

Organisational Aesthetics in Sustainable Human Resource Management: A Four-Dimensional Framework

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Abstract: Organisations increasingly face pressure to develop more human-centred and sustainable approaches in complex and rapidly changing environments. One such development is the ‘aesthetic turn’ in management, which integrates sensory and artistic dimensions into organisational practices. This study examines the relationship between organisational aesthetics, human resource management (HRM), and sustainability, addressing a gap in the literature on sustainable HRM. A systematic literature review of 38 peer-reviewed journal articles, identified through searches in Scopus and Web of Science, was conducted using an iterative coding process. The analysis identified 20 themes, which were aggregated into four key dimensions: (1) talent attraction, (2) organisational culture and diversity, (3) physical work environment, and (4) employee well-being and satisfaction. The findings show that organisational aesthetics function as a connecting mechanism between HRM practices and the social dimension of sustainability. The analysis also reveals key limitations, including the uneven distribution of aesthetic benefits, the superficial use of aesthetics in employer branding, and the risk of reinforcing appearance-based biases. The study contributes to theory by proposing a four-dimensional framework of organisational aesthetics in sustainable HRM and by integrating fragmented multidisciplinary insights into a coherent structure. It also highlights the need for further empirical research and demonstrates that organisational aesthetics is a critical, yet underexplored, driver of sustainable HRM.

Keywords: Human Resource Management, Sustainability, Organisational Aesthetics, Workplace Aesthetics, Employee Well-Being

1. Introduction

Quickening and aggravating changes in environments, particularly crises and disruptive events, force organisations to respond adequately and to find novel solutions to upcoming problems. Operating in an increasingly complex and unpredictable world calls for innovation, imagination, intuition, improvisation, etc. (Mairesse et al., 2022). Such novel approaches can be ‘borrowed’ from other, sometimes close, sometimes (apparently or actually) rather distant realms. As Kuhn (1962) noted, when the existing does not provide sufficient results, something novel is needed. This concerns the ‘aesthetic turn’ in organisation studies – collating organisations and their management with art and aesthetics has led to a novel, artistic approach exploring fluidity, creativity, and playfulness (Strati 2010).

Organisational aesthetics as an ‘epistemological metaphor’ offers considerable alternatives to the traditional logical-rational understanding of organisations. Strati and Guillet de Montoux (2002) qualified this notion by three dilemmas: the essential (survival) versus the superfluous (pleasure); the serious (income, etc.) versus the facetious (human relations, etc.); and notably, the scientific (methodical rigour, etc.) versus the artistic (seeing the unusual, sensitive-aesthetic judgement, etc.). They also delimited three research approaches in organisational aesthetics, labelled ‘archaeological’, ‘empathic-logical’, and ‘empathic-aesthetic’ (ibid).

Aesthetics in organisations concerns resources, processes, organisation, and environment. The last embraces physical spaces, including all socio-material dimensions. Physical spaces are nowadays increasingly affected by information technology, forming hybrid (physical and virtual) workspaces with new possibilities and limitations. This brings along specific aesthetic aspects. (Petani and Mengis, 2021) A focal keyword in this context is *socio-materiality* which combines ‘social’ (symbols, meanings, desires, culture, etc.) and ‘material’ (things: forms, machines, databases, furniture, etc.). Various human-machine (including robots and artificial intelligence) interactions are increasingly important, as all these have aesthetic aspects. (Moura and Bispo, 2020)

The role of artistic thinking and (metaphorical) learning from the arts is increasingly recognised. Artistic interventions have proved useful in several ways. In the context of this paper, particularly important is making the work (more) meaningful (Berthoin Antal et al., 2018). Organisational aesthetics and organisational culture are inherently linked, and both have an influence on employee satisfaction and motivation (Bjerke et al., 2007). Aesthetical organisations promote the well-being of employees, thereby helping to attract and retain employees, especially talents, also older personnel and other specific groups. Human resource practices and

organisational culture affect performance, including service quality (ibid). This is increasingly important in the current situation because of hard competition in consumer as well as in labour markets.

Human resource management (HRM) is a complex (sub)field in practice and a (sub)discipline in academic education and research. Significant developments in HRM, caused by rapidly advancing technologies, changes in labour force expectations, etc., are generally recognised. The literature points to various trends that have shaped and will shape the future of HRM. For example, the overall digital transformation has revolutionised most organisational practices: traditional human and paper-based tasks are gradually automated and transferred to digital systems. The forming new conjuncture, labelled as HRM 4.0, implies modern features like Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data, etc., augmenting data-based decision-making, agility and innovation. Nowadays, HRM is a strategic organisational function, not just administrative work. (O'Brien et al., 2025) Another case is remote and hybrid work that proliferated during the COVID-19 pandemic (Liang et al., 2022).

Contemporary HRM involves several fascinating developments in practice and in research. Recently, Hewett and Meier-Barthold (2026) reiterated that HRM is inherently complex, involving systems of principles, practices, and activities at individual, group, organisational, and macro levels, conjoined through systems of interconnected processes. To address this, they called for shifting from isolated variables to patterns, processes, and interdependencies that change in time. Among other aspects, they (ibid) point to temporary organising that "... requires us to conceptualise HR systems as dynamic ecosystems". Temporary (project) organisations became usual, yet HRM and employment practices are still treated in the context of routine tasks and 'permanent' organisations (Samimi et al., 2026). HRM and temporality deserve more attention, also because of a loop to organisational aesthetics: more aesthetic temporary organisations may bring along more aesthetic permanent organisations, and vice versa (Raadik and Kuura, 2025).

As cited before, Liang et al. (2022) noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had an effect on incorporating sustainability principles into HRM. Emerging 'sustainable HRM' includes four types: as socially responsible HRM activities; as green HRM; as triple bottom line HRM, and as common good HRM (Aust et al., 2020). Sustainable HRM has deserved significant attention in research: prevalent themes are sustainable leadership, environmental sustainability, organisational performance, and notably, paradoxical tensions between HRM and sustainability. Particularly important is the social dimension of sustainability, including social responsibility and relations with multifarious stakeholders. (Macke and Genari, 2019)

Surprisingly, the relationship between HRM practices and organisational aesthetics has not deserved much attention in academic literature. So, there is a certain research gap that this paper attempts to fill. Furthermore, this paper integrates another neoteric topic – sustainability. The next section presents a scoping review of existent literature, concerning relations between organisational aesthetics, HRM and sustainability issues. The final section is for discussion and conclusions.

2. Systematic Literature Review

The research approach relied on the grounded theory, starting with open coding and proceeding with axial coding to aggregate the second- and third-level constructs. Searches of literature were conducted in the Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases, using a structured query of keywords: "sustainability", "human resource management", and "organisational aesthetics". The searches were restricted by publication type (articles in peer-reviewed journals), but not by publication date. The search in Scopus revealed 15 and in WoS 30 matches, including six duplicates. So, the initial sample included 39 articles, all published during the past two decades. All the articles were then evaluated through a multi-stage iterative process, involving the title, abstract, and full-text reviews. One source lacked sufficient contemporary relevance and was omitted in the screening, resulting in a final analytical sample of 38 articles. To ensure systematic selection, thematic relevance was assessed using a traffic light principle. Green was assigned to articles directly addressing the research questions, whereas yellow indicated studies offering valuable theoretical parallels or secondary insights. The articles marked both green and yellow were included in the final sample; however, those categorised as red were excluded. These typically lacked sufficient theoretical grounding, were only peripherally related to the scope, or used keywords in an unrelated context, such as solely describing a target population. By applying these criteria, the final synthesis focused exclusively on the sources providing clear empirical or conceptual contributions to the intersection of organisational aesthetics and sustainable HRM. Keywords were selected based on their conceptual centrality within each source rather than their mere presence. The analytical objective was to identify recurring patterns, relational structures, and thematic consistencies across the dataset. The analysis began by examining the keywords in individual articles before comparing their recurrence across the sample. To ensure consistency,

terms were consolidated and then grouped into themes, following their contextual application. This approach yielded 20 themes, which underwent further refinement to ensure analytical depth and clarity. To enhance consistency, the keywords and themes were iteratively refined. The coding process followed an iterative approach. In the first stage, recurring concepts and keywords were identified across the selected articles. These initial codes were then compared and grouped based on their conceptual similarity. The resulting themes were further refined by assessing their frequency and theoretical relevance, leading to the aggregation of twenty themes into four broader dimensions. This process ensured that the identified dimensions were grounded in the literature while also reflecting consistent patterns across the dataset. The identified dimensions form the basis for the conceptual framework, discussed in the next section.

The sample included 38 journal articles, both conceptual and empirical. Academic impact was evaluated through citation counts and annual citation rates (citations per year availability). The earliest publication in the sample is Avgerou et al. (2007), ranking third in terms of the overall citation count with 331 citations. The most cited is the study by Suh et al. (2017) with 465 citations, which examines the consistent use of gamified information systems in the workplace. The annual citation rate indicates that the contribution of Suh et al. (2017) maintains the highest academic impact within this sample.

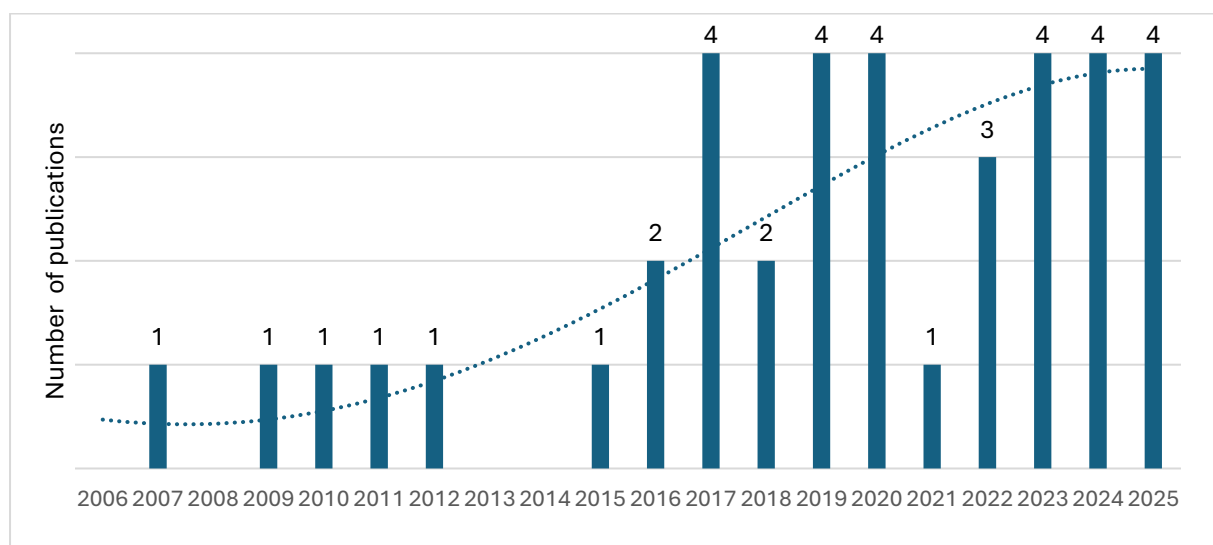


Figure 1: Distribution of selected publications over time

As depicted in Figure 1, the distribution of publications over time indicates that research on this topic is in its early stages and has only shown a growth trend over the last decade. Remarkably, 32 of 38 articles in the sample have been published within the last decade.

The discerned twenty initial themes were subsequently aggregated into four broader dimensions: (1) talent attraction, (2) organisational culture and diversity, (3) physical work environment, and (4) employee well-being and satisfaction (see Appendix 1 for the coding structure). Based on these findings, a four-dimensional framework of organisational aesthetics in sustainable human resource management is proposed (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: A four-dimensional framework of organisational aesthetics in sustainable HRM

The constructed four-dimensional framework illustrates how organisational aesthetics operates through four key dimensions that collectively influence sustainable HRM. It highlights the integrative role of aesthetics in linking organisational practices with employee experience and sustainability objectives.

Talent attraction appeared an important dimension that formed from six themes which aggregated 26 initial keywords with a total number of 55 mentions. A clearly prevalent theme *Competenc* formed from the keywords that were mentioned 31 times, which is over 80% of articles in the final sample of 38.

Organisational culture and diversity aggregated eight themes. The number of total occurrences was a bit smaller (50) but mentions in more than ¾ of articles in the final sample indicates the importance of the topic. The prevalent theme organisational culture accounts for a third of the total occurrences; followed by discrimination.

Physical work environment formed from a single theme that indicates its specificity. This theme and dimension comprised 21 initial keywords with the highest total number of occurrences (70). This means that an average article in the final sample mentioned about two related initial keywords. The initial keywords varied significantly.

Employee well-being and satisfaction formed from five themes and 21 initial keywords that occurred in 33 sources of the sample. The two most universal themes in this dimension were well-being and teamwork that concern also management.

3. Discussion and Conclusions

This section discusses and develops the four dimensions of the framework.

Talent attraction. Organisational aesthetics plays a significant role even before the first contact between an employer and a potential employee. As Ganesan and George (2019) note, the visual aspect of recruitment advertisements is not merely a matter of taste but an important indicator of organisational values and culture. Similarly, Merriman et al. (2025) show that the inclusion of biophilic or nature-inspired elements can signal diversity and social orientation, thereby increasing employer attractiveness. However, as Kele and Cassell (2023) warn, a critical limitation arises when such external representations do not match internal organisational reality, creating a disconnect between image and practice. This is further reflected in recruitment processes, where Torres and Gregory (2018) found that although first impressions are influenced by visual cues, final decisions still rely on candidates' communication and problem-solving skills. At the same time, Ronda and De Gràcia (2022) demonstrate that applicants increasingly consider office design and spatial layout as key decision factors, sometimes even more important than traditional benefits such as salary or working hours.

It should be noted that the literature in the formed sample concentrated on talent attraction as a particular stage in employee lifecycle. However, office design and spatial layout, not to mention salary and working hours, indicate the importance of the following stages in employee lifecycles. This means that talent attraction is not enough, it is necessary to cover the whole lifecycle of a talent and speak about talent management. This idea is depicted in Figure 2.

Organisational culture and diversity. Aesthetics also shapes how employees represent the organisation in their everyday work. Organisational culture is reflected through employee behaviour, where charisma, empathy, and professional conduct act as aesthetic expressions of service and organisational identity (Gelacio-Macedo et al., 2025). Supporting this interplay between people, space, and technology requires deliberate alignment through human-centred design and resource management (Majid et al., 2020), as well as the development of practical and technological skills (Teng et al., 2019). Cultural change cannot be achieved solely through top-down rules; authentic identity and internal coherence are essential for maintaining legitimacy (Benn et al., 2009). Leaders may support this process through narrative-building and dramaturgical approaches that create shared meaning (D'Souza, 2024). At the same time, organisations risk losing legitimacy when external diversity signals do not reflect internal reality (Kele and Cassell, 2023), which may lead to superficial diversity practices and even appearance-based discrimination (Jones et al., 2024).

The *physical work environment* shapes how spatial design and aesthetics influence employee productivity and well-being. Barton and Le (2023) position an aesthetically pleasing work environment as a fundamental employee need that directly influences job satisfaction and psychological comfort. This perspective is reinforced by Abu-Lail et al. (2025), who show that the adaptive reuse of historic buildings, where architectural heritage is integrated with modern features such as natural light and acoustics, enhances both individual creativity and collective well-being. However, spatial design may also generate unintended consequences. Rolfö et al. (2018) observe that while activity-based workspaces may improve visual and acoustic conditions, the absence of fixed

seating introduces challenges for team cohesion. Employees may spend excessive time searching for available desks or attempt to reclaim control over their surroundings through personal items, which can further increase spatial tensions. In addition, Kirillova et al. (2020) highlight spatial inequalities, where employees in less visible areas experience lower levels of aesthetic satisfaction. This is particularly significant given that employees may prioritise aesthetic improvements even over ergonomic ones, as environmental aesthetics is closely linked to both psychological and physical health outcomes (Schell et al., 2011).

Employee well-being and satisfaction reflect how these aesthetic conditions are experienced by employees in everyday work. In work environments where employees are treated primarily as instruments for organisational goals, the neglect of human sustainability becomes evident (Crichton and Shrivastava, 2017). Combined with high workloads, particularly in service-related roles, this leads to emotional exhaustion and reduced job satisfaction (Masters et al., 2025). Traditional approaches, such as formal codes of ethics, often remain insufficient. Instead, Agostini et al. (2016) argue that preventing burnout requires aesthetic flexibility and a greater acceptance of improvisation and imperfection within organisational culture. This perspective challenges the separation of mind and body and emphasises the need for a holistic approach, where employee vitality is continuously supported.

Taken together, our findings clearly demonstrate that organisational aesthetics operates as a multidimensional mechanism linking HRM practices with sustainability. Empirical evidence indicates that neglecting workplace aesthetics is associated with concrete health risks, including stress, sleep disturbances, and musculoskeletal problems (Schell et al., 2011). At the same time, aesthetic qualities such as spatial unity, variety, and the inclusion of natural elements contribute directly to employees' perceived comfort and daily work experience (Kirillova et al., 2020; Barton and Le, 2023). These effects are not limited to physical conditions alone. As Akgün (2020) shows, employee satisfaction is also shaped by social interaction, where teams' ability to communicate in an empathetic and meaningful way supports learning and collaboration. In this context, aesthetic sensitivity extends beyond visual design to include interpersonal dynamics, as highlighted by Niemi-Kaija (2022) and Ferri et al. (2017), who emphasise its role in reducing social tensions and strengthening cohesion within diverse teams.

Although the literature highlights the positive role of organisational aesthetics in improving employee well-being and organisational attractiveness, several critical limitations remain. Aesthetic benefits are not equally distributed across organisational contexts, as employees in less visible roles may experience lower levels of aesthetic satisfaction. Furthermore, aesthetics may be used superficially as part of employer branding strategies, creating a discrepancy between external image and internal organisational practices. In addition, the growing emphasis on aesthetics may reinforce appearance-based biases, contributing to discrimination in recruitment and evaluation processes. Finally, despite increasing academic interest, empirical evidence linking organisational aesthetics to HRM and sustainability outcomes remains limited, indicating the need for further research.

Although research on these intersections is still in its early stages, continuous development requires a multi-disciplinary integration of architecture, environmental psychology, and information technology. In response to these limitations, this study proposes a four-dimensional framework of organisational aesthetics in sustainable human resource management (see Figure 2). For one, enlarging the first dimension from talent attraction to talent management points to opportunities and needs for further research.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that human resource managers should treat organisational aesthetics as a strategic rather than a purely decorative element. First, organisations should integrate aesthetic considerations into recruitment and employer branding, as visual and symbolic cues influence organisational attractiveness. Second, aesthetic improvements should be distributed across all organisational spaces, including less visible work areas, in order to avoid inequalities in employee experience. Third, organisations should align external aesthetic representations with internal practices to prevent discrepancies between employer image and actual working conditions. Finally, HRM practices should support holistic approaches to employee well-being by incorporating aesthetic flexibility in workplace design, including elements such as natural light, spatial harmony, and opportunities for personalisation.

These implications highlight that organisational aesthetics is not merely a matter of design, but a critical factor in achieving sustainable HRM and long-term organisational resilience.

Ethics Declaration

This study is based on published literature and does not involve human participants or sensitive data. No ethical clearance was required.

AI Declaration

ChatGPT 5.4, GeminiAI, and NotebookLM were used as tools to compress and structure the text during the review. The authors critically reviewed and checked all outputs generated by artificial intelligence.

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Appendix 1: Clustering Themes and Dimensions in Existing Research

1st Order Keywords/Concepts		2nd Order Themes		3rd Order Dimensions	
Sense and perception	7	Competenc_	31	Talent attraction	55
Sensorial_	4				
Performance_	4				
Knowledge_	3				
Wisdom_	3				
Competencies_	2				
Game	2				
Experience	2				
Competency	2				
Attentionality	1				
Skilful performance	1				
Staff selection	5	Recruitment	10		
Attraction	2				
Job choice	1				
Human capital	1				

1st Order Keywords/Concepts		2nd Order Themes		3rd Order Dimensions	
Job characteristics	1				
Entrepreneur_	4	Entrepreneur_	5		
Typicality	1	Variability	3		
Unity	1				
Variety	1				
Non-financial resources	1	Resources	3		
Reservation wage	1				
Managing the resources	1				
Screen-based	1	Simulation-based training	3		
High-fidelity	1				
Virtual reality simulation	1				
Creativity	7	Organizational culture	17	Organizational culture and diversity	50
Visual	3				
Engagement	2				
Organizational culture	1				
Poetics	1				
Identity_	1				
Archetypes	1				
Habitus	1				
Employer branding	2				
Discrimination	1				
Stigma_	1				
Prejudice	1				
_Diversity	1				
Empathy	1				
Stereotype	1				
Lookism	1				
Metaphor_	6	Metaphor_	6		
Legitimacy	2	Legitimacy	6		
Organisational legitimacy	1				
Symbolic_	1				
Reflexive modernisation	1				
Boundaries	1				
Value_	3	Values	6		
Moral	1				
Service quality	1				
Perfectionism	1				
Care of the self	1	Morality and ethics	3		
Problematization	1				
Reflexive rationality	1				
Western aesthetics	1	Philosophy (western/eastern)	2		
Chinese philosophy	1				
Cult. & Creat. Ind.	1	Cult. & Creat. Ind.	1		
Visually attractive	19	Physical work environment	70	Physical work environment	70
_Design	10				
Art/artwork	6				
Productivity	4				
Control over workplace	3				
Workplace design	3				
Office layout and functionality	3				
Employee voice_	3				
Historical context	3				
Acoustics, noise, music	3				
Authenticity	2				
Physical work condition	2				
Privacy	1				
Green areas / courtyard area	1				
Biophilic design	1				
Environmental aspects	1				

1st Order Keywords/Concepts		2nd Order Themes		3rd Order Dimensions	
Open-plan office	1				
Ergonomics	1				
_Beauty	1				
Semiotic perspective	1				
Fresh air mobility	1				
Wellbeing	2	Wellbeing	9	Employee well-being and satisfaction	33
Illusio	1				
Learning engagement	1				
Utility	1				
Novelty	1				
Everyday experience	1				
Work overload	1				
Vital nourishment	1				
Attitude	2				
Joint epistemic actions	1				
Meetingization	1				
Communication	1				
Inter-practice	1				
Role conflict	1				
Temporary institutions	1				
Sustainab__	6	Sustainab__	6		
Job satisfaction	4	Satisfaction	6		
Pre-use usability	1				
Territoriality	1				
Stress and burnout	3	Stress and burnout	4		
Deskilling	1				