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# Designing a Sustainable Human Resource Management Model for Faculty Members of Iraqi Universities

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## Abstract

Sustainable human resource management is one of the most recent paradigms in human resource management that has received attention over the past two decades. The present study aimed to design a sustainable human resource management model for faculty members of Iraqi universities. This research was qualitative in nature and based on the interpretive paradigm, implemented using the systematic grounded theory approach. Through purposive sampling, 10 Iraqi experts were selected and interviewed in-depth. The resulting data were analyzed through three stages of open, axial, and selective coding, leading to the extraction of 192 final open codes. The open codes were categorized into 48 subcategories and 20 main categories. The study's paradigmatic model was designed with the following sections: contextual factors (global sustainability contexts, national sustainability contexts, and higher education sector-specific contexts); causal conditions (increasing public awareness and concern, and the importance of sustainability in achieving competitive advantage); intervening conditions (organizational culture and leadership, and availability of sufficient resources); core phenomenon or sustainable human resource management practices in universities (including sustainable recruitment and hiring, sustainability training and training in a sustainable manner, sustainable performance management, sustainable rewards and benefits, and provision of appropriate work arrangements); strategies (aligning university goals with sustainable development goals, developing a comprehensive university sustainable human resource strategy, implementing university sustainable human resource strategies and policies, overcoming individual resistance to change, promoting research in the field of sustainability, engaging stakeholders, integrating sustainability into university curricula, and sustainability performance reporting); and consequences (enhanced sustainable performance, improved status of faculty members, enhanced university reputation, and facilitation of sustainable community development).

**Keywords:** Sustainable human resource management, sustainable recruitment and hiring, sustainability contexts, sustainable performance.



## 1. Introduction

Although in recent decades research has made significant progress in applying sustainability principles in environmental and social domains, the importance of human resources and social dimensions, both individually and collectively within organizations, has often been overlooked (Teimouri, 2018). Studies indicate that today, sustainable practices have permeated all aspects of business. Therefore, they must be institutionalized at all organizational levels and transformed into a continuous organizational change process (Nishitha & Kavitha, 2024). In the field of human resources, sustainability has recently garnered widespread attention, given its crucial role in shaping and achieving successful organizational programs. The concept of sustainable human resource management refers to a comprehensive approach to workforce management, where economic, social, and environmental goals are simultaneously considered (Mehta & Sharma, 2021). In other words, sustainable human resource management refers to a set of practices and strategies aimed at promoting sustainable development within organizations, particularly in educational environments (Umair et al., 2024). Sustainable human resource management assists employees in achieving organizational goals with ethical and environmental perspectives while simultaneously improving their quality of work life (Kobal Grum & Babnik, 2022). Overall, sustainable human resource management can be considered a more comprehensive and inclusive approach that takes into account the long-term impacts of management practices on all stakeholders (Westerman et al., 2020).

Today's organizations, in order to survive and grow in changing environments, must embrace sustainability and establish various dimensions of it. These organizations must be capable of adapting to environmental changes and implementing sustainability strategies across all facets to not only preserve survival but also pursue the path of evolution and advancement (Moallemi et al., 2020). Clearly, multiple factors contribute to the creation of sustainability dimensions within an organization, among which human resource management plays a key role. Effective human resource management can enhance organizational productivity and efficiency through sustainable practices while creating a stable environment for individual growth and development, thus facilitating the achievement of long-term organizational goals (Tooranloo et al., 2017). In today's era, organizational attention to human resources has increased more than ever, driven by rising demands, the need for efficient service delivery, and dynamic environmental changes. Consequently, aligning human resources with organizational goals and missions has turned human resources into a fundamental pillar of competitive advantage. Thus, a new paradigm has emerged, demonstrating organizational superiority through the utilization of superior human resources, leading organizations toward success and sustainability (Phipps et al., 2013). Ehnert (2009) argues that organizations must utilize their current and potential human resources to maintain social legitimacy, providing a rationale for sustainable human resource utilization. Furthermore, organizations must not only ensure the attraction and retention of talented human resources but also secure sustainable access to identifying, selecting, recruiting, training, and developing human resources to achieve organizational objectives (Ehnert, 2009). Therefore, it is evident that human resource sustainability must be addressed at least at two levels: first, providing equal opportunities for the attraction of talented human resources, which can contribute to social sustainability by creating job opportunities and promoting social justice (Hakkak et al., 2021); second, preserving organizational sustainability through facilitating tools such as work-life balance to retain talent and enhance human resource productivity (Stella et al., 2014).

Despite researchers' efforts to explain the relationship between sustainability and human resource management, studies on sustainable human resource management within academic organizations have received limited attention. Nevertheless, the critical role of universities and educational centers in achieving sustainability and sustainable development has been emphasized. These include the necessity of shifting faculty perspectives toward sustainability and their collaboration to more effectively integrate sustainability concepts into education (Moreno-Pino et al., 2022), the importance of good teaching practices in the field of information technology to achieve sustainability in Spain's higher education system (Alonso-García et al., 2019), the need to manage and resolve conflicts between students and faculty and between students and administrative staff to achieve sustainability (Martínez-Martín & Lozano-Martín, 2021), and the role and significance of Colombia's regional university (Universidad de Ibagué) in human development and transition toward sustainable pathways through expanding the capabilities of involved individuals and generating comprehensive, interdisciplinary knowledge via interaction



among academic and non-academic actors (Velasco et al., 2021). Other research has also recognized sustainable human resource management as a foundation for future organizational growth and success, highlighting the influence of variables such as human resource practices, social factors, psychological factors, employer branding, and political factors on sustainable human resource management in Iranian public universities (Mohiuddin et al., 2022). As is evident, in universities—as in other organizations—the role and importance of human resources in achieving sustainability are undeniable. Moreover, contemporary discourse now includes the concepts of fourth-generation and even fifth-generation universities. The fourth-generation university, sometimes referred to as an "ecological university" or "university for others," maintains deep and outward-oriented connections with communities and sectors within society, including various industries, and is committed to meeting students' needs. A fourth-generation university is not merely a passive economic entity responding to market demands but actively engages with and shapes its environment to create a better society. Attention to social and regional responsibility and education for sustainable development are key concepts in fourth-generation universities, where empowering students and faculty to accelerate national development and solve societal problems is essential (Salehi et al., 2021). Accordingly, universities bear a heavier and more critical responsibility than other organizations in driving societies toward sustainability, as the empowerment of students—who become the specialized workforce for other organizations—ultimately rests with universities and, more precisely, with faculty members. Chaleta et al. (2021) also emphasize two concepts in describing faculty perceptions of universities and their role in sustainability: the space for the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge and the space for community engagement to foster human development, collaboration, and the design of a more sustainable global society. In the community engagement space, universities are considered agents of human equality and socio-economic and cultural development, aligning with the overall goals of sustainable community development (Chaleta et al., 2021).

The importance of sustainable human resource management in university environments relates to the unique challenges universities face. Universities are not only responsible for educating future generations but must also act as leading research centers. Currently, Iraqi universities face numerous challenges, including financial resource shortages, inconsistency in management policies, and insufficient attention to the educational and research needs of faculty members (Mahdi & Abass, 2022). These challenges have negatively impacted the quality of education and research and have led to decreased employee motivation and commitment. Designing a sustainable human resource management model for these universities can help improve the working conditions of faculty members and increase their motivation and commitment. In order for universities to effectively fulfill their role in sustainable community development, they require sustainable human resource management, especially concerning faculty members, because without it, universities cannot achieve their objectives. Although many studies have investigated human resource management issues in various organizations, research on sustainable human resource management in academic environments, particularly in developing countries like Iraq, remains limited. Therefore, the relationship between sustainability and human resource management requires deeper investigation, and significant research gaps exist regarding faculty members as the core producers of knowledge and drivers of sustainable development. There is still no precise understanding of the sustainability status of faculty members, the nature of this sustainability, its influencing factors, and the various dimensions of sustainable human resource management for this group. This research gap is particularly evident in Iraqi universities regarding the design of sustainable models that address the needs of faculty members. The present study focuses on this gap and aims to provide a model for sustainable human resource management in Iraqi universities. This model can serve as a guarantee for improving the quality of education and research in universities through sustainable human resource management and can help Iraqi universities play a more effective role in sustainable community development.

## 2. Methodology

In the present study, the research onion model proposed by Saunders et al. (2019) was used as the basis for selecting the research method and strategy, data collection techniques, and data analysis method (Saunders et al., 2019). In this model, each layer is influenced by the layer above it, and researchers must, at each stage, select appropriate methods and processes for their study based on the upper layer and various conditions. According to this model, the present research was based on the interpretive paradigm, inductive reasoning, and was a qualitative study grounded in grounded theory. The study also had a



cross-sectional time horizon and relied on data collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. In this research, the systematic approach of Strauss and Corbin (1990) was used, which employs a paradigmatic coding model for data analysis and involves a systematic three-stage coding process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Given the research objective—designing a sustainable human resource management model for faculty members of Iraqi universities—it was clear that members of the study population needed to have sufficient familiarity with the construct and the studied environment. Furthermore, based on the qualitative approach and grounded theory strategy, the sampling method was non-probabilistic. Accordingly, the criteria for selecting experts included having scientific and research expertise in the fields of human resource management, sustainability, social responsibilities, and strategic human resource management, as well as executive experience in human resource management with an emphasis on universities. Through searching various information sources, an initial list of potential experts for participation in the study was prepared, and each member of this list was further assessed for suitability for the study. After preparing the list through a purposive method, contact was established with the identified and confirmed experts. Participation in the study was voluntary, and 10 experts were interviewed, achieving the criterion of theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation is a characteristic closely related to sample size and refers to the point at which continued data collection yields repetitive data and no new information is obtained (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

### 3. Findings and Results

In the present study, open coding was conducted after each interview. Strauss and Corbin (1990) described open coding as: "the part of analysis concerned with naming and categorizing phenomena through close examination of the data". The purpose of open coding is the conceptualization and labeling of the data. Each interview was conducted and immediately followed by open coding; that is, the researcher conducted open coding right after completing Interview 1. Then Interview 2 was conducted and coded, and this process continued until the final interview. In every interview and coding session, previous codes were available, and during this process, sometimes similar concepts were replaced with better codes. After coding the 10 interviews, a total of 192 final open codes were extracted. Due to the large volume of corresponding tables, it is not possible to present the coding process for all interviews here.

In the next stage, axial coding was conducted through careful reflection on the open codes and repeated review of the interview transcripts, along with continuous comparative processes. As a result, different categories were created, yielding 48 subcategories and 20 main categories. These 48 subcategories and 20 main categories were organized within the paradigm model framework, categorized into the sections of contextual conditions, causal conditions, intervening conditions, core phenomenon, strategies, and consequences, as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Research Paradigm Model Categories and Characteristics**

Layer	Main Category	Subcategories	Final Codes
Contextual Conditions	Global Sustainability Contexts	Global Sustainability Movement	International policies in higher education, global policies and higher education, internationalization policies for universities, international policies and diversity
		Impact of International Organizations on Higher Education	UNESCO standards for sustainable development in universities, United Nations educational policies, international cooperation in research and development, role of the World Bank and the European Union in financing sustainable higher education
		Green Economy and Higher Education	Impact of global sustainable economic policies on universities, financing sustainable projects in higher education, investment in renewable energy for university infrastructure
		International Environmental Policies and Universities	Global environmental agreements and their impact on universities, implementation of carbon footprint reduction standards in international universities
		Social Justice and Sustainability in Higher Education	Enhancing equality in access to sustainable education, support policies for underprivileged students in international universities
	National Sustainability Contexts	National Policies and Sustainable Governance	Governance policies and governmental oversight, government policies and universities, impact of government policies on universities, economic policies for universities, cultural and social sustainability-related policies
		National Laws and Regulations	Transparency policies in recruitment, government policies in sustainable development, environmental regulations related to universities, national policies for energy consumption reduction in higher education institutions



	Higher Education Sector-Specific Contexts	Impact of Social and Political Factors	Educational policies in response to social and political changes, impact of social changes on university management, policies to enhance social engagement of universities in sustainable development
		Sustainable Technologies and Innovation in Universities	Development of green technologies in educational infrastructures, role of digitalization in resource optimization
		Sustainable Teaching and Learning	Sustainable education and development, education policies for sustainable development, lifelong learning, sustainable development policies, incorporation of environmental and sustainability topics into curricula
		Universities' Role in Innovation and Sustainable Development	Policies encouraging sustainable research, support for interdisciplinary projects for sustainable development, establishment of research centers for sustainable innovations, university-industry collaboration for green research
		Impact of Digitalization on Sustainable Resource Management	Role of technology in reducing university resource consumption, online learning systems and sustainability, development of smart infrastructures for sustainable resource management, role of artificial intelligence in optimizing university processes
		Financial and Economic Sustainability Policies in Universities	Sustainable budgeting for university development, new investment models in sustainable higher education, economic policies aimed at reducing environmental costs
		Impact of University Programs on Sustainable Behaviors	Encouraging sustainable behaviors through extracurricular activities, university programs focusing on teaching sustainable skills
		Role of Inter-University Collaboration Networks	International collaborations to strengthen university sustainability, knowledge and experience sharing at the global level, creation of university consortia for sustainability research
		Development of Universities' Social Responsibility	Expansion of university social projects to enhance community impact, sustainable engagement policies with local communities
		Increased Awareness of Social Issues	Social awareness and culture-building, participation in sustainability, awareness-raising policies, social responsibility culture
Causal Conditions	Increased Public Awareness and Concerns	Increased Awareness of Environmental Issues	Environmental policies in universities, green human resource management policies, green economy policies, carbon footprint reduction policies in universities
		Increased Awareness of Universities' Impact on Sustainable Development	Universities' role in solving sustainability challenges, higher education's impact on social and environmental development
	Stakeholder Expectations and Pressures	Community Engagement Policies	Social and environmental responsibility policies, welfare and motivational policies, strategies for reducing resistance, university collaboration with industry and government
		Student and Staff Expectations of Sustainability	Social welfare development policies in universities, policies for improving sustainable working environments
		Public Perception of Universities' Role in Sustainable Development	Localization of education and research, universities' role in social cohesion, sustainable technology development policies
		Universities' Impact on Raising Public Awareness	Scientific and social communication policies, educational policies for enhancing environmental knowledge
	Importance of Sustainability in Achieving Competitive Advantage	Awareness of Sustainability's Role in Gaining Competitive Advantage	Sustainable reward policies, compensation policies, sustainability incentives, university brand development policies based on sustainability
		Organizational Culture and Leadership	Culture-building in university environments, value creation and organizational development, policies strengthening innovation and sustainability culture, development of participatory models in universities
	Intervening Conditions	Impact of Organizational Culture on Sustainable Development	Policies for fostering organizational commitment to sustainability, role of organizational culture in retaining faculty members
		Leadership	University governance policies, innovation and sustainable development, transformational leadership models in universities
	Availability of Sufficient Resources	Role of Leaders in Sustainable Management	Policies for training sustainable leaders, educational programs for university leaders on sustainability
		Academic Resources	Sustainable research and innovation policies, interdisciplinary research, impact of applied research on sustainable development
		Financial and Infrastructure Resources	Sustainable financing, development of university infrastructure, policies for attracting investments in sustainable projects, use of alternative financial resources for supporting sustainability
		Role of Technology in Resource Management	Digitalization policies for educational and research processes, impact of new technologies on reducing operational costs in universities



Core Phenomenon	Sustainable Human Resource Management Practices in Universities	Human Capital Development Policies	Faculty empowerment programs, policies for developing innovative skills, productivity enhancement models in universities
		Sustainable Recruitment and Hiring	Recruitment and hiring policies, transparency in recruitment, development of competency-based models for hiring faculty, diversity and inclusion policies in recruitment processes, digital methods in recruitment, use of AI systems for candidate evaluation
	Sustainable Training and Development	Human Capital Development Strategies	Talent retention policies, development of sustainable career paths, implementation of sustainable human resource planning models, alignment of recruitment policies with university sustainability goals
		Faculty Skill Development	Education for sustainable development, development of specialized sustainability courses, lifelong learning, organizational learning policies for faculty members, use of new technologies in sustainable education, interdisciplinary skill development for enhancing sustainability
		Increasing Managerial Competency	Training programs for sustainable leadership skills, enhancement of sustainable human resource management knowledge, designing training courses to improve change management
	Performance Management and Sustainable Evaluation	Innovative Performance Evaluation Models	Performance management policies, sustainable evaluation and monitoring policies, performance evaluation and organizational improvement, sustainable performance evaluation policies, data-driven systems for monitoring faculty performance, creation of sustainability measurement indicators in faculty performance
		Motivational and Reward Systems	Reward and incentive policies, sustainable reward policies, sustainability incentives, compensation policies, development of incentive systems based on sustainability indicators, economic models for sustainable rewards, designing financial and non-financial incentives to promote sustainable behaviors
		Improving Work and Welfare Conditions	Welfare and work-life balance policies, welfare and motivational policies, welfare and quality of life policies, hybrid work models (on-site and virtual) for improving productivity, flexible working hours policies for faculty members, enhancing supportive infrastructure to improve job welfare
	Work-Life Balance and Job Welfare	Human Resource Digitalization	Use of technology in human resource management
		Human Resource Data Analysis and Optimization	Use of data analysis to improve employee productivity, predicting human resource needs based on analytical data, data-driven decision-making policies
Strategies	Aligning University Goals with Sustainable Development Goals	Aligning University and Sustainability Goals	Aligning human resource management policies and practices with sustainable development goals, developing strategic policies for organizational sustainability, fostering a sustainability culture in universities
	Developing a Comprehensive Human Resource Sustainability Strategy	Developing Innovative Sustainability Strategies	Sustainability policy impact assessment models, designing educational programs to align university goals with sustainable development
		Defining Sustainable Goals for Human Resource Management	Developing key sustainability performance indicators, creating mechanisms for monitoring and assessing sustainability performance in universities
		Implementing Sustainable Human Resource Management Policies	Developing transparent standards for human resource management, implementing digital systems for monitoring sustainability in human resources
	Overcoming Resistance to Changes	Executing Sustainability Policies and Strategies	Creating execution frameworks for sustainable human resource management, establishing transparent reporting systems for sustainability
		Change Management Policies	New methods of organizational change for sustainability, analyzing the impact of sustainable changes on employee productivity
		Organizational Change Challenges	Empowering staff to accept sustainable changes, creating motivation for participation in sustainability processes
	Promoting Sustainability Research	Reducing Resistance to Sustainability Changes	Training programs to raise staff awareness, implementing conflict management strategies in organizational changes
		Specialized Research in Sustainability	Policies supporting sustainability research, creating financial opportunities for sustainable projects
		Promoting Interdisciplinary Research	Developing interdisciplinary collaborations for sustainability research, establishing international research networks for sustainability
Engaging Stakeholders	Engaging Stakeholders	Supporting Sustainable Research and Innovation	Developing supportive policies for researchers in sustainability, funding sustainable innovations
		Creating Partnerships with Stakeholders	Industry and government engagement programs, strengthening university-community communication
		Public Awareness	Designing awareness campaigns on sustainability, promoting social responsibility culture in universities
		Creating Platforms for Dialogue and Interaction	Creating digital platforms for knowledge exchange in sustainability, expanding international collaborations for sustainable development



Consequences	Integrating Sustainability into University Curricula	Integrating Sustainability Concepts into Academic Education	Designing specialized courses on sustainable development, integrating sustainability principles into diverse educational programs
		Reporting Sustainability Performance	Creating transparent reporting systems on sustainability program progress, developing sustainability performance measurement indicators in universities
	Advanced Sustainable Performance	Improved Environmental Performance of Universities	University environmental policies, reducing carbon footprint, using renewable energy in university infrastructures
		Resource Consumption Reduction	Optimizing energy and water consumption, sustainable waste management, developing green buildings in universities
		Facilitating University Sustainability Goals	University economic policies, allocating budgets for sustainability programs, creating research centers for sustainable development innovations
		Improving Financial Performance	Financial and academic value creation, increasing revenue through sustainable technologies, reducing operational costs through resource optimization
	Improving Faculty Status	Improved Faculty Performance	Incentive policies for sustainable research activities, supporting faculty in executing sustainability projects
		Improved Personal Status	Enhancing faculty work-life quality, improving mental health and work-life balance
	Enhancing University Reputation	Developing Sustainable Personality in Individuals	Continuous education for developing sustainable values, enhancing management skills related to sustainability
		Enhancing International University Reputation	International collaborations in sustainable research, participation in conferences related to sustainable development
		Enhancing National University Reputation	Integrating sustainability principles into various university programs, developing sustainability-based educational programs
	Community Sustainable Development	Developing University Culture	Organizational culture-building, increasing university-community interaction in sustainability
		Strengthening University Ranking	Improving global university ranking indicators through sustainable actions, attracting international students and researchers
		Developing Efficient Human Resources	Training graduates with sustainability knowledge, creating sustainable skills in university human resources
		Developing Jobs and Businesses	Developing supportive policies for sustainable startups, strengthening university-industry collaboration to promote sustainable businesses
		Culture-building	Creating awareness campaigns on sustainability, promoting sustainable behaviors in the university environment
		Increasing Social Resilience	Participating in sustainability, strengthening social support networks in universities, promoting social responsibility values
	Increasing Scientific and Research Impact of Universities	Increasing Sustainable Scientific Production	Growth in the number of publications and research in sustainability, encouraging interdisciplinary research in sustainable development
		Influencing Macro Policy-making	Participating in the formulation of national and international sustainability policies, advisory role in macro decision-making related to sustainable development
		Enhancing Innovation in Research	Establishing innovation centers for sustainable development, supporting innovative research projects in sustainability

After completing open coding and the formation of the research's subcategories and main categories, the quality of the qualitative findings can be ensured for the following reasons.

First, the researcher's prolonged engagement with the research topic, meaning that the researcher and the research team were in extensive and sustained contact with the subject matter and its context.

Second, the recoding of part of the interview data by a second researcher: for this purpose, approximately 30% of the interviews (three interviews) were given to a second researcher familiar with qualitative methodology and knowledgeable about the research topic. The inter-coder agreement percentage was then calculated. This index reflects the degree of intra-subject agreement between two independent coders and is presented in Table 2.

$$\text{Reliability Percentage} = 100 \times (2 \times \text{Number of Agreements}) / (\text{Total Number of Codes})$$

**Table 2. Calculation of Inter-Coder Reliability**

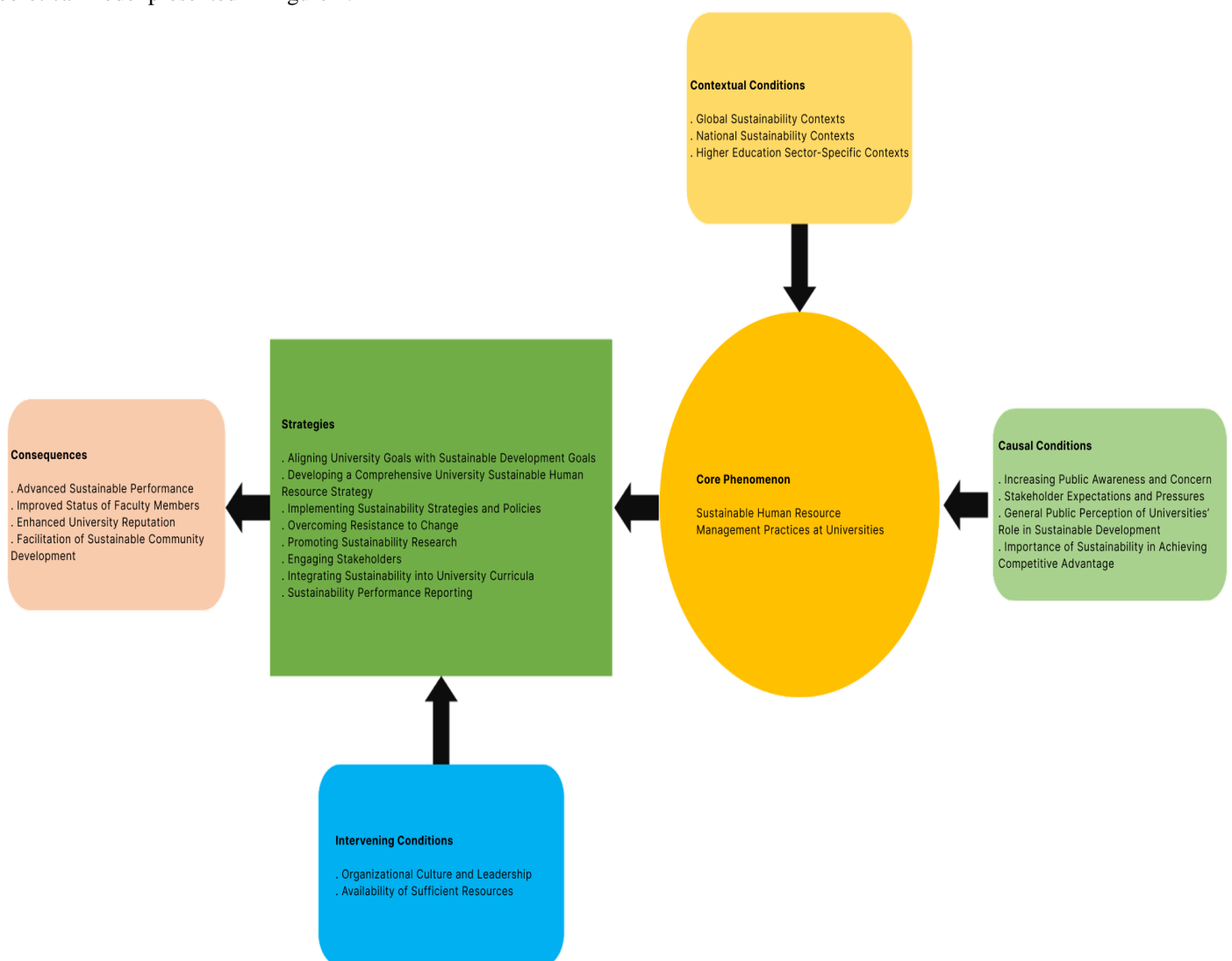
Interview Number	Total Codes	Agreements	Disagreements	Inter-Coder Reliability (%)
1	43	19	5	88.37
5	35	16	3	91.42
8	36	16	4	90.00
Total	114	51	12	89.47



Third, validation of the findings by part of the study participants: the final findings, including final codes, subcategories, and main categories, were validated by four of the interviewed experts.

During the axial coding process, the researcher used analytical tools such as questioning, constant comparison, and theoretical comparison between categories, subcategories, and their properties (which emerged during open coding) to develop the relationships among categories and subcategories and to shape them according to the paradigmatic model. Simultaneously with open and axial coding, a model was developed that reflected the relationships among categories and subcategories. Once these relationships were developed, selective coding procedures were used to facilitate the integration of categories and subcategories identified during open and axial coding into an emerging theory. In fact, selective coding applies the results of previous coding steps, selects the core category, systematically relates it to other categories, validates these relationships, and refines categories that need further development.

It should be noted that the stages of selective coding are not strictly separated from each other. In simpler terms, selective coding is conducted through an interactive process alongside open and axial coding, ultimately leading to the creation of the theoretical model presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Paradigmatic Model of Sustainable Human Resource Management for Faculty Members of Iraqi Universities**

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion





The present study was conducted qualitatively with the aim of presenting a sustainable human resource management model for faculty members of Iraqi universities. The systematic grounded theory approach was chosen to achieve this objective, and the data collected from in-depth interviews were analyzed through three stages of open, axial, and selective coding. Ultimately, a paradigmatic model for sustainable human resource management for faculty members in Iraqi universities was developed.

The proposed paradigmatic model consists of six parts, with sustainable human resource management practices at universities positioned at the core as the central phenomenon. The central phenomenon is the main idea, event, or occurrence that a set of actions and reactions manage or relate to; therefore, the reason for selecting sustainable human resource management practices as the central phenomenon of the model is that these practices interact with and are shaped by other categories and concepts within the model. Sustainable human resource management practices at universities included the subcategories of sustainable recruitment and hiring, sustainability training and sustainable learning, sustainable performance management, sustainable rewards and benefits, and the provision of appropriate work arrangements.

Sustainable recruitment and hiring refer to employment practices at universities aligned with the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development, promoting diversity, equality, and offering equal opportunities to individuals from different backgrounds. Sustainability training and sustainable learning imply that faculty members must be educated in various aspects of sustainability upon their entry into the university, and also continuously receive diverse skills training over time. Sustainable performance management involves integrating sustainability criteria into faculty performance evaluations and striving to enhance their performance in line with sustainable development goals. Professional advancement through clear career paths and the provision of diverse and challenging career opportunities not only improves faculty performance but also aids in retention and aligns faculty members with sustainable development goals. Sustainable rewards and benefits involve creating a reward and promotion system based on sustainable performance, encouraging initiatives and achievements in sustainability, and offering incentives for sustainable behaviors, such as the use of public transportation. Providing appropriate work arrangements refers to creating flexible and suitable working environments for all faculty members to foster creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship with an emphasis on sustainable development.

Causal conditions are events that create situations, discussions, and issues related to the phenomenon and explain why and how individuals and groups engage with the phenomenon. In simpler terms, causal conditions refer to events that affect the central phenomenon and lead to its emergence. The movement of universities toward sustainability and the application of sustainable human resource management practices, which constitute the core of the present study model, are influenced by two major forces. Increasing public awareness and concern—encompassing greater public awareness of social and environmental issues—has placed universities under rising pressure. Simultaneously, various stakeholder groups expect universities to play a more prominent role in sustainably developing their communities.

According to Piwovar-Sulej (2021), different types of external pressures on organizations, environmental and social concerns, are among the main reasons organizations focus on green human resource management and socially responsible human resource management, which aligns with the categories identified in the present study (Piwovar-Sulej, 2021). Additionally, universities are recognized as scientific institutions tasked with leading society's movement toward sustainable development in a localized and contextually appropriate manner. In Iraq, this role of universities is also acknowledged.

Universities themselves recognize that achieving competitive advantage today requires attention to sustainability in managing various sectors, including human resources. Human resources are considered a fundamental pillar of competitive advantage, and research has shown that organizational superiority is achieved through superior human resources (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2007; Phipps et al., 2013). Furthermore, sustainable competitive advantage is identified as one of the key components of sustainable human resource management alongside self-responsibility and work-life balance (Ehnert & Harry, 2012). Therefore, it is evident that universities seek to establish sustainable human resource management systems to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

As mentioned, causal conditions are the direct drivers moving universities toward sustainable human resource management. However, another group of factors exists that exerts a lesser influence compared to causal conditions. These are called contextual conditions, referring to broader environmental factors that universities have limited or no control over. Global sustainability movements have gradually expanded from environmental issues to various aspects of human development and life, influencing all sectors, including human resource management systems.



Alongside the global sustainability movement, national sustainability contexts—comprising national policies and laws—must also be considered. Although national policies and laws in Iraq are not explicitly framed as sustainability or sustainable development initiatives, they cover various sustainability dimensions. Additionally, sector-specific conditions in higher education are crucial. The concept of sustainable development and its integration into different sectors, including higher education, emerged alongside societal advancements. The Talloires Declaration was one of the first formal initiatives for sustainability in universities, signed by university presidents in 1990 in Talloires, France, committing to environmental sustainability in higher education. Although the Talloires Declaration primarily focuses on environmental commitments and not specifically on human resource management (HRM), its principles are closely related to HRM practices within universities and beyond.

Currently, sustainability-focused university rankings are becoming increasingly prevalent, indicating a growing attention to sustainability in higher education. As a result, university human resource management systems must also integrate sustainability concepts.

Strategies refer to purposeful and directed actions taken to address an issue. In this study, strategies were conceptualized for establishing sustainable human resource management systems for faculty members in Iraqi universities under the identified causal and contextual conditions. The strategies identified include aligning university goals with sustainable development goals, developing a comprehensive sustainability strategy for university human resources, implementing sustainability strategies and policies, overcoming resistance to change, integrating sustainability into university curricula, promoting sustainability-related research, engaging stakeholders, and sustainability performance reporting.

Aligning university goals with sustainable development goals involves revising the university's mission, vision, values, strategies, policies, and objectives to align them with sustainable development. Consequently, human resource management strategies must be redefined accordingly. Policy and action implementation must follow, with clear role definitions and goal setting for individuals. Overcoming resistance to change is crucial from the redefinition stage through implementation. Since moving toward sustainability and integrating it into human resource management directly impacts employees, resistance may arise. University managers must recognize the challenges and time-consuming nature of change initiatives, employing educational methods to reduce resistance and ensure successful implementation.

Integrating sustainability into curricula, including offering specialized courses, is another strategy that supports universities' societal development role and strengthens faculty engagement in sustainability efforts. Promoting sustainability research—through specialized studies, interdisciplinary projects, and application of research findings—is another key strategy where faculty play an essential role. Furthermore, universities must enhance stakeholder engagement in sustainability initiatives. Finally, sustainability performance reporting should transparently share universities' sustainability actions with the public and national and international organizations.

These strategies do not automatically achieve sustainable human resource management systems. Their success is influenced by intervening conditions—specific factors that can facilitate or hinder the strategies' effectiveness. Intervening conditions identified in this study include organizational culture and leadership, and the availability of sufficient resources. A supportive and participatory organizational culture can accelerate the transition to sustainable HRM systems. Strong, sustainability-committed leadership can create a collaborative environment conducive to success.

The irreplaceable role of leadership has also been highlighted in previous studies. For example, Eynbaghi Esfahani et al. (2018) emphasized the role of postmodern leadership styles that reflect systemic and inclusive perspectives, particularly amplifying women's voices, in supporting human resource sustainability. Similarly, Tolouiyan (2021) emphasized the importance of sustainable leadership in HRM sustainability in a systematic review covering studies from 2001 to 2018 (Tolouiyan, 2021). Macke and Genari (2019) also identified leadership for sustainability alongside environmental, economic, and social indicators as key indices for sustainable human resource management (Macke & Genari, 2019).

Ultimately, the establishment of sustainable HRM systems in universities requires various resources, categorized into scientific resources and financial and infrastructural resources.

The final component of the paradigmatic model developed in this study is consequences. Consequences are the outcomes resulting from actions and reactions to the central phenomenon. In simpler terms, implementing the strategies results in specific outcomes. The establishment of a sustainable human resource management system for faculty members in Iraqi universities



leads to outcomes such as enhanced sustainable performance, improved faculty conditions, improved university reputation, and facilitation of sustainable community development.

Sustainable performance is reflected in improved environmental practices at universities, resource consumption reduction, achievement of overarching sustainability goals, and financial performance improvement. Improvement in faculty conditions refers to enhanced academic performance, better personal well-being, and the development of sustainable personalities—faculty members who embody a strong commitment to sustainability values.

Another consequence is the enhancement of the university's national and international reputation. Universities leading in sustainability and sustainable HRM create a positive image, attracting both domestic and international students and faculty members. Such universities embody a culture that supports sustainability at all levels.

Finally, sustainable human resource management systems contribute to national sustainable development goals by training competent human resources, supporting sustainable businesses, promoting sustainability culture, and enhancing societal resilience.

The paradigmatic model of this research was developed considering the specific local and contextual conditions of Iraq and its universities, aiming to explain various aspects of sustainable human resource management for faculty members. Overall, the model addresses both internal sustainability (university sustainability) and external sustainability (universities' role in societal sustainable development).

As highlighted in the literature, the latest paradigm proposed for sustainable HRM is the "Common Good HRM," a model emphasizing outward-inward perspectives based on shared and collective good values. Similarly, the present research model emphasizes the integration of sustainability values into HRM functions from recruitment to performance evaluation and compensation. Furthermore, the model recognizes increasing environmental demands and pressure. According to this model, educational curricula and university research must be explicitly designed to address societal challenges and advance sustainability, placing faculty members at the center of these efforts. These conditions ultimately lead to sustainability at individual (faculty), organizational (university), and societal levels.

## Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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