

Review

# Socially Responsible Human Resource Management: A Systematic Literature Review and Research Agenda

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**Abstract:** At the intersection of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and human resource management (HRM), a specific research strand has been forming and considerably flourishing over the past years, contributing to the burgeoning academic debate of what has been called “socially responsible human resource management” (SRHRM). The SRHRM debate seeks to proactively enhance employees’ work experiences and meet their personal and social expectations in ethical and socially responsible ways. Despite the increasing interest in research about SRHRM, however, the literature in this area is highly scattered, and a comprehensive study has yet to be undertaken. The present paper addresses this shortcoming by systematically reviewing 57 scholarly articles published in this research domain. It integrates previous insights on the topic to provide a far-reaching theoretical framework that highlights antecedents, practices, and outcomes of SRHRM research. As the results show, between 2011 and 2021, the *Sustainability* journal has published most of the empirical papers in this area, while the last three years (2019–2021) experienced a significant surge of publications on the topic. Our framework shapes a holistic overview of the SRHRM domain and illuminates different relevant elements upon which future studies in this area could be developed. This contribution is also beneficial for general CSR literature as it stresses the importance of its internal stakeholders, which have been comprehensively given less attention so far. By critically examining the recent literature on SRHRM, we further show how previous research is dominated by studies rooted in utilitarian approaches. Therefore, we set a research agenda for future studies by acknowledging the need for process-oriented studies and the importance of critical scholarship within the field of SRHRM.

**Keywords:** corporate social responsibility; critical HRM; HRM ethics; internal CSR; responsible management; socially responsible HRM; SRHRM



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## 1. Introduction

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

insisted that CSR could not be seen as an optional provision; rather, it should even be regulated as mandatory obligation of a firm.

The strategic formulation of CSR priorities as well as their translation into everyday managerial practices has however represented a critical challenge for many organizations. As Jamali [13] argued, organizations responded to this challenge by emphasizing the role of human resource management (HRM). Indeed, HRM assumes a critical role as HR activities are highly intertwined with humanistic approaches in organizations [13,14] while contributing to business value creation at the same time [15,16]. It is thus not surprising to see that prior research has considerably sought to relate CSR with HRM [17,18]. The linkage between CSR and HRM can be critical for organizations to, for instance, make sense of the ethical assumptions about their role in societies, improve relationships between themselves and employees [2], and solve the paradoxical tensions (i.e., conflictual interests of different stakeholders) that may occur during CSR initiatives [19].

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

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

Previous research has addressed the role of SRHRM practices in various domains such as “sustainable competitive advantages” [28], “employee citizenship behavior” [29], “talent management” [30], “performance management” [31], “employee well-being” [32], “employees’ turnover intention” [33], “corporate reputation” [34], “affective and organizational commitment” [35], among many others. Despite the increasing research interest in SRHRM, the literature in this area is highly fragmented, and a comprehensive study has yet to be undertaken. Therefore, by doing a systematic review of past robust research in this domain, the present paper seeks to respond to a recent call by Santana et al. [36] for developing a comprehensive framework in SRHRM. To this end, this review integrates the findings of high-impact publications within the SRHRM field to determine, through a multi-level analysis, its antecedents, practices, and outcomes. In addition to depicting a comprehensive theoretical framework in SRHRM, we further aim to explore the research gaps in this area and contribute to the literature by setting an agenda for future research.

More explicitly, the overall contribution of the present systematic review can be explained in three aspects as follows:

- (a) It adds to our understanding of the SRHRM domain by analyzing previous literature that has remained understudied thus far [36] and offers a theoretical framework by which future studies in this area could be stimulated. This contribution is of importance for the general CSR literature in reference to internal stakeholders as less attention has been paid to this dimension so far [22];
- (b) By critically addressing previous literature and potential gaps in the SRHRM area, the paper suggests a different yet relevant vision for moving this field forward. It calls for a paradigmatic shift from utilitarian approaches to process-oriented studies and critical scholarship within this domain;
- (c) It introduces new research contexts and methodologies for future research that have received less attention from previous scholars in SRHRM, thereby opening new realms for the interested scholars to enter.

The rest of the paper is structured in the following manner. Firstly, we explain the review methodology upon which the present study has been conducted. Secondly, we present the bibliometric information of the reviewed articles in terms of journals, publishing years, geographical data coverage, and methods. Thirdly, we categorize the main findings of previous research in three sections, including antecedents, practices, and outcomes at different levels. Fourthly, we present a theoretical framework for SRHRM, discuss the implications of our review, and suggest some potential ideas upon which future studies in this area could be developed. Finally, some concluding remarks end our paper.

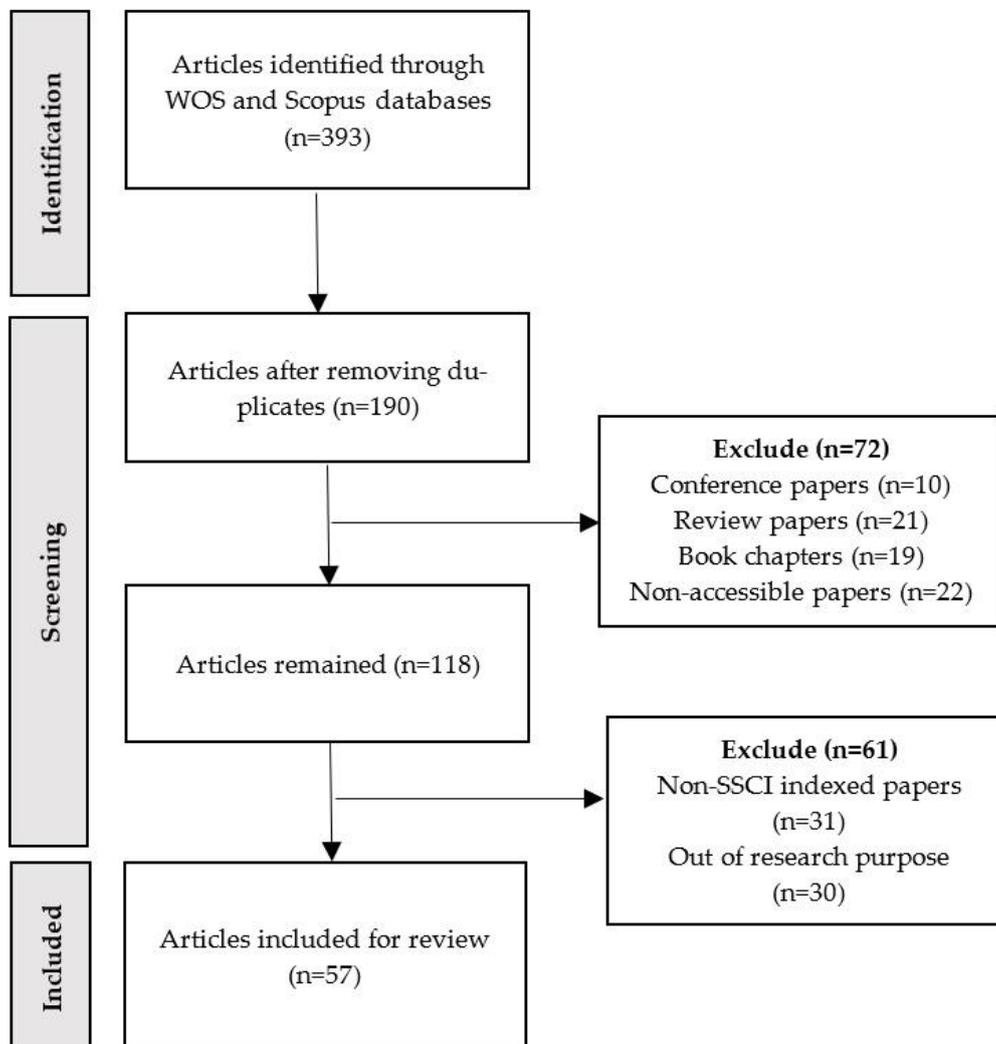
## 2. Research Methodology and Materials

The present research conducts a systematic literature review (SLR) that, by comprehensively studying previously published articles in the SRHRM domain, attempts to determine the antecedents, practices, and outcomes of this research strand. By synthesizing scattered yet interrelated past studies, SLR is indeed a fruitful way to search for and flourish collective insights on a topic, thereby transferring new knowledge into new (sub)fields and realms [37,38]. According to Paul and Criado [39] and Paul et al. [40], SLRs can be classified in various types of reviews such as domain-based (e.g., [41]), theory-based (e.g., [42]), method-based (e.g., [43]), meta-analytical (e.g., [44]), and meta-systematic (e.g., [45]) reviews. Our systematic review falls into the category of domain-based reviews as it seeks to figure out the key variables in relation to a specific research domain, i.e., socially responsible HRM.

As a starting point, we first delineated our research domain, that is, SRHRM, and developed our main research question as follows: “What are the antecedents, practices, and outcomes of SRHRM?” In the next step, our inclusion and exclusion criteria were determined. In so doing, we sought to reach out to the robust empirical papers published in English by academic journals indexed by the Web of Science (WOS) and covered by the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) with impact factor (IF)  $\geq 1$ . We insisted on merely focusing on empirical papers to provide an evidence-driven ground upon which future studies can develop further empirical projects. These inclusion criteria were also consistent with what was suggested by Paul et al. [40]. To identify relevant papers for conducting this review, as suggested by Paul and Criado [39] and Paul et al. [40], we searched our keywords within the two most popular academic databases, including WOS and Scopus. The keywords used for collecting documents include “socially responsible AND human resource management” OR “socially responsible human resource management” OR “socially responsible HRM” OR “SRHRM” OR “SR-HRM” OR “internal corporate social responsibility” OR “internal CSR”. We especially did not include the “CSR AND HRM” keyword in our search process because we sought to be very specific in our research scope, and the CSR-HRM link has already received several systematic reviews thus far [2,18,36].

After the initial search within the mentioned databases, we collected 393 documents published from 2011 to the end of November 2021. We chose 2011 as our starting point since

the first relevant paper appeared this year according to our inclusion criteria. Subsequently, we removed the duplicates ( $n = 203$ ), which shortened our list to 190 documents. As with our inclusion criteria, conference papers ( $n = 10$ ), review papers ( $n = 21$ ), book chapters ( $n = 19$ ), and non-accessible documents ( $n = 22$ ) were excluded from our list. The remained papers ( $n = 118$ ) were again screened to exclude those papers that did not meet our SSCI criteria, and as a result, a further 31 papers were removed. A careful study of the papers left ( $n = 87$ ) led us to exclude the papers that were out of our main research scope and purpose ( $n = 30$ )—i.e., the papers that were not related to our main question nor concerned with any of the antecedents, practices, and outcomes of SRHRM. As such, our review includes a final list of 57 articles that meet all the inclusion criteria mentioned above. The selected papers for this review were thoroughly addressed and coded in terms of their publishing year, journal, research method, and geographical data coverage. In the next step, we analyzed their findings and thematically categorized them based on the antecedents, practices, and outcomes of SRHRM, similar to what has been conducted by Paul and Benito [46]. Figure 1 shows the article selection process related to the present research.



**Figure 1.** The systematic article selection process for the present paper.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Bibliometrics

This section presents the bibliometric information concerning the papers reviewed in the current research. Table 1 shows 26 journals that published empirical research in

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

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

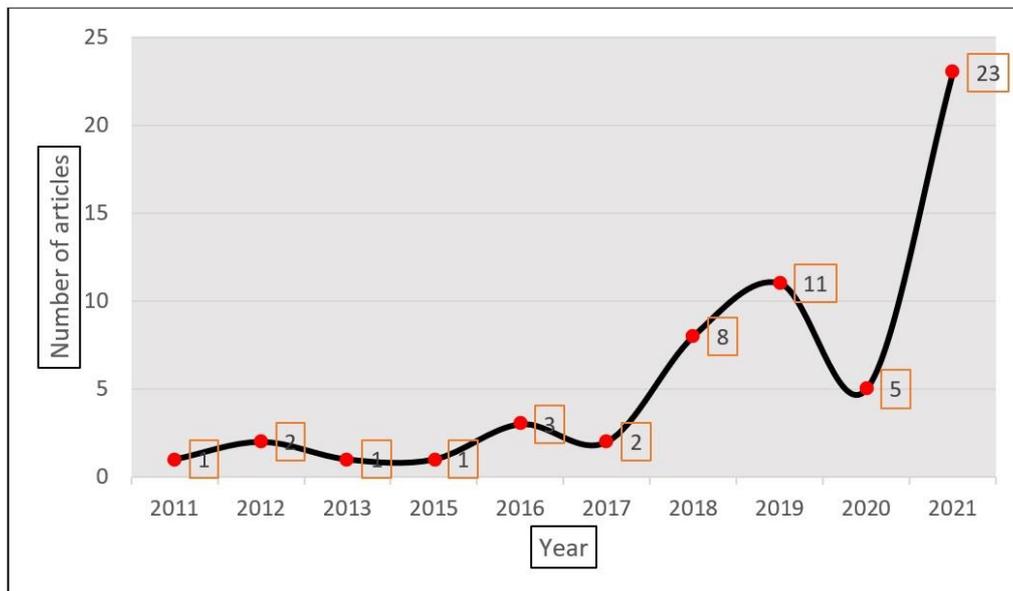
No.	Journal	Publisher	Frequency	Percentage	Source(s)
1	<i>Sustainability</i>	MDPI	13	22.81%	Obrad and Gherhes [47]; Barrena-Martinez et al. [48]; López-Fernández et al. [49]; Bombiak and Marciniuk-Kluska [50]; Shao et al. [51]; Shao, Zhou, and Gao [52]; García Mestanza et al. [53]; Revuelto-Taboada et al. [54]; Sobhani et al. [55]; Koinig and Weder [56]; He and Kim [57]; Adu-Gyamfi et al. [58]; Chang et al. [59]
2	<i>The International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	Taylor and Francis	7	12.29%	Shen and Jiuhua Zhu [21]; D'Cruz and Noronha [60]; Parkes and Davis [61]; Newman et al. [62]; Mory et al. [63]; Barrena-Martínez et al. [64]; Richards and Sang [65]
3	<i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>	Springer	5	8.78%	Tongo [66]; Shen and Zhang [67]; Heikkinen et al. [26]; Zhang et al. [68]; Zhao et al. [69]
4	<i>Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management</i>	Wiley	4	7.02%	Barrena-Martinez et al. [70]; Lombardi et al. [71]; Sorribes et al. [72]; Gangi et al. [73]
5	<i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i>	Emerald	3	5.27%	Jia et al. [74]; Luu [75]; He et al. [76]
6	<i>Business Ethics: A European Review</i>	Wiley	2	3.52%	Nie et al. [77]; Diaz-Carrion et al. [78]
7	<i>Employee Relations: The International Journal</i>	Emerald	2	3.52%	Lin-Hi et al. [79]; Espasandín-Bustelo et al. [80]
8	<i>European Research on Management and Business Economics</i>	Elsevier	2	3.52%	Barrena-Martínez et al. [81]; Celma et al. [82]
9	<i>Management Decision</i>	Emerald	2	3.52%	Jamali et al. [83]; Lee [84]
10	<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources</i>	Wiley	1	1.75%	Sarvaiya and Arrowsmith [85]

Table 1. Cont.

No.	Journal	Publisher	Frequency	Percentage	Source(s)
11	<i>Baltic Journal of Management</i>	Emerald	1	1.75%	Bučiūnienė and Kazlauskaitė [86]
12	<i>Business Ethics, the Environment &amp; Responsibility</i>	Wiley	1	1.75%	Low and Bu [87]
13	<i>Human Resource Management</i>	Wiley	1	1.75%	Shen et al. [88]
14	<i>International Business Review</i>	Elsevier	1	1.75%	Lythreatis et al. [89]
15	<i>International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal</i>	Springer	1	1.75%	Ramos-González et al. [90]
16	<i>International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health</i>	MDPI	1	1.75%	Sánchez-Hernández et al. [91]
17	<i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i>	Elsevier	1	1.75%	Zhao and Zhou [92]
18	<i>Journal of Corporate Finance</i>	Elsevier	1	1.75%	Goergen et al. [93]
19	<i>Journal of Management</i>	Sage	1	1.75%	Shen and Benson [94]
20	<i>Journal of Management Analytics</i>	Taylor and Francis	1	1.75%	Chanda and Goyal [95]
21	<i>Journal of Organizational Change Management</i>	Emerald	1	1.75%	D. T. Luu [96]
22	<i>Personnel Review</i>	Emerald	1	1.75%	Lechuga Sancho et al. [97]
23	<i>Review of Managerial Science</i>	Springer	1	1.75%	Giang and Dung [98]
24	<i>SAGE Open</i>	Sage	1	1.75%	Li et al. [99]
25	<i>Strategic Management Journal</i>	Wiley	1	1.75%	Shan et al. [100]
26	<i>The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science</i>	Sage	1	1.75%	Brown [101]
Total			57	100	

Figure 2 represents the distribution of studies in SRHRM research published from 2011 to 2021. Interestingly, the number of publications in this area received a sharp surge in 2021 ( $n = 21$ ), making it the most prolific year over the last decade. As depicted in Figure 2, the number of publications from 2011 to 2017 was often the same (i.e., between one or two papers) in this area. However, SRHRM gained momentum in 2018 ( $n = 8$ ) and culminated

in 2021 with 23 published papers until November. Considering the appearance of the Covid19 pandemic and numerous challenges HRM practitioners face [102–105], we expect the publishing rate in the field of SRHRM to rise considerably in the coming years.



**Figure 2.** Distribution of studies in SRHRM across years.

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

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

No.	Country	Frequency	Percentage	Source(s)
1	China	15	26.32%	Shen and Jiuhua Zhu [21]; Newman et al. [62]; Shen and Benson [94]; Shen et al. [88]; Lin-Hi et al. [79]; Jia et al. [74]; Shen and Zhang [67]; Shao et al. [51]; Shao, Zhou, and Gao [52]; Zhao and Zhou [92]; He et al. [76]; He and Kim [57]; Zhang et al. [68]; Zhao et al. [69]; Li et al. [99]
2	Spain	13	22.81%	Barrena-Martínez et al. [81]; Celma et al. [82]; Lechuga Sancho et al. [97]; Barrena-Martínez et al. [48]; López-Fernández et al. [49]; Barrena-Martínez et al. [70]; García Mestanza et al. [53]; Barrena-Martínez et al. [64]; Sánchez-Hernández et al. [91]; Sorribes et al. [72]; Ramos-González et al. [90]; Revuelto-Taboada et al. [54]; Espasandín-Bustelo et al. [80]
3	Multi-country	5	8.77%	Goergen et al. [93]; Diaz-Carrion et al. [78]; Gangi et al. [73]; Koinig and Weder [56]; Lythreatis et al. [89]
4	USA	3	5.26%	Shan et al. [100]; Brown [101]; Lee [84]

Table 2. Cont.

No.	Country	Frequency	Percentage	Source(s)
5	Vietnam	3	5.26%	D. T. Luu [96]; Luu [75]; Giang and Dung [98]
6	Finland	2	3.52%	Nie et al. [77]; Heikkinen et al. [26]
7	India	2	3.52%	D’Cruz and Noronha [60]; Chanda and Goyal [95]
8	Italy	2	3.52%	Lombardi et al. [71]; Jamali et al. [83]
9	UK	2	3.52%	Parkes and Davis [61]; Richards and Sang [65]
10	Bangladesh	1	1.75%	Sobhani et al. [55]
11	Germany	1	1.75%	Mory et al. [63]
12	Ghana	1	1.75%	Adu-Gyamfi et al. [58]
13	Lithuania	1	1.75%	Bučiuėnienė and Kazlauskaitė [86]
14	Malaysia	1	1.75%	Low and Bu [87]
15	New Zealand	1	1.75%	Sarvaiya and Arrowsmith [85]
16	Nigeria	1	1.75%	Tongo [66]
17	Poland	1	1.75%	Bombiak and Marciniuk-Kluska [50]
18	Romania	1	1.75%	Obrad and Gherheș [47]
19	Taiwan	1	1.75%	Chang et al. [59]
	Total	57	100	

Table 3 categorizes the previous studies in SRHRM based on research approaches and methods. Most published papers employed a quantitative approach (n = 44) and tested previous scholars’ research models [20,21,94]. Qualitative (n = 7) and mixed (n = 6) approaches were also used in this field, though their size is not very significant compared to the quantitative studies. The proliferation of quantitative studies provides an excellent ground upon which to generalize the findings in the SRHRM domain, while the shortage of qualitative studies in this area signals a significant void to gain a more in-depth understanding of SRHRM dynamics and processes. We will reflect more deeply on it in the discussion section.

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

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

### 3.2. Antecedents of SRHRM

This section determines the factors affecting and driving the adoption and implementation of SRHRM practices in organizations. In this way, we categorized the antecedents into three groups, including external, firm-level, and individual-level factors. Concerning external factors, previous studies mentioned different items that could have an impact on the SRHRM practices, such as laws and regulations [21,62,66,100], public demand and expectations [61,64,92], market pressures induced by, for example, competitors and/or customers [26,53,74], union pressures such as those coming from the International Labour Organization (ILO) [48,62,66], the national institutional context [78,89], and external crisis, such as what all organizations experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic since its appearance in 2019 [72,76]. The second group of antecedents pertains to the firm-level factors. Although all the reviewed papers assert that CSR firm policies impact SRHRM practices, some studies also explored other drivers within firms that might have been influential in this regard. Such factors include firms' strategic policies and priorities [48,60], available financial resources [60], HRM systems design [60], HRM power in the organization [26], ethics-oriented HRM philosophies [65], the multi-nationality of firms [93], as well as organizational structure and culture [80]. The third antecedent category is related to the individual factors, including employees' needs and wants [21,62,77,79], the presence of an ethical leader [60,61,75,89,92,101], the HR professionals' perception of their ethical role [61], and the role of employees' representatives in organizations [56].

### 3.3. Practices in SRHRM

This section addresses the practices in SRHRM that have been considered by previous studies. As most of the studies in the reviewed papers were conducted by applying quantitative methods, as shown in Table 3, they more or less employed the same framework developed by Shen and Benson [94], Shen and Jiu-hua Zhu [21], and Orlitzky and Swanson [20]. SRHRM practices were mostly adapted from the traditional HRM functions (i.e., recruitment and selection, training and development, working conditions, appraisal and reward) by including ethical and fairness issues such as the consideration of work-life balance through, for example, flexible working time (e.g., [63]), enhanced communication at work (e.g., [62]), safety and health at work (e.g., [49]), transparent criteria in recruitment and selection (e.g., [54]), equal opportunities (e.g., [53]), fair appraisal processes (e.g., [78]), training opportunities and different personal development alternatives such as employee participation in decision-making (e.g., [86]), as well as providing additional support for employee education [83]. However, some studies that emphasize specific practices, less addressed by previously structured frameworks, are worth mentioning. In this vein, Shan et al. [100] call for considering sexual minorities to make the workplace diverse, Lombardi et al. [71] recommend embracing more extended work contracts to make the job more secure for the employees, and Obrad and Gherheş [47] note that facilities for people with disabilities and also for remote working should be provided. Moreover, Celma et al. [82] and Lin-Hi et al. [79] insist on devising non-discrimination policies at the workplace, and some studies hold that a context for social dialogue between employees and managers needs to be built [70,81,96–98].

### 3.4. Outcomes of SRHRM

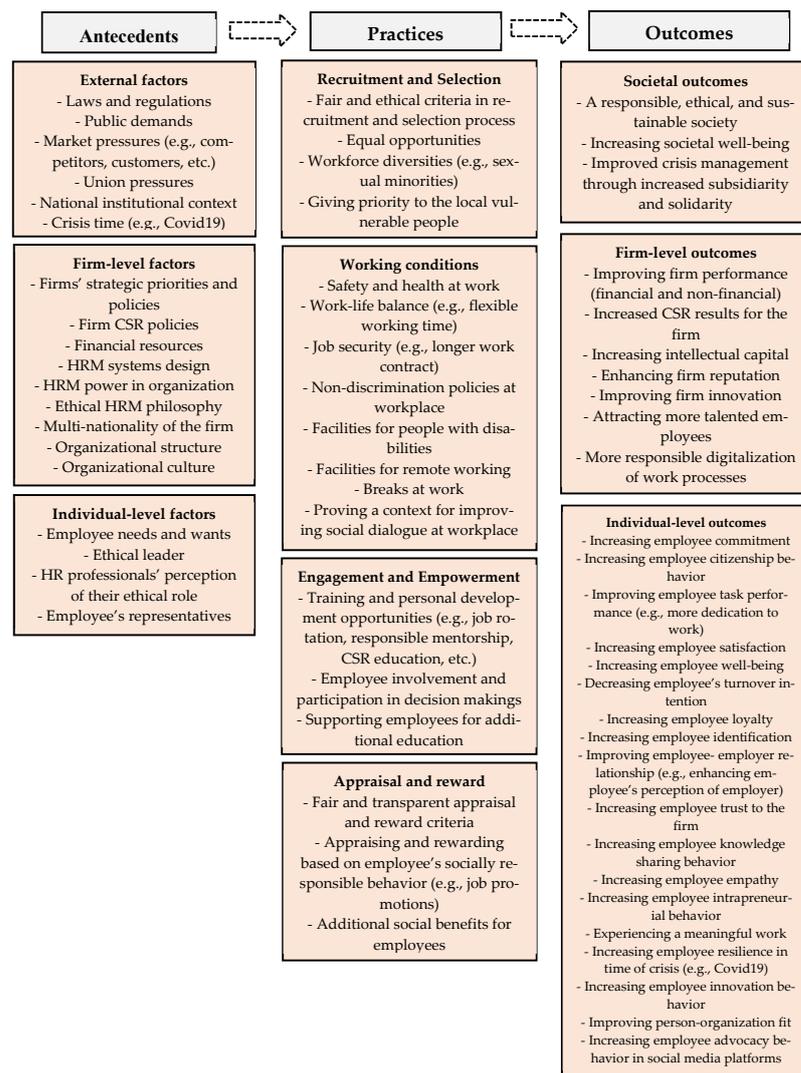
In this part, we report the outcomes of SRHRM as found by previous studies. At the macro level, Bombiak and Marciniuk-Kluska [50] assert that SRHRM practices provide a path for the sustainable development of organizations, which finally result in increasing societal well-being [78] and the building of a sustainable, responsible, and ethical society [53]. Concerning the firm-level outcomes, evidence shows that SRHRM practices could increase financial and non-financial firm performance [66,81,86,95,96], already achieved CSR firm results [86], intellectual capital [70], firm reputation [55,90], and even firm innovation [90]. Furthermore, Low and Bu [87] suggest that SRHRM practices can help the organization to implement the digitalization of work processes more committedly, while Parkes and

Davis [61] contend that organizations could more quickly attract talents by employing SRHRM strategies.

Individual outcomes of SRHRM practices have been the most topical issue addressed by previous studies. In this regard, a considerable number of studies confirmed that SRHRM can have a positive impact on employee commitment [21,49,63,66,78,83,87,95,97]. Other individual factors positively affected by SRHRM practices include employee citizenship behavior [51,55,62,66,83,84,92], employee task performance [59,94], employee satisfaction [72,81,95], employee well-being [68,78], employee loyalty [101], the propensity of employees to identify themselves with their organization [59,83,88,89,91], employee–employer relationships [79,84], employee trust in the firm [72,74,76], employee empathy [52], employee knowledge sharing behavior [74], employee innovation behavior [54,99], and employee intrapreneurial behavior [96,98,99]. It has also been shown that SRHRM practices can help employees to make sense of their jobs in a meaningful way [75] and even make employees more resilient in times of crisis, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic [76]. Further positive outcomes include increasing employee advocacy behavior within social media platforms [84] and enhancing the person–organization fit [69]. Using SRHRM practices, organizations can also decrease employees’ intention to leave their organizations [55,77].

#### 4. Discussion and Future Directions

By conducting a comprehensive study of the selected empirical articles published from 2011 to 2021, the present paper has analyzed the current state of knowledge in SRHRM. The results of the reviewed articles can be categorized into three sections, including the antecedents, practices, and outcomes of SRHRM, as Figure 3 shows. We have provided insights concerning antecedents and outcomes of SRHRM from different levels of analysis, including societal-, firm-, and individual-level analyses. Regarding SRHRM practices, we have presented four critical domains, including recruitment and selection, working conditions, engagement and empowerment, and appraisal and reward. Figure 3 thus presents a new, comprehensive framework within which the antecedents, practices, and outcomes of SRHRM are combined and related to each other. By integrating previous literature that was scattered thus far [36], the introduced framework has shaped a holistic overview of the SRHRM domain and presented different relevant elements upon which future studies in this area could develop novel research projects. This contribution is also vital for general CSR literature regarding its internal stakeholders as less attention has been paid to this dimension until now [22]. While our framework provides a collective insight into the state of the art in the field of SRHRM, it barely suggests new pathways regarding what future studies should explore and investigate. Hence, by critically addressing the current research gaps and delineating potential research opportunities in the SRHRM area, the paper depicts a different yet relevant vision for developing this field in the future. It calls for a paradigmatic shift from utilitarian to critical and humanistic management approaches and process-oriented studies within this domain. This very landscape could stimulate future studies to embrace the “provoking” mode of theorization [106] on SRHRM in which the taken-for-granted concepts are challenged, and hidden sides of already presumed realities might be unraveled. In the next section, we will reflect on and bring new insights into this critical and paradigmatical shift more in detail.



**Figure 3.** SRHRM theoretical framework based on the reviewed articles.

#### 4.1. Implications for Theory

Critically examining previous SRHRM research, we concede that most of the articles reviewed in this paper are rooted in utilitarian ideologies [107], seeking to find out how HR practitioners might get different yet “positive” results through socially responsible management of people within firms. The domination of studies based on utilitarian approaches could be problematic in the development of SRHRM research. According to Dale [108] and Greenwood [109], these approaches treat employees as the “dish of the day” being consumed, even though in a socially responsible manner, by the employers. One of the common assumptions behind such utilitarian studies is that there are no conflictual interests between employers and employees, all attempting to serve a common end harmoniously. However, there are some exceptions in the papers we reviewed. Some authors [60,61,65] do unveil how conflictual interests between employees, managers, and employers could compromise SRHRM and even drag it into “irresponsible” terrains, see also Voegtlin and Greenwood [2]. Thus, future researchers will need to focus more on the political role and the power dynamics at play in SRHRM, as suggested by Sarvaiya and Arrowsmith in one of our reviewed articles [85]. This criticism by no means argues that the utilitarian approaches should be divested. Instead, it insists on the crucial role that a pluralistic and multidisciplinary approach in the chosen research methodology can play to make the theoretical development in the HRM field more constructive [110–112]. For instance, if we consider with Hegel [113] and Durkheim [114] that the labor market is not only a

means to increase efficiency but also a means for social integration, then we acknowledge that the market is part of our social life and its functions depend from the satisfaction of moral promises such as those of quality and meaningful work that can transparently be related with the work of others [115]. This philosophical perspective highlights, and thus helps us to understand, that capitalism works only if two conditions are satisfied: (a) the independence of all economic actors, including workers, is ensured by appropriate salaries, and (b) work is not only meaningful but its contribution to the common goal can be identified and recognized by the others. Fairness and transparency in the division of labor and in working conditions are the premises for developing a sense of social belonging as well as solidarity among workers, and thus the necessary social integration to ensure the pacific development of capitalism. Within this context, the political role that SRHRM can play to accompany and enhance this development is evident.

One of the reasons why the utilitarian approaches dominate previous research is perhaps related to the way scholars looked at the nature and functions of HRM. Explicitly, most of the reviewed papers understand HRM in its utilitarian, even though ethical, definition that is prevalent in the main HRM textbooks, such as “*the process of acquiring, training, appraising, and compensating employees, and of attending to their labor relations, health and safety, and fairness concerns*” [116]. Critical HRM scholars criticized this viewpoint as it offers a depoliticized and simplified understanding of HRM [117]. To tackle this challenge, we note that other researchers have also offered alternative conceptualizations of HRM. In this respect, we draw future scholars’ attention to a comprehensive definition that explains HRM as “*institutions, discourses and practices focused on the management of people within an employment relationship enacted through networks comprising multiple public and private actors*” [2]. We strongly believe that such a definition can broaden the future research scope in the field of HRM and encourage researchers to consider a multi-level analysis addressing different issues through the lenses of both micro and macro frameworks. This definition does not consider HRM as a linear order of practical functions within the borders of organizations but rather as a network of multiple (i.e., internal and external) actors and institutions, which calls for more engaged and coordinated scholarship and practice in different realms. The HRM field gains this way more importance and assumes more responsibilities within the management field. Based on this definition, SRHRM will be able to offer more holistic insights by considering how different institutions and stakeholders can shape the trajectories of future research in the field.

To engage more committedly in critically addressing the political dimensions of SRHRM, future researchers need to equip themselves with some holistic frameworks that allow them to connect firm-related issues with the political, economic, and social factors shaping the ways companies operate. To this end, we strongly recommend that future researchers consider the labor process theory (LPT) [118,119]. LPT is a Marxist approach asserting that the capitalistic mode of production, which seeks to increase capital accumulation, has been steering the ways workers are managed, disciplined, and evaluated in modern companies. The primary rationale behind the LPT is that the managerial apparatus aims to separate workers from their holistic knowledge to make their work cheaper by, for example, splitting the work processes into smaller and more superficial elements. The other underlying idea is how workers are controlled to primarily serve employers’ interests at the expense of a degraded nature of work as workers experience it. Literature in the LPT has much progressed over the last decades and shows, for instance, how “lean production” initiatives [120], “knowledge management” [121], and “performance management” systems [122], are employed to induce more pressure on workers, thereby achieving more “desirable” results for the employers. The LPT has also been more recently applied in the age of digital technologies, to analyze and understand algorithmic control in the workplace [123] and workers’ algorithmic management in the sharing and gig economies [124,125]. Therefore, by conducting a cross-level analysis, as suggested by Shao et al. [51], and employing the LPT framework in the SRHRM research, we firmly believe that future researchers can open new venues in which fresh insights about, for exam-

ple, socially responsible control mechanisms, work design approaches, and agency-enabled work organizations could be attained to reach a humanistic type of management and capitalism [112]. A consideration of the dynamic role of business imperatives in shaping ethical HR practices is also suggested by one of the articles reviewed in this research [26]. LPT also offers many potentialities to link SRHRM research with the political CSR approach, see [2], which conceives the role of corporations not just for profit-making but rather as political actors that can proactively play a responsible role in defining the standards for treating employees in a socially responsible manner [7,10,11].

The other theoretical implication that we can draw from past SRHRM research pertains to its “static” position toward different workplace issues. More simply, most of the articles reviewed in this research focused on the content of SRHRM and sought to find antecedents, practices, or outcomes related to the SRHRM domain. While we clearly recognize the contributions of such studies for improving our understanding of the SRHRM phenomenon, we call for a “processual turn” and recommend future research to consider process-oriented approaches in organization studies [126] for shedding light on the “social construction” of SRHRM practices in the workplace. By emphasizing the need for process-oriented studies, we intend to draw researchers’ attention to the dynamics that may exist in the SRHRM practices. To reach this aim, prospect scholars may consider the application of process thinking abilities to enrich their cognitive skills in recognizing movements, events, and changes concerning the given phenomenon [127]. If we consider the nature of organizations as “ongoing world-making phenomena” [128], it is then arguable that each reality relating to organizations could or even should be understood as a process and problematized as an evolving phenomenon. We thus invite interested scholars to investigate the processual nature of SRHRM, for instance by asking and reflecting on how, why, and when specific practices emerge and grow within the SRHRM debate over time [129]. In this respect, future researchers may benefit from some process-based theories that have been influencing previous HRM research, such as “sensemaking theory” [130,131], “strategy-as-practice theory” [132,133], and “dynamic capabilities theory” [134].

#### *4.2. Implications for Context and Method*

While previous literature in the SRHRM domain has provided valuable insights into different contexts, including service sectors [69], public organizations [91], manufacturing companies [94], and educational institutions [58], there is still insufficient knowledge about the state of SRHRM practices in platform-mediated business organizations. Considering the disruptions that these new online companies brought to the traditional HR functions [135,136], it is thus a crucial area that needs to be addressed by future studies. We believe that platform-mediated work presents specificities [137–140], which make it significantly different from other types of work and allow for unique power structures among various actors to develop [141]. This calls for special attention on this very topic. As such, we encourage prospective researchers to address the challenges for devising and implementing SRHRM practices consistent with the nature and specificities of such platform-based companies. This may have substantial implications for the optimization of resources and thus the sustainability of those companies [142].

Another context in which SRHRM is rather unexplored is related to the media and cultural industries [143,144]. Indeed, the success of the products created by these industries is highly dependent on the professionals’ innovation capability [145–147], creativity [148,149], emotions [150], reputation [151], and entrepreneurial orientations [152–155]. It is also reported that media professionals often have project-based careers [156] and, hence, experience their occupations as highly precarious [157,158]. Another exciting feature of media and cultural industries is that their products do not merely include economic value [159–161]. Instead, they could affect people’s understanding of different societal issues connecting media organizations with a wide array of social and political affairs and actors [162,163]. Thus, considering the social value of media and cultural work, we recommend that future studies develop novel theories and conceptualizations concerning how social responsibility

could guide the sustainable management of creative professionals in the media and cultural industries, as well as the drivers of and barriers to the successful implementation of SRHRM practices within organizations in those industries.

Regarding the methodological implications, and according to the reviewed articles in the present paper, it appears that future research would highly benefit from employing ethnographic methods [61], longitudinal studies [59,88,94,98], comparative and cross-cultural research [67,80,83,85], experimental research design [57], and data collecting from different sources [84,87], specifically relying more on the employees rather than senior managers' perspectives [47,48]. However, these methodological recommendations mostly come from those quantitative studies that originated from utilitarian philosophies. To reach the paradigmatic shift and critical standpoint in this area, as suggested in this paper, we thus recommend that future researchers consider different points of view to analyze organizational and workplace realities, which requires greater attention to the ontological, epistemological, and methodological imperatives related to each paradigm. In this way, we encourage future researchers to embrace different paradigmatic alternatives such as radical structuralism and/or radical humanism in organizational analysis, as for instance explained by Burrell and Morgan [164].

#### 4.3. Research Limitations

While we did our best to cover all major research conducted in the SRHRM domain, there are still some chances that we may have missed some articles. In addition, just like other SLRs, we had to limit our inclusion criteria and, as such, merely empirical articles (covered by SSCI in WOS) with IF more than 1 were included. To cope with these limitations, we encourage future scholars to broaden their inclusion criteria and embrace other non-empirical documents such as book chapters and conceptual articles to shape a more comprehensive picture of SRHRM.

## 5. Conclusions

In the present review, we have integrated the recent literature on SRHRM and presented a comprehensive theoretical framework to shed light on the antecedents, practices, and outcomes related to this research area. To this end, we have reviewed 57 scholarly articles published in high-quality journals from 2011 to 2021. Based on the results, it is reported that the *Sustainability* journal has published most articles on SRHRM, and the number of publications has considerably increased in this area during recent years. We have also shown how utilitarian approaches dominate the SRHRM research. To embrace more theoretical pluralism in this domain, as also suggested by Pirson [112], we have encouraged future studies to consider a processual turn and adopt critical as well as multi-disciplinary perspectives within this area. Therefore, the present paper has contributed to the burgeoning literature on SRHRM by analyzing and integrating the current knowledge in this domain and setting a research agenda to stimulate future studies.

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