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Strategic Human Resource Management for Workforce Sustainability in the GCC Region

Raed Atef ^{1,*}

¹ *Independent, Ramallah, Palestine*

*Corresponding author. Email: raed.drra@gmail.com

Received: 30 June 2026, Revised: 10 July 2026; Accepted: 15 July 2026, Published: 21 July 2026

Abstract

This article examines strategic International Human Resource Management (IHRM) and its role in fostering workforce sustainability within corporations operating in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). It aims to explore how cultural intelligence, employee well-being, and organizational resilience are embedded in HRM practices to support sustainable workforce development in a diverse and culturally complex context. The study is guided by four research questions addressing how strategic IHRM contributes to workforce sustainability in the GCC, the role of cultural intelligence in managing multicultural employees, the influence of employee well-being on organizational outcomes, and the ways organizations build resilience through HRM practices. A qualitative exploratory design is adopted, drawing on secondary data from academic literature, organizational reports, and illustrative case studies. Thematic analysis is applied to identify patterns and develop an integrated conceptual understanding. Findings indicate that strategic HRM practices, including talent development, continuous learning, and adaptive performance management, significantly enhance workforce sustainability. Cultural intelligence is identified as a key capability that improves communication, collaboration, and integration between expatriate and local employees. Employee well-being strengthens engagement, retention, and organizational commitment, while organizational resilience is reinforced through leadership development and flexible HR systems. Theoretically, the study integrates Sustainable HRM Theory, Cultural Intelligence Theory, and Organizational Resilience Theory to explain how HRM collectively supports sustainable workforce outcomes in the GCC. The study suggests that organizations must adopt culturally responsive, employee-centered, and adaptive HR strategies to remain competitive in dynamic environments. Limitations include reliance on secondary data and restricted generalizability beyond the GCC context. Future research should incorporate primary data, comparative regional studies, and longitudinal designs to deepen understanding of sustainable HRM in multicultural environments.

Keywords: Strategic Human Resource Management, Workforce Sustainability, Cultural Intelligence, Employee Well-being, Organizational Resilience.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid transformation of the global business environment has significantly elevated the strategic importance of international human resource management (IHRM), positioning it as a key driver of organizational sustainability and long-term competitiveness. Organizations operating across borders are now expected not only to attract and retain talent but also to build resilient workforces capable of responding effectively to economic, technological, and social change. As globalization reshapes labour markets, corporations increasingly emphasize that workforce sustainability relies on HR practices that enhance employee well-being, adaptability, and cultural inclusiveness, rather than prioritizing efficiency alone [1].

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) represents one of the most culturally diverse employment contexts globally, where organizations manage employees from varied national, linguistic, and professional

backgrounds. While this diversity fosters innovation, knowledge exchange, and growth, it also introduces significant challenges related to communication, leadership, engagement, and workforce integration [2]. As a result, HR professionals in the GCC must align global HR strategies with local cultural norms, Islamic values, and national workforce development priorities, requiring a more culturally intelligent and context-sensitive approach to human capital management [3]. Workforce sustainability has therefore become a major priority for organizations and policymakers. Sustainable HRM goes beyond traditional personnel management by focusing on long-term employee development, supportive work environments, continuous learning, psychological well-being, and organizational resilience. It reframes employees as strategic assets whose development contributes to both organizational success and wider societal progress [4]. This is particularly relevant in the GCC, where economic diversification agendas and labour reforms require organizations to attract, develop, and retain diverse talent effectively.

Cultural intelligence has emerged as a critical competency in this context. HR professionals and leaders must understand cultural differences, manage cross-cultural interactions, and foster inclusive workplaces. In the GCC, this includes sensitivity to Islamic traditions, local customs, and institutional practices while maintaining global HR standards [5]. Strong cultural intelligence enhances collaboration, reduces conflict, and strengthens employee commitment, ultimately supporting sustainable performance [6]. Employee well-being is another essential dimension of strategic IHRM. Factors such as job satisfaction, health, work-life balance, and psychological safety directly affect productivity, innovation, and resilience. In multicultural GCC workplaces, well-being-focused HR policies improve retention, engagement, and cooperation across diverse employee groups [7].

At the organizational level, resilience reflects the capacity to adapt to disruption, uncertainty, and change. HRM contributes to resilience through leadership development, continuous learning, employee engagement, and organizational flexibility. In the GCC, integrating cultural intelligence, well-being, and sustainable HR practices strengthens resilience while supporting national transformation agendas [8]. Despite increasing scholarly attention to sustainable HRM, cultural intelligence, and resilience, limited research has explored their interconnection within the GCC context. Existing studies largely focus on Western environments, offering limited applicability to regions shaped by strong cultural and religious frameworks and highly diverse labour markets [9]. This gap underscores the need for context-specific research examining how IHRM can enhance workforce sustainability while aligning with local institutional realities. Accordingly, this article explores the role of IHRM in promoting workforce sustainability through the integration of cultural intelligence, employee well-being, and organizational resilience in the GCC. It synthesizes existing literature and empirical evidence to develop a conceptual framework aligning global HRM practices with regional characteristics, offering insights for HR practitioners, leaders, and policymakers seeking to strengthen sustainable workforce strategies in a dynamic global economy.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The growing complexity of the global business environment has repositioned international human resource management (IHRM) from a primarily administrative function to a strategic capability that drives organizational sustainability, employee development, and long-term competitiveness. As firms expand across borders, they must manage culturally diverse workforces while adapting to rapid technological change, demographic shifts, labour mobility, and evolving employee expectations. As a result, strategic IHRM has become essential for building organizations that sustain high levels of performance, adaptability, and resilience [10]. Current HRM scholarship highlights that long-term organizational success depends not only on talent acquisition but also on employee well-being, cultural inclusion, continuous learning, and organizational flexibility [11]. Although IHRM has been widely studied, much of the literature remains rooted in Western contexts and institutional settings [12]. Fewer studies have examined how strategic HRM supports workforce sustainability in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), where organizations operate in culturally diverse environments shaped by expatriate-dominant labour markets, Islamic values, strong national traditions, and government-led localization policies [13]. These conditions require HR systems that

simultaneously enhance performance, support employee well-being, and enable effective cross-cultural integration [14]. Accordingly, this review focuses on four interrelated themes: strategic IHRM and workforce sustainability; cultural intelligence and multicultural workforce management; employee well-being and organizational resilience; and strategic HRM practices in the GCC. It concludes by presenting an integrated framework grounded in Sustainable HRM Theory, Cultural Intelligence Theory, and Organizational Resilience Theory.

2.1. Strategic IHRM and Workforce Sustainability

Strategic IHRM aligns human resource practices with long-term organizational goals, moving beyond administrative tasks such as recruitment and appraisal to focus on human capital development, innovation, and adaptability [15]. Sustainable HRM emphasizes balancing organizational performance with employee development, engagement, and well-being [16]. Key practices include fair recruitment, continuous learning, diversity management, equitable rewards, and employee engagement [17]. These practices strengthen commitment, reduce turnover, enhance learning, and improve organizational performance. CSR-related HR initiatives further reinforce sustainability by building trust and organizational legitimacy [18]. In the GCC, sustainability is particularly important due to workforce localization policies, economic diversification agendas, and intense competition for skilled labour [19].

2.2. Cultural Intelligence and Multicultural Workforce Management

Cultural intelligence is a critical capability for managing diverse workforces, enabling HR professionals to interpret and respond effectively to cultural differences. It improves communication, conflict management, inclusion, and employee integration [13]. Cultural dimensions such as power distance and collectivism strongly influence leadership expectations and workplace behaviour, particularly in GCC contexts where hierarchical structures and indirect communication are common [20]. Cross-cultural management frameworks further emphasize the importance of adapting HR systems to differing communication and relationship styles [21]. Organizations increasingly invest in intercultural training, global leadership development, and expatriate preparation to enhance cross-cultural effectiveness [22]. In the GCC, cultural intelligence also requires sensitivity to Islamic values, local customs, and national employment systems [23].

2.3. Employee Well-being and Organizational Resilience

Employee well-being is a central component of sustainable HRM, directly influencing productivity, engagement, and retention [24]. Closely linked is organizational resilience, defined as the ability to anticipate, adapt to, and recover from disruption. HRM strengthens resilience through leadership development, continuous learning, engagement, and talent management systems [25]. CSR-aligned HR practices further enhance both well-being and resilience by promoting supportive and ethical work environments [18].

2.4. Strategic HRM Practices in the GCC

The GCC presents a highly diverse labour environment where expatriates and nationals work together under evolving localization policies such as Saudization and Emiratization [26]. Recruitment increasingly prioritizes cultural adaptability alongside technical skills [27], while compensation systems must balance equity across diverse employee groups [28]. Performance management is also becoming more culturally responsive, reflecting hierarchical norms and communication styles [29]. At a strategic level, organizations are investing in learning, leadership development, and cultural intelligence to enhance sustainability and resilience while supporting national development objectives [30].

2.5. Theoretical Framework

This article adopts an integrated theoretical framework consisting of Sustainable Human Resource Management Theory, Cultural Intelligence Theory, and Organizational Resilience Theory to explain how strategic IHRM contributes to workforce sustainability within the GCC. Firstly, Sustainable Human Resource Management Theory emphasizes the long-term development of human capital by integrating employee well-being, continuous learning, workforce capability, organizational performance, and responsible employment

practices into HR strategy. Rather than focusing solely on short-term organizational outcomes, sustainable HRM seeks to create employment systems that simultaneously benefit employees, organizations, and society [31]. Within the GCC, this perspective supports HR strategies that balance organizational competitiveness with national workforce development priorities, employee well-being, and culturally appropriate employment practices [32].

Secondly, Cultural Intelligence Theory explains how individuals and organizations develop the knowledge, behavioural flexibility, and adaptive capabilities necessary to function effectively within multicultural environments. Cultural intelligence enables HR professionals and organizational leaders to design inclusive HR policies, strengthen cross-cultural collaboration, reduce workplace conflict, and improve expatriate adjustment while respecting local cultural and religious values [33]. Thirdly, Organizational Resilience Theory focuses on the ability of organizations to anticipate change, adapt to uncertainty, and sustain performance during periods of disruption. Human resource management contributes directly to organizational resilience by developing employee capabilities, promoting continuous learning, encouraging innovation, and strengthening workforce engagement. Resilient organizations are therefore better equipped to respond to changing labour markets, technological transformation, and evolving business environments [34]. The integration of these three theoretical perspectives provides a comprehensive framework for understanding strategic IHRM in the GCC. Sustainable HRM provides the foundation for long-term workforce development. Cultural Intelligence Theory explains how organizations manage multicultural employees. Organizational Resilience Theory shows how strategic HR practices improve adaptability and competitiveness. Together, these theories support an integrated model. This model shows that strategic HRM practices improve employee well-being, develop culturally intelligent organizations, support workforce sustainability, and strengthen organizational resilience within the unique GCC institutional and cultural context. [35]. Figure 1 presents the integrated theoretical framework underpinning this study, illustrating how three complementary theories collectively explain strategic IHRM and workforce sustainability in the GCC.

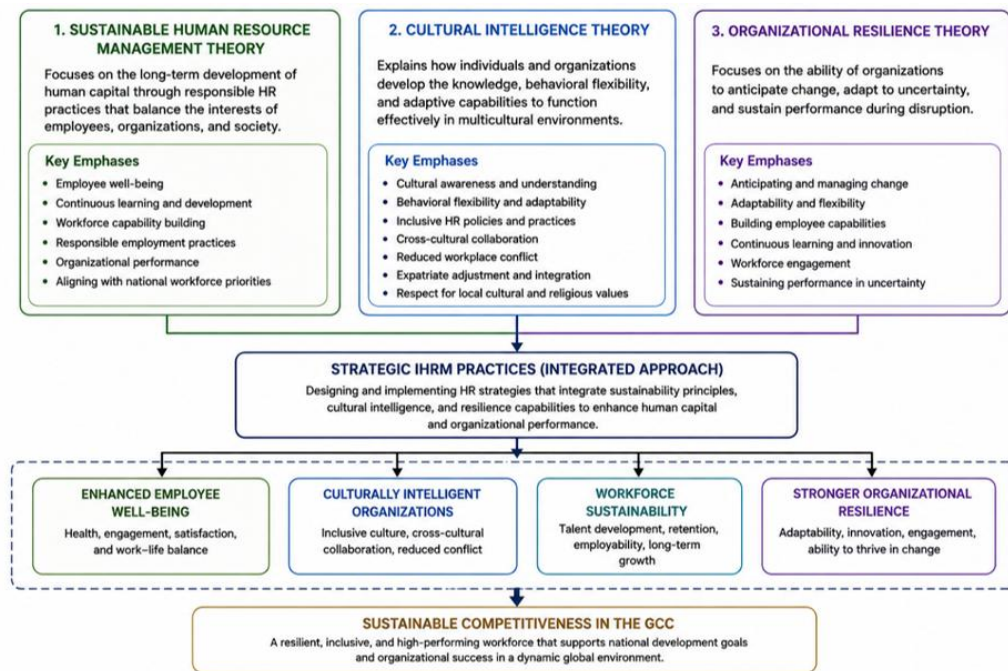


Figure 1. Integrated Theoretical Framework

Source: author own work

2.6. Literature Gaps and Research Implications

Although extensive research has explored international HRM, sustainable HRM, employee well-being, and cross-cultural management, limited attention has been given to how these dimensions interact within the GCC context. Much of the existing literature remains grounded in Western institutional environments, offering limited applicability to settings shaped by Islamic values, expatriate-dominated workforces, and government-led localization policies [36]. This article addresses these gaps by examining how strategic IHRM contributes to workforce sustainability and organizational resilience within the GCC. It further investigates the role of cultural intelligence in enhancing employee well-being and supporting effective management of multicultural workforces. In addition, it develops an integrated theoretical framework that brings together Sustainable HRM Theory, Cultural Intelligence Theory, and Organizational Resilience Theory to explain workforce sustainability in complex organizational settings. The study also provides practical insights for HR professionals and policymakers aimed at strengthening resilient and sustainable workforce practices in multicultural organizations. Overall, the literature indicates that workforce sustainability depends on the coordinated integration of employee development, cultural intelligence, adaptive organizational systems, and sustainable HRM practices. By focusing on these interrelationships within the GCC, this paper contributes to both theoretical advancement and practical application, offering a structured framework for managing diverse workforces while promoting long-term organizational effectiveness and sustainable economic progress.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Aim and Design

The primary aim of this paper is to examine how strategic International Human Resource Management (IHRM) contributes to workforce sustainability in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) by integrating cultural intelligence, employee well-being, and organizational resilience into human resource practices. Specifically, it seeks to explore how multinational organizations operating in culturally diverse environments develop sustainable HR strategies that simultaneously support organizational performance, workforce engagement, and long-term adaptability. To achieve this objective, the study adopts a qualitative exploratory research design, which is particularly appropriate for investigating complex organizational phenomena involving multiple contextual, cultural, and institutional factors [37]. Workforce sustainability and strategic IHRM involve dynamic interactions between organizational policies, cultural diversity, employee experiences, and environmental influences that cannot be adequately understood through quantitative indicators alone. The qualitative approach therefore provides the flexibility to explore these relationships within the unique socio-cultural and economic context of the GCC [38]. The article relies primarily on secondary qualitative evidence, combining an extensive review of scholarly literature with organizational documents and illustrative case studies. This design enables the development of an integrated conceptual understanding of how sustainable HRM practices, cultural intelligence, and organizational resilience contribute to effective workforce management in multinational organizations operating across the GCC.

3.2. Data Sources and Collection Procedures

This study adopts a qualitative research approach based exclusively on secondary data to examine how strategic international human resource management (IHRM) supports workforce sustainability in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Data are obtained from two complementary sources. First, a review of peer-reviewed articles, scholarly books, conference papers, and reports examines strategic IHRM, sustainable HRM, cultural intelligence, organizational resilience, employee well-being, and multicultural workforce management in GCC contexts. Second, organizational documents, such as sustainability reports, HR policies, diversity strategies, talent frameworks, governance reports, and annual reports, are analyzed to understand the implementation of sustainable HR practices. Data are collected through a structured document review and analysed using thematic analysis. Evidence is systematically coded and compared to identify recurring themes, including employee well-being, cultural intelligence, workforce localization, leadership development, continuous learning, talent retention, employee engagement, and organizational resilience. This

integrated analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of strategic IHRM practices that promote workforce sustainability across GCC organizations.

3.3. Analytical Approach and Framework Development

The article employs thematic analysis as the primary analytical technique for synthesizing evidence obtained from the literature [39]. Thematic analysis is particularly appropriate because it facilitates the identification of recurring patterns across diverse qualitative sources while allowing theoretical concepts to emerge through systematic interpretation. The analytical process follows several stages. Initially, the collected literature and organizational documents are reviewed to develop familiarity with the data. Relevant information is subsequently coded according to concepts associated with sustainable workforce management, cultural intelligence, employee well-being, organizational resilience, leadership development, employee engagement, talent management, and multicultural HR practices. Similar codes are then grouped into broader thematic categories that reflect the strategic dimensions of workforce sustainability within the GCC. The findings obtained through thematic analysis are subsequently synthesized to develop an integrated conceptual framework that explains the relationships among strategic international human resource management, cultural intelligence, employee well-being, organizational resilience, and sustainable workforce development.

The proposed framework consists of four interconnected dimensions:

- Strategic Sustainable HRM, emphasizing talent development, workforce capability, employee engagement, continuous learning, and long-term organizational performance.
- Cultural Intelligence, focusing on intercultural competence, cross-cultural communication, inclusive leadership, and culturally responsive HR policies that facilitate effective management of multicultural employees.
- Employee Well-being, highlighting psychological well-being, work-life balance, employee support systems, professional development, and healthy workplace environments that strengthen employee commitment and retention.
- Organizational Resilience, emphasizing adaptive leadership, workforce flexibility, organizational learning, innovation, and strategic preparedness that enable organizations to respond effectively to changing business environments.

Together, these dimensions provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how strategic IHRM contributes to workforce sustainability within multinational organizations operating across the GCC. The framework bridges theoretical perspectives with practical HR applications, offering guidance for HR professionals seeking to develop resilient, culturally intelligent, and sustainable organizations.

3.4. Ethical Considerations, Limitations, and Justification

This study relies on secondary qualitative data, ensuring ethical research through the use of credible peer-reviewed sources and reputable organizational reports, with proper citation to maintain transparency and avoid bias. No primary data collection is involved, so issues of consent and privacy do not apply. All information is analysed from publicly available documents at an aggregate level. However, limitations include the lack of first-hand perspectives, context-specific findings limited to the GCC, and dependence on available organizational data. Despite these constraints, the methodology supports a strong exploratory analysis of sustainable HRM and organizational resilience.

4. RESULTS

The thematic analysis of secondary literature identified four interrelated themes that explain how strategic International Human Resource Management (IHRM) contributes to workforce sustainability. Rather than focusing solely on operational HR activities, the findings demonstrate that organizations increasingly view human resource management as a strategic function that supports employee development, organizational adaptability, cross-cultural collaboration, and long-term competitiveness. The four themes

emerging from the analysis include: (1) strategic sustainable HRM practices, (2) cultural intelligence and multicultural workforce integration, (3) employee well-being as a driver of workforce sustainability, and (4) organizational resilience through strategic HRM. Collectively, these findings reinforce the integrated theoretical framework developed in this article and illustrate how strategic IHRM strengthens sustainable workforce management within the unique institutional and cultural environment of the GCC [40].

4.1. Strategic Sustainable HRM Practices in the GCC

The analysis indicates that multinational organizations operating in the GCC increasingly position human resource management as a strategic contributor to organizational sustainability rather than solely an administrative function. Sustainable HRM practices extend beyond traditional recruitment and personnel administration by integrating workforce planning, talent development, employee engagement, continuous learning, and leadership development into long-term organizational strategies [41]. Recruitment and talent acquisition have evolved toward competency-based approaches that emphasize both professional expertise and cultural adaptability. Organizations increasingly recognize that successful employees require not only technical competence but also the ability to collaborate effectively within culturally diverse workplaces. Consequently, structured recruitment processes, transparent selection criteria, and competency-based interviews are used to identify individuals capable of contributing to sustainable organizational performance while integrating successfully into multicultural environments [42]. The findings also demonstrate that talent development has become a central component of workforce sustainability. Organizations invest in continuous learning opportunities, leadership development, mentoring programmes, and professional development initiatives that strengthen employee capability while supporting long-term organizational objectives. These initiatives contribute to knowledge retention, succession planning, and organizational competitiveness, particularly within labour markets characterised by high employee mobility [43].

Performance management has similarly shifted from periodic employee evaluation toward continuous performance development. Rather than focusing exclusively on measuring performance outcomes, organizations increasingly use appraisal systems to support coaching, capability development, and career progression. Within the GCC, performance management systems are adapted to respect hierarchical organisational structures and culturally appropriate communication styles while maintaining accountability and transparency [44]. Compensation and reward strategies also contribute to workforce sustainability by balancing organizational competitiveness with employee expectations. While expatriate employees frequently value financial incentives and international career opportunities, local employees often attach greater importance to job security, professional recognition, and career advancement. Strategic reward systems therefore seek to accommodate these diverse expectations while maintaining internal equity and organizational commitment [45].

4.2. Cultural Intelligence and Multicultural Workforce Integration

The second theme demonstrates that cultural intelligence has become an essential capability for organizations operating within the multicultural labour markets of the GCC. The coexistence of expatriate professionals and local employees requires HR policies that facilitate cross-cultural understanding, effective communication, and inclusive workplace practices. Organizations that invest in cultural intelligence report stronger employee collaboration, reduced workplace conflict, and improved organizational integration [46]. Recruitment and onboarding programmes increasingly incorporate cultural orientation activities designed to familiarise newly appointed expatriates with local customs, organisational expectations, Islamic values, and business etiquette. Such programmes assist employees in adapting more effectively to the regional working environment while reducing cultural misunderstandings during organisational socialisation [47]. Several corporations operating in the UAE and Qatar provide structured induction programmes covering local workplace culture, communication norms, and hierarchical relationships, thereby strengthening employee adjustment and organisational integration [48].

Training and development initiatives further reinforce cultural intelligence by providing employees and managers with opportunities to strengthen intercultural communication, conflict management, inclusive

leadership, and collaborative decision-making skills. These programmes improve expatriate adjustment while enhancing teamwork and organisational effectiveness across culturally diverse workforces [49]. The analysis also reveals that culturally responsive performance management contributes significantly to employee acceptance of organisational practices. Managers adapt communication styles, feedback mechanisms, and recognition systems to reflect local cultural expectations regarding hierarchy, respect, and interpersonal relationships. Such adaptations improve employee engagement while maintaining consistency with organisational performance objectives [50]. Furthermore, organisations increasingly recognise the importance of accommodating religious practices and local cultural traditions within workplace policies. Flexible scheduling during Ramadan, designated prayer facilities, and recognition of religious holidays contribute to employee inclusion, psychological comfort, and stronger organisational commitment. These culturally responsive practices strengthen workforce sustainability by fostering a supportive and inclusive organisational environment [51].

4.3. Employee Well-being as a Driver of Workforce Sustainability

The third theme highlights employee well-being as one of the principal foundations of sustainable workforce management. The analysis indicates that organizations increasingly acknowledge the relationship between employee well-being, engagement, productivity, and long-term organizational performance. Rather than viewing employee welfare as a standalone HR initiative, multinational organizations increasingly integrate well-being into broader strategic HRM policies that promote workforce sustainability [52]. Workforce development initiatives represent one of the most visible manifestations of this strategic orientation. Organizations invest extensively in employee training, career development, leadership preparation, mentoring, and professional growth opportunities that enhance both individual employability and organizational capability. Within the GCC, these initiatives frequently complement national workforce localization programmes, including Saudization and Emiratization, thereby supporting broader economic development objectives while strengthening organizational talent pipelines [53]. Employee participation in community engagement and organizational volunteering activities further contributes to workforce sustainability by strengthening employees' sense of purpose, organizational identification, and social responsibility. Community-oriented programmes also provide opportunities for leadership development, teamwork, and employee engagement beyond routine organizational activities [54]. Leadership emerges as another critical contributor to employee well-being. The findings indicate that organizations demonstrating strong leadership commitment to employee development, inclusion, learning, and cultural awareness create healthier organizational climates characterised by higher employee trust and stronger organizational commitment. Leadership practices that encourage collaboration, communication, and continuous development positively influence employee motivation and workforce stability [55]. Overall, organizations that invest in employee well-being report multiple strategic benefits, including higher employee satisfaction, stronger organizational commitment, improved retention, enhanced employer reputation, and increased workforce capability. These outcomes collectively strengthen workforce sustainability while improving organizational competitiveness in the increasingly dynamic labour markets of the GCC [56].

4.4. Organizational Resilience through Strategic Human Resource Management

The final theme demonstrates that strategic IHRM contributes significantly to organizational resilience by enhancing workforce adaptability, learning capability, and organizational flexibility. As organizations face rapid technological change, economic uncertainty, demographic transformation, and evolving labour market conditions, HR functions increasingly support organizational resilience through proactive workforce planning and capability development [57]. One of the primary challenges identified relates to balancing global HR standards with the cultural, legal, and institutional characteristics of GCC countries. Organizations must simultaneously respond to international corporate expectations and local employment regulations while maintaining culturally appropriate HR practices. Successfully achieving this balance requires adaptive HR strategies capable of responding to changing organizational and environmental conditions [58]. Managing a dual workforce consisting of expatriates and local nationals remains another significant challenge affecting

organizational resilience. Differences in career expectations, reward preferences, cultural values, and employment regulations require HR managers to design flexible workforce strategies capable of maintaining employee engagement while supporting organizational performance. Organizations that successfully balance this diverse workforce expectations demonstrate greater adaptability and workforce stability [59].

The analysis also reveals implementation challenges associated with translating strategic HR policies into consistent organizational practice. Although many corporations have developed comprehensive HR strategies, variations frequently occur across subsidiaries due to differences in managerial capability, organizational culture, and national regulatory environments. Continuous leadership development, managerial training, and organizational learning therefore become essential mechanisms for strengthening resilience and maintaining consistency across geographically dispersed operations [60]. Expatriate adjustment represents another important contributor to organizational resilience. Organizations providing structured relocation assistance, mentoring programmes, family support services, and intercultural development opportunities report improved expatriate adjustment, stronger organizational commitment, and lower turnover rates. Such practices preserve organizational knowledge while strengthening workforce continuity and long-term organizational capability [61]. Finally, organizations operating in the GCC must continually balance the expectations of multiple stakeholders, including governments, local communities, employees, shareholders, and international headquarters. HR functions therefore play a strategic role in aligning workforce management with national development priorities, organizational objectives, and employee expectations. Organizations capable of maintaining this balance demonstrate greater resilience and long-term sustainability within increasingly complex business environments [62]. Figure 2 presents the four interrelated themes identified through thematic analysis, illustrating how strategic IHRM enhances workforce sustainability and organizational competitiveness in the GCC.

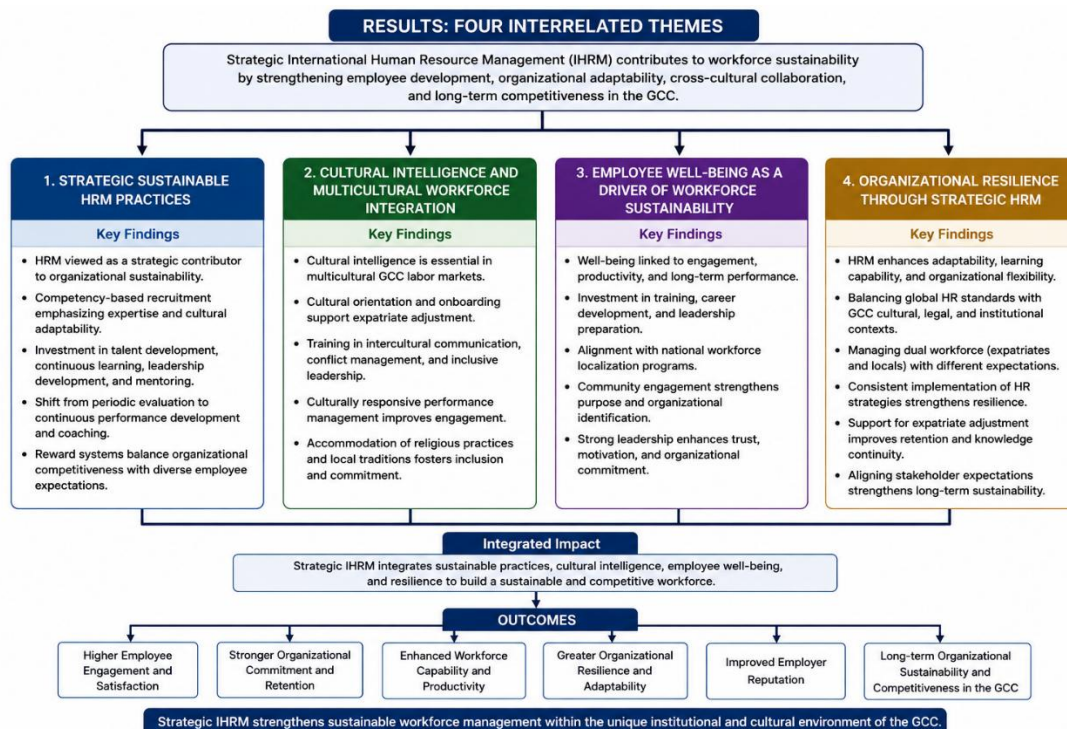


Figure 2. Four Interrelated Temeses

Source: Authors own work

4.5. Summary of Results

The findings demonstrate that strategic International Human Resource Management is a fundamental driver of workforce sustainability within multinational organizations operating in the GCC. Four interdependent dimensions emerged from the thematic analysis. First, sustainable HRM practices strengthen long-term organizational performance through strategic talent acquisition, workforce development, employee engagement, and continuous learning. Second, cultural intelligence enhances multicultural workforce integration by supporting inclusive leadership, effective communication, and culturally responsive HR practices. Third, employee well-being contributes directly to workforce sustainability by improving employee commitment, organizational loyalty, capability development, and retention. Finally, organizational resilience is reinforced through adaptive HR strategies that strengthen workforce flexibility, leadership capability, organizational learning, and responsiveness to changing business environments. Collectively, these findings provide strong support for the integrated theoretical framework proposed, demonstrating that Sustainable HRM Theory, Cultural Intelligence Theory, and Organizational Resilience Theory operate as complementary perspectives for understanding workforce sustainability in the GCC. The results further suggest that organizations capable of integrating these strategic dimensions are better positioned to develop resilient, culturally intelligent, and sustainable workforces capable of supporting long-term organizational success within the region.

5. DISCUSSION

This article examined how strategic International Human Resource Management (IHRM) contributes to workforce sustainability within corporations operating in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The analysis of secondary literature, organizational reports, and illustrative case studies indicates that strategic HRM functions as a critical capability for developing adaptable and sustainable workforces. Workforce sustainability in the GCC is shaped by the interaction of strategic HRM practices, cultural intelligence, employee well-being, and organizational resilience, consistent with the proposed integrated theoretical framework [64].

The findings suggest that sustainable HRM in the GCC requires a shift from traditional administrative HR functions toward strategic workforce development. Practices such as talent management, leadership development, employee engagement, and continuous learning contribute to long-term organizational performance [41]. However, the effectiveness of these practices depends on alignment with GCC institutional, legal, and cultural conditions. This highlights the importance of context-sensitive HR approaches rather than direct adoption of standardized global models [10,12]. Cultural intelligence emerges as an important organizational capability for managing multicultural workforces. In the GCC context, where expatriate and national employees work together, cultural intelligence supports communication, collaboration, knowledge sharing, and workforce integration. Intercultural training, inclusive leadership, and culturally responsive HR practices strengthen organizational cohesion and support previous research on international HRM [13,33]. The findings further extend existing perspectives by showing that cultural intelligence contributes to overall workforce sustainability rather than only expatriate adjustment [3]. Employee well-being represents another essential dimension of sustainable workforce development. Investment in career growth, supportive work environments, leadership development, and work-life balance strengthens employee engagement and retention. Localization initiatives, including Saudization and Emiratization, demonstrate how HR strategies can support both organizational objectives and national workforce development priorities [53]. Continuous learning and employee participation further reinforce the strategic value of employee well-being [56].

Strategic IHRM also contributes to organizational resilience by enabling organizations to respond to technological changes, labor market pressures, and workforce diversity. Adaptive HR systems, leadership development, and organizational learning enhance flexibility and competitiveness in changing environments (Jamali et al., 2020). However, resilience requires balancing global HR practices with local regulations, institutional expectations, and cultural norms [58]. Expatriate management remains an important component of workforce sustainability in the GCC. Support mechanisms, including cultural orientation, mentoring, leadership support, and family assistance, improve expatriate adjustment and reduce turnover [6]. At the same

time, multinational organizations must balance the interests of governments, employees, shareholders, and headquarters through strategically aligned HR practices [62].

Overall, the findings reinforce the integrated theoretical framework. Sustainable HRM Theory explains how investment in employees supports long-term workforce sustainability. Cultural Intelligence Theory highlights the role of intercultural competence in promoting inclusion and collaboration [63]. Organizational Resilience Theory explains how adaptive HR systems strengthen organizational flexibility and performance. Together, these perspectives demonstrate that strategic IHRM is a key driver of workforce sustainability in the GCC. Organizations should therefore integrate HR strategy with business objectives, strengthen cultural intelligence, promote employee well-being, and develop adaptive workforce capabilities to achieve long-term resilience and competitive advantage.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the strategic role of International Human Resource Management (IHRM) in promoting workforce sustainability within corporations in the GCC. Using secondary literature, organizational reports, and case studies, it shows that workforce sustainability depends on strategic HRM, cultural intelligence, employee well-being, and organizational resilience. IHRM has evolved from an administrative function into a core strategic capability that enables organizations to build adaptable and resilient workforces in complex, multicultural environments.

Findings highlight that sustainable HRM practices strengthen long-term performance by integrating workforce planning, talent management, leadership development, learning, and employee engagement into organizational strategy. However, their effectiveness depends on balancing global HR practices with GCC-specific cultural, legal, and institutional contexts. Cultural intelligence is essential for managing diverse workforces of expatriates and local employees. Inclusive HR practices such as intercultural training, culturally sensitive leadership, and effective onboarding improve communication, reduce misunderstandings, and strengthen collaboration. Employee well-being is also a key pillar of sustainability. Investments in career development, supportive work environments, and work-life balance improve engagement, retention, and performance. These initiatives also support national localization goals, linking organizational outcomes with broader socioeconomic development. Organizational resilience is reinforced through adaptive HR systems that promote flexibility, learning, and continuous capability development. Resilient organizations are better able to respond to technological, economic, and institutional changes while balancing stakeholder expectations.

The proposed integrated framework shows that Sustainable HRM Theory, Cultural Intelligence Theory, and Organizational Resilience Theory together explain how strategic HR practices support workforce sustainability in the GCC context. These perspectives highlight the importance of investing in people, cultural capability, and adaptability as interconnected drivers of long-term success. Practically, the study suggests that organizations should embed IHRM into core strategy, strengthen cultural intelligence through training and inclusive leadership, and prioritize employee well-being and resilience-building initiatives. In conclusion, workforce sustainability in the GCC relies on the integration of strategic HRM, cultural intelligence, employee well-being, and organizational resilience, enabling organizations to remain competitive, inclusive, and adaptable in dynamic environments.

Acknowledgment: The authors acknowledge the use of the free version of ChatGPT to assist with language refinement, grammatical editing, and proofreading of the manuscript.

Funding Statement: This study received no funding from any party.

Author Contributions: The article was developed and written by a sole author.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The author declares no conflicts of interest associated with this article.

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