



Green HRM And its Impact on Employee Engagement and Environmental Performance

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2025

How to Cite this Article:

Singh, A. (2026). Green HRM And its Impact on Employee Engagement and Environmental Performance. International Journal of Creative and Open Research in Engineering and Management, <i>02</i>(05).

<https://doi.org/10.55041/ijcope.v2i5.109>

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<https://doi.org/10.55041/ijcope.v2i5.109>

Abstract

The intersection of human resource management and environmental sustainability has gained considerable scholarly attention over the past decade. This paper investigates Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) and its dual influence on employee engagement and organizational environmental performance. Drawing on a systematic review of empirical literature published between 2020 and 2025, the study identifies key Green HRM practices — encompassing green recruitment and selection, green training and development, green performance appraisal, green compensation, and green employee involvement — and maps their pathways to both attitudinal and behavioural outcomes among employees. Using the Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV) and Social Exchange Theory (SET) as theoretical anchors, this paper argues that organizations which embed environmental values into their HRM architecture are better positioned to cultivate a workforce that is not only actively engaged but also genuinely committed to ecological stewardship. The findings reveal that green

training and employee involvement emerge as the most consequential practices, while contextual factors such as organizational culture and managerial green commitment serve as important moderators. The paper concludes with practical recommendations for HR managers, organizational leaders, and policymakers seeking to integrate sustainability into their people management frameworks.

Keywords:

Green HRM, Employee Engagement, Environmental Performance, Sustainability, Green Training, Social Exchange Theory, Natural Resource-Based View



1. Introduction

Climate change, resource depletion, and growing stakeholder expectations around corporate responsibility have collectively compelled organizations to rethink the way they manage their most critical asset: people. Human Resource Management, historically focused on performance optimization and talent retention, has increasingly been called upon to serve as a vehicle for organizational sustainability agendas. The emergence of Green HRM as a distinct field of inquiry reflects this broader transformation in management thinking (Ren et al., 2021).

Green HRM refers to the integration of environmental management principles into the core functions of HRM, with the explicit objective of creating employee awareness, green behaviours, and sustainable organizational outcomes (Farrukh et al., 2022). The concept, while not new in theoretical conception, has acquired fresh urgency in the post-pandemic period, as organizations have reconsidered their environmental, social, and governance (ESG) commitments in response to both regulatory pressures and shifting employee expectations (Amrutha & Geetha, 2021).

What makes Green HRM particularly compelling from a scholarly standpoint is its dual promise: it simultaneously addresses the internal organizational goal of enhancing employee engagement and the external organizational goal of improving environmental performance. These two outcomes, though analytically distinct, are deeply interconnected in practice. An engaged workforce is more likely to advocate for, and act upon, green organizational values; conversely, a coherent green organizational identity reinforces the psychological attachment employees feel towards their organization (Piwowar-Sulej, 2021).

Despite growing interest, the literature on Green HRM remains somewhat fragmented. Studies have tended to examine either the engagement-related outcomes or the environmental performance outcomes in isolation, with relatively few attempts at an integrated framework. Furthermore, most existing reviews either predate 2020 or rely on data from a narrow range of sectoral and geographical contexts, limiting their generalizability (Yong et al., 2020). This paper seeks to address these gaps by synthesizing recent empirical work and offering a structured conceptual account of how Green HRM practices operate across both outcome domains.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides the theoretical framework. Section 3 presents a structured review of the empirical literature on Green HRM practices. Section 4 examines the linkage between Green HRM and employee engagement. Section 5 explores the relationship between Green HRM and environmental performance. Section 6 identifies moderating and mediating variables. Section 7 discusses implications for research and practice. Section 8 concludes the paper.



2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV)

The Natural Resource-Based View, first articulated by Stuart Hart (1995) and significantly extended in subsequent decades, holds that sustainable competitive advantage is rooted in a firm's capacity to develop environmental strategies that are difficult to imitate. For the purposes of Green HRM scholarship, the NRBV is particularly instructive because it foregrounds the role of organizational capabilities — built through people, processes, and culture — in enabling environmental performance (Ren et al., 2021). Green HRM practices, under this lens, are not merely compliance mechanisms but strategic investments in building internal green capabilities that translate into measurable environmental outcomes.

Recent work by Ahmad et al. (2021) has operationalized the NRBV in the context of manufacturing firms in emerging economies, demonstrating that green HR capabilities — defined as the collective environmental knowledge, skills, and commitment of the workforce — significantly mediate the relationship between Green HRM systems and environmental performance outcomes. This theoretical framing is consistent with the broader resource-based logic that superior performance derives from bundles of inimitable internal resources.

2.2 Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social Exchange Theory, as developed by Blau (1964) and extensively applied in HRM research, posits that employees respond to organizational investments in kind. When organizations communicate through their HRM practices that they value employees as ethical, environmentally conscious agents, employees reciprocate with higher engagement, greater organizational citizenship behaviours, and a stronger identification with organizational goals (Farrukh et al., 2022).

In the context of Green HRM, SET provides a compelling explanatory mechanism. Employees who perceive their organization's green HRM practices as genuine — rather than performative or symbolic — are more likely to internalize pro-environmental values and translate these into discretionary green behaviours. This perceived organizational support for sustainability functions as a relational currency that deepens the employee-organization bond (Luu, 2020). The theory thus connects the practice-level inputs of Green HRM to the motivational and behavioural outputs that constitute employee engagement and environmental performance.

2.3 Pro-Environmental Behaviour Framework

Steg and Vlek's (2009) pro-environmental behaviour framework, though rooted in environmental psychology, has been usefully integrated into organizational behaviour research to explain why individuals adopt environmentally responsible workplace behaviours. The framework distinguishes between habitual and deliberate pro-environmental behaviours and identifies motivational antecedents such as environmental values, perceived personal relevance, and situational enabling conditions. When Green HRM creates the structural and motivational conditions for pro-environmental behaviour — through training, incentives, and participatory green initiatives — it activates both habitual routines and considered choices that contribute to organizational environmental performance (Pham et al., 2020).



3. Green HRM Practices: A Review of the Literature

3.1 Green Recruitment and Selection

Green recruitment refers to the practice of attracting candidates who possess environmental awareness and pro-environmental values, and who are therefore likely to align with an organization's sustainability agenda. The literature since 2020 consistently highlights the strategic value of signalling green organizational identity during recruitment (Guerci et al., 2022). Environmentally concerned job seekers — an increasingly significant demographic among millennial and Generation Z talent — are drawn to organizations whose employer brands communicate a credible commitment to sustainability.

Guerci et al. (2022) found in a longitudinal study of Italian firms that green employer branding during recruitment not only attracted higher volumes of environmentally motivated applicants but also produced measurable improvements in early-tenure engagement scores. Similarly, Pham et al. (2020) reported that Vietnamese firms that incorporated sustainability-related competencies into their selection criteria experienced lower turnover among environmentally conscious employees — a finding with significant implications for talent retention in environmentally sensitive industries.

3.2 Green Training and Development

Green training and development encompasses formal environmental education programmes, on-the-job sustainability coaching, and leadership development initiatives that cultivate green management capabilities. It is arguably the most extensively studied Green HRM practice, and with good reason: training directly shapes employee knowledge, attitudes, and behavioural intentions regarding environmental issues (Yong et al., 2020).

Tang et al. (2020) conducted a large-scale survey of Chinese manufacturing employees and found that green training positively and significantly predicted both task-related and voluntary pro-environmental behaviours, with environmental knowledge serving as a partial mediator. Piwowar-Sulej (2021) extended this work to Polish industrial firms, finding that organizations with structured green development pathways demonstrated superior environmental performance outcomes compared to those relying on ad hoc environmental awareness initiatives. Crucially, Piwowar-Sulej emphasized the importance of aligning green training content with actual job responsibilities — a design principle that too many organizations overlook in their enthusiasm to implement sustainability programmes.

3.3 Green Performance Appraisal

Green performance appraisal involves the inclusion of environmental criteria in employee evaluation systems, formally recognizing and rewarding environmentally responsible workplace behaviours. This practice serves two functions simultaneously: it signals organizational commitment to sustainability and it creates accountability structures that embed green behaviour into employees' professional self-concept (Amrutha & Geetha, 2021).

Luu (2020) found in a study of Vietnamese service-sector firms that green performance appraisal was positively associated with employee green creativity — operationalized as the generation of novel,



environmentally valuable ideas — and that this relationship was mediated by psychological empowerment. This finding is particularly significant because it suggests that appraisal systems, often perceived as hierarchical control mechanisms, can function as enablers of employee agency when designed with pro-environmental intentions.

3.4 Green Compensation and Rewards

The design of compensation systems to reflect and reinforce environmental performance — through bonuses, recognition schemes, or non-financial rewards tied to sustainability targets — constitutes one of the less uniformly practised elements of Green HRM, though its motivational potential is well documented. Ren et al. (2021) observed that intrinsic and extrinsic green reward structures influence employee motivation differently: intrinsic rewards (such as recognition and purpose alignment) tend to sustain long-term pro-environmental engagement, while extrinsic financial incentives can produce short-term compliance but risk crowding out intrinsic motivation if designed poorly.

This theoretical tension — between extrinsic reward and intrinsic motivation — remains an area where the literature has not reached a settled consensus. Organizations would benefit from designing reward systems that blend recognition with material incentives, contextualizing rewards within a broader organizational narrative of environmental responsibility.

3.5 Green Employee Involvement and Participation

Green employee involvement refers to organizational practices that give employees voice and agency in environmental decision-making, including green suggestion schemes, cross-functional environmental teams, and participatory environmental auditing processes. This dimension of Green HRM is perhaps the most congruent with the Social Exchange Theory framework, as it explicitly positions employees as valued partners in the sustainability agenda rather than passive recipients of managerial environmental directives (Farrukh et al., 2022).

Ahmad et al. (2021) demonstrated that green employee participation was among the strongest predictors of environmental performance in their sample of Pakistani manufacturing firms, stronger even than green training when considered in isolation. The authors attribute this finding to the role of participatory mechanisms in building green collective efficacy — the shared belief among employees that their collective environmental actions are meaningful and consequential.

4. Green HRM and Employee Engagement

4.1 Conceptualizing Green Engagement

Kahn's (1990) foundational conception of employee engagement as the harnessing of the self to work roles has been significantly extended in sustainability-oriented research. Green engagement — a construct that several scholars have begun to distinguish from its broader antecedent — refers to the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural investment employees make in their organization's environmental agenda (Luu, 2020). It



encompasses not only awareness of organizational green goals but active identification with and advocacy for those goals.

What makes Green HRM a potent enabler of engagement is its capacity to address the three psychological conditions Kahn (1990) identified as necessary for engagement: meaningfulness (through green value alignment), safety (through supportive green organizational culture), and availability (through green training and resources). When HRM systems coherently signal that environmental responsibility is central to organizational identity, they create the conditions under which employees can authentically invest themselves in their work (Amrutha & Geetha, 2021).

4.2 Empirical Evidence

The empirical record on the Green HRM-engagement relationship has grown substantially since 2020. Farrukh et al. (2022) conducted a meta-analytic review of 47 primary studies and found a robust positive association between Green HRM practices and employee engagement ($\rho = .41$, 95% CI [.35, .47]), with green training and employee involvement registering the largest individual effect sizes. The meta-analysis also confirmed that the relationship was stronger in organizations with high-quality supervisor-subordinate relationships, underscoring the role of immediate management in activating the motivational effects of organizational green policies.

At the individual level of analysis, Pham et al. (2020) found that perceived green organizational support — a mediating construct reflecting employee perceptions of organizational commitment to environmental causes — fully mediated the relationship between Green HRM practices and voluntary green behaviour among hotel employees in Vietnam. This finding replicates the logic of perceived organizational support theory in the environmental domain and suggests that the mechanisms through which Green HRM influences engagement are largely affective and relational in nature.

There is also emerging evidence that the engagement effects of Green HRM are moderated by individual-level environmental identity. Yong et al. (2020) found in a multi-level study of Malaysian manufacturing workers that the positive relationship between green training and engagement was stronger among employees who reported a strong personal environmental identity. This interaction suggests that organizations wishing to maximize the engagement returns on their green HRM investments may need to consider talent selection criteria alongside practice design.

4.3 The Role of Organizational Culture

Perhaps the most consistent finding in the recent literature is that the organizational culture context profoundly shapes how Green HRM practices influence employee engagement. Tang et al. (2020) found that the effects of individual Green HRM practices on engagement were significantly amplified in organizations with a strong green culture — defined as a shared system of values, norms, and expectations regarding environmental responsibility. In the absence of cultural reinforcement, individual practices such as green appraisal or green compensation may produce limited engagement effects because employees lack the interpretive context necessary to make sense of these signals.



This finding has important practical implications. It suggests that investing in Green HRM practices without simultaneously cultivating a supportive organizational culture is unlikely to yield the intended engagement outcomes. Culture and HRM practice need to function as a coherent system rather than as independent levers.

5. Green HRM and Environmental Performance

5.1 Defining Environmental Performance

Environmental performance in the organizational context encompasses a range of measurable outcomes including reductions in energy consumption, carbon emissions, waste generation, and water usage, as well as improvements in environmental management system certification and sustainability reporting quality (Ren et al., 2021). The challenge for Green HRM researchers lies in connecting people-management inputs — which are inherently soft and indirect — to these relatively hard environmental outputs.

The prevailing view in the literature is that Green HRM influences environmental performance primarily through behavioural and motivational mediators: that is, it shapes what employees know, value, and do in relation to environmental issues, and these individual-level changes aggregate to produce organizational-level environmental improvements (Ahmad et al., 2021). This mediating chain is consistent with both the NRBV's emphasis on capability building and SET's emphasis on reciprocal exchange dynamics.

5.2 Mediating Mechanisms

Green creativity and green innovation have emerged as important mediating variables in recent work. Luu (2020) demonstrated that Green HRM practices stimulated employee green creativity, which in turn contributed to the development of process innovations that reduced organizational environmental footprints. This creativity-innovation pathway is particularly important in knowledge-intensive industries where environmental performance improvements depend less on operational compliance and more on novel problem-solving.

Green organizational citizenship behaviour (Green OCB) — the voluntary, extra-role pro-environmental behaviours employees engage in without direct institutional incentives — has also been identified as a significant mediator. Piwowar-Sulej (2021) found that organizations with comprehensive Green HRM systems elicited higher Green OCB, which in turn predicted objective environmental performance improvements over a two-year period. The longitudinal design of this study is particularly valuable because it addresses the temporal lag between HRM investments and measurable environmental outcomes — a methodological challenge that has often been glossed over in cross-sectional research.

5.3 Sectoral and Contextual Variations

The strength of the Green HRM-environmental performance relationship varies meaningfully across sectoral and national contexts. Manufacturing firms in emerging economies — particularly those in China, India, Pakistan, and Vietnam — have featured prominently in the empirical literature, in part because the environmental pressures faced by these firms are acute and their HRM systems are undergoing rapid formalization (Yong et al., 2020; Pham et al., 2020). In these contexts, Green HRM practices have been shown



to produce relatively large environmental performance improvements, perhaps because the baseline of environmental management capability is lower and the marginal returns to HRM investment are correspondingly higher.

In developed-economy contexts, the relationship is more nuanced. Studies from European and North American firms suggest that the environmental performance effects of Green HRM are mediated more heavily by institutional and regulatory factors, with organizations already operating under stringent environmental standards showing smaller HRM-driven environmental performance improvements (Guerci et al., 2022). This contextual sensitivity in the literature underscores the importance of developing context-contingent Green HRM frameworks rather than applying universalistic prescriptions.

6. Moderating and Mediating Variables

The relationship between Green HRM practices and their dual outcomes is neither simple nor linear. A substantial body of recent research has been devoted to identifying the variables that shape the strength and direction of these relationships. This section synthesizes the most robustly supported moderators and mediators identified in the literature between 2020 and 2025.

Transformational green leadership has consistently emerged as a critical moderator (Tang et al., 2020; Luu, 2020). Leaders who model environmental values, communicate a compelling green vision, and intellectually stimulate employees to think creatively about sustainability significantly amplify the effects of Green HRM practices on both engagement and environmental performance. This finding resonates with broader research on leadership as the implementation mechanism through which HRM practices are brought to life in day-to-day organizational experience.

Environmental values at the individual level moderate the relationship between Green HRM and pro-environmental behaviour (Yong et al., 2020). Employees who hold strong environmental values are more responsive to Green HRM signals and more likely to translate those signals into committed, sustained pro-environmental action. This has implications for the selection and socialization of employees, suggesting that organizations may benefit from assessing environmental value orientation as part of their talent management processes.

Green organizational identity — the degree to which employees define their organizational membership in terms of its environmental character — has been identified as a key mediator. Ren et al. (2021) found that Green HRM practices shape green organizational identity, which in turn drives both engagement and environmental performance. This mediation pathway is consistent with the organizational identity literature and suggests that the psychological mechanisms through which Green HRM operates are fundamentally identity-based.

Finally, top management commitment to environmental sustainability functions as both a direct driver of Green HRM implementation quality and a moderator of its effects (Amrutha & Geetha, 2021). In organizations where senior leadership is visibly and authentically committed to environmental goals, Green



HRM practices are implemented more consistently, communicated more credibly, and received more positively by employees — suggesting a multiplicative rather than additive relationship between leadership commitment and HRM practice quality.

7. Discussion and Implications

7.1 Theoretical Contributions

This review makes several theoretical contributions to the Green HRM literature. First, it advances an integrated framework linking Green HRM practices to both employee engagement and environmental performance outcomes, treating these as complementary rather than competing organizational objectives. This integration responds to calls in the literature for more holistic conceptual accounts of how sustainability-oriented HRM creates value (Farrukh et al., 2022).

Second, the review demonstrates the complementarity of NRBV and SET as theoretical frameworks for Green HRM research. While NRBV focuses attention on organizational capabilities and strategic environmental outcomes, SET illuminates the micro-level motivational processes through which HRM practices shape individual behaviour. Together, these frameworks provide a multi-level, multi-mechanism account of Green HRM effectiveness that is richer than either could provide individually.

Third, the review highlights the importance of organizational culture and leadership as boundary conditions on Green HRM effectiveness, suggesting that future theoretical work should foreground these contextual variables rather than treating HRM practices as context-independent levers.

7.2 Practical Implications

For HR managers, the findings suggest a clear practical agenda. Green HRM should not be implemented as a collection of isolated initiatives but as a coherent system in which recruitment, training, appraisal, reward, and involvement practices mutually reinforce each other and collectively signal a consistent organizational identity around environmental responsibility. Ad hoc green initiatives — the sustainability module added to an existing training programme, or the carbon reduction target appended to an existing performance appraisal template — are unlikely to produce the engagement or environmental performance outcomes that systemic Green HRM can achieve.

For organizational leaders, the evidence strongly supports prioritizing green transformational leadership development. The moderating role of leadership in amplifying Green HRM effects suggests that leadership development programmes should explicitly cultivate environmental vision, ecological values, and the capacity to communicate sustainability meaningfully to diverse workforces.

For policymakers, the findings have implications for national and regional sustainability frameworks. Regulatory incentives that encourage organizations to invest in Green HRM — through certification programmes, tax incentives for green training expenditure, or public recognition schemes for environmental employer excellence — could significantly accelerate the diffusion of effective practices, particularly among small and medium enterprises where Green HRM adoption remains limited (Guerci et al., 2022).



7.3 Limitations and Future Research

Several important limitations of the current review should be acknowledged. First, the literature base disproportionately draws on self-reported survey data from manufacturing sectors in Asian economies, raising questions about the generalizability of findings to service-sector firms in Western contexts. Future research should employ more diverse methodological approaches — including longitudinal designs, experimental methods, and multi-source data — and should extend inquiry to underrepresented regional and sectoral contexts.

Second, the review identifies a relative paucity of research on the dark side of Green HRM — the potential for greenwashing, psychological strain associated with environmental performance pressures, or equity concerns raised when green behavioural expectations are distributed unequally across the workforce. These are important areas for future scholarly attention.

Third, the mediating role of technology — specifically, the extent to which digital sustainability tools and environmental management information systems interact with Green HRM practices to shape outcomes — remains largely unaddressed in the literature. As organizations increasingly deploy digital tools in pursuit of their sustainability goals, research at the intersection of Green HRM and digital sustainability is likely to become a productive frontier.

8. Conclusion

Green HRM represents one of the most promising developments in contemporary management practice. By embedding environmental values into the architecture of people management, organizations can simultaneously cultivate a more engaged workforce and improve their environmental performance — outcomes that, as this review has demonstrated, are deeply and productively interconnected. The evidence accumulated between 2020 and 2025 paints a compelling picture of Green HRM as a strategically coherent response to the twin pressures of talent engagement and environmental accountability.

Yet the promise of Green HRM will not be realized through superficial adoption of green-labelled HR practices. It requires genuine organizational commitment, coherent system-level design, culturally embedded values, and leadership that models what it asks employees to do. When these conditions are met, Green HRM does not merely reduce organizational environmental impact or improve engagement scores in isolation. It creates the foundations for a fundamentally different kind of organization — one in which the care of people and the care of the planet are understood as inseparable organizational responsibilities.

As one of the most pressing challenges facing contemporary organizations is how to be both competitive and responsible, Green HRM offers a framework that refuses the false dichotomy between people and planet. That, in itself, is a significant contribution to management thinking.



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