

# **Human Resource Management and the Pursuit of Sustainable Development**

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# Abstract

**Purpose:** This master thesis aims to identify how Human Resource Management may influence an organizations sustainability activities, where the main focus is on the early stages of employment, from recruitment and selection to onboarding.

**Theory:** The theory is based around the topic question “*What is the role of Human Resource Management in self-proclaimed green organizations?*”, and discusses topics such as Sustainability, Human Resource Management, Organizational Culture, The Recruitment Process, and Onboarding.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This thesis is exploratory as we try to produce introductory ideas about recent developments in the business world. It is also set up according to the qualitative method, as we are looking for a holistic understanding of the phenomena we study. The data was collected through qualitative, semi-structured digital interviews with three different informants, from three large Norwegian organizations.

**Findings:** Our main findings were: *The main focus of our informants when it comes to sustainability lie in reducing the organization's environmental pressure, while also having a focus on equality. We saw indications that the reason behind this may be to gain a competitive advantage over their competitors. Furthermore, we saw that HRM may have an impact on the sustainability work in organizations, both via how the organization is structured and how the goals are communicated with the employees. Our findings also indicate that the organizational culture may influence the sustainability activities of organizations, and that it is important to have clear roles and good communication within the organization. We saw indications that even though sustainability is not emphasized during the recruitment process, it is an important step for the sustainability culture in particular. We also saw indications that the most important parts of the onboarding process are to build affiliation, a social network, and provide an insight into the organizational culture. We therefore conclude that human resource management may have an impact on the sustainability work in an organization.*

**Future research:** Future research should focus on how a change in leadership can influence HRM in an organization, how different generations look at the topic of sustainability, or expanding our research by increasing and diversifying the sample size.

**Key Words:** Human Resource Management (HRM), Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), recruitment, onboarding, organizational culture, sustainability, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

# Sammendrag

**Hensikt:** Denne masteroppgaven prøver å identifisere hvordan Human Resource Management kan påvirke en organisasjons bærekraftsarbeid. Hvor hovedfokuset ligger på de tidlige stadiene av ansettelser, fra rekruttering til introduksjonsprogram (onboarding).

**Teori:** Teorien er basert rundt forskningsspørsmålet «*Hva er rollen til Human Resource Management i selverklærte grønne organisasjoner?*», og diskuterer emner som bærekraft, HRM, organisasjonskultur, rekrutteringsprosessen, og introduksjonsprogram.

**Design/metode/tilnærming:** Oppgaven er hovedsakelig utforskende ettersom vi prøver å produsere innledende ideer om nyere utviklinger i forretningsverdenen. Den er også satt opp etter den kvalitative metoden ettersom vi er ute etter å få en helhetlig forståelse av fenomenene vi studerer. Dataene ble samlet inn igjennom semi-strukturerte intervjuer med tre forskjellige personer fra tre norske organisasjoner.

**Funn:** Hovedfunnene våre var: *at hovedfokuset til våre informanter når det kommer til bærekraft ligger i å redusere organisasjonens miljøpress, samt å ha et fokus på likestilling. Vi så indikasjoner på at bakgrunnen for dette kan være å få en konkurransefordel over konkurrentene deres. Videre så vi at HRM kan ha stor innvirkning på bærekraftsarbeidet i organisasjoner, både via hvordan organisasjonen er bygget opp og hvordan man kommuniserer målene med de ansatte. Våre funn indikerer også at organisasjonskulturen kan påvirke bærekraftsarbeidet til organisasjoner, og at det da er viktig med klare roller, åpenhet, og god kommunikasjon innad i organisasjonen. Vi så indikasjoner til at selv om bærekraft ikke er vektlagt under rekrutteringsprosessen, så er det et viktig steg for spesielt bærekraftskulturen. Til slutt så vi indikasjoner på at den viktigste delen av introduksjonsprogrammet til organisasjoner er å skape tilhørighet, et sosialt nettverk, og gi et innblikk i organisasjonskulturen. Vi konkluderer derfor med at HRM kan ha stor innvirkning på bærekraftsarbeidet i en organisasjon.*

**Videre forskning:** Videre forskning bør fokusere på hvordan endring i lederskap kan ha innvirkning på HRM i en organisasjon, hvordan forskjellige generasjoner ser på emnet bærekraft, eller å fortsette vår forskning ved å ekspandere vår prøvestørrelse.

**Nøkkelord:** Human Resource Management (HRM), Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), rekruttering, seleksjon, introduksjonsprogram, organisasjonskultur, bærekraft, bærekraftsmål (SDG)

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# 1 Introduction

According to Cohen (2006), many urban areas have experienced a substantial economic growth over the last 20 years. The current global urbanization trends closely mirror the global patterns of industrialization and economic development. Consequently, issues such as environmental degradation and climate change have become increasingly imperative in today's debate when discussing global problems. We increasingly find evidence of rising poverty, environmental disintegration, inequality, unemployment, and ecological degradation in nearly every country around the world, with economic growth being an important contributing factor (Korten, 2001). Korten (2001) further states that the global economic output has increased more than five times since 1950, where most of the benefits have been collected by the wealthiest 20 per cent of humanity. This is a result of finance-driven capitalism without environmental consequence being taken into consideration (Koch, 2011).

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly introduced "the 2030 agenda for sustainable development", which consisted of 17 sustainable development goals known as SDGs, and 169 targets. A total of 193 countries signed the agreement (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). These goals did not only affect conventional business standards, but also encouraged policy makers and civil society to focus more on long-term sustainability. The SDGs and their sub targets may serve as a tool for companies who seek long-term guidance for investments and new business opportunities (Pedersen, 2018). Ever since the introduction of SDGs, policy makers in countries all over the world would start to create effective long-term political frameworks concurrent with societal and environmental needs, which would then further secure long-term success for business both in the private and public sector. This would further encourage organizations to implement SDGs into their business strategy and to focus on long-term success, rather than the conventional short-term success mindset (Pedersen, 2018). The image of the modern supply chain has since been shifted and is closely associated with the term sustainable development (Pedersen, 2018). Subsequently, current trends show that there is an increasing number of companies that choose to implement SDGs into their business strategy and supply chain (Zimon & Sroufe, 2020). Not only does this improve the company's image, but may also help reduce waste, vitalize innovation as well as creating a competitive advantage (Zimon & Sroufe, 2020). However, the implementation of SDGs in a company's business strategy and supply chain may prove to be comprehensive and complex. It is therefore important to utilize all

operative functions, such as the human resource function, to help with the process (Zimon & Sroufe, 2020).

What we today call human resource management (HRM) has evolved a great deal since its introduction in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A field which mainly focused on administrative operations in larger companies such as employee payrolls and records, has gradually blossomed into a more comprehensive field that branches out into all administrative aspects of an organization (Mathis et al., 2016). Today, human resource management plays a central managerial role in an organization. It covers areas such as recruitment, team building, and employee empowerment, as well as being responsible for the implementation of effective communication and reward systems and practices with the intention of strengthening the organizational culture, autonomy, and overall efficiency (Chams & Garcia-Bladòn, 2019; Nagendra, 2014). Although the work of HR is necessary and has been proved to have a positive and beneficial impact on organizations, it is not always viewed that way in practice (Mathis et al., 2016). Further, Mathis et al. (2016) states that some managers believe that HRM departments actually reduce organizational efficiency due to the absence of good human resource (HR) programs. It is therefore important for companies to have well-structured HR departments that are capable of implementing adequate HR programs and practices.

Ever since the term ‘green movement’ started to trend, companies from all over the world are continuously trying to implement sustainable management and practices. Consumer demand for more eco-friendly goods and services is growing, and companies are actively seeking ways to enhance their competitive advantage by becoming greener (Peattie & Ratnayaka, 1992). As a result of this, the demand for human resource management to be more sustainable increased. The term sustainable human resource management, or green human resource management (GHRM), first appeared nearly 20 years ago and has since been a trending topic among scholars (Aust et al., 2020). As green business practices grow, the temptation to front one’s business as more sustainable and environmentally friendly than it actually is, also increases. Especially in industries that are often associated with greenwashing. According to (Delmas & Burbano, 2011), greenwashing can be defined as the intersection of two firm behaviors: poor environmental performance and positive environmental communication. There are several leading factors to why some companies choose to greenwash. One being that most businesses are driven by maximizing short-term profits for their shareholders and stakeholders. Companies promise



consumers environmentally friendly goods and services but deliver them in the cheapest way possible, regardless of how it may impact the environment (Cherry & Sneirson, 2012). Some industries are scrutinized more than others. One main reason for this, may be the industry's history and reputation. For instance, the petroleum industry is often associated with greenwashing, not only because of its focus on nonrenewable resources, but also because of its immense quantity of immoral and unethical behavior. Therefore, having a knowledgeable HR department and staff may potentially reduce these risks and enhance the company's core competency. More organizations are recognizing the significance of sustainable HRM practices, and how these practices may successfully set them apart from their competitors, increasing the overall competitive advantage, as well as strengthen the organization's long-term strategy (Mathis et al., 2016). Most of these practices start already in the beginning phase of the employee life cycle, and is the reason to why the recruitment, selection and onboarding strategy is so important (Nagendra, 2014).

Traditionally, HRM goals have been separated into three main categories: cost effective, improving services for internal customers and addressing the strategic objectives of the organization (Parry & Tyson, 2011). In terms of understanding the main goals of HRM, we can safely say its main objective is to add value to an organization, as well as the stakeholders and shareholders. Ulrich (2006) has introduced four aspects in which HR professionals must add value in an organization: (i) employees who want competence and commitment, (ii) line managers who want to make strategy happen, (iii) key customers who want to buy more products/services, and (iv) investors who want the stock price to go up. In order to fully understand the role of HRM it can be useful to identify the three vital subfields, micro, international and strategic HRM (Boxall et al., 2008). Micro HRM (MHRM) is concerned with the management of individuals and small groups, which includes areas such as recruitment, selection, induction, training and development, and performance management. International HRM (IHRM) focuses on the management of people in organizations that operate across national boundaries. The third subfield, Strategic HRM (SHRM), focuses more on the big picture. In other words, SHRM is about creating a framework for employees to be hired, trained, and managed in ways that align with organizations long-term goals (Boxall et al., 2008). A way to help ensure that employees of an organization understand the values and fundamental characteristics set by the firm, is through organizational culture. HRM practices within an organization cannot be separate from the social culture of the firm. Therefore, it is important to

understand the importance of organizational culture, as well as how it cultivates strategic human resource management (Vu & Nwachukwu, 2020).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the link between HRM and an organization's sustainability strategy, with a primary focus on the early stages of employment. Some organizations, in industries with a negative reputation towards sustainability, front themselves as environmentally aware through marketing, while their actions do not accurately reflect their sustainable claims (Szabo & Webster, 2021). In light of the above information, we would like to address the following topic question:

*What is the role of Human Resource Management in self-proclaimed green organizations?*

In order to investigate and answer this question we have elaborated five research questions. First, many people have different ideas about what lies in the concept of sustainability, as well as emphasize different parts of it. Therefore, we find it important to understand and concretize how the term is interpreted by each individual/organization, and propose the following question: *What aspects of sustainability are important for organizations?* Second, HRM has had a gradual development throughout the years (administrative to strategic/managerial), which has influenced the overall importance of HRM. For this reason, we propose the following question: *Is Human Resource Management considered important for an organization's sustainability activities?* Third, research done by Harrison & Bazy (2017) conclude that organizational culture positively influences strategic human resource management when culture is aligned with strategy. Therefore, we address the third research question: *What role does organizational culture have in connection to an organization's sustainability activities?* Based on the above theory, we found it interesting to see what role sustainability has on the early stages of employment in an organization, and propose the following research questions: (i) *Is sustainability emphasized in the recruitment process?* and (ii) *How are the organization's sustainability values communicated in connection with new hires?*

## *1.1 Structure of the study*

In the first chapter we address the main purpose of the thesis, as well as the topic question and five research questions. The second chapter introduces various theories related to sustainability, HRM, and strategy. In chapter three, various methodological approaches are presented, as well

as which methods were used for the study, and why they were used. In the fourth chapter, empirical findings based on collected qualitative data is presented, which further builds onto chapter five, which is the discussion chapter. Finally, a summary of the study is presented, where key findings and improvements are discussed.

## 2 Theory

As mentioned in the introduction, it is difficult not to address sustainable development when discussing current global issues. For decades, scholars have been trying to come up with a universal definition for sustainable development. In the notable Brundtland report, ‘Our Common Future’, by World Commissions on Environment and Development (1987), sustainable development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising future generations.” Dyllick & Hockerts (2002, p. 131) attempts to narrow it down by defining sustainable development as “meeting the needs of a firm’s direct and indirect stakeholders without compromising its ability to meet the needs of future stakeholders as well.”

Tomislav (2018) describes sustainable development as being based on the concept of *development*, the concept of *needs* and the concept of *future generations*. The concept of development concerns socio-economic development being aligned with the ecological constraints. The concept of needs, refer to the distribution of valuable resources with the intention of sustaining quality of life for all. Lastly, the concept of future generations covers the possibility of long-term usage of valuable resources (Tomislav, 2018). The overall nature of sustainable development emanated from the *triple bottom line concept* (TBL), which implies that organizations should focus as much on the environment and social aspect, as they do on making profit (Tomislav, 2018). Slaper & Hall (2011) define the triple bottom line as an accounting framework that consist of three dimensions of performance: environmental, financial, and social. The environmental dimension refers to establishing business practices with the intention of reducing the organization’s carbon footprint. This dimension should represent measurements of natural resources, such as air and water quality, solid and toxic waste, and energy consumption (Slaper & Hall, 2011). The financial dimension considers economic variables such as income or expenditures, employment, and taxes. These variables are meant to measure the organization’s impact on the economic environment. The social dimension considers all stakeholders, which include employees, communities within which the organization operates in, supply chain and future generations. Slaper & Hall (2011) also include a list of measurements that can help assess the social aspect: education, access to social resources, quality of life and health. The connections with corporate social responsibility (CSR) are essential to this aspect of the triple bottom line (Slaper & Hall, 2011).

The European Commission (2003) defines corporate social responsibility as responsible business practices that support the three dimensions of sustainable development: environmental integrity, financial growth, and social equity. The term CSR was first introduced in the 1950s, and gained a lot of attention within economic and management studies in the 1970s (Advantage, 2020). Liang & Renneboog (2017) explain that organizations tend to invest in CSR in hopes of enhancing the profitability and value, whilst also focusing on the environmental aspect. Incorporating CSR and sustainability goals into the organization's business strategy may enhance brand perception and reputation, as well as increase their knowledge on economical sustainability (Advantage, 2020). Further, Advantage (2020) concludes that there is a significant positive relationship between CSR and brand perception and competitive advantage. Guerrero-Villegas et al. (2018) identified in their study on sustainable development and innovation in Spain, that CSR has a positive influence on innovation, as well as innovation having an influence on CSR. Regarding the future of CSR, Latapí et al. (2019) state that the concept will eventually have to take the latest technological advances into consideration, incorporating it into new business strategies and practices. The adoption and adaption to new technological tools and processes are relevant challenges for both the discussion around CSR and organizations in general.

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly introduced seventeen sustainable development goals, consisting of 169 targets (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). The SDGs were introduced with the intention of transforming our world by addressing the environmental challenges humanity is currently facing. The agenda is set to 2030 and is meant to be used as a guide for organizations to achieve economic prosperity, while considering human well-being, and protecting the environment. The nature of the SDGs framework insinuates that all 169 targets have to be considered by policy makers (Pradhan et al., 2017) Furthermore, Pradhan et al. (2017) elaborate that no SDGs alone would be able to realize the overall goal of global sustainability, but together have the ability to create a global system which can create a safe space for organizations to operate in.

With a higher organizational focus on integrating sustainability into business practices, Charter & Clark (2007, p. 9) put forward a definition of sustainable innovation, that captures the three dimensions of the triple bottom line, and the concept of CSR: "Sustainable innovation is a process where sustainability considerations (environmental, social, and financial) are integrated

into company systems—business systems—from idea generation and development (R&D) and commercialization. This applies to products, services, and technologies, as well as to new business and organizational models.” In the perspective of sustainable development, business model innovation (BMI) is closely interconnected with sustainability, where innovation stems from the motivational pursuit for sustainable objectives (Ferauge, 2013). Therefore, more and more organizations are thriving to create a sustainable business model. Bocken et al. (2013, p. 484) defines sustainable business model as “sustainable business models seek to go beyond delivering economic value and include a consideration of other forms of value for a broader range of stakeholders.” The primary reason for organizations to peruse such a sustainable business model is to gain a competitive advantage (Porter & Kramer, 2019). Here, organizations try to base their strategy and business model off the idea of sustainable development. Strategic human resource management plays an important role in this process, with both implementing and sustaining green business practices and programs throughout the organization.

## *2.1 Human Resource Management*

According to Boxall & Purcell (2011), HRM refers to all the activities that are associated with the management of work and personnel in an organization. Terms such as ‘employee relations’, ‘labor management’ and ‘people management’ are all synonymous with human resource management. HRM can easily be understood as a set of practices aimed at building individual and collective performance in an organization (Boxall & Purcell, 2011).

When tracing the roots of human resource management, we can discover traits as early as 2000BC-1500BC, where the Greeks used an apprentice system and the Chinese used various techniques for employee screening (History of Human Resource Management, 2010, cited in Rotich, 2015). Although the term HRM had not been coined until the 1980’s, it had started to gain popularity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. To put things in perspective, Rotich (2015) writes about how HRM has developed through four crucial stages: (i) stage one (1900-1940s) administrative stage, (ii) stage two (1940s-mid-1970s) welfare and administration stage, (iii) stage three (mid-1970s-late 1990s) HRM and strategic HRM (SHRM) stage, and (iv) stage four (Beyond 2000) SHRM into the future. Although these stages represent the development in Australia, they also reflect the rest of the world’s development of HRM, more notably the USA and UK (Rotich, 2015). While stage one and two were crucial for the development of what we today consider HRM, it wasn’t until stage three the umbrella term HRM was introduced. More common terms

such as ‘personnel management’ were gradually falling under this new term, representing a shift towards the blending of previous personnel functions with organizational strategy and effectiveness (Rotich, 2015). Prior to HRM, personnel management (PM) focused more on short-term planning and cost minimization with a bureaucratic and centralized organizational structure. HRM on the other hand, focused more on long-term and proactive planning, as well as maximum utilization of the human capital (Human Resource and Industrial Relations, 2010, cited in Rotich, 2015). These two different forms of practice are often referred to as ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ versions of HRM. The primary difference between these two forms is that hard HRM see their employees as a cost, whereas in soft HRM they see their employees as an asset (Bratton et al., 2021). Bratton et al. (2021) further discusses three important emphases that can be identified when defining HRM. First off, we have the strategic role, which refers to the combination of strategic management and HR management activities. Here, the main focus is to ensure effective worker management, and that jobs are designed in such a way that contributes to the organization’s strategic goals. Secondly, Bratton et al. (2021) discuss how the human factor is the only factor that has inherent capacity to generate value for the organization. Thirdly, we shift the focus to how HR systems are successfully integrated to align with the organization’s overall strategy.

Studies have indicated that effective people management enhances employee well-being as well as it contributes towards a positive relationship between employees (Guest, 2017; Peccei et al., 2013). Signs of trust and mutual respect point to a positive employment relationship (Guest, 2017). As mentioned above, this form of HRM is often referred to as soft HRM and is a crucial aspect when trying to understand and govern employee morale. With this approach, if done successfully, employees will feel more valued and appreciate the organization’s efforts, which further enhances employee work motivation and morale (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2016).

It is a well-known fact that effective human resource management can only take place in an organization when the importance of the field is accepted and acknowledged by the top management (Brewster et al., 1997; Budhwar, 2000). Regarding resource allocation by top management, it is important that they give HRM more, or at least the same amount of resources for the development of HRM as they do for any other function in the organization (Mitsubishi et al., 2000). Wei & Lau (2005) conclude that if top management, as strategic leaders, believe that HRM is important for business development, they should direct their attention towards integrating HRM with the organization’s strategy. In other words, how top management

perceives HRM and its importance, and how they act upon it, is critical for the development of strategic human resource management (see Figure 1) (Wei & Lau, 2005).

Critical questions that often arise around the concept of HRM tend to refer to the field's vagueness, variability, and ambiguity (Steyaert & Janssens, 1999). Further, Steyaert & Janssens (1999) discuss how several studies question the very existence of HRM, due to the gap between theory and reality. For example, a study by Ogbonna (1992) finds that employees tend to pretend and show behavior compliance, rather than an actual change in their values, in regard to HRM trying to manage and influence organizational culture. Further, Gbadamosi (2003) states in order for HRM to be able to function effectively and efficiently, it requires not only managers that acknowledge the importance of the field, but employees as well.

### 2.1.1 Strategic Human Resource Management and Organizational Culture

It is difficult to define the concept of "organizational culture". Usually, when an author defines organizational culture, it often depends on the authors intentions, what concept they reflect, and their emphasis (Szczepańska-Woszczyzna, 2014). In this thesis we will use Schein (1985, p. 9) definition of organizational culture: "a pattern of basic assumptions invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaption and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems". Cabrera & Bonache (1999) explain how organizational culture is a reflection and outcome of an organization's SHRM practices. Organizational culture reflects assumptions, values, and beliefs that are incorporated in an organization, which then influences the employee's behavior, thus affecting the overall organizational performance (Wei et al., 2008). Further, Wei et al. (2008) state that organizational culture not only influences the implementation of SHRM but is also directly influenced by them (see Figure 1). Also, since the organizational culture reflects the values, beliefs, and decisions of the leaders of the organization, it is directly connected with the overall strategy of the firm (Wei et al., 2008). The implementation of HRM is a process that communicates practices and procedures to employees about which behaviors are important, anticipated and strengthened (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Through organizational practices and policies, employees tend to learn from one another, shaping similar behavioral patterns and beliefs, thus creating an organizational environment. As a result, an organizational culture is formed (Wei et al., 2008). Wei et al. (2008) concludes that good organizational culture possibly leads to the adoption of effective SHRM



practices and procedures, that may further benefit the strategy and performance of the organization.

Schein (2010) presents the following three key dimensions that cover all cultural levels in an organization: (i) artifacts, (ii) espoused values, and (iii) assumptions. The first level concerns the observable symbols, mission, and vision statement. Espoused values refer to the organization's strategies, goals, and philosophies. Lastly, assumptions, concern the underlying assumptions and unconscious beliefs in an organization that represent the core or essence of the organizational culture. In other words, assumptions are key to understanding why people do things the way they do it (Schein, 2010).

Further, Schneider & Bowen (1993) suggest that individuals in an organization create inimitable value through its organizational culture, which can create a sustainable competitive advantage. It is therefore important for both managers and HR departments to implement good practices that can help shape and sustain a productive and healthy organizational culture, as it is a major influence on both employee satisfaction and organizational success (Kane-Urabazo, 2006).

### 2.1.2 Strategic Human Resource Management and Its Future

Paauwe & Farndale (2017) describe strategy as an outline of an organization's goals and performance indicators. These indicators may consist of market share, competitive positioning, return on investment (ROI), and profit/growth. Other organizational goals may focus the financial, technological, or human aspect of the organization. In addition, Mintzberg (1987) presents the five meanings of strategy, also known as the 5 P's for strategy: (i) strategy as a plan, (ii) strategy as a pattern, (iii) strategy as a ploy, (iiii) strategy as a position, and (iv) strategy as a perspective. These five aspects represent different definitions or approaches of developing strategy.

When looking at Rotich (2015) four stages of HRM development, there is a clear shift from personnel management to human resource management in the late 1990s. According to Taylor (2011), the gradual transition from personnel management to human resource management is not only a new rhetoric for managers, but a new way of thinking. These traditional personnel functions were gradually heading into a more strategic direction, with the focus being on the overall organizational effectiveness. In the fourth stage, Rotich (2015) writes about strategic

human resource management and its future. This stage focuses on the year 2000 and beyond. Strategy and human resource management are two terms that have progressively become interlinked with one another as a consequence of rapid globalization. Strategic human resource management can be explained as an approach to ensure that HR practices are concurrent with the organization's overall strategy (Mello, 2014).

External and internal pressures from globalization have not only affected the field of HRM, but business strategy as a whole (Rotich, 2015). Rotich (2015) further states that due to globalization, HR professionals will have to act more proactive in regard to global issues such as global warming, as well as the introduction and adoption of new technology. Bae & Rowley (2001) suggests that globalization has had an important impact on HRM, especially when it comes to its new strategic direction. Further, Erwee (2003) explains that globalization has increased the overall market competitiveness and complexity and is a reason to why it is vital for organizations to use SHRM, especially large multinational organizations. Rotich (2015) concludes that HRM is a complex field that is in constant change. Similarly, to other professions, HRM is prone to a number of difficult dilemmas regarding roles, ethics, and practices. A continuous development of SHRM may therefore resolve these kinds of dilemmas and issues, through new effective and creative practices. Essentially, the new human resource management altered how organizations perceived their employees. Employees were now considered to be an important asset that possessed unique knowledge and skills that were vital for organizational growth (Rotich, 2015). As mentioned in the introduction, organizational culture positively influences SHRM when culture is aligned with the organization's strategy (Harrison & Bazzzy, 2017). Adequate human resource management strategies need to be in place in order to utilize the employee's full potential, as well as to help align them with the overall goals of the organization. This can be done through effective recruitment and onboarding programs.

#### *2.1.2.1 Green Human Resource Management*

As mentioned, companies from all industries are becoming increasingly aware of the significance and importance of social, environmental, and ethical objectives. As a result of the increased focus, many firms aim to strengthen their sustainable reputation and position by presenting their environmental efforts to both the shareholders and stakeholders. They do so by dedicating a large number of resources for green marketing strategies such as advertisement, product innovation and awareness campaigns (Szabo & Webster, 2021). They may also

restructure their current business model to a more sustainable business model, that can generate market share and return on investments (NHO, 2018). As mentioned in the introduction, some firms in certain industries may significantly front themselves as environmentally aware through marketing and advertisement, even though many of their actions do not accurately reflect their sustainable claims (Szabo & Webster, 2021). This form for faux corporate social responsibility is often referred to as greenwashing. Over the past several years, companies from a variety of industries are being called out for greenwashing (Szabo & Webster, 2021).

A growing awareness of sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) has gradually led to a shift in focus, from the economic and financial aspects of an organization to a more environmental and social approach. Amrutha & Greetha (2020) define green human resource management as practices that contribute towards the health and well-being of organizations and its employees, all while trying to achieve both economic stability and environmental balance. Today, GHRM has become an essential business strategy for organizations that wish to encourage a greener office environment through HRM initiatives and practices (Ahmad, 2015). Further, Mandip (2012) states that there are two elements of green HR, namely environment-friendly HR practices, and the preservation of knowledge capital. Being a fairly new field of study, the future of GHRM appears promising for stakeholders of an organization, as well as the development of HRM (Mandip, 2012).

### 2.1.3 The Process from Applicant to Employee

#### *2.1.3.1 Recruitment*

Employee life cycle plays an important part for any organization. It refers to an employee's journey within the organization, from start to finish (Gupta, 2019). Gutpa (2019) further presents the five stages an employee goes through during their time with an organization: (i) Recruitment, (ii) Onboarding, (iii) Development, (iv) Retention, and (v) Offboarding. As mentioned in the introduction, an increasing number of organizations are recognizing the importance of effective HRM practices, and how crucial they are when forming a sustainable long-term strategy (Mathis et al., 2016). This study has chosen to focus on the early stages of the employee life cycle, seeing this is where most HRM practices start, as well as these two stages playing a crucial role regarding the integration of new employees into the organization (Nagendra, 2014).

Recruitment is an important part of any organizations business plan. In light of today's immediate market based HRM, organizations are to some extent forced to improve and develop their recruitment strategy. As mentioned earlier, the human asset is the base of every organization, and is therefore important to have effectively trained and like-minded employees. According to Cloutier et al. (2015), successful employee retention is vital for the growth and stability of an organization. Attraction of suitable applicants is also essential for organizational success and is therefore necessary to have sufficient recruitment and selection procedures. According to Jepsen & Grob (2015), recruitment can be seen as a key component when trying to create a sustainable culture in an organization. An early focus on sustainability in the recruitment process is not only good for existing employees and the organizational culture, but it may also attract new like-minded employees that are willing to participate and support the organizations sustainable activities (Jepsen & Grob, 2015).

Recruitment can fairly be defined as practices and activities carried out by an organization with the intention of attracting and identifying potential employees (Barber, 1998). Although recruitment and selection are two terms that are often knitted together, they operate as two separate HR functions. Selection can easily be explained as the process of reducing the number of applicants, whereas recruitment is the process of actually finding firm-specific candidates and expanding the pool from where the selection process takes place (Orlitzky, 2007). Delery & Shaw (2001) state that the performance of an organization is determined by three employee characteristics: motivation, ability, and empowerment. Recruitment and selection practices may contribute to providing the first two of these employee characteristics.

As mentioned, recruitment is one of the main functions of the HR department, where the recruitment process is the first step towards hiring new employees. The recruitment process identifies the hiring need, analyzing job requirements, attracting potential applicants, reviewing job applications, screening and then selecting adequate candidates. According to Abdulla et al. (2017), this form for recruitment process is often referred to as the traditional recruitment process. Although the traditional recruitment process is seemingly straight forward, it often varies from organization to organization, and depends on whether it's an internal or external recruitment process. DeVaro (2020) define internal recruitment as filling a vacancy with one of its own employees, either through horizontal transfer or promotion. External recruitment can be

explained as filling a vacant position with a new hire from outside the organization. Both hiring practices have their own set of strengths and weaknesses, and there are several reasons to why an organization would choose an internal or external recruitment strategy, such as firm size, budget, HR policies and reputation (Ahmed, 2019).

When choosing an internal hiring strategy, the organization reduce the risk of a faulty hire. This is both due to the employee already being familiar with the organization, as well as the organization being familiar with the employee's capabilities and knowledge. Internal hiring gives employees (who anticipate a long-term career in the organization) strong incentives to develop specialized skills and knowledge in hopes of being rewarded with a promotion. Another advantage is that internal hiring creates new vacancies, which can strengthen incentives at lower levels in the organization (DeVaro, 2020). Some disadvantages that may come with internal hiring include limiting the application pool and creating an inflexible organization culture. Although external hiring may be more expensive and time consuming when compared to internal hiring, it offers a more extensive pool of potential employees. This allows the organization to gain new knowledge and ideas, as well as experiences (Patel & Rana, 2007).

The resource-based view (RBV) can be defined as a framework that labels the valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources as the basis of an organizations competitive advantage (Lin & Wu, 2014). According to Wright et al. (2001), RBV has had an important influence on the development of SHRM literature, both conceptual and theoretical. This was mainly due to RBV shifting its focus away from external factors such as industry position, towards internal resources as sources of competitive advantage (Hoskisson et al., 1999).

Wright and McMahan (1992) presented that the RBV perspective provided a rationale for how an organizations HRM could potentially be a source for an organizations sustainable competitive advantage. Orlitzky (2007) presents how recruitment satisfies five RBV criteria that might offer a competitive advantage. First off, recruitment may add value by enhancing labor cost efficiencies. Second, recruitment help an organization find candidates that possess knowledge and talent that is considered scarce in the labor market. Third, an organizations recruitment strategy might be complex and hard to imitate and can offer a competitive advantage. Fourth, the recruitment strategy for an organization might be non-substitutable, making the practice distinctive and innovative. Lastly, since the recruitment strategy is often aligned with other HR

practices in the organization, it may often increase the benefits of other HR functions, such as selection. Ma'mun et al. (2017) conducted a study on Indonesian government employees investigating the long-term effects of an organization's recruitment strategy and employee motivation. They concluded that recruitment and motivation have a positive and significant effect on overall job satisfaction. To be clear, job satisfaction refers to an employee's perception of their work environment as well as their relationship with other employees. Another study, by Belias & Koustelios (2014), concluded that employee's job satisfaction has a positive correlation with organizational culture.

### *2.1.3.2 Onboarding*

Although many organizations fail to notice the importance of employee onboarding, it can be described as one of the most important processes for new employees in an organization (Klein et al., 2015). The term onboarding can be defined as a set of formal and informal practices, policies and programs that are engaged and encouraged by an organization, to help facilitate and shape new employees (Klein et al., 2015). In other words, onboarding can be described as the process of helping new employees become productive and integrated in their new work environment. Not only does this refer to their new role and tasks that it entails, but also the social aspect of the organization, such as the firm's culture. The sooner a new employee can learn firm specific knowledge and understand its organizational culture, the faster they are able to contribute to the success of the organization, as well as increase its competitive advantage (Coff & Kryscynski, 2011). Research suggests that the success of a new employee can be determined within his or her first 90 days and is usually the timeframe when onboarding activities take place (Watkins, 2013). A study by Fisher (1985) indicate that sixty percent of employees blame failed onboarding for strained relationships with their peers.

Davila & Pina-Ramirez (2018) state that employees are more likely to go to work when they are proficient and comfortable with what they do, which further increases employee retention. Lower turnover rates lead to lower organizational costs regarding recruitment, selection, and training. A stable workforce with low turnover rates would also increase the overall productivity. Equal to adequate recruitment strategies, good reputation for stable onboarding practices may also increase an organizations competitive advantage (Davila & Pina-Ramirez, 2018).

As similar as the terms onboarding and socialization may sound, they are distinctive to one another (Klein & Polin, 2012). Klein et al. (2015) define socialization as something that happens within each individual, while onboarding refers to the efforts made by an organization to help encourage socialization. Another distinction between these two terms is that the individual can act proactively regarding their own socialization, whereas for onboarding, the organization itself is responsible for putting in place programs and practices to help promote socialization (Klein et al., 2015).

Furthermore, Klein et al. (2015) present three reasons to why organizations choose to implement effective onboarding measures and practices. First, it may help reduce anxiety and uncertainty among the new employees. Second, it may assist the newcomers of understanding the new organizational environment. Lastly, it helps to provide them with both intangible and tangible resources. These three motives help ensure that the new employees of an organization are able to become full functioning members of the firm, fulfilling their new role effectively and successfully. Klein & Heuser (2008) concluded that there are three primary ways of onboarding. These three include *informing* the newcomers, *welcoming* them, and *guiding* them, also known as the IWG framework.

The first category, *informing*, encompasses all attempts to deliver the necessary information and resources to the new employees, in order for them to adjust successfully into their new role. The second category, *welcoming*, addresses the emotional needs of the new employee. Here, the organization provides opportunities for the new employee to meet other organizational members through different social activities, such as a welcome lunch. Third, *guiding*, consists of all practices with the intention of providing the necessary active and direct assistance for the new employees. Previous studies indicate that organizations differentiate their onboarding practices, depending on what kind of employee they are hiring. To give an example, Fondas & Wiersema (1997) found that organizations had a more informal and individual onboarding tactic when hiring executives, when compared to employees at a lower level in the organization. Another factor that may influence how a new employee is onboarded, is the organizational characteristics, such as the firm's size and organizational strategy. Klein et al. (2015) further elaborate that not only do the organizational characteristics influence the onboarding procedures, but also the individual characteristics and the job itself. Therefore, the IWG framework is not designed to

identify specific practices within the three categories, but a general framework which can be applied to all organizations (Klein & Heuser, 2008).

It may be difficult to define what it means to execute a successful onboarding of new employees, however there are several factors that can help indicate a successful process. Bauer (2010) describes several short-term outcomes that can help identify a successful onboarding experience. These outcomes include knowledge and understanding of organizational culture, job certainty, social integration, and self-efficiency. Another way to indicate a successful onboarding process is to look for the absence of negative factors such as stress, dissatisfaction, and unhappiness. Bauer et al. (2007) proposes that job uncertainty often is a source of dissatisfaction, which is associated with stress. Therefore, an absence of these negative factors may express a successful onboarding.

According to Dai & Meuse (2007), there are six key areas new employees need to adjust to when starting a new organization. First, *performance proficiency*, which refers to identifying the skills and knowledge that needs to be acquired and learned so that one is able to perform the required work efficiently. Second, *people*, refers to establishing a successful relationship with the other members of the organization. Dai & Meuse (2007) further state that it is important for an organization to find the right person or people for new employees to learn from, as it plays a central role in the socialization process. Third, *politics*, concern the formal and informal power structures and work relationships within the organization. By identifying the people who have knowledge and power may enhance the individual's success. The fourth dimension, *language*, concerns the individual's knowledge of the profession's language, whether this being technical terms, acronyms, or slang. Without this knowledge, it can be difficult for the newcomer to understand the information given by other employees, which may further hinder or even restrain the learning process. It may also prevent new employees from participating in conversation, as they are not comfortable or knowledgeable enough. Fifth, *organizational visions and values*, refers to the individual's knowledge of the organization's formal and informal rules and principles. By acquiring this knowledge, it may help the newcomer to form a collective identity with his or her peers, as well as organization. The sixth and last dimension, *history*, refers to the firm's traditions and cultural knowledge. This may help the new employee to understand why things are the way they are, and why people behave a certain way. The six aspects presented by



Dai & Meuse (2007) also resemble Bauer's (2013) *four C's for successful onboarding*; (i) clarification, (ii) compliance, (iii) culture, (iiii) connection.

Further, Caldwell & Caldwell (2016) present a few common onboarding mistakes that organizations should be aware of. First, *insensitivity in understanding stress*, refers to how some organizations fail to understand the amount of stress that can fall upon a new employee when transitioning into their new position. If ignored completely, it may contribute to low productivity and efficiency. As a result, it can therefore be wise to incorporate stress management into the onboarding process. Second, *overloading employees with key information*, refers to organization's that try to hurry the onboarding process, which may overwhelm the new hires, resulting in a negative onboarding experience. Third, *providing disorganized transitional information*, concerns when an organization's onboarding process is poorly planned, fragmented, and disorganized. This may cause confusion and uncertainty among the new employees. Another common mistake worth mentioning is how organizations view their onboarding process. Instead of viewing it as an integrated process beneficial for the new employee, some organizations view it as a checklist, ignoring the value the process may bring the organization long-term (Dai & Meuse, 2007). Avoiding these common errors can help enhance the onboarding success for the organization.

## 2.2 Summary

Scholars have been trying to come up with a universal definition for the term sustainable development ever since it was introduced. In this study, the term sustainable development can be defined as ‘‘meeting the needs of a firm's direct and indirect stakeholders without compromising its ability to meet the needs of future stakeholders as well’’ (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002, p. 131). Sustainable development does not only focus on the environmental aspects, but also on the societal (CSR) and financial aspects, as the concept emanates from the triple bottom line. It is therefore important to understand what an organization interprets by the term sustainable development, and which of the three aspects do they lay emphasis on. By means of this, research question one (RQ1 in figure 1) is introduced.

As we have seen, human resource management has evolved a fair amount since its introduction in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A field which primarily focused on the administrative aspects of an organization, to having a more managerial and strategic approach. With this development, the importance of HRM has increased among top management in organization due to its link to strategy, however, remnants from its past reputation still linger. Therefore, it is important to understand how both employees and leaders perceive the importance of HRM in an organization (RQ2 in figure 1).

Organizational culture reflects values, assumptions, and beliefs in an organization, and is tightly knitted with HRM practices, as well as organizational strategy. HRM and organizational culture have an influence on one another. Since strategic decisions are made by the leaders of the organization, there is a connection between culture and strategy (RQ3 in figure 1).

The early stages of employment, such as recruitment and onboarding, are key components when trying to shape a sustainable organizational culture and strategy. Thus, it is interesting to see how much emphasis on sustainability an organization has in their recruitment process (RQ4 in figure 1). As mentioned, onboarding plays a crucial role when integrating new hires in an organization. Since strategy influences culture, and culture influences onboarding, it is compelling to examine how these sustainable values and beliefs are communicated regarding new employees (RQ5 in figure 1).

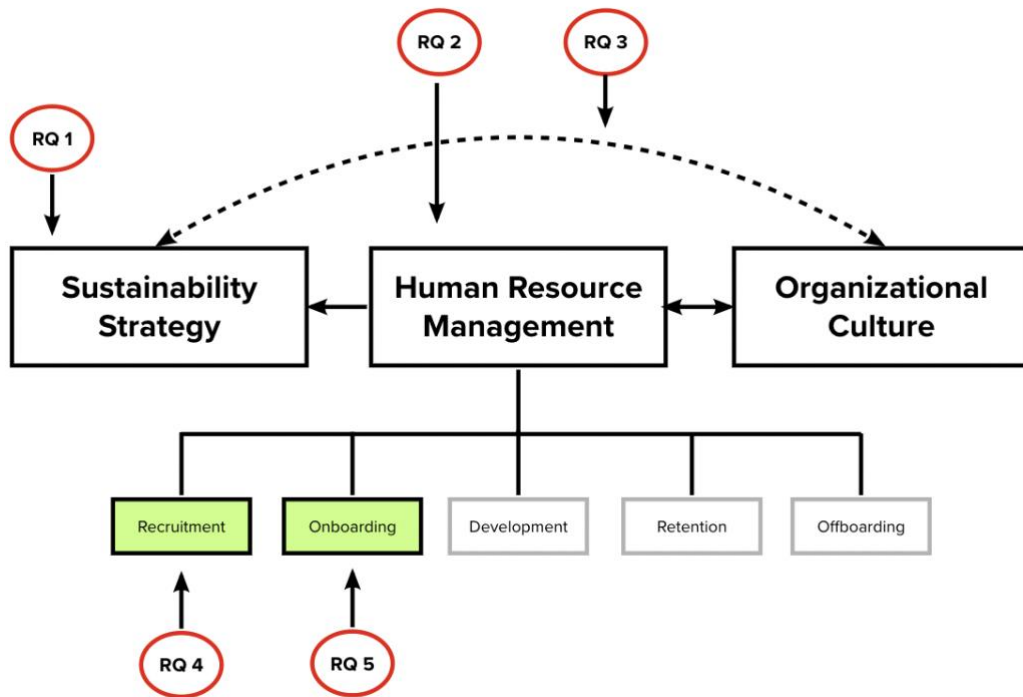


Figure 1: Summary of Concepts and Research Questions

As previously mentioned in the introduction, as well as summarized above, the research questions of this study are the following:

- RQ1: *What aspects of sustainability are important for organizations?*
- RQ2: *Is Human Resource Management considered important for an organization's sustainability activities?*
- RQ3: *What role does organizational culture have in connection to an organization's sustainability activities?*
- RQ4: *Is sustainability emphasized in the recruitment process?*
- RQ5: *How are the organization's sustainability values communicated in connection with new hires?*

## 3 Method

### 3.1 Design

There are many different reasons to why one would conduct scientific research. Most studies fall under at least one of the three different categories: (i) exploratory, (ii) descriptive, and (iii) explanatory (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Exploratory research is usually conducted in new areas of inquiry. The main goal for this type of research, in most cases, is to inspect the importance or range of a particular research problem or occurrence, to produce an initial idea about newer development, or to test the feasibility of undertaking a deeper and more excessive study regarding the phenomenon (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Descriptive research aims to make observations, and detailed documentations, of an area of interest (Leavy, 2017). Leavy (2017) further states that the observations are based on scientific methods and are therefore more reliable than casual observations by individuals without extensive knowledge of the field or phenomenon of interest. Lastly, Bhattacharjee (2012) explains how explanatory research is based on looking for explanations on a specific phenomenon or area of interest, as well as behaviors, or issues. They further state that descriptive research focuses on what, when, and where, while explanatory research looks into the why and how.

Our research design is based upon our five research questions. We want to explore how HRM is used in connection to an organization's sustainable strategy, with a focus on the early stages of employment as well as organizational culture, as there are few studies focusing on this phenomenon. As we have presented in chapter two, both HRM and sustainability have undergone changes throughout the past decades, and we are therefore interested in seeing how today's organizations view the concept of sustainable development. We find it also interesting to see how organizations use human resource management as a tool to help enhance the overall sustainable strategy of the organization, as well as how organizations view HRM, regarding its importance. With this, we find our research methods primarily exploratory, as we aim to produce initial ideas about newer developments in the world of business.

When choosing a methodical approach, it is important to address the two primary methodologies, qualitative and quantitative methods (Leavy, 2017). The qualitative method focuses on what is referred to as soft data, which includes texts, images, or sounds. On the other hand, quantitative methods focus on what is referred to as hard data, which is data retrieved and analyzed with the

help of numbers (Leavy, 2017). With the nature of our research questions, it was natural for us to pick the qualitative method, as our design is based around giving an insight to how organizations internally work on developing a sustainable strategy. According to Bhattacharjee (2012), the emphasis in qualitative data analysis is more understanding a phenomenon, rather than explaining or predicting it. Our research aims to understand the field of study, not predict, nor explain it.

Both research methods have their own set of strengths and weaknesses, all depending on what you wish to study. As our research is based on the development of long-term sustainability strategies and the actions behind that take place, it would not be beneficial to use a quantitative method, due to the number driven nature of the method (hard data). There is no clear instruction that indicates which method to choose from when conducting a study, as it is often appropriate to combine both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to get the results you want. (Bhattacharjee, 2012). For our research, it was not necessary to use a combination of the two, as our study relies on soft data in order to get the results we need. When using the qualitative method, we are able to get a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon (Bhattacharjee, 2012). For our interviews, we had predetermined questions and topics, while adding or changing the questions throughout the interview process (Leavy, 2017). As we experienced throughout the process, the interview objects approached a question differently than we expected, adding additional and useful information. This gave us the opportunity to further ask questions based on the new information and add sub-questions afterwards. This openness and flexibility improved our interviews, while at the same time providing new perceptions of the topic in question (Bhattacharjee, 2012).

### *3.2 Sample*

Regarding the selection process, there were a few criteria we found important and interesting for our research. First of all, we were primarily interested in organizations that have publicly expressed that they were a green organization, or involved in some sort of green business activities, through e.g., ads or their website. The main reason for this was that we assumed there was a higher probability that these organizations had a business plan or business goals involving sustainability. It was also important that they had been working with sustainability for a while, as we were aware that long-term projects take time to establish, and often change in the early stages of development. We did not only want to know about the business projects, but also the

experiences they have had throughout the process. The type of industry in which the organizations operated in was also an important criterion. We sought after organizations that operated in industries that had received a great deal of negative attention, as well as having a bad reputation, in connection to the negative impact the industry had on the environment (e.g., the clothing industry). For comparability, we chose to only focus on Norwegian organizations. As our research questions are heavily focused on human resource management and sustainability, we mainly focused on people who had experience with these topics, whether it being someone with management, having a role in HR, or someone working with sustainability or strategy.

The size of the organization was our last criteria, as we set our minimum limit to 50 employees. The reason behind this criterion is that we wanted organizations that had HR departments which consisted of more than one employee, as smaller organizations tend to have less of a focus on HRM due to the lack of resources (Dudjarejia, 2020). We wanted to ensure that our samples had enough resources to be able to have a more intricate HR focus. There are also strict rules regarding the conduction of research where personal data is involved in Norway, something we will come back to. We wanted to ensure that the informants would remain anonymous by only interviewing employees within a larger organization. According to Mitchell & Jolley (2010), anonymity in interviews may enhance the respondent's response rate and overall honesty.

We contacted fifteen different organizations in four different industry sectors: (i) seven in the clothing industry, (ii) six in the oil and offshore industry, (iii) one in the retail industry, and (iv) one in the logistics industry. All of these organizations responded, however, only three of them were willing to participate in the study. The organizations we had conducted interviews with are all relatively large Norwegian organizations in their respective industries. We only spoke to one person per organization, and as we are keeping the organizations anonymous, they will go by informant A, B, and C.

Informant A works within the HR department, for one of the largest Norwegian clothing organizations and has been there for over 10 years. This organization has over 50 employees and over 100 years of experience in the industry.

Informant B works within the HR department, for a Norwegian project-based organization that focuses on maintenance and repairs for the offshore industry, and has been an employee there for

over 20 years. This organization has over 4000 employees and well over 100 years of experience.

Informant C works with sustainability, for one of the larger Norwegian shipping companies, and has been with the organization for over 10 years. This organization has over 100 vessels, and over 50 years of experience in the shipping industry.

### *3.3 Data Collection*

By using qualitative interviews, one distinguishes between how structured the interview is. There are unstructured, semi-structured, and structured interviews, as well as focus group interviews (Adam, 2015). Regarding our approach, we believed that a semi-structured interview was the most preferred method. A semi-structured interview is a type of interview in which a few questions are determined in advance, whereas, in light of new relevant information, new questions can be added and asked during the interview (Adam, 2015). Although our interview guide had a predetermined order in which the questions were asked, we also had the option to go back and forth between questions, depending on what answers we got. We chose this method to make the interview feel more like a natural conversation, with a transition between topics, as well as having the ability to delve into new topics that were not predetermined (Adam, 2015). We also added a permanent supplementary question regarding organizational culture, after gaining new information about the topic during our first interview. While shifting between research topics during our interviews, we made sure to keep the topic questions separate in our notes, in order to have control over our answers. We also tried to look at job postings from the organizations we had interviewed, to collect some data regarding their stance on sustainability, and if they incorporated it in their job postings. However, this kind of information was scarce, as we were only able to find one job posting that contained this information. As a result, we chose to abandon the idea of using this information.

As previously mentioned, there are strict rules regarding the use of personal data in Norway. If you need personal data, or if you are using or saving data that can be traced back to an individual, you will have to apply for permission through NSD (Norwegian Center for Research Data). You must make sure that your data cannot in any way, or at any time, be traced back to an individual (NSD, 2022). We chose not to register our research with NSD, as it is a time-consuming process, and we thought it would not add value to our project to use or process

personal information. Which is to say, that throughout our research, we are not allowed to process personal information in any shape or form. To ensure that we stayed within the NSD guidelines on how to carry out a project without processing personal data, we chose not to record out interviews, but instead take notes continuously throughout the interview. We let the informants know that no information attained throughout the interview could be traced back to them, or the organization they worked for.

### 3.3.1 Interview Guide

The interview guide (see Appendix 2. Interview Guide), is divided into three main parts. The purpose of part one is to warm up the informant, allowing them to introduce themselves properly. For part two and three, we chose to start off with open questions in order to ask more specific questions depending on the answers we got. Part two contains questions about sustainability. Here we focused on questions concerning how they, as an organization, view the concept of sustainability, and what experiences they have from their sustainability activities. We also asked about the organization's sustainability strategies, what their goals are with the strategy, how it was developed, who was involved, and if they got any of their inspiration from the UNs SDGs. Part three is divided into three areas of interest: (i) human resource management, (ii) recruitment, and (iii) onboarding. In the section of human resource management, we asked about how important HRM is to the organization, if HRM is involved in the development of the business strategy, how members of the organization perceive HRM, and if there are any dissatisfactions regarding the culture within the organization. As mentioned previously, this is where we added questions about organizational culture, and in what way they measured and evaluated the organizational culture. With the recruitment process, we asked if there was any focus on sustainability through the recruitment process, and if they have noticed a difference between how graduates view sustainability, in contrast to earlier generations. Lastly, we asked the informant if they had some sort of onboarding program, how long it lasted, and if there was any focus on sustainability throughout the onboarding process.

### 3.3.2 The Interviews

We sent out consent forms in advance of the interviews, explaining why we wanted to interview them, and presented general information about our research, including the anonymity (see Appendix 1. Consent Form). Here we explained that our thesis is based on how organizations, operating in specific industries, work towards a long-term sustainability strategy. Further, we explained that participation in our research is voluntary, and that they have the ability withdraw



their consent at any given time without the need to explain why. The consent form also informs the informants that we will not be using or saving any personal data, that we are not going to record our interviews, and that our project ends 01.06.22. For convenience and to save time, both for ourselves and the informants, we decided to conduct our interviews digitally, through Microsoft Teams. A downside of conducting digital interviews is that we miss the opportunity to pick up on non-verbal cues, as well as the interview becoming less personal. Our interviews were held earlier this year, on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and the 11<sup>th</sup>. Although we asked the informants for 30 minutes of their time, the interviews with informant A and C lasted for approximately 45 minutes. As the nature of our interviews were based off the semi-structured interview guide, we were able to start by asking predetermined questions, and subsequently change the conversation flow by asking more specific questions, depending on the answers we got along the way. When conducting the interviews, one of us steered the conversation through asking questions, while the other focused on writing notes, while also supplementing with questions if necessary. Our notes were sorted into chapters, mimicking our interview guide: (i) sustainability, (ii) human resource management, (iii) recruitment, and (iv) onboarding. We chose to focus on keeping our notes sorted, since it would make it easier for us to analyze the data, as well as spot deviations in the answers we collected. By the nature of using qualitative data, we collected a lot of surplus information that was not relevant for our research, which was then filtered out before combining the notes from every interview.

### 3.3.3 The Quality of the Data

When evaluating the quality of our data, it is important to note that we cannot guarantee that the data we have collected through our interviews are true. However, for our research purposes, we have chosen to believe that our informants were completely truthful throughout our interviews. It is common to look at reliability and validity when looking at the quality of the data that has been collected (Fitzner, 2007). Reliability indicates that something can be measured consistently (Fitzner, 2007). As previously mentioned, the primary purpose of our semi-structured interview guide was to help guide our questions, meaning there are fluctuations in our answers. If we conducted the same interviews again, with the same organizations, there would be no guarantee that we would obtain the same answers. Though, we believe that by using the same interview guide, most of the data that we have collected would remain the same. Also, if we conducted the same interviews again, we assume that the extra material collected throughout the interviews would stand for most of the changes. Validity means that you are accurately measuring the

phenomenon you wish to measure (Fitzner, 2007). For this study, we believe that we were able to measure what we wanted. Both our interview guide and research questions were aimed to help give us an understanding on how organizations view the concept of sustainability, and how HRM is used through the early phases of the employee life cycle in order to create a work environment which focuses on sustainability. Regarding the accuracy of our research, we only interviewed a pool of three individuals, all from different organizations and industries, in Norway. We are therefore not able to standardize and conclude that, for example, all organizations focus on sustainability through the recruitment process. Our research also only reflects the views of the informants we interviewed, who worked in the field of sustainability and HRM, and also did not represent the organization as a whole.

### 3.3.4 Ethical Considerations

The protection of human subjects through the application of appropriate ethical principles is important for any research study. With a qualitative study, such as ours, ethical considerations have a particular resonance due to the in-depth nature of the process used (Arifin, 2018).

Through our process, we have focused on protecting the people and the organizations they work for. One of our steps to ensure that we have protected our subjects was to not record the interviews. We had ensured that the notes we took from the interviews were written in a way that, if leaked, would be untraceable and unidentifiable. We also informed the informants that the interviews were completely voluntary, and if they had anything they wanted to redact, we would cut it out. Also, they had the opportunity to completely withdraw from the study, even long after the interviews were over. Our interviews were also conducted individually, in a private room via Microsoft Teams, in order to protect their identity (Arifin, 2018).

## 4 Empirical Findings

As mentioned, informant A works in human resources, for an organization in the clothing industry. Informant B also works in human resources, for a project-based organization in the offshore industry. Informant C works with sustainability, for an organization in the shipping industry.

### 4.1 *Sustainability and Sustainability Activities*

#### 4.1.1 How Does Your Organization View the Concept of Sustainability?

All our informants agreed that sustainability plays an important role in their organization, and they have established their own sustainability departments. When asked about their view on sustainability, our informants focused on preserving the earth's natural resources, and using them in a sustainable way. They clarified that they wanted the future generations to have the same opportunities as we have. Furthermore, all three of our informants mentioned their focus on equality. Informant C stated that they *"Try to give everyone an equal chance, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, or background"*. Informant A and C stated the importance of proper reporting, in order to avoid any form of greenwashing. Making it easy for both shareholders and stakeholders who are interested in seeing how the organization is doing, regarding their sustainability activities. Both informant A and C stated that they try to make all the information as accessible for everyone as possible. Continuing on the subject of proper reporting and greenwashing, informant C stated that *"Our organization is transparent, and we have zero tolerance for corruption. Therefore, we report both the good and bad aspects of our organization, for everyone to see"*. They also use this transparency as a motivational factor when it comes to sustainability. Next, the way they view the concept of sustainability also differs among our three informants. Informant B and C agreed that the economic aspect plays an important role when it came to sustainability. Informant A, however, did not mention this aspect. Informant C stated *"The best projects are not only those that give us the desired effects, but the ones that also save us money"*. Informant B and C also stated that they took inspiration from the UN's sustainability goals for their outlook on sustainability. Informant A expressed *"we are authentic, responsible, and passionate explorers"* when asked about sustainability, clarifying the importance of keeping the environment clean, and having as little waste emitting from their products as possible. Informant C on the other hand informed us that their main focus is to find new ways to reduce their climate footprint.

#### 4.1.2 What Experiences Does Your Organization Have with Sustainable Activities?

When asked about their experiences concerning sustainability activities, there were three factors that were mentioned by all informants: (i) organizational culture, (ii) the ability to continuously improve, and (iii) differentiation between the older and younger generation of employees. Our informants stated that organizational culture, and having the right mindset, plays an important role on the sustainability activities. They continued speaking about how employees from an older generation often were reluctant to change, when implementing sustainable practices. They further stated that younger generations often were more aware of sustainability in general and were more likely to accept new policies and practices that incorporated sustainability.

Informant A made it clear that their organization focused on making their products more durable. An example of this, is how informant A expressed their concern regarding their clothes getting worn out, and how they had implemented repair services in order to reduce waste. They also implemented a rental service where customer could rent clothes, as well as a thrift store, where customers had the opportunity to purchase used clothes that had been repaired and washed. These services have been around for many years, and the organization noticed that these kinds of services had become increasingly popular in recent years. Informant A also mentioned that they were introducing a new subscription service in the future, with the intention of customers subscribing to get clothes. Once the clothes get worn out, they can send them in and receive new clothes from the newest collection. The worn clothes are then washed and fixed, then resold in the aforementioned thrift store.

All three informants stated that they acknowledged the need to have their own sustainability department in the organization in order to focus on current and future sustainability activities and strategies. Both informant A and C discussed their work with gender, ethnicity, and equality. They focused on bringing more women into leadership roles and how they appreciate all the different culture backgrounds and diversify they have throughout their organization. Informant C stated that *“ We cannot do everything ourselves when it comes to sustainability in such a large organization, so we have “sown seeds” in every department to help highlight and enhance the concept of sustainability”*. Informant C further expressed that they are currently working actively on reducing their climate gas emissions, as well as improving their ship’s energy sources, gradually separating themselves from fossil fuels. On a smaller scale, they have chosen

to look at issues they have regarding single use of cutlery, water bottles and dishes, with the intention of reducing plastic waste.

#### 4.1.3 What Are the Organization's Sustainability Goals?

All three informants stated that their main goal when it came to sustainability was to be a frontrunner within their respective industries. They also want their organization's values and culture to be embedded into their employees, as well as reflecting their values externally through social media, websites, as well as their products. Neither informant A nor B have specific goals when it comes to their sustainability activities but want to be a benchmark for other organizations who wish to compare themselves. While as organization C had mentioned that their main goal was to cut their climate gas emissions by 50 per cent within 2030, and to be completely climate neutral within year 2050.

## 4.2 *Human Resource Management*

### 4.2.1 What Role Does Human Resource Management Have in the Organization?

All our informants stated that HR is one of the most important departments in their respective organizations. They further clarified the importance of taking care of their employees, as HR views the employees as an important asset, rather than a business expense. All three informants stated that the department of HR was involved with all other departments of the organization, all from solving employee conflicts, to being an important player regarding the development of the organization's sustainability strategies. Our three informants have all experienced the changes HRM has gone through for the last 10-15 years, primarily the shift from hard to soft HRM strategies. They all stated how HRM has become more and more important, and how it is also tightly connected with the top management. Our informants explain how there is a large focus on having the right people for the right jobs in the organization. It is an important aspect that an employee's mindset is congruent with the organization's values and sustainability goals.

Informant A and B mentioned that they have noticed how the change in their organization's leadership in recent years have altered the importance of HRM. Senior management did not prioritize HRM, whereas new leaders focused more on culture, sustainability, and employee development, i.e., HRM became more highlighted. Informant A emphasized HRM's role regarding employee development. They further stated that "*HRM plays a crucial role regarding employee development, motivation, engagement, as well as ensuring their well-being in the*

*organization*’. Informant A mentioned that they wanted to be a ‘we’ organization, not a ‘me’ organization. Informant B articulated how HRM is about the practical work that most employees take for granted, from overtime, promotions, to how leaders behave and share information. Informant C talked about how they saw the need for two HR departments, one for land operations and one for crewing, as it would be too difficult to just have one department.

#### 4.2.2 Organizational Culture

All three informants stated that their organizational culture was an important aspect of good HRM, as well as good HRM playing an important role by influencing the organizational culture. They further express the importance of having the right mindset and values, so that the organization can improve its productivity and efficiency. Continuing on the subject of culture, our informants mentioned once again that having the right people for the right jobs was something the HR departments wanted to achieve. All three informants emphasized how leaders with the right mindset are particularly important, as they have the power to directly influence the departments and strategy, influencing both HRM and the overall organizational culture. Informant C stated that *‘With the right organizational culture, sustainability should be equally as important as quality and safety’*, when asked about organizational culture and sustainability. All of our informants mentioned how their organizations have anonymous surveys that enables them to measure the organizational culture, in order to see if departments are satisfied or not. However, they have all used different types of surveys. Informant A’s organization has a short weekly survey that consist of seven to eight questions, rating them from good (5) to bad (1), on a 1-5 scale. If employees expressed dissatisfaction, the organization would send out a new survey, allowing them to elaborate, in order to initiate improvements. Informant B’s organization has a yearly survey that allowed them to compare themselves with other international organizations within the same business sector. Employees are also able to express concern and improvements regarding the organization. Informant C explained how their organization sends out surveys every second year, where they would compare themselves to previous years in order to see the organization’s development or shortcomings. All informants emphasized the importance of the surveys being anonymous, as they got more uncensored and honest answers, when compared to the yearly appraisal interviews.

### 4.2.3 The Recruitment Process

When asked about the recruitment process, all three informants highlighted the importance of inclusion. They further mentioned how they valued having a diverse workforce, giving everyone an equal chance when applying for a job, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. Our informants also mention how their organizations do not ask direct questions about sustainability during the early stages of the recruitment process unless the job specifically involves the subject. However, they often ask indirect questions that revolve around the topic of sustainability in order to get insight of the interviewee's values and overall mindset. When asked about the recruitment process of the organization, it came forth that all three of our informants have observed that there is a difference in how newly educated and older/experienced applicants view the concept of sustainability. They thought that the reasoning behind this was the education system having greater focus on sustainability now, than before. All three informants emphasized how they do not focus on grades when looking for new hires, but focus on what type of person they are, and if they have the skills and experience needed to fulfill the role they are applying for. The informants also talked about how the recruitment process is an expensive process, as it is time consuming and costly. When asked about the recruitment process, informant A stated that *“Once you hire someone, it is hard to get rid of them. It is therefore important to find someone who fits into our organization's culture and can get along with the other employees”*. Further, Informant A stressed the importance of the *“we person”* mindset, and how they do not wish to have anyone who expresses themselves as a *“me person”*. Informant B expressed how they focus primarily on promoting within their organization, rather than looking for outside applicants. Although informant C talked about how their organization had not been in a position to hire new employees lately, they stressed the importance of proper qualifications.

### 4.2.4 Onboarding Procedures

When asked about their onboarding procedures, all three of our informants agreed that the main purpose of their organization's onboarding program was to help integrate new employees, allowing them to build a connection with the organization. They also added that onboarding was about making the new employees feel welcomed by creating a social network for them, as well as giving them insight of the organization's culture, values, and goals. In order to do so, all three informants mentioned how an employee, who is familiar with the department and have experience within the organization, is tasked to assist new employees. For example, they give them a tour of the organization, invite them to lunch, and include them in social activities.

Informant A stated that, *‘The mentor system does not have a specific time frame, as it gradually fades out naturally as the new employee gets familiar with the job and the organization’*.

Informant A continued to speak on the matter and expressed how their onboarding program has already started when they have their last round of interviews. Here the interviewee expresses the organization’s values and expectations. Informant B talked about how their organization mainly focuses on internal recruitment, and do not necessarily have an onboarding program, as most of the new employees are already familiar with the organization. Although, they do send small gifts, such as flowers and chocolates, to welcome the new employees. When it is needed, informant B states that the organization tries to create project teams where the employees have something in common, e.g., matching age groups, in order to create a better flowing social work environment. Informant C stated that their organization uses e-learning tools and courses to help new employees settle into their new role.



## 5 Discussion

### 5.1 *What Aspects of Sustainability are Important for Organizations?*

There are four main concepts surrounding the term sustainability that our theory covers: (i) sustainable development, (ii) the triple bottom line (TBL), (iii) corporate social responsibility (CSR), and (iv) the UN's 17 sustainability development goals (SDGs). Sustainable development (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002), triple bottom line (Slaper & Hall, 2011), and corporate social responsibility (The European Commission, 2003) stress that environmental integrity, financial growth, and social equity, should be equally important for organizations today. This appears to be consistent with the information we have received while interviewing all three of our informants. When the informants were asked about sustainability, they all emphasized the importance of using our earth's natural resources in a sustainable way. They also mention how they all work towards lessening their overall environmental pressure.

Regarding the social aspect of sustainability, all informants agree that everyone should have the same opportunity to learn, and develop within the organization, regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. Informant B and C appeared to have a strong focus towards the economic aspect of sustainability, as informant C stated *"The best projects are not only those that give us the desired effects, but the ones that also save us money"*. This indicates that the environmental and social aspect sometimes come second to economic growth, and that the main goal of implementing a sustainability strategy is to gain a competitive advantage over their competitors. This statement is congruent with Porter & Kramer's (2019) proposal that the main reason for organizations to pursue a sustainable business model is to gain a competitive advantage. For example, informant A gained a competitive advantage by spotting new areas of business in the market, such as opening a thrift store as well as other activities to help reduce waste. They were able to find new innovative ways to become more sustainable. Informant C also expressed how they were working on reducing their climate gas emissions by looking into other clean energy sources, moving away from fossil fuels. However, unlike informant A, informant C had not yet developed technology for such a big change.

The last concept concerning sustainability is the 17 sustainable development goals presented by the UN (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). However, the importance of the SDGs varies from organization to organization, as well as industry. Most organizations have to choose which

SDGs are relevant to fulfill, while at the same time being able to be profitable. While interviewing our informants, both informant B and C mentioned taking direct inspiration from the UNs SDGs, primarily goals 8, 13, and 14. Goal 8 focuses on promoting decent, sustainable work and economic growth (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Our research indicates that all our informants' organizations focused on giving everyone an equal opportunity to grow and evolve within their organization. Especially informant B, who strongly believed that their focus on recruiting and hiring from within their organization is the best way for their organization to grow. Goal 13 evolves taking urgent action to combat climate change and its detrimental impacts (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Goal 14 refers to conserving and sustaining the oceans, seas, and marine resources (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). All three of our informants' organizations seem to be working towards reducing their overall carbon footprint and impact on the environment, from developing new business strategies, to finding more efficient ways to reduce waste and climate gasses from their daily activities. However, it is worth mentioning that they might only have used the SDGs as an inspiration to find ways to get a competitive advantage over their competitors. Nevertheless, if they can both gain a competitive advantage, and obtain said goals, they are all for it.

## *5.2 Is Human Resource Management Considered Important for an Organization's Sustainability Activities?*

Bratton et al. (2021) introduces three important aspects of human resource management: (i) the strategic role, (ii) the human factor, and (iii) how HR systems need to be successfully integrated and aligned with the organization's overall values and goals. The strategic role refers to the combination of strategic management and human resource management activities. The main focus of the strategic role is to ensure effective worker management, and that jobs are designed in a way that contributes to the organization's strategic goals (Bratton et al., 2021). Also, micro HRM (MHRM) is concerned with the management of individuals and small groups. Our findings suggest that there is a link between the strategic role of HRM and MHRM, regarding their connection with sustainability activities. By establishing sustainability departments, all our informants' organizations have made a clear decision to have roles specifically dedicated to work with sustainability, in order to reach their goals. Dividing their organization into specified departments in order to work more efficiently is a way HRM influences the organization's structure. By creating smaller groupings, such as an organization's sustainability department, it may be easier to manage individuals. As informant C stated '*We cannot do everything*

*ourselves when it comes to sustainability in such a large organization, so we have ‘sown seeds’ in every department to help highlight and enhance the concept of sustainability’*. This indicates that they are dependent on the leaders in each department to help assist with the organization’s sustainability work. This leads us to Bratton et al. (2021) second and third factors. By focusing on the human factor is the only factor that has inherent capacity to generate value for the organization, and the focus on how HR systems being successfully integrated to align the the organization’s overall goals may enhance the firm’s competitive advantage (Bratton, et al., 2021; Porter & Kramer, 2019). Our findings indicate that all three organizations focus on aligning their employees and HR practices with their sustainability goals. Other studies have indicated that effective people management enhances the well-being of an employee, as well as it contributes towards a positive relationship between one another (Guest, 2017; Peccei et al., 2013). Our findings support these indications, as informant A stressed that it was important to have the right people for the right jobs, and how they focused on finding employees that aligned with the values of the organization. Informant A also believed that viewing their employees as an asset rather than a cost inherently enhances their ability to achieve their sustainability goals. Informant A further emphasized how the close bond between HR and the leadership group help the organization run more smoothly, as well as highlight the organization being a ‘we’ organization, rather than a ‘me’ organization.

Over the past several years, companies from a variety of industries are being called out for greenwashing. According to Delmas & Burbano (2011), greenwashing can be defined as the intersection of two firm behaviors: poor environmental performance, and positive environmental communication. Our findings indicate that transparency and reporting both the positive and negative sides of business is important, for both the shareholders and stakeholders. Informant C specified that their reports are used as motivational factors for their employees and are used in a way that helps their employees understand the organization’s actions and activates. Clarity and understanding are two important aspects of HRM, as it has the ability to motivate employees (Parry & Tyson, 2011). Informant C emphasized how small posters with statistics and indicators throughout the organization are used as a way to remind the employees about the importance of sustainability (Paauwe & Farndale, 2017). These posters also showed their daily tasks, in order to assist the organization to reach their sustainability goals.

Organizations from all industries are becoming increasingly aware of the significance and importance of the social, environmental, and ethical objectives (Szabo & Webster, 2021). Bae &

Rowley (2001) suggest that globalization has had an important impact on HRM, especially regarding its strategic development. Our findings suggest that HRM indeed has been impacted by the global focus on social, environmental, and ethical objectives. When conducting interviews, all three informants expressed how their organizations focus was to become a benchmark regarding sustainability, in their respective industries. They also focused on reducing their climate footprint, combining sustainability goals and economic goals, as well as giving everyone an equal opportunity. These drivers may be used to strengthen their sustainable reputation and competitive position. Amrutha & Greetha (2020) define green human resource management as practices that contribute towards the health and well-being of an organization and its employees. Our findings suggest that GHRM plays an important role in each of our informants' organizations.

### *5.3 What Role Does Organizational Culture Have in Connection to an Organization's Sustainability Activities?*

Organizational culture is a way for an organization to express its values, mission, beliefs, and objectives, both internally and externally (Cabrera & Bonache, 1999). Further, Scheiner & Bowen (1993) suggest that individuals in an organization create inimitable value through its organizational culture, which can create a sustainable competitive advantage. It is therefore important for both managers and HR departments to implement effective practices that can help shape and sustain a productive and healthy organizational culture, as it is a major influence on both employee satisfaction and organizational success (Kane-Urabazo, 2006). Our findings suggest that having employees with the right mindset and values could improve the overall productivity, as well as help the organization achieve its sustainability goals. Informant C stated that *“With the right organizational culture, sustainability should be equally as important as quality and safety.”* This statement gave us insight into the importance of organizational culture within an organization. Our informants also expressed how they measure culture through a variety of different surveys, in order to ensure that the employees are satisfied with how things are in the organization. They can then compare these surveys with last year's results, in order to adjust if needed. As informant B stated, these surveys can be used to motivate employees, since they compare their results with other organizations, both nationally and internationally, within their business sector. Informant C also mentioned how they compare their results with previous years, in order to see if they have improved. Our findings suggest that these types of surveys can help motivate the employees, resulting to improving their culture regarding sustainability. As

these surveys are anonymous, our findings indicate that there is a greater chance for employees to give more truthful and honest answers, when compared to the organization's yearly appraisal interviews. These appraisal interviews are still an important aspect to ensure the organizational culture and that everything runs smoothly, according to our informants. Our findings also suggest that surveys are the best indicators to see just how good or bad the organizational culture is.

#### *5.4 Is Sustainability Emphasized in the Recruitment Process?*

According to Cloutier et al. (2015), successful employee retention is vital for the growth and stability of an organization. Attraction of suitable applicants is also essential for organizational success and is therefore necessary to have sufficient recruitment and selection procedures. Delery & Shaw (2001) state that the performance of an organization is determined by three employee characteristics: (i) motivation, (ii) ability, and (iii) empowerment. Recruitment and selection practices may contribute to providing the first two of these employee characteristics. Our findings also indicate that organizations are focusing more on the motivational aspect through their recruitment and selection process. As informant A stated, their organization wants to be a 'we' organization, indicating that their employees prioritize teamwork, rather than people who primarily focus on themselves and their desires. Furthermore, not one of our informants' organizations focus on grades or what topics the applicant had studied, unless it was highly relevant for their new role. The organizations rather focused on what kind of person the applicant was, and if they had the skills and experience needed to fulfill the role they were applying for. Our findings suggest that organizations are more concerned about an applicant's motivation, rather than their ability. This does not imply that you do not need to have the right abilities to fulfill the role in question, but through a proper recruitment process, all applicants should already possess the needed abilities. In other words, the focus during the recruitment stage is mainly on how the applicants are as people, e.g., how driven they are, and whether their values align with the organization's values.

Our findings indicate that the recruitment process is a pivotal and decisive aspect of every organization and may have an influence on the future state of the organization. The recruitment process, as important as it is, is an expensive process, both when it comes to time and costs. Our findings indicate that a well-structured recruitment process is worth both the time and cost. As informant A stated *'Once you hire someone, it is hard to get rid of them. It is therefore*

*important to find someone who fits into our organization's culture and can get along with the other employees''*. This indicates the importance of hiring like-minded people into the organizations. One way to ensure that new employees fit well in with the organization, is through an internal recruitment process, as informant B stated. DeVaro (2020) explains how internal recruitment in an organization fills a vacancy with one of their own employees, either through horizontal transfer or promotion. Our findings suggest that internal recruitment ensures that people filling the vacant role(s) are familiar with the values and goals of the organization, already possessing the right knowledge and capabilities. However, with internal hiring, one limits the application pool, as well as creating an inflexible organizational culture (DeVaro, 2020).

Regarding the focus on sustainability through the recruitment process, our findings indicate that the recruitment process can have an overall impact on the sustainability work in an organization. Firstly, our research implies that organizations value having a diverse workforce, as all applicants and employees are given an equal opportunity for organizational development. Diversity and equality fall under the social aspect of sustainability (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Our findings therefore indicate that there is a correlation between sustainability and the recruitment process. Belias & Koustelios (2014) concluded that employee job satisfaction has a positive correlation with organizational culture. As we previously discussed, our research indicates that organizational culture has an important role in an organization's sustainability work. Therefore, it is important to have employees that work well together, as it enhances the employee's job satisfaction (Ma'mun et al., 2017). Our findings support this theory, as it emphasizes the importance of hiring the right people for the right jobs. None of the informants we interviewed expressed that their organization asked direct questions about sustainability unless the job they were applying for directly involved the subject. However, the informants discussed how, through indirect questions regarding sustainability, they were able to get an insight of the interviewee's values and overall mindset. This further indicates that the informants' organizations value the mindset of a new employee, and if they fit into the organization's culture, rather than focusing on how knowledgeable they were about the topic of sustainability.

## *5.5 How Are the Organization's Sustainability Values Communicated in Connection with New Hires?*

Although many organizations fail to notice the importance of employee onboarding, it can be described as one of the most important processes for new employees in an organization (Klein et al., 2015). The term onboarding can be defined as a set of formal and informal practices, policies, and programs, that are engaged and encouraged by an organization to help facilitate and shape new employees (Klein et al., 2015). Klein & Heuser (2008) concluded that there are three primary ways of onboarding: (i) *informing* the newcomers, (ii) *welcoming* the newcomers, and (iii) *guiding* the newcomers. This is also known as the IWG framework. Our findings indicate that the goal of an organization's onboarding programs is to provide the opportunity for new hires to be successfully integrated into the organization. This implies that the employees feel welcomed into the organization by creating a social network for them, as well as giving them an insight into the organization's culture and values. This suggests that our findings are congruent with Klein & Heuser's (2008) three primary ways of onboarding. Identifying the skills and knowledge that needs to be acquired by newcomer, to be successful in their new role in their organization and give clarity regarding the role. Dai & Meuse (2007) state that this is a vital part of an organization's onboarding process. Helping newcomers succeed can be done by using e-learning tools, as mentioned by informant C, or having some sort of a mentor system, as mentioned by informant A. The mentor system involves experienced employees providing guidance for newcomers, assisting them with their tasks and answering any questions they have concerning their new job, or the organization in general. The mentor also often gives the newcomers a tour of the organization, inviting them for lunch as well as including them in other social activities that may occur in, or outside the organization. Our findings indicate that the mentor system is one of the most crucial HRM measures regarding the integration of new employees into an organization, as it gives them insight of the organizational culture. By this type of onboarding process, the new employees get insight on the organizational values and overall vision, increasing their knowledge of the organization's formal and informal rules and principles (Dai & Meuse, 2007). Further, our findings indicate that by acquiring this knowledge through a mentor system may help the newcomer form a collective identity with their peers, as well as organization. As we have previously mentioned, having a good and effective organizational culture creates a good work environment, which in turn helps the organization reach their desired goals. The mentor system usually has a time aspect, however, as informant A stated "*The mentor system does not have a specific time frame, as it gradually fades out*

*naturally as the new employee gets familiar with the job and the organization''*. This indicates that when the newcomer gradually gets familiar with the organization's culture and goals, as well as understanding what is expected by them, the mentor system naturally fades out.



## 6 Summary

Throughout this thesis, we have tried to provide information surrounding the research question:

*“What is the role of Human Resource Management in self-proclaimed green organizations?”*

Our findings support the argument that sustainability is an important aspect for organizations today. While the term sustainability is a broad term (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002), our findings indicate that there may be some key factors of sustainability that organizations are interested in. One factor that all our informants could agree upon was the goal of reducing their organization’s overall environmental pressure and carbon footprint. Another factor is equality, and that all our informants expressed that their organization focused on giving everyone an equal opportunity to grow and evolve within their organization, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. We also found that competitive advantage is an important reason to why organizations choose to focus on sustainability, as supported by Porter & Kramer’s (2019) theory that the primary reason for organizations to pursue a sustainable business model is to gain a competitive advantage in the long run. Informant B and C specifically spoke about wanting their sustainable business projects to yield a combination of economic growth and sustainability, providing a sustainable competitive advantage.

Through our findings, we found an indication as how the strategic role of HRM is used in connection with a sustainability activities. By establishing sustainability departments, all our informants made clear that it was important for their organization to initiate their own departments in order to reach their sustainability goals. However, we saw that these departments may not be able to affect the whole organization and is why the implementation HRM practices in each department play an important role when wanting to achieve sustainability goals. As these practices may push department leaders to have a larger focus on sustainability. While we focus on the leaders in the organizations, our finding indicates that there may be a correlation between having the right people in the right jobs to help ensure sustainable growth in an organization. This is due to the leaders being able to impact the strategy, culture, and vision of the organization. Our findings also indicate that HRM plays an important role regarding communication. Clarity and understanding are important aspects of HRM, as it may motivate employees (Parry & Tyson, 2011).

Our findings suggest that organizational culture may play an important role in an organization's sustainability activities, as the culture could affect an employee's behavior, mindset, and overall values. Further, our findings are congruent with Schneider & Bowen's (1993) theory, suggesting that individuals in an organization create inimitable value through its organizational culture, which then can create a sustainable competitive advantage. As organizational culture may have a positive impact on sustainability activities, our informants indicated that their respective organizations use periodical surveys to help ensure that their organizational culture is on the right track. Our findings also indicate that the recruitment process may have an impact on an organization's sustainability activities. With a strong focus on what type of person the applicant is, rather than their grades and experience, indicates that organizations may value motivation and drive over their skills and experience. Hiring the wrong person may create a toxic work environment, which may then affect the daily operations of an organization. Our informants strongly emphasize that their organization take the recruitment process very seriously, as one wrong hire could have a detrimental effect on the organizational culture.

Through our findings, we have found that there could be a connection between a good onboarding program and sustainable growth for organizations. An effective onboarding program ensures that the new employee gains a connection with the organization through developing a social network, as well as gaining insight into the organization's culture and values. Our findings indicate that the best way to fulfill these objectives is through a mentor system. An effective mentor system allows the new employee to be informed of the formal and informal practices and policies that are engaged and encouraged by the organization, in order to help facilitate and shape new employees (Klein et al., 2015). It also helps create a social network for the new employee, as they have a mentor who can introduce them to the other employees in the organization. This will allow the newcomer to form values that align with their peers, as well as the organization.

*What is the role of Human Resource Management in self-proclaimed green organizations?* From our findings, we see indications that human resource management may have an impact on organizations sustainability activities. Through proper recruitment and onboarding programs, and a sustainability focused culture, an organization may see that there could be changes in their organization's success with sustainability activities. This may then lead to a sustainable competitive advantage over their competitors.

## *6.1 Critical Remarks and Future Research*

The main weakness of our research is that our sample is of a small-scale. We have only interviewed three informants from three separate organizations. Consequently, we only have insight in how the informants perceive the discussed topics, and not the views of the organization as a whole. Furthermore, we only reached out to organizations that operate in Norway, which means that we do not have the full scope of how these aspects are viewed on a global scale. For this, future research should consider using a larger sample size, that includes both domestic and international samples.

Our informants work with HRM and sustainability, which means that the data we have collected may be biased and might not reflect how other employees in the organization view the discussed topics. Also, the organizations our informants work for front themselves as sustainable, or sustainability oriented. If we were to collect information from an organization with less focus on sustainability, we might have received different data. Future research, should include samples that are more diverse, spreading into other departments of an organization. By doing so, one could get insight in how HRM practices are implemented and use in other departments that do not mainly focus on sustainability or HRM.

It is also worth mentioning that while conducting this research, we made adjustments based of the initial data gathered from our informants. An example of this is the aspect of organizational culture, where we saw the need to add both theory and an extra question to our interview guide, based off the data collected from informant A. Our research is of qualitative nature, and our interviews were semi-structured, which suggests that the flexibility of our questions may have lessen the data's reliability, as well as it being difficult to compare answers. We also took notes while conducting the interviews, which may have impacted our findings as we were not able to go back and rewatch them. Therefore, future research should include a more in-depth and comprehensive methodology that can improve both the validity and reliability of the data.

Our informants expressed how they saw changes being made in connection with HRM, during a shift of top management in the organization. They emphasized that a younger generation of managers focused more on sustainability and HRM than their previous managers, who were from an older generation. In light of this, future research should study these changes and how they could have an impact on an organization's sustainability activities. Rotich (2015) discussed

how the field of HRM has been experiencing pressures for changes since the early 2000s. From shifts in the economy, domestic diversity, globalization, and technology, the field of HRM has been pushed in some completely new directions and has opened up new opportunities within the field. Which is why we propose to further research how these changes are impacting the field of HRM today.

## 7 References

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## 8 Discussion paper

### 8.1 Retzius, Garrett Christian (*International*)

#### 8.1.1 Introduction

This master thesis aims to provide different aspects on how human resource management may influence an organization's sustainability activities. Further, this study also focuses on the early stages of the employee life cycle, which include recruitment and onboarding (Gupta, 2019). The theory is based around the topic question:

*What is the role of Human Resource Management in self-proclaimed green organizations?*

In order to explore and answer this question, five research question have been put in place: (i) *What aspects of sustainability are important for organizations?* (ii) *Is human resource management important for an organization's sustainability activities?* (iii) *What role does organizational culture have in connection to an organization's sustainability activities?* (iv) *Is sustainability emphasized in the recruitment process?* and (v) *How are the organization's sustainability values communicated in connection with new hires?* These questions are then linked to theory. The theoretical framework of the thesis starts off with introducing the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), presented by the United Nations General Assembly (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Next, the concept human resource management (HRM) is introduced, discussing the development the field has had since the early 1900s to today, with a focus on *why* HRM is important for an organization. Following this, the thesis emphasizes the connection between human resource management, strategy, and organizational culture. Lastly, theory is presented regarding the early stages of the employee life cycle, focusing on the recruitment process and onboarding procedures.

This study has an exploratory research approach as it tries to produce introductory ideas about recent developments in the world of business. The study is of qualitative nature, as it gathers qualitative data through semi-structured digital interviews. By using an interview guide, three informants, from relatively large Norwegian organizations, were interviewed in regard to their view on sustainability, human resource management, and strategy.

Findings of the study suggests that the informants focus on reducing the organization's environmental pressure, as well as having a great focus on employee equality. There were indications that the main reasoning behind these large organizations wanting to pursue green business practices, was because it allowed them to gain a competitive advantage over their competitors. The indications include that the majority of the informants focus on the economic aspect of sustainability. Further, findings indicate that human resource management may have an impact on the sustainability activities of the organizations, both regarding the structure to the organization, as well as how the goals and values are communicated with the employees. There was also an indication that the organizational culture may have an influence on the sustainability activities of the organizations, and that it is important for an organization to have clear roles and a good communication flow within the organization. Regarding recruitment, findings suggest that although sustainability is not emphasized in the recruitment process, it plays an important overall role in the onboarding process, particularly the organizational culture. Findings also suggest that one of the most important parts of the onboarding process is to build a social network with other employees of the organization, gaining insight into the organizational culture and its values. The thesis can therefore conclude that human resource management may have an influence on the sustainability activities of an organization.

The basis of the master thesis surrounds the topic of human resource management. Regarding the topic of this discussion paper, it is relevant to delve into the subject of international human resource management (IHRM). This discussion paper aims to provide a short overview of challenges regarding the development of HRM, which includes the rise of globalization, and the impact technology has had on HRM.

### 8.1.2 Human Resource Management

According to Boxall & Purcell (2011), human resource management refers to all the activities that are associated with both management of work and the personnel in an organization. In other words, human resource management can be understood as the set of practices aimed at developing individual and collective performance within an organization.

### *8.1.2.1 International Human Resource Management*

International human resource management can be described as a new, rapidly changing and growing academic field, that is about managing world-wide human resources (Schuler et al., 2002). As mentioned in the thesis, HRM has had a greater focus on the environment as a consequence of rapid globalization (Rotich, 2015). Harzing & Pinnington (2010) further elaborate how IHRM has its roots from the introduction and growth of international business practices, as well as the development of multinational companies, also known as MNCs. As HRM refers to personnel administration, strategy, and personnel management, IHRM focuses on these aspects on an international level (Harzing & Pinnington, 2010). Further, Bartlett & Ghoshal (2002) present five significant requirements that may help a multinational enterprise (MNE) succeed globally: (i) competitive throughout the world, (ii) efficient, (iii) locally responsive, (iv) flexible and adaptable within the shortest of time periods, and (v) capable of transferring knowledge and learning across their globally dispersed units.

As mentioned in the thesis, adequate HRM practices can help enhance the overall productivity and efficiency of an organization (Mathis et al., 2016). According to Schuler et al. (2002), this also applies to IHRM, as most organizations view it as a critical and important for the growth of an organization, as IHRM can make the difference between the organization surviving or going extinct. Although the multinational enterprise is scattered across the globe, it still remains a single organization. Therefore, it must balance competing pressures for both integration and differentiation (Schuler et al., 2002). As integration and differentiation are often associated with HRM practices, they represent an important element in IHRM. Further, Schuler et al. (2002) present three main areas that IHRM represent: (i) an MNE's human resource orientation, (ii) the resources, and (iii) the location of said resources and HR decision making. The resources mentioned refer to time, energy, and money.

Pudelko et al. (2015) compares the rapid development of IHRM to the rapid development of HRM. Further stating that IHRM has become too important to be left to IHRM scholars alone, as human resources in organizations became too important to be left to the HR departments alone. Pudelko et al. (2015) further expresses how the scope of IHRM is broad, as it encompasses non-international and domestic HRM, comparative HRM, and cross-cultural management. To clarify, comparative HRM concerned with understanding the differences of HRM practices across countries, and to what extent these differ from one another (Brewster & Mayrhofer, 2012).

Although MNEs are considered as one single enterprise, the HRM practices may vary from country to country, or region to region, as a result of cultural differences (Pudelko et al., 2015). The process of implementing universal HRM practices can therefore be a challenge for an organization's IHRM. As a result of globalization, the number of multinational organizations will increase, meaning that HR practices will need to be congruent with these new, complex organizational structures (Stone & Deadrick, 2015). Stone & Deadrick (2015) further explain that most theoretical frameworks in HR were developed in Western nations, with the assumption that cultural values for an individual in an organization are homogeneous, thus, making it difficult for organizations to form universal HR practices. An example of this, cross-cultural research suggests that individuals react differently when given negative feedback, and how individuals' cultural values help them form their perception of rewards (Gelfand et al., 2007; Stone & Deadrick, 2015). Other challenges for MNEs, as a result of globalization, include countries having different legal systems and policies, as well as the organization having less control (Stone & Deadrick, 2015).

#### *8.1.2.2 Human Resource Management and the use of Technology*

Over the past 30 years, the field of HR has been influenced and developed by the increased use of technology. Changes in HRM and technologies have as a result increased the geographical boundaries of HR practices, as well as shortening the distance between organizations (Bondarouk & Brewster, 2016). Aspects of the use of technology include collecting and storing information, communication, as well as using data for decision-making (Gueutal & Stone, 2005). Kiesler et al. (1984) emphasize how the World Wide Web (WWW) transformed the overall nature of HR processes in organizations. The internet and computer technology has also made it easier for organizations to communicate with their departments and employees, as well as enhancing the recruitment and onboarding process (e.g., e-learning, e-recruiting, e-selection, e-training). Further, Dineen & Allen (2013) express how technology has made it easier for multinational organizations to advertise job positions, making it possible for potential employees, both international and domestic, apply for jobs online. The introduction of these technologies has generated new vocabulary for the field of HRM, namely electronic HRM (e-HRM) (Bondarouk, 2014). A study by Bondarouk et al. (2016) explored the adoption of e-HRM by multinational organizations found that availability of the organization's resources influenced the adoption of e-HRM, as well as the importance of the HR function in the organization.

Stone & Deadrick (2015) indicate that the use of technology to facilitate HR processes generally enhance the overall organizational efficiency, as well as decreases organizational costs. However, there are a number of limitations associated with the use of technology in order to facilitate HR processes in an organization (Stone et al., 2015). Although technology has the power to bring cross border organizations together, it may also create distance between management and employees, as technology is impersonal, and static (Stone & Deadrick, 2015). As mentioned in the thesis, onboarding can be viewed as one of the most important processes for new employees (Klein et al., 2015). Informant C stressed the importance of having a mentor system when integrating new employees into the organization. Taking this into consideration, using technology as a way to train new employees may limit their opportunities as it does not give them the chance to gain important feedback (Stone & Deadrick, 2015). Although technology may come with some challenges, Stone & Dulebohn (2013) conclude that technology often increases the overall organizational efficiency and communication, as it provides less of an administrative burden in HR. As new technology emerges, it allows the field of human resources to contribute to the strategic direction of the organization (Stone & Deadrick, 2015).

### 8.1.3 Conclusion

As a result of globalization, many challenges have emerged, such as internationalization, cross-cultural differences, the loss of organizational control, and having to be aware of different legal systems and policies. However, I believe that globalization has offered more opportunities than it has challenges, in regard to both organizations as a whole, and the field of human resources. For example, globalization has allowed organizations to become more culturally diverse, which may further enhance their overall creativity and innovation (Stone & Deadrick, 2015). Stone & Deadrick (2015) further suggest that diversity in an organization is an important driver for innovation and creativity, and that these aspects should be applied into the field of human resources. Regarding the use of technology, I also conclude that it provides more opportunities than it does challenges in the field of HR. Although there are challenges surrounding the use of these technologies, there is definitely room for improvement regarding how to use them in an effective and efficient way. For instance, an organization does not only have to rely on technology when training new employees. They can use a combination of a both technological, as well as using more social onboarding procedures, such as the mentor system. As technology gets better and better, I believe that it can prove to benefit both the implementation and



enforcement HR practices in an organization, but also continue to develop the field of HR, as it already has done.

#### 8.1.4 References

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## 8.2 Skaar, Morten Midtsæther (*International*)

### 8.2.1 Introduksjon

Vår oppgave er basert rundt to hovedaspekter av en organisasjon, Human Resource Management (HRM) og bærekraft. Hvor hovedfokuset ligger på de tidlige stadiene av ansettelse, fra starten på rekrutteringsfasen til introduksjonsprogrammet (onboarding). Problemstillingen vår er «*Hva er rollen til Human Resource Management i selverklærte grønne organisasjoner?*». Vi prøver å få besvart denne best mulig gjennom våre fem forskningsspørsmål, disse er; (i) Hvilke aspekter av bærekraft er viktige for organisasjoner? (ii) Er Human Resource Management sett på som viktig for en organisasjons bærekrafts arbeid? (iii) Hvilken rolle spiller organisasjonskultur for en organisasjons bærekraftsstrategi? (iv) Legges det vekt på bærekraft i rekrutteringsprosessen? (v) Hvordan kommuniseres organisasjonens bærekraftsverdier i forbindelse med nyansettelser? Vi knytter så disse forskningsspørsmålene på teorien, hvor vi først diskuterer temaet bærekraft, fra Bruntlandsrapporten til FNs 17 Bærekraftsmål. Så starter vi med å bygge opp temaet HRM, og hvordan det har utviklet seg gjennom årene fra starten på 1900 tallet til i dag, og hvorfor HRM kan være viktig for en organisasjon. Videre diskuterer vi temaet organisasjonskultur og hvilken sammenheng dette har med HRM. For å så avslutte med teori rundt rekruttering og introduksjonsprogram.

Når det kommer til metodevalgene våre, så har vi en utforskende forskningsmodell, og designet vårt er kvalitativt. Vi valgte å fokusere på kvalitative data ettersom vi ønsket å få et helhetsbilde rundt problemstillingen vår. Vi samlet disse kvalitative dataene gjennom å ha semi-strukturerte digitale intervjuer, hvor vi hadde en intervjuguide til å guide oss gjennom dem. Vi intervjuet tre ansatte i tre norske organisasjoner, som holder til i bransjer som har vært satt i et dårlig lys ettersom disse bransjene har et negativt globalt fotavtrykk.

Til slutt prøvde vi å belyse hvilke aspekter av bærekraft organisasjoner er interesserte i og hvorfor. Vi så at informantene våre sitt fokus når det kommer til bærekraft lå på å redusere organisasjonens miljøpress og de hadde alle fokus på likestilling. Vi så indikasjoner på at bakgrunnen for dette kan være å få en konkurransefordel over konkurrentene deres. Vi så også at HRM kan ha en innvirkning på bærekraftsarbeidet til organisasjonene til våre informanter. Fra hvordan organisasjonene er bygget opp, til kommunikasjonen, til kulturen, og til hvilke personer de ansetter. Funnene våre indikerte også at organisasjonskulturen kan ha en innvirkning på bærekraftsarbeidet til organisasjoner, så alt i fra samhold og sosialt nettverk, til klarhet og

åpenhet kan ha en innvirkning. Selv om bærekraft ikke er direkte vektlagt under rekrutteringsprosessen, så fant vi indikasjoner på at det spiller en viktig rolle underveis, ettersom våre informanter vektla hvilke mennesker de er, og hvordan de kan passe inn i organisasjonens kultur. Samtidig, at de fokuserte på likestilling og å gi alle like muligheter uansett bakgrunn, rase eller kjønn. Vi så også tegn til at de viktigste delene av introduksjonsprogrammet er å skape tilhørighet, et sosialt nettverk, og gi et innblikk i organisasjonskulturen. Vi konkluderer derfor med at HRM kan ha stor innvirkning på bærekraftsarbeidet i en organisasjon.

## 8.2.2 Internasjonale trender og krefter

Alle våre informanter arbeidet for organisasjoner som holder til på det internasjonale markedet, men ettersom disse er holdt anonyme gjennom vår forskning, så skal jeg ikke ha fokus på dette. Informantene kommer til å gå under informant A, B og C.

### 8.2.2.1 Bærekraft

Gjennom studiet og oppgaven her, så er det spesielt et tema som stikker seg ut til temaet internasjonale trender og krefter, nemlig bærekraft. Dette globale problemet kom først skikkelig frem i lyset gjennom «Our Common Future» som senere har vært mer kjent under navnet «The Brundtland Report» (World Commissions on Environment and Development, 1987). Bærekraftig utvikling har hatt et globalt fokus siden den gang, og er enda viktigere i dagens samfunn og næringsliv. I 2015 kom FNs generalforsamling med 17 bærekraftsmål, som inneholdt 169 delmål (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Bærekraftsmålene ble introdusert med den hensikt å transformere vår verden ved å ta tak i miljøutfordringene menneskeheten står overfor. Agendaen er satt til 2030 og er ment å brukes som en veiledning for organisasjoner for å oppnå økonomisk velstand, samtidig som de tar hensyn til menneskelig velvære og beskytter miljøet (United Nations General Assembly, 2015).

Ettersom bærekraft er et såpass omfattende konsept, så fokuserte vi gjennom vår forskning, på å prøve å finne ut hvordan konseptet har påvirket våre informanter og deres organisasjoner.

Gjennom analysen av dataene fra vår forskning så fikk vi indikasjoner på blant annet hvilke av FNs bærekraftsmål organisasjoner har blitt påvirket av, og de som ble dratt fram var spesifikt mål 8, 13, og 14. Mål 8 er å fremme vedvarende, inkluderende og bærekraftig økonomisk vekst, full og produktiv sysselsetting og anstendig arbeid for alle (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Vår forskning indikerte at alle informantenes organisasjoner fokuserte på å gi alle like

muligheter til å vokse og utvikle seg i deres organisasjoner. Spesielt organisasjonen tilhørende informant B, som har stor tro på at deres fokus på å fremme innenfra deres egen organisasjon er den beste måten for deres organisasjon å vokse. Mål 13 er å iverksette hastetiltak for å bekjempe klimaendringer og de globale innvirkningene dette har. Mål 14 som er å bevare og bærekraftig bruke hav og marine ressurser for bærekraftig utvikling (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Våre informanternes organisasjoner ser ut til å jobbe for å redusere deres klimapåvirkning og deres påvirkning på naturen og naturressursene rundt dem. Fra å utvikle nye forretningsstrategier til å finne mer effektive måter å redusere avfall og klimagasser fra deres daglige virksomhet, jobber de alle mot disse bærekrafts målene.

Men som Porter & Kramer (2019) viser til, så kan den primære grunnen for at organisasjoner velger å forfølge en slik bærekraftig forretningsmodell være å oppnå et konkurransefortrinn. Dette viser også vår forskning til, og informanten C sa at «de beste prosjektene er ikke de som kun gir oss den ønskede effekten, men de som også kan spare oss penger». Dette viser til at selv om det globale presset om å tenke på bærekraft først er der, så er det først og fremst de økonomiske aspektene som kan drive organisasjoner mot bærekraftige løsninger. Det er flere mulige løsninger for å få seg et konkurransefortrinn når man ser på bærekraft. Informant A jobber for en organisasjon i klesindustrien. Denne organisasjonen valgte å se på forskjellige markedssegmenter i sitt eget marked hvor det var lite konkurranse fra deres konkurrenter. De valgte å utvikle forskjellige forretningsmodeller, hvor de da blant annet tilbyr en utleie service. De utviklet en systue, hvor kundene deres kan sende inn brukte og slitte varer for å få de fikset når det skulle være nødvendig. De har også utviklet en bruktbuikk, hvor de tar imot brukte varer, vasker og ordner dem slik at de skal være så gode som nye, for å så selge dem til en redusert pris. Mens informant C jobber for en organisasjon i shipping sektoren. De har valgt å prøve å fokusere på hvordan de kan minske utslippet på skipene deres, da ved å fokusere spesielt på å finne alternative drivstoff som kan løse dette problemet. Men ettersom at denne teknologien ikke er kommet langt nok, så er det kun noe de arbeider med og har enda ikke fått brukt det i praksis. For å konkludere så ser man antydning til hvordan organisasjoner kan ha blitt påvirket av det internasjonale presset til å ha et fokus på bærekraft og FNs 17 bærekraftsmål. Vi ser også hvordan dette presset har drevet fram innovativ tenking, i det minste for våre informanternes organisasjoner.

### 8.2.3 *Human Resource Management*

Human Resource Management, som er det vår forskning hovedsakelig fokuserer på, er et annet aspekt som blir påvirket av internasjonale trender og krefter (Rotich, 2015). Dette kan man blant annet se på hvordan Human Resource Management har utviklet seg i fart med globaliseringen. For å sette ting i perspektiv, så skriver Rotich (2015) om hvordan HRM har utviklet seg gjennom fire hovedstadier; (i) trinn én (1900 - 1940-tallet) den administrative fase, (ii) trinn to (1940-tallet - midten av 1970-tallet) velferds- og administrasjonsstadiet, (iii) trinn tre (midten av 1970-tallet - sent 1990-tallet) HRM og strategisk HRM (SHRM), (iv) trinn fire (fra og med 2000-tallet) SHRM inn i fremtiden. Human Resource Management begynner også å få en viktigere posisjon i organisasjoner. Vi kan se dette gjennom dataene vi samlet til forskningen vår. Det som skiller seg spesielt ut er at når temaet rundt HRM ble diskutert med to av våre informanter (informant A og B) som arbeider i HR avdelingene til sine respektive organisasjoner. Det kom frem at de hadde sett et skift i hvordan HR avdelingene deres ble brukt når det ble endring i ledelsen. De tidligere lederne deres hadde et eldre syn på HR avdelingen, hvor fokuset lå i hovedsak i de administrative arbeidsoppgavene. Mens når det ble endring og de fikk yngre ledere inn, så fikk HR avdelingen en større stemme, ved å blant annet bli tatt enda mer inn i ledergruppen. Dette skiftet kan skyldes de internasjonale trendene om å bytte fokus fra hard HRM til myk HRM (Bratton et al., 2021). Den primære forskjellen mellom disse to formene er at hard HRM ser på sine ansatte som en kostnad, mens de i myk HRM ser sine ansatte som en ressurs (Bratton et al., 2021). Bratton et al. (2021) diskuterer videre tre viktige vektlegginger som kan identifiseres når man definerer HRM. For det første har vi den strategiske rollen, som refererer til kombinasjonen av strategisk ledelse og HR-ledelse. Her er hovedfokus å sikre effektiv medarbeiderledelse, og at jobbene utformes på en slik måte at de bidrar til organisasjonens strategiske mål. For det andre, Bratton et al. (2021) diskuterer hvordan den menneskelige faktoren er den eneste faktoren som har iboende kapasitet til å generere verdi for organisasjonen. For det tredje flytter vi fokus til hvordan HR-systemer er vellykket integrert for å samsvare med organisasjonens overordnede strategi.

Cabrera & Bonache (1999) forklarer hvordan organisasjonskultur er en refleksjon og et resultat av en organisasjons SHRM-praksis. Vår forskning viser til at organisasjoners kultur har blitt påvirket av det globale fokuset på bærekraft. Hvor informant C til og med snakket om at «med den rette organisasjonskulturen, så skal bærekraft være like viktig som kvalitet og sikkerhet». Vår forskning viser videre til hvor viktig det er for organisasjoner å forsikre seg om at

organisasjonskulturen er slik de ønsker den skal være. Våre informanternes organisasjoner gjør dette gjennom spørreundersøkelser, slik at de kan sammenligne seg med hvordan kulturen deres var tidligere. Vi ser også her at vi har en kobling til temaet internasjonalt, ettersom at informant B sin organisasjon, har en spørreundersøkelse via en global organisasjon. Denne spørreundersøkelsen gjør at de kan sammenligne seg med andre internasjonale organisasjoner i samme sektor. Dette sammenligningspotensialet kan føre til at organisasjoner følger mer med på de internasjonale trendene for å prøve å være ledende i deres sektor.

#### 8.2.4 Konklusjon

Større deler av vår forskning går på rekruttering og introduksjonsprogrammer for nyansatte, men de er litt mer vriende å koble opp mot internasjonale trender og krefter. Det er mulig å se på hvordan globalisering har åpnet opp for å rekruttere internasjonalt og at det derfor har en sammenheng, men personlig synes jeg det ble litt tynt. Med introduksjonsprogrammet for nyansatte, så kan man også koble det opp mot dette med e-learning som informant C's organisasjon bruker, og diskutere hvorvidt dette er en internasjonal trend. Eller hvordan mentor systemet, som er en del av introduksjonsprogrammet, kan ha blitt påvirket av internasjonale krefter. Men ettersom vår forskning ikke fokuserer direkte på dette, og det ikke var så mye forskning ute rundt hvordan dette har blitt påvirket. Så har jeg valgt å se vekk fra disse delene av vår forskning her.

For å konkludere for hvordan vår forskning har en sammenheng med temaet internasjonale trender og krefter. Så ser man hvordan organisasjoner har blitt påvirket av blant annet FNs bærekraftsmål. Hvor de har fått et fokus på å prøve å redusere deres klimautslipp, samt å fokusere på likestilling. Selv om vår forskning viser til at grunnene bak fokuset på bærekraft, kan være at organisasjonene ønsker å finne plasser i markedet hvor konkurransen er mindre, i stedet for at det kun står på at de ønsker å være bærekraftige fordi det er det rette å gjøre. Vi ser også på at HRM har blitt påvirket av globalisering, og hvordan organisasjonskultur har blitt påvirket av det globale fokuset på bærekraft.



### 8.2.5 Kilder

Bratton, J., Gold, J., Bratton, A., & Steele, L. (2021). *Human resource management*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Cabrera, E. and Bonache, J. (1999), “*An expert HR system for aligning organizational culture and strategy*”, *Human Resource Planning*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 51-60.

Porter, M. E., & Kramer, M. R. (2019). Creating shared value. In *Managing sustainable business* (pp. 323-346). Springer, Dordrecht.

Rotich, K. J. (2015). History, evolution and development of human resource management: a contemporary perspective. *Global Journal of Human Resource Management*, 3(3), 58-73.

United Nations General Assembly (2015). *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). (1987). *Our Common Future (Brundtland Report)*. Oxford University Press.

## 9 Appendix

### Consent form

Are you interested in taking part in the research project:

*What is the role of HRM in self-proclaimed green organizations?*

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to explore the role HRM has in self-proclaimed green organizations. In this letter we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

### Purpose of the project

The purpose of this master's thesis is to investigate if HRM is considered important for an organization's sustainability work, with focus on the recruitment process and onboarding.

#### **Who is responsible for the research project?**

*The University of Agder* is the institution responsible for the project.

#### **Why are you being asked to participate?**

The reason for the selection of this thesis is based on examining how organizations based in sectors that are associated with larger carbon footprints, work towards a long-term sustainable strategy. Hence, we are interested to see how the theoretical base we are researching works in practice, or if it is used at all.

#### **Participation is voluntary**

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made

anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

### **Your personal privacy**

We are not taking any form of recording of the interview, only notes. Throughout the notes and the thesis, we are in no shape or form using any information that can be tracked back to you.

- *To help ensure the safety of privacy we will save no personal data in any form. We will also replace your name and company with a code when writing the thesis.*

### **What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?**

The project is scheduled to end 01.06.22. No personal data will be saved.

Yours sincerely, Garrett C. Retzius and Morten M. Skaar

*Project Leader*

(Stine Rye Bårdsen)

*Student*

(Garrett C. Retzius & Morten M. Skaar)

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## **Consent form**

### **By participating in this interview:**

- You have received and understood information about the project
- Agreed to participate in the interview
- Consent that information described above can be shared with the project
- Consent for your information to be processed until the project is completed

# Interview guide

## *Intervju Detaljer*

Bransje:      Dato:      Klokkeslett:  
—            —            —

## *Spørsmål til intervjueren*

- Del 1
  - Si litt om deg selv
    - § Hva du gjør, bakgrunn, osv.
  
- Del 2
  - Bærekraftsarbeid
    - § Hva legger dere i begrepet bærekraft?
    - § Hvilke erfaringer har dere med bærekraftsarbeid?
      - Har det oppstått noen utfordringer (eksempel?)?
    - § Har dere en bærekraftstrategi?
      - Hva går den ut på?
        - Mål?
      - Hvordan utformet dere deres bærekraftstrategi
        - Hvem er involvert?
  
- Del 3
  - Hvilken rolle spiller HRM i virksomheten
    - § Viktighet?
    - § Er HRM involvert i strategiarbeidet?
    - § Hva er deres syn på almen oppfatningen av HRM?
      - § Hvilken rolle har organisasjonskultur i deres organisasjon? (spørsmål lagt til under første intervju)

- Rekrutteringsprosess
  - § Fokuseres det på bærekraft i rekrutteringsprosessen?
  - § Nyutdannet mot erfaren
- Onboarding
  - § Har dere et system for å ta imot nyansatte?
    - Prosessen?
      - Feedback tools
      - Training
      - Coaching and support
      - Orientering
      - Support verktøy
    - Tidsaspekt (første uke eller lengre)?
    - Verdier
- Bærekraft