

FROM HUMAN RESOURCE TO HUMAN DIGNITY: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF LEADERSHIP AND SUSTAINABLE HRM IN EDUCATIONAL COUNSELING SYSTEMS

Hikmatun Balighoh Nur Fitriyati

Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: hikmatunbalighoh@students.unnes.ac.id

Abstract. The convergence of leadership and sustainable human resource management (S-HRM) has driven a paradigmatic shift from an instrumental human resource logic toward dignity-based organizing. However, the conceptual integration among leadership, S-HRM, and human dignity remains fragmented, particularly within educational counseling systems. This study aims to synthesize the intellectual development, conceptual nexus, and implications of integrating these three domains through a systematic literature review. Following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, this review analyzed 28 selected articles retrieved from Scopus, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and citation-based searching, primarily published during 2021–2025, complemented by seminal works as theoretical foundations. Using descriptive mapping, thematic synthesis, and theory-building conceptual integration, the review identifies three major shifts: leadership has evolved from a performance-control orientation toward a relational-ethical infrastructure; S-HRM has transformed from resource optimization into a human development architecture; and human dignity has moved from an ethical complement to an organizing principle. The findings reveal an increasing convergence among these domains through the themes of well-being, flourishing, meaningful work, sustainable employability, and dignity-based organizing. This synthesis produces an integrative framework, *From Human Resource to Human Dignity*. It proposes a Dignity-Based Educational Counseling Ecosystem, positioning counseling systems as a strategic locus for integrating relational leadership, developmental HRM, and dignity-based sustainability. The review contributes theoretically by advancing a shift from human resource logic toward human dignity logic as a new paradigm, while offering practical implications for reconstructing educational counseling systems as human development ecosystems oriented toward flourishing, justice, and sustainability.

Keywords: leadership; sustainable human resource management; human dignity; educational counseling systems; human flourishing; systematic literature review.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, scholarship in leadership and human resource management has undergone a significant paradigmatic transformation, shifting from mechanistic orientations toward more humanistic and sustainability-oriented perspectives. Early foundations of this field were rooted in the logic of scientific management, which positioned human beings primarily as factors of production optimized through efficiency and control (Taylor, 1911; Mayo, 1933). This perspective subsequently evolved through human capital theory, which reconceptualized people as strategic organizational assets (Becker, 1993; Wright & McMahan, 2011), and was further extended through strategic human resource management, emphasizing the alignment of people management practices with organizational performance and long-term competitive advantage

(Boxall & Purcell, 2016; Delery & Roumpi, 2017; Collings et al., 2019). However, despite broadening the role of people in organizations, these perspectives have remained largely embedded in an instrumental logic that values individuals primarily for their contributions to performance.

The emergence of sustainable human resource management (S-HRM) has expanded this paradigm by integrating economic, social, and environmental dimensions into people management (Ehnert, 2009; Kramar, 2014). Existing literature demonstrates that sustainable HRM contributes not only to organizational sustainability but also to well-being, engagement, resilience, and sustainable employability (Mariappanadar, 2020; Shen & Benson, 2021; Duvnjak & Kohont, 2021; Piwowar-Sulej, 2021; Khan et al., 2022; Ren et al., 2023). This development signals a broader transformation from a resource-optimization orientation toward systems for sustainable human development.

A parallel transformation has occurred in leadership scholarship. Contemporary literature reveals a shift from control-oriented leadership models toward increasingly adaptive, digital, relational, and values-based approaches (Khalili, 2023; Liden, 2025; Sacavém et al., 2025; Alhnaity et al., 2026). Within this development, leadership is no longer understood merely as a mechanism for achieving performance outcomes but as a capacity to navigate change, cultivate relationships, and generate long-term value for individuals and organizations (Alhnaity et al., 2026; Khalili, 2023). Approaches such as transformational leadership, authentic leadership, servant leadership, and full range leadership have consistently been associated with greater engagement, job satisfaction, trust, and sustainable performance outcomes (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Eva et al., 2019; Hoch et al., 2018). More recent studies further demonstrate the contribution of ethical leadership and value-based leadership to innovation, organizational commitment, and psychological outcomes in contexts shaped by digital and global transformation (Abdullah et al., 2022; Iqbal & Parray, 2024; Garzón-Lasso et al., 2024; Mukhtar & Numaningsih, 2024; Zhang, 2025; Agazu, 2025; Cheng & Zhu, 2025; Masry-Herzallah, 2025).

Nevertheless, critical scholarship suggests that both HRM and leadership research often preserve an instrumental logic in which human beings are positioned as means to achieve organizational ends (Bal et al., 2019). Such critiques have stimulated the emergence of human dignity perspectives, which regard human beings as ends in themselves and as possessing intrinsic worth irreducible to productive functions (Pirson, 2017; Bolton, 2007). Within organizational contexts, human dignity is closely associated with ethical, relational, and human-development-oriented leadership (Maak & Pless, 2006; Ciulla, 2020). A growing body of research shows that value-oriented leadership contributes to well-being, organizational trust, and long-term sustainability (Iqbal & Parray, 2024; Abdullah et al., 2022). Consequently, a broader shift is emerging from understanding organizations as systems for optimizing resources toward understanding them as systems that sustain recognition, justice, meaningfulness, and human flourishing (Abbas et al., 2024).

This paradigmatic transformation is particularly relevant within educational organizations, especially educational counseling systems, whose primary mandate concerns holistic human development. In this context, organizational quality is defined not solely by institutional effectiveness but also by the system's capacity to support individual development and psychological well-being (Day et al., 2014; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Research demonstrates that educational leadership significantly influences the quality of learning, educator well-being, and the effectiveness of educational organizations (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Hua, 2025). Within educational counseling systems, service quality is likewise deeply shaped by leadership support, supervision, professional development, and human-centered work systems. This perspective aligns

with the American School Counselor Association National Model, which positions leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change as foundational to counseling services (American School Counselor Association, 2019). It also resonates with evidence-based practice, strength-based approaches, and positive psychology frameworks that emphasize well-being, engagement, meaning, and the development of human potential (Spring, 2017; Oades et al., 2017; Seligman, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Despite the rapid development of leadership and sustainable HRM scholarship, several important conceptual gaps remain. First, leadership and sustainable HRM research have largely evolved as parallel domains and have rarely been explicitly integrated (Collings et al., 2019; Ren et al., 2023). Second, integration between these domains through a human dignity perspective remains relatively limited, while recent scholarship suggests that leadership research continues to be heavily shaped by performative assumptions (Alhnaity et al., 2026). Third, in educational counseling systems, research that explicitly connects leadership, sustainable HRM, and human dignity within a unified conceptual framework remains scarce (Bal et al., 2019; Pirson, 2017).

These gaps indicate the need for an integrative inquiry that moves beyond fragmented approaches toward a more holistic understanding of the relationship among leadership, sustainable HRM, and human dignity. In this regard, a systematic literature review provides a relevant approach for mapping the intellectual development of the field, identifying conceptual patterns, and revealing research gaps within an evolving interdisciplinary domain (Page et al., 2021).

In response to this need, this study aims to systematically examine the relationship between leadership and sustainable HRM through the lens of human dignity in educational counseling systems. Beyond synthesizing existing evidence, this review seeks to contribute theoretically to the paradigmatic transition from human resource logic toward human dignity logic, while also offering implications for strengthening educational service systems oriented toward human development. Based on this purpose, the study addresses four research questions:

- a) **RQ1.** How has research on leadership and sustainable human resource management developed, and what are its key characteristics within the academic literature?
- b) **RQ2.** How are leadership and sustainable HRM conceptually related in supporting human dignity-oriented organizational practices?
- c) **RQ3.** How can the integration of leadership, sustainable HRM, and human dignity be understood within educational counseling systems?
- d) **RQ4.** What research gaps and future directions emerge regarding the integration of leadership, sustainable HRM, and human dignity?

METHODS

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to identify, critically evaluate, and synthesize the literature on leadership, sustainable human resource management, and human dignity within educational counseling systems. This approach was selected because it enables the systematic mapping of knowledge development, the identification of research gaps, and the transparent, replicable integration of empirical and conceptual findings (Tranfield et al., 2003; Snyder, 2019). Compared with traditional narrative reviews, SLR provides a more rigorous procedure through explicit search protocols, systematic selection criteria, and scientifically robust synthesis procedures (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007).

In this study, the SLR was positioned as a theory-building review rather than merely a mapping review, because it was intended to construct a conceptual integration regarding the relationships among leadership, sustainable HRM, and human dignity. This orientation aligns with

contemporary generations of systematic reviews that position review studies not only as mechanisms for aggregating evidence, but also as vehicles for theory development (Snyder, 2019; Post et al., 2020).

The review process followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure transparency, auditability, and rigor across all stages of study identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion (Page et al., 2021). Given that the reviewed studies were methodologically heterogeneous, a narrative thematic synthesis was conducted to identify patterns, themes, and conceptual relationships across studies that were not suitable for meta-analysis (Popay et al., 2006).

Analytically, this review design integrated three orientations, namely descriptive mapping, thematic synthesis, and conceptual integration. Descriptive mapping was used to characterize and trace the development of the literature corpus. Thematic synthesis was employed to trace relational patterns and recurring themes across studies. Conceptual integration was used to develop an integrative framework concerning the transition from a human resource paradigm toward human dignity within educational counseling systems. The combination of these three orientations enabled the study not only to synthesize evidence but also to make a stronger theoretical contribution (Tranfield et al., 2003; Snyder, 2019; Post et al., 2020).

The search strategy was designed using a multi-source search strategy to ensure breadth of literature coverage while minimizing publication bias (Tranfield et al., 2003). The primary search was conducted using two highly reputable databases, namely Scopus and ScienceDirect, selected for their strong coverage of leadership, human resource management, education, and psychology. To enhance search comprehensiveness, this strategy was complemented by supplementary resource searches via Google Scholar, as well as backward and forward citation searches to identify relevant studies that the primary databases may not have captured.

The search strategy was developed based on the research questions and focused on three major conceptual domains, namely leadership, sustainable human resource management, and human dignity within educational and counseling contexts. The search terms included leadership, ethical leadership, transformational leadership, servant leadership, sustainable human resource management, sustainable HRM, human dignity, and humanistic management, combined with contextual terms such as education, counseling, and educational counseling using the Boolean operators AND and OR.

The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published in English between 2021 and 2025, while several seminal works published before this period were selectively retained as theoretical foundations. This temporal delimitation was intended to capture the most recent developments in the field while maintaining the conceptual relevance of the synthesis (Paul & Criado, 2020).

The initial search yielded 180 articles from the primary databases, comprising 128 from Scopus and 52 from ScienceDirect. Through supplementary resource searches, an additional 36 articles were identified: 22 from Google Scholar, 9 through backward citation searching, and 5 through forward citation searching, resulting in a total of 216 records prior to deduplication and screening.

The combination of core databases and supplementary sources was intended to improve the comprehensiveness of the search, strengthen the validity of the evidence base, and reduce the risk of database selection bias through source triangulation (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). This strategy aligns with recommendations from contemporary systematic review scholarship that emphasize combining database searching with citation-based searching to increase search sensitivity and enhance the robustness of synthesis (Tranfield et al., 2003; Paul & Criado, 2020).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established *a priori* to ensure consistency in study selection, strengthen methodological rigor, and maintain alignment between the synthesized evidence and the research questions (Page et al., 2021; Tranfield et al., 2003). Defining these criteria in advance also helped minimize selection bias and enhance the transparency and reproducibility of the review.

Studies were included if they met five criteria: they were peer-reviewed journal articles; published between 2021 and 2025, while selected seminal works were retained as foundational references; focused on leadership and or sustainable human resource management; incorporated human-centered or human dignity dimensions; and were relevant to educational contexts, human services, or educational counseling systems.

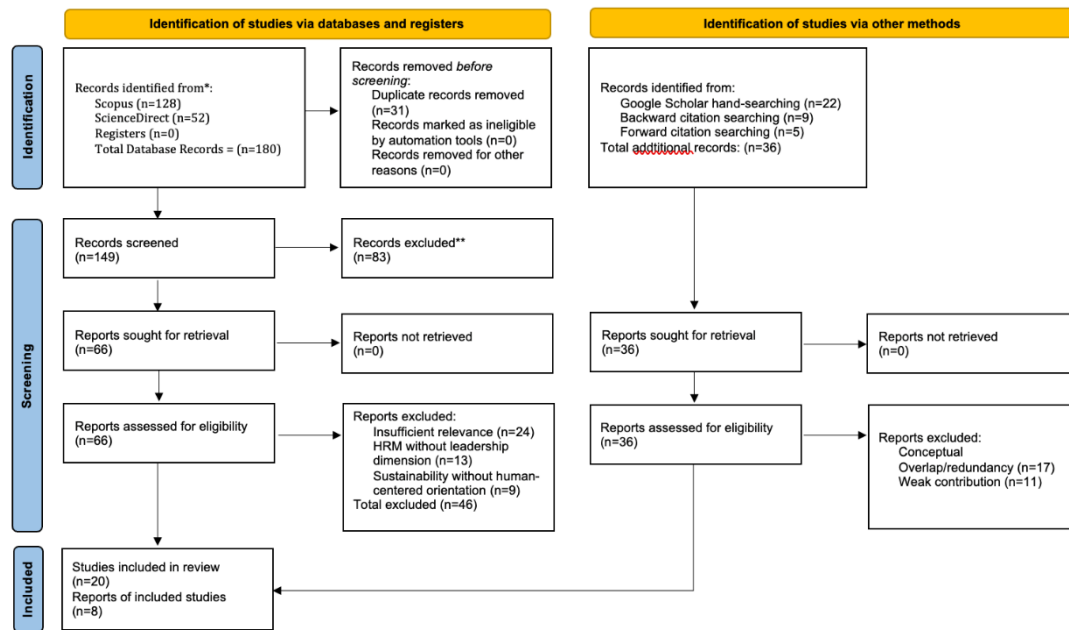
Studies were excluded if they were editorials, conference proceedings, book reviews, duplicate studies, conceptually weak contributions, inaccessible full texts, or studies offering no substantive contribution to the review objectives. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Peer-reviewed journal articles	Editorials, proceedings, book reviews
Published 2021–2025 with selected seminal works retained	Duplicate studies
Focus on leadership and/or sustainable HRM.	Weak conceptual relevance
Includes human dignity or human-centered orientation	Full text inaccessible
Relevant to educational or counseling contexts	

Study selection followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines through four stages, namely identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, to ensure transparency, auditability, and reproducibility of the review process (Page et al., 2021a). The selection flow was presented using the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for new systematic reviews, including searches of databases and other sources, adapted from the official PRISMA template under the CC BY 4.0 license (Page et al., 2021a, 2021b), as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram



Consistent with the dual-source identification structure, the selection process proceeded through two search streams: primary database searching and supplementary resource searching. The primary database search yielded 180 records, comprising 128 articles from Scopus and 52 from ScienceDirect. After deduplication, 31 records were removed, leaving 149 records for title and abstract screening. At this stage, 83 articles were excluded for topic irrelevance or weak alignment with the leadership, sustainable HRM, and educational nexus, resulting in 66 articles proceeding to full-text eligibility assessment. During this stage, 46 articles were excluded for limited conceptual relevance or failure to align with the review focus, leaving 20 studies included from the database search stream.

The primary search was complemented by 36 additional records identified through Google Scholar, as well as backward and forward citation searches, to broaden the evidence base and reduce database-dependency bias (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). From this supplementary stream, 28 articles were excluded due to conceptual overlap or limited substantive contribution, resulting in eight additional studies being included. Overall, the selection process produced a final sample of 28 studies that met all eligibility criteria for synthesis.

The combination of database searching and citation-based supplementary searching strengthened search comprehensiveness and helped minimize publication bias, as recommended in systematic reviews within management and organization research (Tranfield et al., 2003). Positioning these two selection streams within the PRISMA framework also reinforced the validity of the evidence base underpinning the conceptual synthesis.

Following final study selection, data extraction was conducted using a standardized coding matrix developed deductively from the research questions, the study's conceptual framework, and evidence synthesis practices in management systematic reviews (Tranfield et al., 2003). This procedure was intended to ensure consistency in identifying information across studies, reduce analytical subjectivity, and provide a strong foundation for conceptual synthesis.

Data were extracted from all 28 included studies across six domains: bibliographic information, leadership dimensions, sustainable HRM dimensions, human dignity or human-

centered orientation, research context, and key empirical and conceptual findings. The extraction framework is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Data Extraction Framework

Domain	Extraction Focus
Bibliographic Information	Author, year, journal
Leadership Dimension	Leadership models and approaches
Sustainable HRM Dimension	Practices, systems, strategic issues
Human Dignity Dimension	Human-centered and dignity-oriented constructs
Context	Educational and counseling settings
Key Findings	Empirical and conceptual findings

Beyond extracting study characteristics, analytical coding was conducted iteratively through open, axial, and selective coding to identify patterns, conceptual relationships, and cross-study synthesis themes (Snyder, 2019; Post et al., 2020). Because the review was theory-building oriented, synthesis focused not merely on aggregating findings but on developing conceptual integration.

Given the heterogeneity of the included studies, a narrative thematic synthesis was conducted (Popay et al., 2006). This approach enabled the integration of empirical and conceptual evidence not suitable for meta-analysis, while supporting the exploration of dominant themes, conceptual relationships, and research gaps. The synthesis focused on three major analytical areas: leadership patterns that support dignity-oriented systems, sustainable HRM as a human development architecture, and integrative pathways that explain the transition from human resource logic to human dignity logic.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the synthesis, data extraction and theme development followed a constant comparison principle through iterative cross-study comparisons to maintain category consistency and conceptual validity (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Accordingly, the extraction and synthesis procedures served not only to summarize existing evidence but also as a knowledge-building process for developing an integrative understanding of the nexus among leadership, sustainable HRM, and human dignity in educational counseling systems.

To strengthen methodological rigor and ensure the synthesis was grounded in credible evidence, all studies that passed the eligibility stage underwent quality appraisal (Tranfield et al., 2003; Aromataris & Pearson, 2014). In systematic reviews, quality appraisal is important not only for evaluating the strength of evidence but also for minimizing the inclusion of studies with methodological limitations or weak conceptual contributions.

Given the heterogeneity of the included studies, encompassing empirical, conceptual, and review articles, this study adopted an integrative quality appraisal approach to ensure quality assessment was applied proportionately across diverse study designs (Snyder, 2019). The appraisal was conducted across four dimensions: methodological transparency, conceptual relevance, empirical or theoretical contribution, and alignment with the research questions, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Quality Appraisal Criteria

Appraisal Dimension	Evaluation Focus
Methodological Transparency	Clarity of design, methods, and reporting
Conceptual Relevance	Alignment with leadership–S–HRM–dignity nexus
Empirical/Theoretical Contribution	Strength of contribution
Alignment with Research Questions	Direct relevance to review objectives

Each study was assessed using a three-level appraisal matrix of high, moderate, and low quality, adapted from quality-screening approaches in management systematic reviews (Tranfield et al., 2003; Gough, 2007). Studies classified as low quality or offering limited substantive contribution were excluded during the final selection stage, while only studies of moderate to high quality were retained in the synthesis. Based on this appraisal, all 28 included studies were judged to have sufficient methodological quality and conceptual contribution to support the synthesis.

Beyond functioning as a quality filter, appraisal was also used analytically to assess the relative weight of each study's contribution to theme development and conceptual integration, consistent with the weight-of-evidence approach (Gough, 2007). This is important because, in theory-building reviews, study quality is determined not only by methodological rigor but also by the depth of conceptual contribution to knowledge development (Post et al., 2020). Thus, quality appraisal served a dual role as both an evidence-quality assurance mechanism and a means of strengthening the synthesis's interpretive validity.

By incorporating quality appraisal as an explicit part of the review protocol, this study sought to enhance the trustworthiness, analytical rigor, and credibility of the systematic review findings (Tranfield et al., 2003; Aromataris & Pearson, 2014).

RESULTS

Descriptive Profile

As an initial stage of synthesis, a descriptive profiling of the 28 included studies was conducted to map the structure of the literature corpus underpinning the analysis. In systematic reviews, descriptive profiling not only portrays general study characteristics but also provides a foundation for understanding patterns of knowledge development, evidence configurations, and intellectual tendencies within a field (Tranfield et al., 2003; Snyder, 2019). The corpus was analyzed across publication period, study context, research design, primary themes, and evidence type, as summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive Profile of Included Studies

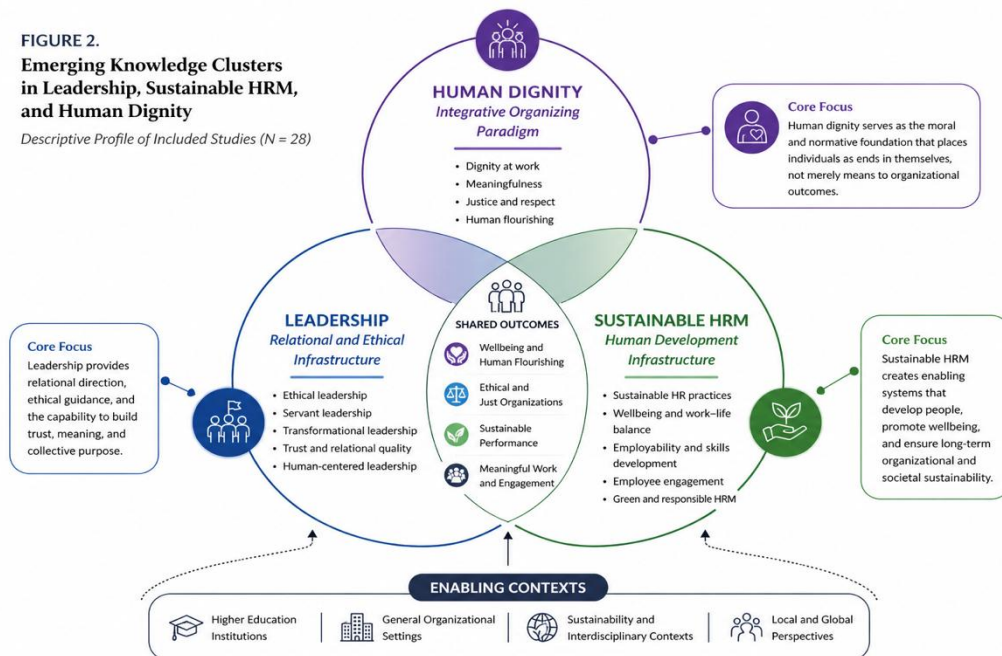
Dimension	Category	n	%
Publication Period	2020–2021	5	17.9
	2022–2023	9	32.1
	2024–2026	14	50.0
Study Context	Higher Education / Educational Systems	10	35.7
	General Organizational Context	12	42.9
	Sustainability / Interdisciplinary Context	6	21.4
Study Design	Empirical Studies	16	57.1
	Conceptual/Theoretical Studies	7	25.0
	Systematic Reviews	5	17.9
Primary Theme	Leadership	10	35.7
	Sustainable HRM	10	35.7
	Human Dignity / Human-Centered Organizing	8	28.6
Primary Focus	Organizational Performance and Sustainability	9	32.1
	Human Development and Well-being	11	39.3
	Dignity-Oriented Transformation	8	28.6
Evidence Type	Empirical Evidence	16	57.1
	Conceptual Evidence	7	25.0
	Review Evidence	5	17.9

Over time, the distribution of publications indicates a strong acceleration in field development, with recent studies dominating the corpus. Earlier works such as Fonsén and Soukainen (2020), Inceoglu et al. (2018), Puaca (2021), and Piwowar-Sulej (2021) largely established conceptual foundations in leadership and sustainable people management. A subsequent phase reflected integrative expansion through studies such as Mukhuty et al. (2022), Iqbal and Piwowar-Sulej (2022), Mariappanadar et al. (2022), Cachón-Rodríguez et al. (2022), Bornay-Barrachina et al. (2023), and Asfahani (2023), which increasingly connected sustainability, wellbeing, and human development. The most recent phase, represented by studies such as Verheijen-Tiemstra et al. (2024), Annosi et al. (2025), Kisahwan et al. (2025), Pandey et al. (2025), Barabanova et al. (2025), Connelly et al. (2025), McCartney et al. (2026), and Tabaghdehi et al. (2026), signals a stronger human-centered and dignity-oriented frontier in the field.

Across contexts, the corpus shows a relatively balanced distribution among higher education, broader organizational settings, and sustainability-related interdisciplinary contexts, which enhances the transferability of the synthesis. The heterogeneity of empirical, conceptual, and review studies also contributes to a rich evidence base by enabling integration between empirical depth and conceptual breadth (Post et al., 2020). Empirical studies largely provide evidence on leadership, well-being, and sustainability practices, whereas conceptual and review studies deepen theorization of dignity, flourishing, and humanistic organizing.

The thematic distribution also suggests a relative balance among leadership, sustainable HRM, and human dignity-oriented organizing. Rather than being dominated by a single domain, the corpus reflects growing convergence across fields. Read integratively, at least three emerging knowledge clusters can be identified, namely leadership as relational and ethical infrastructure, sustainable HRM as human development infrastructure, and human dignity as an integrative organizing paradigm, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Emerging Knowledge Clusters in Leadership, Sustainable HRM, and Human Dignity



The first cluster is supported primarily by leadership literature emphasizing trust, ethics, empowerment, and relational influence, as reflected in Inceoglu et al. (2018), Asfahani (2023),

and Pandey et al. (2025). The second cluster emerges through sustainable HRM scholarship emphasizing sustainable employability, wellbeing, and people development, as seen in Piwovar-Sulej (2021), Mariappanadar et al. (2022), Kisahwan et al. (2025), and Connelly et al. (2025). The third cluster centers on dignity, flourishing, and meaningful organizing, increasingly visible in recent studies such as Annosi et al. (2025), Barabanova et al. (2025), and Tabaghdehi et al. (2026). Notably, studies such as Iqbal and Piwovar-Sulej (2022), McCartney et al. (2026), and Verheijen-Tiemstra et al. (2024) reveal overlaps across these clusters, indicating knowledge convergence.

At the same time, the descriptive profile reveals several imbalances in the structure of the evidence. Leadership and sustainable HRM appear comparatively mature empirically, whereas dignity remains a frontier construct that is conceptually rich but less operationalized. In addition, the dominance of evidence from Global North contexts and formal organizations highlights important opportunities for extending scholarship into Global South contexts and educational counseling systems.

Overall, the corpus profile yields three main findings. First, there is a clear acceleration in knowledge development toward the integration of leadership, sustainable HRM, and human dignity. Second, heterogeneity in context, design, and evidence type provides a rich foundation for conceptual development. Third, thematic distribution and knowledge clustering indicate an emerging transformation from instrumental organizing toward dignity-based organizing. These findings provide the basis for the subsequent analysis of patterns in evidence quality and intellectual development.

Quality Patterns and Evidence Characteristic

Beyond the descriptive profile of the corpus, the synthesis reveals patterns in evidence quality that indicate a progressively maturing field, though maturity varies across domains. In systematic reviews, examining evidence patterns is important not only for assessing corpus quality but also for understanding how knowledge structures develop and the extent to which available evidence supports conceptual integration (Tranfield et al., 2003; Gough, 2007). Based on quality appraisal and thematic synthesis, three major patterns characterize the evidence base in this review.

First, the corpus is dominated by moderate- to high-quality evidence with relatively strong conceptual contributions. Most studies demonstrate sufficient methodological transparency, strong conceptual relevance, and substantive contributions to the nexus among leadership, sustainable HRM, and human dignity. This strength is evident in empirical studies such as Verheijen-Tiemstra et al. (2024), Lartey and Ampofo (2025), and Pandey et al. (2025), as well as in conceptual and review studies such as Mukhuty et al. (2022), Snyder (2019), and Post et al. (2020), which reinforce the field's theoretical elaboration.

Second, the evidence reveals differentiated maturity across domains. Leadership scholarship appears to be the most empirically mature, supported by extensive evidence on relational processes, ethical influence, trust, and well-being outcomes, as reflected in Inceoglu et al. (2018), Asfahani (2023), Kekäle and Pinheiro (2024), and Voigt and von der Oelsnitz (2024). Sustainable HRM represents a rapidly evolving transitional domain, moving from people management toward a human development orientation, as shown in Piwovar-Sulej (2021), Mariappanadar et al. (2022), Iqbal and Piwovar-Sulej (2022), Connelly et al. (2025), and Kisahwan et al. (2025). By contrast, human dignity remains an emerging frontier construct, conceptually rich yet still empirically developing, as illustrated by Silveira Ramalho and Martins (2022), Annosi et al. (2025), Barabanova et al. (2025), and Tabaghdehi et al. (2026). These quality patterns are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Quality Pattern and Evidence Characteristics

Evidence Dimension	Dominant	Interpretation
Evidence Quality	Moderate to High	Robust evidence base
Leadership Literature	Empirically mature	Strong relational and ethical evidence
Sustainable HRM Literature	Emerging mature	Development-oriented evidence-based
Human Dignity Literature	Conceptually rich, empirically emerging	Frontier construct
Overall Knowledge Structure	Increasingly integrative	Shift toward paradigm convergence

Third, the synthesis indicates a growing pattern of evidence convergence. Whereas earlier studies often treated leadership, sustainable HRM, and dignity as relatively separate domains, more recent scholarship reveals increasing conceptual overlap through shared themes such as flourishing, meaningful work, ethical organizing, wellbeing, and sustainable employability. This pattern is evident in integrative studies such as Iqbal and Piwovar-Sulej (2022), Annosi et al. (2025), Connelly et al. (2025), and McCartney et al. (2026), suggesting a shift from fragmented evidence toward a cumulative, integrative knowledge structure (Snyder, 2019).

Alongside these strengths, the corpus also reveals analytically important imbalances. Evidence remains concentrated in formal organizations, higher education, and Global North contexts, while educational counseling systems and Global South settings remain underrepresented. Moreover, the dominance of associational studies suggests that much of the evidence still focuses on relationships among constructs, whereas integrative models that explicitly position human dignity as an organizing principle remain limited. This indicates that the frontier of the field lies less in evidence scarcity than in the need for stronger theoretical integration.

Taken together, the quality patterns reveal three major characteristics. First, the corpus possesses sufficient quality and credibility to support conceptual synthesis. Second, differences in maturity across domains create opportunities for interdisciplinary integration. Third, the evidence signals an ongoing paradigmatic transformation from instrumental organizing toward dignity-based organizing, as visualized in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Maturity Pattern of Evidence Development



Viewed from the perspective of intellectual development, this pattern suggests that evidence quality has evolved not uniformly, but through simultaneous differentiation and convergence. It is precisely through this dynamic that the corpus provides a sufficiently strong foundation for supporting the argument concerning a transition from instrumental organizing toward dignity-based organizing (Tranfield et al., 2003; Gough, 2007).

Research Trends and Intellectual Development in Leadership and Sustainable HRM

The synthesis reveals that the intellectual development of leadership and sustainable HRM scholarship has progressed from functional orientations to increasingly relational, human-centered, and sustainability-oriented paradigms. While earlier studies largely positioned leadership and HRM as instruments for improving organizational effectiveness, more recent scholarship increasingly conceptualizes both as infrastructures for human development (Collings et al., 2019; Ren et al., 2023). This development becomes even more explicit in recent studies linking sustainability, dignity, and human flourishing as a new frontier of inquiry (Annosi et al., 2025; Connelly et al., 2025; McCartney et al., 2026; Tabaghdehi et al., 2026).

Based on thematic synthesis, the field's intellectual evolution can be understood through three major trends. The first is a shift from instrumental leadership toward relational, ethical, and human-centered leadership. Here, the focus shifts from control and effectiveness to trust, empowerment, ethics, well-being, and flourishing. This shift is reflected in the growing scholarship on transformational, servant, authentic, and ethical leadership, which are increasingly understood as dignity-supportive systems (Khalili, 2023; Liden, 2025; Sacavém et al., 2025; Alhnaity et al., 2026). In this context, studies such as Iqbal and Piwowar-Sulej (2022) and Asfahani (2023) suggest that leadership is no longer framed merely as a managerial style, but as a relational infrastructure for sustainable human development.

The second trend concerns the transformation of sustainable HRM from a people-management function into a human-development architecture. The literature reflects a shift from a strategic resource orientation toward systems that support sustainable employability, capability development, well-being, and human sustainability (Collings et al., 2019; Ren et al., 2023). Recent

studies such as Annosi et al. (2025), Connelly et al. (2025), and McCartney et al. (2026) further suggest that sustainable HRM is increasingly understood as an enabling architecture that connects sustainability goals with dignity-oriented people development.

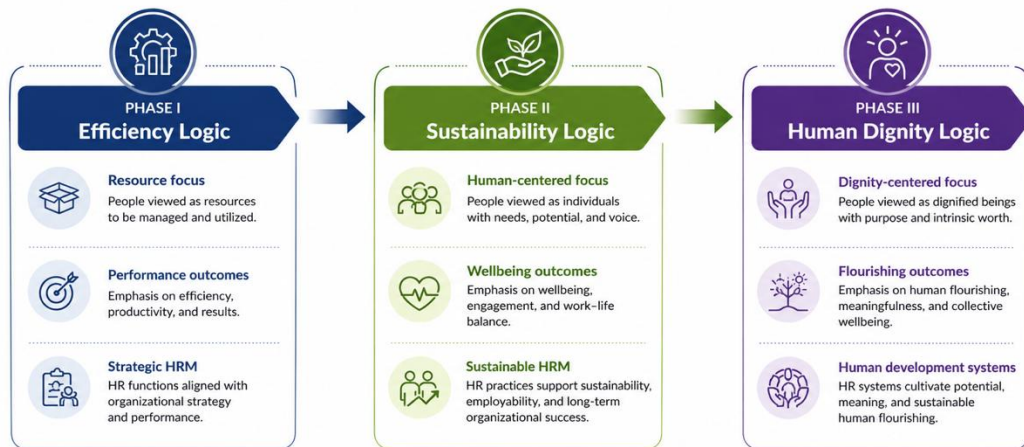
The third trend is the growing intellectual convergence among leadership, sustainable HRM, and human dignity. Whereas these domains previously evolved in parallel, recent scholarship shows stronger conceptual overlap through shared themes such as meaningful work, flourishing, ethical organizing, inclusive development, and human sustainability (Snyder, 2019; Post et al., 2020). This convergence is particularly evident in studies spanning domains, including Tabaghdehi et al. (2026), Annosi et al. (2025), and Iqbal and Piwovar-Sulej (2022), which indicate a shift from fragmented scholarship toward a more integrative knowledge structure. These intellectual trends are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Research Trends and Intellectual Development

Intellectual Trend	Earlier Orientation	Emerging Orientation
Leadership	Performance and control	Relational, ethical, human-centered leadership
Sustainable HRM	Resource optimization	Human development architecture
Organizing Logic	Instrumental organizing	Dignity-based organizing
Outcomes	Efficiency and performance	Wellbeing, flourishing, sustainability
Knowledge Structure	Fragmented domains	Integrative interdisciplinary nexus
Leadership	Performance and control	Relational, ethical, human-centered leadership

Viewed longitudinally, the field appears to have evolved through three phases of intellectual development. The first phase was dominated by efficiency and performance logic. The expansion of sustainability and human-centered perspectives characterized the second. The third, and most recent, reflects the emergence of human dignity logic as a new frontier of knowledge development, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4. The Emergence of Human Dignity Logic as a New Frontier of Knowledge Development



This evolutionary pattern suggests that the novelty of the field lies not merely in the emergence of new themes but in the reconfiguration of foundational assumptions about the human being in

organizations. In this sense, scholarship is moving from viewing people as resources to understanding them as dignified subjects who constitute the purpose of organizing. This shift also reflects movement from disciplinary silos toward interdisciplinary integration, as leadership increasingly intersects with sustainability studies, positive organizational scholarship, and humanistic management (Tranfield et al., 2003).

Overall, the synthesis yields three major findings. First, research has shifted from an instrumental to a human-centered and dignity-oriented perspective. Second, sustainable HRM has evolved from a managerial function into a human development infrastructure. Third, the convergence among leadership, sustainable HRM, and human dignity points to the emergence of a new intellectual frontier that forms the conceptual basis of this article.

Conceptual Nexus Between Leadership, Sustainable HRM, and Human Dignity

Addressing the second research question, the synthesis indicates that the relationship among leadership, sustainable HRM, and human dignity cannot be understood as three separate domains, but rather as a conceptual nexus shaped through relational, systemic, and normative mechanisms. While earlier literature often positioned leadership as an antecedent, sustainable HRM as a practice domain, and dignity as an ethical implication, more recent scholarship suggests a more integrative reconceptualization in which these domains form a configuration supporting human flourishing-oriented organizing (Maak & Pless, 2006; Ciulla, 2020; Connelly et al., 2025).

The first cluster within this nexus positions leadership as a relational and ethical infrastructure. Studies by Iqbal and Piwovar-Sulej (2022), Asfahani (2023), Anastasiou (2025), Syamsir et al. (2025), and Wakhid et al. (2026) consistently suggest that the primary contribution of leadership lies not mainly in control or effectiveness, but in cultivating trust, empowerment, agency, and stewardship that sustain human dignity. In this sense, leadership functions as a relational medium through which dignity is enacted. This relational dimension is summarized in Table 7.

Table 7. Leadership as Relational-Ethical Infrastructure

Relational Dimension	Leadership Contribution	Human Dignity Implication
Trust	Builds psychological safety	Recognition and respect
Empowerment	Strengthens agency	Human autonomy
Stewardship	Sustains collective flourishing	Shared dignity
Ethical responsibility	Protects justice and fairness	Dignity preservation

As suggested by Eva et al. (2019) and Ciulla (2020), this perspective shifts leadership from performance-centered influence toward dignity-enabling leadership. Dignity, therefore, does not exist outside leadership, but is realized through the quality of relationships leadership makes possible.

However, relational conditions alone are insufficient. The synthesis also shows that sustainable HRM functions as a human development architecture that institutionalizes dignity through organizational systems. Studies by Piwovar-Sulej (2021), Mukhuty et al. (2022), Annosi et al. (2025), Kisahwan et al. (2025), and McCartney et al. (2026) point to a transition from people management to systems that support capability development, wellbeing, sustainable employability, and mutual gains.

Table 8. Sustainable HRM as Human Development Architecture

Developmental Dimension	Systemic Role	Dignity Contribution
Capability development	Sustains growth	Human flourishing
Wellbeing orientation	Protects welfare	Dignity protection
Sustainable employability	Maintains agency	Long-term dignity

Mutual gains systems	Aligns individual and institutional good	Shared flourishing
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These findings suggest that sustainable HRM no longer merely supports organizational sustainability but increasingly constitutes an architecture through which human development becomes an end in itself. At the same time, the synthesis indicates that human dignity appears not only as an outcome of effective leadership and HRM, but as a normative principle that orients both. Studies such as Connelly et al. (2025), Atay et al. (2025), Tabaghdehi et al. (2026), Shankar and Sarkar (2026), and Barabanova et al. (2025) suggest that dignity serves as an integrative organizing principle that links relationships, systems, and organizational purpose. This integrative dimension is summarized in Table 9.

Table 9. Human Dignity as Integrative Organizing Principle

Dignity Dimension	Organizing Role	Implication
Recognition	Affirms personhood	Human-centered relations
Justice	Guides ethical arrangements	Fair systems
Meaningfulness	Orients flourishing	Purposeful work systems
Human worth	Anchors organizational purpose	Dignity-centered organizing

Within this nexus, leadership provides the relational medium, sustainable HRM provides the systemic medium, and dignity offers the normative orientation. Together, these domains form an organizational system oriented toward human flourishing. This relationship reflects a broader ontological transition from human resource logic toward human dignity logic, as summarized in Table 10.

Table 10. From Human Resource Logic to Human Dignity Logic

Human Resource Logic	Human Dignity Logic
People as resources	People as ends in themselves
Leadership as control	Leadership as stewardship
HRM as administration	HRM as development architecture
Sustainability as performance support	Sustainability as human flourishing
Dignity as an ethical supplement	Dignity as an organizing principle

This shift represents more than conceptual integration. It signals a paradigmatic transformation. In the first paradigm, people are positioned as organizational inputs. In the second, organizations are arranged so that people can flourish. In this synthesis, the transition captures the essence of the movement from human resources to human dignity.

Overall, four major findings emerge. First, leadership evolves as a relational ethical infrastructure that enables recognition and agency. Second, sustainable HRM develops as a human development architecture that institutionalizes dignity through systems. Third, human dignity emerges as an integrative principle that provides normative direction for both relationships and systems. Fourth, their interaction signals a paradigmatic shift from instrumental organizing toward dignity-based organizing.

Integrating Leadership and Sustainable HRM in Educational Counseling System

The synthesis suggests that the most significant implication of the nexus among leadership, sustainable HRM, and human dignity lies in the possibility of reconceptualizing educational counseling systems not merely as individual support services, but as human development ecosystems that sustain flourishing, dignity, and sustainability systemically (Collings et al., 2019; Ren et al., 2023; Connelly et al., 2025). From this perspective, counseling systems are no longer understood primarily as remedial or problem-solving mechanisms, but as institutional spaces in

which human development, ethical relationships, and social sustainability are cultivated in an integrated way.

This reconceptualization rests on three major syntheses emerging from the corpus. First, educational counseling systems can be understood as dignity-supportive relational systems. Leadership scholarship consistently shows that trust, empowerment, stewardship, and ethical responsibility create relational conditions that support recognition, autonomy, justice, and the preservation of dignity (Maak & Pless, 2006; Eva et al., 2019; Ciulla, 2020; Iqbal & Piwovar-Sulej, 2022; Asfahani, 2023). Within educational contexts, this implies that counseling systems should not be positioned merely to respond to developmental problems, but as relational infrastructures that cultivate psychological safety, belonging, and agency. Studies by Syamsir et al. (2025), Anastasiou (2025), and Wakhid et al. (2026) reinforce the idea that human-centered leadership operates through relationships that recognize and develop the dignity of learners and educational communities.

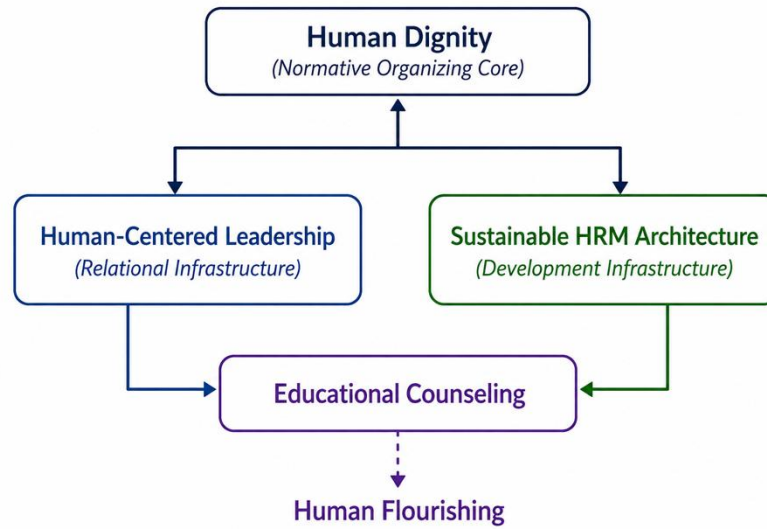
In this configuration, trust does not merely function as a relational quality but creates psychological safety through which recognition can emerge authentically. Empowerment strengthens agency and autonomy, positioning individuals as active subjects of development rather than passive recipients of intervention (Eva et al., 2019; Iqbal & Piwovar-Sulej, 2022). At the same time, stewardship connects individual flourishing with shared collective dignity, suggesting that dignity is not only an individual concern but also a quality of relationships and community (Maak & Pless, 2006; Asfahani, 2023). Dignity, therefore, does not stand outside leadership as an added value, but is enacted through relational mechanisms that sustain recognition, autonomy, justice, and flourishing simultaneously.

Second, the synthesis suggests that educational counseling systems can also be understood as human development architectures. Sustainable HRM perspectives indicate that human development requires systems supporting capability development, wellbeing orientation, sustainable employability, and mutual gains, rather than episodic services alone (Piwovar-Sulej, 2021; Mariappanadar et al., 2022; Ren et al., 2023; Annosi et al., 2025; Kisahwan et al., 2025; McCartney et al., 2026). In this perspective, counseling shifts from a support service to a developmental system that actively builds capacity, resilience, and sustainable growth. Importantly, evidence suggests that dignity here is not merely a normative aspiration, but is operationalized through system design that supports growth and flourishing. Capability development, sustainable employability, and mutual gains thus become institutional mechanisms through which dignity is embedded in developmental architecture.

Third, human dignity in this synthesis emerges not simply as an ethical outcome of effective leadership and sustainable HRM, but as the organizing principle orienting both. Studies by Atay et al. (2025), Connelly et al. (2025), Barabanova et al. (2025), Tabaghdehi et al. (2026), and Shankar and Sarkar (2026) show that dignity operates through recognition, justice, meaningfulness, and human worth, providing orientation for both relationships and systems. In this perspective, dignity is not reduced to a protected value but becomes a principle that organizes the purposes, practices, and design of educational systems themselves.

When these three syntheses are read together, leadership provides relational conditions for dignity through trust, empowerment, and stewardship; sustainable HRM provides systemic conditions through wellbeing, capability, and human development; while dignity offers a normative orientation that prevents both relationships and systems from reverting to instrumental logic. Their interaction forms a Dignity-Based Educational Counseling Ecosystem, as illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Dignity-based Educational Counseling Ecosystem



This model suggests that educational counseling systems serve as the meeting point of two core infrastructures, integrated through human dignity and oriented toward human flourishing. Importantly, this relationship does not operate through linear relationships among variables but through simultaneous relational, systemic, and normative mechanisms. This strengthens the argument that the Dignity-Based Educational Counseling Ecosystem is not merely a conceptual metaphor but an integrative model supported by cross-study evidence.

A key contribution of this model is the shift from service-based counseling toward ecosystem-based counseling. In the first model, counseling primarily responds to individual needs. In the second, counseling becomes part of an institutional architecture that actively cultivates flourishing. This shift marks a transition from remedial logic toward developmental and dignity logic.

The synthesis also reveals a broader ontological shift from human resource logic toward human dignity logic. Within the former, people are positioned as resources to be optimized, leadership is understood as control, and development systems support performance. However, recent evidence suggests movement toward a paradigm in which people are understood as ends in themselves, leadership as stewardship, sustainable HRM as human development architecture, and sustainability as flourishing rather than efficiency alone (Collings et al., 2019; Ren et al., 2023; Annosi et al., 2025; McCartney et al., 2026). This represents not merely conceptual integration, but a paradigmatic transformation and constitutes a central contribution of this review.

Intellectually, this model also bridges three traditions that are often developed separately: leadership scholarship, sustainable HRM, and counseling development. The synthesis suggests that integrating these traditions can reconstruct educational counseling systems as spaces where sustainability, dignity, and human development intersect. More importantly, educational counseling systems can be understood not merely as an application context for dignity-based organizing, but as a strategic locus for advancing the human dignity paradigm itself.

Overall, four major findings emerge. First, educational counseling systems can be reframed as dignity-supportive relational systems that sustain recognition, agency, and flourishing. Second, sustainable HRM can be positioned as a human development architecture that institutionalizes dignity through systems. Third, human dignity serves as the organizing principle that integrates relationships and systems. Fourth, their interaction generates a reconceptualization of educational counseling systems as a Dignity-Based Educational Counseling Ecosystem, which constitutes a central conceptual contribution of this article.

Research Gaps and Future Research Agenda

Although the synthesis demonstrates increasingly integrative intellectual development among leadership, sustainable HRM, and human dignity, the reviewed corpus also reveals several significant research gaps. Importantly, these gaps lie less in a lack of research volume than in conceptual fragmentation, evidence imbalance, and the limited availability of integrative models that explain how the nexus among these domains operates systemically. In systematic reviews, identifying such gaps is important not only for mapping current limitations but also for shaping the field's future development (Tranfield et al., 2003; Snyder, 2019; Post et al., 2020).

The first gap concerns conceptual fragmentation. Although recent studies suggest convergence among leadership, sustainable HRM, and human dignity, much of the literature still treats them as partially interacting domains rather than a unified conceptual system. Many studies examine leadership and wellbeing, sustainable HRM and employability, or dignity and ethical organizing, yet relatively few develop integrative explanatory models linking all three domains (Collings et al., 2019; Ren et al., 2023; Annosi et al., 2025; Connelly et al., 2025). Future scholarship, therefore, needs to move beyond associational relationships toward integrative models positioning dignity as an organizing principle rather than merely an outcome.

The second gap concerns the limited operationalization of human dignity. The synthesis shows that dignity has developed richly as a normative and philosophical construct, but remains comparatively underdeveloped empirically. Studies such as Atay et al. (2025), Barabanova et al. (2025), Tabaghdehi et al. (2026), and Shankar and Sarkar (2026) highlight its potential as a frontier construct. However, empirical evidence, mechanisms, and measurement models remain limited. This opens important directions for dignity measurement, dignity-based organizational indicators, and empirical models examining dignity as a mediator, moderator, or systemic logic.

A third gap concerns contextual imbalance. Much of the corpus is concentrated in Global North settings, higher education systems, and formal organizations, while Global South contexts and value-based educational counseling systems remain underexplored (Mariappanadar et al., 2022; Kisahwan et al., 2025; McCartney et al., 2026). This suggests the need for comparative, cross-cultural, and context-sensitive studies to test both transferability and contextual variation of emerging models.

A fourth gap concerns research design limitations. The evidence base remains dominated by conceptual studies, cross-sectional empirical work, and associational models. Longitudinal, multilevel, mixed methods, and process-oriented inquiries capable of capturing long-term dynamics remain limited (Snyder, 2019; Post et al., 2020). Given that relationships among leadership, sustainable HRM, and human dignity are inherently dynamic and multilayered, future research should move toward developmental longitudinal studies, multilevel modeling, and systems-oriented inquiry.

A fifth, and particularly important, gap for this article concerns the scarcity of studies that explicitly link this nexus to educational counseling systems. Although several studies point to human-centered educational leadership (Asfahani, 2023; Syamsir et al., 2025; Wakhid et al., 2026), integrated models that directly connect leadership, sustainable HRM, and dignity within counseling systems remain largely absent. This may represent one of the most promising frontiers for future inquiry.

Based on these gaps, five broad research agendas emerge:

Future scholarship should advance integrative theory building that moves from fragmented scholarship toward unified dignity-based frameworks, focusing not only on whether leadership

affects wellbeing or sustainable HRM affects employability, but on how relational, systemic, and normative mechanisms interact to generate flourishing.

Greater attention is needed to the measurement and empirical operationalization of dignity through the development of constructs, indicators, and instruments for dignity-based organizing.

Future research should expand contextual and comparative inquiry, particularly in Global South contexts, faith-based education, and educational counseling systems, as also suggested by Collings et al. (2019) and Ren et al. (2023).

Multilevel and systems research is needed to examine this nexus simultaneously at individual, relational, institutional, and systemic levels, since much of the novelty of the field lies precisely in its cross-level complexity.

Intervention and design-oriented research should move beyond explaining relationships among variables toward testing dignity-based educational ecosystems in practice. This may include dignity-oriented counseling models, sustainable developmental institutions, or leadership interventions oriented toward flourishing.

Conceptually, these agendas represent a shift from understanding relationships to designing systems. This shift is significant because the frontier of the field appears to lie less in identifying new variables than in constructing new paradigms. In this sense, the future research agenda is not merely incremental, but potentially paradigmatic. The transition from human resource logic toward human dignity logic identified in this review requires not simply expanding themes, but reexamining foundational assumptions about human beings, organizations, and the purpose of sustainability itself (Maak & Pless, 2006; Ciulla, 2020; Tabaghdehi et al., 2026).

Overall, the synthesis suggests three overarching directions for future research. First, deepen theoretical integration among leadership, sustainable HRM, and human dignity. Second, expand the evidence base through more diverse contexts, research designs, and methodological approaches. Third, develop dignity-based educational counseling ecosystems as a new frontier of scholarship. Together, these directions suggest that the future of the field lies not in multiplying isolated studies, but in building integrative scholarship capable of linking human flourishing with sustainable systems.

An Integrative Framework: From Human Resource to Human Dignity

The synthesis of the corpus suggests that the most fundamental contribution of this review lies not merely in integrating leadership, sustainable HRM, and human dignity, but in reconstructing the underlying logic through which human beings are understood in organizations and educational systems. While dominant traditions in management remain largely grounded in human resource logic, the reviewed evidence points toward an alternative paradigm that can be understood as human dignity logic (Maak & Pless, 2006; Collings et al., 2019; Ciulla, 2020).

This shift does not simply extend HRM through ethical considerations, but reconfigures ontological assumptions about the human person. Within human resource logic, people are often positioned as assets developed to support performance and system sustainability. By contrast, the logic of human dignity views human beings as ends in themselves and as the organizing purpose of institutions. This transition recurs across the corpus, including humanistic leadership scholarship (Eva et al., 2019; Asfahani, 2023), sustainable HRM research (Ren et al., 2023; Annosi et al., 2025), and dignity scholarship (Atay et al., 2025; Tabaghdehi et al., 2026).

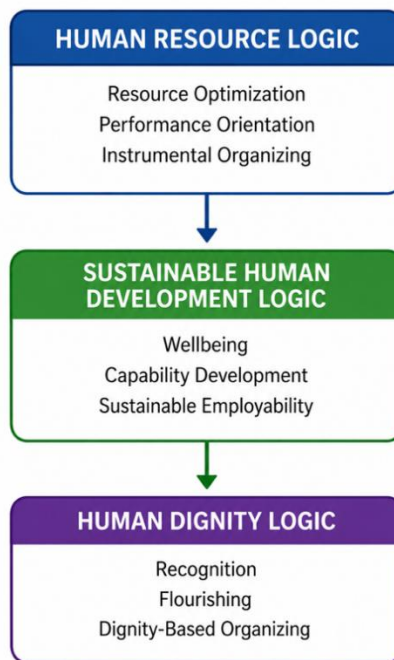
Within this synthesis, the transition unfolds through three interconnected layers of transformation. The first is relational transformation, in which leadership shifts from control toward stewardship and from performance influence toward relational conditions for flourishing. Studies such as Iqbal and Piwovar-Sulej (2022), Syamsir et al. (2025), Wakhid et al. (2026), and

Connelly et al. (2025) suggest that trust, empowerment, recognition, and ethical responsibility are not supplementary leadership qualities but foundations of dignity-supportive organizing.

The second is systemic transformation. Here, sustainable HRM moves beyond strategic people management toward a human development architecture that supports capability development, sustainable employability, wellbeing, and flourishing (Piwowar-Sulej, 2021; Mariappanadar et al., 2022; Kisahwan et al., 2025; McCartney et al., 2026). In this sense, HRM shifts from an administrative mechanism to an institutional architecture through which dignity is embedded.

The third is normative transformation. At this level, dignity is no longer treated as an ethical supplement but as an organizing principle that orients both relationships and systems through recognition, justice, meaningfulness, and human worth (Ciulla, 2020; Barabanova et al., 2025; Shankar & Sarkar, 2026). The transition from the human resource paradigm toward the human dignity paradigm is illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6. From Human Resource to Human Dignity: An Integrative Framework



The framework positions sustainable HRM as a paradigmatic bridge between leadership and dignity. It functions not merely as an intermediate domain but as a transitional architecture that enables movement from resource logic toward dignity logic. In this sense, sustainable HRM becomes a mechanism of transformation rather than simply a substantive theme.

A central contribution of this framework is its reconfiguration of three foundational questions: how human beings are understood, how organizations are designed, and what organizing ultimately seeks to achieve. In the former paradigm, people are resources, organizations are designed for effectiveness, and performance is the central objective. In the dignity paradigm, people are ends, organizations are designed for flourishing, and sustainability is understood as dignified human development.

This transition becomes particularly evident when viewed through the lens of educational counseling systems. Here, the movement from human resource logic to human dignity logic does not simply revise how systems manage development but transforms counseling itself from a support service into a dignity-based developmental ecosystem. At this point, the integration of

leadership, sustainable HRM, and dignity becomes not only theoretical but a framework for system design.

Intellectually, the framework also bridges three traditions that are often developed separately: strategic and sustainable HRM, humanistic and ethical leadership, and dignity scholarship. Its novelty lies not in adding one domain to another, but in reading all three as an integrative paradigm. In this sense, the contribution of this review extends beyond literature synthesis toward a framework for future theory building.

The framework also addresses the research gaps identified earlier. It responds to conceptual fragmentation through an integrative model, addresses the weak operationalization of dignity through an explanatory structure, and offers a conceptual design for educational counseling systems. It therefore functions not merely as a summary of findings, but as a theoretical proposition emerging from synthesis.

Read alongside humanistic management and sustainability scholarship, the framework also reflects a broader transition from instrumental organizing toward flourishing-based organizing (Maak & Pless, 2006; Collings et al., 2019; Ren et al., 2023). In this perspective, dignity is not simply a new research theme, but a candidate paradigm for organizational and educational development.

Overall, five propositions emerge. First, leadership functions as relational infrastructure for dignity-supportive systems. Second, sustainable HRM serves as a developmental architecture that mediates the paradigmatic transition. Third, human dignity serves as the organizing principle that integrates relationships and systems. Fourth, educational counseling systems represent a strategic locus for applying dignity-based organizing. Fifth, the movement from human resources to human dignity represents a paradigmatic shift rather than a conceptual extension.

DISCUSSION

Reframing Leadership and Sustainable HRM Through Human Dignity

The findings suggest that the central contribution of recent developments in leadership and sustainable human resource management lies not in the proliferation of new models, but in a deeper shift in the logic through which human beings are understood in organizations. Rather than representing only thematic evolution, this shift is better understood as a paradigmatic reframing from performative and resource-based assumptions toward human dignity-centered organizing.

Within leadership scholarship, this transformation is reflected in a move from influence for effectiveness toward relational conditions that enable flourishing. While servant, ethical, and sustainable leadership have challenged control-oriented paradigms for some time (Eva et al., 2019; Iqbal & Piwovar-Sulej, 2022), this review suggests a stronger proposition: leadership is increasingly understood as relational infrastructure that enables recognition, agency, and human development. This extends relational leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, 2006) by suggesting that relationality itself requires a normative orientation, here provided by dignity. The implication is a shift from leadership for performance toward leadership for flourishing.

A comparable transformation appears in sustainable HRM. Although the field has moved beyond strategic HRM toward more human-centered approaches (Ehnert, 2009; Kramar, 2014; Ren et al., 2023), the synthesis suggests a more fundamental reconceptualization of sustainable HRM as human development architecture supporting capability, well-being, sustainable employability, and flourishing (Piwovar-Sulej, 2021; McCartney et al., 2026). Sustainability, in this reading, is no longer defined primarily by organizational endurance but by the system's capacity to support human flourishing.

Within this configuration, dignity is not simply an ethical complement to sustainability, but a principle that redefines sustainability itself. This resonates with humanistic management theory (Pirson et al., 2016) while extending it by positioning dignity as an integrative logic that reconstructs the relationship between leadership and sustainable HRM.

Taken together, the synthesis suggests a reframing of four foundational assumptions. Leadership shifts from an influence mechanism to a flourishing, enabling relational infrastructure. HRM shifts from resource optimization to developmental architecture. Sustainability shifts from institutional endurance to flourishing-oriented sustainability. Human value shifts from instrumental to intrinsic. Viewed through the capability approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011), the significance of these shifts lies in designing systems that expand substantive human freedoms rather than merely managing resources.

This also reverses a longstanding question in organization theory. Rather than asking how people support organizational goals, the question becomes how organizations are designed to support human development. This reversal captures the essence of the logic of human dignity emerging from this review.

The novelty of this article lies precisely here. It does not merely connect leadership and sustainable HRM through dignity; it also proposes dignity as a lens for reinterpreting both. In doing so, dignity moves from ethical supplement to organizing principle of sustainability.

Overall, three propositions emerge. First, leadership is reframed as flourishing, enabling relational infrastructure. Second, sustainable HRM is reconceptualized as human development architecture. Third, human dignity is positioned as an organizing principle of sustainability. Together, these propositions suggest not simply an extension of existing theory but the emergence of a human dignity-centered organizing paradigm.

Theoretical and System Implications for Educational Counseling Transformation

The logical implication of the shift from human resource logic to human dignity logic is not merely a revision of organizational theory but a reconceptualization of educational counseling systems within the same paradigm. In this perspective, counseling systems can no longer be understood solely as support services, but as developmental ecosystems designed to sustain flourishing, justice, and dignity. This reading extends scholarship emphasizing educational organizations as developmental systems rather than administrative structures alone (Day et al., 2014; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005), while resonating with counseling frameworks that position leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change as core foundations of practice (American School Counselor Association, 2019).

A first theoretical implication concerns the reframing of educational counseling through relational leadership. The synthesis suggests that trust, empowerment, stewardship, and ethical responsibility should not be viewed simply as leadership qualities, but as conditions that make recognition, agency, and dignity possible (Maak & Pless, 2006; Ciulla, 2020; Eva et al., 2019; Iqbal & Piwovar-Sulej, 2022; Asfahani, 2023; Syamsir et al., 2025; Wakhid et al., 2026). This expands educational leadership beyond effectiveness-oriented assumptions and positions leadership as developmental stewardship for flourishing.

A second implication concerns the role of sustainable HRM in educational systems. Rather than functioning merely as support administration, sustainable HRM can be interpreted as a human development architecture that institutionalizes wellbeing, capability development, and sustainable employability (Collings et al., 2019; Ren et al., 2023; Piwovar-Sulej, 2021; Mariappanadar et al., 2022; Annosi et al., 2025; Kisahwan et al., 2025; McCartney et al., 2026). In this sense, counseling

transformation is linked not only to service redesign but to institutional arrangements that support sustainable human development.

A third implication concerns the normative role of human dignity itself. The review suggests dignity should not be treated as a value-added ethical layer, but as an organizing principle guiding both relational and systemic design through recognition, justice, meaningfulness, and human worth (Pirson, 2017; Ciulla, 2020; Connelly et al., 2025; Atay et al., 2025; Barabanova et al., 2025; Tabaghdehi et al., 2026; Shankar & Sarkar, 2026). This has important implications for counseling systems because it shifts attention from service effectiveness alone toward the dignity conditions institutional arrangements make possible.

These implications also intersect strongly with positive psychology and developmental perspectives that frame educational systems around wellbeing, strengths, meaning, and flourishing (Spring, 2017; Oades et al., 2017; Seligman, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Read together with the capability perspective, they suggest that the quality of counseling systems should be judged not simply by service delivery, but by how far they expand human freedoms and developmental opportunities (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011).

From this perspective, an important systems implication is a shift from service-based counseling toward ecosystem-based counseling. In conventional models, counseling often responds to developmental problems after they emerge. In a dignity-based framework, counseling becomes part of institutional architecture that proactively cultivates psychological safety, agency, well-being, and flourishing. This is precisely where leadership, sustainable HRM, and dignity intersect as system design principles rather than isolated constructs.

A further implication is that educational counseling systems may be understood as a strategic locus for translating dignity-based organizing into institutional practice. Rather than serving merely as application contexts, they may function as living sites where sustainability, human development, and dignity can be integrated and tested, both conceptually and practically (Collings et al., 2019; Ren et al., 2023; Connelly et al., 2025).

Overall, three implications emerge. First, this review extends leadership and sustainable HRM theory into a framework for transforming educational counseling. Second, it reconceptualizes counseling systems as dignity-based developmental ecosystems. Third, it positions educational counseling as a strategic arena for institutionalizing the logic of human dignity in practice.

Toward a Human Dignity-Centered Organizing Paradigm

Taken together, the synthesis and discussion suggest implications that extend beyond revising leadership and sustainable HRM theories toward the emergence of a broader organizing paradigm centered on human dignity. The central contribution of this review lies not merely in identifying new conceptual relationships but in demonstrating a deeper reorientation in the way organizations, sustainability, and human development are understood. Whereas dominant organizational assumptions have long positioned people as resources serving institutional goals, the reviewed literature increasingly points toward a paradigm in which people are understood as ends in themselves, and organizing is oriented toward flourishing, justice, and dignity (Maak & Pless, 2006; Pirson, 2017; Ciulla, 2020; Collings et al., 2019).

This emerging paradigm can be understood through the convergence of three shifts traced throughout the review. First, leadership is being reconceptualized from control-oriented influence toward stewardship, relationality, and dignity, supportive conditions for flourishing (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Eva et al., 2019; Hoch et al., 2018; Khalili, 2023; Liden, 2025; Sacavém et al., 2025; Alhnaity et al., 2026; Iqbal & Piwowar-Sulej, 2022; Asfahani, 2023; Syamsir et al., 2025; Wakhid et al., 2026). In this perspective, leadership is no longer defined

primarily by effectiveness but by its capacity to sustain recognition, agency, and shared flourishing.

Second, sustainable HRM is increasingly moving from resource optimization toward developmental architectures supporting capability, wellbeing, sustainable employability, and human sustainability (Ehnert, 2009; Kramar, 2014; Collings et al., 2019; Mariappanadar, 2020; Piwovar-Sulej, 2021; Mariappanadar et al., 2022; Shen & Benson, 2021; Duvnjak & Kohont, 2021; Khan et al., 2022; Ren et al., 2023; Annosi et al., 2025; Kisahwan et al., 2025; Connelly et al., 2025; McCartney et al., 2026). This shift reframes HRM from an administrative practice to an institutional architecture for dignified human development.

Third, dignity itself moves from an ethical supplement to an organizing principle. Rather than appearing only as a normative add-on, dignity increasingly orients relationships, institutional design, and organizational purpose through recognition, justice, meaningfulness, and human worth (Bolton, 2007; Pirson, 2017; Ciulla, 2020; Atay et al., 2025; Barabanova et al., 2025; Tabaghdehi et al., 2026; Shankar & Sarkar, 2026). In this sense, dignity does not simply evaluate organizing, but helps constitute its purpose.

What makes this convergence significant is that it shifts theorizing from improving practices within existing assumptions toward reconsidering those assumptions themselves. This resonates with humanistic management scholarship (Pirson et al., 2016), positive organizational scholarship (Oades et al., 2017), and the capability tradition, which emphasizes institutional conditions that expand substantive freedoms (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). However, the synthesis extends these perspectives by suggesting they can be read not as adjacent traditions but as components of an emerging human-dignity-centered organizing paradigm.

Importantly, this paradigm does not reject performance or sustainability concerns, but reorders them. Performance is reframed within flourishing, sustainability is grounded in human development, and organizational quality is evaluated not only by efficiency but also by the dignity conditions that institutions enable. This corresponds with the transition traced throughout the review from human resource logic toward human dignity logic (Maak & Pless, 2006; Collings et al., 2019; Ren et al., 2023; Tabaghdehi et al., 2026).

Educational counseling systems provide a particularly significant illustration of this paradigm shift. As argued throughout this review, such systems may function not merely as contexts where dignity-based organizing is applied, but as strategic sites where it can be enacted and further developed through the integration of leadership, sustainable HRM, flourishing, and human development (Day et al., 2014; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; American School Counselor Association, 2019; Spring, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Overall, three broader implications emerge. First, the review suggests a paradigmatic movement from human resource logic toward human dignity logic. Second, it positions dignity not as an ethical supplement but as a foundational organizing principle. Third, it proposes human dignity-centered organizing as a new horizon for leadership, sustainable HRM, and educational development scholarship.

Seen in this light, the future of the field may depend less on refining isolated constructs than on developing theories and systems capable of placing human dignity at the center of organizing itself.

CONCLUSION

This review demonstrates that research on leadership, sustainable human resource management, and human dignity is transitioning from human resource logic to human dignity

logic, in which dignity is no longer positioned as an auxiliary ethical value but as an organizing principle. The findings suggest that the integration of leadership and sustainable HRM gains fuller theoretical meaning when interpreted through dignity as a relational, systemic, and normative foundation.

This article makes three main contributions. First, it reframes leadership as dignity, enabling relational infrastructure. Second, it repositions sustainable HRM as human development architecture. Third, it advances human dignity-centered organizing as a new paradigmatic horizon that extends scholarship in leadership, sustainability, and organizational theory. In this sense, the review contributes not only by synthesizing evidence but also by advancing theory.

The review further suggests that this integration has important implications for transforming educational counseling systems, which should be understood not merely as support services but as dignity-based developmental ecosystems oriented toward human flourishing.

Looking forward, future research should advance three broad agendas: strengthening dignity-centered theory building, expanding empirical research focused on mechanisms and multilevel inquiry, and extending scholarship into underrepresented contexts, particularly educational counseling systems and human service organizations.

Overall, this article suggests that the frontier of the field no longer lies simply in managing people more sustainably, but in designing organizations that support dignified human development. In this sense, the future direction of scholarship moves from human resource management toward human dignity-centered organizing.

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