

Beyond Ulrich's HR Role Framework: The Case for an Ethics and Sustainability Steward

Jawad Syed, PhD

Citation: Syed, J. (2026). Beyond Ulrich's HR role framework: The case for an Ethics and Sustainability Steward. SAAM Working Paper 20261004. South Asian Academy of Management.

Abstract

Ulrich's role frameworks describe human resources' (HR) contribution through strategy, change, process expertise, employee advocacy, capability development, and leadership. Research shows that HR professionals who recognise ethical responsibilities often struggle to act on them amid competing priorities and unequal power. This conceptual paper proposes an Ethics and Sustainability Steward as an additional role in Ulrich's framework, bringing ethical reasoning, stakeholder effects, and long-term social and environmental consequences into HR decisions. The Steward combines deliberative analysis with assertive challenge when concerns meet resistance and treats certain ethical minimums as floors that wealth creation cannot override. Five groups of propositions address role designation, legitimacy, decision-maker response, durability, and decision outcomes.

Keywords: employee wellbeing; ethical stewardship; role theory; sustainable human resource management; Ulrich's HR roles

Introduction

When Ulrich published *Human Resource Champions* in 1997, human resources (HR) was still widely seen as a support function. His four-role model—strategic partner, change agent, administrative expert, employee champion—changed that. Eight years later, Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) added a fifth role and split employee advocacy from human capital development. The framework has been taught, cited, and contested ever since. But it has a blind spot that has become harder to ignore.

Both formulations contain ethical content, such as the 2005 Employee Advocate's attention to fair treatment and wellbeing, yet neither foregrounds ethical and sustainability evaluation as something HR is expected to do in every decision. The Steward adds one question: how do HR decisions affect human dignity, stakeholders, and social and environmental conditions over time? This question is important because decisions about pay, workload, performance management, and restructuring distribute opportunities and burdens. They affect health and

voice, can shift costs to communities and future workers, and may produce environmental consequences. For instance, an increasing use of algorithms, scheduling software, and sustainability targets in HR decision-making makes it more pressing to clarify who is expected to ask who bears the costs of those decisions.

Research documents a gap between recognition of ethical responsibilities and their enactment. Parkes and Davis (2013) found that HR professionals understood expectations of ethical stewardship but faced competing tensions and role perceptions that made fulfilling them difficult. In two UK hotel cases, Walker and Nickson (2025) identified socially irresponsible HR management and adverse consequences for employee wellbeing. Page and Mgwanya (2023) described toxic HR practices and cases in which HR professionals were excluded from discussions where they might have challenged leadership. Together, these studies show the implementation gap and motivate the proposal for a visible, evaluable contribution that makes ethical and sustainability concerns legitimate topics of HR work.

What the Steward adds is a place for these concerns in every role, attention to environmental systems and future generations, and ethical minimums that wealth creation cannot override. Take a hospital that introduces algorithmic scheduling with short rest between night shifts. A deliberative Steward perspective would ask whose health and care needs are represented, how night and weekend shifts are distributed, what evidence supports efficiency claims, and whether the system creates foreseeable fatigue or unequal burdens. If leaders dismiss those concerns because the change is already approved, assertive enactment would involve documenting the risks, seeking additional analysis, and raising the issue through appropriate channels. The role provides a professional vocabulary for both contributions.

The paper positions the Steward in relation to Ulrich's frameworks and ethical HR scholarship, specifies its contribution, and presents propositions for empirical study. It also considers limitations, including the possibility that the role could be adopted symbolically or co-opted into managerial control.

Ulrich's evolving framework and the implementation gap

Ulrich and Brockbank's (2005) five-role formulation gave employee advocacy a more explicit place, distinguished it from human capital development, and added HR leadership. Yet none of these roles explicitly makes ethical evaluation part of what HR is routinely expected to do, nor do these roles give prominent attention to environmental systems or future generations (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005).

The Employee Advocate role centres on the employee–organisation relationship and does not require attention to communities, future workers, or ecological systems. The HR Leader role concerns leading the HR function and its contribution to organisational value; it does not specify what conception of value should guide that contribution or whether environmental and intergenerational effects belong in it.

These gaps matter because the capacity to consider ethical questions does not ensure that they will be considered across decisions. Francis and Keegan (2006) found that business partnering dominated HR professionals' accounts of policy and practice, raising concerns

about employee wellbeing. Bennett et al. (2024) show that relationships among HR business partners, line managers, and the wider HR function can constrain role enactment. These findings locate the problem in both conceptual framing and organisational conditions.

Conceptual positioning of the Steward

Here 'role' refers to a recurring contribution within a conceptual framework, not a job title. The Steward is something HR does, repeatedly, across decisions—not a new office or compliance function.

Ethics concerns principles for judging decisions, including fairness, dignity, and rights. Social responsibility is about an organisation's effects on and obligations to stakeholders; sustainability concerns the longer-term viability of social, environmental, and organisational systems. HR decisions about work design, pay, workload, safety, development, and voice connect these domains.

The Steward has two dimensions. Deliberative enactment means identifying ethically significant issues, mapping affected stakeholders, examining how benefits and costs are distributed, weighing trade-offs, and giving reasons for recommendations. Assertive enactment occurs when resistance arises: HR professionals sustain relevant concerns, seek missing information, challenge omissions, document foreseeable harms, and escalate issues where appropriate.

When a decision-maker resists further scrutiny, assertive work keeps the concerns in the decision process. Assertion is observed only when resistance occurs; its absence in a decision with no resistance is not evidence of weak enactment.

Role theory and the mechanism of influence

Role theory explains how expectations shape behaviour by defining which contributions are considered legitimate and what conduct others expect from a person in a given role (Biddle, 1986). In organisations, perceived legitimacy affects which issues people feel entitled to raise and how colleagues respond when they do. Wellman et al. (2016) found that people expect those with less legitimate power to comply with ethically questionable practices and that moral objectors with less power face greater risk of sanction. HR professionals challenging senior leaders may often occupy this lower-power position, which gives particular importance to the legitimacy of their challenge.

The Steward works through legitimacy. If HR professionals can point to a recognised role, they have a vocabulary for raising concerns that might otherwise seem like personal objections—and a basis for asking whether those concerns were taken seriously.

Relationship to sustainable HRM, CSR, and prior stewardship research

Sustainable human resource management (HRM) broadens attention to human, social, and environmental consequences alongside organisational performance (Kramar, 2014). Common-good HRM places HRM in relation to collective social purposes and sustainability challenges (Aust et al., 2020). The Steward works at a different analytical level: these

approaches guide the design and outcomes of HR systems, while the Steward identifies a professional contribution that can be enacted in a particular decision within any of Ulrich's roles. For example, sustainable HRM can guide an organisation's approach to work design; the Steward perspective asks how HR evaluates the health, distributional, and environmental effects of a specific scheduling or restructuring decision.

The CSR–HRM literature identifies instrumental, social-integrative, and political perspectives (Voegtlin & Greenwood, 2016). The Steward draws on the social-integrative concern with affected stakeholders and the political recognition that interests can conflict, bringing those conflicts into view and making their distributional consequences examinable.

Ethical HRM scholarship has long examined the moral assumptions and consequences of people-management practices. Winstanley and Woodall (2000) outline the ethical dimension of HRM; Greenwood (2002) offers a review and conceptual analysis of ethics and HRM; and Legge (1995) examines tensions between HRM rhetoric and organisational realities. The Steward's specific contribution is its location within Ulrich's role framework and its emphasis on cross-role, decision-level consideration of social and environmental effects.

Ethical stewardship also has a direct precedent. Caldwell et al. (2011) conceptualised strategic HRM as ethical stewardship: a governance model that honours obligations to multiple stakeholders while maximising long-term organisational wealth creation. Their model does not foreground environmental systems or future generations, and it does not specify ethical minimums that constrain wealth creation. The present proposal extends concern to environmental systems and future generations, treats certain ethical commitments as floors that wealth creation cannot override, and locates stewardship within Ulrich's role framework with propositions for studying its enactment.

The proposal also overlaps with professional competency frameworks. The CIPD Profession Map sets standards for ethical practice, including considering stakeholders, explaining ethical reasoning, and challenging decisions that are not ethical (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development [CIPD], n.d.-a). Its separate "Professional courage and influence" behaviour addresses speaking up, constructive challenge in the face of opposition, and skilful influence (CIPD, n.d.-b). Although these standards treat ethical challenge as a professional expectation, Parkes and Davis (2013) found that HR professionals still struggled to act on it. An explicit Ethics and Sustainability Steward role within Ulrich's framework may help address this gap. The CIPD standards are behavioural expectations for individual practitioners; the Steward is a role within a role framework, specifying what HR contributes to decisions.

Ulrich's Credible Activist and Paradox Navigator competencies also include challenging and raising difficult issues (Ulrich, Kryscynski, Brockbank, et al., 2017; Ulrich, Kryscynski, Ulrich, et al., 2017; Ulrich, 2017). These frameworks and the CIPD standards are important precedents.

Substantive minimums

The Steward's ethical analysis is pluralist but bounded. Decision-makers can draw on rights, justice, care, or other ethical traditions and explain how their principles apply. A decision can be transparent, carefully reasoned, and still cause serious harm. Procedure is not a substitute

for substance. The role is therefore bounded by commitments to human dignity, non-discrimination, fundamental labour rights, and avoidance of serious foreseeable harm. These draw on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which since 2022 includes a safe and healthy working environment (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022), and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (United Nations, 2011). Health and environmental thresholds come from applicable law and credible scientific or professional standards, which vary by jurisdiction. The Steward raises concerns about these standards and refers them to specialists; it does not certify legal or technical compliance.

Empirical grounds for the proposal

Research on wellbeing shows why employee and organisational outcomes cannot simply be assumed to align. Van de Voorde et al. (2012) found that wellbeing related to happiness and workplace relationships was generally compatible with performance, whereas health-related wellbeing could conflict with performance. Mariappanadar (2020) examined how performance-oriented HR systems can restrict employee quality of life and contribute to health harm.

Evidence also shows that HR systems can support beneficial outcomes. Lu et al. (2023) found that sustainable HRM practices were positively associated with employee resilience and work engagement. Shahzad et al. (2024), using multisource and multiwave data from 232 employee-supervisor pairs across 84 Pakistani small and medium-sized enterprises, found that ethics-oriented HRM systems related to lower deviant workplace behaviour through moral attentiveness. None of these studies tests the Steward role directly. What they show is that HR practices can help or harm—and that the difference is not automatic. Qamar et al. (2024) further show that sustainable HRM and wellbeing research remains conceptually diverse and empirically uneven.

Environmental evidence also connects sustainability to routine HR work. Dumont et al. (2017) found that green HRM practices shaped in-role and extra-role workplace green behaviour through employees' perceptions of a green psychological climate. Renwick et al. (2013) reviewed contributions of recruitment, training, performance management, and employee involvement to environmental management. This work supports the relevance of HR's environmental effects, while leaving open how ethical and sustainability considerations are integrated across the full range of HR decisions.

The Steward also responds to structural critiques of green HRM. Fadillah and Suryadi (2026) argue that green HRM can frame ecological crises as technical problems to be managed through employee behaviour while leaving wider sources of harm unexamined. The Steward asks who defined the problem, what was left out of the analysis, and who bears the costs that were externalised.

The Steward across Ulrich's roles: Conceptual model and propositions

Figure 1 summarises the proposed model. Ulrich's roles from the 1997 and 2005 formulations appear at the top, and the Steward sits beneath them, its questions reaching each role. Within

the Steward, deliberative enactment examines the decision, and assertive enactment sustains that examination when it meets resistance. Concern extends beyond current employees to communities, future workers, and environmental systems, and the whole role rests on the ethical minimums set out above. Table 1 lists the question the Steward brings to each role. It shows how the Steward carries ethical, stakeholder, and long-term social and environmental questions into each area of HR work, while the final row summarises its distinct cross-role contribution.

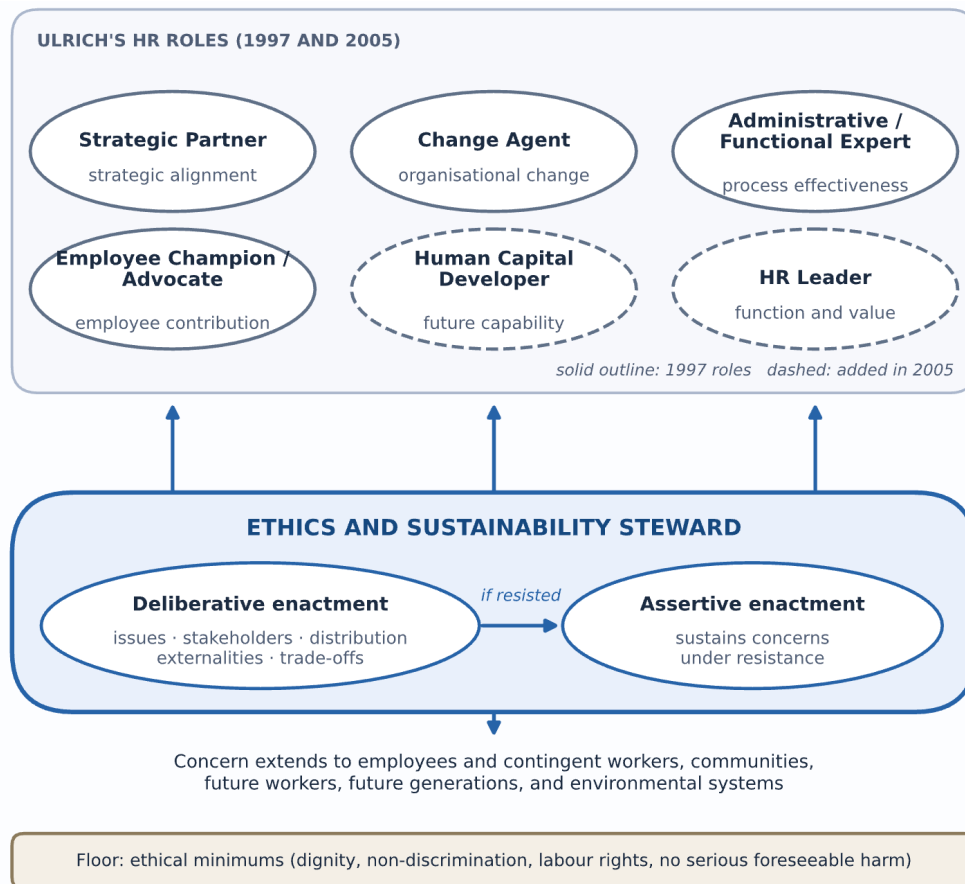


Figure 1. *The Ethics and Sustainability Steward Within Ulrich's HR Role Framework*

Note. Solid outlines mark roles in the 1997 model; dashed outlines mark roles added in 2005. The arrows show the Steward's cross-role reach across Ulrich's framework, not a reporting line.

Table 1. *The Ethics and Sustainability Steward Across Ulrich's 1997 and 2005 Role Frameworks*

Ulrich role or framework element	Primary contribution	Question brought by the Steward
Strategic partner (1997; 2005)	Aligns HR priorities and capabilities with organisational direction.	How does the chosen direction affect dignity, wellbeing, stakeholders, and long-term social or environmental conditions?

Change agent (1997)	Enables organisational adaptation and transformation.	Who benefits, who bears the costs, whose voice shapes the change, and what effects may persist?
Administrative expert (1997) / functional expert (2005)	Designs and delivers effective HR processes and expertise.	What values and assumptions are built into the process, and what effects follow for fairness, privacy, safety, and opportunity?
Employee champion (1997) / employee advocate (2005)	Attends to employee concerns, contribution, representation, and wellbeing.	How do employee interests connect with effects on other stakeholders and future conditions of work?
Human capital developer (2005)	Develops employee capability and organisational human capital.	Which capabilities are valued and developed, and how are access and costs distributed?
HR leader (2005)	Leads the HR function and its contribution to organisational value.	What conception of value guides HR, and how are social and environmental consequences considered alongside performance?
Ethics and Sustainability Steward (proposed)	Brings ethical, stakeholder, and long-term social and environmental considerations across HR's work.	What responsibilities follow from HR's effects on people and stakeholders, and how should those effects inform decisions over time?

Impact assessments, ethics committees, ombuds functions, centralised HR oversight, and employee representation can all contribute to responsible decisions. These mechanisms provide review, coordination, advice, or representation. The Steward helps HR bring their concerns into ordinary decisions, including ones where no dedicated review has been convened.

The propositions treat role designation, decision-level enactment, and outcomes as related but separate concepts. They predict that designation can shape expectations about what HR is responsible for raising and whether decision-makers regard that contribution as legitimate. Perceived legitimacy can influence whether HR raises concerns; access to information and decision forums can strengthen or weaken that pathway.

Deliberative enactment can be assessed from decision records for stakeholder identification, distributional analysis, attention to longer-term effects, trade-off recognition, and reasons informing recommendations. Assertive enactment is assessed where resistance occurs and concerns whether HR sustains, documents, or escalates a challenge before the final decision. It is measured separately from the subsequent selection of a mitigating alternative. Future studies can test whether these measures are distinguishable from employee advocacy, ethical climate, CSR orientation, sustainable HRM, and Credible Activism.

The propositions are organised into five groups.

Group 1: Role designation and framing

Proposition 1a. When the same guidance about deliberative activities, ethical challenge, and escalation is framed as an expected professional role contribution, HR professionals will demonstrate greater assertive enactment under resistance than when that guidance is framed as a decision procedure or as a general organisational value.

In a scenario study, the three conditions would contain identical substantive guidance; only the framing would differ. The general-values condition presents the same guidance as an organisational value statement rather than as a role expectation or procedure. Manipulation checks would establish whether participants understood the assigned framing.

Group 2: Legitimacy and decision access

Proposition 2a. Role designation will be associated with greater perceived legitimacy of ethical and sustainability-oriented HR challenge, which in turn will be associated with greater assertive enactment under resistance.

Proposition 2b. The indirect association between role designation and assertive enactment through perceived legitimacy will be stronger when HR has access to relevant information and decision-making forums than when that access is restricted.

Proposition 2b is a moderated mediation hypothesis: decision access conditions the indirect relationship through legitimacy. Experiments can manipulate access in a scenario; field studies can measure it as an organisational condition.

Group 3: Decision-maker response

Proposition 3. Decision-makers receiving an ethical or sustainability-oriented challenge framed as Steward enactment should be more likely to revise the proposal than decision-makers receiving the same challenge framed as procedural advice.

Proposal revision is the primary outcome. Retaining the concern in decision criteria and requesting further analysis are secondary outcomes. Revisions can be coded according to whether they address the substance of the concern, not merely whether the document changed. Research would include decision-makers as participants, not only HR professionals.

Group 4: Durability

Proposition 4. Following a sustained intervention, HR functions in which stewardship activities are repeatedly framed and reinforced as an expected professional role contribution will demonstrate more stable deliberative and assertive enactment across successive decisions than comparable functions receiving the same activities framed as procedural guidance.

A feasible test would use staggered rollout across HR functions or professional groups. Training hours, communications, coaching, and review frequency would be matched or

recorded so that any observed effect is not simply greater attention to the role-designation group. Stability can be assessed across decisions and after active reinforcement ends.

Group 5: Decision processes under trade-offs and resistance

Proposition 5a. When two HR policy alternatives are comparable in expected short-term performance and feasibility, greater deliberative enactment will be associated with a higher likelihood of selecting the alternative with lower anticipated employee health harm or environmental impact. Health and environmental impacts would be assessed separately using predefined criteria.

Proposition 5b. When short-term performance goals conflict with employee health or wellbeing, greater deliberative enactment will be associated with greater consideration of employee input. Consideration means that input is recorded, evaluated, and responded to, rather than merely invited.

Proposition 5c. When short-term performance goals conflict with employee health or wellbeing, greater deliberative enactment will be associated with consideration of a wider range of alternatives that mitigate anticipated harm.

Proposition 5d. Where resistance to ethical or sustainability concerns occurs, higher assertive enactment will be associated with greater adoption of harm-mitigating alternatives beyond the contribution of deliberative enactment, controlling for the intensity of resistance.

Proposition 5e. The association between deliberative enactment and adoption of harm-mitigating alternatives will be stronger when HR participates in setting decision criteria, identifying affected stakeholders, and generating initial options than when HR is involved only in evaluating predetermined options or offering implementation advice.

Assertive behaviour would be measured before the final decision, with adoption assessed afterwards. Proposition 5d tests an incremental association, not a pure causal effect, because HR may assert more when it expects success. Experiments that vary resistance can provide stronger causal evidence.

Limitations and future research

The studies cited here show that the problem is real, but they examine particular organisations or practice bundles, not the proposed role, so they cannot show that designation changes practice. The propositions are a research agenda for testing that claim.

Role designation may become symbolic. A title or checklist can produce visible documentation without changing decisions, and a new expectation could become a mechanism of managerial control over HR professionals. Future research may examine whether the role enables challenge or pressures practitioners to conform to organisational interpretations of stewardship, and who bears the career risk of raising concerns. The CIPD's Fellow-level standard calls for creating an environment that supports safe challenge and speaking up at all levels (CIPD, n.d.-b); this is a professional expectation, not evidence that such protection is consistently available in practice.

The proposed construct will need careful measurement. Deliberative and assertive enactment may correlate with employee advocacy, ethical climate, sustainable HRM, or Credible Activism. Whether they are distinct depends on whether the Steward's environmental and intergenerational scope and ethical minimums add explanatory value. A validated measure of Credible Activism may not exist for these purposes, so testing domain-specificity may first require measure development. Decision records can also capture performative language rather than genuine deliberation; comparisons with interviews, observed decisions, and subsequent outcomes can help identify that gap.

The substantive minimums are a starting point. Legal standards and health and environmental thresholds vary by jurisdiction and issue, and national and cultural settings shape which stakeholders are recognised, how trade-offs are framed, and what challenge is considered legitimate. Future work should set operational criteria for different decisions and test the role across institutional settings.

Conclusion

Ulrich's role frameworks remain valuable accounts of what HR contributes. What it lacks is a role for asking who pays the price of HR decisions—and for keeping that question alive when the answer is inconvenient. The Ethics and Sustainability Steward is an attempt to name that role. It is helpful for examining how HR decisions affect people, stakeholders, and social and environmental conditions over time, and keeping those concerns in the decision when they meet resistance.

The evidence is mixed: HR systems can build resilience, engagement, and ethical attentiveness—and they can produce health costs and socially irresponsible outcomes. The Steward gives that record a place in Ulrich's framework and a set of testable propositions. It treats ethical and sustainability judgement as part of what HR is professionally expected to do—and makes that expectation something researchers can test.

Disclosure: The author used AI to critique drafts, suggest structure and wording edits. The author developed the argument and takes responsibility for the content.

References

- Aust, I., Matthews, B., & Muller-Camen, M. (2020). Common good HRM: A paradigm shift in sustainable HRM? *Human Resource Management Review*, 30(3), Article 100705. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2019.100705>
- Bennett, H., McCracken, M., O'Kane, P., & Brown, T. (2024). The elusiveness of strategic HR partnering: Using paradox theory to understand tensions surrounding the HR business partnering role. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 34(4), 942–959. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12538>
- Biddle, B. J. (1986). Recent developments in role theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 12, 67–92. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.12.080186.000435>
- Caldwell, C., Truong, D. X., Linh, P. T., & Tuan, A. (2011). Strategic human resource management as ethical stewardship. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 98(1), 171–182. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-010-0541-y>

- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. (n.d.-a). *Ethical practice*. Retrieved October 3, 2026, from <https://www.cipd.org/uk/the-people-profession/the-profession-map/explore-the-profession-map/core-behaviours/ethical-practice/>
- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. (n.d.-b). *Professional courage and influence*. Retrieved October 3, 2026, from <https://www.cipd.org/uk/the-people-profession/the-profession-map/explore-the-profession-map/core-behaviours/professional-courage-influence/>
- Dumont, J., Shen, J., & Deng, X. (2017). Effects of green HRM practices on employee workplace green behavior: The role of psychological green climate and employee green values. *Human Resource Management*, 56(4), 613–627. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21792>
- Fadillah, M. I., & Suryadi, E. (2026). Green HRM as ideological fantasy: Unmasking sustainability under capitalism. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-09-2025-5931>
- Francis, H., & Keegan, A. (2006). The changing face of HRM: In search of balance. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 16(3), 231–249. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-8583.2006.00016.x>
- Greenwood, M. R. (2002). Ethics and HRM: A review and conceptual analysis. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 36(3), 261–278. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1014090411946>
- International Labour Organization. (2022). *ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*. <https://www.ilo.org/ilo-declaration-fundamental-principles-and-rights-work>
- Kramar, R. (2014). Beyond strategic human resource management: Is sustainable human resource management the next approach? *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 25(8), 1069–1089. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2013.816863>
- Legge, K. (1995). *Human resource management: Rhetorics and realities*. Macmillan.
- Lu, Y., Zhang, M. M., Yang, M. M., & Wang, Y. (2023). Sustainable human resource management practices, employee resilience, and employee outcomes: Toward common good values. *Human Resource Management*, 62(3), 331–353. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22153>
- Mariappanadar, S. (2020). Do HRM systems impose restrictions on employee quality of life? Evidence from a sustainable HRM perspective. *Journal of Business Research*, 118, 38–48. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.06.039>
- Page, T., & Mgwenya, J. J. (2023). Conformer or colluder? The human resource professional's contribution to toxic leadership. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 21, Article a2123. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v21i0.2123>
- Parkes, C., & Davis, A. J. (2013). Ethics and social responsibility—Do HR professionals have the “courage to challenge” or are they set to be permanent “bystanders”? *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24(12), 2411–2434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2013.781437>
- Qamar, F., Afshan, G., & Rana, S. A. (2024). Sustainable HRM and well-being: Systematic review and future research agenda. *Management Review Quarterly*, 74(4), 2289–2339. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-023-00360-6>
- Renwick, D. W. S., Redman, T., & Maguire, S. (2013). Green human resource management: A review and research agenda. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 15(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2011.00328.x>

- Shahzad, K., Hong, Y., Muller, A., DeSisto, M., & Rizvi, F. (2024). An investigation of the relationship between ethics-oriented HRM systems, moral attentiveness, and deviant workplace behavior. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 192(3), 591–608. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-023-05513-x>
- Ulrich, D. (1997). *Human resource champions: The next agenda for adding value and delivering results*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Ulrich, D. (2017, May 2). *Paradox navigator: 10 skills every HR professional needs to deliver business results*. The RBL Group. <https://www.rbl.net/insights/articles/10-skills-hr-pros-need-to-navigate-paradox-that-delivers-business-results>
- Ulrich, D., & Brockbank, W. (2005). *The HR value proposition*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Ulrich, D., Kryscynski, D., Brockbank, W., & Ulrich, M. (2017). *Victory through organization: Why the war for talent is failing your company and what you can do about it*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Ulrich, D., Kryscynski, D., Ulrich, M., & Brockbank, W. (2017). Competencies for HR professionals who deliver outcomes. *Employment Relations Today*, 44(2), 37–44. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ert.21623>
- United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>
- United Nations. (2011). *Guiding principles on business and human rights*. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_en.pdf
- Van de Voorde, K., Paauwe, J., & van Veldhoven, M. (2012). Employee well-being and the HRM–organizational performance relationship: A review of quantitative studies. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 14(4), 391–407. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2011.00322.x>
- Voegtlin, C., & Greenwood, M. (2016). Corporate social responsibility and human resource management: A systematic review and conceptual analysis. *Human Resource Management Review*, 26(3), 181–197. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2015.12.003>
- Walker, V., & Nickson, D. (2025). Socially irresponsible HRM: Findings from the UK hotel sector. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 197(3), 581–595. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-024-05761-5>
- Wellman, N., Mayer, D. M., Ong, M., & DeRue, D. S. (2016). When are do-gooders treated badly? Legitimate power, role expectations, and reactions to moral objection in organizations. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 101(6), 793–814. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000094>
- Winstanley, D., & Woodall, J. (2000). The ethical dimension of human resource management. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 10(2), 5–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-8583.2000.tb00017.x>

Indicative Discussion Questions

1. Why might Ethics and Sustainability Stewardship (ESS) need explicit attention alongside Ulrich's HR roles?
2. Can existing HR roles reliably keep employee wellbeing and long-term social and environmental effects in view when these conflict with short-term performance?
3. What could an ESS add to HR decision-making—and what might prevent the role from making a difference?
4. How could an organisation tell whether ESS is shaping decisions or is merely a stated value?