

# Socially Responsible Human Resource Management

Subjects: **Management**

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At the intersection of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and human resource management (HRM), a specific research strand has been forming and considerably flourishing over the past years, contributing to the burgeoning academic debate of what has been called “socially responsible human resource management” (SRHRM). The SRHRM debate seeks to proactively enhance employees’ work experiences and meet their personal and social expectations in ethical and socially responsible ways.

corporate social responsibility

SRHRM

ethical HRM

internal CSR

responsible management

## 1. Introduction

As corporations are an integral part of contemporary society with their operations impacting a wide array of stakeholders, unsurprisingly, the idea of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been gaining momentum in management research over the last decades <sup>[1]</sup>. While prior research in this area, not all though, has instrumentally been attempting to find a link between CSR plans and positive financial results for firms <sup>[2][3]</sup>, it has been argued that CSR intentions have gone beyond financial results <sup>[4]</sup>, thereby more actively contributing to solving societal and grand challenges <sup>[5][6][7]</sup>. Increasing interest in CSR research has partially been rooted in a rationale that considers organizations as critical in reaching a sustainable society <sup>[8]</sup>. Some authors <sup>[9]</sup> contended that CSR initiatives are “voluntary” activities of corporations that could bring positive results in different realms of societies. However, this “voluntary” viewpoint is challenged by an intensifying globalization, and one might argue that the strict separation of private and public interests is no longer relevant <sup>[10]</sup>. Public states even failed in fully serving public and environmental demands to build a sustainable society <sup>[11]</sup>. Keeping this criticism in mind, Tamvada <sup>[12]</sup> insisted that CSR could not be seen as an optional provision; rather, it should even be regulated as mandatory obligation of a firm.

The strategic formulation of CSR priorities as well as their translation into everyday managerial practices has however represented a critical challenge for many organizations. As Jamali <sup>[13]</sup> argued, organizations responded to this challenge by emphasizing the role of human resource management (HRM). Indeed, HRM assumes a critical role as HR activities are highly intertwined with humanistic approaches in organizations <sup>[13][14]</sup> while contributing to business value creation at the same time <sup>[15][16]</sup>. It is thus not surprising to see that prior research has considerably sought to relate CSR with HRM <sup>[17][18]</sup>. The linkage between CSR and HRM can be critical for organizations to, for

instance, make sense of the ethical assumptions about their role in societies, improve relationships between themselves and employees [2], and solve the paradoxical tensions (i.e., conflictual interests of different stakeholders) that may occur during CSR initiatives [19].

At the intersection of CSR and HRM, a specific research strand has been forming and considerably flourishing over the last years, contributing to the burgeoning academic debate of what has been called “internal corporate social responsibility” or, as addressed in the present paper, “socially responsible human resource management” (SRHRM) [20][21]. A critical reason for the increasing research interest in this area has been the shortage of insights in CSR literature about its internal stakeholders, i.e., employees [22]. It makes sense to argue that organizations must have a socially responsible approach towards employees, as they will finally implement CSR strategies to responsibly serve external stakeholders. In fact, socially responsible HRM practices could for instance help organizations increase their employees’ ethical awareness and meaningfully motivate them to engage in CSR activities [23].

Finding a universal definition for SRHRM could be a daunting task as this concept is rooted in ethical imperatives and, hence, is highly contextual [24]. We thus hold that SRHRM activities are not merely attempting to provide employees with good working conditions based on legal requirements and regulations (e.g., minimum wage). Instead, they seek to proactively enhance employees’ work experiences and meet their personal and social expectations in ethical and socially responsible ways [25]. Indeed, the SRHRM debate moves the ethical issues concerning employees beyond their instrumental value for organizational aims. It also intends to express deep care for fulfilling organizational members’ personal and professional expectations, thereby genuinely contributing to the employees’ well-being and societal demands [26]. With growing public demands and pressures to shift corporate priorities from mere profitability to responsible and sustainable approaches to management, the HRM field must play a leading role in driving and implementing such plans in practice [27]. To reach this aim, a holistic understanding of the latest advancements in the field could help HRM scholars to more wisely explore current challenges and potential gaps in SRHRM, thereby moving toward a higher level of sustainable management of organizations.

## 2. Researches and findings

### 2.1. Bibliometrics

**Table 1** shows 26 journals that published empirical research in SRHRM. Accordingly, the *Sustainability* journal was ranked first by publishing 13 relevant studies in this area, followed by *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* (n = 7) and *Journal of Business Ethics* (n = 5) in the second and third ranks, respectively. It seems that these three journals will remain one of the most attractive targets for prospective researchers who wish to publish their studies in SRHRM. The publishing journals come from several academic publishers, including MDPI, Taylor and Francis, Springer, Emerald, Wiley, Elsevier, and Sage. The journals’ scope that published research in this domain is varied, including business ethics, environmental sciences, CSR, HRM, public health, strategic management, to name but a few. The varieties of the journals indicate the interdisciplinary nature of the

SRHRM research field, which is connected with, and can have critical implications for, a wide array of issues in societies.

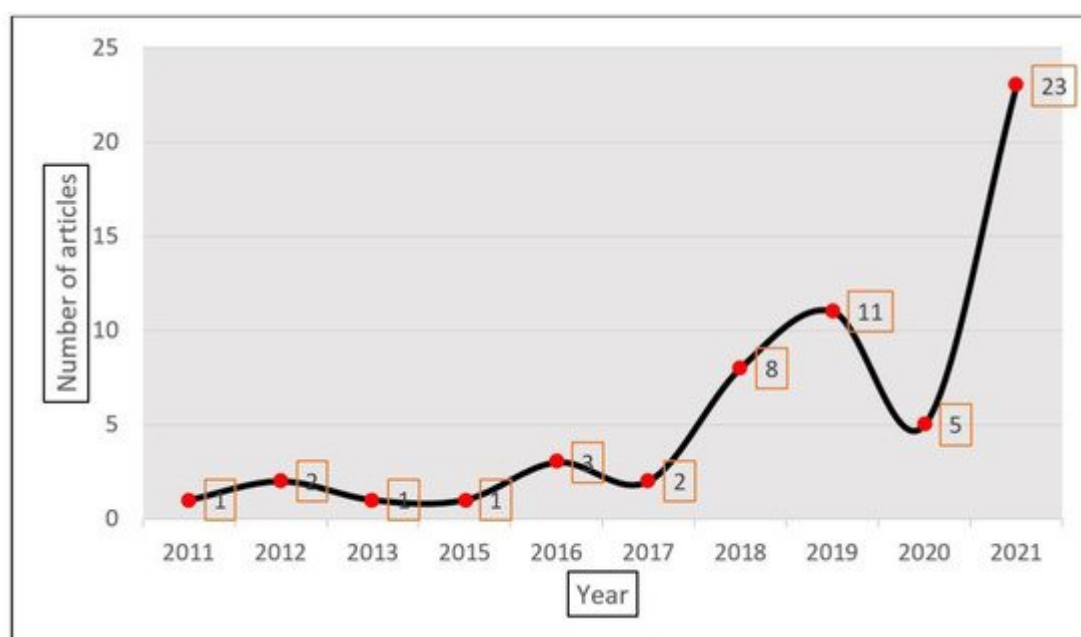
**Table 1.** Journals that published empirical research in SRHRM.

No.	Journal	Publisher	Frequency	Percentage	Source(s)
1	<i>Sustainability</i>	MDPI	13	22.81%	Obrad and Gherhes <a href="#">[28]</a> ; Barrena-Martinez et al. <a href="#">[29]</a> ; López-Fernández et al. <a href="#">[30]</a> ; Bombiak and Marciniuk-Kluska <a href="#">[31]</a> ; Shao et al. <a href="#">[32]</a> ; Shao, Zhou, and Gao <a href="#">[33]</a> ; García Mestanza et al. <a href="#">[34]</a> ; Revuelto-Taboada et al. <a href="#">[35]</a> ; Sobhani et al. <a href="#">[36]</a> ; Koinig and Weder <a href="#">[37]</a> ; He and Kim <a href="#">[38]</a> ; Adu-Gyamfi et al. <a href="#">[39]</a> ; Chang et al. <a href="#">[40]</a>
2	<i>The International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	Taylor and Francis	7	12.29%	Shen and Jiu Hua Zhu <a href="#">[21]</a> ; D'Cruz and Noronha <a href="#">[41]</a> ; Parkes and Davis <a href="#">[42]</a> ; Newman et al. <a href="#">[43]</a> ; Mory et al. <a href="#">[44]</a> ; Barrena-Martínez et al. <a href="#">[45]</a> ; Richards and Sang <a href="#">[46]</a>
3	<i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>	Springer	5	8.78%	Tongo <a href="#">[47]</a> ; Shen and Zhang <a href="#">[48]</a> ; Heikkinen et al. <a href="#">[26]</a> ; Zhang et al. <a href="#">[49]</a> ; Zhao et al. <a href="#">[50]</a>
4	<i>Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management</i>	Wiley	4	7.02%	Barrena-Martinez et al. <a href="#">[51]</a> ; Lombardi et al. <a href="#">[52]</a> ; Sorribes et al. <a href="#">[53]</a> ; Gangi et al. <a href="#">[54]</a>
5	<i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i>	Emerald	3	5.27%	Jia et al. <a href="#">[55]</a> ; Luu <a href="#">[56]</a> ; He et al. <a href="#">[57]</a>
6	<i>Business Ethics: A European Review</i>	Wiley	2	3.52%	Nie et al. <a href="#">[58]</a> ; Diaz-Carrion et al. <a href="#">[59]</a>

7	<i>Employee Relations: The International Journal</i>	Emerald	2	3.52%	Lin-Hi et al. <a href="#">[60]</a> ; Espasandín-Bustelo et al. <a href="#">[61]</a>
8	<i>European Research on Management and Business Economics</i>	Elsevier	2	3.52%	Barrena-Martínez et al. <a href="#">[62]</a> ; Celma et al. <a href="#">[63]</a>
9	<i>Management Decision</i>	Emerald	2	3.52%	Jamali et al. <a href="#">[64]</a> ; Lee <a href="#">[65]</a>
10	<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources</i>	Wiley	1	1.75%	Sarvaiya and Arrowsmith <a href="#">[66]</a>
11	<i>Baltic Journal of Management</i>	Emerald	1	1.75%	Bučiūnienė and Kazlauskaitė <a href="#">[67]</a>
12	<i>Business Ethics, the Environment &amp; Responsibility</i>	Wiley	1	1.75%	Low and Bu <a href="#">[68]</a>
13	<i>Human Resource Management</i>	Wiley	1	1.75%	Shen et al. <a href="#">[69]</a>
14	<i>International Business Review</i>	Elsevier	1	1.75%	Lythreatis et al. <a href="#">[70]</a>
15	<i>International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal</i>	Springer	1	1.75%	Ramos-González et al. <a href="#">[71]</a>
16	<i>International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health</i>	MDPI	1	1.75%	Sánchez-Hernández et al. <a href="#">[72]</a>
17	<i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i>	Elsevier	1	1.75%	Zhao and Zhou <a href="#">[73]</a>
18	<i>Journal of Corporate</i>	Elsevier	1	1.75%	Goergen et al. <a href="#">[74]</a>

Finance					
19	<i>Journal of Management</i>	Sage	1	1.75%	Shen and Benson <a href="#">[75]</a>
20	<i>Journal of Management Analytics</i>	Taylor and Francis	1	1.75%	Chanda and Goyal <a href="#">[76]</a>
21	<i>Journal of Organizational Change Management</i>	Emerald	1	1.75%	D. T. Luu <a href="#">[77]</a>
22	<i>Personnel Review</i>	Emerald	1	1.75%	Lechuga Sancho et al. <a href="#">[78]</a>
23	<i>Review of Managerial Science</i>	Springer	1	1.75%	Giang and Dung <a href="#">[79]</a>
24	<i>SAGE Open</i>	Sage	1	1.75%	Li et al. <a href="#">[80]</a>
25	<i>Strategic Management Journal</i>	Wiley	1	1.75%	Shan et al. <a href="#">[81]</a>
26	<i>The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science</i>	Sage	1	1.75%	Brown <a href="#">[82]</a>
Total			57	100	

**Figure 1** represents the distribution of studies in SRHRM research published from 2011 to 2021. Interestingly, the number of publications in this area received a sharp surge in 2021 ( $n = 21$ ), making it the most prolific year over the last decade. As depicted in **Figure 1**, the number of publications from 2011 to 2017 was often the same (i.e., between one or two papers) in this area. However, SRHRM gained momentum in 2018 ( $n = 8$ ) and culminated in 2021 with 23 published papers until November.



**Figure 1.** Distribution of studies in SRHRM across years.

**Table 2** shows the distribution of papers published in the SRHRM domain based on geographical data coverage. Most published articles pertain to China ( $n = 15$ ), followed by Spain ( $n = 13$ ) in the second rank. Five papers did not limit themselves to specific countries; instead, they simultaneously addressed SRHRM within several countries. As shown by **Table 2**, the countries covered by the empirical data gathered in previous papers come from different continents worldwide, including Asia, Europe, North America, Oceania, and Africa. According to the increasing interest in the SRHRM research over the last years, it is predicted that future empirical studies will cover more countries, thereby providing cross-cultural data for better understanding the contingencies that may exist within different national contexts.

**Table 2.** Distribution of studies on SRHRM across countries based on geographical data coverage.

No.	Country	Frequency	Percentage	Source(s)
1	China	15	26.32%	Shen and Jiu Hua Zhu [21]; Newman et al. [43]; Shen and Benson [75]; Shen et al. [69]; Lin-Hi et al. [60]; Jia et al. [55]; Shen and Zhang [48]; Shao et al. [32]; Shao, Zhou, and Gao [33]; Zhao and Zhou [73]; He et al. [57]; He and Kim [38]; Zhang et al. [49]; Zhao et al. [50]; Li et al. [80]
2	Spain	13	22.81%	Barrena-Martínez et al. [62]; Celma et al. [63]; Lechuga Sancho et al. [78]; Barrena-Martínez et al. [29]; López-Fernández et al. [30]; Barrena-Martínez et al. [51]; García Mestanza et al. [34]; Barrena-Martínez et al. [45]; Sánchez-Hernández et al. [72]; Sorribes et al. [53]; Ramos-González et al. [71]; Revuelto-Taboada et al. [35]; Espasandín-Bustelo et al. [61]

3	Multi-country	5	8.77%	Goergen et al. <a href="#">[74]</a> ; Diaz-Carrion et al. <a href="#">[59]</a> ; Gangi et al. <a href="#">[54]</a> ; Koinig and Weder <a href="#">[37]</a> ; Lythreitis et al. <a href="#">[70]</a>
4	USA	3	5.26%	Shan et al. <a href="#">[81]</a> ; Brown <a href="#">[82]</a> ; Lee <a href="#">[65]</a>
5	Vietnam	3	5.26%	D. T. Luu <a href="#">[77]</a> ; Luu <a href="#">[56]</a> ; Giang and Dung <a href="#">[79]</a>
6	Finland	2	3.52%	Nie et al. <a href="#">[58]</a> ; Heikkinen et al. <a href="#">[26]</a>
7	India	2	3.52%	D'Cruz and Noronha <a href="#">[41]</a> ; Chanda and Goyal <a href="#">[76]</a>
8	Italy	2	3.52%	Lombardi et al. <a href="#">[52]</a> ; Jamali et al. <a href="#">[64]</a>
9	UK	2	3.52%	Parkes and Davis <a href="#">[42]</a> ; Richards and Sang <a href="#">[46]</a>
10	Bangladesh	1	1.75%	Sobhani et al. <a href="#">[36]</a>
11	Germany	1	1.75%	Mory et al. <a href="#">[44]</a>
12	Ghana	1	1.75%	Adu-Gyamfi et al. <a href="#">[39]</a>
13	Lithuania	1	1.75%	Bučiūnienė and Kazlauskaitė <a href="#">[67]</a>
14	Malaysia	1	1.75%	Low and Bu <a href="#">[68]</a>
15	New Zealand	1	1.75%	Sarvaiya and Arrowsmith <a href="#">[66]</a>
16	Nigeria	1	1.75%	Tongo <a href="#">[47]</a>
17	Poland	1	1.75%	Bombiak and Marciniuk-Kluska <a href="#">[31]</a>
18	Romania	1	1.75%	Obrad and Gherheș <a href="#">[28]</a>
19	Taiwan	1	1.75%	Chang et al. <a href="#">[40]</a>
Total		57	100	

**Table 3** categorizes the previous studies in SRHRM based on research approaches and methods. Most published papers employed a quantitative approach ( $n = 44$ ) and tested previous scholars' research models [\[20\]\[21\]\[75\]](#). Qualitative ( $n = 7$ ) and mixed ( $n = 6$ ) approaches were also used in this field, though their size is not very significant compared to the quantitative studies. The proliferation of quantitative studies provides an excellent ground upon which to generalize the findings in the SRHRM domain, while the shortage of qualitative studies in this area signals a significant void to gain a more in-depth understanding of SRHRM dynamics and processes.

**Table 3.** Distribution of studies in SRHRM based on research methods.

No.	Research Approach	Methods and Techniques	Frequency	Percentage
1	Quantitative	Survey; Factor analysis; Hierarchical regression; Regression analysis; Structural equation modeling; Quantitative content analysis; Analysis of variance (ANOVA); Multivariate linear regression model (MLRM); Intra-class correlation (ICC1); Bayesian network model; Bivariate linear regression analysis; Bootstrapped multi-mediation analysis; PROCESS macro	44	77.19%
2	Qualitative	Single-case study; In-depth interviews; Thematic analysis; Discourse analysis; Life history interviews; Document analysis	7	12.28%
3	Mixed	Survey; correlation analysis; Open-ended questionnaires; Axial coding; Delphi method; Score analysis; Design thinking; Focus groups; Expert panels; Weight analysis; Multiple linear regression; Interviews	6	10.53%
Total			57	100

## 2.2. Antecedents of SRHRM

Concerning external factors, previous studies mentioned different items that could have an impact on the SRHRM practices, such as laws and regulations [\[21\]\[43\]\[47\]\[81\]](#), public demand and expectations [\[42\]\[45\]\[73\]](#), market pressures induced by, for example, competitors and/or customers [\[26\]\[34\]\[55\]](#), union pressures such as those coming from the International Labour Organization (ILO) [\[29\]\[43\]\[47\]](#), the national institutional context [\[59\]\[70\]](#), and external crisis, such as what all organizations experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic since its appearance in 2019 [\[53\]\[57\]](#). The second group of antecedents pertains to the firm-level factors. Although all the reviewed papers assert that CSR firm policies impact SRHRM practices, some studies also explored other drivers within firms that might have been influential in this regard. Such factors include firms' strategic policies and priorities [\[29\]\[41\]](#), available financial resources [\[41\]](#), HRM systems design [\[41\]](#), HRM power in the organization [\[26\]](#), ethics-oriented HRM philosophies [\[46\]](#), the multi-nationality of firms [\[74\]](#), as well as organizational structure and culture [\[61\]](#). The third antecedent category is related to the individual factors, including employees' needs and wants [\[21\]\[43\]\[58\]\[60\]](#), the presence of an ethical leader [\[41\]\[42\]\[56\]\[70\]\[73\]\[82\]](#), the HR professionals' perception of their ethical role [\[42\]](#), and the role of employees' representatives in organizations [\[37\]](#).

## 2.3. Practices in SRHRM

SRHRM practices were mostly adapted from the traditional HRM functions (i.e., recruitment and selection, training and development, working conditions, appraisal and reward) by including ethical and fairness issues such as the consideration of work-life balance through, for example, flexible working time (e.g., [\[44\]](#)), enhanced communication at work (e.g., [\[43\]](#)), safety and health at work (e.g., [\[30\]](#)), transparent criteria in recruitment and selection (e.g., [\[35\]](#)), equal opportunities (e.g., [\[34\]](#)), fair appraisal processes (e.g., [\[59\]](#)), training opportunities and different personal development alternatives such as employee participation in decision-making (e.g., [\[67\]](#)), as well as providing additional support for employee education [\[64\]](#). However, some studies that emphasize specific practices, less

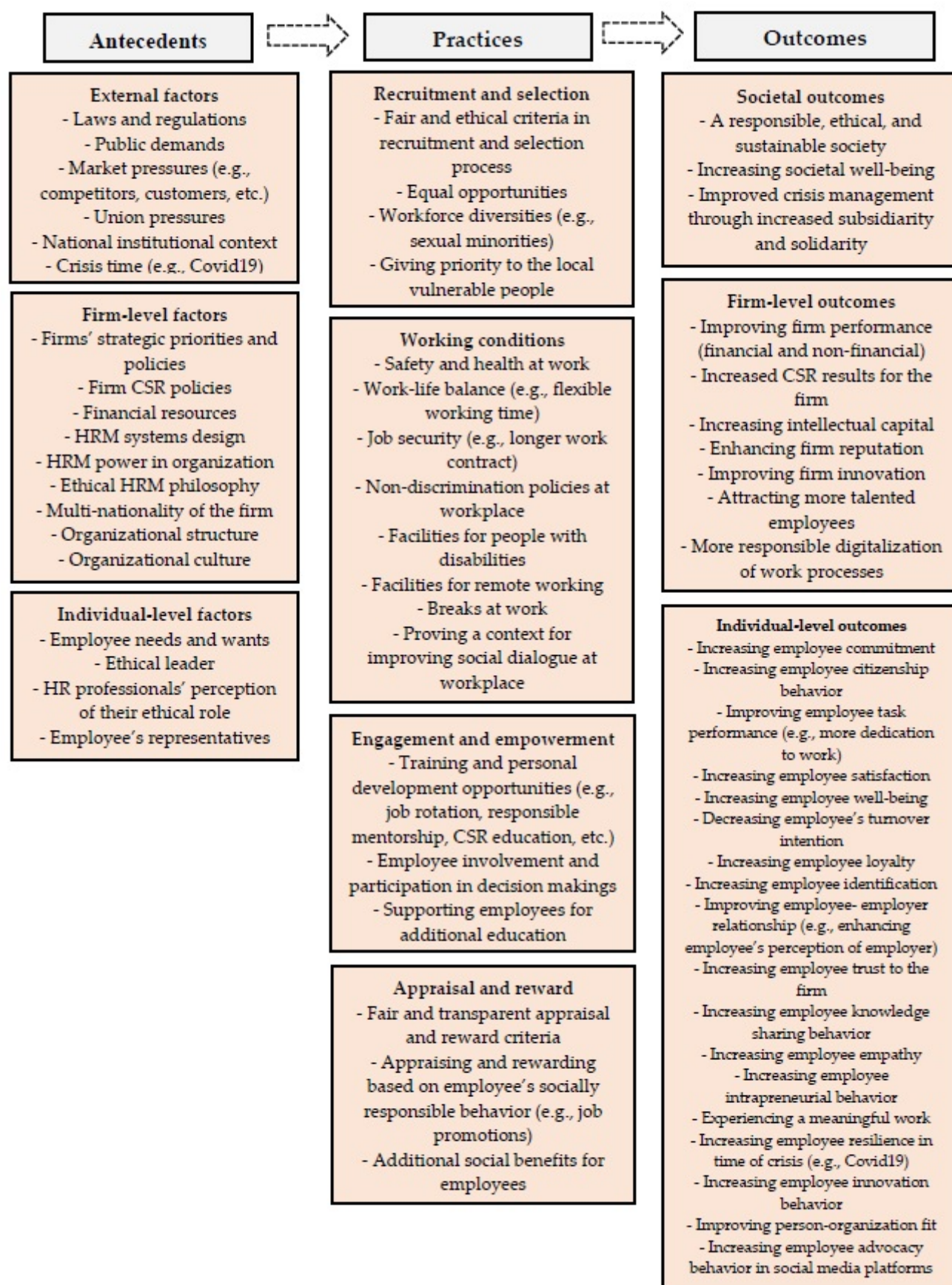


addressed by previously structured frameworks, are worth mentioning. In this vein, Shan et al. [81] call for considering sexual minorities to make the workplace diverse, Lombardi et al. [52] recommend embracing more extended work contracts to make the job more secure for the employees, and Obrad and Gherheş [28] note that facilities for people with disabilities and also for remote working should be provided. Moreover, Celma et al. [63] and Lin-Hi et al. [60] insist on devising non-discrimination policies at the workplace, and some studies hold that a context for social dialogue between employees and managers needs to be built [51][62][77][78][79].

## 2.4. Outcomes of SRHRM

At the macro level, Bombiak and Marciniuk-Kluska [31] assert that SRHRM practices provide a path for the sustainable development of organizations, which finally result in increasing societal well-being [59] and the building of a sustainable, responsible, and ethical society [34]. Concerning the firm-level outcomes, evidence shows that SRHRM practices could increase financial and non-financial firm performance [47][62][67][76][77], already achieved CSR firm results [67], intellectual capital [51], firm reputation [36][71], and even firm innovation [71]. Furthermore, Low and Bu [68] suggest that SRHRM practices can help the organization to implement the digitalization of work processes more committedly, while Parkes and Davis [42] contend that organizations could more quickly attract talents by employing SRHRM strategies.

Individual outcomes of SRHRM practices have been the most topical issue addressed by previous studies. In this regard, a considerable number of studies confirmed that SRHRM can have a positive impact on employee commitment [21][30][44][47][59][64][68][76][78]. Other individual factors positively affected by SRHRM practices include employee citizenship behavior [32][36][43][47][64][65][73], employee task performance [40][75], employee satisfaction [53][62][76], employee well-being [49][59], employee loyalty [82], the propensity of employees to identify themselves with their organization [40][64][69][70][72], employee–employer relationships [60][65], employee trust in the firm [53][55][57], employee empathy [33], employee knowledge sharing behavior [55], employee innovation behavior [35][80], and employee intrapreneurial behavior [77][79][80]. It has also been shown that SRHRM practices can help employees to make sense of their jobs in a meaningful way [56] and even make employees more resilient in times of crisis, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic [57]. Further positive outcomes include increasing employee advocacy behavior within social media platforms [65] and enhancing the person–organization fit [50]. Using SRHRM practices, organizations can also decrease employees' intention to leave their organizations [36][58].



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