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Aligning HR practices with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): A roadmap for Omani organizations

Abstract

Research background and purpose: This paper aims to address a critical gap in both sustainable development and human resource management literature by constructing a practical, context-sensitive framework for Omani organizations. It seeks to demonstrate how Human Resource Management can evolve from a support function into a central strategic driver, directly contributing to Oman Vision 2040's pillars of economic diversification and social sustainability. The primary goal is to provide a clear roadmap for integrating the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into core HR systems.

Design/methodology/approach: Employing a qualitative, conceptual research design, this study conducts an integrative literature review and theoretical synthesis. It analyses contemporary scholarly works from databases like Web of Science and Scopus, focusing on Sustainable HRM, Common Good HRM, ESG principles, and SDG alignment. The methodology emphasizes theoretical relevance and contextual applicability, synthesizing global advancements and tailoring them to Oman's unique socio-economic, cultural, and institutional context. This approach facilitates the development of a novel framework, the SDG-HR Alignment Matrix, which is further contextualized using illustrative cases from leading Omani organizations.

Findings: The central finding is the proposed "SDG-HR Alignment Matrix for Oman," a comprehensive framework that maps core HR functions – talent acquisition, learning & development, performance management, compensation, and employee relations – to priority SDGs (4, 5, 8, 10). The study identifies context-specific practices, such as transitioning to competency-based "Omanization 2.0," implementing SDG-linked performance KPIs. These findings illustrate how HR can operationalize sustainability, foster intrapreneurship, and build a future-ready workforce, thereby creating a direct link between micro-level organizational behaviors and macro-level national vision goals.

Value added and limitations: To the best of the author's knowledge, this paper offers the first dedicated framework that aligns HRM with the SDGs in a manner explicitly tailored to Gulf Cooperation Council GCC states specifically the Sultanate of Oman. It moves beyond generic Western models by integrating global SHRM theory with local institutional logics, such as Islamic ethics and nationalization policies. The study provides a significant value by bridging theoretical discourse with practical application, offering scholars a context-sensitive research model and providing Omani leaders with a novel, actionable tool to utilize human capital for sustainable national development.

Keywords: *Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM); UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Oman Vision 2040*

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1. Introduction

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda has changed how people think about corporate success. George et al. (2021) argue that companies are no longer judged only by their financial returns. Instead, stakeholders now look at environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and governance as the three pillars of ESG. This shift is particularly visible in rapidly changing economies like Oman's. Under Oman Vision 2040, the country has set economic diversification and social environmental sustainability as central goals, both of which closely mirror the UN's SDG framework (Oman Vision 2040 National Priorities, 2020). In practice, HR and other business functions must now be engaged with the sustainability agenda. Effective realization of this vision depends not only on macroeconomic policy and investments in infrastructure but, critically, on the resources, incentives, and alignment of the national workforce. Aust et al. (2020) and Kramar (2022) argue that SHRM theory sees HR as a strategic partner, one that can shape culture, change behavior, and bring sustainability into the core value chain. But when you look at Omani institutions, the gap between theory and practice is striking. HR is rarely at the table for sustainability decisions. Instead, the sustainability agenda tends to stay inside CSR departments or focus on external environmental compliance. HR remains largely separate from strategic sustainability goals (Kramar, 2022; AlQudah & Houcine, 2024). That is a problem the proposed framework is trying to solve.

In this paper it will be suggested that a systematic matching of HRM practices to the SDGs represents an important and under-developed frontier in pursuing Oman's national aspirations and addressing its global obligations. The research question of this study is: How can Omani organizations strategically align their core HRM practices with the UN SDGs to foster sustainable innovation, entrepreneurship, and contribute to Oman Vision 2040?

The purposes of this paper are identified as to: (1) consolidate latest global literature on SHRM and SDG alignment, (2) critically assess the potential opportunities and challenges for such alignment in an Omani context, and: (3) suggest a customized actionable framework an "SDG-HR Alignment matrix for Oman" as guidance tool for stakeholders. In linking these fields, this paper seeks to provide the basis for a site-specific model that may contribute to advancement in academic and applied debate in the region.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The evolution of Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM)

SHRM has evolved from early concepts of “Green HRM” focused primarily on environmental compliance (e.g. recycling, paperless offices) to a holistic paradigm that encompasses the economic, social, and ethical dimensions of sustainability (Ren et al., 2023). Kramar (2022) defines SHRM as “the adoption of HRM strategies and practices that enable the achievement of financial, social, and ecological goals, with an impact inside and outside the organization and over a long-term time horizon.” This definition underscores the multi-dimensional and stakeholder-oriented nature of modern SHRM.

Recent meta-analyses and systematic reviews (Aust et al., 2020; Macke & Genari, 2019) identify key characteristics of SHRM, including: long-term orientation, care for employees and communities, stakeholder cooperation, and voluntary practices that go beyond legal compliance. The literature establishes a positive relationship between SHRM practices and some outcomes such as enhanced organizational reputation, employee attraction/retention, innovation, and financial performance (Al-Sabi et al., 2024; Kara et al., 2023). The current integration between SHRM and corporate strategy is considered as a privilege of sustained competitive advantage, particularly in transformation-focused economies like Sultanate of Oman.

2.2. The strategic intersection of HRM and the UN SDGs

The 17 UN SDGs provide a global framework and common guidelines for sustainability. Their integration into business’ strategy is increasingly seen as an indicator of resilience and creation of long-term value (George et al., 2021; Costa et al., 2023). Scholars have begun mapping the linking between HRM and specific SDGs, moving beyond symbolic reporting to actual operational integration. As the following:

- SDG 4 (Quality Education): This should be linked to corporate training, lifelong learning initiatives, programs for upskilling and reskilling workers, and strategic partnerships with educational institutions to shape future-ready curricula (Cooke et al., 2021; Bindawas, 2025);
- SDG 5 (Gender Equality): Gender equality in the Arab region has grown in recent years. Sweileh (2026) found in his bibliometric review of 634 papers that publications on SDG 5 have risen sharply since 2015, focusing on topics such as women’s economic empowerment through microfinance. But few of these studies examined how gender equality is operationalized inside organizations through formal HRM systems, which can be translated into tangible HR practices: diversity and inclusion policies, addressing gender wage gaps, creating leadership pipelines

for women, and designing family-friendly working conditions (Alhalwachi et al., 2024; Jabeen et al., 2024). In Oman's public sector through primary research, Alhalwachi et al. (2024) demonstrate that institutionalized gender biases continue to limit women's upward mobility, creating a glass-ceiling effect that remains relatively unaddressed. Sweileh's regional macro-analysis and Alhalwachi's Omani sector-specific evidence suggest that while gender equality research is growing at the societal level, there is a need to translate these ambitions into concrete HR practices within Omani organizations;

- SDG 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth): Wages should be sufficient to allow employees a decent living, and the basic rights of employees including health and safety in the workplace, job security, social dialogue, empowerment for employability improvement of skills to do a job that can earn one some money (other than just to get an education which might not ever produce income), ethical supply chains that take account of CSR issues in management development (De Stefano et al., 2018; Sharma & McLean, 2025);
- SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities): Issues include policies on inclusive recruitment (e.g. people with special needs, marginalized groups), systematic discrimination in all its forms against any segment of the workforce and equal opportunities for advancing one's career as well as fair pay across gender ethnic origin religion age disability status (Fitzsimmons et al., 2023; Ling et al., 2025).

The literature posits that HR is the primary function to operationalize these goals internally by shaping the employees' experience and the culture of organization (Ehnert et al., 2016; Stahl et al., 2023). While prior studies have acknowledged the growing intersection between HRM and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, many literatures remain fragmented, often treating sustainability, ethics, ESG, and HR practices as parallel and separate rather than integrated domains. The present paper tries to bridge this gap by combining two established frameworks: Kramar's (2022) Sustainable HRM and Aust et al.'s (2020) Common Good HRM. ESG serves as the organizational governance mechanism, and the SDGs provide the overarching societal outcome framework. This combination will be argued with offering a more cohesive theoretical lens.

Kramar's SHRM Model asks, how can the HRM organizational base be leveraged in the service of sustainability? These six characteristics long-term orientation, stakeholder orientation, respect for human dignity and wellbeing, fairness and justice, environmental responsibility and systemic integration describe how HRM can be structured to contribute to the sustainable creation of value on economic, social as well as environmental levels. These attributes relate closely to the dimensions of ESG; placing HRM in a core place through which sustainability promises are translated, regulated and measured throughout institutions (see Table 1).

Table 1. Kramar's six characteristics of sustainable HRM with ESG pillars and SDGs

Kramar's SHRM characteristic	ESG pillar	Relevant SDGs	Interpretation
Long-term orientation	Governance (G)	SDG 8, 9, 12	HRM supports long-term employability, work-force resilience, and sustainable economic growth aligned with Vision 2040
Stakeholder orientation	Social (S), Governance (G)	SDG 8, 10, 17	HR considers employees, society, future generations, and national priorities
Respect for human dignity & wellbeing	Social (S)	SDG 3, 5, 8	HR practices promote decent work, health, gender equality, and psychological safety
Fairness & justice	Social (S), Governance (G)	SDG 5, 10, 16	Meritocracy, pay equity, transparency, and reduced inequalities in the workplace
Environmental responsibility	Environmental (E)	SDG 12, 13	HR enables green skills, sustainable behaviors, and climate-conscious workforce practices
Integration & coherence	Governance (G)	SDG 8, 16, 17	Sustainability embedded across all HR functions and linked to corporate strategy

Source: Kramar (2022)

Following this complex and multi-dimensional strategic approach, Aust et al.'s innovative model of Common Good Human Resource Management (CGHRM) is introduced. This provides a sound normative, ethical, and moral base for developing the strong influence and change that human resources (HR) may have over sustainable development. It is firmly based upon long-standing principles of moral philosophy, with a strong underpinning from the essence of social sustainability and has human dignity itself deeply embedded within its core. In this context, Human Resource Management goes beyond the limited contribution to organizational performance measures or ESG reporting: HRM is considered as a moral actor with the duty to drive societal good and seek ways to reduce some inequalities or work misbehaviors that still affect our societies. This moral foundation is linked with the social and governance dimensions of ESG. Thus, Table 2 offers a more detailed design of this structure, which demonstrates the relations between these interpretations and what they mean for a society has more fairness.

Table 2. **Alignment of Aust et al.'s of Common Good HRM Principles with ESG and SDGs**

Common Good HRM Principle	ESG Pillar	Relevant SDGs	Contribution
Primacy of human dignity	Social	SDG 3, 5, 8	Employees treated as moral subjects, not merely resources
Orientation toward the common good	Social, Governance	SDG 8, 10, 11	HR contributes to societal wellbeing beyond organizational boundaries
Mutual advantage (non-instrumentalization)	Social	SDG 8, 12	Balances organizational performance with employee wellbeing
Social justice & solidarity	Social, Governance	SDG 5, 10, 16	Inclusion, equity, voice, and fair labor practices
Responsible freedom	Governance	SDG 16	Ethical autonomy, accountability, and participatory HR decision-making
Institutional embeddedness	Governance	SDG 17	Alignment with national institutions (Oman Vision 2040, labor law, Islamic ethics)

Source: Aust et al. (2020)

Integrating these two perspectives enables a more holistic understanding of HRM's contribution to sustainability. Kramar's SHRM explains the strategic framework of sustainable HR systems, while Common Good HRM builds the ethical purpose guiding their design and implementation. ESG provides the mediating mechanism through which internal HR practices are converted into external accountability and transparency, whereas the SDGs offer a widely recognized benchmark for evaluating the broader societal contribution of HRM. Tables 1 and 2 synthesize this integration by systematically mapping the core principles of SHRM and CGHRM onto the ESG pillars and relevant SDGs, thereby establishing the conceptual foundation for the SDG-HR Alignment Matrix developed later in the paper. However, these frameworks are generic in nature and not precisely contextualized to regions with unique institutional and cultural environments such as the Gulf Cooperation Council GCC.

2.3. The Omani and GCC context: A unique landscape

The GCC region, including Oman, has a specific environment with a middle-aged national population, economic dependence on oil and gas resources, a high volume of expatriate labor force and ambitious national vision (Afiouni, 2014; Budhwar et al., 2023). Research on SHRM and SDGs in the GCC is emergent but growing, highlighting both opportunities and deep challenges. 117 studies about HRM in Oman were systematically

reviewed by Al Harrasi and his colleagues (2024), they found how these studies examined the HRM practices but almost none of them connected the HRM practices with sustainable development agenda in Oman.

Nationalization (Omanization) Policies: In the human resources domain it is of vital and crucial perspective and interlinks closely to SDG 8, which concerns opportunities for decent work with fair pay, as well as to SDG 10 (reducing inequities within societies). Academia has lately shown interest in the classic solution taken by quantity-based quota systems, as well as a new model “Omanization 2.0”. This is a powerful model focusing on competency development, strong mentorship relationships, and the intentional creation of important work opportunities. This is in line with promoting sustainability and expansion, as well as effectively balancing or alleviating any conflict or tension possibly resulting from meritocracy practices (Glaister et al., 2021; Dickmann et al., 2020).

Gender Equality (SDG 5): Omani women have achieved outstanding and meaningful successes in the field of education, proving their compatibility with learning; however, contrary to those achievements, they experience a relatively low rate of participation in the job market, and their presence at high senior levels (positions) appears occasionally across different sectors. An accelerating and more extensive research body now identifies the cultural and organizational obstacles that remain in place for them, inhibiting their full integration into work. This paper emphasizes the immediate need for policy interventions that support human resource management around work-life options and endorsement by leaders, as well as the importance of implementing anti-bias training. This is needed to both release the potential and enhance the abilities of this promising talent pool, enabling Omani women to play their effective role in the labor market (Al-Lamky, 2007; Belwal & Belwal, 2017; Belwal et al., 2020). Kiran et al. (2026) interviewed HR professionals across different Omani sectors, and they identify four themes curriculum alignment, transparent recruitment, career pathways, and dynamic work environments align closely with the talent acquisition practices proposed in this paper’s SDG-HR matrix. Separately, Shawky and Al Sawi (2025) found that even motivated Omani educators face time and resource constraints when trying to integrate gender equality. This reinforces the need of formal HR-led programs, such as leadership acceleration initiatives for translating SDG ambitions into practice.

Private Sector Development & Entrepreneurship: Oman Vision 2040 further sheds light on facilitating and supporting entrepreneurship and SMEs. Family business and SME sectors, for example, tend to have less formal HR systems. But this can be a problem and an opportunity to lay the foundation of SHRM, entrepreneurial orientation, and ethical employment practices. (Haak-Saheem et al., 2017; Al-Matani, 2018). A recent study by Waqas et al. (2024) showed that even in smaller enterprises with less formal HR systems, green strategic orientation – when mediated by green talent management practices –

can lead to measurable improvements in sustainable performance. This suggests that the Omani SME sector, while often perceived as a challenge for SHRM implementation, may represent a significant opportunity for targeted intervention.

Cultural Values and Institutional Logic: Network connections and collectivist values can make it harder to implement foreign-derived SHRM models effectively, because these models usually need to be localized to fit the Omani context. Islamic principles particularly justice (Adl), equity, and consultation (Shura) offer a strong philosophical foundation for SHRM that resonates locally (Budhwar et al., 2023; Tlaiss, 2015).

Overall, the existing SHRM literature is extensive, and there is no shortage of business studies focused on the GCC. But very little research has produced a comprehensive, SDG-rooted SHRM framework that is specifically designed for Oman. That is the gap this paper tries to fill in, by offering a model that is both culturally relevant and actionable.

3. Methodology: A conceptual framework development

The research is qualitatively, conceptually designed to develop an integrative model of linking HRM, ESG governance and UN SDGs within the context of Oman Vision 2040. The study employs a focused integrative review and theoretical synthesis approach (Snyder, 2019; Paré et al., 2023), which is appropriate for theory development and conceptual model construction. While there was not a full systematic review in the PRISMA model, the search and analysis were conducted systematically to ensure transparency.

The methodology prioritizes theoretical relevance, conceptual coherence, and contextual applicability over exhaustive coverage. Foundational and contemporary bodies of literature in Sustainable HRM, Common Good HRM, ESG, and HR-SDG alignment were analyzed and integrated to develop the proposed framework.

A structured theory-led search was conducted using the Web of Science Core Collection and Scopus databases. To reflect recent debates within ESG/HRM and sustainable development SDGs, peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2019 and 2025 were considered. In the search I used the combinations such as: (“Sustainable HRM” OR “Green HRM” OR “Socially Responsible HRM”), (“HRM” AND “SDG” OR “Sustainable Development Goals”), (“HRM” AND “GCC” OR “Oman”), (“Oman Vision 2040” AND “Human Resource”) and (“Nationalization” AND “GCC HRM”).

Empirically and conceptually the framework was developed in recent years; key founding and theoretically important publications were selected for a solid conceptual base with respect to the framework, while central theoretical ideas as well as groundbreaking contributions on Sustainable HRM and Common Good HRM had been taken into account. Criteria were based on English working papers peer-reviewed

in business, management, and sustainability journals that are directly related to HRM and sustainable development. Grey literature, including policy documents and reports from Oman's Vision 2040 Implementation Unit, the National Centre for Statistics and Information, and sustainability reports from leading Omani organizations (e.g., Petroleum Development Oman -PDO, OQ, Oman Telecommunications Company-Omantel), was used to provide contextual grounding and illustrative validation, rather than as primary analytical evidence.

Some exclusion criteria were applied: purely technical HR papers without a sustainability relation; sustainability papers that slightly mention HR; and non-peer-reviewed reports (grey literature was used only for illustrative validation, not as primary analytical evidence). 276 documents were returned by the initial search, after screening titles and abstracts against the previous criteria, 83 articles were used for full-text review.

The 83 selected articles were fully read. I used a thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. First, I familiarized myself with the texts by taking notes on an Excel spreadsheet. Second, I generated initial codes for each paper under the following categories: (a) HR function discussed (talent acquisition, L&D, performance, compensation, employee relations); (b) SDG(s) addressed; (c) specific practice or tool recommended; (d) mention of GCC/Oman context; (e) enablers or barriers identified. Third, I arranged these codes into six proposed themes: SHRM attributes, SDG-HR mapping, GCC contextual factors, barriers to implementation, enablers, and existing tools/matrices. Fourth, I reviewed and polished these themes by checking them against the original texts. Fifth, I defined and named the final themes, which correspond to the subsections of the literature review and the columns of the proposed matrix. Finally, I wrote synthesis that constructs the basis of the proposed framework.

Based on the above analysis, the development of SDG-HR Alignment Matrix for Oman done in four stages:

HR functions were identified in the first stage. From the thematic analysis, five HR functions appeared most frequently across the literature: talent acquisition, learning and development, performance and career management, compensation and benefits, and employee relations and engagement.

The second stage: Mapping priority SDGs. I recorded which SDGs were most commonly linked to each HR Practice in the literature. SDGs 4 (Quality Education), 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth), and 10 (Reduced Inequalities) emerged as the most frequently mentioned. SDGs 9, 12, 16, and 17 appeared as secondary but relevant topics.

Global practices collected in the third stage. From the global SHRM literature (e.g. Kramar, 2022; Aust et al., 2020; Stahl et al., 2020), specific practices were extracted (e.g. blind recruitment, ESG-linked KPIs, social dialogue) that formed the Global SHRM Practice in the matrix.

Contextualizing for Oman, done in the last stage. I adapted each global practice to the Omani institutional and cultural environment, using the GCC/Oman-specific literature (e.g. Glaister et al., 2021; Al Harrasi et al., 2024; Umair et al., 2023; Waqas et al., 2024; Shawky & Al Sawi, 2025). For example, “blind recruitment” translated into “gender-balanced shortlists” and “competency-based Omanization”; “sustainability training” was extended to include “structured knowledge transfer” between expatriates and nationals. I also cross-checked the proposed practices against sustainability reports from PDO, Omantel, and Bank Muscat to ensure practical credibility. Table 3 presents the final synthesized framework.

Table 3. **SDG-HR alignment matrix for Omani organizations**

HR function	Primary SDGs addressed	Global SHRM practice	Contextualized practice for Oman	Expected outcome & link to Vision 2040
Talent acquisition	SDG 4, 5, 8, 10	Blind recruitment, skills-based hiring, employer branding for sustainability.	1. Omanization 2.0: Shift from quota-based to competency-based national talent pipelines (Glaister et al., 2021). Develop «Future Skills» partnerships with SQU, and other Higher Education Institutions to co-create curricula (SDG 4, 8). 2. Inclusive Hiring: Implement explicit policies and onboarding support for «people with handicapped» and underrepresented groups (SDG 10). 3. Ethical Expatriate Recruitment: Mandate ethical recruitment audits for supply chains, ensuring no fees for workers and transparent contracts (SDG 8, 10). 4. Gender-Balanced Shortlists: Require gender-balanced candidate shortlists for managerial roles (SDG 5).	Building a skilled, competitive, and inclusive national workforce (Economic Diversification). Enhancing employer reputation locally and globally. Promoting social justice and reducing inequalities (Social Development).
Learning & development	SDG 4, 8, 9, 12	Sustainability training, leadership for sustainability, lifelong learning platforms. Sustainability training that includes knowledge retention mechanisms (Ugheoke et al., 2024).	1. Vision 2040 Competency Framework: Embed training in renewable energy, circular economy, digital transformation, SMEs entrepreneurship, and sustainable project management (SDG 4, 8, 9). 2. Mandatory SDG Literacy: Develop and deliver organisation-wide modules on the SDGs principles, and Oman's Vision 2040 (SDG 4). 3. Structured Knowledge Transfer: Formalize job rotation, shadowing, and reverse-mentoring programs between expert expatriates and Omani nationals to ensure capability succession (SDG 9). 4. Intrapreneurship Labs: Create internal incubators with training on design thinking and sustainable business modelling (SDG 9).	Developing future-ready skills for a post-oil, knowledge-based economy. Accelerating innovation and industrial development. Ensuring knowledge retention and builds national innovation capacity.

Performance & career management	SDG 8, 5, 10, 16	ESG-linked KPIs, 360-degree feedback, sustainability in promotion criteria. Green talent management KPIs linked to innovative work behavior and green performance (Umair et al., 2023; Waqas et al., 2024).	1. SDG-Linked Performance Metrics: Cascade organizational sustainability targets into individual KPIs (e.g., % reduction in operational waste, hours spent on community development, success in mentoring nationals) (SDG 8, 12). 2. Transparent & Meritocratic Pathways: Publish clear, competency-based promotion criteria and career ladders. Implement calibrated panel reviews for promotions to counter perceptions of connections (SDG 10, 16). 3. High-Potential Programs for Omani Women: Create dedicated leadership acceleration programs with executive sponsorship for high-potential Omani women (Shawky & Al Sawi, 2025) (SDG 5). 4. Career Conversations: Integrate discussions on sustainability contributions and skill development for future roles into regular career development dialogues.	Drives accountability for sustainability at all levels. Fosters a culture of meritocracy, transparency, and good governance. Actively supports gender equity and talent retention.
Compensation & benefits	SDG 8, 3, 10	Living wage, pay equity, green benefits (e.g., transport allowances). Sustainability-linked variable pay (Ogbeibu et al., 2024).	1. Beyond-Compliance Wage Leadership: Benchmark and lead the market on entry-level and skilled wages for nationals to make private sector careers attractive (SDG 8). 2. Family-Friendly & Holistic Wellness Packages: Offer comprehensive benefits supporting work-life balance, childcare, eldercare, mental health support, and preventative healthcare to boost female participation and overall wellbeing (SDG 3, 5). 3. Sustainability-Linked Variable Pay: Introduce a «Sustainability Bonus» or ESG-linked component in variable compensation for teams/individuals achieving verifiable SDG-aligned impacts (SDG 8, 12). 4. Pay Equity Audits: Conduct regular audits to identify and rectify gender and nationality-based pay gaps (SDG 5, 10).	Promotes decent work, reduces income inequality, and enhances employee wellbeing. Directly attracts and retains top national talent, supporting Omanization goals.

Em- ployee relations & enga- gement	SDG 8, 16, 17	Social dialogue, employee voice mechanisms, vol- unteer programs.	1. Formalized Consultative Councils (Shura): Establish structured forums with elected representatives from Omani and expatriate staff to consult on operations, OHS, sustainability initiatives, and organizational change (SDG 8, 16). 2. SDG-Aligned Volunteerism: Offer paid Volunteer Time-Off (VTO) for employees to participate in national priority projects (e.g., environmental clean-ups, digital literacy for youth, mentoring startups) (SDG 4, 11, 17). 3. Whistleblowing & Grievance Mechanisms: Implement robust, anonymous channels for reporting unethical practices, discrimination, or safety concerns, with clear anti-retaliation policies (SDG 8, 16). 4. Cultural & Social Cohesion Activities: Sponsor events that foster interaction and mutual understanding between national and expatriate employees, building social capital.	Strengthens so- cial partnership, fosters employee ownership and engagement. Build trust and social co- hesion. Direct channels corpo- rate resources into community resilience and national develop- ment.
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Source: own study based on: Glaister et al. (2021); Ugheoke et al. (2024); Umair et al. (2023); Waqas et al. (2024); Shawky & Al Sawi (2025); Ogbeibu et al. (2024).

To ground the framework in practice, it is shaped by documented practices from leading Omani organizations. Examples include Petroleum Development Oman's (PDO) structured In-Country Value (ICV) -creates a virtuous cycle where develop a skilled national workforce, and oil and gas investments generate maximum local value- and nationalization programs that emphasize skills transfer, Omantel's integration of SDGs into its sustainability reporting and employee engagement initiatives, and Bank Muscat's targeted women's empowerment and leadership development programs, and Dhofar University which used most SDGs as concentration areas in its strategic plan (PDO Sustainability Report, 2023; Omantel Annual Report, 2023). These cases provide real-world anchors for the proposed practices.

4. Discussion

The proposed matrix (expanded in Table 3) is designed as a strategic diagnostic and planning tool for Omani HR leaders and policymakers. It moves from generic alignment to contextually relevant, actionable practices, directly linking HR activities to both SDG outcomes and Oman Vision 2040 strategic pillars.

This suggested framework is not merely a template for compliance; it is strategically formed to release the human capital potential necessary for fostering responsible innovation and entrepreneurship, the core pillars of Oman Vision 2040. The following discussion offers more insights into the mechanisms through which this alignment acts as an enhancer for change in a specific context, like the Sultanate of Oman.

Economic diversification is a complex challenge and aim for Oman, especially among its many family-owned enterprises. These firms tend to be mature and well established. Their ability to create a more entrepreneurial climate is therefore critical. Many strategic measures can dramatically support the path to sustainability, such as the use of KPIs that link to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), e.g., incentivize ideas for innovative sustainable products and operations, and a reward mechanism, which may comprise providing sustainability bonuses. These rewards extracted by these mechanisms that encourage innovative behaviors from the employees, do not only inform employees but also provide them with the tools necessary to experiment. This is a fundamental shift in the Human Resources role, from being enforcers of compliance to becoming champions of the most innovative working environments. In this new environment, employees are expected to take the intrapreneurial approach and create a corporate climate of innovation. This creative spirit is, however, metabolized and deployed both strategically and sustainably in business by being conducted over its environment (Alalawi, 2020).

Oman Vision 2040 places a strong emphasis on the need for a thriving SME sector. Big corporates can do a lot more than just invest. HR can exert its influence in two keyways. By promoting a workforce with transferable skills such as Agile Project Management, Digital Literacy, and Entrepreneurial Thinking, it is directly augmenting the talent pool and founder base for the startup ecosystem by sourcing outcomes. Second, and more directly, HR can advise on supply chain sustainability. Ethical buying policy in line with corporate SDG commitment. Waqas et al. (2024) supported this second pathway by finding that green talent management mediates the relationship between green strategic orientation and sustainable supply chain performance in Omani SMEs, even among firms with relatively informal HR systems. Leveraging fair employment practices (SDG 8) of the SMEs, businesses raise the involvement by default. This is an extension of SHRM outside the borders of the organization, and it has implications beyond an organization because potentially it has a multiplying effect on fair work.

In GCC countries, one of the expected challenges to implement the framework is the claim of competition between Wasta and meritocracy. To avoid this, the strategy proposed here is to transparentize performance and promotion processes (e.g., criterion lists, calibration panels). Instead of networks eliminating, it provides an objective filter for subjects' decisions that will help in generating more trust in the system. At the same

time, it corresponds to more fundamental positive cultural and religious foundations. Alsarhan et al. (2024) argue that HR managers themselves set and influence the level of *wasta* in an organization through a phenomenon they call ‘relational gatekeeping behavior’. In fact, this might be the most crucial finding for such a framework because it shows that HR leaders and top managers can elect to neutralize *wasta*’s function and not just avoid its effects. Islamic Justice (Tlaiss, 2015) forms the foundation of fair wages and inclusion. This will allow the model to become more legitimate and well-accepted by framing SHRM through this value system.

Moving to SHRM will encounter resistance, which is characterized by: short-term cost considerations; discomfort with the change among traditional HR-trained middle management; lack of SDG/ESG expertise even among HR departments. A recent empirical study in 16 Omani banks by Umair et al. (2023) reinforces the urgency of addressing this barrier: they found that while green talent management improves sustainable performance, its effectiveness is heavily based on whether HR professionals have the right skills to implement green hard and soft talent management practices skills, which are currently underdeveloped in many Omani organizations. Mitigation will take a gradual and common-sense approach: To make SHRM part of leadership, the CEO and board must clearly connect HR strategy to Vision 2040. Invest in the upskilling of HR professionals, provide training in sustainability metrics or ESG reporting, and change management. Begin with pretentious, high-impact pilots (a successful women’s leadership program or popular employee volunteering) in your highest traffic businesses. Calculate and communicate their ROI around engagement, employer brand, and operating efficiency as well to generate internal advocacy. HR leaders should be pushing for national policies that reward SHRM, like tax breaks for companies with evidenced fair wage policies or some other form of public recognition of HR practices aligned with the SDGs.

Table 4 presents the proposed SDGHR Alignment Matrix for context in Oman, against three prominent international comparison models: Kramar’s (2022) six characteristics of Sustainable HRM, Aust et al.’s (2020) Common Good HRM principles, and the UN Global Compact’s SDG-HR guidance (Stahl et al., 2020). The comparison explicitly illustrates the originality of this study, it also structured around five criteria that are highly critical for the Omani context: cultural contextualization, operational specificity, integration of Islamic values, handling of informal networks (*wasta*), and direct linkage to the national vision.

Table 4. **Comparative assessment of SHRM frameworks for the Omani context**

Criterion	Kramar (2022)	Aust et al. (2020)	Stahl et al. (2020)	(SDG-HR Matrix for Oman)
1. Cultural contextualization	Assumes Western stakeholder capitalism	Assumes strong civil society institutions	Designed for global MNCs, not tailored	Explicitly built for GCC/Oman institutional logics
2. Operational specificity	Principles only (six characteristics)	Moral principles only	General recommendations	Specific, actionable practices for each HR function
3. Integration of Islamic values	Not addressed	Not addressed	Not addressed	Explicitly discussed (Sections 2.3, 5.3) and linked to SHRM
4. Handling of wasta / informal networks	Not addressed	Not addressed	Not addressed	Addressed with practical mitigation strategies (transparent KPIs, panel reviews)
5. Linkage to national vision	None	None	None (global goals only)	Directly mapped to Oman Vision 2040 pillars

Source: own study

5. Conclusion

This paper argued that aligning HRM with UN SDGs is not just an optional improvement but a strategic necessity for Oman. This alignment is critical for the realization of goals set out in Oman Vision 2040, as well as ensuring that the Sultanate of Oman plays an active role within the global sustainable development agenda. The “SDG-HR Alignment Matrix for Oman” is a novel, contextually driven framework purposely designed to embed this imperative into HR functions. In doing so, it harmonizes the gap between high level national goals and the concrete daily practices in organizations.

The study offers an important contribution to SHRM literature by going beyond generic Western-based models to present a culturally and institutionally sensitive model of a Gulf state. It meets calls for more context- based HRM research (Budhwar et al., 2023) and advances the discussion on the micro foundations of sustainability activation. Ugheoke and his colleagues (2024) examined HRM practices in 10 Omani higher education institutions and found that training plays as genuine source of sustainability, with knowledge retention playing a significant mediating role in this relationship. This finding provides concrete evidence that micro-level HR practices can, in fact, drive

macro-level sustainable development outcomes, thus aligning with and supporting the core premise of the proposed SDG-HR Alignment Matrix.

This demonstrates the operationalization of macro-level goals such as SDGs and national visions in the contexts of daily HR practices and is constantly accompanied by a clear theoretical linkage among institutional theory, SHRM, and sustainability transitions. This culturally sensitive orientation is powerfully reinforced by a recent large-scale, cross-national study by Peretz (2024). By analyzing data from 1,950 individuals across 26 countries, the study found that the effectiveness of SHRM practices is significantly moderated by national culture; SHRM practices are more effective in flexible and adaptive cultural environments. This key finding provides compelling, multi-country evidence for a central argument of this paper: that for SHRM to be effective – particularly in a context like Oman – it must move beyond generic Western models and be carefully tailored to its unique institutional and cultural environment.

For HR Leaders & Practitioners in Oman: The matrix can be as diagnostic tool and strategy planner for overall management. It can be used to review the existing practice, identify gaps and develop a step-by-step process/roadmap for SDG integration. It offers specific, culturally relevant recommendations to drive at their organizations.

For policymakers (e.g. MoL): For policy makers, especially the MoL, the framework can help facilitate a transition towards an “Omanization 2.0”, that prioritizes skill-based skills development over mandatory localization targets. This transition could be managed by incentivizing employers to develop and invest in mentoring, knowledge transfer, and career progression processes for Omani nationals in high-value and future-oriented sectors, combined with incorporation of SDG-aligned Sustainable HRM standards (e.g., fair recruitment, pay equity, gender inclusion; occupational health and safety) into labor regulations and inspection systems. Simultaneously, policy incentive tools and national recognition standards should be restructured to reward firms with well-established records of achievement in sustainable HR practices, thereby promoting good governance and equity in labor markets. MoL can strengthen immunity/vision against the potential impacts of such linkages by linking them to Oman Vision 2040 priorities via national competence frameworks, and utilize HR data/ people analytics, and ESG standards in building evidence-based policies that are open and serve as a tool for labor market improvements.

For Business & Board Leaders The study demonstrates that investment in SHRM is a basis for long-term organizational resilience, capability to innovate, and manage risk. Practitioners may care about the Omani banking sector, where Umair et al., (2023) found that environmental corporate social responsibility directly impacts green talent management, which in turn controls sustainable organizational performance. And it also strengthens the employer brand, which is crucial when they are working to pull in that diverse and highly skilled pool of talented Omani youth. A strong employer’s brand is more important than ever in this significantly competitive landscape, and where

international investors and corporates are much more selective about the type of human resources they decide to work with.

Being a conceptual paper, this paper proposes the basis of a model that needs to be tested and developed through empirical research. The weaknesses associated with this methodology provide obvious avenues for future work:

The primary limitation is the propositional nature of the matrix; further studies need to be carried out using mixed methods designs to determine its applicability and efficacy. Indeed, qualitative follow-up longitudinal case studies located in several Omani settings will bring the process of implementation into focus, highlight any unintended obstacles to change, and record output. Quantitatively, academics can develop and test a structural equation model (SEM) to assess the effects of specific matrix behaviors, such as SDG-linked KPIs or structured knowledge transfer programs, on outcomes including innovation output, employee well-being, national talent retention, and overall business sustainability performance.

Moreover, the framework, though intended to be generalizable, needs testing across multiple industries. In the tourism, logistics, or renewable energies industry, other challenges and opportunities than in industrial sectors might determine SDG-HR alignment. Research that fails to consider the roles and contributions of its SMEs in general, which are central to Oman VISION 2040, and the fact that their HR functions do not operate under traditional and formal job evaluation systems. Further research needs to be conducted on how principles in the matrix can be transformed into implementable tools for SMEs and family businesses in Oman.

Also, there is no close examination of the infrastructural and enabler role of Human Resource Technology (HR Tech). It remains for further work to explore the possibilities and potential of employees' Analytics, AI-driven recruitment tools, and ESG data platforms in promoting, monitoring, and reporting on SDG-aligned HR practices. Technology-related solutions could be investigated that solve implementation constraints: for example, automatically conducting the pay equity audit and having dashboards related to SDG-linked KPIs.

And thirdly, Given Oman's accelerated progress in economic diversification from hydrocarbons, the human dimension and management are critical. A crucial line of enquiry is the contribution of HR to the development and implementation of just transition strategies. This would involve researching if, and how, the HR function can drive large-scale reskilling initiatives to offer a social protection network for displaced workers and give everyone equitable access to new opportunities in green industries, thus operationalizing SDG 8 (Decent work) and SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities) during structural economic change.

Analyzing these limitations with rigorous empirical research will not only strengthen the suggested framework but also elevate evidence-based SHRM practice in Oman and

elsewhere, guaranteeing that HRM's alignment to sustainable development is firmly grounded in theory and makes a valid impact on practice.

Finally, HR in Oman can no longer ignore its role as an architect of the human system, because it needs to complete its journey from personnel manager to builder of the human system. This is the alignment that marks the true frontier where global responsibility meets corporate innovation and cultural wisdom to provide a future of resilience, inclusiveness, and prosperity for the Sultanate of Oman.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the author used Quillbot in order to proofreading and editing. After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication

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