformYard, 2024). Moreover, 50% reported that their jobs have an undesirable impact on their mental health (Agovino, 2024). These statistics present different types of experiences an employee has within an organization. Hence, it can be inferred that an overall good experience is essential for employees, as that determines the attraction and retention of top talent, makes a convincing case for having a fine onboarding system, and emphasizes fostering a strong supervisory relationship while simultaneously highlighting that a poorly designed job can have detrimental psychological impacts. Therefore, a positive employee experience is essential as it not only mitigates turnover (Click Boarding, 2021) but also enhances engagement and attracts top talent (PerformYard, 2024), making it a key focus area for any firm aiming to succeed in the current dynamic market.

The role of job crafting can be instrumental in creating a positive employee experience, as it is a self-initiated behavior that can help the employees establish boundaries and create a work environment that is more suited to their skills, abilities, and preferences (Kim & Beehr, 2018; Park & Park, 2023). Job crafting is a proactive behavior focused on effectively aligning the job with the employees' personal characteristics, as designing jobs that are tailored to the entire workforce is challenging for the managers (Lazazzara et al., 2020). Numerous researchers have argued that job crafting has positive outcomes such as meaningfulness in work, engagement with the tasks, and improved performance (Bruning and Campion, 2018; Slemp and Vella-Brodrick, 2014; Tims and Bakker, 2010; Tims et al. 2022). However, the question remains: What encourages employees to engage in proactive behaviors like job crafting?

Sustainable human resource management can serve as a key driver to foster job crafting. Sustainable human resource management is considered a broad concept, sometimes identified as the triple bottom line (Piwowar-Sulej, 2024). It further encapsulates sub-concepts such as green HRM, socially responsible HRM, and common good HRM (Piwowar-Sulej, 2024). Sustainable human resource management considers employees as a valuable resource for the organization, while carefully considering their needs, preferences, and perspectives (Sypniewska et al., 2023). Its initiatives are geared towards increasing the firm's performance by fostering long-term relationships with the workforce (Sypniewska et al., 2023). Deloitte's recent survey highlighted that, organizations focusing on the human sustainability yielded a 2.2% higher five-year return on equity, produced 50% less carbon dioxide per dollar of revenue, and were over twice as likely to provide a family sustaining living wage (Janaite, 2024).

Despite the extensive studies on sustainable human resource management, research on whether and how sustainable human resource management can influence job crafting and employee

experience remains unexplored. The purpose of this paper is to analyze contemporary research on sustainable human resource management, job crafting, and employee experience and offer a research model for future research directions. Thus, the present study contributes to the existing literature by addressing several gaps. First, this research is concerned with sustainable human resource management and its relationship to job crafting. Hence, this research proposes that sustainable human resource management has a direct impact on job crafting. Previous research has focused on sustainable human resource management and its association to career growth (Cheng et al., 2024), employee resilience (Lu et al., 2023), work engagement and perceived employability (Lulewicz-Sas et al., 2022). Little to no research has been conducted thus far to determine whether sustainable human resource management influences job crafting. Thus, this research fills this gap by conceptualizing the relationship between sustainable human resource management and job crafting.

Second, this paper is concerned with job crafting and its direct impact on employee experience. Recent literature has focused on studying job crafting in relation to detachment (Sanz-Vergel et al., 2024), applicant attraction (Schüler et al., 2023), and artificial intelligence (Li et al., 2024). There is an evident gap between job crafting and employee experience. Therefore, this paper proposes a model for future researchers to fill that gap.

Third, this paper proposes that job crafting mediates the relationship between sustainable human resource management and employee experience. Despite the literature available on sustainable human resource management (see Cheng et al., 2024; Lulewicz-Sas et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2023) and employee experience (see Malik et al., 2023; Pillai et al., 2024), studies on the mediating role of job crafting are almost absent. The majority of the available literature on employee experience is focused on conceptualizing the concept and understanding its dimensions (Batat, 2022; Panneerselvam & Balaraman, 2022; Plaskoff, 2017; Joshi et al., 2024). The present paper is among the first to conceptualize the mediating role of job crafting between sustainable human resource management and employee experience.

Lastly, this paper is grounded in the stakeholder theory. Recent studies on sustainable human resource management have emphasized on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory and resource-based view (Huang et al., 2024), JD-R theory (Lu et al., 2023), social exchange theory (Papademetriou et al., 2023), and person-fit theory (Sypniewska et al., 2023). Previous studies on job crafting are underpinned in transactional theory of stress and coping (Cheng et al., 2023), JD-R theory (Schüler et al., 2023; Li et al., 2023), and conservation of resource theory (Harju et al., 2021). The literature available on employee experience is still in its initial stages and mostly emphasizes on conceptualizing the variable (Batat, 2022; Panneerselvam & Balaraman, 2022; Plaskoff, 2017; Joshi et al., 2024). Evidently, the recent literature is scarce in using stakeholder theory as the foundational basis. Therefore, the current study fills the gap by proposing stakeholder theory as the underlying theoretical framework.

This study is structured as follows: First, we begin with the conceptualization of sustainable human resource management, job crafting, and employee experience. Second, we develop a set of propositions and a research model that can be validated by future research scholars. Finally, we offer future recommendations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Sustainable Human Resource Management*

The research on sustainable human resource management is still in its infancy. In the past 10 years, sustainable human resource management has been a subject of interest for academics and practitioners in the field of HRM which is due to the expected advantages for both organizations and other stakeholders such as employees, consumers and the external environment (Lu et al., 2023).

The earliest description of sustainable human resource management focuses on the actions firms must undertake within their surroundings to attract highly qualified professionals in the future (Müller-Christ and Remer, 1999; Qamar et al., 2023). Later, sustainable human resource management has been defined as implementing long-term strategies which are socially responsible and economically effective in the process of recruiting, developing, retaining, and dis-employing of employees (Zaugg et al., 2001). Meanwhile, as per Gollan (2005) sustainable human resource management refers to a firm's ability to generate value and as an outcome have the capability to renew value and replenish wealth through the execution of human resource policies and practices. At the same time, Ehnert (2005) defined sustainable human resource management as "value of human resources is recognized as being more than immediate financial usefulness".

Recently, others have added to the discourse by associating the notion of sustainability to HRM. For instance, Wikhamn (2019) described sustainable human resource management as dealing with soft issues such as emphasis on the employee well-being, decent work environment, and development opportunities. Alternatively, some scholars have focused on a holistic and future oriented approach to HRM which prioritizes sustainability beyond profit maximization by focusing on the societal, environmental, and organizational dimensions (Qamar et al., 2023). However, the current conceptual paper follows the definition of Ehnert et al. (2016) - "Adoption of HRM strategies and practices that enable the achievement of financial, social, and ecological goals, with an impact inside and outside of the organization and over a long-term time horizon while controlling for unintended side effects and negative feedback" (p.90).

### *Job Crafting*

Currently, while numerous operationalization of job crafting exist, the most prevalent approaches were proposed by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) and Tims et al. (2012), namely role-based approach and resource based approach, respectively. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) identified three types of job crafting. First, task crafting has been described as changes in the job tasks by altering amount, scope, or type. Second, relational crafting is explained as altering the social interactions at the workplace. Third, cognitive crafting is referred to as changing the way an individual perceives the job. In contrast, Tims et al. (2012) combined job crafting with the JD-R theory, defining four dimensions, which are (1) increasing structural job resources, (2) increasing social job resources, (3) increasing challenging job demands, and d) decreasing hindering job demands.

However, recent studies have made an attempt to integrate the two approaches and have proposed that there is a higher-order job crafting orientation, referred to as the approach and avoidance crafting (Bruning and Campion, 2018; Zhang and Parker, 2019; Tims et al., 2022). The former has been described as effortful actions through which the individuals try to gain favorable results while the latter has been explained as actions to avoid undesirable outcomes (Zhang & Parker, 2019; Tims et al., 2022). This is not to say that job crafting is about redesigning the job in its entirety but about altering certain components of the job within the parameters of the particular job tasks (Berg & Dutton, 2008; Tims et al., 2012). The present paper follows Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) for their definition on job crafting which has been referred to as "the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work" (p. 179).

### *Employee Experience*

Employee experience was introduced in recent years and can be traced back to the late 2010s (Batat, 2022). Though the term employee experience was established by Abhari et al. (2008), its conceptualization was put forth by Jacob Morgan. He described it as "the combination of an organization's cultural, physical and technological environments that enables, empowers and enhances employee's overall evaluation of their workplace, about the positiveness of such workplaces" (Morgan, 2017; Panneerselvam & Balaraman, 2022, p. 202). Following Morgan's definition, other authors in the field have recently examined the concept and have offered several definitions. For instance, employee experience has been explained by Dery et al. (2018) as those work intricacies and behavioral norms about collaboration, creativity, and empowerment that have the potential to enable, empower and engage employees throughout the employment journey.

The recent definitions can be categorized into three distinct perspectives, namely, holistic, interactionism, and adjunction-based perspectives. First, the holistic aspect of employee experience has been described as how several personal and organizational factors influence the comprehensive and integrative journey of the employee's entire life experienced, impacting it positively or negatively (Batat, 2022). Additionally, both external and internal factors influence the experiences (see Itam & Ghosh, 2020; Plaskoff, 2017). Second, the aspect of interactionism has been referred to as the situations where the employees experience several kinds of interactions concurrently, comprising those that are organizational, social, and private (Abhari et al., 2008; Morgan, 2017). Third, the adjunction-based perspective describes the employees' experiences as the accumulation of perceptions acquired from the first interaction with organization and its actors to the last interaction (Yohn, 2018; Maylett and Wride, 2017). The present paper refers to Batat (2022) definition of employee experience which accounts for the three perspectives. Table 1 summarizes operational definitions of the constructs.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND MODEL DEVELOPMENT

### *Stakeholder theory*

A stakeholder is "any individual or group who can affect or is affected by actions, decisions, policies, practices or goals of an organization" (Freeman 1984, p. 25; Järlström et al., 2018). Stakeholder theory characterizes business models as frameworks that benefits customers, employees, suppliers, financiers, and communities, illustrating how improving the situation of one group favorably enhances the situation of others (Greenwood & Freeman, 2011). The theory further argues that the purpose, principles, and the organization's societal relationships should be a collaborative effort, with employees at the center of the equation (Greenwood & Freeman, 2011).

From the perspective of this study, sustainable human resource management and stakeholder theory converge in their responsibility to accomplish financial, ecological, and social objectives that affects both internal and external stakeholders. For instance, offering the employees tailored training for future needs of the organization can equip them with the confidence needed to take initiatives in their job roles leading to proactive behaviors such as job crafting. Once the workforce adapts to their roles which aligns with both personal needs and preferences, they experience increased job satisfaction, engagement, and overall well-being, which can contribute to an enhanced employee experience. Hence, stakeholder theory illustrates how sustainable human resource management favorably impacts employee experience through initiatives that are consistent with stakeholder interests, thereby cultivating a holistic organizational impact.

Table 1: Definitions

| Variable                              | Definition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sustainable human resource management | Adoption of HRM strategies and practices that enable the achievement of financial, social, and ecological goals, with an impact inside and outside of the organization and over a long-term time horizon while controlling for unintended side effects and negative feedback (Ehnert et al., 2016; p.90).                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Job Crafting                          | The physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton , 2001; p. 179).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Employee Experience                   | Employees' subjective and evolving perceptions of their cognitive, behavioral and emotional state, along with their social interactions among the employing organization and its related social actors, whether they are internal (e.g., coworkers and managers) or external (e.g., suppliers and clients). These perceptions are derived from numerous encounters affecting the well-being of employees and their perceived value throughout their experiential journeys within organizations (Batat, 2022; p. 996). |

### *Sustainable Human Resource Management and Job Crafting*

Sustainable human resource management is defined as "Adoption of HRM strategies and practices that enable the achievement of financial, social, and ecological goals, with an impact inside and outside of the organization and over a long-term time horizon while controlling for unintended side effects and negative feedback" (Ehnert et al., 2016, p.90). The concept of sustainable human resource management consists of sub-concepts such as green HRM, socially responsible HRM, and common good HRM (Piwowar-Sulej, 2024). Even though there is lack of evidence on a direct relationship between sustainable human resource management and job crafting, Luu et al. (2021) revealed a positive impact of socially responsible HRM practices on job crafting. Additionally, green HRM practices, too, have a significant impact on green crafting, as the author re-operationalized the concept of job crafting relevant to their study (Luu, 2019). Furthermore, other HR practices such as commitment HR practices (Hu et al., 2020), discretionary HR practices (Luu, 2020; Ekmekcioglu & Nabawanuka, 2023) are often positively associated with job crafting. From the perspective of stakeholder theory, sustainable human resource management has the potential to influence job crafting by focusing on the needs and interests of all stakeholders, especially employees. This cultivates an encouraging environment for the workforce to proactively modify their job roles, strengthening the job crafting behaviors. Hence, it is proposed that:

*P1: Sustainable human resource management will positively impact job crafting.*

### *Job Crafting and Employee Experience*

Employee experience has been defined as "employee's holistic perceptions of the relationship with his/her employing organization derived from all the encounters at touch points along the employee's journey" (Plaskoff, 2017, p. 137; Yadav & Vihari, 2023). Employee experience is a complex and diverse concept that consists of various aspects such as job satisfaction, work-life balance, organizational culture, leadership, and career development (Contreras-Cruz et al., 2023; Malik et al., 2023; Basar, 2024). Previous studies have found that job crafting improves work-life balance (Slowiak & DeLongchamp, 2022) and job satisfaction (Zito et al., 2019), which can enhance the experiences of employees within an organization. Additionally, in a study by Lichtenthaler & Fischbach (2018), it was found that employee-oriented leadership styles can improve job crafting. This can result in an enhanced employee experience. Moreover, it was also found that two dimensions of job crafting i.e. task crafting and cognitive crafting had a positive impact on the career attitudes and commitment which ultimately led to career success (Yoon et al., 2019). This, too, may have a positive impact on employee experience. From the perspective of stakeholder theory, the objectives of the firm should be consistent with the well-being of the stakeholders (employees) which will encourage them to take initiatives by modifying their roles such that it creates a value and an enriching employee experience. Thus, we propose that:

*P2: Job crafting will positively impact employee experience.*

### *Job Crafting as Mediator*

Job crafting is essentially shaping one's jobs so that tasks and social interactions are more fitted to the employee's requirements, abilities, and preferences (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Job crafting helps in improving the person-job fit, revise meaning of the job, and make alterations to the work identity (Niessen et al., 2016). It can act as a mediator between sustainable human resource management and employee experience by allowing the workforce to customize their job roles consistent with sustainable human resource management which will enable them to leverage their strengths creating a better employee experience. Past research suggests that job crafting can be enhanced with the green HRM practices (Luu, 2019) and socially responsible HRM practices (Luu et al., 2021), which are types of sustainable human resource management. Additionally, job crafting can improve job satisfaction (Zito et al., 2019), career success (Yoon et al., 2019) and work-life balance (Slowiak & DeLongchamp, 2022). Furthermore, sustainable human resource management grounded in stakeholder theory, helps in understanding that both the paradigms focus on benefitting the stakeholder interests which can drive employees to take initiatives in better defining their job roles, thereby improving their overall experience. Therefore, we propose that:

*P3: Job crafting will mediate the relationship between sustainable human resource management and employee experience.*

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model of the study. The dotted lines represent the indirect relationship between sustainable human resource management and employee experience via job crafting.

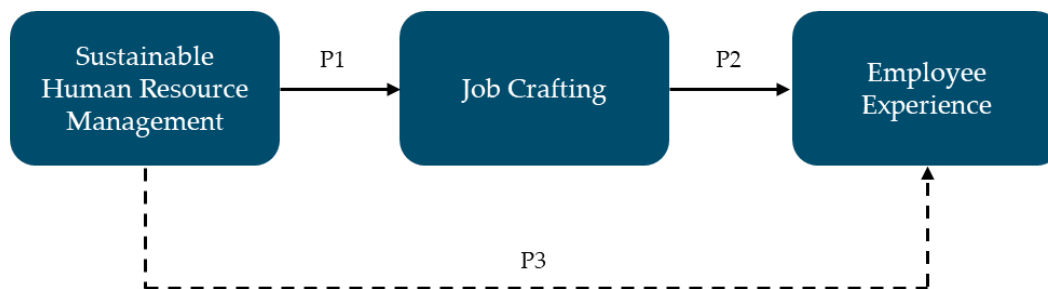


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Several avenues can be explored to further advance the sustainable human resource management domain. First, empirical studies are required to validate the proposed research model in this study. It is recommended that future research scholars conduct longitudinal studies to analyze how sustainable human resource management impacts job crafting over a period of time. Also, how these proactive behaviors as a result of job crafting could impact the overall experience of an employee. Second, it is advised that researchers examine the role of individual sustainable human resource management practices such as responsible talent

management practices (Qamar et al., 2023) or flexible work arrangements, in facilitating job crafting. This can help achieve the most effective sustainable human resource management strategy which encourages proactive behavior. Doing so, may also help in identifying the practices which can help enhance the overall employee experience.

Third, it is recommended that researchers conduct comparative studies in multiple industries which can offer insightful observations into the generalizability of the proposed model. This will also help in understanding how sustainable human resource management and attitudes towards job crafting differ across different organizational settings. The findings can be used to tailor the sustainable human resource management strategies to specific contexts to help facilitate job crafting and simultaneously improve the employee experience. Fourth, it is suggested that future researchers utilize other theoretical frameworks to explain the model such as positive organizational scholarship, self-efficacy theory (Qamar et al., 2023), and psychological contract theory. These theories can offer various perspectives on how sustainable human resource management impacts employee experience with the mediation of job crafting while also strengthening the theoretical robustness.

Fifth, it is advised that scholars study the model with other mediators such as organizational commitment and psychological empowerment (Lu et al., 2023). Mediators such as employee well-being, employee resilience, and organizational learning can also be considered. This will offer a deeper understanding of the mechanisms which can explain how sustainable human resource management impacts employee experience. Additionally, testing the model with various mediators can help with formulating better practical interventions to enhance employee experience.

Finally, it is suggested that future studies analyze the potential moderating variables such as human capital (Li et al., 2023) and authentic leadership (Qamar et al., 2023). Moderating variables such as organizational culture and leadership styles can also be considered to better understand the various aspects and its impact on the research model. By addressing these recommendations, future research can offer a more in-depth understanding of how sustainable human resource management cultivate job crafting and improve employee experience, thereby contributing to the development of more effective sustainable human resource management strategies.

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