GREEN HRM AND ESG PERFORMANCE: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMPLOYEE GREEN BEHAVIOUR AND THE MODERATING INFLUENCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP

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Green HRM and ESG Performance: The Mediating Role of Employee Green Behaviour and the Moderating Influence of Organizational Culture and Leadership.

ABSTRACT:

Organizations across industries are increasingly expected to integrate sustainability into their strategic and operational practices through Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) initiatives. In this context, Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) has emerged as an important organizational approach for encouraging environmentally responsible employee behaviour and supporting long-term sustainability objectives. Although earlier studies have examined the relationship between GHRM and environmental performance, limited attention has been given to its broader contribution toward integrated ESG outcomes. Existing literature also provides an insufficient understanding of the behavioural and organizational conditions through which GHRM practices influence sustainability performance.

To address this gap, the present conceptual study develops a comprehensive framework that links Green HRM practices to ESG outcomes via the mediating role of Employee Green Behaviour (EGB). The framework further examines the moderating influence of organizational culture and leadership in strengthening environmentally responsible activities employee actions. Drawing on the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) Theory and Social Exchange Theory (SET), the study explains how green recruitment, training, performance management, and reward systems shape employees' attitudes and behaviours that contribute to organizational sustainability goals.

The proposed model highlights that sustainability outcomes cannot be achieved solely through formal policies, but require supportive cultural values, ethical leadership, and active employee participation. By integrating behavioural and contextual dimensions within a single framework, the study extends existing Green HRM literature beyond environmental concerns toward a broader ESG perspective. The paper also offers strategic insights for organizations seeking to align human resource practices with sustainable development priorities and responsible governance objectives.

KEYWORDS:

Green Human Resource Management, ESG Performance, Employee Green Behaviour, Sustainable Organizations, Green Leadership

INTRODUCTION:

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) has evolved into an important strategic approach for organizations seeking to integrate sustainability within their operational and managerial practices. Unlike traditional human resource management systems, GHRM incorporates environmental objectives into key HR functions such as recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and compensation. Through this integration, organizations aim to encourage environmentally responsible employee behaviour and support long-term environmental and organizational responsibility initiatives (Jabbour, 2013). The growing relevance of GHRM is further supported by the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) framework, which explains how organizations enhance employee capabilities through green training and recruitment, strengthen motivation through appraisal and reward systems, and create opportunities for participation in environmentally responsible organizational activities (Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013).

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks have emerged as broader sustainability assessment mechanisms that evaluate organizational performance beyond traditional financial and environmental indicators. Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) has emerged as a strategic organizational mechanism for translating sustainability objectives into employee-level practices and organizational behaviour. Within evolving sustainability-driven business environments, increasing stakeholder scrutiny has encouraged organizations to integrate environmental and governance considerations into internal operational systems and workforce management practices. In response to these pressures, GHRM supports the integration of environmental responsibility, employee engagement, and ethical governance within organizational processes. As a result, many organizations now consider GHRM an important capability for achieving ESG-related objectives and responsible business practices (Opatha, 2024).

While early conceptualisations of Green HRM focused primarily on ecological footprint reduction, a modern strategic alignment requires human resource architectures to address all three pillars of the ESG framework simultaneously. The social pillar is closely associated with employee well-being, workplace equity, and organizational identification, whereas the governance pillar depends on HR systems that support transparency, ethical leadership, and accountability. This transition reflects the growing strategic importance of ESG-oriented management practices within contemporary organizations (Eccles et al., 2014).

These observations indicate that sustainability performance depends not only on organizational policies but also on employee participation. In this regard, human resource management functions become instrumental in embedding ESG principles within organizational processes. By consistently aligning HR practices with organizational sustainability goals, organizations can enhance overall performance while simultaneously strengthening stakeholder trust and long-term value creation (Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013).

Green HRM practices provide organizations with a structured mechanism for incorporating sustainability into routine HR functions. These practices include green recruitment and selection, where organizations across industries prioritize environmentally conscious candidates; green training and development, which enhance employees' sustainability-related knowledge and competencies; green performance management, where environmental objectives are incorporated into appraisal systems; and green compensation and reward systems, which encourage employees to engage in environmentally responsible behaviour. Together, these practices support the development of a workforce that actively contributes to organizational sustainability objectives and responsible business conduct (Dumont, Shen, & Deng, 2017).

Although prior studies acknowledge the relationship between Green HRM and sustainability performance, existing literature remains fragmented in explaining how integrated HR systems contribute to broader ESG outcomes through behavioural and organizational mechanisms. Most existing studies focus primarily on environmental outcomes or isolated HR practices, thereby limiting a comprehensive understanding of sustainability-oriented organizational performance. As a result, the existing literature provides limited explanation regarding how sustainability-oriented HR systems collectively shape broader ESG performance through employee-driven organizational behaviour.

The mediating role of Employee Green Behaviour (EGB) in linking Green HRM practices with ESG performance remains insufficiently explored. Similarly, contextual factors such as organizational culture and leadership have received limited attention in explaining how sustainability-oriented HR practices influence employee behaviour and organizational sustainability outcomes (Pham, Tučková, & Jabbour, 2020; Yong, Yusliza, Ramayah, & Fawehinmi, 2019). The study contributes to sustainability and HRM literature by extending Green HRM research beyond environmental performance toward a broader ESG perspective. It further conceptualises Employee Green Behaviour as a behavioural mechanism connecting HR practices with sustainability outcomes while incorporating organizational culture and leadership as contextual moderators. To address these gaps, the present study proposes a conceptual framework that links Green HRM practices with ESG outcomes through the mediating role of Employee Green Behaviour. The framework further examines the moderating influence of organizational culture and leadership in strengthening environmentally responsible employee actions. Drawing upon the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) Theory and Social Exchange Theory (SET), the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how ESG-related HR systems influence employee behaviour and contribute to long-term ESG performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM)

Definition

Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) has been increasingly recognised as a strategic approach that integrates environmental sustainability into human resource policies and practices. It extends traditional HRM by embedding environmental concerns into core functions such as recruitment, training, performance management, and reward systems. Scholars argue that Green HRM not only focuses on reducing the environmental impact of organizational activities but also plays a crucial role in shaping employee attitudes and behaviours toward sustainability (Renwick et al., 2013; Jabbour & Santos, 2008).

2.2 Green HRM Practices and Their Impact

2.2.1 Green Recruitment and Selection

Existing studies consistently indicate that green recruitment practices strengthen organizational sustainability orientation by attracting candidates whose environmental values align with organizational goals. This not only strengthens the organization’s environmental orientation but also ensures that new employees are more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviours from the beginning (Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013).

2.2.2 Green Training and Development

Existing literature indicates that green workplace training enhances employee environmental awareness and participation in organizational green initiatives (Dumont et al., 2017).

2.2.3 Green Performance Management

Green Performance Management (GPM) refers to the integration of environmental objectives and sustainability indicators into employee performance evaluation systems. Unlike traditional appraisal systems that primarily focus on financial or operational outcomes, GPM incorporates environmental performance criteria such as resource conservation, waste reduction, and environmentally responsible workplace practices. By embedding environmental benchmarks within appraisal mechanisms, organizations encourage employees to align their work behaviour with broader sustainability objectives. Existing Research findings suggest that employees are more likely to demonstrate environmentally responsible behaviour when sustainability performance is formally recognised and evaluated within organizational systems. Green performance evaluation also strengthens accountability and reinforces organizational commitment toward environmental initiatives. According to Jabbar and Akhtar (2020), the inclusion of environmental criteria within performance management systems positively influences employee motivation and participation in sustainability-oriented activities.

2.2.4 Green Compensation and Rewards

Reward systems that recognise and incentivise environmentally responsible behaviour have been found to significantly influence employee motivation. Financial and non-financial rewards linked to sustainability outcomes encourage employees to actively contribute to environmental goals, thereby enhancing overall organizational performance (Dumont et al., 2017).

Overall, existing research suggests that Green HRM practices significantly influence employee attitudes and behaviours toward sustainability. However, their effectiveness is contingent upon contextual factors such as leadership and organizational culture, which shape the implementation of these practices and reinforce alignment with sustainability objectives.

2.3 ESG CONCEPT

2.3.1 Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Explanation

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) has emerged as a comprehensive framework for evaluating organizational performance beyond traditional financial metrics. It reflects how organizations manage their environmental impact, social responsibilities, and governance practices in a structured and measurable manner. The environmental dimension focuses on issues such as resource efficiency, energy consumption, and waste management, while the social dimension emphasizes employee well-being, diversity, and community engagement. The governance dimension addresses aspects such as ethical leadership, transparency, and regulatory compliance (Eccles et al., 2014).

Scholarly literature highlights that ESG is not merely a reporting mechanism but a strategic approach that integrates sustainability into core business operations. Organizations adopting ESG principles are better positioned to manage risks, enhance reputation, and create long-term value. Moreover, ESG frameworks encourage organizations to move beyond short-term financial gains toward sustainable and responsible growth, aligning business objectives with broader societal expectations (Pham, Tučková, & Jabbour, 2020).

2.3.2 Importance of ESG in Organizations

The importance of ESG in organizations has increased significantly due to growing stakeholder expectations and the need for sustainable value creation. Several empirical studies report that organizations with strong ESG performance demonstrate improved financial outcomes, enhanced market valuation, and better long-term stability. ESG practices not only contribute to environmental and social responsibility but also serve as strategic tools for improving corporate performance and competitiveness in dynamic business environments (Ademi & Klungseth, 2022).

2.4 The Mediating Role of Employee Green Behaviour (EGB)

Employee Green Behaviour (EGB) refers to employee actions and workplace behaviours that contribute to environmental sustainability within organizations. These behaviours may include energy conservation, waste reduction, recycling practices, and participation in environmentally responsible organizational initiatives.

Existing literature suggests that Employee Green Behaviour plays an important role in translating organizational sustainability policies into practical environmental outcomes.

Green HRM practices such as training, rewards, and performance management contribute to the development of sustainability-oriented employee attitudes and behaviours. However, organizational sustainability outcomes are achieved not merely through formal HR policies, but through employees' active behavioural participation in environmental initiatives. In this regard, Employee Green Behaviour acts as an important mediating mechanism linking Green HRM practices with ESG performance outcomes.

The mediating role of EGB can also be explained by Social Exchange Theory (SET), which suggests that employees reciprocate organizational support with environmentally responsible workplace behaviour. When organizations invest in green HR practices and environmental development initiatives, employees are more likely to respond through environmentally responsible actions and greater participation in organizational sustainability efforts (Dumont et al., 2017).

2.5 The Moderating Role of Organizational Culture and Leadership

2.5.1 Organizational Culture as a Boundary Condition

Organizational culture plays an important role in shaping employee perceptions and responses toward sustainability-oriented HR practices. A sustainability-oriented organizational culture is characterised by shared values, beliefs, and behavioural expectations that support environmental responsibility and ethical organizational conduct. Existing studies suggest that organizational culture strengthens the effectiveness of Green HRM practices by encouraging employees to internalize sustainability objectives within their routine workplace behaviour.

When organizational culture strongly supports environmental values, employees are more likely to actively participate in sustainability initiatives and demonstrate environmentally responsible behaviour. In contrast, organizations lacking sustainability-oriented cultural support may experience lower employee engagement toward Green HRM initiatives. Roscoe et al. (2019) argue that organizational culture provides the behavioural and psychological environment necessary for strengthening the relationship between Green HRM practices and sustainability performance outcomes.

2.5.2 Leadership as a Moderating Factor

Leadership plays a significant role in influencing the effectiveness of Green HRM practices within organizations. In particular, green transformational leadership encourages employees to support organizational sustainability objectives by promoting environmental awareness, ethical responsibility, and long-term collective goals. Leaders who demonstrate strong environmental commitment positively influence employee attitudes and participation in environmental initiatives.

Existing literature indicates that leadership strengthens the relationship between Green HRM practices and employee green behaviour by reinforcing organizational sustainability values and legitimizing environmental initiatives. Robertson and Barling (2013) found that employees are more likely to engage in environmentally responsible workplace behaviour when leaders actively support and model sustainability practices. Therefore, leadership functions as an important moderating factor that enhances the effectiveness of Green HRM systems in achieving ESG-related outcomes.

Overall, existing literature suggests that organizational culture and leadership significantly influence the effectiveness of Green HRM practices and employee sustainability-oriented behaviour. These contextual factors strengthen organizational support for environmental initiatives and contribute to improved ESG-related outcomes.

3. METHODOLOGY AND REVIEW STRATEGY

To construct this conceptual framework, the researchers adopted a systematic narrative review approach, which allowed for a deep-dive synthesis of existing research. The study focused on screening peer-reviewed literature from databases like Scopus and Web of Science, prioritising studies that explicitly bridge the gap between human capital management and organizational sustainability. The inclusion criteria were intentionally selective; I focused on identifying how individual HR practices—recruitment, training, and rewards—translate into behavioural outcomes. This process was not merely about gathering data, but about identifying the 'missing links' in how current models explain the transition from micro-level employee behavior to macro-level ESG performance.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Ability – Motivation – Opportunity (AMO) Theory

The underlying theories on which this study relies are the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) Theory and Social Exchange Theory (SET). These frameworks shed light on the relationship between Green HRM practices and the organizational ESG outcomes, through employee behaviour as a mechanism.

The AMO framework suggests that organizational performance is a function of three components: employee Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity to contribute (Renwick et al., 2013)

In the context of this study, Green HRM practices are categorised as follows:

Ability: Green recruitment and selection ensure the organization hires individuals with environmental values, while green training enhances their sustainability-related competencies.

Motivation: Green performance management and compensation provide the extrinsic and intrinsic drive for employees to align their daily tasks with ESG goals.

Opportunity: Within the proposed framework, organizational culture and leadership function as contextual factors that strengthen employees' opportunities to apply sustainability-oriented knowledge and behaviour within organizational settings.

4.2 Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Blau (1964) states that while AMO explains the structure, Social Exchange Theory explains the reciprocal relationship between organizations and employees. SET posits that when an organization invests in its employees (through green training or rewards), employees feel a sense of obligation to reciprocate with positive behaviours. In this model, Employee Green Behaviour is the "repayment" for the organisation's commitment to sustainability, ultimately leading to superior ESG performance (Dumont, Shen, & Deng, 2017).

5. PROPOSITION DEVELOPMENT

P1: Green HRM practices positively influence the prevalence of Employee Green Behaviour (EGB).

P2: Employee Green Behaviour (EGB) acts as a mediator, bridging the gap between Green HRM interventions and overall ESG outcomes.

P3: The relationship between EGB and ESG performance is positively moderated by a Green Organizational Culture.

A sustainability-oriented organizational culture strengthens the effectiveness of employee green behaviour by reinforcing shared environmental values, ethical responsibility, and organizational support for sustainability initiatives.

P4: Green Transformational Leadership strengthens the impact of Green HRM practices on Employee Green Behaviour.

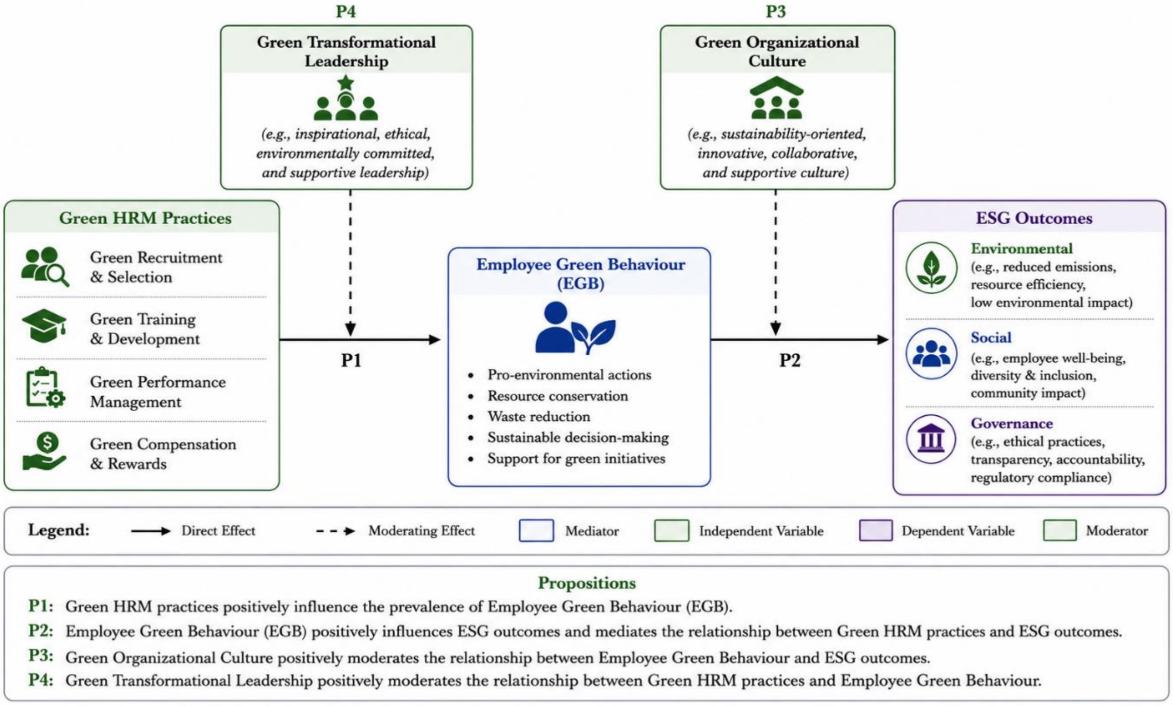

Figure 1. A Conceptual Framework for Green HRM and ESG Outcomes: The Mediating Role of Employee Green Behaviour and the Moderating Influence of Leadership and Culture.

6. DISCUSSION

The conceptual model proposed in this study addresses a significant gap in current literature by extending the scope of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) beyond purely environmental metrics to include the comprehensive Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) framework. While traditional research often evaluates HR practices in isolation, this model demonstrates how a holistic integration of recruitment, training, performance management, and compensation serves as a strategic facilitator for broader sustainability goals.

Employee Green Behaviour as a Mediating Mechanism

The proposed framework suggests that Green HRM practices do not directly yield ESG results; rather, they operate through the critical mediating mechanism of Employee Green Behaviour (EGB). Drawing on various theoretical perspectives, it is evident that practices such as green training and development enhance the environmental knowledge and skills of the workforce. When these competencies are reinforced by green compensation and rewards, employees become motivated to engage in sustainable behaviours and pro-environmental actions. This behavioural shift acts as a mediating mechanism that translates green HR practices into organizational ESG outcomes.

Contextual Enablers: Culture and Leadership

The proposed framework further suggests that the effectiveness of Green HRM practices depends upon supportive contextual conditions, particularly organizational culture and leadership. A sustainability-oriented organizational culture strengthens employee alignment with environmental values and encourages long-term, responsible workplace behaviour. Similarly, leadership plays an important role in reinforcing organizational commitment toward sustainability initiatives. Leaders who actively support ESG-oriented practices enhance employee participation, strengthen organizational legitimacy, and facilitate the integration of sustainability objectives into organizational decision-making processes.

Achieving Multi-Dimensional ESG Outcomes

By aligning internal HR systems with ESG-related organizational objectives, Green HRM practices contribute toward multiple ESG dimensions. Environmental outcomes may include improved resource efficiency, waste reduction, and responsible energy utilisation. Social outcomes are reflected through employee well-being, diversity, inclusion, and community-oriented organizational practices. Governance outcomes are associated with ethical leadership, transparency, accountability, and regulatory compliance. While the environmental and social impacts of GHRM are often emphasized, its contribution to the governance pillar is equally foundational. By embedding transparency and accountability into human resource functions—such as linking executive compensation to ESG targets and ensuring fair, equitable performance appraisals—organizations move beyond mere compliance. This structural alignment ensures that ethical behaviour is not just a policy statement, but a measurable metric integrated into the daily decision-making processes of all employees. Collectively, these dimensions demonstrate the broader strategic contribution of Green HRM toward organizational sustainability performance.

6.1 Theoretical Integration of the Micro-Macro Divide

The core theoretical contribution of the proposed framework lies in its capacity to bridge the micro-macro divide in sustainability literature. Historically, strategic human resource management (SHRM) has operated at the micro-level, focusing on individual attitudes and performance, while ESG frameworks have been utilised as macro-level corporate reporting and investment metrics. By synthesising the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) framework with Social Exchange Theory, this model demonstrates the behavioural mechanism through which micro-interventions contribute toward macro-level sustainability outcomes.

As illustrated in the conceptual model, GHRM practices structurally construct employee 'Ability' and 'Motivation'. However, macro ESG outcomes are not achieved through unguided individual actions; rather, they require the 'Opportunity' provided by contextual boundary conditions—specifically, a Green Organizational Culture and Transformational Leadership. When leaders actively validate green initiatives and the culture provides organizational support, individual Employee Green Behaviour (EGB) is successfully aggregated into verified institutional ESG milestones. This integration provides a broader understanding of how employee behaviour contributes to organizational sustainability performance.

7. STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

Translating this conceptual model into corporate reality requires a systematic, phased implementation strategy. Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) practices require alignment between HR systems and organizational sustainability objectives. This process involves integrating human capital systems with organizational sustainability objectives. To achieve this, organizations must approach implementation through a multi-tiered framework that sequentially addresses structural capabilities, behavioral motivation, and cultural context.

7.1 Phase I: Structural and Capability Alignment (Ability-Enhancing)

The initial phase focuses on embedding environmental objectives directly into the baseline talent management architecture. This begins with Green Recruitment and Selection, where job descriptions must explicitly reflect the organization's sustainability values, and evaluation matrices should assess a candidate's alignment with organizational environmental values with eco-friendly initiatives.

Following selection, Green Training and Development must move beyond generic environmental awareness. Organizations should implement continuous, domain-specific training modules that equip employees with actionable technical skills—such as resource efficiency tracking, waste minimization protocols, and sustainable decision-making metrics. By prioritising these two functions, the firm establishes the foundational technical "ability" required to support macro ESG goals (Renwick, Redman, et al., 2013).

7.2 Phase II: Behavioural Accountability and Incentivization (Motivation-Enhancing)

Once structural capability is established, the implementation must shift toward sustaining individual effort through accountability. Green Performance Management systems must formalise sustainability targets by integrating specific eco-KPIs into annual performance appraisals. Employees should be evaluated on measurable reductions in departmental energy consumption or on their contributions to waste-reduction initiatives.

Crucially, these evaluations must be tied directly to Green Compensation and Rewards. Implementation should feature a balanced mix of financial incentives and non-financial rewards linked to environmental performance outcomes to encourage employees to actively contribute to environmental goals. This systematic reinforcement transforms voluntary compliance into sustained employee motivation toward environmentally responsible behaviour. (Dumont, Shen, & Deng, 2017).

7.3 Phase III: Contextual Activation (Opportunity-Enhancing)

The final phase of implementation involves activating the contextual variables that allow GHRM practices to succeed. This requires senior leadership to demonstrate active commitment toward sustainability initiatives. Leaders must serve as visible role models, explicitly championing ESG metrics during strategic decision-making and allocating the capital necessary to execute green proposals.

Simultaneously, management must intentionally cultivate a Green Organizational Culture. This is achieved by embedding environmental responsibility into organizational practices, internal communication channels, and shared behavioral norms. When the internal culture and daily leadership validate formal GHRM initiatives, it provides employees with the organizational support and opportunities to engage in sustained pro-environmental behaviours on the ground, ultimately driving long-term ESG outcomes (Eccles et al., 2014).

8. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

While the proposed conceptual framework offers a conceptual understanding of Green HRM practices and their relationship with organizational ESG performance, the study is subject to certain limitations that provide opportunities for future research.

8.1 Limitations and Directions for Empirical Validation

The primary limitation of this study is its purely conceptual nature. Because the linkages between GHRM, Employee Green Behaviour, and ESG outcomes are theoretically derived, they have not yet been empirically validated. To address this limitation, future researchers should deploy quantitative methodologies to statistically validate the framework. Future studies may employ Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the direct and indirect relationships proposed in the framework, including the mediating role of Employee Green Behaviour (Yong et al., 2019).

8.2 Methodological and Contextual Considerations

Furthermore, the cross-sectional testing of this model might capture a single moment in time, whereas long-term ESG objectives are inherently long-term and developmental. Future longitudinal studies would be highly valuable to track whether the implementation of green compensation and performance management yields sustained environmentally responsible workplace behaviour over multi-year periods. Additionally, investigating the model across different institutional contexts—such as comparing asset-heavy manufacturing industries with service-oriented sectors—would provide deeper understanding regarding the moderating influence of organizational culture across different organizational settings (Pham et al., 2020).

9. CONCLUSION

The growing importance of corporate sustainability has significantly influenced organizational human resource practices and ESG-related strategic priorities. This paper concludes that achieving robust Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) objectives requires organizations to integrate sustainability principles into workforce management and organizational behaviours. By leveraging the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity framework, this study demonstrates that Green HRM practices function as the essential organizational architecture needed to encourage Employee Green Behaviour.

When these structural HR interventions are championed by active leadership and embedded within a supportive corporate culture, individual environmentally responsible behaviours contribute toward broader organizational ESG outcomes. Ultimately, this framework bridges the micro-macro divide in sustainability research, offering corporate leaders and HR practitioners a clear, strategic roadmap to transform human potential into verified sustainable growth.

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