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Diversity and Social Sustainability: A Systematic Review and Integrative Framework for Advancing Socially Sustainable Diversity Management

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ABSTRACT

Diversity is essential for social sustainability, yet its role in advancing social sustainability remains underexplored. This systematic and integrative review aims to integrate diversity literature with social sustainability and two key processes driving organisational sustainability—CSR and sustainable HRM. Drawing on 461 papers across three key literature streams—diversity-SS, diversity-sHRM, and diversity-CSR—we critically juxtapose the corporate-driven approach to diversity management, which conceptualises diversity as a business tool operating from an 'inside-out' profit-oriented perspective, with a socially sustainable approach. The latter, which we advance as an 'outside-in and from within' perspective, is anchored in the Common Good paradigm. This reconceptualisation positions diversity management as a pivotal interface between CSR and sustainable HRM, offering a framework through which global diversity challenges may be better addressed. Our contributions are twofold: first, we offer a systematic integration of the literature on diversity, social sustainability, CSR and sustainable HRM; second, we advance an innovative framework that reorients the diversity management research agenda through the lens of the Common Good, thereby supporting corporate social sustainability.

1 | Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), underscore diversity as a pressing global challenge (George et al. 2016). In this context, effective diversity management (DM) is essential for corporate governance to advance social sustainability (SS), enabling organisations to strengthen resilient social systems at both societal and organisational levels (Lanzalonga et al. 2023). Realising this potential demands purposeful DM strategies that foster inclusive and sustainable organisations and communities (Duchek et al. 2020). However, the relationship between DM and SS remains significantly underexplored. Duchek et al. (2020) observe that, despite extensive research on resilience and diversity—core components of SS (Missimer et al. 2017)—their interconnection has received limited attention. The evolving and fragmented diversity discourse (Garg and Sangwan 2020; Jonsen et al. 2011) has resulted in diversity and inclusion models that rarely address sustainability holistically (Brøgger and Andersen 2024; Gross-Gołacka and Maditinos 2024; Labucay 2013), leaving DM's role in SS poorly understood.

As organisations increasingly adopt roles as social actors, extending beyond traditional economic functions (Reed 2017), the need to understand DM's contribution to SS becomes critical if we are to advance SS through everyday management practices (Kumari and Singh 2024). This gap is exacerbated by key SS processes, such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainable Human Resource Management (sHRM) (Lueg and Jebsen 2024), which often address DM in isolation,

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overlooking their potential synergies in enhancing SS (Maier and Ravazzani 2019). Consequently, scholarship and practice prioritise CSR and sHRM as primary drivers of SS (Galuppo et al. 2014; Lueg and Jebsen 2024), frequently underemphasising DM's strategic role in bridging the internal focus of sHRM with the external orientation of CSR to foster SS. Emerging demands on how organisations contribute to sustainability challenges (Aust et al. 2020; Dyllick and Muff 2016) further underscore the urgency of bridging these gaps to enhance theoretical and practical insights into DM's contribution to SS.

This study addresses the aforementioned gaps by offering a systematic and integrative analysis of diversity and DM in relation to SS, CSR, and sHRM. It is guided by two central research questions: *RQ1*. 'What is the current understanding of diversity and DM in relation to social sustainability?' and *RQ2*. 'How should future research evolve to expand this critical area of inquiry?' These questions facilitate an exploration of the interconnections among diversity, DM, and SS across three core management domains—SS, CSR, and sHRM—representing, to our knowledge, the first comprehensive synthesis of these fields. Furthermore, this study proposes an integrative framework that repositions DM as a pivotal organisational practice for aligning internal and external sustainability efforts. Drawing on the Common Good paradigm on diversity (Frémeaux 2020) and the concept of 'true sustainability' (Dyllick and Muff 2016), we challenge the dominant 'inside-out' corporate-driven approach to DM, which prioritises competitive advantage, by advocating an 'outside-in and from within' perspective that fosters shared value for organisations and society. This review highlights the current limitations of DM and supports efforts to address the societal challenge of managing diversity and inclusion to advance SS meaningfully.

This article is organised as follows. The literature review section delineates the conceptual boundaries of diversity, DM, CSR, SS, and sHRM. It establishes the interconnections among these domains through the lens of diversity, laying the groundwork for the systematic review process outlined in the subsequent section. The results section addresses RQ1 by analysing the current understanding of diversity and DM within the contexts of SS, sHRM, and CSR. The discussion section then responds to RQ2 by evaluating the limitations identified in the results and proposing an integrative framework informed by the Common Good perspective. This section also highlights implications for scholars and practitioners, offering a set of research questions and a theoretical lens to guide future investigations into DM and SS. The paper concludes with a section on limitations and conclusions that summarise key contributions.

2 | Literature Review

2.1 | Social Sustainability: The Role of Sustainable HRM and CSR.

Definitions of SS emphasise social integration, social capital, empowerment, quality of life, justice, cohesion, and well-being (see Koning 2002; Littig and Grießler 2005; Partridge 2005; Rogers et al. 2012, among others). Within organisations, SS involves enhancing employees' knowledge, skills, and competencies to support sustainable performance and community well-being (Dunphy et al. 2000). It comprises internal dimensions, such as human capital and organisational relationships, and external dimensions, including broader community interactions (Galuppo et al. 2014; Sajjad and Shahbaz 2020).

Internally, SS advances through HRM practices and organisational designs that promote socially responsible operations (Lueg and Jebsen 2024; Podgorodnichenko et al. 2021). In this regard, sHRM supports organisations in the pursuit of sustainability goals by harnessing employees' social capital, knowledge, and skills to meet financial, social, and environmental objectives whilst mitigating negative impacts (Ehnert et al. 2014; Podgorodnichenko, Edgar, and McAndrew 2020). As the human-capital element of corporate sustainability, sHRM embeds CSR values into HR policies, including equal opportunities and inclusion (Sthapit 2024). Externally, SS engages communities through stakeholder interactions, often via CSR programmes (Galuppo et al. 2014; Leal Filho et al. 2022). Carroll (1979) defines CSR as encompassing society's economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations of organisations. Companies implement CSR strategically to address stakeholder interests (Choi et al. 2023), with government regulations providing a baseline (Barrena-Martínez et al. 2019). Nonetheless, McWilliams and Siegel (2001) highlight initiatives that exceed legal requirements to benefit society. In this context, SS represents broad societal goals like equity and well-being, which result from socially responsible corporate behaviour, while CSR acts as a corporate strategy to advance them (Iyengar 2024). Overall, SS's internal dimension focuses on defining and safeguarding human and social capital within the organisation, whereas the external dimension extends this commitment beyond boundaries, exchanging social resources for mutual regeneration (Galuppo et al. 2014).

2.2 | Diversity and Diversity Management

DM has become essential for addressing diversity and inclusion in organisations (Cho et al. 2017). Although diversity and inclusion are often conflated, they represent distinct constructs (Mor Barak 2015). Diversity describes the presence of individuals with varied cultural or demographic traits that influence workplace interactions (DiTomaso et al. 2007). Inclusion, however, entails practices and cultures that ensure employees feel valued and empowered (Ferdman and Deane 2014). It measures the extent to which employees perceive themselves as esteemed members, fulfilling needs for belonging and uniqueness (Shore et al. 2018).

In this context, organisational discourse has shifted from merely managing diversity to emphasising inclusion (Nishii 2013). DM thus encompasses workforce diversity policies (Kossek et al. 2006; Ozbilgin and Tatli 2008; Zanoni et al. 2010) and a commitment to inclusion as a core value (Ferdman and Deane 2014; Mor Barak 2015). This study adopts Mor Barak's (2014, 218) definition of DM as "the voluntary organisational actions designed to create greater inclusion of employees from various backgrounds into the formal and informal organisational structures through deliberate policies and programs". This definition

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frames inclusion as a central DM principle that promotes equitable organisations based on respect and trust.

2.3 | Diversity and Diversity Management—Relationships to Social Sustainability

Diversity plays a critical role in preventing social system degradation, enhancing "the capacity of the social system to provide the possibility for human well-being" (Missimer 2015, 51). In this regard, diversity, equity, and inclusion constitute fundamental drivers of organisational and societal sustainability (Hollander et al. 2016). Furthermore, the International Labour Organisation (2022) underscores that diverse and inclusive workplaces strengthen community and economic resilience, thereby advancing fairness, reducing inequality, and fostering stable as well as innovative and sustainable economies. However, significant gaps persist in understanding how diversity and DM integrate with SS efforts.

Despite advances in DM research (Yadav and Lenka 2020), discourse on diversity remains fragmented (Jonsen et al. 2011; Roberson 2019), often failing to address sustainability holistically. In particular, existing DM models tend to prioritise short-term economic gains, thereby overlooking behavioural and societal impacts, including SS (Labucay 2013). Moreover, Brøgger and Andersen (2024) argue that debates between social and business-case perspectives lack an integrated theoretical framework to explain DM's mechanisms for advancing organisational and societal goals. Similarly, Gross-Gołacka and Maditinos (2024) emphasise the underdeveloped role of DM within organisational sustainability strategies, where diversity and inclusion are frequently treated as secondary components. Notably, research on SS contributions primarily occurs within CSR and HRM fields (see Malik and Singh 2024; Subramanian and Suresh 2022, among others).

2.4 | Diversity and Diversity Management—Relationships With Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable HRM

Amid debates on DM, researchers increasingly link it to CSR and HRM (Karataş-Özkan et al. 2014). CSR initiatives and HRM explicitly tackle diversity and inclusion (Voegtlin and Greenwood 2016). For instance, CSR strategies often commit to equal opportunities and community diversity, while sHRM ensures these alongside fair labour and employee development (Sthapit 2024). Such approaches involve recruitment, training, and retention strategies that embrace diversity and equity, thereby embodying workforce sustainability (Luu 2021) through HRM practices and social responsibility actions (Barrena-Martínez et al. 2019). Consequently, CSR and sHRM not only act as key channels for DM implementation (Karataş-Özkan et al. 2014) but also bolster organisational sustainability (Ali and Kaur 2021; Zink 2014). At first glance, this may suggest a direct connection between DM and SS contributions. However, cross-fertilisation between these areas remains limited, with diversity issues often isolated in CSR and HRM research (Karataş-Özkan et al. 2014). Moreover, the emphasis on CSR and sHRM as primary drivers of SS frequently overshadows DM's distinct role in corporate SS, since diversity issues are addressed indirectly rather than centrally. For instance, recent reviews explore socially responsible HRM—primarily CSR-driven—for social value creation, including DM (Somuah et al. 2025). Others synthesise sHRM's impact on corporate sustainability, highlighting underexplored ethical aspects like inclusion (Christina et al. 2025). Nevertheless, despite the acknowledged intersections with CSR and sHRM, DM's distinct and systematic contribution to SS remains insufficiently theorised and underexplored.

3 | Review Method

This study employed a dual-method approach, combining a systematic literature review (SLR) with an integrative literature review (ILR), to provide a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of diversity and DM in the context of SS, CSR, and sHRM. The SLR, guided by Tranfield et al. (2003), ensured transparency and minimised bias in the search and selection phases. The ILR, following Toronto and Remington (2020), enabled a broader, interpretive synthesis of empirical, theoretical, and methodological literature across SS, CSR, and sHRM domains. This integration balanced methodological rigour with the exploration of the interdisciplinary complexities surrounding diversity in SS.

3.1 | Question Formulation

The research questions addressed by the systematic and integrative literature review are articulated in the introduction.

3.2 | Locating Studies

A database-driven search strategy was employed using Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus, selected for their interdisciplinary scope and high-quality, peer-reviewed content (Norris and Oppenheim 2007). The search was structured into three streams: 'diversity-SS', 'diversity-CSR', and 'diversity-sHRM'. Keywords were derived from an exploratory search, following the procedure described by Shu et al. (2022). The final keyword sets appear in Appendix A: Table A1. Searches occurred between September 2023 and March 2025, targeting 'Article title, Abstract, Keywords' in Scopus and 'Topic' in WoS. Inclusion criteria encompassed English-language scientific articles, book chapters, books, and conference proceedings in business, management, and economics, with no temporal limits. After deduplication, the searches yielded 809 documents for diversity-SS, 97 for diversity-sHRM, and 4647 for diversity-CSR.

3.3 | Study Selection and Evaluation

To ensure relevance and methodological coherence, inclusion and exclusion criteria (detailed in Appendix A: Table A1) were applied through two complementary sets of criteria, supplemented by a thorough manual screening during full-text review. Our objective was to strike a balance between rigour—through quality filtering of peer-reviewed journals—and comprehensiveness in an interdisciplinary field where significant findings are also published outside traditional journals. For this reason,

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both empirical and conceptual papers were included, with priority given to high-impact journals in Quartile 1 (Q1) or Quartile 2 (Q2) based on metrics such as CiteScore, SJR, and Journal Impact Factor (Ferrer-Serrano et al. 2022). Conference proceedings, book chapters, and books were included if they had at least 100 citations in Scopus, WoS, or Google Scholar (Shu et al. 2022). Screening was conducted in two stages (title/abstract selection and full-text review), carried out independently by two reviewers, with decisions recorded using a labelling system ('included', 'possible inclusion', 'excluded'). Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus among reviewers. Full-text reviews evaluated documents that addressed diversity and DM within SS, CSR, and sHRM frameworks, including indirect connections. The final dataset included 461 documents: 37 on 'diversity and SS', 398 on 'diversity and CSR', and 26 on 'diversity and sHRM'. The selection process is illustrated in Figure 1 for transparency and replicability (Tranfield et al. 2003).

3.4 | Analysis and Synthesis

Analysis was conducted in two phases. First, a descriptive analysis assessed research methods, levels of analysis, key diversity sources and journal citation, using an iteratively adapted data extraction form (Heinis et al. 2022; Miles and Huberman 1994). Second, a thematic/content analysis identified conceptual categories, such as understandings of diversity and DM, DM initiatives and outcomes in the SS, CSR, and sHRM research. This approach addressed the research questions, uncovered unexpected findings, and identified gaps and future research directions (Rojon et al. 2021).

3.5 | Reporting and Using the Results

In line with Tranfield et al. (2003), findings are reported in two stages. Initially, a descriptive overview highlights trends and approaches in diversity and DM research across SS, CSR, and sHRM. Subsequently, an in-depth content analysis elucidates the conceptualisation of diversity and DM in these areas, identifies opportunities for conceptual integration, and suggests avenues for future research to advance the field.

4 | Characteristics of the Studies on Diversity and DM in SS, sHRM and CSR Research

This section synthesises the characteristics of studies across the three literature streams. The analysis reveals distinct patterns in research types, methodologies, levels of analysis, sources of diversity and journal citation (see Table 1), identifying key gaps for future exploration.

4.1 | Research Types, Methodologies and Methods

Most studies across the three streams are empirical, with diversity–CSR showing the highest proportion and near-exclusive use of quantitative methodologies. This pattern indicates a mature field emphasising robust statistical evidence for diversity–CSR links. Common methods include panel data analysis (e.g., Pucheta-Martínez et al. 2023), logistic regression (e.g., Buertey 2021), hierarchical regression (e.g., Colakoglu et al. 2021), multivariate regression analysis (e.g., Ben Fatma and Chouaibi 2023) and structural equation modelling (e.g., Li et al. 2025). In contrast, qualitative and mixed methods, such as content analysis for disclosure assessments (e.g., Velasco-Balmaseda et al. 2023), interviews (e.g., Weerasinghe et al. 2023) or case studies (e.g., Fontana 2020), are less frequent. While quantitative dominance enables generalisable insights, it limits nuanced examinations of mechanisms, highlighting a key gap.

In contrast, diversity-SS and diversity-sHRM empirical studies exhibit greater methodological diversity. Diversity–SS combines quantitative approaches, like panel regression (e.g., Hernández-Lara et al. 2021) and generalised least squares (e.g., Amiri

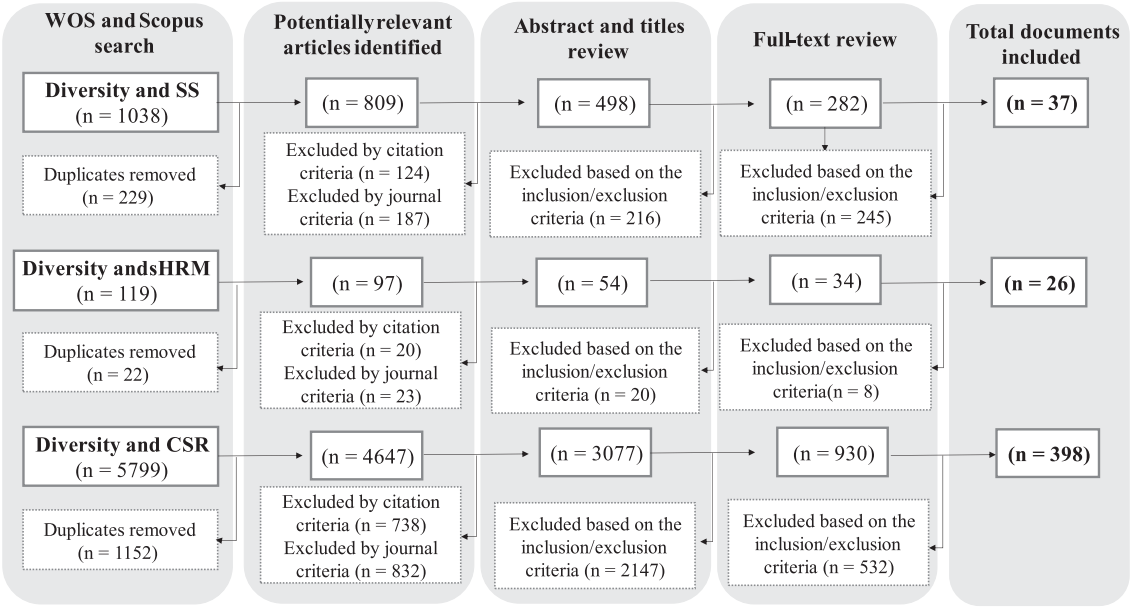


FIGURE 1 | Flowchart for the SLR process.

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TABLE 1 | Characteristics of the reviewed studies on diversity and DM in SS, sHRM and CSR research.

	Diversity and social sustainability		Diversity and sustainable HRM		Diversity and CSR	
	($n = 37$)		($n = 26$)		($n = 398$)	
Type of study	Conceptual	21.7%	Conceptual	19.2%	Conceptual	4.7%
	Empirical	70.2%	Empirical	61.5%	Empirical	90.8%
	Review	8.1%	Review	19.3%	Review	4.5%
	Total	100.0%	Total	100.0%	Total	100.0%
	($n = 26$)		($n = 16$)		($n = 361$)	
Methodology of empirical studies	Qualitative	34.7%	Qualitative	50.0%	Qualitative	7.4%
	Quantitative:	46.1%	Quantitative	43.7%	Quantitative	91.6%
	Mixed	19.2%	Mixed	6.3%	Mixed	1.0%
	Total	100.0%	Total	100.0%	Total	100.0%
	($n = 26$)		($n = 16$)		($n = 361$)	
Level of analysis of empirical studies	Macro	11.5%	Macro-meso	18.7%	Macro	0.2%
	Macro-meso	7.9%	Meso	37.5%	Macro-meso	9.4%
	Meso	57.6%	Meso-micro	37.5%	Meso	82.5%
	Meso-micro	11.5%	Micro	6.3%	Meso-micro	4.7%
	Micro	11.5%	Total	100.0%	Micro	3.2%
	Total	100.0%			Total	100.0%
	($n = 37$)		($n = 26$)		($n = 398$)	
Sources of diversity	Gender	45.9%	Diversity (unspecified)	42.3%	Gender	78.4%
	Diversity (unspecified)	24.3%	Gender	38.4%	Age	11.3%
	Cultural	8.1%	Age	26.9%	Nationality	6.5%
	Nationality	5.4%	Disability	11.5%	Ethnic/Racial	6.3%
	Disability	5.4%	Citizen status	7.6%	Sexual orientation	5.8%
	Ethnic/Racial	5.4%	Cultural	3.8%	Disability	5.0%
	Sexual orientation	2.7%	Religion	3.8%	Diversity (unspecified)	4.3%
	Age	2.7%	Ethnic/Racial	3.8%	Education	4.3%
	Education	2.7%	Sexual orientation	3.8%	Tenure	4.3%
			Neurodiversity	3.8%	Cultural	4.0%
			Social class	3.8%	Religion	1.5%
			Education	3.8%	Ideology	0.5%
					Citizen status	0.3%
	Journal	CV	Journal	CV	Journal	CV
Top 5 most cited journals[a]	JCP	39.5%	IJHRM	39.5%	JBE	39.5%
	COES	19.3%	JBE	19.3%	CSR-EM	19.3%
	Sb	18.6%	Sb	18.6%	BAR	18.6%
	CSR-EM	6.5%	HRMR	6.5%	JCF	6.5%
	ER	4.6%	ER	4.6%	BSE	4.6%

Note: Macro-level: sector, industry, nation, or society; meso-level: organisational; micro-level: individual or employee. Adapted from Shu et al. (2022). Publications covering more than one source of diversity at the same time were added to each corresponding category. CV measures the ratio between individual and total citations within a specific period (Backhaus et al. 2011). When the same journal contained multiple articles, we calculated individual journal citations by adding the citations of all articles (Shu et al. 2022).

[a]JCP: *Journal of Cleaner Production*; COES: *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*; Sb: *Sustainability*; CSR-EM: *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*; ER: *Employee Relations*; IJHRM: *International Journal of Human Resource Management*; JBE: *Journal of Business Ethics*; HRMR: *Human Resource Management Review*; BAR: *British Accounting Review*; JCF: *Journal of Corporate Finance*; BSE: *Business Strategy and the Environment*.

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et al. 2022), with qualitative methods such as interviews (e.g., Sundström et al. 2019) and qualitative case studies (e.g., Loureno and Loureno 2016). Similarly, diversity-sHRM predominantly uses qualitative methods, such as interviews (e.g., Kwan 2020; Podgorodnichenko, Akmal, et al. 2020) or inductive data analysis from survey responses to develop conceptual dimensions (e.g., Järlström et al. 2018). Quantitative examples vary, encompassing multi-group analysis (e.g., Dutta et al. 2024) and hierarchical linear modelling (e.g., Yu et al. 2022). This methodological variety suggests exploratory stages in diversity-SS and diversity–sHRM, reflecting an interpretive focus on complex diversity and inclusion dynamics.

4.2 | Level of Analysis

Across the three streams examined, meso-level (organisational) research predominates. In the diversity-SS stream, studies frequently examine the roles of institutions and companies in promoting SS. For instance, Sundström and Mickelsson (2020) investigate how cluster organisation boards engage with gender equality and diversity initiatives. In the diversity–sHRM stream, the meso focus centres on HR strategies, diversity practices, and sustainability frameworks. Mazur and Walczyna (2020), for example, investigate HR departments' implementation of sHRM in Polish companies across psychological, social, and ecological domains. Diversity–CSR research is also overwhelmingly meso-oriented, often addressing organisational attributes such as board composition, CSR performance, and firm outcomes. Hartmann and Carmenate (2021), for instance, assess board diversity's effects on CSR reputation in leading firms. This emphasis prioritises diversity's organisational implications over individual behaviours or societal structures.

Macro-level (societal) perspectives are more common in diversity-SS and diversity-CSR. These studies address global phenomena and policies, as in Rogers et al. (2012), who envision human well-being and equity in developing countries. Micro-level (individual) research focuses on individual behaviours and personal perceptions, such as employee preferences in workplace SS (e.g., Lin and Efranto 2023). In diversity-sHRM, for instance, Peters et al. (2019) examine how age-based stereotypes influence older workers' self-reported employability. In diversity–CSR, micro-focused studies are comparatively scarce, with limited examples such as Buttner and Lowe (2017), who explore turnover intentions among racial-ethnic minority professionals, focusing on perceptions of pay equity and diversity climate.

Multi-level approaches are limited but insightful. Macro–meso perspectives integrate organisational dynamics with societal or policy issues, such as inequalities or incentives. For instance, in the diversity-SS stream, Gartzia (2021) advocates multi-actor collaborations across societal and organisational domains for gender equality in business and policy. In diversity–sHRM, Santos (2023) analyses Portugal's tourism sector, linking organisational practices to gender inequalities at the societal level. In diversity–CSR, Velasco-Balmaseda et al. (2023) review global gender equality standards in CSR frameworks for policy harmonisation. Micro–meso integration in diversity-SS is exemplified in Nogueira et al.'s (2025) study, which examines organisational practices alongside employees' sustainability perceptions. In diversity–sHRM, such integration is more frequent, as in Nie et al. (2018), who analyse socially responsible HRM and its impact on female employees' turnover intentions. In diversity–CSR, this integration of organisational factors and individual experiences is scarce, with examples like Fontana's (2020) study of transgender inclusion in Bangladeshi organisations, which addresses workplace harassment and advocates firm-level collaborations. Although these studies address multiple levels simultaneously, there remains a clear lack of truly multi-level research that integrates the individual, the organisation, and society as a whole.

Overall, meso-level analyses dominate, particularly in diversity–CSR. Diversity–sHRM demonstrates stronger meso-micro integration, while diversity–SS offers a more even distribution across levels. This organisational focus reflects a pragmatic emphasis on corporate implementation but underscores the need for greater macro (societal) and micro (individual) integration to comprehensively address diversity challenges. The diversity–CSR stream is comparatively mature, supported by an extensive body of research and a focus on measurable organisational outcomes. In contrast, diversity–sHRM and diversity–SS remain less developed, featuring fewer studies but greater methodological diversity and a wider range of analytical levels. These latter streams appear to be in a more exploratory phase, prioritising theory-building and the examination of complex, multidimensional relationships. CSR research seeks robust, generalisable evidence to inform governance and policy, whereas sHRM and SS scholarship emphasise nuanced analyses that integrate organisational practices with broader sustainability goals.

4.3 | Sources of Diversity

Consistent with Roberson's (2019) review, existing research prioritises observable diversity attributes (e.g., physical characteristics) over unobservable ones (e.g., aptitudes, personality, and values). Gender and age dominate across all three streams, reflecting a sustained focus on demographic factors relevant to social SS, sHRM and CSR, such as age management and gender inequality. Unobservable attributes, including education, religion, ideology, and citizenship, receive comparatively limited attention. Some diversity sources are absent from specific streams: ideology and tenure are missing from diversity-SS and diversity-sHRM, while socio-economic background and neurodiversity are absent from diversity-CSR. The strong emphasis on observable attributes is most pronounced in diversity-CSR, where corporate governance studies frequently examine diversity in terms of visible demographic representation (Kent Baker et al. 2020). In contrast, diversity–sHRM research often adopts a broader conceptualisation, treating diversity as an umbrella term encompassing multiple sources. This reflects a focus on general DM initiatives or broad HRM practices.

4.4 | Journal Citation

Citation analysis provides a complementary perspective, enabling the identification of collaboration patterns, disciplinary boundaries, and knowledge transfer (Ding et al. 2014). In this regard, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Journal of Cleaner Production*,

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and *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* emerge as particularly influential, reflecting their role in shaping debates on diversity and social sustainability. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management* is notable for its strong presence across both the diversity-SS and diversity-CSR streams. Similarly, *Employee Relations* and *Sustainability* are relevant to the diversity-SS and diversity-sHRM streams, while *Journal of Business Ethics* contributes substantially to both diversity-CSR and diversity-sHRM. These patterns highlight the interdisciplinary nature of the field and the importance of cross-disciplinary journals in advancing this body of research. Finally, although only three of the five most-cited journals in the sHRM stream are HRM-focused, this gap underscores the need for leading HRM journals to strengthen their engagement with DM and social sustainability, and to guide future scholarship in these areas.

5 | Understanding Diversity and DM in Social Sustainability Research

Diversity and DM are conceptualised through two primary lenses. Diversity emphasises the demographic composition of groups, viewing it as an inherent attribute of individuals or groups that influences organisational, societal, and individual behaviours and outcomes (Sinicropi and Cortese 2021). DM extends beyond mere representation, requiring intentional strategies to cultivate an environment where diversity thrives and yields positive impacts such as trust and perceived inclusion (Downey et al. 2015; Shore et al. 2018). The way these concepts are understood differs across SS, CSR, and sHRM research, with implications for their practices and outcomes.

5.1 | Diversity—SS Stream

5.1.1 | Conceptualisation

In the SS framework, diversity constitutes a core element of social systems, enhancing their resilience and adaptability (Boström 2012). Missimer (2015) posits that diversity—spanning personalities, ages, genders, abilities, and other traits—is vital for resilience, particularly in fostering social integration and inclusion. Together with trust, shared meanings, self-organisation, and learning, diversity prevents systemic dysfunction in social systems (Missimer et al. 2017). As a dynamic feature, diversity demands proactive strategies to generate positive social impacts (Ajmal et al. 2018; Kumari and Singh 2024). SS scholars advocate promoting equity, human rights, and social rights, while cultivating inclusion via values like tolerance, acceptance, and social responsibility (McKenzie 2004; Missimer 2015; Pieper et al. 2019). In organisational settings, where entities function as social systems pursuing SS, DM ensures diversity within these systems and supports inclusion and well-being as key SS principles (Rogers et al. 2012).

5.1.2 | Practices

Socially sustainable organisations embed human rights into corporate strategies, prioritising social equity, diversity, and rights as central elements rather than peripheral concerns (Barile et al. 2024). Consequently, SS practices are designed to promote non-discrimination, diversity, equity, inclusion, well-being, resilience, labour standards, and decent work (Amiri et al. 2022; Leal Filho et al. 2022). Policies incorporate metrics to sustain diversity and equal opportunities for employee development and satisfaction (Amiri et al. 2022), promoting equality and enforcing zero tolerance for discrimination (Gálvez et al. 2020; Niemistö et al. 2021). Organisations should maintain fair evaluation, promotion, and treatment systems free from bias (Karakhan et al. 2020), addressing discrimination based on sex, age, race, ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity (Krysovatyy et al. 2022). Moreover, monitoring compliance with international human rights conventions is essential (Amiri et al. 2022).

Social inclusion policies build systems where all individuals, especially minorities, have a voice and receive support (Krysovatyy et al. 2022). In this regard, regular reassessment of vulnerable groups ensures adaptive inclusion (Leal Filho et al. 2022). Practices involve inclusive recruitment for underrepresented groups, cultural recognition programmes, and belonging initiatives (Kumari and Singh 2024). Workplace accommodations, including paid leave and flexible arrangements, bolster inclusion and economic equity (Olmsted 2024). Prioritising work-life and family balance, which disproportionately impacts women, is crucial for SS and signals employer respect and appreciation for their workers (Karakhan et al. 2020; Niemistö et al. 2021). These policies contribute to a just society, extending beyond individual benefits.

5.1.3 | Studied Outcomes

Diversity-SS research focuses on diversity representation outcomes, emphasising SS reporting and disclosure. For instance, Blay et al. (2024) and Tarda et al. (2024) show that board committee traits influence SS reporting, underscoring the role of governance structures in shaping disclosure practices and the mediating effect of financial performance. Beyond reporting, studies link diversity to broader SS practices. Fernandes et al. (2022) and Amiri et al. (2022) find that board gender and cultural diversity promote human rights, community engagement, workforce development, and well-being in the logistics sector and high-ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) countries. In this stream, a significant research gap persists in examining diversity representation outcomes at non-board levels.

In terms of DM, outcomes relate to workforce well-being and SS. Nogueira et al. (2025) identify labour practices as mediators between perceived SS and performance. Similarly, Kumari and Singh (2024) show how gender-focused DM practices enhance employee well-being and sustainable business models in Indian manufacturing. Conceptual works further connect DM to socially sustainable factors, such as social capital and cohesion (Elgoibar and Shijaku 2022), work-life balance (Niemistö and Hearn 2022), and human well-being (Rogers et al. 2012). However, empirical evidence substantiating these conceptual linkages remains scarce, revealing a significant gap in validating these associations across diverse contexts.

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5.2 | Diversity—sHRM Stream

5.2.1 | Conceptualisation

In sHRM research, diversity is regarded as an inherent individual trait that organisations must mirror in their workforce via HR policies (Sinicropi and Cortese 2021). In this context, DM acts as a cross-cutting HRM policy to foster inclusion through deliberate strategies, creating respectful and inclusive workplaces (Diaz-Carrion et al. 2018). In this stream, workforce diversity is closely tied to the social dimension of sustainability, with sustainable HRM promoting it through policies that foster diversity, inclusion, and ethical labour practices.

5.2.2 | Practices

Core sHRM-DM practices include fair recruitment, training, career development, equitable pay and merit-based promotions (Barrena-Martínez et al. 2019). These practices reflect a commitment to diversity representation, equality, and non-discrimination, but often neglect broader inclusion. Inclusive workplaces require practices beyond representation (Nishii and Rich 2014; Shore et al. 2018). Such initiatives focus on building a respectful and psychologically safe environment, offering flexible working arrangements, ensuring health and safety, and supporting work-life balance through measures such as parental leave, family-friendly policies, and flexible working hours (Baum and Hai 2019; Diaz-Carrion et al. 2018; Kwan 2020). Employee involvement in decision-making—through minority groups or trade unions—empowers diverse voices and promotes social inclusion, cohesion and justice (Richards 2020). Policies that uphold human rights and celebrate diversity through shared values strengthen a culture of diversity and inclusion (Järlström et al. 2018). Training, coaching, and mentoring programmes nurture this culture (Kwan 2020), engaging minority groups and raising awareness of diversity and inclusion principles across the workplace. Furthermore, sHRM assumes a critical role in internal communication, promoting consensus, respectful language, and inclusion awareness (Barrena-Martínez et al. 2019).

5.2.3 | Studied Outcomes

A dominant theme in this research stream is sHRM characterisation and configuration. Studies explore diversity attributes like age and gender on sHRM outcomes. For example, Vraňaková et al. (2021) assess generational perceptions of age management pillars in Slovak firms, showing younger groups value development and flexibility. Likewise, Peters et al. (2019) identified a negative link between workers' age and self-reported employability, moderated by stereotypes, affecting optimisation and balance. Research on DM practices within sHRM highlights a positive impact on employee well-being, retention and recruitment discrimination (Lee 2019; Yu et al. 2022). In this vein, Dutta et al. (2024) found that inclusive HRM practices enhance well-being among female employees in Indian MSMEs, while Nie et al. (2018) demonstrated that socially responsible HRM—such as equitable career opportunities and work-family balance—reduces turnover among Finnish women, particularly under female supervisors. Despite these insights, notable gaps endure, including intersectional diversity analysis and long-term sustainability impacts.

5.3 | Diversity—CSR Stream

5.3.1 | Conceptualisation

CSR views diversity as a key part of its social commitments, embedding inclusion and equity into corporate policies to advance societal well-being. In this stream, diversity extends beyond workforce traits to encompass all organisational stakeholders' characteristics (Maj 2015). DM integrates into CSR strategies, framing diversity and inclusion as social responsibilities extending to societal concerns (Krause 2017). DM thus involves dynamic strategies for inclusion and social responsibility, engaging stakeholders on societal issues (Jamali and Dirani 2014).

5.3.2 | Practices

DM initiatives are integral to CSR strategies (Krause 2017). Internally, employee-focused practices overlap with HRM diversity practices (Voegtlin and Greenwood 2016), including fair recruitment, pay, promotions, training, and development (Achyldurdyyeva et al. 2019; Jamali et al. 2014). CSR designs structures for representation via monitoring and DM practices (Krause 2017; Starostka-Patyk et al. 2015), and aligns organisational actions with legislative and compliance standards (Maier and Ravazzani 2019). These efforts commonly involve regular audits and reporting on diversity metrics within sustainability or social responsibility reports (Daub 2007). Yet, such diversity disclosures are often criticised as superficial (Ojeda et al. 2025), serving as mere 'business cards' with limited insight into the real state of diversity and inclusion (Daub 2007; Maj 2018). This highlights the need for more substantive reporting mechanisms (Ojeda et al. 2025).

DM initiatives further engage stakeholder groups through CSR, particularly when organisations are seen as open systems (Kramar 2012). Internal networks—such as minority representation groups or trade unions—often connect externally via CSR, collaborating with minority rights movements to advance broader social inclusion (Parshakov et al. 2022). CSR also extends to external communication (Maier and Ravazzani 2019), using marketing to showcase diversity and inclusion commitments and strengthen corporate image. Participation in diversity events and partnerships (Colgan 2011; Ravazzani 2016), including those representing minorities or local communities, can amplify DM's societal impact. While these actions can drive change, gaps persist in evaluating their long-term effectiveness and internal people-focused aspects.

5.3.3 | Studied Outcomes

An analysis of diversity-CSR reveals distinct thematic outcome areas related to diversity. Within this literature, studies treating demographic representation as an independent variable

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typically link it to organisational-level outcomes. Financial and business performance dominates, encompassing metrics like financial performance (Ben Fatma and Chouaibi 2023; Fatmy et al. 2022), customer satisfaction (Patel and Feng 2020), firm value and reputation (Bear et al. 2010; Dwertmann et al. 2023; Lourenço et al. 2021), and perceived legitimacy (Blanco-González et al. 2023). Environmental management features as outcomes, including environmental innovation (Issa and Bensalem 2023) and corporate CO_2 emissions (Valls Martínez et al. 2022). CSR-focused studies measure corporate social performance (Boukattaya et al. 2024; Xin et al. 2025), CSR commitment (Shaukat et al. 2016) and voluntary disclosure (Pucheta-Martínez and Gallego-Álvarez 2019). For example, Hartmann and Carmenate (2021) assess how board gender and ethnic diversity affect CSR reputation, while Bear et al. (2010) evaluate the association between women on boards and firm CSR ratings.

On a smaller scale, research addresses social outcomes, covering enhanced business practices (Glass and Cook 2018), reduced workplace sexual harassment (Au et al. 2023), advancement in labour practices, decent work, human rights performance (Monteiro et al. 2022), reporting standards (Branco et al. 2022) and addressing gender inequality (Biswas et al. 2021). Notably, investigations emphasise board-level diversity representation with less attention to other stakeholders like shareholders (e.g., Baatwah and Abdul Wahab 2023) and employees (e.g., Câmara and Petrenko 2021; Sharma et al. 2020). Conversely, research on DM practices as independent variables focuses on employee effects. Employee engagement and well-being outcomes include turnover intentions (Buttner and Lowe 2017), employee satisfaction (Creek et al. 2019), employee well-being and work engagement (Rožman et al. 2019). For instance, Brimhall et al. (2014) link inclusive climates to job commitment and employee retention intentions, and Choi and Rainey (2010) analyse DM's impact on job satisfaction in the public sector.

6 | Advancing Research on Diversity and Social Sustainability

6.1 | A Critical and Comparative Analysis of the Distinct Perspectives on Diversity and DM in Relation to Social Sustainability

The synthesis of literature across the diversity-SS, diversity-sHRM, and diversity-CSR streams reveals distinct yet overlapping perspectives on diversity and DM. Across all streams, diversity is viewed as an inherent trait encompassing observable and unobservable attributes. However, the streams vary in scope and emphasis. The diversity-SS stream frames diversity as a prerequisite for SS (Missimer et al. 2017), extending beyond organisations to societal systems and requiring proactive strategies to generate positive social impacts. In contrast, the diversity-sHRM stream adopts an internal, operational focus, emphasising workforce representation and workplace inclusion (Barrena-Martínez et al. 2019) rather than broader systemic resilience. The diversity-CSR stream further broadens this by integrating diversity into social responsibility agendas, combining internal representation with external engagement (Jamali and Dirani 2014). These conceptualisations converge on the necessity of intentional DM to advance beyond mere representation towards genuine inclusion but diverge in breadth: diversity-SS employs a macro-systemic lens, diversity-sHRM a micro-organisational one, and diversity-CSR a stakeholder-oriented hybrid. Convergences in DM practices and outcomes suggest potential for cross-stream synergies, yet divergences reveal silos: SS prioritises societal impact, sHRM internal culture, and CSR external legitimacy.

Analysing how conceptualisations translate into practices and outcomes reveals a pronounced corporate orientation across the streams. This orientation is particularly evident in diversity-CSR and diversity-sHRM, where the "business case" for DM dominates, prioritising organisational performance over broader social considerations (Byrd and Sparkman 2022; Trittin and Schoeneborn 2015). As a result, diversity is often instrumentalised: employees are treated as economic tools rather than valued for their intrinsic worth (Noon 2007). This corporate-driven logic privileges organisational-level concerns, which elevates business performance above individual and societal concerns (Syed and Kramar 2009). In fact, financial, performance, and legitimacy-related indicators lie at the core of the analysed streams, whereas outcomes more directly tied to SS—such as social cohesion, community well-being, or the reduction of structural discrimination—remain consistently underexplored.

A further limitation stems from the overemphasis on visible diversity traits such as gender and age, strongly influenced by external pressures, regulatory compliance, and socio-political dynamics (Konrad et al. 2016). This narrow framing neglects deep diversity dimensions, including abilities, mental health, political orientation, class, or migration background, thereby producing interventions that are partial and potentially distorted (Dennissen et al. 2020), rather than embracing the holistic principles of SS, which call for respect for the full spectrum of human diversity. In parallel, a significant gap exists between formal diversity policies and their actual implementation, pointing to a decoupling dynamic that raises questions about performativity and the adequacy of current measurement approaches (Kwon and Nicolaides 2024). Consequently, diversity and inclusion programmes are often criticised for their limited societal impact and for the ambiguity of organisational commitment to inclusivity (Hawkins 2018).

Stakeholder inclusion also remains uneven. While the diversity-CSR stream engages boards and shareholders, and the diversity-sHRM stream focuses on employees, the experiences and influence of temporary workers, contractors, suppliers, local communities, and civil movements are largely overlooked. This compartmentalisation highlights the difficulty in attaining a holistic, multilevel, and multi-stakeholder perspective when viewing sHRM and CSR in isolation. The diversity-SS stream is similarly constrained, despite greater variety in studied levels, as a true multilevel approach remains absent. However, it offers an integrative lens—absent in the other streams—through social systems theory, which facilitates the analysis of interdependencies within social systems and enables a more systemic understanding of diversity and DM in the pursuit of SS.

At a broader level, this limited multilevel, non-systemic and corporate-driven focus reflects an "inside-out" sustainability

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management perspective, where business objectives dictate the framing of DM. From this "inside-out" viewpoint, where business objectives are the starting point (Dyllick and Muff 2016), diversity and DM serve as means to ends—instrumental for achieving business and social goals—rather than ends in themselves essential to social system sustainability. On one hand, whether in terms of representation or DM initiatives, diversity is often treated as a resource for optimising organisational benefits, reflecting economic theories of the firm in the CSR–HRM relationship (Voegtlin and Greenwood 2016) and the instrumental approach to DM (Brøgger and Andersen 2024). On the other hand, the social perspective draws on moral arguments for DM (Hawkins 2018) and socially integrative CSR-HRM (Voegtlin and Greenwood 2016), promoting responsibility towards disadvantaged groups while addressing stakeholder needs alongside economic and ethical concerns (Syed and Kramar 2009). However, Mensi-Klarbach and Leixnering (2017) caution that conflating moral and instrumental motives in DM can erode authentic social initiatives, as 'doing the right thing' is often vaguely defined and detached from any clear organisational or societal value. Although Kwon and Nicolaides (2024) note instances where dignity aligns with strategic goals, such commitments often falter during economic, social, or political crises, exposing their vulnerability.

In sum, DM faces a triple challenge within the SS context. First, it must devise strategies to enhance diversity within social systems. Second, it must cultivate inclusive environments that sustain diversity over time (Köllen 2019; Mor Barak 2015). Third, it must navigate complex internal and external dynamics to reconcile organisational, stakeholder, and societal needs. Meeting this challenge requires moving beyond efficiency-driven approaches to position diversity and inclusion as central levers of genuinely sustainable organisations and societies (Gross-Gołacka and Maditinos 2024).

6.2 | The Common Good: An Integrative Framework for a Social Sustainable Approach to DM

What if organisations embraced diversity through the lens of SS, not merely as a tool for enhancing business performance, but as a profound challenge of our era, one capable of strengthening the sustainability of social systems? Such a paradigm shift requires redefining diversity—and associated issues—within sHRM and CSR as pivotal challenges to the sustainability of social systems. Achieving this vision demands a dual focus that examines both internal dynamics (i.e., from within the system) and the external environment in which it operates ('outside-in') rather than concentrating solely on impacts to the triple bottom line (inside-out) (see Table 2). To this end, an integrative framework necessitates an 'outside-in' perspective grounded in the Common Good paradigm, which redirects organisational efforts towards addressing critical social challenges, such as diversity (Aust et al. 2020; Dyllick and Muff 2016). This paradigm asserts that long-term business success hinges on supporting collective well-being (Ehnert et al. 2014) while harmoniously integrating societal needs with individual and organisational objectives (Frémeaux and Michelson 2017). At its core lie three normative principles identified by Frémeaux (2020): subsidiarity, which grants autonomy to each community level (individual, group, organisation, and society); teleological hierarchy, which places the economic as a means to human development; and solidarity, which fosters mutual responsibility and ensures no one is excluded.

Under this viewpoint, diversity is framed as a social issue, positioning businesses as agents of social change and corporate citizens accountable not only for profit generation but also for advancing societal well-being (Reed 2017; Scherer et al. 2014). Consequently, if an organisation is embedded within a broader community and committed to human flourishing, inclusion, diversity, and social justice become integral to its purpose and legitimacy, rather than optional values or secondary objectives. Through this lens, DM evolves from a discrete and standalone policy or strategy within sHRM or CSR into an organic, cross-departmental practice embedded in a culture of inclusion. As Sison and Fontrodona (2013) highlight, the Common Good of the firm is realised through collaborative work, enabling stakeholders to cultivate virtues and derive meaning while producing goods and services that meet societal needs, thereby aligning internal practices with external societal contributions. This perspective resonates with the principle of teleological hierarchy (Frémeaux 2020), as it situates economic performance as a necessary but subordinate means, while prioritising human development and social well-being as the ultimate ends of organisational activity.

To complement the 'outside-in' perspective and mitigate potential unintended consequences—such as instrumentalisation and group exclusion or categorisation (Frémeaux 2020)—the integrative approach to DM should incorporate a 'from within' perspective. This inward orientation addresses the need, identified in our SLR, for research that examines diversity-related requirements at individual and group levels within the system. Diversity needs at these levels are contextually shaped and interpreted variably across social and cultural settings (Besić and Hirt 2016; Pringle and Ryan 2015), leading to diverse challenges. For instance, needs for social inclusion, identity, belonging, cohesion, and the expression of uniqueness (Bagci et al. 2020; Spicker 2014; Valcke et al. 2020) are shaped by societal constructions of 'diversity', 'sameness', and 'difference'. In certain contexts, the emphasis may be on expressing social identities (human diversity), while in others it shifts to respecting religious practices (human rights) or promoting gender equality (social justice). These nuances underscore that societal challenges fundamentally reflect the aggregated needs of their members (Eidlin 1995). We therefore agree with Frémeaux and Michelson's (2017) assertions that human development requires prioritising each individual's personal good, which, when respected, enables the pursuit of a Common Good that enhances humanity for all. Accordingly, the 'from within' perspective is essential for addressing foundational needs and applying an intersectional approach to avoid unintended discrimination or paradoxical DM practices (Nadiv and Kuna 2020). By invoking subsidiarity, this perspective supports decision-making at the most suitable level (individual, group, or organisational), ensuring lower-level needs guide higher-level societal objectives (Frémeaux 2020). This fosters conditions for diversity to flourish and endure within organisational systems, ultimately benefiting the wider societal systems in which the organisation operates and advancing the Common Good for all.

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TABLE 2 | Corporate-driven approach and socially sustainable approach to DM.

	Diversity-SS	Diversity-CSR	Diversity-sHRM	Socially sustainable approach to DM
Conceptualisation of diversity and DM	Diversity is a core element of resilient and adaptive social systems, fostering inclusion, trust, and learning. DM should support inclusion, well-being, and social equity within organisations' social sustainability frameworks.	Diversity is an inherent characteristic of organisational stakeholders and a central element of CSR social commitments. DM is embedded within CSR as a social responsibility strategy that addresses societal issues and influences organisational behaviour and outcomes.	Diversity is an inherent characteristic of the workforce. DM functions as a cross-cutting HRM policy that promotes representation, inclusion, and ethical labour practices, shaping employee behaviour and organisational outcomes.	Diversity is a vital part of SS. It is considered a feature of social systems and a condition that the systems must possess for adaptability and long-term resilience. DM is vital for ensuring SS values of human diversity, equity, inclusion and human and social rights while promoting the sustainability of social systems.
Stakeholders considered	Board members, employees, vulnerable and minority groups, and community stakeholders.	Board members, shareholders, employees, customers, communities, minority rights organisations.	Primarily employees.	Stakeholders within the social system (employees, board members, managers, shareholders), and the environment in which it operates (customers, communities, minority rights organisations, and suppliers).
DM practices	DM practices emphasise human rights, social equity and employee well-being as foundations of organisational sustainability. They embed equality and non-discrimination into strategic decision-making, supported by zero-tolerance policies, monitoring of international human rights commitments and measures that enable work–life balance and reasonable accommodations. DM practices are essential to decent work, social justice and long-term resilience.	DM practices prioritise external visibility, stakeholder legitimacy, and compliance with legal and societal expectations regarding diversity. They strengthen reputation and accountability through diversity reporting, external communication and collaboration with community or minority organisations. The key differentiator of this approach is its communication-driven nature, leveraging diversity to reinforce corporate legitimacy.	sHRM DM practices concentrate on operational inclusion and a respectful, psychologically safe work environment. They integrate diversity into people management systems through fair recruitment and development opportunities, flexible working arrangements, health and safety measures, and training or mentoring that nurtures inclusive behaviour. The emphasis lies on everyday experience, ensuring people feel valued and able to contribute fully.	DM practices align internal diversity with wider social goals to create lasting value for the organisation and society. It aligns diversity and inclusion with organisational sustainability strategies and the common good through co-creation with stakeholders, evaluation of equity and well-being outcomes, and partnerships that address social inequalities. Diversity and DM thus become an intrinsic cultural value, linking organisational practices with societal well-being and fostering solidarity and shared responsibility.

(Continues)

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TABLE 2 | (Continued)

	Diversity-SS	Diversity-CSR	Diversity-sHRM	Socially sustainable approach to DM
Diversity sources focus	The primary focus is on observable characteristics rather than unobservable ones, and it is often influenced by demographic, governmental, and political contexts.		Balances the focus between observable and non-observable characteristics—and includes the term diversity in its broadest sense.	This approach demands respect for the full spectrum of human diversity. It focuses on individual needs and societal challenges related to diversity and inclusion issues while addressing these aspects from an intersectional perspective.
Outcomes	The primary focus is on diversity representation outcomes, particularly in SS reporting and disclosure. Beyond reporting, board gender and cultural diversity are linked to broader SS contributions such as human rights, community engagement, workforce development and well-being, with conceptual connections to social capital, cohesion, work–life balance and human well-being.	The primary focus is on organisational performance outcomes, including financial results, firm value, reputation, legitimacy, customer satisfaction and CSR commitment, as well as environmental innovation and CO_2 reduction. Social outcomes relate to the external dimension of SS and include social reporting, labour practices, decent work and human rights performance.	The primary focus is on organisational performance shaped by inclusive HRM systems. Social outcomes relate to the internal dimension of SS and include employee well-being, job satisfaction, reduced turnover intentions, lower recruitment discrimination, improved perceptions of fairness, psychological safety and equitable development.	This approach is expected to generate social outcomes at multiple levels, potentially strengthening social cohesion, equity, and justice while improving individual experiences of inclusion, fair opportunities, work–life balance, and well-being. It links the resilience of social systems with the everyday realities of diverse individuals.
Sustainability management perspective	Inside-out: business objectives are the starting point; diversity and DM are regarded as a means to an end, instrumental in achieving both business and social goals. Demographic, governmental, political and organisational contexts and agendas shape DM implementation and motivations.			Outside-in and from within: diversity and related challenges are regarded as critical issues for ensuring the long-term sustainability of social systems. This perspective positions businesses as agents of social change while addressing diversity-related needs at both individual and group levels within the system.

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A core strength of the Common Good paradigm lies in its emphasis on stakeholder participation, ensuring the framework is collaborative and inclusive rather than top-down. As Sison and Fontrodona (2013) contend, the Common Good of the firm is participatory, involving not only shareholders but also employees, managers, and external stakeholders in decision-making. In this regard, the principle of solidarity, by recognising the inherent interdependence among individuals and groups (Frémeaux 2020), provides the normative foundation for this participatory approach. Stakeholders must actively bridge the 'outside-in' and 'from within' perspectives, transforming diversity from a managerial imperative into a collective responsibility. Employees, for example, are central to praxis-oriented work, fostering virtues such as solidarity and empathy through collaboration, which enhances inclusion at individual and group levels (Ferdman and Deane 2014; Nishii and Rich 2014). Managers, acting as stewards, enable subsidiarity by decentralising decisions, allowing diverse voices to influence DM policies and aligning internal needs (e.g., identity expression) with societal goals like inequality reduction (Frémeaux 2020; Kwon and Nicolaides 2024). External stakeholders, including suppliers, customers, and communities, contribute to poiesis by ensuring products and services address diversity challenges, such as equitable supply chains or inclusive marketing. Communities, as societal actors, offer feedback on macro-level impacts, aiding organisations in progressing towards true sustainability, where business actively resolves global challenges like social inequity (Dyllick and Muff 2016).

Under this integrative framework, diversity and inclusion are no longer mere instruments for organisational, social, or economic gains; they are intrinsic ends, vital to the SS of the organisation as a social system. Organisations, as social actors, are called to integrate global diversity challenges ('outside-in') with internal individual and group needs ('from within'). This dual approach, inspired by the Common Good, bridges the 'big disconnection' between micro-level organisational advances and macro-level societal deterioration (Dyllick and Muff 2016), as well as the lack of integration between DM, CSR and sHRM strategies. By doing so, it facilitates the development of an integrative DM strategy that resolves inherent gaps and tensions in the revised literature streams. In particular, this approach helps to resolve tensions that often manifest in dilemmas such as balancing unity with plurality, universal fairness with equity-oriented measures, shared purpose with dissenting voices from marginalised groups, and social stability with the transformative change needed to address deep-rooted exclusion (Goodin and Spiekermann 2018). Rather than being perceived as weaknesses, these tensions become generative spaces for praxis and for advancing DM as a driver of SS. Under this socially sustainable DM approach, CSR, sHRM, and DM converge as interconnected pillars that guide organisations toward SS by aligning external social expectations with internal people-centred practices. This integrated basis allows core SS processes—particularly CSR and sHRM—to coordinate their efforts through DM in a way that is more authentic and clearly directed toward the Common Good. It also strengthens DM execution through both bottom-up and top-down dynamics, adopting a multilevel approach that supports lasting advancement. Consequently, DM's potential to advance SS is elevated, with CSR- and sHRM-grounded initiatives more likely to reflect genuine organisational commitment.

6.3 | Implications for Further Research

This socially sustainable DM approach has substantial implications for future research under the Common Good paradigm (see Table 3), responding to calls for a more integrative diversity perspective (Frémeaux 2020). While the Common Good framework emphasises shared values, mutual obligations, and social cohesion, DM requires recognising, protecting, and sometimes prioritising distinct and potentially conflicting identities, needs, and claims. By theorising these internal tensions, future studies can refine the Common Good framework and clarify the conditions under which collective-oriented sustainability principles coexist with, adapt to, or are challenged by intersectional forms of human diversity, ultimately enhancing both its theoretical rigour and practical relevance for socially sustainable DM. This offers fertile ground for investigating how organisations can align DM, CSR, and sHRM strategies to address global diversity challenges, respond to internal needs, and generate societal impact.

The 'outside-in' perspective involves harnessing organisational resources and competencies to address global challenges (Dyllick and Muff 2016); thus, future research examining how sHRM deploys skills, knowledge, behaviours, and capabilities to address diversity and inclusion challenges would advance both the Common Good HRM paradigm and socially sustainable DM, enriching our understanding of its practical utility (Frémeaux 2020). The 'from within' perspective emphasises individual and group levels, advocating prioritisation of workers' interests over shareholder maximisation, thereby incorporating employee viewpoints into DM research (Maiorescu-Murphy 2022). Future research should therefore adopt an employee-centred approach to identify genuine diversity and inclusion needs and critically evaluate the DM practices designed to address them, ensuring they do not result in unconscious discrimination.

Furthermore, a compelling avenue for future research could examine how sHRM and CSR navigate tensions between individual needs, organisational objectives, and global diversity challenges (Jaeck et al. 2023). Considering the contextual shaping of these challenges, research should explore how global diversity issues influence institutional frameworks across regions, recognising organisations as open systems embedded in their environments (Gharajedaghi 2011). Such research could prove specific contextual challenges and internal HR barriers in addressing global issues. Addressing such complexities requires a multi-level and multi-actor lens (Syed and Kramar 2009), with implications for advancing management theory towards true sustainability (Dyllick and Muff 2016, 17). In this line, qualitative research that captures diverse expectations and lived experiences could further explain why many CSR- and sHRM-based DM strategies fail to achieve meaningful social impact (Hawkins 2018) and illuminate how organisational and cultural interpretations of diversity and inclusion affect the reconciliation of internal dynamics with societal expectations.

Equally important is examining stakeholder contributions—employees, customers, suppliers, competitors—to the Common Good of diversity and inclusion, extending beyond objective societal value (i.e., producing societal value) to its subjective,

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TABLE 3 | Future research directions on diversity management grounded in the common good framework.

Type of contribution	Core perspective	Key research question	Expected contribution
Theoretical and Conceptual	Integrative	What new paradoxes might the Common Good framework introduce when attempting to balance collective well-being with radical individual diversity?	Provides theoretical insights by identifying internal tensions between collective cohesion and recognition of diverse individual needs, including unity vs. plurality, equality vs. equity, shared purpose vs. dissent, and stability vs. change. Clarifies internal limitations of the framework and guides its adaptation for socially sustainable DM.
	Outside-In	How do the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity redefine corporate responsibility by compelling firms to address systemic social inequalities?	Expands theoretical understanding by showing how these principles deepen corporate responsibility, positioning firms as social actors obliged to respond to structural inequalities and strengthening their role as "corporate citizens" within the Common Good paradigm.
Empirical	Integrative	How can organisations successfully address both individual and group diversity needs ('from within') and wider societal challenges ('outside-in')?	Provides empirical evidence of practices that integrate both dimensions, demonstrating how internal needs (identity, inclusion, belonging) connect with external social goals (equity, social justice, and cohesion), thereby validating the dual-perspective model as an effective tool for socially sustainable DM.
		How do organisations manage tensions between individual diversity needs, organisational objectives, and global social challenges?	Identifies and explains the mechanisms (structural, cultural, and decision-making) that help resolve these tensions, showing how the micro, meso, and macro levels of DM can be aligned in practice.
		How do multi-stakeholder participatory models (involving employees, managers, community leaders, customers, etc.) foster virtues like empathy and justice in DM, as envisioned by the Common Good?	Shows, through empirical findings, how genuine participation by multiple actors develops precisely the virtues highlighted in the Common Good approach—such as justice, empathy, and solidarity—transforming DM from a top-down managerial practice into a shared, virtue-based responsibility.

(Continues)

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TABLE 3 | (Continued)

Type of contribution	Core perspective	Key research question	Expected contribution
		What multi-level metrics can assess a firm's contribution to the Common Good through DM, CSR, and sHRM, beyond traditional KPIs?	Develop multi-level indicators specifically designed for the measurement of a firm's genuine social impact—including social cohesion, reduction of discrimination, and community well-being—beyond conventional performance metrics.
	Outside-In	What governance structures and cultural values sustain commitment to a socially sustainable DM approach over time?	Identifies governance systems (rules, incentives, decision processes) and cultural values (solidarity, justice, authenticity) that ensure sustained, non-instrumental commitment to socially sustainable DM over time.
		What HRM competences and capabilities enable an 'outside-in' DM approach contributing to the Common Good?	Clarifies which specific HRM competences—such as systemic analysis, inclusive policy design, and intercultural management—are required to address external diversity challenges and contribute meaningfully to the Common Good.
		How do cultural, institutional, and regional contexts shape the interpretation and implementation of socially sustainable DM under the Common Good paradigm?	Provides comparative evidence on how ethical expectations, stakeholder roles, and organisational practices vary across cultural and institutional contexts. This explains why Common Good–oriented DM approaches succeed or fail in different settings and helps adapt DM, CSR, and sHRM strategies to local norms, regulations, and societal values, increasing their global applicability.
	From Within	What diversity needs (identity, belonging, cohesion) do employees perceive across contexts, and how do these explain DM success or failure?	Reveals directly how employee needs—identity, belonging, cohesion—shape the effectiveness of DM practices, providing evidence that enables more context-sensitive and impactful interventions.
Methodological	From Within	What research tools (e.g., qualitative inquiries, participatory action research) can implement the 'from within' perspective effectively?	Offers concrete and ethically appropriate methods to capture internal diversity needs, showing how these tools enable rigorous and inclusive research at individual and group levels that can meaningfully inform DM.

Note: 'Outside-In': How organisations address global diversity challenges and societal needs. 'From Within': How organisations identify and respond to individual/group diversity needs. 'Integrative': How organisations bridge both perspectives through Common Good.

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virtue-based aspects (Sison and Fontrodona 2012). This aligns with the ethical implications of subsidiarity, teleological hierarchy, and solidarity, which future research could examine in practice (Frémeaux 2020). Finally, this agenda calls for multilevel investigations into how diversity-related needs at individual, group, and societal levels shape social outcomes, including the development of SS indicators grounded in diversity and inclusion. Such empirical work would strengthen the theoretical and practical contributions of DM and further advance the relevance of the Common Good paradigm in business ethics.

6.4 | Practical Implications

This framework's dual perspectives offer actionable guidance for organisations to advance socially sustainable DM, addressing the 'big disconnection' between micro-level progress and macro-level societal deterioration (Dyllick and Muff 2016). The 'outside-in' lens urges companies to integrate SS into core activities by posing complex questions about diversity's role in broader strategies, shifting toward true business sustainability where firms actively resolve societal challenges like inequity and exclusion, rather than treating DM as superficial sHRM or CSR compliance. This aligns with the common good's emphasis on collaborative production for societal needs, requiring organisations to identify pressing issues, leverage internal resources and business models, and foster genuine commitments through community relationships and mutual feedback and collaboration mechanisms (Sison and Fontrodona 2013). Organisations must thus embrace their role as social change agents, promoting SS universally. Complementing this, the 'from within' perspective directs HR practitioners to employ qualitative tools for exploring individual and group diversity needs—such as identity and belonging—ensuring these inform a cohesive multi-level strategy that flows bottom-up and top-down. Crucially, these efforts must counteract DM pitfalls, including group exclusion, categorisation, instrumentalisation and unintended DM practices outcomes (Frémeaux 2020; Nadiv and Kuna 2020).

Implementation challenges, such as aligning internal dynamics with societal needs, can be addressed by drawing on these perspectives and the Common Good paradigm. For instance, resistance and power imbalances—potentially leading to tokenistic DM in hierarchies (Kwon and Nicolaides 2024; Sison and Fontrodona 2013)—may be mitigated via subsidiarity and stakeholder dialogues, empowering groups like employee resource networks to influence decisions and link internal needs to societal contributions. Contextual clashes, where cultural needs conflict with global objectives, can be addressed through co-creation, the promotion of shared virtues, the reduction of resistance and targeted intersectionality training. Risks of instrumentalisation—favouring economic over moral/social domains and undermining solidarity—are avertable by embedding teleological hierarchy in governance and using multilevel metrics for alignment (Dyllick and Muff 2016; Frémeaux 2020).

6.5 | Study Limitations

This study has several limitations that warrant acknowledgement. First, our systematic review was limited to two databases and focused on specific diversity-related keywords within business, management, and economics disciplines. We adopted a wider array of diversity terms, following Manoharan and Singal (2017), to enhance comprehensiveness and employed 'diversity' broadly rather than 'diversity management' to expand coverage, as initial searches with 'diversity management' yielded limited results (7 for SS and 12 for sHRM post-deduplication). While this ensured methodological rigour and manageable scope, contributions from adjacent fields or using alternative terminology may have been excluded. However, our focus was on intersections among SS, sHRM, and CSR regarding diversity and DM, to advance this organisational framework. Future reviews could benefit from interdisciplinary expansion and alternative search strategies.

Second, and most importantly, we recognise that our socially sustainable DM framework represents a conceptual proposal at an early developmental stage rather than a fully operationalised theoretical model. While foundational elements of our integrated framework are established, deeper exploration from each perspective is needed. The empirical validation, contextual adaptation, and practical operationalisation of the Common Good paradigm to DM constitute the core research agenda we propose, inviting scholars to engage in the research efforts needed to consolidate and fully develop this integrative framework. Third, we acknowledge the risk that the Common Good framework may not resonate with organisations that prioritise short-term financial performance or operate under shareholder-primacy logics, potentially limiting the practical appeal of our study. However, we believe the advancements proposed in this review significantly expand the potential of DM to contribute to SS.

7 | Conclusion

Diversity and inclusion issues continue to be a grand challenge at many levels and contexts. Beyond merely comparing existing knowledge on diversity and DM in relation to SS across the three streams of the literature analysed—SS, CSR, and sHRM—this review makes a conceptual contribution by proposing an integrative framework to approach DM through an SS lens. Such a framework seeks to overcome the limitations of the traditional corporate-driven approach by advocating an 'outside-in and from within' perspective, grounded in the paradigm of the Common Good. From this standpoint, diversity and related issues are reconceptualised not merely as instrumental means to an end, but as intrinsic goals that lie at the very heart of achieving SS. Building on this argument, we contend that the Common Good principles on diversity are essential for CSR and sustainable HRM to contribute more effectively to social sustainability. By framing diversity and inclusion challenges as collective responsibilities, this approach provides a multilevel perspective that enhances the capacity of both CSR and sHRM to advance SS in a holistic and ethically grounded manner through DM initiatives.

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Ethics Statement

The authors have nothing to report.

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Appendix A

TABLE A1 | Exclusion and inclusion criteria.

Review stages	Diversity-SS	Diversity-sHRM	Diversity-CSR
Search syntax (Keywords)			
Keywords	*("diversity" OR "inclusion" OR "equality" OR "equity" OR "equal opportunit*" OR "equal employment opportunit*" OR "affirmative action$") AND*		
	("social sustainability" OR "socially sustainable organi" OR "socially sustainable compan*" OR "socially sustainable corporat*" OR "socially sustainable firm$")*	*("sustainable HRM" OR "sustainable human resource management" OR "SHRM" OR "socially responsible human resource management" OR "socially responsible HRM" OR "SRHRM")*	*("corporate social responsibility" OR "CSR" OR "social responsibility" OR "socially responsible organi*" OR "socially responsible compan*" OR "socially responsible corporat*" OR "socially responsible firm$")*
Exclusion and inclusion criteria			
Database search	Inclusion • Only articles, book chapters, books and conference proceedings published in the fields of management, economics and business. • Documents in English only.		
Identifying documents for review of title and abstract	Exclusion • Duplicate papers. Inclusion: • Articles published in journals ranked in Q1 or Q2 according to CiteScore, SJR, or Journal Impact Factor (Ferrer-Serrano et al. 2022; Srivastava and Pandita 2025). • Books, book chapters, and conference proceedings must have more than 100 citations in WoS, Scopus or Google Scholar citations (Shu et al. 2022). • Documents that do not meet this requirement will be evaluated based on publication date and study relevance.		
Identifying documents for full-text review	Exclusion: • Documents that do not address issues of diversity or DM. • Documents that do not fall within the scope of SS (e.g., environmental or financial sustainability).	Exclusion: • Documents that do not fall within the scope of sustainable HRM or socially responsible HRM (e.g., strategic HRM or green HRM).	Exclusion: • Documents that do not explicitly fall within the scope of CSR (e.g., leadership, corporate governance, etc.)
Selecting documents included in the study	Inclusion: • Documents that conceptualise diversity or DM in the context of SS. • Documents that indirectly address diversity or DM as a critical element of SS. • Documents that address practices or initiatives of DM in SS research. • Documents that address outcomes related to diversity and DM in SS research.	Inclusion: • Documents that conceptualise diversity or DM in the context of sHRM. • Documents that address DM practices or initiatives in sHRM research. • Documents that address outcomes related to diversity and DM in sHRM research.	Inclusion: • Documents that conceptualise diversity or DM in the context of CSR. • Documents that address DM practices or initiatives in CSR research. • Documents that address outcomes related to diversity and DM in CSR research.

Note: ($) allows for one or no extra letters; (*) allows for multiple extra letters.

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