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Quantitative Research Article

## The Impact of Proactive Human Resource Functions on Sustainability in The Gambia During COVID-19: Organizational Agility as a Mediator

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### Abstract

**Background/problem:** The reliance on tourism in The Gambia, was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and revealed critical vulnerabilities in organizational sustainability. While sustainable human resource management (SHRM) aligns human resource (HR) practices with long-term goals, limited research explores its human-centered outcomes. This study addresses the gap in HR management research on the human and social dimensions of sustainability, focusing on how proactive HR functions and organizational agility contribute to SHRM in resource-constrained contexts like The Gambia.

**Objective/purpose:** This research aimed to evaluate the influence of proactive HR functions on SHRM during the COVID-19, with a particular focus on examining the mediating role of organizational agility.

**Design and Methodology:** This study adopted a quantitative approach, utilizing data from 222 directors and managers of private businesses in The Gambia, and applied structural equation modeling for hypotheses testing.

**Results:** The results reveal that proactive HR function has a significant direct effect on sustainable HRM ( $\beta = .14, p < .001$ ) and organizational agility ( $\beta = .54, p < .001$ ). Additionally, organizational agility demonstrates a strong and significant direct relationship with sustainable HRM ( $\beta = .54, p < .001$ ). Furthermore, proactive human resources function indirectly influences sustainable HRM through the mediation of organizational agility ( $\beta = .40, p < .001$ ).

**Conclusion and Implications:** This study highlights the critical role of proactive HR functions in fostering SHRM and organizational agility. By integrating resource-based theory, social cognitive theory, and organizational development principles, it is recommended that proactive strategies need to optimize resources, enhance employee behavior, and cultivate adaptability. Hence, this provides insights for building resilient and sustainable organizations.

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Sustainable human resource management (SHRM) has emerged as a critical focus for organizations worldwide, particularly in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments. Unlike traditional human resource management (HRM), which often prioritizes financial and operational outcomes, SHRM integrates sustainability principles into HR practices to enhance long-term organizational performance. By aligning organizational goals with economic, social, human, and ecological outcomes, SHRM provides a framework for resilience and adaptability in the face of complex challenges (Kumar & Singh, 2024). These principles are particularly relevant in developing countries like The Gambia, where socio-economic dependencies and external shocks amplify organizational vulnerabilities.

Located on the west coast of Africa, The Gambia is the smallest country on mainland Africa, bordered by Senegal and the Atlantic Ocean. Known for its rich cultural heritage, diverse ecosystems, and vibrant tourism industry, the country attracts visitors to its beaches, wildlife reserves, and historical landmarks (The World Bank, 2025). Tourism, a cornerstone of the Gambia's economy, contributes approximately 20% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and employs a substantial portion of its workforce (Gokalp & Tinsley, 2024). However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this vital sector through travel restrictions and lockdown measures, causing an abrupt halt in operations and exposing deep vulnerabilities. Organizations faced severe challenges, including reduced revenue streams, workforce displacement, and declining employee morale. The HR departments had to respond swiftly by adopting proactive strategies to manage these disruptions, such as implementing flexible work policies, ensuring employee well-being, and maintaining productivity amid significant uncertainty (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). These dynamics highlight the importance of SHRM as a tool for addressing crises, building organizational resilience, and sustaining performance in resource-constrained settings.

Although research on sustainability in HRM is expanding, much of it emphasizes green HRM, e-HRM, and financial and environmental dimensions of sustainability (Kramar, 2022; Saini, 2022; Yu et al., 2021). However, limited attention has been given to the human and social aspects of sustainability, particularly the role of proactive HR functions in fostering employee well-being, engagement, and adaptability (Järlström et al., 2023). Addressing this gap, this study examines how proactive HR practices enhance human-centered sustainability and contribute to organizational resilience. It focuses specifically on developing countries like The Gambia, where unique economic, cultural, and institutional factors shape, such as reliance on tourism for economic stability (Gokalp & Tinsley, 2024), a collectivist culture emphasizing community well-being over individual interests (Żemojtel-Piotrowska & Piotrowski, 2023), and limited institutional capacity to address external shocks (World Bank, 2025), significantly shape HRM practices.

Proactive HR functions are forward-thinking and strategically oriented, emphasizing empowerment, adaptability, and resilience among employees. These practices align with resource-based theory (RBT), which views human resources as strategic assets for sustained competitive advantage (Barney et al., 2021). This proactive HR functions also draw on social cognitive theory (SCT) by fostering self-efficacy, behavioral adaptability, and resilience among employees, while the organizational development (OD) framework emphasizes their role in facilitating adaptive work processes and fostering organizational agility (Douglas, 2020; Nakra & Kashyap, 2024). Despite their importance, the behavioral implications of proactive HR functions and their relationship with organizational agility in supporting SHRM remain underexplored, especially in the contexts characterized by economic vulnerability, such as The Gambia. The Gambia's reliance on tourism, which accounts for a substantial share of GDP and employment, heightens its susceptibility to external shocks. This fragility was starkly revealed during the COVID-19 pandemic, when travel restrictions and lockdowns severely disrupted the tourism sector, resulting in financial instability and significant workforce challenges.

To address these gaps, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) to what extent does proactive HR function influence SHRM during crises?; and (2) what is the role of organizational agility in mediating the relationship between proactive HR functions and Sustainable HRM? By situating its analysis within The Gambia, this study contributes to the growing body of SHRM literature by providing empirical evidence on the role of proactive HR functions in fostering human and social sustainability. Furthermore, it highlights the critical mediating role of organizational agility in linking proactive HR practices to sustainable organizational outcomes. These insights extend the theoretical understanding of SHRM and offer practical implications for enhancing resilience and sustainability in resource-constrained environments.

### Literature Review

This section examines the fundamental concepts underlying the study, beginning with an exploration of the theoretical framework, which integrates resource-based theory (RBT), social cognitive theory (SCT),

and the organizational development (OD) framework to explore how proactive HR functions, supported by organizational agility, foster sustainable HRM. Finally, the research hypotheses related to proactive HR functions, organizational agility, and SHRM are proposed based on the theoretical and empirical insights discussed.

## Theoretical Background

Resource-based theory (RBT) is widely applied to explain how organizations achieve sustained competitive advantage by leveraging resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (Barney et al., 2021). Proactive HR functions operationalize RBT by identifying and developing these resources to enhance organizational resilience and agility, particularly during disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic (Jiao & Bu, 2024). By linking resource optimization to adaptability, RBT forms a critical foundation for understanding the role of HR in achieving sustainability and strategic agility.

Social cognitive theory (SCT) complements RBT by focusing on human behavior and its influence on organizational outcomes. The SCT highlights the role of cognitive processes, learning, and social interactions in shaping employee behaviors, adaptability, and motivation (Alvarez-Risco et al., 2022). Proactive HR practices grounded in SCT promote positive behavioral outcomes, such as self-efficacy and innovation, through mechanisms like training, feedback, and recognition (Alvarez-Risco et al., 2022). By aligning employee behaviors with organizational goals, SCT broadens the RBT perspective by emphasizing human capital as both a resource and a driver of organizational agility and reinforcing resilience during periods of volatility (Trisaputra & Bernarto, 2024).

Organizational development (OD) integrates the resource and behavioral perspectives of RBT and SCT into systemic processes that build adaptive cultures and structures. Organizational development emphasizes planned interventions to enhance collaboration, flexibility, and alignment between HR strategies and organizational objectives (Jiao & Bu, 2024). Proactive HR practices underpinned by OD principles create inclusive environments and flexible frameworks that enable organizations to respond effectively to environmental changes (Armanious & Padgett, 2021). This systemic approach ensures the translation of strategic and behavioral insights into practical, sustainable outcomes.

Together, these theories provide an integrated framework for examining how proactive HR functions foster sustainable HRM and organizational agility. This study applies these theoretical perspectives to demonstrate how proactive HR functions drive sustainability by aligning resources, behaviors, and organizational systems, with organizational agility acting as a mediating capability. This integration is particularly relevant in navigating the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, where agility and resilience proved essential for long-term success.

## Proactive Human Resource Function

The proactive HR function, by definition, integrates strategic, agile and flexible orientations to adjust or modify work arrangements in response to or in anticipation of future environmental challenges, ensuring sustained organizational growth and performance (Ajayi & Udeh, 2024; Shakil et al., 2019). Drawing on Dave Ulrich's dimensions as measures of proactive HR function for this study, the constructs include strategic planning, administrative expertise, employee advocacy, and change management (Ulrich, 1998). Through strategic planning, the proactive HR function aligns initiatives with business strategy, ensuring the organization's human capital is prepared for future challenges and capable of adapting swiftly to changes (Shakil et al., 2019). As an administrative expertise, it improves internal processes and leverages technology to enhance efficiency, which is critical in volatile contexts. By advocating for employees, the proactive HR function sustains morale and productivity, mitigating stress and uncertainty during turbulent periods (Kuncoro & Thaha, 2023; Sumayya et al., 2023). In its role as a change manager, the proactive HR function fosters a culture of adaptability and continuous improvement, effectively managing change to drive growth and innovation (Shakil et al., 2019). Collectively, these roles enable the proactive HR function to enhance operational efficiency, maintain employee engagement, and support change initiatives, positioning the organization to thrive in dynamic environments.

## Sustainable Human Resource Management

Sustainable human resource management (SHRM) is defined as the integration of innovative ideas and actionable practices that nurture and sustain diverse qualities of human capital, enabling organizations to balance short- and long-term goals related to employee well-being, organizational resilience, and societal advancement (Kumar & Singh, 2024; Yu et al., 2021). The SHRM is measured using sustainable HRM ideas and practices adopted from Yu et al. (2021). Focusing on long-term value creation, sustainable HRM integrates economic, social, human, and ecological dimensions while promoting stakeholder engagement and enhancing organizational performance (Yu et al., 2021). The SHRM transcends traditional HRM by balancing business growth with environmental preservation, contributing to innovation capabilities, and aligning with sustainable development goals through green HRM practices (Sapna & Gupta, 2021).

## Organizational Agility

Organizational agility refers to an organization's ability to rapidly adapt to market changes and internal transformations in a flexible, efficient, and proactive manner. It is defined as the ability to efficiently adjust operational states in response to unpredictable and evolving demands (Akkaya & Mert, 2022). This capability encompasses responding swiftly to emerging opportunities, mitigating risks, and continuously improving processes and strategies to maintain a competitive edge. Agility is characterized by a combination of a flexible organizational structure, a responsive and adaptive workforce, effective communication and information flow, and a culture that fosters continuous learning and innovation (Dyer & Shafer, 2014; Nijssen & Paauwe, 2012).

## Proactive Human Resource Function and Sustainable Human Resource Management

In dynamic and challenging environments characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), such as those provoked by COVID-19, the interplay between proactive HR function and SHRM is both subtle and pivotal for organizational success. A proactive HR function adopts strategic approaches, anticipating and addressing potential threats or opportunities before they escalate into significant risks to the organization's functioning and survival. This is achieved through the efficient and effective management of the organization's human capital. Proactive HR involves planning, analyzing trends, and implementing policies or programs that support organizational goals, enhance employee well-being, foster engagement and retention, promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, ensure employee health and safety, and advocate for work-life balance initiatives.

Resource-based theory (RBT) identifies four key organizational resources and capabilities as critical drivers of competitive advantage: organizational culture, trustworthiness, human resource practices, and information technology (Barney et al., 2021). In the context of this study, proactive HR functions, align with HR practices and are designed to optimize organizational resources to achieve sustainability goals. SHRM reflects the integration of these resources into long-term strategic objectives, while organizational agility embodies the adaptability and responsiveness required to connect proactive HR functions with sustainable outcomes. The integration of RBT, SCT, and OD highlights the essential interplay of people, behavior, and the environment, underscoring the interconnectedness roles of proactive HR function and organizational agility in fostering SHRM.

Extensive research has demonstrated the positive influence of organizational culture, trustworthiness, and human resource practices on organizational performance, effects that can be sustained over the long term (Nikpour, 2017). Accordingly, a proactive HR function can positively influence organizational performance and, by extension, contribute to the creation of a SHRM framework within the organization. Based on this theoretical foundation, the study hypothesizes the following:

H1: Proactive human resource function positively effects sustainable human resource management.

Furthermore, the proactive HR function, a strategically oriented approach, significantly influences organizational agility by fostering adaptability, responsiveness, and innovation. Research indicates that HR agility, as a capability, is a key determinant of organizational performance and overall agility. By aligning HR practices with organizational goals, HR professionals enhance employee engagement, thereby boosting

organizational competitiveness (Shakil et al., 2019). High-commitment HR practices positively impact organizational agility by enabling employees to respond swiftly to challenges through effective training and compensation (Trisaputra & Bernarto, 2024).

Organizational agility, defined as the ability to swiftly change business processes beyond normal flexibility levels to manage unpredictable changes, is driven by dynamic human assets within the organization (Dyer & Shafer, 2014). Both proactive HR function and organizational agility are internally significant capabilities. Moreover, fostering agile work cultures, particularly in the information technology sector, is crucial for enhancing innovation and agility within organizations (Ajayi & Udeh, 2024).

According to resource-based theory (RBT), valuable resources, such as human resources under the coordination of the HR function, represent organizational capabilities embedded in the organization's processes, routines, and culture. These valuable resources may reside within specific functions, such as HR, and drive superior performance by developing a distinct set of competitive resources and deploying them through a well-crafted strategy, such as a proactive HR function. Strategically, a proactive HR function enables organizational agility as a core capability, helping the organization withstand challenges and stress. Based on this theoretical foundation, the study hypothesizes the following:

H2: Proactive human resource functions positively effects organizational agility.

### **Organizational Agility as a Mediator**

Organizational agility is essential for navigating complex and uncertain environments, enabling organizations to respond swiftly and effectively to rapid changes while continuously innovating (Bundtzen & Hinrichs, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the critical need for agility, as organizations lacking this quality experienced delayed responses to emerging threats. Agility encompasses resilience and the ability to sustain a competitive advantage during economic upheavals, enhancing customer responsiveness, operational efficiency, and risk management (Bundtzen & Hinrichs, 2021).

Organizational agility supports adaptive planning and decision-making by leveraging knowledge management and real-time data to make informed choices. Agile practices such as digital capability, ambidextrous leadership, and e-procurement strengthen operational continuity and mitigate supply chain vulnerabilities (Makudza et al., 2023). Additionally, agility helps manage complexity through cross-functional teams, fostering innovation and problem-solving by integrating diverse expertise (Kuncoro & Thaha, 2023). In ambiguous situations, agile organizations clarify objectives, maintain flexibility, and explore multiple solutions, driven by dynamic capabilities and responsive leadership (Chen et al., 2022). Fostering agility remains a key determinant of long-term success and sustainability in an increasingly dynamic and unpredictable global landscape (Armanious & Padgett, 2021). Based on this understanding, the study hypothesizes the following:

H3: Organizational agility positively effects sustainable human resource management.

Research indicates that strategic agility positively impacts the relationship between HRM strategies and sustainable competitive advantage (Battour et al., 2021). This suggests that organizations with higher levels of agility are better positioned to implement sustainable HRM practices effectively.

Organizational agility is a key factor mediating the relationship between proactive HR functions and SHRM. Research demonstrates that proactive HR functions foster an agile organizational culture by implementing flexible work practices, continuous learning opportunities, and dynamic goal setting, aligning HR practices with sustainable development objectives (Sumayya et al., 2023). Organizational agility enables companies to respond swiftly to sustainability trends and stakeholder expectations, which are essential for SHRM (Kumar & Singh, 2024).

Agility in HR practices facilitates the adoption of green HR practices, enabling organizations to quickly integrate environmentally sustainable policies (Aukhoon et al., 2024). Research also highlights that organizational agility acts as a mediator in various contexts, including between organizational learning and employee engagement (Ludviga & Kalvina, 2024), IT capability and service innovation performance, big data analytics capability and organizational performance (Xie et al., 2022), knowledge creation processes

and firm performance, and enterprise resource planning system usage and service differentiation (Shajrawi & Aburub, 2023).

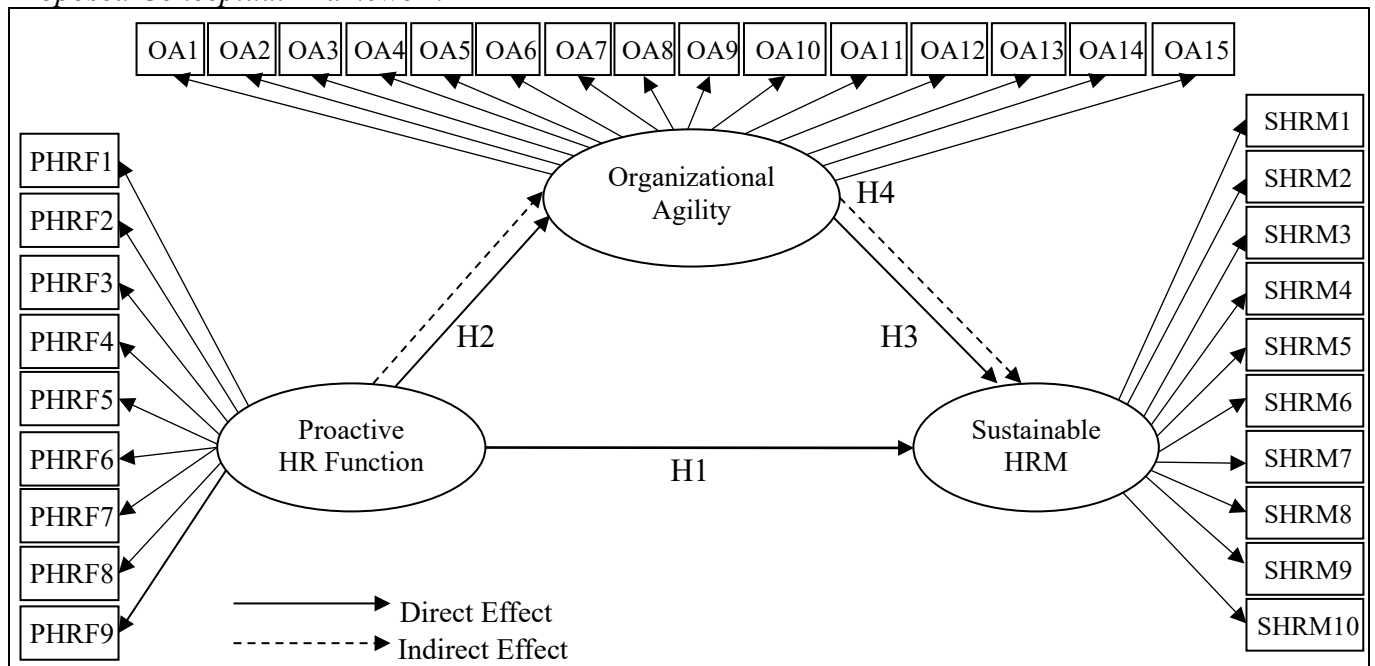
Organizational agility is critical for proactively addressing unexpected environmental changes, enhancing organizational trust, promoting ambidexterity, and fostering a sustainable competitive advantage. Based on this understanding, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Organizational agility mediates the influence of proactive human resource function and sustainable human resource management.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of the study is illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
*Proposed Conceptual Framework*



Note. PHRF: proactive human resource function, OA: organizational agility, SHRM: sustainable human resource management

**Method**

**Research Design**

The study employs a causal research design with a quantitative approach, targeting individual directors and managers as respondents to reflect the unit of analysis. The survey targeted a total of 464 directors and managers from 322 private businesses across The Gambia. The data collection period spanned from April to November 2023. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the researchers’ institution prior to data collection. Permissions were secured from key organizations, including the Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI), the Gambia Investment and Export Promotion Agency (GiEPA), and the Gambia Tourism Board. A research assistant was recruited and trained in data collection procedures to ensure consistency and accuracy. Participants willing to participate in the study were informed about the ethical considerations, and written consent was obtained through a questionnaire distributed in person, facilitated by the research assistant.

**Participants/ Sample**

This study employed the Krejcie and Morgan table to determine the minimum sample size necessary to ensure statistical reliability at a 95% confidence level. Based on this method, a minimum of 210

respondents was required. The sampling frame consisted of a list of 464 directors and managers of private businesses in The Gambia, compiled from the databases of the Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI), the Gambia Investment and Export Promotion Agency (GiEPA), and the Gambia Tourism Board. Participants were selected from a population of 322 private businesses using an area sampling technique, with the criterion that their office location must be within the Greater Banjul Area. As a result, a total 272 companies were included in the study.

To ensure data quality and relevance, three eligibility criteria were applied: (1) participants had to be directors or managers of private companies responsible for making work arrangement decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic; (2) they needed to demonstrate a willingness to contribute to academic research; and (3) their office location had to be within the Greater Banjul Area, including Banjul City, Kanifing, and selected parts of the Brikama Local Government Area. Convenience sampling allowed for efficient data collection given the variability in respondents' willingness and availability to participate. While convenience sampling was pragmatic due to time and resource constraints, it may introduce potential biases, such as limited generalizability and overrepresentation of certain respondent characteristics.

To address concerns regarding data quality and representativeness, efforts were made to ensure the sample included directors and managers from diverse private organizations within the Greater Banjul Area. Data collection spanned an eight-month period, during which questionnaires were distributed manually with the assistance of a trained research assistant. A pilot study was conducted with 40 companies, while the remaining 232 companies were included in the main study. Each organization received two questionnaires: one designed for HR directors or managers and another for directors or managers responsible for staff working arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, only one completed questionnaire was returned per company. Ultimately, 222 companies participated in the data collection process, while 10 companies failed to submit their responses.

Out of the 464 questionnaires distributed, 230 were returned. After screening for completeness and validity, eight questionnaires were excluded due to incomplete responses, resulting in a total of 222 valid responses and a response rate of 96.5%. Measures were also implemented to minimize common method bias, a critical concern in self-report surveys, in order to reduce systematic errors and enhance the validity of the findings. These measures included ensuring respondent anonymity, using clear and neutral language in questionnaire items, counterbalancing question order to reduce response set biases, and emphasizing non-overlapping constructs to enhance construct validity, as recommended by Golzar et al., (2022). This rigorous process ensured that the self-report data accurately reflected the factual conditions of the participating organizations, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the study. Although area sampling inherently limits the generalizability of results to business outside the Greater Banjul Area, the careful implementation of these strategies ensured that the final dataset was both reliable and representative of the targeted population. As a result, the study provides valuable insights into the role of HR practices and organizational agility during the pandemic within the context of The Gambia.

## **Instruments**

This study examined three latent variables: proactive HR function, organizational agility, and SHRM. A structured questionnaire was utilized to measure all constructs using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The questionnaire was developed in English, The Gambia's official language, ensuring alignment with the linguistic and professional context of the respondents. The targeted participants, directors and managers from private sector organizations, were selected for their educational background and their ability to provide informed responses relevant to the study's constructs.

The proactive HR function was measured using nine items adopted from Ulrich, as cited by Shakil et al. (2019). Organizational agility was measured using fifteen items adapted from the propositions of Dyer and Shafer (2014) and Nijssen and Paauwe's (2012). Finally, SHRM was measured using the scales validated by Yu et al. (2021); however, two items were removed, namely: 'The company has dedicated

departments and positions for issues related to corporate social responsibility,' and 'The company has dedicated departments and positions for issues related to corporate social responsibility.' The measurement models for these variables met the criteria for validity and reliability, as shown in Tables 2 and 3.

## Results

### Sample Characteristics

**Table 1**

*The Respondents' Profile*

Measure	Description	Frequency	%	Measure	Description	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	150	67.57	Field	Banking & Finance	20	9.01
	Female	72	32.43		Hospital/Health	3	1.35
Age	=/<25	16	7.21		Education	1	0.45
	26-35	60	27.03		Hotels, Lodges	31	13.96
	36-45	72	32.43		Oil & gas	2	0.90
	46-55	48	21.62		Properties & Construction	10	4.50
	=/>56	26	11.71		Newspaper & Printing	1	0.45
Educational Background	High school	24	10.81		Factory/Manufacturing	10	4.50
	Diploma	48	21.62		Farm/Agriculture	17	7.66
	Certificate	34	15.32		Services	9	4.05
	Bachelor's Degree	70	31.53		Technology & Communication	6	2.70
	Master's	46	20.72		Restaurant & Bar	22	9.91
	PhD	0	0.00		Transportation	8	3.60
					Import/Export	16	7.21
			General Trading	62	27.93		
			Others	4	1.80		

The respondents' profile, as presented in Table 1, reveals a diverse demographic and professional background. The sample is predominantly male (67.57%), with the largest age group being 36-45 years old (32.43%). In terms of education, the majority hold a bachelor's degree (31.53%), followed by those with a diploma (22%). Regarding the business sector, the largest representation is from the general trading sector (27.93%), with significant numbers also from the hotel and lodges sector (13.96%) and the restaurant and bar sector (9.91%). All respondents were directors or managers in private business.

### Measurement Model Assessment (Outer Model)

The measurement (outer) model assessment was conducted using the software SmartPLS 4. As shown in Table 2, the results indicate robust reliability and validity for the latent constructs: SHRM, proactive HR function, and organizational agility. The three latent variables had composite reliability (CR) scores of .95, .93, .95, which exceeded the threshold criterion of  $> .70$  (Hair, Jr. et al., 2022).

**Table 2**

*Validity and Reliability*

Variables	No of Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Sustainable HRM	10	.71–.87	.94	.95	.66
Proactive HR Function	9	.71–.84	.91	.93	.58
Organizational Agility	15	.71–.82	.95	.95	.58

Furthermore, indicator reliability was confirmed, with all factor loadings exceeding the recommended threshold of  $.70$  (Hair, Jr. et al., 2022). This finding indicates that each indicator significantly contributes to defining its respective construct. Lastly, convergent validity, which ensures that indicators accurately



reflect the intended construct, was validated using the average variance extracted (AVE). All constructs demonstrated AVE values well above the recommended threshold of .50, with sustainable HRM at .66, proactive HR function at .58, and organizational agility at .58. This signifies that a substantial portion of the variance among the indicators is explained by the constructs they represent.

Additionally, discriminant validity was assessed to empirically confirm that each construct is distinct from the other. Henseler et al., as cited in Hair, Jr. et al. (2022), recommended using heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) values to evaluate discriminant validity rather than relying solely on the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Both the HTMT ratio and the Fornell-Larcker criterion, as depicted in Table 3, demonstrate that each construct measures a unique concept. This confirms good discriminant validity and effectively differentiates organizational agility, proactive HR function, and SHRM in the analysis.

**Table 3**

*HTMT and Fornell-Larcker Criterion*

Variables	Organizational Agility		Proactive HR Function		Sustainable HRM	
	HTMT	Fornell-Larcker	HTMT	Fornell-Larcker	HTMT	Fornell-Larcker
Organizational Agility		.76				
Proactive HR Function	.55	.54		.76		
Sustainable HRM	.73	.70	.63	.59		.81

**Structural Model Assessment (Inner Model)**

Table 4 illustrates the explanatory power of the model by examining the relationships between latent variables. The R-squared values indicate that proactive HR function explains 29% of the variance in organizational agility, while proactive HR function and organizational agility together account for 56% of the variance in SHRM. The f-squared values reveal the effect sizes, with proactive HR function having a significant impact on organizational agility (.40) and a moderate impact on SHRM (.14), whereas organizational agility has a substantial impact on SHRM (.48). The Q-square values, which are .28 for organizational agility and .34 for SHRM, suggest that the model has good predictive relevance for both organizational agility and SHRM. These results indicate that the constructs in the model are well-explained and possess strong predictive power.

**Table 4**

*Exploratory Power*

Predictor(s)	Outcome(s)	R-Square	f-Square	Q-Square
Proactive HR Function	Organizational Agility	.29	.40	.28
Proactive HR Function Organizational Agility	Sustainable HRM	.56	.14	.34
			.48	

**Table 5**

*Hypothesis Testing*

	Path	Std Beta	SE	t- value	95% CI (LL, UL)	Interpretation
H1	PHRF → SHRM	.14	.07	4.36	.15 - .42	Significant Effect
H2	PHRF → OA	.40	.06	9.54	.41 - .63	Significant Effect
H3	OA → SHRM	.54	.06	9.51	.43 - .66	Significant Effect
H4	PHRF → OA → SHRM	.29	.05	6.53	.21 - .39	Significant Mediation

Note:  $p < .001$ ; PHRF: proactive human resource function; SHRM: sustainable human resource management (HRM); OA: organizational agility.

**Results of Hypotheses Testing**

The results of the hypotheses testing, as shown in Table 5, were assessed using bootstrapping analysis in SmartPLS 4 and confirm all proposed relationships in the conceptual model. The analysis indicates that

the proactive HR function significantly and positively impacts SHRM ( $\beta = .14, p < .001$ ) and organizational agility ( $\beta = .40, p < .001$ ). Furthermore, organizational agility strongly influences SHRM ( $\beta = .54, p < .001$ ). Mediation analysis reveals that the proactive HR function indirectly affects SHRM through organizational agility ( $\beta = .29, p < .001, CI = [.21-.39]$ ). The absence of zero in all confidence intervals provides robust evidence for the direct and indirect effects, validating the critical roles of the proactive HR function and organizational agility in achieving the sustainability of HRM.

## Discussion and Conclusion

### Discussion of Main Results

The outcome of the study has affirmed that proactive HR functions have a direct impact on SHRM and indirectly through the mediation of organizational agility among the Gambian businesses. This finding supports the proposed hypotheses and aligns with previous studies that established that both proactive HR functions as strategic initiatives and organizational agility as valuable resources translate into better performance and sustained competitive advantage (Barney et al., 2021; Wang & Yang, 2021). By applying social cognitive theory (SCT) and organizational development (OD) theory, the study sheds light on the psychological and developmental mechanisms through which proactive HR strategies enhance organizational resilience and adaptability. The SCT suggests that proactive HR practices positively shape employees' perceptions of their roles, reinforcing behaviors that support sustainable goals (Alvarez-Risco et al., 2022). The application of the OD theory further complements this by emphasizing how proactive HR functions foster a culture of learning, adaptability, and collaboration, which together strengthen organizational agility and responsiveness in the face of change (Jiao & Bu, 2024).

The study makes a substantial theoretical contribution in the context of The Gambia by illustrating the association between SHRM, proactive HR functions, and organizational agility. These results align with RBT and SCT, which highlight the critical role of unique organizational resources and capabilities in creating value and achieving competitive differentiation. Resource based theory focuses on sustaining competitive advantage through organizational resources (Barney et al., 2021), while SCT emphasizes the importance of employee behaviors and perceptions, shaped by supportive HR initiatives, in leveraging these resources -for lasting outcomes (Alvarez-Risco et al., 2022). Organizational development (OD) theory further underscore the need for an agile, development-oriented culture to adapt to changing environments, enhancing the sustainability of HR strategies (Armanious & Padgett, 2021).

This study extends the integrated framework of RBT, SCT and OD by demonstrating the synergistic relationship between proactive HR functions and organizational agility. For instance, HR practices that empower employees to be flexible and innovative allow them to respond effectively to environmental changes, thereby enhancing organizational agility as a mediator between proactive HR practices and SHRM (Jiao & Bu, 2024). This mediation illustrates that while HR strategies directly foster sustainability, their full potential is unlocked when combined with a high degree of organizational agility (Armanious & Padgett, 2021). The incorporation of agility-promoting practices, such as employee participation and task ownership, into HR strategies highlights the role of an adaptive and responsive organizational culture, an idea central to OD theory, in achieving long-term sustainability goals (Armanious & Padgett, 2021; Jiao & Bu, 2024).

Additionally, this study addresses a notable gap in the literature by providing empirical evidence on the influence of proactive HR functions on SHRM, specifically within the context of The Gambia which could be useful for similar socio-economic settings. By identifying HR practices focused on sustainable development orientation, the research underscores the importance of HR strategies that balance economic, social, and environmental objectives. This balanced approach, supported by SCT and OD principles, demonstrates that HR strategies not only manage resources but also shape employee attitudes and behaviors aligned with sustainable organizational goals.

In summary, this study contributes to theoretical literature by elucidating the interconnected roles of proactive HR function and organizational agility in achieving SHRM. By integrating RBT, SCT, and OD perspectives, it provides a nuanced understanding of how HR practices can drive sustainability, particularly in challenging and dynamic environments (Nakra & Kashyap, 2024), thereby offering a robust framework for future research to further explore the psychological, behavioral, and developmental dimensions of HRM in sustainable business practices.

### **Limitations**

The research has several limitations that warrant consideration. Firstly, its geographical focus on The Gambia limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different socio-economic and cultural contexts. The cross-sectional design, which collects data at a single point in time, restricts the ability to establish causal relationships among the studied variables. Moreover, the sample size of 222 respondents, while sufficient for explanatory analysis, may limit the statistical power. The study also omits consideration of other potentially influential factors, such as organizational culture, leadership styles, and external economic conditions, which could affect the observed relationships.

Additionally, the research does not fully address the impact of rapid technological advancements on HR practices, which are increasingly critical to organizational agility and sustainability of HRM. Finally, the evolving and long-term effect of the COVID-19 pandemic are only partially captured, making it difficult to comprehensively represent the VUCA environment faced by organizations. Future research addressing these limitations, including longitudinal designs and larger, more diverse samples, could provide deeper and more generalizable insights into SHRM dynamics.

### **Implications for Behavioral Science**

This study makes a significant contribution to behavioral science and organizational development by offering a multidimensional perspective on the influence of proactive HR functions on sustainable HRM and organizational agility. Practically, it provides valuable insights for HR practitioners and organizational leaders seeking to enhance sustainability. The findings highlight the critical role of proactive HR strategies in fostering organizational agility and SHRM, emphasizing the importance of anticipating future challenges, aligning HR practices with long-term business goals, and cultivating a culture of continuous improvement and innovation (Trisaputra & Bernarto, 2024; Wang & Yang, 2021). Consistent with organizational development (OD) principles, these strategies facilitate adaptive change processes, fostering an environment conducive to agility, resilience, and sustained growth (Jiao & Bu, 2024). Proactive HR thus serves as the foundation for developing organizational capabilities, that enable leaders to reconfigure resources and create new competitive advantages (Barney et al., 2021).

The behavioral implications are evident in how proactive HR functions shape employee commitment, retention, and innovation by cultivating a supportive work environment that motivates employees to align with organizational goals (Battour et al., 2021; Douglas, 2020). Integrating SCT, proactive HR practices enhance employees' perceptions of HR initiatives, strengthening their adaptability and willingness to contribute to sustainable objectives. The SCT highlights the importance of cognitive processes and social learning, suggesting that employees' belief in their adaptability—reinforced by proactive HR practices—drives their commitment, innovation, and resilience (Alvarez-Risco et al., 2022). Similarly, OD theory's emphasis on collaborative and learning-oriented culture aligns with these principles by fostering an environment that encourages personal growth and flexibility. Through proactive HR, organizations not only manage resources but also cultivate a behavioral culture that reinforces adaptability and responsiveness, essential traits in today's dynamic environment (Jiao & Bu, 2024).

To fully realize SHRM, organizations should implement HR practices that embody the principles of sustainability, fairness, and transparency. These practices ensure employee well-being and development while promoting a balanced approach to organizational goals. For example, an HRM approach aligned with sustainable development principles (as reflected in a loading factor of .87) supports environmental sustainability alongside long-term business objectives, integrating OD's focus on system-wide change and

development with RBT's emphasis on resource optimization. Within the RBT framework, the HR function acts as the steward of the organization's valuable resources, essential for establishing and sustaining a competitive advantage (Barney et al., 2021). By merging RBT's resource-centered approach with SCT's focus on behavior and OD's commitment to holistic development, the study demonstrates that proactive HR functions go beyond managing tangible assets. They also cultivate a behavioral and developmental environment that fosters resilience, innovation, and sustainability, aligning individual growth with organizational longevity.

## Conclusion

This study underscores the critical role of proactive HR functions in enhancing SHRM by demonstrating their direct impact on organizational sustainability and the mediating role of organizational agility. Through the integration of RBT, SCT, and organizational development, the findings reveal how proactive HR strategies optimize organizational resources, shape employee behaviors, cultivate a culture of adaptability and resilience (Douglas, 2020). SCT highlights the role of HR practices in influencing employee perceptions, thereby enhancing self-efficacy, commitment, innovation, and resilience within the workforce (Nakra & Kashyap, 2024). Concurrently, OD theory emphasizes the importance of fostering a collaborative and development-oriented organizational culture as foundation for sustaining agility and long-term performance (Jiao & Bu, 2024). These theoretical perspectives are particularly salient in the context of The Gambia, where balancing economic, social and environmental objectives is paramount (Anlesinya & Susomrith, 2020). This approach not only supports sustained organizational growth and performance but also enhances resilience and agility, offering a pathway for achieving long-term sustainability goals (Kumar & Singh, 2024; Yu et al., 2021). By presenting an integrated framework that combines resource optimization, behavioral insights, and organizational development principles, this study provides both theoretical and practical contributions to the discourse on building resilient, adaptive, and sustainable organizations.

## Declarations

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

**Ethical Approval Statement:** The study was conducted in accordance with the guidelines reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Business at Brawijaya University, Malang, Indonesia (protocol code: 12770/UN10.F02.11.31/KM.07.04/2023, dated: October 28, 2023).

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