

Research Article

Sustainable Human Resource Practices and Nurse Retention: Examining the Roles of Work-Life Balance, Organizational Commitment and Employer Branding

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Abstract: The retention of qualified nurses has become a critical organizational challenge because workforce instability can affect service continuity, employee well-being, organizational reputation and the quality of patient care. Traditional retention strategies have largely emphasized compensation and recruitment, whereas contemporary approaches increasingly recognize the importance of Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM), employee experience and employer branding. This review examines the relationship between sustainable human resource practices and nurse retention, with particular emphasis on work-life balance, organizational commitment and employer branding. The review integrates perspectives from sustainable HRM, organizational commitment theory, social exchange theory and employer branding to develop an integrated conceptual framework. Evidence from the literature indicates that employee-centred HR practices, including flexible scheduling, supportive leadership, career development, employee participation, recognition, psychological safety and well-being initiatives, can contribute to improved work-life balance and stronger organizational commitment. Employer branding further strengthens these relationships by translating internal employment practices into a distinctive organizational identity and employee value proposition. In healthcare organizations, an authentic employer brand may enhance nurses' organizational identification, perceived organizational support and intention to remain. The review proposes that sustainable HR practices influence nurse retention both directly and indirectly through work-life balance and organizational commitment, while employer branding can reinforce these relationships. The article concludes with implications for healthcare managers and future research, particularly the need to integrate employee experience with employer-brand strategy.

Keywords: Sustainable HRM, Retention, Work-Life Balance, Organizational Commitment, Employer Branding

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INTRODUCTION

Human resources constitute one of the most important strategic assets of healthcare organizations. Among healthcare professionals, nurses represent a particularly critical workforce because they provide continuous patient care and operate at the interface between clinical services, patients, families and multidisciplinary teams. However, nurse retention remains a significant organizational challenge. Workload, shift-based employment, emotional demands, limited career progression, inadequate staffing, occupational stress and poor work-life balance can contribute to turnover intentions and actual employee departure.

The issue of nurse retention has implications beyond human resource management. High turnover can increase recruitment and training expenditure, disrupt team functioning, reduce institutional knowledge and potentially affect patient outcomes. Consequently, healthcare organizations increasingly need to move from short-term employee retention initiatives toward sustainable employment systems that support both organizational performance and employee well-being.

Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM) provides such a perspective. Sustainable HRM extends conventional HRM by emphasizing the long-term development, well-being, employability and social sustainability of employees while simultaneously considering organizational performance [1-3]. Rather than viewing employees merely as resources for achieving productivity objectives, employee-centred sustainable HRM emphasizes the CREATION of working environments in which individuals can remain productive and psychologically healthy over time.

The relationship between HR practices and retention can also be interpreted through employer branding. Employer branding refers to the development and communication of a distinctive employment identity that differentiates an organization from competing employers [4,5]. Originally associated with marketing, employer branding has increasingly become an interdisciplinary concept connecting marketing, human resources, organizational behaviour and talent management. In healthcare, employer branding can communicate organizational values such as professional development, employee recognition, ethical leadership, work-life balance, career opportunities and commitment to employee welfare.

Work–life balance and organizational commitment are two additional mechanisms that can explain why sustainable HR practices influence retention. Work-life balance represents employees' ability to manage work responsibilities alongside family, personal and social roles [6]. Organizational commitment reflects the strength of employees' psychological attachment to their organization and has long been associated with turnover-related outcomes [7].

Therefore, this review integrates these four dimensions-sustainable HR practices, work-life balance, organizational commitment and employer branding-to examine how healthcare organizations can develop sustainable strategies for retaining nurses.

Sustainable Human Resource Practices in Healthcare

Sustainable HRM is concerned with the long-term relationship between employees and organizations. It emphasizes practices that simultaneously support organizational effectiveness, employee well-being, social responsibility and long-term employability. Ehnert [1] argued that sustainable HRM requires organizations to balance economic objectives with the sustainable development of their human resources. Kramar [2] further positioned sustainable HRM within a broader framework of social, environmental and economic sustainability.

In healthcare organizations, sustainable HR practices may include fair compensation, reasonable workloads, flexible scheduling, adequate staffing, professional development, participative decision-making, employee recognition, occupational safety, psychological support and career progression. Such practices are particularly important for nurses because nursing work frequently involves irregular working hours, emotional labour, high responsibility and exposure to stressful clinical situations.

Employee-centred sustainable HRM also emphasizes the quality and sustainability of employment relationships. Richards [3] argued that sustainable HRM should place employees at the centre rather than focusing exclusively on productivity. This perspective is especially relevant in nursing, where employee well-being and patient care are closely interconnected.

Recent healthcare research has also highlighted the relationship between sustainable HRM, employee well-being, job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Sustainable HR practices can therefore serve as a foundation through which healthcare organizations improve the employee experience while strengthening organizational resilience (Table 1).

Work-Life Balance and Nurse Retention

Work–life balance is particularly significant in nursing because nurses often work rotating shifts, nights, weekends and extended hours. These working conditions can interfere with family responsibilities, personal recovery, social relationships and leisure activities. When employees perceive persistent conflict between professional and personal roles, their job satisfaction and psychological well-being may decline.

Table 1: Sustainable HR Practices and Their Potential Influence on Nurse Retention

Sustainable HR practice	Employee-level mechanism	Expected retention outcome	Employer-brand implication
Flexible scheduling and shift management	Improves work–life balance	Lower turnover intention	Signals employee-centred culture
Adequate staffing and workload management	Reduces exhaustion and role overload	Greater intention to stay	Strengthens reputation as a responsible employer
Career development and training	Enhances employability and career satisfaction	Higher organizational commitment	Creates a development-oriented employer image
Recognition and fair rewards	Increases perceived organizational support	Greater loyalty	Builds positive employee value proposition
Supportive leadership	Strengthens trust and psychological safety	Lower withdrawal intention	Reinforces authentic employer identity
Employee participation	Enhances autonomy and organizational identification	Stronger commitment	Promotes inclusive employer brand
Health and well-being programmes	Supports physical and psychological well-being	Improved retention	Demonstrates organizational responsibility
Ethical and socially responsible practices	Enhances value congruence	Stronger organizational identification	Differentiates employer brand

Greenhaus *et al.* [6] conceptualized work-family balance as the extent to which individuals experience equilibrium between work and family roles. Subsequent research has demonstrated that work-life balance is associated with employee well-being, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover-related outcomes [8].

For nurses, sustainable HR practices can improve work-life balance through predictable scheduling, flexible shift arrangements, adequate leave, childcare support, workload redistribution and supportive supervisors. Importantly, work-life balance should not be reduced to flexible working arrangements alone. Staffing adequacy, supervisor support, manageable workloads and organizational norms are equally important.

A hospital may formally offer flexible scheduling, but if nurses feel unable to use it because of staffing shortages or fear of managerial disapproval, the policy may have little practical value. Thus, the effectiveness of work-life balance initiatives depends on organizational culture and managerial implementation.

Work-life balance may also contribute to retention through a social exchange mechanism. When nurses perceive that their organization recognizes their personal responsibilities and invests in their well-being, they may reciprocate with stronger loyalty and commitment. Consequently, work-life balance can function as an important psychological pathway connecting sustainable HR practices to retention.

Organizational Commitment as a Retention Mechanism

Organizational commitment represents an employee's relationship with and attachment to an organization. Meyer and Allen [7] proposed three dimensions: affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. Affective commitment reflects emotional attachment; continuance commitment relates to perceived costs associated with leaving; and normative commitment reflects a sense of obligation to remain.

For nurse retention, affective commitment may be particularly important because healthcare professionals often identify strongly with the mission and social purpose of their profession. Nurses who perceive that their hospital respects their professional contribution, provides development opportunities, recognizes achievements and supports their well-being may develop stronger emotional attachment to the organization.

Sustainable HR practices can strengthen organizational commitment by creating a positive employment relationship. Training and career development may demonstrate organizational investment in employees, while participative management can provide nurses with greater autonomy and voice. Recognition and fair rewards can increase perceived organizational support, whereas supportive leadership can strengthen trust.

The relationship between sustainable HRM and commitment is also consistent with social exchange theory. Employees tend to respond positively when organizations demonstrate concern for their welfare. In turn, employees may reciprocate through stronger commitment, engagement and willingness to remain with the organization.

Thus, organizational commitment can be conceptualized as an important mediator between sustainable HR practices and nurse retention.

Employer Branding: The Marketing Dimension of Nurse Retention

Employer branding provides a direct connection between human resource management and marketing. Ambler and Barrow [4] introduced employer branding as the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits associated with employment. Backhaus and Tikoo [5] subsequently established employer branding as a strategic framework involving employer associations, organizational identity and employee attraction and retention.

In competitive healthcare labour markets, hospitals compete not only for patients but also for qualified healthcare professionals. Consequently, employer branding has become increasingly relevant to workforce strategy. An effective employer brand communicates why nurses should join, remain with and advocate for a particular organization.

Employer branding, however, should not be based solely on external communication. If an organization promotes itself as a supportive and employee-friendly employer but nurses experience excessive workload, limited career opportunities, poor leadership, or inadequate recognition, a gap may emerge between the employer-brand promise and the actual employee experience.

Employer branding should therefore be regarded as an outcome of authentic organizational practices rather than merely a promotional activity. Sustainable HR practices create the employee experience; employer branding communicates and reinforces that experience.

Recent evidence specifically examining nurses indicates that employer branding can contribute to nurse retention, with organizational culture and career development playing important mediating roles. This finding reinforces the argument that employer branding in healthcare should integrate employee experience, career development, organizational values and workplace culture rather than focus exclusively on recruitment communication.

Integrated Role of Work-Life Balance, Organizational Commitment and Employer Branding

The literature suggests that sustainable HR practices do not influence retention through a single pathway. Rather, multiple psychological and organizational mechanisms may operate simultaneously.

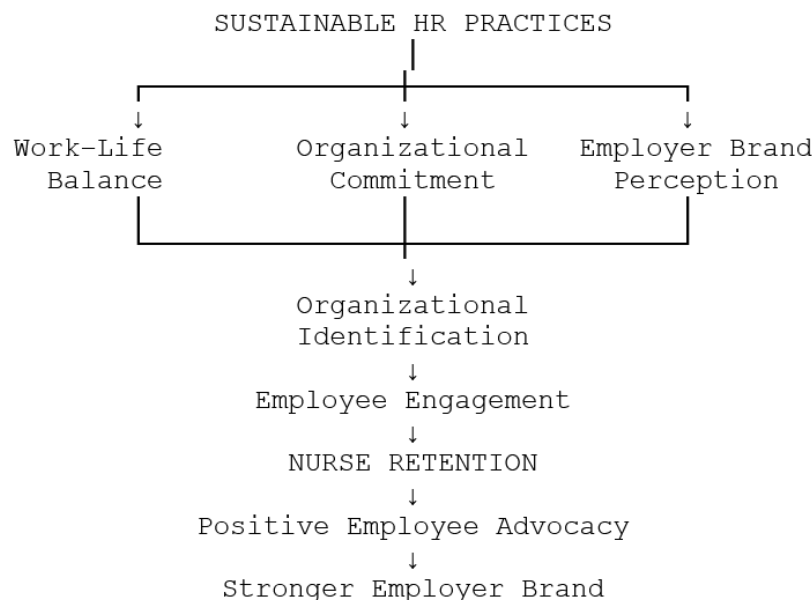


Figure 1: Proposed Integrated Model Linking Sustainable Hr Practices with Nurse Retention through Work–Life Balance, Organizational Commitment and Employer Branding

First, sustainable HR practices can directly improve the employee experience. Second, these practices can improve work–life balance by reducing role conflict and supporting employee recovery. Third, a positive employment experience can strengthen organizational commitment. Fourth, consistent HR practices can strengthen employer-brand perceptions and organizational identification.

The interaction among these constructs can create a reinforcing cycle. When nurses experience supportive HR practices, they may develop greater work–life balance and perceive their employer more positively. A positive employer image may strengthen pride and identification with the organization, while organizational commitment can increase willingness to remain. Retention itself can further strengthen the employer brand because satisfied and experienced nurses can become internal and external advocates of the organization (Figure 1).

The framework suggests that employer branding should be considered both an antecedent and an outcome of employee experience. Organizations that offer sustainable employment conditions create credible employer-brand propositions. Conversely, a strong and authentic employer brand can reinforce employee identification and commitment.

Strategic Implications for Healthcare Organizations

The integrated perspective has several implications for healthcare managers:

- **First, Retention should be Treated as a Strategic Rather than Purely Administrative HR Objective:** Hospitals should monitor retention alongside employee well-being, engagement, organizational commitment and employer-brand perception
- **Second, Work–Life Balance should Become Part of Workforce Planning:** Flexible shift arrangements, predictable rosters, adequate leave, employee assistance programmes and supportive supervision should be integrated into nursing workforce strategies
- **Third, Organizations should Invest in Career Development:** Structured professional development, mentoring, leadership pathways, continuing education and transparent promotion systems can strengthen both commitment and employer attractiveness
- **Fourth, Employer Branding should Reflect Actual Employee Experiences:** Healthcare organizations should avoid treating employer branding simply as recruitment advertising. The employer value proposition should be based on authentic organizational practices related to culture, leadership, professional development, fairness and well-being
- **Fifth, Nurse Participation should be Strengthened:** Nurses should be involved in decisions concerning staffing, scheduling, workplace safety, professional development and quality improvement. Employee voice can strengthen organizational identification and create a sense of ownership

- **Sixth, Internal Branding should Complement External Branding:** Employees are important brand ambassadors. Nurses who experience organizational support and identify with the institution may communicate positive employer experiences to colleagues, professional networks, prospective employees and the wider community

Future Research Perspectives

Although existing literature provides substantial support for relationships among HR practices, work-life balance, organizational commitment, employer branding and retention, several research gaps remain.

Future studies should empirically test the integrated model presented in figure using structural equation modelling or longitudinal research designs. Studies could examine whether work-life balance and organizational commitment mediate the relationship between sustainable HR practices and retention, while employer branding moderates or reinforces these relationships. Cross-cultural research would also be valuable because perceptions of work-life balance, organizational commitment, leadership and employer attractiveness may differ across countries and healthcare systems. Comparative studies involving public and private hospitals could further identify whether institutional context affects the effectiveness of sustainable HR strategies.

Future research should also investigate generational differences among nurses. Early-career nurses may place greater emphasis on career development and organizational learning, whereas experienced nurses may place greater value on autonomy, recognition, flexibility and long-term employment security. Another important direction is the integration of digital HRM. Digital scheduling, employee feedback systems, learning platforms and data-driven workforce analytics may support sustainable employment practices. However, technological solutions should complement rather than replace human-centred leadership and employee relationships.

Finally, future studies should examine the relationship between employer-brand authenticity and nurse advocacy. Employee advocacy may be an important but underexplored pathway through which internal HR practices influence external employer reputation and future talent attraction.

CONCLUSION

Nurse retention is increasingly dependent on organizations' ability to create sustainable, supportive and meaningful employment experiences. This review indicates that sustainable HR practices can provide an important foundation for improving nurse retention by addressing employee well-being, work-life balance, career development, organizational support and professional growth.

Work-life balance can reduce the conflict between professional and personal responsibilities, while organizational commitment can transform positive workplace experiences into stronger psychological attachment to the organization. Employer branding adds a marketing-oriented dimension by translating these internal experiences into a distinctive employer identity and employee value proposition.

The central proposition of this review is that employer branding should not be separated from sustainable HRM. A credible employer brand is ultimately created through employees' actual experiences. For healthcare organizations, therefore, sustainable HR practices, work-life balance, organizational commitment and employer branding should be viewed as interconnected components of an integrated nurse-retention strategy.

In conclusion, healthcare organizations that invest in sustainable employment conditions can potentially achieve a dual benefit: improving the well-being and retention of nurses while simultaneously strengthening their employer reputation. The integration of HRM and marketing perspectives provides a promising direction for developing resilient healthcare organizations and sustainable nursing workforces.

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