



Understanding Resilience in the Context of Sustainable HRM and the Human–Nature Relationship¹

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ABSTRACT

This study proposes that the deepening ecological crisis requires novel frameworks of resilience at work so that it considers the human–nature relationship. Increased sustainability reporting provides a platform to disclose how organizations practice sustainable HRM as a part of the SDGs. The research questions are: How are resilience approaches illustrated in sustainable HRM reporting? What argumentation is used for resilience approaches? What HRM practices are associated with different resilience approaches? The sustainability reports of 10 well-known Finnish organizations were studied using reflexive thematic analysis. The results identified that resilience is well addressed in the organizations' SHRM at the individual and human interaction levels. However, the ecocrisis is not the challenge for which organizations are preparing SHRM in practice. Despite the good intentions of SHRM, the pursuit of resilience can lead to contradictions in terms of socio-ecological resilience. More conceptual guidelines are needed to emphasize the connection with the human–nature relationship.

KEYWORDS

ecological crisis / human–nature relations / human resource management / resilience / socio-ecological resilience / sustainable human resource management / sustainability report

Introduction

As a result of the human-caused ecological crisis, a reconsideration of the long-term sustainability and resilience of societies, businesses, and individuals is required (Folke et al. 2021; McPhearson et al. 2021). Although all working life has a strong impact on the environment, studies have paid very little attention to the relationship between nature and work (Labatut 2023; Lahikainen & Toivanen 2019; Wright et al. 2018). Basically, it is—or it should have been—about an ontological rethinking of humans and nature in the context of work (Labatut 2023; Lahikainen & Toivanen 2019).

¹ You can find this text and its DOI at <https://tidsskrift.dk/njwls/index>.

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This means an ontological shift to a relational view of employees, organizations, and nature (Ergene et al. 2020). The need for rethinking is approached in this article by reconciling the resilience and sustainable human resource management (HRM) debates in working life.

HR practices and HR policies are key to achieving resilience in organizations (e.g., Lengnick-Hall et al. 2011), as well as being part of organizations' sustainability policies (Di Vaio et al. 2020). Sustainable HRM has become public and visible when many companies disclose their sustainable HRM policies and practices through their environmental, social, and governance (ESG) reports (Aust et al. 2024). This, according to Ehnert et al. (2016), shows how much value companies place on sustainability issues. However, reports focus on the accountability view (European Commission 2023), less on HR issues (Di Vaio et al. 2020), and do not explain how companies frame employee–nature relationships behind their disclosures.

The recent literature (Alcazar et al. 2019; Labatut 2023) has pointed out that organizational and HRM research, as well as sustainability activities in organizations, underemphasize nature in the organization contexts. Characteristically, humans and nature are seen as independent entities, and ecological issues and social problems are thus separated (Ergene et al. 2020). The focus of the research is on developing sustainability as disconnected from planetary boundaries and the root issues of the ecocrisis. However, organizations are not isolated islands; they are part of dynamic systems whose ecological base is changing radically (Folke et al. 2021; McPhearson et al. 2021; Steffen et al. 2011). Likewise, human and natural well-being are intertwined (Helne & Hirvilammi 2015). The well-being, survival, coping, and adaptation of people is therefore related to the nature around them and vice versa. How the relationship is recognized in organizations and sustainable HRM seems to be less explored, and a gap between the challenges of the ecocrisis and sustainable HRM research exists (Aust et al. 2020; Järnlström et al. 2018). It is therefore time to focus deeper on resilience research in the context of sustainable HRM.

In the context of work, resilience is usually defined not only as the ability of individuals, teams, or organizations to adapt or bounce back in the face of everyday hardship or traumatic adversity (Fletcher & Sarkar 2013) but also in the face of continuous change in a volatile working life (Braun et al. 2017; Kuntz et al. 2016). Given the vast and growing amount of research on organizational resilience such as strategic and risk management perspectives, the research on resilience in HRM in this article focuses on the individual and interactional aspects. According to a review by Duchek (2020), several studies have linked an organization's social resources such as high social capital, shared goals, and shared knowledge to its resilience or ability to anticipate, cope with, and adapt to changing conditions. The basic idea is therefore that resilience is built via social interaction through shared interpretations and organizational practices (e.g., Lengnick-Hall et al. 2011), thus benefitting both employees and the community (e.g., Gerschberger et al. 2023). When resilience is conceptualized as community-centered, the members of a work community or team can be interpreted as being in a relationship with one another. However, relationships are built between people, while nature has been considered an external threat to organizations and people (e.g., Linnenluecke 2017; Williams et al. 2021). Indeed, pandemics or natural hazards threaten human well-being, as well as companies and work communities, and researchers have also contributed to this field (e.g., Wilmar & Lesauvage 2024). However, it is not entirely clear

from which perspective nature is approached in these debates. Is it outside the worlds of work, organizations, and employees? Is it just for leisure? Or are they all related? What is the sustainable HRM perspective on this? In this study, we argue that resilience at work can be explored not only as the abovementioned human-centered conceptions but also as a socioecological approach in which the resilience of employees and organizations is constructed and maintained in relation to nature. This study considers these perspectives as potential approaches to the sustainability issue.

In this article, we examine sustainability as a long-term super-generational goal that considers the challenges of the ecocrisis and is separate from corporate sustainability (Ergene et al. 2020). Resilience is thus more the situationally emerging traits and processes that people *and nature* need to achieve sustainability and is a potential driver of sustainable HRM in organizations. By setting long-term sustainability as a goal, the broadening of resilience exploring becomes relevant to the socioecological approach. The current study is based on the finding that the human–nature relationship can also be recognized in the workplace from the perspective of employees, and that a socioecological resilience approach in the workplace could benefit the sustainability of both employees and nature (Niemi et al. 2023). The research proposes that resilience approaches can be recognized direct or indirect in the organizations' sustainability reports.

Overall, sustainability reporting has been increased and developed in the recent in 2000s (De Silva Lokuwaduge & De Silva 2022). The EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive and the European Sustainability Reporting Standard have made corporate sustainability reporting, including reporting on HR, for large and medium-sized listed companies in phases from 2024 onwards. In the Nordic countries, this directly or indirectly covers more than 22,000 companies, with 5.6 million employees (Eurostat 2023). From the perspective of the numerous, this change is remarkable because mainly large, listed companies and public sector organizations have thus far reported on sustainability in the EU, based on the Non-Financial Reporting Directive in 2014. The purpose of the NFRD was to improve companies' disclosure of social and environmental activities and to overcome stakeholder distrust (Di Vaio et al. 2020), but in general, sustainability reporting has looked at the balance between companies' business goals, stakeholders, and social legitimacy (De Silva Lokuwaduge & De Silva 2022).

The aim of the study is to explore:

- Q1: How are resilience approaches illustrated in sustainable HRM reporting?
- Q2: What argumentation is used for resilience approaches?
- Q3: What HRM practices are associated with different resilience approaches?

Thus, in the theoretical section, we first highlight the aspects in which resilience has been principally examined in workplaces along with sustainable HRM. Second, we review alternative resilience approaches based on ecological resilience studies. After identifying different approaches to resilience in the workplace research literature, we analyze these approaches in the sustainable HRM reporting of well-known Finnish organizations. The study suggests that the results of this analysis can be used to enrich both the resilience and sustainable HRM literature and the development of organizational reporting practices with the socioecological perspective.



Emphasis on resilience and sustainability in HRM research

It seems that resilience has become a kind of fashionable meta-skill that both employees and organizations need. Kuntz et al. (2016) conceptualized employee resilience as the ability of employees to use individual and organizational resources to continuously adapt and thrive in everyday working life. Employee resilience has been linked to many positive consequences. For example, it predicts greater job satisfaction and job engagement (Näswall et al. 2019) and is related to good work performance (Hartmann et al. 2020). Resilience is also linked to employee agility (Braun et al. 2017) and positive organizational behavior based on positive psychology, which emphasizes the strengths and virtues that enable employees and communities to adapt (Youssef & Luthans 2007). Although employee resilience is individual in this sense, it is underpinned by supportive leadership, the organizational culture, and organizational structures. Moreover, many protective and supportive resilience factors are situationally dependent on other people (Fletcher & Sarkar 2013), which in the working life context refers to supportive leadership and a psychologically safe working environment (e.g., Gerschberger et al. 2023) and collective job demands (Hartwig et al. 2020). Also, resilience is conceptualized as a characteristic of employees or organizations in these studies, so the concepts can be interpreted as human-centered.

Resilience research has especially increased in the 2000s (Linnenluecke 2017), approximately at the same time as the sustainable HRM concepts (Aust et al. 2020). Sustainable HRM has been described as the umbrella concept of such approaches that consider both sustainability and HRM (Kramar 2014). In this sense, ‘sustainability’ refers to corporative economic performance on the one hand (Elkington 1994; Labatut 2023) and the more multidimensionally social, cultural, and ecological sustainability of organizations on the other hand (Aust et al. 2020; Kramar 2014).

Aust et al. (2020) classify four sustainable HRM types: Socially Responsible HRM; Green HRM (GHRM); Triple Bottom Line HRM; and Common Good HRM, to which we will return later. Socially Responsible HRM refers to the most conventional type, which focuses on human capital conservation inside companies and the indirect impacts of companies on surrounding societies (Aust et al. 2020), but not ecological aspects. Green HRM, in particular, focuses on supporting environmental and HRM goals at the strategic and practical levels (Paulet et al. 2021; Renwick et al. 2016), whereas the third type, the ‘triple bottom line’ approach, equally emphasizes the economic, social, and environmental aspects in HRM (Aust et al. 2020) as a ‘win-win-win’ setting for corporations, the environment, and people (Elkington 1994).

Many practices that have been identified as supporting resilience at the employee and community levels—such as supporting initiatives and capability development, as well as balancing work and leisure—are also included in sustainable HRM (Aust et al. 2020). GHRM, agility, and resilience together have also been shown to develop an organization’s innovation capacity and performance (Alipour et al. 2022). However, as Aust et al. (2020) show, despite the environmental purposes, GHRM and also Socially Responsible HRM approaches limit the pursuit of resilience to economic and social objectives. Kramar (2014) saw that sustainability, especially Green HRM, has an opportunity to take a role in building a bridge between ecological and human sustainability in organizations. Although this ‘paradigm shift’ has been discussed for years, researchers (Alcaraz et al. 2019; Aust et al. 2020; Järlström et al. 2018) have more recently criticized the fact that the basic setting

of sustainable HRM in its various approaches is still to develop sustainability inside the organization or from inside-out, based on economic values and purposes.

The fourth type of HRM, presented by Aust et al. (2020, 2024; see also Lu et al. 2023), includes a proposal to address the above problem. The basic assumption of ‘common good HRM’, based on common good values, is to use skills and expertise to benefit society and address major challenges such as the social problems. Thus, the idea of CGHRM is to contribute from outside to inside the firms (Aust et al. 2020; Lu et al. 2023). Aust et al. (2020) suggest that CGHRM could also consider ‘grand sustainability challenges such as climate change’. Lu et al. (2023) connect common good values with employee resilience. In the Chinese context, they operationalize CGV by using 22 questions (unfortunately none of them directly related to ecological issues) and show how CGHRM positively affects employee resilience (individual) and enhances employee well-being. In Lu et al.’s example, CGHRM is used as an external resilience factor for employees. Thus, recent studies (Alipour et al. 2022; Lu et al. 2023) have shown several benefits of sustainable HRM in terms of resilience.

However, both sustainability and resilience have some limitations in the view of ecological sustainability. Mainstream resilience studies seem to be based on a conventional organizational paradigm that draws on growth and adopts an instrumental stance to nature. In many research settings, resilience and sustainability refer to the physical or mental work environment for humans, so these are separated from the natural environment. This is also the case at the organizational level; for example, organizations do develop their environmental management and carbon neutrality, but this is not specifically connected to HRM (Järlström et al. 2018). Järlström et al. (2018) also noted that Finnish top managers connected sustainable HRM corporate’s social responsibility, equality, and work well-being themes, and ‘sustainability’ could mean anything, depending on the situation. Naturally, this challenges sustainability development. The Canadian researchers Haffar and Searcy (2018) also noted that even leading sustainability companies built sustainability report targets based on organization-centered goals rather than resilience-based thinking that considered planetary boundaries. Räikkönen (2011, 2016) demonstrated similar weaknesses at the work policy level in Finland: Weak resilience methods have reinforced ecological sustainability.

Resilience methods refer to either weak or strong sustainability ideas (Hediger 1999). In weak sustainability, ecological, economic, and social targets are considered equal parts of sustainability. This target setting leads to actions that aim to continue operations with slow and gradual changes such as investment in green transition, technological solutions, or consumer choices. On the contrary, in a strong sustainability approach, ecological limits and planetarian thresholds are set as the foundation of everything. (Hediger 1999.) For example, Räikkönen (2016) argued that investments in green energy were insufficient, and that working life should have a deeper understanding of the limits of nature’s capacity and the risks and consequences of the ecocrises for working life (see also Lahikainen & Toivanen 2019; Wright et al. 2018). A more critical and active approach to the maintained ways of working is also needed (Räikkönen 2016), so resilience practices in working life should be investigated through the lenses of weak and strong sustainability. As Hediger (1999) noted, different goals for what should be sustained and different natural resource concepts lie behind weak and strong sustainability. This leads to the question of for whose or which resilience we are aiming. In the next section, we focus on alternative approaches to resilience studies.



A relational-socioecological resilience perspective to HRM research

The ecological crisis has shown that society and nature are not separate and mutually exclusive (Beck 2010). Regarding the intertwined nature of the world, researchers have pointed out the need for a socioecological resilience approach in organization studies (Bansal *et al.* 2021). The socioecological resilience perspective is based on Holling's (1973, p. 14) concept of ecosystems, in which 'resilience is the ability to absorb change and disturbance while maintaining the same relationships between populations or state variables'. Holling's approach has been applied to the ability of organizations to anticipate, absorb, and persist after unexpected shocks (Walker & Salt 2006). Although the approach is popular among organizational resilience researchers, it is said to be an inadequate approach on its own (Clifton 2010). With the exception of a few studies, organizational resilience is disconnected from the broader concerns of socioecological resilience (Clifton 2010; Walker & Salt 2006; Williams *et al.* 2021). In the words of Williams *et al.* (2021), researchers have 'missed the opportunity to consider how to build resilience across broader social and ecological systems' (p. 103).

In many research settings, the environment refers to the business environment, and natural risks are concerns that can be addressed through organizational risk management and anticipation, after which the organization returns to 'normal' (Linnenluecke & Griffiths 2010). A more fundamental question is whether organizations (especially those that are highly dependent on natural resources) recognize themselves as parts of ecological ecosystems, and whether distinguishing between social and ecological resilience is possible (Adger 2000). In the wake of the increasing ecosystem volatility caused by climate change, long-term survival depends on the awareness of socioecological resilience at the strategic level in enterprises (Williams *et al.* 2021). In organizations and leadership practices, this could mean a shift from linear and subarea-focusing approaches to relational and holistic sustainability thinking (Bansal *et al.* 2021; Ergene *et al.* 2021; Linnenluecke & Griffiths 2010), as well as holistic managerial approaches (Williams *et al.* 2021) and interdisciplinary knowledge in organization studies (Ergene *et al.* 2021; Labatut 2023).

Although resilience scholars in organization and HRM studies have rarely considered ecological views, some sustainability researchers have taken steps toward studying sustainable societies and highlighting human–nature relations (Heikkurinen *et al.* 2019; West *et al.* 2020). Researchers have also adopted a well-being view of human–nature relationships (Armitage *et al.* 2012; Helne & Hirvilammi 2015; White 2017). In this sense, the relational paradigm means that human well-being depends on the health of ecosystems (Helne & Hirvilammi 2015). Resilience, which maintains well-being in the face of pressures and threats, should therefore also be approached relationally and in a wider socioecological context. Of course, relationality can also be seen in previous interpretations of resilience in working life—for example, in the sense that a supportive and protective environment is considered an external resilience factor for employees (e.g., Kuntz *et al.* 2016; Seville 2018). However, a consideration of both nature and humans can also offer conceptual tools and solutions for a more sustainable and resilient future for both (Armitage *et al.* 2012; Ergene *et al.* 2020; West *et al.* 2020). For example, a socioecological perspective could help HRM reduce the organizational

speed and short-termism that affect employees' organizational experience and mental health, as well as learn how to identify root causes and global and local interdependencies (Bansal et al. 2021). Labatut (2023) also suggests a relational perspective on the interaction between people and the environment in organizations. Despite these theoretical novel conversations, this is rarely discussed in practical terms. This practical platform could simply be sustainable HRM. Interestingly, Aust et al. (2024) have recently positioned common-good HRM as a socioecological perspective. More specifically, they propose that CGHRM could lead sustainability-oriented organizational culture and play an active role as a contributing organization to the SDGs. However, they do not discuss more about what this could be in HRM practice particularly in ecological sense.

We conclude that both sustainable HRM and resilience have been much studied but less together. Bringing together environmental and social sustainability issues in the same platform, namely ESG reporting, provides an avenue for exploring how resilience is addressed in organizations and particularly in HRM. Similarly, it continues the discussion Järlström et al. (2018) call for concerning what sustainability actually means in organizations, and what the role of HRM is in sustainable management. In the following, therefore, we consider resilience approaches and sustainable HRM (Q1-Q3) in the context of sustainability reporting.

Research methods and material

According to resilience research, we identify three approaches of the conception of resilience: individual, community-centered, and socioecological. The research review indicates that resilience emphasizes sustainability number of ways in the context of HRM. We examined insights into resilience related to HRM on well-known public companies' websites. After a brief search, we observed that HRM strategies were presented in various ways on the websites of companies, but many companies link their HR webpages to SDG themes. This led us focus our research material collection on sustainability reports. The search process also led us to the view that the gap between sustainability issues and HR policy was decreasing. In practice, public HR websites and sustainability reports were very similar and used the same phrases. By selecting sustainability reports, we ensured that the research material collected from different organizations was balanced.

We used 'sustainability Report 2022' and its Finnish version 'vastuullisuusraportti 2022' in the search conducted via LinkedIn and Google in May–August 2023 because we made no assumptions about the suitable companies. An organization was selected if its sustainability reports, including HR themes, were available on its website, if the majority of the organization's personnel was estimated to consist of knowledge workers, and if the organization operated in Finland. Only one company per industry was selected to ensure the balance of the material. If more than one company per industry was found, the choice was based on the scope of the social sustainability part of the report. Reports from small and medium-sized companies with fewer than 500 employees were excluded. Those that did not include personnel perspectives (some companies reported only energy saving, raw material, logistics, and such topics) or those from companies with which some of the authors had close relationships (e.g., their close relatives worked there, or



they worked there themselves) were excluded. If the reports were published as a part of annual reports, both were considered.

The study material consisted of 10 high-profile organizations and included sustainability reports or both sustainability and annual reports to the extent that these were about employees (Table 1). The total length of the reports was 1133 pages, of which 119 pages were on personnel matters (pages include images, tables, and graphical elements). The selected companies represent widely different kinds of industries, and the companies were well established in Finland. By choosing only large companies, we attempted to address the fact that those with better sustainability capabilities reported more than others.

Table 1 Research material

Type of organization	Industry	Collected material
A listed company operating in the Nordic countries, headquarters in Finland	Media and publishing (Sanoma Group)	Annual and sustainability report 2022
A Finnish listed company	Telecommunications (DNA)	Annual report 2022, incl. sustainability report
An international listed company, headquarters in Finland	Forest industry (UPM)	Annual report 2022, incl. sustainability report
A Finnish publicly owned organization operating internationally	Research and development (VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland)	Annual and sustainability report 2022
An international listed company, headquarters in Finland	Financial management (Accountor)	Sustainability report 2022
An international listed company, headquarters in Finland	Private healthcare (Terveystalo)	Annual report 2022, incl. sustainability report
An international listed company, headquarters in Finland	Elevator and escalator industry (Kone)	Sustainability report 2022
An international listed company, headquarters in Finland	Pharmaceutical industry (Orion Group)	Sustainability report 2022
A Finnish publicly owned company	Energy production (Helen Ltd)	Sustainability report 2022
A Nordic listed company operating in Finland	Insurance (If P&C Insurance Holding Ltd)	Sustainability report 2022

Written documents of organizations are used relatively less as research material (Peräkylä & Ruusuvaori 2011), even though they can be used to study a wide range of organizational phenomena. Here, the sustainable reports were used to describe how organizations argument their resilience approaches in sustainable HRM strategies and practices. The written reports illustrated directly or indirectly resilience in sustainable HRM and disclose hidden meanings.

We adopted a reflexive thematic approach (Braun & Clarke 2006, 2022) to the analysis. We also utilized text analysis (Coulthard 1994) to strengthen reflexive thematic

analysis due to the nature of sustainability reports: Reports are written for a wide audience, including stakeholders, employees, customers, and investors, and greenwashing is likely to occur (i.e., the gap between words and deeds) (Aust et al. 2024; De Silva Lokuwaduge & De Silva 2022). Thus, sustainability reporting has not been immune to criticism. On the other hand, the reports represent the companies' ideas about sustainability (De Silva Lokuwaduge & De Silva 2022).

The reports were skimmed individually in their entirety and checked for suitability. The introduction and social responsibility sections were then read word for word, creating short ideas for coding at the same time. The words 'employee', 'staff', and 'personnel' were then searched for using a search tool across all other parts of the reports to ensure that the employee perspective was not missed. Texts (one or more sentences) were selected if they were related to resilience, employee and HR policies and practices, or the relationships between them for the purpose of this research. During this progress, we noticed that not all companies are familiar with resilience as a term, or they do not use it in written reports. Rather, sustainability seems to be more commonly used. Resilience and sustainability are also sometimes used as parallel terms (Marchese et al. 2018). Some reports where sustainability is mentioned, we have interpreted it to mean more resilience (i.e., adaptation, coping). The inclusion criterion for an expression of resilience was that it represented a single idea of resilience (e.g., to anticipate, manage, cope, maintain, absorb, adapt, or renew the work content and environment).

The selected parts of the reports were categorized as individual, community, and socioecological resilience, depending on whether they focused on supporting the individual employee, team, or work community, or whether they included the wider, human–nature relationship. The implicit content of the texts was also considered when conducting the analysis and interpretation (Braun & Clarke 2022). In this phase, text analysis (Coulthard 1994) was utilized, presenting to the text such questions as what the author's purpose was, who seemed to be the intended audience, and what the tone of the text was.

Texts from different reports within the same resilience approach were combined, and within each approach, different themes were extracted from the texts. The themes were summarized and analyzed using the three research questions. The next chapter discusses the findings in depth. The rhetorical findings are reported above with the other results.

Results

An individual employee-centered resilience approach and sustainable HRM

The individual employee-centered resilience approach appears to be dominant in the reports examined. It emphasizes work well-being and conventional HRM practices in two ways. The first includes one-directional well-being activities from HR to employees, in which HR offers employees resilience-supporting services such as self-leadership training, stress management, and physical activity, but employees make the choices and take responsibility for their own well-being (Table 2).



Table 2 Individual employee-centered resilience approach and sustainable HRM

Q1: How is the individual-centered resilience approach illustrated in the organizations' sustainable HRM documents?	Q2: What argumentation is used in the resilience approach?	Q3: What HRM practices are associated with the resilience approach?
HR as an enabler	HR's role is to serve employees (voluntary).	Stress management support, work well-being and leisure activities, self-leadership, health services
Resilience as a mutually constructive process	The psychological premise	Work quality benefits: Meaningfulness, the importance of work, flexibility of work
Resilience in terms of anticipating and adapting to change	Changes in the business environment motivate employees for renewal (mandatory).	Training and development programs
Resilient employees as a means of production	Development and maintenance of the business	Employee development and well-being without specific details

The second way is bidirectional and appears to be based on a psychological premise; the employer provides work quality benefits such as meaningful and flexible work, and employees perform at their best, as is reflected in the following: ‘It invests heavily in culture, people engagement and talent acquisition to build a work environment that both enables strong performance and supports employee well-being’. In practice, the balance between work and private life is an arrangement that benefits both sides. In the post-Covid period, some of the reports mentioned concerns about mental coping and difficult times, but none reported finding solutions, not to mention less work.

The reports also argued that the individual resilience approach entailed proactivity and adaptivity in the face of external change. This view is more obligatory, which means that employees need to learn new things or adopt new ways of working, which is supported by the organization’s staff training, resilience coaching, and development programs: ‘During 2022, we developed our employees’ capabilities to succeed in the modern world by investing in automation and competence development through our DigiOS program’ (Accountor). However, the external changes mentioned in the reports are digitalization, the pandemic, the Russian attack and the Ukraine war, and organizational changes such as outplacement. The ecocrisis, climate change, and other environmental sustainability issues are not addressed in the reports as trajectories that affect employee resilience. Even in the energy industry, where the energy crisis seems to be a fundamental and tangible change factor, the need for learning and development is justified using economic sustainability, not environmental issues. For example, in Accountor, ‘Systematic and business-driven competence and people development is a critical factor for sustainable success in transforming and digitalizing financial administration with increasing compliance requirements’. Interestingly, uncertain times and unpredictable events are mentioned in general, but employee training focuses only on acknowledged issues. The exception is UPM, which mentions volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) training for managers.

Another way to illustrate the connection between the individual resilience approach and sustainable HRM is to identify resilient employees as a means of production, which sets employee resilience as an external value. In other words, the premise is not employee

resilience, but business continuity. Investments in employee resilience are argued through customer satisfaction and a knowledge-intensive business environment that requires learning new abilities, as in Sanoma’s report: ‘As a learning and media company, [we focus on] the professional development of our employees and their ability to acquire new skills, [which] is key to our future growth’ (original in Finnish), or by addressing the challenge of recruiting new employees: ‘Ensuring that great people want to join If, want to stay at If, and want to give their best to help the company achieve its goals is vitally important for the company’s performance and value creation’. When employee resilience is illustrated as a means of production, measures remain more abstract than in the other views in which several tangible resilience-supporting measures are mentioned.

Overall, the text analysis shows that employees rarely do anything themselves. They are encouraged, supported, trained, and coached in a variety of ways, but they are mainly objects of HRM. Accordingly, employees have no independent agency on sustainability issues either. There are basically two actors in the reports: HR and ‘we’. Naturally, ‘we’ is a rhetorical idea of all the members of an organization, but it does not identify who is actually expected to do something.

A working community-centered resilience approach and sustainable HRM

In the sustainability reports, the community-centered resilience approach includes not only traditional HRM practices but also signs of new working models in the post-pandemic era (Table 3). However, neither environmental sustainability nor nature is included in the community-centered approach.

Table 3 Working community-centered resilience approach and sustainable HRM

Q1: How is the community-centered resilience approach illustrated in the organizations' sustainable HRM documents?	Q2: What argumentation is used in the resilience?	Q3: What HRM practices are associated with the resilience approach?
Skilled supervisors who support resiliency	Supervisors are needed to lead teams for goal achievement and well-being.	Supervisors' resilience training Supervisors' peer training
The work community's autonomy	Providing team autonomy is the best way to make practical work arrangements.	Hybrid work Flexible work
Continuous collaborative and experimental learning, knowledge sharing	Learning is necessary in a constantly changing business environment to sustain the organization. Learning is based on social interactions at work.	Trying new things and allowing mistakes Learning together at work Social interaction
Resilience as a cultural and interactive phenomenon of the organization	Interaction as a value in itself	Open communication and discussion of organizational goals Community cohesion Ongoing interaction Employee experience



Perhaps the most conventional view of resilience is illustrated in the development of competent leadership and management, which influences teams' well-being and productivity. In practice, resilience-building activities involve management training and peer support between managers. Apart from leadership training, the reports also stress teams' autonomy, as in the following example from Accountor: 'Our a+ hybrid working model gives teams and team members autonomy to balance remote and office work. It also provides a solid basis for creating belonging and community by defining the minimum amount of in-person presence'. In many organizations, new working models are under reinvestigation after a long period of remote work because of the pandemic. The autonomy of teams is therefore especially related to places of work, hybrid work, and the balance between office and remote work.

Continuous collective learning, experimentation, and knowledge sharing form one view of community-centered resilience. It seems that learning at work at a collective level has been internalized in depth in many organizations, as in previous resilience studies. Collective learning is also connected with a culture that allows mistakes, as Orion's report mentioned:

Learning takes place largely by working together with others. Trying new things, as well as sharing lessons learned from situations, speeds up learning processes in the team. Active searching for information and learning new things are inevitable and essential skills every one of us needs in this rapidly changing working life. Trying new things can be successful or can be a failure, but failure should always be seen as an opportunity to grow and develop further.

As in the individual resilience approach, the community-level view has also been justified by changes in the organization's environment. Furthermore, changes do not refer to ecological issues or environmental crises. In addition, the 'environment' refers to the working environment, including its social and built dimensions, but is separate from the natural environment. Nature is something to be visited as a means of distinguishing between work and leisure.

As a final qualitative view of community resilience, we recognize a communicative organizational culture. In some reports, communication and dialog are considered values, as in the following: 'At KONE, we believe that employee engagement can be strengthened through honest, open, and timely communication and dialogue about our culture, values, goals, and strategic direction. We encourage dialogue with our employees and nurture collaboration'. According to the reports, open communication and dialog create a sense of belonging and facilitate the sensemaking of an organization's goals, which many studies have also called resilience-building actions.

A socioecological resilience approach and sustainable HRM

The socioecological resilience approach emphasizes more organization-level, ecological purposes than human-centered, individual, or working community-based management practices. At a practical level, the socioecological view is considered marginal, but the approach becomes visible through organizational values, aims, and how organizations set themselves in relation to the surrounding world and the ecocrisis. Three themes were found, and these differed in their levels of relational approaches (Table 4).

Table 4 Socioecological resilience approach and sustainable HRM

Q1: How is the socioecological resilience approach illustrated in the organizations' sustainable HRM documents?	Q2: What argumentation is used in the resilience approach?	Q3: What HRM practices are associated with the resilience approach?
Normative obligation to minimize the environmental impact of a company.	Corporate politics and rules Ethical responsibility	A general duty of everyone is to consider environmentally friendly practices at work such as material and energy savings in offices.
Company as an active player in solving the external ecological crisis.	Environmental agency	Staff as part of the system but is not addressed in terms of how this is enabled.
The organization as part of the ecological crisis.	'In the same boat' Sustainability as a complex system	Indirect environmental impacts of the workplace are recognized, and some tangible actions are taken to avoid them.

The most minimalist ecological view is presented in the reports as environmental activities based on norms and practical instructions. For example, the HR view is argued for using normative codes such as ethical codes, but it is also justified by practical rules in everyday office life, such as using green energy and avoiding printing. The aims are thus connected with the staff, as everyone's general duty, or not at all. Such sustainability reporting focuses on how an organization's positive impact on the environment can be maximized, and how its environmental footprint can be minimized, but it still places the natural environment in second place, as in the following example: 'Above all, we want to promote the health and well-being of our customers and our staff—and minimize our environmental impact in all our operations and products' (original in Finnish). This statement from Terveystalo is also interesting in the broader healthcare sector. As the ecocrisis affects people's health, it may be worthwhile for the healthcare industry to focus on its consequences. This is also a matter related to the organization's values:

In the middle of it all is a human being. We take responsibility for everyone's health and well-being and for the opportunity to live well. We work together for the benefit of the customer, and the customer shows the direction of our renewal. We help each other and appreciate all our talents. (Terveystalo, original in Finnish)

One step further toward socioecological resilience is the reports in which organizations played an active agency role in environmental issues, serving as spokespersons or leaders in their own business fields 'KONE aims to be the best partner for climate-resilient and sustainable buildings throughout their lifecycle' and even beyond organizational borders: 'We help our customers to rebuild and recover, and we make sure that claims are handled in a sustainable way' (IF). Company-level argumentations are based on company expertise and the provision of technological solutions for the ecocrisis, but relations with the staff are weak, and tangible actions are mostly lacking: 'We want to focus all our skills and energy on the systems and technology challenges where we can make the biggest impact' (VTT, original in Finnish). An exception is the insurance company, which notes the following:



We provide environmentally friendly workplaces, which enables our employees to minimise their environmental footprint. We are continually working on ‘greening’ our offices and making them more sustainable. Environmentally friendly alternatives should be prioritised when procuring office supplies and services. In order to reduce business travel, If focuses on ‘meeting instead of travelling’ and provides state-of-the-art virtual meeting opportunities.

Typically, the actor in the companies is ‘we’, as in the following: ‘We do practical sustainability work every day’ (Helen, original in Finnish). However, the reports do not say how ‘we’ is supported or managed, for example, and, even more so in this case, what exactly ‘we’ does or should do.

In the last dimension, the relationship between human and environmental well-being is recognized, and companies see themselves and their actions as part of a systemic entity. In other words, if companies are part of the socioecological system, the ecocrisis is not an external problem, but an internal one. Relationality is reflected in the following lines from Orion’s CEO:

We are all dependent on nature and its balance. The living conditions close to us and globally, raw materials extracted from nature, and how the changes in natural habitats impact our health are only a few reasons why we must continuously work to protect and restore the environment.

In the case of the pharmaceutical company, sustainability is seen as a complex phenomenon. The industry has a responsibility to produce medicines for people, but it also has a responsibility to the nature of which it is a part. How this responsibility is linked to employees is not always clear. In the telecommunications company, the connection has been recognized as follows:

We also understand that we leave a footprint on the planet — None of these goals will succeed unless we do this work with a committed and enthusiastic staff. That’s why it’s also important for us to be a humane and unique place to work for our current and future employees. (DNA, original in Finnish)

In this view, the indirect environmental impacts of the workplace are recognized, such as work travel and office buildings. The reports also include tangible actions to avoid environmental harm, such as building charging points for employees’ own electronic cars: ‘Our a+ hybrid working model enhances well-being and at the same time decreases our total carbon emissions due to less commute by our employees’ (Accountor). In contrast with the arguments of the community-centered resilience approach, the arguments for hybrid work here are based on environmental issues. Companies evaluate how employees travel to work and ask whether traveling every day is necessary. However, although the relationship between HRM and nature resilience is acknowledged, practical HRM activities are minor and are mentioned only in a couple of reports. Furthermore, the significance of the reference to HRM practices depends on the industry. All the previously mentioned practices are related to ways of working, not to what employees do.

Ultimately, it is also possible that companies do not always know what to do, as is evident in the following: ‘Orion is committed to working towards no biodiversity loss

caused by our business or our value chain. We want to be part of this critical journey towards a more positive future even though we do not have all the answers yet' (Orion). From a socioecological resilience perspective, acknowledging ignorance and uncertainty is welcomed in the face of the ecocrisis.

Discussion

This study examined how resilience approaches are illustrated in sustainable HRM reporting, what argumentation is used for resilience approaches, and what HRM practices are associated with different resilience approaches. Resilience has been recognized in sustainability reports as an individual employee-centered, a working community-centered, and socioecological resilience approach. Based on the findings, sustainability reporting in relation to human resources was primarily understood in terms of an individual, employee-centered approach to resilience. HRM is enhancing individual, employee resilience by providing resilience-supporting well-being activities, meaningful work, work–life balance, and personal development opportunities (focused on pre-defined new skills). HRM expects at the same time active employees. Thus, this supports the idea of Kuntz et al. (2016): they conceptualized employee resilience as a capacity of employees, which is mutually enhanced with supporting organization environment.

A working community-centered resilience approach is illustrated in terms of collective learning, shared knowledge, and a supportive organizational culture. According to Seville (2018), these activities help employees and companies anticipate and adapt in the face of challenges. Particularly, the findings highlight learning at work as a collective practice, which, according to Gerschberger et al. (2023; see also Seville 2018), is a remarkable key to resilience for both organizations and employees. Overall, based on several resilience studies (e.g., Duchek 2020), it seems that the companies included in this research have done their homework well in terms of known resilience factors such as social and organizational cultural resources and leadership skills.

The socioecological resilience approach is illustrated in the organizations' sustainable HRM documents in three ways: on the one hand, companies have normative obligation to minimize the environmental impact of a company. On the other hand, companies aim to be as an active player in solving the ecological crisis that surrounds them. The findings also show the third way, in which organizations position themselves as part of the ecological crisis. Nature's role varies from the obligatory rule to external challenges and the complex question of what part the organization is. However, the ecocrisis is not the key challenge for which organizations are preparing in sustainable HRM. From the perspective of the socioecological resilience approach, resilience was reflected in only a few practical HRM activities. The sustainability reports show very little evidence that organizations are developing their HRM practices with the natural environment in mind, or that they are carefully observing the challenges that the ecological crisis poses to working life. Sustainable HRM seems to represent a mostly socially responsible type (Aust et al. 2020): it is concerned with maintaining human capital in organizations.

The main contribution of this article is its recognition that the resilience approaches in sustainable HRM barely integrate ecological sustainability in ESG reports. The findings show that employees' and communities' resilience is widely observed in companies, and multiple ways of practicing it are announced. How resilience approaches frame



sustainable HRM in organizations contain several good practices at the microlevel, but contradictions at the system level at the same time.

Based on the findings, it seems that sustainability reports, and specifically their parts that deal with sustainable HRM, are not fully in the same framework as nature. The contradictions between these frameworks emerge in several ways. First, sustainable HRM does not address the core problem—the accelerating ecocrisis—and its consequences for the resilience of employees, such as the need to adapt to extreme weather conditions, to face uncertainty, or adjust the whole industry. The aim of the analysis was not to estimate the level of industry-dependent sustainability targets or outcomes, so it does not identify the companies' environmental footprints. It may be difficult for a profit-seeking company to really try to tackle eco-crises. However, we argue that HRM is yet to find its role as a sustainability worker in the ecological sense. While environmental issues are the main concerns of companies, HRM has focused on human-centered resilience. One reason may be that it is not always clear whether an ecological perspective is important for HR actors (Aust *et al.* 2020). However, it is precisely HRM in organizations that should be the key actor in leading sustainable cultural change in organizations (Järström *et al.* 2018).

The second contradiction is that organizations seem to have few practices that support socioecological resilience, even though they claim to be active players in the field of ecocrisis resolution. A few organizations explicitly mentioned that they were developing the necessary practices, but none was encouraging their staff to do so. The practices named represented weak sustainability (Hediger 1999; Räikkönen 2011). We also conclude that the focus of the reports is on describing the company as a responsible and good employer, but not specifically describing the HRM practices that are in place. This contrasts with environmental reporting, where the focus is on an organization describing the actions it is taking to reduce emissions.

Third, as long as organizations do not admit that they are also part of socioecological systems (Adger 2000), HRM and sustainability targets will always have their own separate paths. Based on this study's findings, this causes division in companies.

Focusing only on the organization may cause the fourth contradiction. As Williams *et al.* (2021) noted, rather than addressing the problem at its core, organizations build resilience against the impact of the problem. This is why the use of the relational well-being concept is suggested for framing resilience, even though socioecological systems' own individual units will be investigated, such as at the employee level (e.g., Helne & Hirvilammi 2015; White 2017).

Based on our findings, organizations have invested in a communicative organizational culture, dialog, and learning, but it is limited to the well-known internal needs of businesses, such as digitalization. Socioecological resilience researchers Walker and Salt (2006, also Räikkönen 2016) have noted that resilience can be built by promoting social capital, trust, and adaptive leadership and by encouraging learning and innovation. Trust between people and common actions are also necessary to achieve more ecologically sustainable work (Räikkönen 2016). Companies therefore have an opportunity to manage the transition toward more sustainable HRM in practice if they decide to do so. Strong sustainability requires diverse knowledge and skills, as well as the ability to face uncertainty (Walker & Salt 2006). Bansal *et al.* (2021; see also Williams *et al.* 2021) suggested a more holistic view of organizations and management practices, but broadening the perspective is at the beginning of the progress—if it is the premise at all.

According to Aust et al. (2024), the ‘common good’, including the nature aspect, might be realized through HRM, but they anticipate that this will require HRM to address socioecological goals. In general, Finland, like other Nordic countries, has the reputation of being a well-developed country in environmental issues and ESG reporting. Nordic companies could therefore also be important platforms for novel settings in sustainable HRM in the socioecological sense. To get closer to practice, one direction for future research would be to explore HRM and environmental managers’ and employees’ conceptions of socioecological resilience, that is, possible shared meanings and differences.

Conclusion

Our conclusion is that more knowledge and good practices are needed in workplaces for more sustainable working life. Organizations put much effort on the sustainability reporting. In order to develop reporting, more research should be done to verify the implementation of sustainable HRM practices in relation to the statements. As measurement and reporting tend to guide action, their premises should be chosen carefully. Socioecological resilience could be the missing link between sustainable HRM and ecological sustainability. We propose that by setting relational well-being and socioecological premises as the foundation of resilience in workplaces, novel approaches and practices could be achieved.

Limitations

The research is limited to large organizations operating in different business areas. All the organizations operated in Finland, and most were also managed in Finland. Many of the organizations operate internationally, so the research is not limited to Finland. A different type of content might have been highlighted in the results if the focus had been on only one sector or medium-sized enterprises, for example. The research did not aim to observe how sustainable organizations operated per se. However, HRM issues are mostly horizontal, so the findings can be generally applied to HR and working life development.

Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 18) stressed both process and outcome as the quality criteria of a reflexive thematic analysis. We particularly emphasized the coherence of analysis by following instructions so that each theme was rich and multifaceted, not overlapping with others, and consisted of more than one analytical observation. Considering the nature of reflexive thematic analysis, researchers’ reflexivity and their own interpretations are essential throughout the research process (Braun & Clarke 2022). However, in the case of ambiguous codes, the interpretation was conducted several times. The study material was interpreted critically but avoided overinterpretation. We respected the organizations involved, and we kept in mind the nature of sustainability reporting, that is, there are different positions on corporate responsibility (i.e., stakeholders). Using text analysis meant that the text’s hidden meanings such as the organizations’ values and attitudes were also considered. It is possible that if the material had been collected through interviews, for example, some parts could have been



stressed differently. However, sustainability reports are currently topical. When ESG reports extend to many new enterprises, a consideration of the goals that companies set for them, and how employee aspects are related to other sustainability views, will be important. In future, a comparative analysis between the Nordic countries could provide useful lessons.

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