

## STRATEGIC ROLE OF HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT IN ACHIEVING ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY: EVIDENCE FROM UNIVERSITIES IN PALEMBANG

Irayani<sup>1</sup>, Frecilia Nanda Melvani<sup>2</sup>, Mariyam Zanariah<sup>3</sup>, Suharty<sup>4</sup>, Acika Sabilillah<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1-5</sup> Universitas Tridnanti Palembang, Indonesia

[irayani0707@gmail.com](mailto:irayani0707@gmail.com)<sup>1</sup>, [freciliananda@univ-tridinanti.ac.id](mailto:freciliananda@univ-tridinanti.ac.id)<sup>2</sup>,  
[mariam0222096301@gmail.com](mailto:mariam0222096301@gmail.com)<sup>3</sup>, [suhartihusny@gmail.com](mailto:suhartihusny@gmail.com)<sup>4</sup>, [acikasabilillah12@gmail.com](mailto:acikasabilillah12@gmail.com)<sup>5</sup>

Jl. Kapten Marzuki No. 2446, Palembang 30129, Indonesia

Corresponding email: [irayani0707@gmail.com](mailto:irayani0707@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

*The sustainability of higher education institutions depends largely on their ability to develop and manage human capital effectively. This study examines the role of human capital development in supporting organizational sustainability at universities in Palembang. A qualitative case-study approach was employed to explore human capital practices in depth. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document reviews involving university leaders, human resource personnel, and academic staff. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and insights. The findings reveal that human capital development contributes significantly to organizational sustainability through structured training programs, knowledge-sharing activities, and continuous competency enhancement. These initiatives help universities adapt to environmental changes, foster innovation, and strengthen organizational resilience. Furthermore, the alignment of human resource development strategies with institutional goals was identified as a critical factor in achieving sustainable outcomes. This study highlights the strategic importance of human capital in sustaining higher education institutions and provides practical insights for university management in designing effective and sustainable human resource development strategies.*

## INTRODUCTION

Organizational sustainability has emerged as a strategic imperative across various sectors, particularly in higher education institutions facing increasing competition and environmental pressures (Nzuve et al., 2024); Irayani et al., 2025). In the knowledge-based economy, sustainable organizational performance depends largely on intangible assets, including knowledge, skills, and innovation capabilities, which provide a lasting competitive advantage (Irayani et al., 2025). Consequently, human capital development has become a key mechanism for enhancing organizational sustainability through continuous capability building and performance improvement (Bekele et al., 2024). Additionally, a supportive organizational culture contributes significantly to employee development and long-term organizational effectiveness, making it an essential factor in achieving sustainable outcomes (Sokolovic et al., 2026).

Education has long been recognized as a key driver of economic growth and national development Ma, (2025). To achieve sustainable organizational performance, universities must foster humanistic management practices that promote ethical awareness, relational responsibility, and the preservation of organizational values (Holmbom et al., 2026). Furthermore, the growing demand for sustainability has increased the importance of green human resource practices, which contribute to organizational effectiveness across multiple dimensions (Irayani et al., 2025). In higher education institutions, the quality of human resources, particularly lecturers, plays a crucial role in enhancing institutional performance, accreditation outcomes, and the implementation of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education (Cai et al., 2020). In response to current challenges related to employee well-being and sustainability, strengthening resilience has also become increasingly important for ensuring long-term success in higher education institutions (Muhammad Juliansyah Putra et al., 2023)

Universities are increasingly expected not only to achieve short-term performance goals but also to ensure long-term sustainability in terms of academic quality, stakeholder trust, and institutional adaptability (Mohiuddin et al., 2022). Following the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), sustainability has become a growing concern in higher education institutions, highlighting the strategic role of universities in advancing sustainable development. However, existing research has predominantly focused on sustainability initiatives related to curriculum development, environmental management, and institutional governance, while relatively limited attention has been paid to the contribution of human capital in achieving organizational sustainability (Lambrechts, 2020).

Human Resource Management (HRM) plays a critical role in supporting sustainable organizations by integrating sustainability principles into human resource policies and practices. Through strategic HRM activities, sustainability objectives can be embedded within organizational processes, fostering long-term organizational effectiveness and resilience (Leal Filho et al., 2019). Therefore, developing a sustainability-oriented HRM framework is essential not only for enhancing organizational sustainability but also for expanding the body of knowledge in sustainable human resource management and organizational sustainability research (Morsy & Dar, 2022).

Human capital development is widely recognized as a fundamental driver of

organizational sustainability and long-term competitiveness. Investments in human capital contribute to improved innovation, adaptability, and sustainable development outcomes across various sectors (Irayani et al., 2024). Within higher education institutions, human capital development focuses on strengthening the competencies, skills, and capabilities of academic and administrative personnel to support institutional effectiveness. Moreover, human capital serves as a strategic resource that enhances organizational resilience and the capacity to respond to dynamic environmental challenges (Yassim et al., 2025). Despite its acknowledged importance, limited research has examined how strategic human capital development contributes to organizational sustainability within the higher education sector, highlighting a significant gap in the existing literature.

Globalization and technological advancement have intensified competition in higher education, requiring universities to enhance their sustainability and competitiveness (Leal Filho et al., 2019). Previous studies have emphasized the importance of human resource strategies for organizational performance; however, limited research has examined the role of strategic human capital development in achieving organizational sustainability. Moreover, qualitative evidence on human capital practices in higher education remains scarce (Haan, 2015). Therefore, this study explores how strategic human capital development supports organizational sustainability in Indonesian private universities. By adopting a qualitative approach, this research provides deeper insights into human capital practices and contributes to the literature on sustainable human resource management.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Organizational Sustainability

The concept of sustainability was first associated with the environmental and economic aspects in the 1970s, which were further linked to the social dimension (Campos-García et al., 2024). Organizational sustainability refers to an organization's ability to maintain and enhance its performance over time by balancing economic, social, and environmental objectives. In the context of higher education, sustainability is not only related to financial viability but also to academic quality, institutional reputation, and societal contribution. Universities are expected to operate as sustainable institutions that continuously adapt to environmental changes while maintaining their core functions of education, research, and community service.

Recent studies emphasize that organizational sustainability in higher education is closely linked to institutional resilience, innovation capacity, and strategic resource management. Sustainable universities are characterized by their ability to integrate long-term strategic planning with operational effectiveness, ensuring continuity and competitiveness in a rapidly changing environment (Akbar et al., 2024). Therefore, achieving sustainability requires not only structural and policy changes but also the effective utilization of internal resources, particularly human capital.

### Human Capital Development

Human capital development refers to the process of enhancing the knowledge,

skills, competencies, and abilities of individuals within an organization to improve performance and create value. In higher education institutions, human capital includes academic staff, administrative personnel, and leadership, all of whom play a vital role in achieving institutional goals. Human resources play a crucial role in determining how well an organization performs in carrying out its tasks and functions (Apriliansa & Nawangsari, 2021). Contemporary research highlights that human capital development goes beyond traditional training and education, encompassing continuous learning, capability building, and innovation-oriented development. Effective human capital development enables organizations to improve productivity, foster creativity, and enhance adaptability to environmental changes (Tjahjadi et al., 2024). In universities, investment in human capital is essential for improving teaching quality, research output, and institutional competitiveness.

Moreover, human capital development is increasingly viewed as a strategic process rather than a purely operational function. This perspective positions employees as valuable assets whose development contributes directly to organizational success and sustainability. In line with this, the strategic role of human capital development becomes increasingly important in achieving organizational sustainability in universities in Palembang, where institutions face growing competition and rapid technological transformation. Empirical evidence suggests that the alignment between human capital strategies and sustainability goals enhances institutional adaptability, stakeholder engagement, and innovation capacity (Bilan et al., 2022; Yassim et al., 2025). Moreover, sustainable human resource management practices such as continuous learning, leadership development, and employee empowerment are critical in transforming human capital into intellectual capital that supports long-term organizational effectiveness (Hama & Cavusoglu, (2023); (Alfawaire & Atan, 2021). Thus, integrating human capital development into institutional strategies is essential for universities to maintain competitiveness while ensuring sustainable growth and performance.

### **Resource Based View (RBV)**

The Resource-Based View (RBV) provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how organizations achieve sustained competitive advantage through the effective utilization of internal resources. According to RBV, resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) can serve as sources of long-term competitive advantage (Wernerfelt, 1984).

Human capital is widely recognized as one of the most critical strategic resources within the RBV framework (Madhani, 2010). The knowledge, skills, and capabilities possessed by employees are difficult to replicate, making them a key driver of organizational performance and sustainability. In the context of higher education, the expertise of lecturers, research capabilities, and institutional knowledge represent strategic assets that contribute to long-term success (Radjenovic & Krstic, 2017).

Recent studies confirm that integrating human capital development with strategic resource management enhances organizational sustainability by strengthening internal capabilities and fostering innovation (Akbar et al., 2024). Thus, RBV provides a strong theoretical basis for linking human capital development to sustainability outcomes.

Furthermore, the integration of RBV with organizational sustainability

emphasizes that human capital should not be viewed merely as a supporting function, but as a strategic asset embedded within institutional strategy. Universities that successfully leverage their human capital are more likely to achieve sustainable outcomes, including enhanced institutional reputation, stakeholder trust, and long-term viability. In this regard, human capital development acts as a dynamic capability that continuously renews organizational resources and supports sustainable growth. Therefore, the RBV framework provides a meaningful lens for explaining how the strategic management of human capital contributes to achieving organizational sustainability, particularly within the context of higher education institutions in Palembang.

### **Strategic Role of Human Capital Development in Organizational Sustainability**

The strategic role of human capital development lies in its ability to support organizational sustainability through capability enhancement, innovation, and adaptability. When human capital development is aligned with organizational strategy, it becomes a powerful driver of sustainable performance. Hama & Cavusoglu, (2023) said that in higher education institutions, strategic human capital development contributes to sustainability in several ways. First, it enhances the competencies of academic and administrative staff, leading to improved teaching, research, and service quality. Second, it promotes a culture of continuous learning and innovation, enabling institutions to respond effectively to external changes. Third, it strengthens organizational commitment and engagement, which are essential for long-term sustainability.

The potential of each human resource is crucial to supporting the company's operations in achieving its daily activities and goals. The success of the company is dependent on the management of its human resources. As a result, companies should view their employees as partners in attaining those objectives (Firdaus et al., 2023).

However, the effectiveness of human capital development depends on several factors, including leadership commitment, strategic alignment, and institutional support (Anwar & Abdullah, 2020; Hamadamin & Atan, 2019). Without these elements, human capital initiatives may fail to produce meaningful outcomes. Studies indicate that challenges such as limited resources, lack of integrated strategies, and uneven capability development can hinder the role of human capital in achieving sustainability (Mellyzar et al., 2024).

Human resource management addresses the issues faced by individuals working in organizations by concentrating on traditional methods such as hiring, rewards, performance appraisals, and training from a partial perspective (Alfawaire & Atan, 2021). Workers were questioned about the validity and credibility of the research outcomes. More information was provided on request. Every official conveyed their pleasure with the research and its outcomes, emphasizing the importance of this aspect. It was found that, because the focus on human resources and enabling organizations to innovate through knowledge management processes, it was not necessary for the researchers to conduct any research on Sustainability (Zaid & Jaaron, 2023).

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Research Approach and Design

This study employs a qualitative research approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of how human capital development contributes strategically to organizational sustainability within universities in Palembang. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate as the study seeks to explore meanings, experiences, and institutional practices that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measurement.

The research is designed as a multiple case study, enabling cross-case analysis among several universities. This design allows the researcher to identify both common patterns and unique practices in human capital development strategies across institutions, thereby strengthening the analytical depth and contextual relevance of the findings.

The analysis was conducted iteratively, moving between data and theory to ensure conceptual depth. The interpretation of findings was guided by the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Sustainable Human Resource Management (S-HRM) frameworks, enabling a robust explanation of how human capital functions as a strategic resource in achieving long-term sustainability (Madhani, 2010).

### Research Sites and Informants

The research is conducted in selected private universities in Palembang that have formal programs related to staff training, competency development, or institutional strengthening.

Informants are selected through purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement in human capital development processes. The participants include:

- a. Top management (e.g., rector, vice rector, dean) who determine institutional strategy,
- b. Human resource or administrative managers responsible for staff development programs,
- c. Lecturers and administrative staff who have participated in training, workshops, or capacity-building activities. The number of informants ranges from 12 to 18 individuals, with selection continuing until data saturation is achieved (no new relevant information emerges).

### Data Collection Techniques

Data are collected using three complementary techniques to ensure depth and credibility:

1. Semi-Structured Interviews, Interviews are conducted using open-ended questions focusing on:
  - a. Types and implementation of training and development programs,
  - b. Knowledge sharing practices within the institution,
  - c. Efforts to improve employee competencies,
  - d. Perceived impact of these practices on institutional sustainability (e.g., adaptability, performance, innovation).
2. Document Analysis, Institutional documents are analyzed to validate interview data, including:
  - a. Strategic plans (Renstra),
  - b. HR development policies,

- c. Training reports and internal evaluations,
  - d. Accreditation or performance reports.
3. Limited Observation
- Observations are carried out in selected settings (e.g., training sessions or academic meetings) to understand how development practices are implemented in real situations.

### **Data Analysis and Trustworthiness**

The data collected from interviews, documents, and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis. First, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and reviewed repeatedly to gain familiarity with the data. Second, open coding was conducted by identifying meaningful statements related to strategic human capital development and organizational sustainability. Third, similar codes were grouped into categories and subsequently developed into broader themes. The themes were then reviewed, refined, and interpreted to ensure their relevance to the research objectives.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was employed by comparing information obtained from interviews, institutional documents, and observations. Member checking was also conducted by sharing summaries of the findings with selected participants to verify the accuracy of interpretations. In addition, peer debriefing was used to review the coding process and thematic development. The interpretation of the findings was guided by the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM) frameworks to explain the role of human capital development in achieving organizational sustainability.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study explores how human capital development is implemented within universities in Palembang and how it contributes to organizational sustainability. Based on the thematic analysis, the findings are organized into three major themes: (1) human capital development practices, (2) capability enhancement outcomes, and (3) implications for organizational sustainability.

### **1. Human Capital Development Practices in Universities**

The findings indicate that universities in Palembang have implemented various human capital development initiatives through training programs, workshops, and academic development activities. These initiatives reflect the growing recognition of human capital as a strategic asset that supports institutional effectiveness and sustainability. In line with the Resource-Based View (RBV), investments in employee competencies contribute to the development of valuable organizational capabilities that strengthen long-term competitiveness. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives varies across institutions. Some universities have structured and continuous development programs, while others still rely on ad hoc or short-term training activities. Informants highlighted that the sustainability of such programs depends on leadership commitment and resource allocation.

In addition to formal training, knowledge-sharing practices emerged as an

important component of human capital development. Internal discussions, peer collaboration, and mentoring activities facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experience among employees. This finding suggests that organizational learning plays a significant role in enhancing institutional adaptability and resilience. However, the absence of formal knowledge management systems may limit the long-term sustainability of these practices.

## 2. Capability Enhancement as a Strategic Outcome

This finding demonstrates that human capital development generates strategic outcomes beyond individual skill improvement. Enhanced competencies, adaptability, and innovation capacity enable universities to respond more effectively to environmental changes and increasing stakeholder expectations. These results support previous studies that identify human capital as a key driver of organizational performance and sustainability. The study identifies three key outcomes:

- a. Improved competencies: Lecturers and staff demonstrate better technical and managerial skills after participating in development programs.
- b. Increased adaptability: Employees become more responsive to institutional changes, such as curriculum updates, digital learning systems, and accreditation demands.
- c. Innovation capacity: Some universities show early signs of innovation, particularly in teaching methods and administrative processes.

Despite these improvements, challenges remain. Several informants noted that not all employees have equal access to development opportunities, and evaluation of training effectiveness is still limited.

## 3. Human Capital Development and Organizational Sustainability

The findings reveal that human capital development plays a strategic role in supporting organizational sustainability in three main aspects:

- a. Institutional adaptability: Universities with more consistent development programs are better able to respond to external pressures, including policy changes and competition among higher education institutions.
- b. Long-term performance: Continuous skill development contributes to improved academic performance, service quality, and institutional reputation.
- c. Organizational resilience: Institutions with stronger human capital practices are more capable of maintaining stability in uncertain conditions.

However, the findings indicate that human capital development contributes to sustainability only when it is aligned with institutional strategy. Development initiatives that are implemented in isolation tend to produce short-term improvements, whereas strategically integrated programs are more likely to strengthen organizational resilience, adaptability, and long-term performance. This finding supports the principles of Sustainable Human Resource Management, which emphasize the alignment of human resource practices with organizational sustainability goals.

## Discussion

The findings confirm that human capital development is not merely an operational

activity but a strategic mechanism in achieving organizational sustainability. This supports the perspective of the Resource-Based View (RBV), which emphasizes human capital as a valuable and inimitable resource that can create sustainable competitive advantage. In the context of universities in Palembang, human capital development contributes to sustainability by enhancing institutional capabilities, particularly in terms of adaptability and innovation.

From the RBV perspective, the findings indicate that human capital in the studied universities fulfills the VRIN criteria. Human capital is valuable because lecturers and educational staff contribute directly to teaching quality, research productivity, community service, and institutional accreditation. It is also rare, as highly qualified lecturers with doctoral degrees, professional certifications, and extensive academic networks are not easily available in all higher education institutions. Furthermore, human capital is inimitable because the knowledge, experience, organizational culture, and collaborative relationships developed over time cannot be easily replicated by competing universities. Finally, these capabilities are non-substitutable since technological resources and physical infrastructure cannot fully replace the role of competent lecturers and staff in generating innovation, academic excellence, and sustainable institutional performance. Therefore, the strategic value of human capital becomes a key source of long-term organizational sustainability and competitive advantage.

This finding is supported by statements from key informants. As one Rector explained, "The sustainability of our university depends largely on the quality of our lecturers and staff. Investment in human resource development is not an option but a necessity." Similarly, a Dean stated, "Our competitive strength lies in the competencies, experience, and commitment of our academic personnel, which cannot be easily replicated by other institutions." These statements reinforce the argument that human capital represents a strategic asset that supports organizational sustainability.

However, this study also extends existing literature by emphasizing the contextual challenges faced by regional universities, such as limited resources, uneven program implementation, and lack of systematic evaluation. These findings suggest that while human capital development is widely recognized as important, its strategic execution still requires improvement.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of integrating formal development programs with informal knowledge sharing practices. Institutions that successfully combine both approaches tend to achieve better sustainability outcomes, indicating that organizational learning plays a key role in strengthening human capital. Moreover, the results suggest that human capital development creates a multiplier effect, where improved individual capabilities translate into enhanced organizational performance, stronger academic reputation, and increased competitiveness. From a managerial perspective, university leaders should prioritize human capital development as a core element of institutional strategy rather than as a periodic training activity. Universities need to establish continuous professional development programs, strengthen leadership development initiatives, promote knowledge-sharing practices, and invest in digital competencies to enhance organizational sustainability. For policymakers and higher education authorities, the findings highlight the importance of supporting sustainable human resource development through funding schemes, capacity-building

programs, and performance evaluation systems. By integrating human capital development into long-term strategic planning, universities can strengthen their adaptability, resilience, and competitiveness in an increasingly dynamic higher education environment.

## CONCLUSION

This study confirms that human capital development plays a strategic and pivotal role in achieving organizational sustainability within higher education institutions, particularly in the context of universities in Palembang. The findings demonstrate that the quality of human resources reflected through continuous training, competency enhancement, knowledge sharing, and adaptive capabilities serves as a key driver in strengthening institutional resilience and long-term performance.

Furthermore, the study reveals that universities that systematically invest in human capital development are better positioned to respond to environmental changes, technological advancements, and increasing competition in the higher education sector. The integration of strategic human resource management practices with sustainability oriented goals contributes not only to improved organizational effectiveness but also to the creation of sustainable academic ecosystems.

Importantly, human capital development is not merely an operational function but a strategic asset that aligns institutional vision with sustainable outcomes. This alignment enables universities to enhance innovation capacity, improve stakeholder engagement, and maintain competitive advantage in a dynamic environment. This research also highlights that the sustainability of higher education institutions is significantly influenced by their ability to transform human capital into intellectual capital and organizational capabilities. Therefore, strengthening policies related to professional development, leadership capacity, and institutional learning becomes essential.

The findings of this study provide several managerial implications for university leaders and policymakers. University leaders should prioritize sustainable human capital development by allocating adequate resources for continuous training, competency enhancement, leadership development, and knowledge-sharing initiatives. These strategies can strengthen employee capabilities, improve organizational adaptability, and support long-term institutional sustainability. In addition, policymakers are encouraged to develop supportive regulations and funding programs that facilitate professional development, digital skills enhancement, and capacity-building activities for academic and administrative staff. Such efforts are essential to strengthening the competitiveness and sustainability of higher education institutions in a rapidly changing environment.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence from a local context, emphasizing that sustainable organizational performance in universities cannot be achieved without strategic investment in human capital. Future research is recommended to explore broader comparative contexts and incorporate additional variables such as digital transformation and organizational culture to enrich the understanding of sustainability in higher education.

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