



**THE MEDIATING ROLE OF GREEN LEADERSHIP IN THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GHRM, GREEN TRAINING, AND
SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE**

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Abstract

Organizations face mounting pressure to integrate sustainability into core operations, yet mechanisms translating Green Human Resource Management (GHRM), green training, and green leadership into sustainable employee performance remain incompletely understood. This systematic literature review (SLR), following PRISMA 2020 and SPAR-4-SLR guidelines, synthesized 68 empirical studies from 908 initial records (January 2015–December 2025) to examine green leadership's mediating role. Four pivotal findings emerged: (1) green leadership serves as a key mediator, explaining an additional 15–25% of



variance, between GHRM practices and sustainable employee performance; (2) multiple parallel and sequential mediating pathways operate simultaneously, including green psychological climate, employee green behavior, work engagement, environmental commitment, and green innovation behavior; (3) GHRM practice effectiveness is context-contingent, with green training showing the strongest effects ($r = .40-.55$); and (4) organizational culture, leadership authenticity, employee environmental values, and industry sensitivity act as critical boundary conditions. Theoretically, the review integrates five frameworks (AMO, SET, RBV, SDT, Dynamic Capability Theory) into a comprehensive multilevel model. Practically, findings provide: (1) strategic GHRM implementation sequencing, (2) six evidence-based authenticity criteria, (3) six behavioral dimensions for green leadership effectiveness, and (4) sector-specific guidance. Critical gaps include limited longitudinal evidence (<15% of literature), insufficient multilevel integration, geographic concentration in Asia/Middle East, and inadequate investigation of GHRM's dark side effects.

Keywords: Green Human Resource Management; Green Leadership; Sustainable Employee Performance; Mediation Mechanisms; Systematic Literature Review; Organizational Sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Global environmental degradation and climate change have intensified organizational pressures to embed sustainability into core business operations. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), coupled with mounting regulatory requirements and stakeholder expectations, have positioned Green Human Resource Management (GHRM), green training, and green leadership as critical organizational capabilities for competitive advantage and environmental stewardship. Organizations implementing comprehensive GHRM experience productivity increases of 15–20% and environmental performance improvements of 30%, yet the underlying mechanisms translating these practices into sustainable employee performance remain incompletely understood.

Green Human Resource Management represents a strategic approach to managing human resources that promotes environmental awareness, sustainability consciousness, and pro-environmental behaviors across organizational levels. However, implementation challenges persist: How does GHRM translate into individual and team sustainability behaviors? What role



does green leadership play in this translation? Which organizational contexts amplify or dampen GHRM effectiveness?

This systematic literature review addresses five critical research gaps: (1) green leadership's mediating role lacks systematic conceptualization in an integrated theoretical model; (2) geographic concentration in Asia and Middle East limits generalizability to developing economies, SMEs, and public sector organizations; (3) longitudinal and multilevel research remains scarce, preventing causal inference; (4) specific causal mechanisms linking GHRM practices to performance remain underexplored; and (5) contextual boundary conditions—organizational culture, leadership authenticity, employee values, and industry characteristics—require systematic investigation.

Research Questions and Contribution

This SLR addresses four primary research questions:

- RQ1: What GHRM practices have been examined in empirical studies and how have they been operationalized?
- RQ2: What are the direct effects of GHRM practices and green training on sustainable employee performance?
- RQ3: What empirical evidence exists on green leadership's mediating role in GHRM-performance relationships?
- RQ4: Which contextual factors (organizational, individual, environmental) moderate

These relationships? The review integrates five complementary theoretical frameworks (AMO, SET, RBV, SDT, Dynamic Capability Theory), synthesizes 68 empirical studies from 908 initial records, and proposes a Five-Level Integrated Framework positioning green leadership as the central mediator between GHRM practices and sustainable employee performance outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Key Constructs and Definitions

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) encompasses a comprehensive set of HR practices designed to promote environmental awareness, sustainability consciousness, and pro-environmental behaviors throughout the organization. Core GHRM practices include: (1) green recruitment : selecting candidates with environmental values and sustainability commitment; (2) green training, developing employee capabilities for environmental management and sustainable practices; (3) green performance



management : evaluating and rewarding environmental contributions; (4) green rewards and compensation: providing financial and non-financial incentives for sustainability performance; and (5) green employee involvement : engaging employees in sustainability decision-making and innovation.

Green Leadership refers to transformational leadership that prioritizes environmental sustainability as a core organizational value. It encompasses leaders who inspire pro-environmental behaviors through four primary mechanisms: (1) value transmission: articulating environmental values as organizational imperatives; (2) authentic role modeling: demonstrating personal commitment to sustainability through behaviors and decisions; (3) climate creation: establishing organizational norms and cultures supporting sustainability initiatives; and (4) resource mobilization: providing necessary resources, tools, and support for environmental initiatives.

Sustainable Employee Performance encompasses environmental, social, and economic dimensions of employee contributions. It extends beyond traditional task performance to include: (1) environmental task performance: directly executing sustainability-related work activities; (2) environmental citizenship behaviors: voluntary pro-environmental discretionary efforts; (3) environmental commitment: psychological attachment to organizational sustainability goals; and (4) green innovation behavior: generating creative solutions for environmental challenges.

2. Theoretical Frameworks Integration

This review integrates five complementary theoretical frameworks: **Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) Theory** explains how GHRM practices activate three critical employee factors: (1) Ability: building environmental knowledge, skills, and competencies through green training; (2) Motivation: creating intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for sustainability through rewards and recognition; (3) Opportunity: providing organizational structures, systems, and cultures enabling environmental performance.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) describes reciprocal organizational-employee dynamics where GHRM investments in sustainability signal organizational commitment, generating reciprocal employee environmental engagement, loyalty, and discretionary effort. Employees perceive GHRM as organizational investments warranting reciprocal sustainability behaviors.

Resource-Based View (RBV) positions green human capital as a strategic, valuable, rare, and inimitable organizational resource. GHRM develops this



resource through talent selection, skill development, and culture building, creating competitive advantage and sustainable performance superiority.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) demonstrates how green leadership satisfies three psychological needs: (1) Autonomy: providing choice and decision-making involvement in sustainability initiatives; (2) Competence: developing employee capabilities and confidence in environmental tasks; (3) Relatedness: creating community and belonging through shared sustainability mission, enhancing intrinsic motivation for environmental performance.

Dynamic Capability Theory emphasizes organizational adaptation to evolving sustainability imperatives. GHRM and green leadership develop dynamic capabilities: organizational routines and processes enabling continuous environmental strategy renewal, innovation, and competitive adaptation.

3. Literature Evolution and Research Phases

GHRM research evolved across three distinct phases: **Phase 1 (2015–2018): Foundation and Construct Definition** focused on defining core GHRM constructs, operationalizing practices, and examining direct relationships with performance outcomes. Research established foundational evidence that GHRM practices correlate with environmental and organizational performance, positioning GHRM as strategically relevant.

Phase 2 (2018–2021): Mechanism Exploration identified multiple mediating pathways through which GHRM translates into performance. Green leadership emerged as a critical mechanism during this phase, with research demonstrating its facilitating role in GHRM effectiveness. Studies began examining psychological climate, commitment, and behavioral pathways.

Phase 3 (2021–2025): Integration and Contextualization integrates theories, examines multilevel dynamics, and extends research to developing economies, SMEs, and non-Western contexts. Contemporary research emphasizes authenticity, organizational culture contingency, and dark-side effects of poorly implemented initiatives.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) based on the PRISMA 2020 and SPAR-4-SLR guidelines to ensure methodological rigor and transparent reporting. The review protocol was registered with PROSPERO to reduce reporting bias. A comprehensive search was conducted across six academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCO Business Source Complete, PubMed/MEDLINE, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, and Google Scholar. The



search focused on studies examining Green Human Resource Management (GHRM), green leadership, and employee performance published between January 2015 and December 2025. Only English-language empirical studies and dissertations were included.

The selection process involved title, abstract, and full-text screening conducted independently by two reviewers. From 908 identified records, 68 studies met the inclusion criteria and were retained for final analysis. Eligible studies examined GHRM practices, green training, green leadership, or sustainable employee performance and were grounded in established theoretical frameworks. Conceptual papers, studies without performance outcomes, and duplicate publications were excluded.

Study quality was assessed using the QATSDD and GRADE frameworks. Results indicated that 35% of studies were high quality, 54% medium quality, and 11% low quality. Sensitivity analyses demonstrated that the findings remained robust after excluding lower-quality studies.

Data extraction included study characteristics, sample information, theoretical frameworks, GHRM practices, mediators, moderators, effect sizes, and outcome variables. Findings were synthesized through meta-analysis, meta-regression, subgroup analysis, thematic synthesis, and narrative synthesis, while heterogeneity was evaluated using the I^2 statistic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Characteristics of Included Studies

The 68 included studies (published 2015–2025) comprised 52 quantitative studies (76%), 12 qualitative studies (18%), and 4 mixed-methods studies (6%). Geographic distribution showed concentration: 35% from China and Southeast Asia ($n=24$), 24% from India and South Asia ($n=16$), 19% from Western Europe ($n=13$), 15% from North America ($n=10$), and 7% from other regions ($n=5$).

Sample sizes ranged from 48 to 1,247 participants (median $n=267$). Organizational contexts included manufacturing (35%), hospitality and tourism (22%), energy and utilities (18%), technology (13%), and public sector (12%). Longitudinal studies comprised only 11% of literature ($n=8$), cross-sectional designs dominated (72%, $n=49$), and experimental designs were rare (6%, $n=4$).

2. Finding 1: Green Leadership as Central Mediator

Strong empirical evidence supports green leadership as a key mediator, not merely a moderator, between GHRM practices and sustainable employee



performance. Among 42 studies examining this relationship, 39 studies (93%) found significant indirect effects through green leadership, with pooled effect size ($r = .38$, 95% CI: .33–.43).

Green transformational leadership amplifies GHRM effects through four primary mechanisms:

1. Value Translation: Authentic leaders translate HR policies into environmental values through personal demonstrations of commitment. When leaders visibly prioritize sustainability in decisions, resource allocation, and daily behaviors, employees perceive environmental performance as genuinely valued, not merely policy compliance.

2. Organizational Climate Creation: Green leadership establishes supportive organizational climates and norms normalizing and facilitating green initiatives. Supportive climate ($r = .42$, 95% CI: .37–.47) links leadership to environmental citizenship behaviors through psychological mechanisms of belonging and normative alignment.

3. Psychological Need Satisfaction: Green leadership satisfies three Self-Determination Theory needs: autonomy through involvement in sustainability decisions, competence through coaching and capability development, and relatedness through shared mission commitment, enhancing intrinsic environmental motivation.

4. Resource Mobilization: Leaders secure organizational resources, remove barriers, and provide support for sustainability initiatives, translating GHRM intentions into practical implementation capacity.

This mediation effect explains an additional 15–25% of variance beyond direct GHRM-performance relationships across 38 studies reporting indirect effect magnitudes. Green leadership consistently emerges as the central organizational translator of sustainability intentions into employee and organizational outcomes.

3. Finding 2: Multiple Parallel and Sequential Mediation Pathways

Research identifies five interdependent mediating pathways operating simultaneously and in configuration:

Pathway 1. Green Psychological Climate: GHRM practices establish perceptions of organizational support for environmental initiatives ($r = .42$). Perceived organizational support for environmental goals creates psychological safety for discretionary environmental effort and normative pressure toward sustainability behaviors.



Pathway 2. Employee Green Behavior: GHRM translates directly into environmental task performance and citizenship behaviors ($r = .35$), as trained and rewarded employees execute sustainability activities and adopt environmental practices in daily operations.

Pathway 3. Green Work Engagement: GHRM generates enhanced engagement specifically toward environmental initiatives ($r = .39$), with engaged employees demonstrating discretionary effort, initiative, and persistence in sustainability projects.

Pathway 4. Environmental Commitment: Green leadership and training foster psychological commitment to environmental goals ($r = .45$), with committed employees willing to persist through implementation challenges and advocate for sustainability initiatives.

Pathway 5. Green Innovation Behavior: Supportive conditions enable creative problem-solving for environmental challenges ($r = .28$), with employees developing novel sustainability solutions and process innovations reducing environmental impact.

Critically, these pathways operate in configuration rather than isolation. Synergistic pathway activation produces superior outcomes compared to individual pathway activation. Organizations activating all five pathways simultaneously report 60% greater performance gains than those activating single pathways.

4. Finding 3: Differential GHRM Practice Effectiveness

While all GHRM practices show positive effects on performance, substantial differential effectiveness emerges:

Green Training ($r = .40-.55$): Most consistently effective, directly building employee capabilities for environmental performance. Training shows highest effect sizes across diverse organizational contexts and geographic regions, establishing it as foundational GHRM practice.

Green Rewards and Compensation ($r = .35-.50$): Shows strong effects particularly in competitive labor markets where talent scarcity amplifies reward impact. Contingent rewards amplify training effects through motivational mechanisms.

Green Performance Management ($r = .20-.45$): Demonstrates moderate effects with substantial contextual variation. Systems emphasizing development and learning show stronger effects than those emphasizing accountability and punishment.



Green Recruitment ($r = .25-.40$): Shows weaker direct effects on immediate performance but demonstrates critical long-term cultural implications through selective hiring of environmentally-conscious employees and establishment of sustainability cultures.

Green Employee Involvement ($r = .30-.48$): Shows moderate to strong effects through psychological ownership and discretionary effort mechanisms, particularly in participatory organizational cultures.

Practice effectiveness is contingent on: (1) implementation context and organizational strategy, (2) baseline sustainability maturity, (3) industry environmental sensitivity, and (4) alignment with organizational systems.

5. Finding 4: Context-Specific Boundary Conditions

Research identifies four critical boundary conditions amplifying or dampening GHRM effectiveness:

Boundary Condition 1. Green Organizational Culture: Organizational culture supportive of sustainability amplifies GHRM effects by 40–60%. In strong green cultures, GHRM practices activate readily and align with established norms. In cultures emphasizing only economic performance, GHRM practices face resistance and produce weaker effects (interaction effect = .52, $p < .001$).

Boundary Condition 2. Leadership Authenticity: Authentic green leadership amplifies effects 30–50%, while inauthentic "greenwashing" produces organizational cynicism and actually reduces environmental performance compared to no GHRM implementation ($r = -.18$). Authenticity dimensions include policy-practice alignment, leadership commitment visibility, employee voice integration, transparent accountability, resource provision, and long-term commitment signals.

Boundary Condition 3. Employee Environmental Values: Employees holding strong environmental values show 25–35% stronger responses to GHRM practices. Value alignment acts as amplifying mechanism, with value-aligned employees intrinsically motivated toward environmental performance.

Boundary Condition 4. Industry Environmental Sensitivity: High-impact industries (manufacturing, energy, chemicals) show stronger GHRM necessity and effectiveness compared to lower-impact industries (consulting, finance). Regulatory pressures and stakeholder expectations in high-impact sectors increase GHRM salience and organizational commitment.

1. Theoretical Contributions

This review advances theory through four contributions:



Contribution 1: Green Leadership as Central Mediator in Multilevel Frameworks. Rather than treating green leadership as one variable among many, this review establishes it as the central organizational mechanism translating GHRM intentions into performance outcomes. This positioning reflects emerging multilevel sustainability models recognizing leadership as bridging individual capabilities (through GHRM) and organizational outcomes.

Contribution 2: Causal Pathway Clarification and Configuration Effects. The review clarifies that GHRM operates through multiple interdependent pathways displaying configuration effects, synergistic rather than additive effects. Organizations benefit from integrated GHRM systems activating multiple pathways simultaneously rather than implementing isolated practices.

Contribution 3: Theoretical Integration and Complementarity. Rather than positioning frameworks as competing, the review demonstrates how five theories, AMO, SET, RBV, SDT, and Dynamic Capability Theory, address complementary aspects of GHRM-performance relationships. This integrated perspective provides richer theoretical understanding than single-theory approaches.

Contribution 4: Authenticity as Dark-Side Moderator. By identifying authenticity as critical boundary condition, the review explains previously puzzling findings: why poorly implemented GHRM produces negative effects. Inauthentic GHRM creates organizational cynicism and perceived manipulation, actually undermining employee environmental engagement.

2. Strategic Implementation Framework

Organizations should implement GHRM through a five-phase sequential approach:

Phase 1: Leadership Development and Culture Foundation (Months 1–6)
Develop authentic green leadership as foundational enabler. This phase includes: (1) assessing leadership environmental commitment and authenticity; (2) providing transformational leadership development emphasizing environmental values; (3) establishing green organizational culture through visible leader commitment, participation in environmental initiatives, and consistent message alignment; (4) creating accountability for sustainability performance in leadership evaluations.

Phase 2: Green Training and Competency Building (Months 4–12)
After establishing leadership foundation and cultural support, implement comprehensive green training: (1) environmental awareness and literacy training for all employees; (2) role-specific green skills training; (3) green innovation and



problem-solving training; (4) integration of environmental modules into leadership development.

Phase 3: Rewards and Compensation Alignment (Months 8–14)

Align incentive systems with environmental performance: (1) incorporate sustainability metrics into performance bonuses; (2) establish environmental recognition programs; (3) link compensation decisions to environmental contributions; (4) ensure reward transparency and fairness.

Phase 4: Performance Management Integration (Months 12–18)

Formalize environmental performance expectations: (1) integrate environmental objectives into performance management systems; (2) establish clear environmental performance metrics; (3) emphasize development and coaching rather than punishment; (4) provide ongoing feedback on environmental performance.

Phase 5: Recruitment and Employee Involvement (Months 16–24)

Complete GHRM system through talent acquisition and engagement: (1) select candidates demonstrating environmental values alignment; (2) involve employees in sustainability decision-making; (3) establish employee environmental suggestion systems; (4) create cross-functional sustainability teams.

Six evidence-based authenticity criteria distinguish authentic GHRM from greenwashing:

- 1) **Policy-Practice Alignment:** Environmental policies translate into consistent organizational decisions and resource allocation
 - 2) **Leadership Commitment Visibility:** Leaders visibly participate in sustainability initiatives, not merely mandate them
 - 3) **Employee Voice Integration:** Employees participate in sustainability planning, problem-solving, and decision-making
 - 4) **Transparent Accountability:** Environmental performance and progress transparently communicated; failures acknowledged
 - 5) **Resource Provision:** Adequate budget, time, and tools allocated to sustainability initiatives
 - 6) **Long-term Commitment Signals:** Multi-year sustainability investments and goals signal permanent commitment beyond short-term initiatives
- 3. Six Behavioral Dimensions for Green Leadership Effectiveness**

Effective green leaders demonstrate six behavioral dimensions:



- 1) **Environmental Values Articulation:** Regularly communicate environmental values as core organizational purpose, not peripheral initiative
- 2) **Authentic Role Modeling:** Personally demonstrate environmental commitment through sustainable daily practices, decisions, and lifestyle
- 3) **Inspiring Vision:** Paint compelling future vision of environmentally sustainable organization with clear performance roadmap
- 4) **Autonomy Support:** Encourage employee decision-making, initiative-taking, and discretionary effort in environmental initiatives
- 5) **Competence Development:** Coach employees, develop environmental capabilities, and provide learning opportunities
- 6) **Relatedness Building:** Establish community through shared sustainability mission, collaborative initiatives, and belonging

4. Sectoral Customization Guidance

GHRM implementation should be customized to sector characteristics:

Manufacturing Sector (High Environmental Impact): Leverage operational environmental visibility, manufacturing processes visibly impact environment, making GHRM relevance obvious. Emphasize process innovation, waste reduction, and environmental performance metrics. Green training should emphasize technical skills and equipment operation. This sector shows highest GHRM ROI.

Hospitality and Tourism: Develop guest-facing sustainability programs, guests increasingly demand sustainable practices. GHRM should emphasize customer service integration, visible sustainability practices (renewable energy, water conservation, waste reduction), and guest communication. Employee-guest interaction channels provide sustainability advocacy opportunities.

Energy and Utilities Sector: Establish rigorous environmental standards given regulatory requirements and stakeholder scrutiny. GHRM should emphasize compliance, safety, innovation, and stakeholder engagement. Leadership authenticity is particularly critical given historical industry perception challenges.

Technology and Professional Services: Address perception of low environmental impact; emphasize operational sustainability (energy efficiency, waste reduction, supplier standards) and corporate social responsibility integration. GHRM should emphasize purpose-driven work and environmental innovation.



Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs): Tailor GHRM to resource constraints. Emphasize informal training, simplified metrics, and employee involvement to compensate for formal systems. Integrate environmental performance into existing management systems rather than creating parallel structures.

Public Sector: Reform civil service systems to include environmental performance indicators, professional development in environmental management, and sustainability-focused organizational culture. Emphasize public mission alignment and stakeholder accountability.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review establishes three foundational conclusions regarding green leadership's role in GHRM-performance relationships:

First, green leadership fundamentally mediates GHRM effectiveness. GHRM practices do not automatically translate into sustainable employee performance; rather, green leadership serves as the critical organizational mechanism enabling this translation. Leaders translate HR policies into environmental values through authentic role modeling, establish supportive organizational climates normalizing sustainability, satisfy psychological needs amplifying intrinsic motivation, and mobilize organizational resources enabling implementation. This mediation effect explains an additional 15–25% of performance variance, positioning green leadership as indispensable rather than optional GHRM component.

Second, GHRM operates through multiple parallel and sequential pathways requiring integrated system thinking. Effective GHRM does not rely on individual practices or isolated pathways; instead, synergistic activation across psychological climate, green behavior, engagement, commitment, and innovation pathways produces superior outcomes. Organizations must adopt integrated GHRM system perspectives rather than ad hoc implementation of isolated practices.

Third, GHRM effectiveness is fundamentally context-contingent and authenticity-dependent. GHRM does not follow universal best-practice models; rather, effectiveness depends critically on organizational culture, leadership authenticity, employee environmental values, and industry environmental sensitivity. Poorly implemented inauthentic GHRM creates organizational cynicism and actually undermines environmental performance compared to no



GHRM implementation. Organizations must tailor GHRM to their unique contexts and ensure authentic commitment throughout implementation.

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