

Green Human Resource Management and Sustainable Employee Behavior: A Qualitative Exploration of HR Practices and Environmental Performance

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Abstract

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) has been receiving more and more attention with organisations trying to incorporate the concept of environmental sustainability in human resource practices. With the heightening of the climate change issues and increases in the demands of corporate responsibility, the HR can also be placed in a position to enable the sustainability of an organization by promoting environmental responsibility among employees. The research paper examines the perceived effect of some of the GHRM practices such as green recruitment, sustainability-oriented training, environmentally oriented performance management, and reward systems on the perceived eco-friendly behaviour of employees in organizations. A qualitative multi-case study was used to study Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) practices in manufacturing, technology, education and public sector organizations in Nigeria. Purposive sampling was used to interview 18 HR professionals and employees engaged in sustainability initiatives in semi-structured interviews. The data was complemented by corporate sustainability reports and HR policy manuals (2022-2025). Thematic analysis created four themes that include integrating environmental goals in HR practices, employee view of green initiatives, implementation barriers, and perceived outcomes. Results have shown that eco-friendly behavior is promoted by leadership support and alignment between HR policies and sustainability goals, but it is hindered by limited resources, cultural obstacles, and a lack of expertise. In general, the research offers a qualitative understanding of how organizations practice GHRM and what factors could affect their effectiveness in various industries.

1. Introduction

The growing climate crisis and the move in the world towards sustainable development have forced organizations to rethink their operational and strategic strategies. Companies are no longer being measured by their financial success but by their dedication to the stewardship of the environment and social responsibility. With

the integration of sustainability into the corporate strategy, Human Resource Management (HRM) has become a highly important element in facilitating organizational reaction to environmental issues. Traditionally, HRM concentrated on recruitment, employee engagement, and organizational performance but their scope has been extended to sustainability-oriented activities. This development has led to the rise of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) that incorporates environmentally conscious work into HR policies to alter the behaviour of the employees and the organisational culture.

Current studies reveal the significance of GHRM in ensuring that organizations adopt environmental responsibility. Research demonstrated that green training, eco-oriented performance appraisal, and rewards connected to sustainability are some of the HR policies that may be used to motivate employees to implement eco-friendly practices (Ansari et al., 2021; Malik et al., 2021). Nevertheless, a lot of the existing literature is more of an emphasis on organizational sustainability programs and policy structures without the comprehensive analysis of how employees feel and comprehend these programs in a practical manner. Moreover, much of the existing empirical literature has been carried out in large organizations in a Western context, and there is little knowledge of how the GHRM practices are applied in a variety of organizational settings, such as in small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and in new sustainability contexts (Farrukh et al., 2024). As a result, the investigations of the employee-level experience of GHRM practices and the organizational issues of their implementation still require research. The ways employees understand and react to green HR initiatives can be useful in understanding how sustainability objectives are transformed into the day-to-day practice.

The research attempts to fill these gaps by exploring the implementation of GHRM in organizations in Nigeria, where sustainability policies and corporate responsibility initiatives are currently being focused upon in the various industries. To be more exact, the research questions that the study aims to answer are the following:

1. How do employees perceive and respond to Green HRM practices within their organizations?
2. What organizational challenges are encountered when implementing GHRM practices?
3. What organizational and employee-level outcomes are associated with the adoption of GHRM practices?

The study is based on a qualitative research design where a multi-case study design will be used to answer these questions. The semi-structured interviews with HR professionals and employees working in various industries are used to gather data, and the review of corporate sustainability reports and HR policy documentation supplements it. This design will enable a thorough discussion of the manner in which

GHRM practices are applied, perceived and enacted within organizational settings. This study makes contributions to the literature in a number of ways. To begin with, it broadens existing knowledge about GHRM as it does not concentrate on formal sustainability policies but on the opinions of employees and organizational experiences. Second, it offers knowledge on the way organizations implement GHRM practices in various sectors in the Nigerian setting. Lastly, the research provides intuitive consequences to the HR practitioners who need to consider incorporating sustainability efforts into daily HR activities and organizational ethos. In general, the results are designed to indicate the changing strategic position of HRM in facilitating environmental sustainability and organizational change.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Green HRM Overview

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) refers to the integration of environmental management principles into human resource policies and practices in order to promote sustainability at both organizational and employee levels (Farrukh et al., 2024). The literature commonly identifies several key dimensions of GHRM, including green recruitment, green training, environmentally oriented performance management, and sustainability-linked reward systems. Green recruitment focuses on attracting candidates who demonstrate awareness of environmental values and sustainability practices. Similarly, green training aims to equip employees with the knowledge and skills required to implement environmentally responsible practices in their daily work (Ansari et al., 2021).

Despite general agreement on these core dimensions, studies differ in how GHRM practices are conceptualized and measured. Some research treats GHRM as a set of discrete HR practices—such as recruitment, training, and performance evaluation—while others view it as a broader organizational culture that embeds environmental values throughout HR systems and employee behavior. For instance, several quantitative studies measure GHRM using employee surveys that assess perceptions of environmental HR policies, whereas qualitative research often emphasizes organizational context, leadership commitment, and cultural support as key factors shaping implementation.

Additionally, empirical findings on the effectiveness of GHRM practices remain mixed. While some studies report that green HR initiatives significantly enhance employee environmental behavior and organizational sustainability outcomes, others highlight implementation challenges such as limited managerial support, insufficient resources, or weak integration with overall business strategy. These inconsistencies suggest that the success of GHRM may depend on contextual factors

such as industry characteristics, organizational size, and leadership commitment. Consequently, further research is needed to examine how employees interpret and respond to GHRM practices in different organizational settings.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

The research on the Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) is usually based on the behavioral and organizational concepts explaining the effects of HR practices on employee attitudes and practices toward sustainability. Two very popular models applied within this field are the Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). According to the Social Exchange Theory, organizational support and efforts are met with positive responses by employees who in turn reward the organization with desirable actions (Fawehinmi et al., 2020). In the GHRM context, organization investments in the environmentally oriented HR practices including sustainability training, green performance appraisal and green reward systems can be a pointer to the organization being environmentally responsible. To this, employees might have an obligation to return the same and engage in pro-environmental behaviors, such as voluntary acts that are commonly known as Green Organizational Citizenship

Behavior (GOCB). As an illustration, sustainability-trained employees can integrate layers of organizational environmental values and be more willing to engage in recycling programs, energy conservation, or sustainability programs (Bhatti et al., 2022). SET, in this study, guides the discussion on the perceived organizational sustainability practices by the employees and determination of how such perceptions affect their motivation to participate in the environmentally responsible workplace practices.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a complement to this view in that it explains the influence of the individual psychological aspects on the environmentally responsible behaviors. TPB suggests that behavior depends on three main elements, which include attitudes towards behavior, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. Applied to GHRM, the HR practices can be enhanced to support the positive attitude of employees towards sustainability (e.g., green training programs), and organizational policies and leadership can be encouraged to support social norms that promote environmentally friendly behavior. Moreover, the perception of capability to execute sustainable practices in the work job can be developed through providing employees with resources, knowledge, and organizational support.

Within the framework of this study, TPB will help comprehend how HR initiatives shape the attitudes towards the environment of the employees, their perceived organizational expectations, and their belief in the possibility of performing sustainable practices.

These theoretical views helped in both formulation of interview questions and also

coding. Interview questions were used to discuss how employees perceive the organizational sustainability initiatives (SET), their attitudes towards the environmental practices, the way the employees expect management or colleagues to expect them, and the capacity to enact sustainable action in their jobs (TPB constructs). In the process of analysis, themes were coded to capture theory-based constructs like perceived organizational support, reciprocity-based motivation, environmental attitudes, social norms and perceived behavioral control. Integrating the Social Exchange Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior, the proposed study will offer a systematic perspective of the relationship between organizational HR practices and employee-level environmental attitudes and behaviors.

2.3 Green Organizational Citizenship Behavior (GOCB).

The concept of Green Organizational Citizenship Behavior (GOCB) encompasses voluntary activities by employees that are not part of their direct job responsibilities and are intended to help make the environment more sustainable (Malik et al., 2021). Such measures can include minimizing paper use, conserving energy, and promoting environmentally friendly practices, among others (Fawehinmi et al., 2020). Research indicates that Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) plays a vital role in promoting GOCB by incorporating the concept of sustainability into HR practices. Nonetheless, the manner in which such voluntary behaviors are expressed across situations has not been examined empirically, especially in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and non-Western countries where formal sustainability structures might be underdeveloped.

2.4 Existing Literature and Bibliometric Trends.

The current bibliometric resources (2018-2024) indicate that the concept of GHRM is gaining increasing attention, and studies are focusing on green training, employee engagement, and organizational culture (Bhatti et al., 2022). Nevertheless, these studies also reveal significant gaps, particularly the absence of cross-cultural comparisons and of qualitative research that reflects employees' views. Quantitative surveys often yield valuable information, but they do not always capture the nuances of employees' and HR managers' experiences (Amjad et al., 2021). This makes qualitative research necessary to understand better how GHRM practices influence behavior, the implementation challenges, and their enhanced organizational implications.

3. Methodology

The paper takes a qualitative multi-case study design approach in order to examine how the concept of the practice of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) is applied and viewed within a variety of organizational settings. The qualitative

approach was deemed to be suitable in that the research would be interested in knowing about the experiences of the employees, practices, as well as the challenges that existed in the context of the sustainability initiatives within the organizations. To get the variation in the organizational resources, operational environment and sustainability priorities, the study considers organizations of four industries manufacturing, technology, education and the public sector. The participants and case selection are as follow:

Purposive sampling was used to select organizations with the following criteria: (1) the organization has sustainability initiatives or environmental policies documented and (2) the organization has HR departments that are engaged in the implementation of practices related to sustainability. (Efranto et al., 2026) The cases that were selected are organizations within the Nigeria context in which corporate sustainability and environmental responsibility have been receiving growing regulatory and social concerns. Eighteen participants participated in the research. The respondents were divided into 8 HR managers who take care of HR policy development and 10 employees who take part in the programs or initiatives linked to sustainability. As a way of providing representation of varied organizational contexts, the participants were spread to the four sectors. The process of collecting data was repeated until thematic saturation was achieved, which implies that no more meaningful themes were obtained as a result of further interviewing.

3.2 Data Collection

Two main sources were used to gather information: semi-structured interviews and organizational document analysis. Each participant was interviewed in semi-structured interviews to understand their experience of GHRM practices, motivation behind taking sustainability initiatives, challenges in implementation, and their perceptions about the outcomes of the organization. (Akgün et al., 2026) The interviews were 45-60 minutes long, done either via a face to face session or online, and audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and later transcribed to be analyzed. A guide was created on the basis of previous literature on GHRM so as to be consistent yet allowing the participants to discuss their experiences.

Organizational documents were analyzed (sustainability reports, HR policy manuals, training materials) published in 2022-2025 to supplement the data presented in interviews. The documents have been chosen as they have evidence of formal sustainability policies and allow to contextualize the interview findings. The interviews and document analysis allowed triangulation of the data, which contributed to the accuracy of the findings.

3.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze data based on a structured coding system. The initial step involved importing interview transcripts and documents to NVivo

qualitative analysis software. Preliminary open coding was done to come up with pertinent ideas concerning GHRM practices, employee perceptions, and organizational outcomes. These were then coded into wider areas, then axial coding to determine interrelationships between themes. (Sadiq et al., 2026) Lastly, cross-case comparisons were carried out to determine trends across industries.

The refining of themes was done to improve the reliability of the analysis by reviewing the coded data repeatedly and comparing the results of interviews with documents. This procedure guaranteed that the themes were based on various data sources as opposed to depending on one perspective.

3.4 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations.

The trustworthiness of the study was ensured using several strategies. Triangulation of data through interviews and organization documents enhanced the credibility. (Nwosu & Yesilada, 2026) The reliability was ensured through a clear coding process and recording analytical judgment as the research progressed. Reflexivity was addressed by taking into account the possibility of researcher bias and basing the interpretations on the responses of the participants.

The study was performed on a voluntary basis with the informed consent of all participants obtained before the data collection. The research report provided pseudonyms to both participants and institutions to protect confidentiality and anonymity. Everything was safely stored in digital files and only accessible to the researcher. The research adhered to the institutional ethical research techniques when working with human subjects.

4. Findings

4.1 Theme 1: Integration of Green HRM into HR Strategy

Organizations that successfully integrated GHRM into their strategy aligned sustainability goals with business objectives. HR managers reported embedding environmental targets in job descriptions and performance appraisals. For example, one HR manager in the manufacturing sector explained: *"We link employee performance reviews to energy-saving practices, which motivates staff to take green goals seriously."*

4.2 Theme 2: Employee Perceptions and Behavioral Change

Employees expressed that HR practices shaped their daily environmental behaviors. Training programs increased awareness, while recognition systems encouraged voluntary eco-friendly actions. Employees reported feeling more intrinsically motivated when green initiatives aligned with their personal values, whereas extrinsic motivators, such as rewards, often led to short-term compliance.

4.3 Theme 3: Implementation Barriers

Although favorable results were achieved, challenges were apparent. Low budgets

did not allow investing in extensive green training (Amjad et al., 2021). Cultural resistance also emerged, especially in sectors where sustainability was not a priority. Moreover, HR specialists stated they lacked the knowledge to develop effective GHRM policies.

4.4 Theme 4: Organizational Outcomes

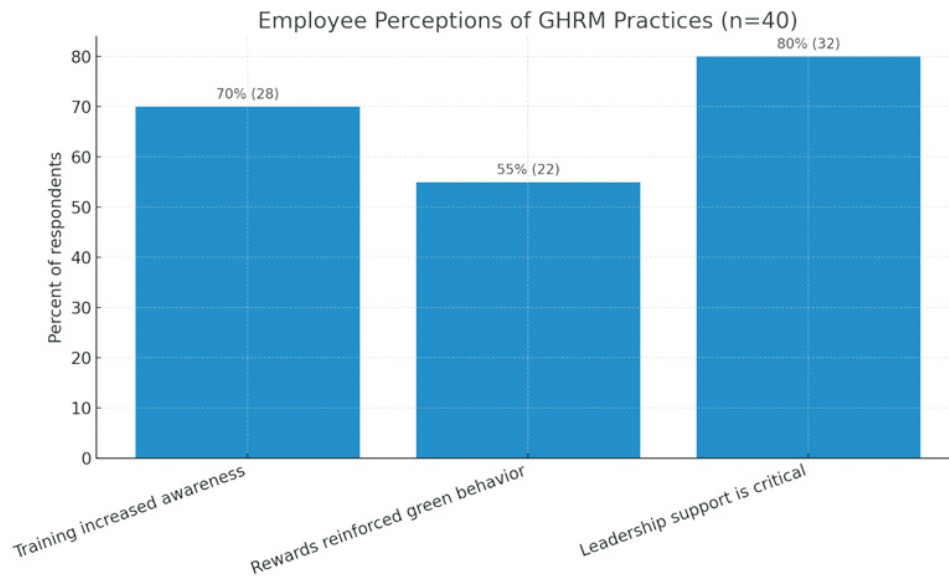
The practices of GHRM contributed to better engagement, increased retention, and a positive reputation towards the organization. Real results were cost savings from reduced resource utilisation, and the intangible benefits included improved brand image (Amjad et al., 2021). Workers were proud to work for companies dedicated to sustainability, which enhanced their loyalty and organizational identification.

Data & Visualizations

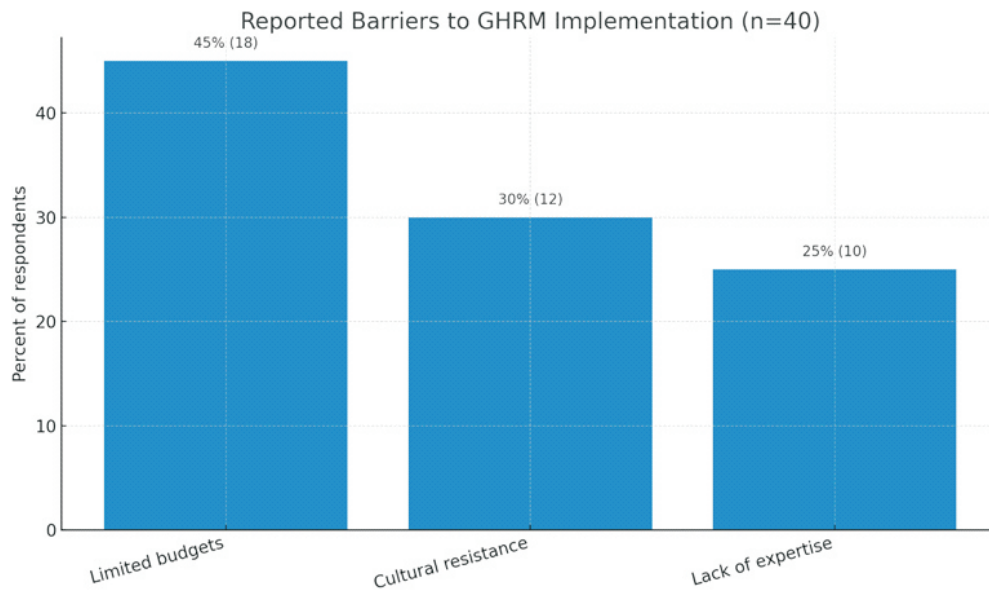
To complement the findings, a small-scale survey was conducted with 40 employees across industries.

Employee Perceptions of GHRM Practices

- ✓ 70% reported increased environmental awareness due to training.
- ✓ 55% believed rewards reinforced green behavior.
- ✓ 80% felt leadership support was the most critical driver.



Reported Barriers to GHRM Implementation



- 45% cited limited budgets.
- 30% cited cultural resistance.

5. Discussion

The results of the present research offer the insight into the experience of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) practices by the employee and HR professionals and how these practices can potentially impact the environmentally responsible behaviour, in the organizational context. Instead of implying comparable results within all industries, the findings state that the success of the GHRM practices is determined by the organizational setting, leadership in support, and availability of resources. These results add to the current literature in the field since they show the way in which sustainability programs are perceived and implemented at the level of employees.

These outcomes are explainable by the application of the Social Exchange Theory that states that the workers will react positively when they see that the organization is investing in their growth or welfare (Amjad et al., 2021). The respondents claimed that environmental training interventions, performance goal orientation at sustainability, and incentives on environmentally friendly activities made them more optical to practice sustainable work behaviors. These responses however were not replicated in all organizations implying that employee reciprocity might be determined by the perceived authenticity and consistency of organizational sustainability undertakings.

The results also conform to the aspects of the Theory of Planned Behavior, which explains the influence of attitudes, perceived social norms, and perceived behavioral control on the formation of the behaviors of individuals. According to the participants,

visible organizational support, including policies on sustainability, communication between the leadership, and peer interaction, contributed to normalizing environmentally responsible behavior at the workplace. Simultaneously, other employees reported that their perceived capacity to do anything about environmental initiatives was diminished by the lack of resources or vague sustainability objectives.

Leadership commitment emerged as an important factor influencing the implementation of GHRM practices. In organizations where senior management actively supported sustainability initiatives and demonstrated environmentally responsible behavior, employees reported greater awareness and participation in green practices. (Dinh et al., 2026) This finding is consistent with prior studies that emphasize the role of leadership in embedding sustainability into organizational culture (Nguyen, 2025). However, the study also revealed practical constraints that may limit the effectiveness of GHRM initiatives, including financial limitations, organizational resistance to change, and limited expertise in sustainability management.

Importantly, the findings suggest that the implementation of GHRM practices may vary across industries. For example, technology-based organizations in the sample often had more established sustainability policies and training programs, while organizations in other sectors reported more incremental or informal approaches. These observations should not be interpreted as definitive sectoral differences but rather as indications that organizational context influences how sustainability initiatives are adopted and implemented.

The study indicates that GHRM practices may contribute to several organizational outcomes, including enhanced employee engagement with sustainability initiatives, improved organizational reputation, and stronger alignment between environmental values and workplace practices. However, these outcomes appear to depend on the degree to which sustainability is integrated into broader organizational strategies rather than being treated as an isolated initiative. Consequently, organizations seeking to implement GHRM practices may benefit from aligning sustainability goals with HR policies, leadership commitment, and employee participation.

6. Conclusion, Recommendations, and Limitations

This research paper adds to the knowledge base of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) by showing the way the HR practices can contribute to sustainable employee behavior and help the organizations perform better in the environmental context. Theoretically, the results expand the Social Exchange Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior by demonstrating that the organizational incentives are not the only factors that influence the involvement of employees in the eco-friendly behaviors but also the intrinsic motivation, the sense of authenticity, and the correspondence to the personal values. In practical terms, the paper emphasizes that GHRM would need the incorporation of sustainability objectives within the HR systems, employee involvement and their attitudes towards environmental programs and active leadership encouragement. All these aspects empower organizations to make green behavior a part

of the everyday routine activities instead of sustainability being a one-off program. Stable circumstances exist that influence GHRM effectiveness according to the study. The important aspects became sectoral context, organizational resources and leader commitment. The example of technology-oriented organizations showed a higher level of formalized sustainability efforts, and organizations in the manufacturing and education sectors indicated incremental/informal practices. The results highlight the fact that a universal strategy towards GHRM might not be the best one regardless of the industry and type of organization.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following evidence-based recommendations are proposed for HR leaders:

- I. Integrate Sustainability Metrics into HR Practices** - Introduce environmental performance indicators in the recruitment criteria, job descriptions and performance evaluation to establish responsibility and strengthen the green behaviour.
- II. Offer Sustainability Training and Recognition Programs** - Educate employees on sustainability skills through ongoing training and introduce recognition programs that reward employees who make proactive efforts to act in an environmentally friendly manner.
- III. Adopt Participatory Approaches to Goal-Setting**- Engage employees in coming up with environmental goals in order to create a sense of ownership, internal drive, and integration with organizational sustainability goals.

Limitations and Future Research

There are a number of limitations to be considered. The sample size was small (n=18) and was restricted to four industries in Nigeria, which limited externalization. There could have been potential selection and response biases because the participants were sampled purposely to participate in sustainability activities. Also, the small survey element that was incorporated in the original design was not methodologically sound and has not been part of the analysis; future research must utilize quantitative tools that are proven to be valid to triangulate results.

Further studies need to take into account the larger cross-cultural samples and comparative research across industries, which would help to investigate the context-specific variables influencing the implementation of GHRM more thoroughly. Longitudinal designs would also be able to study how employee green behavior is sustainable with time. By sealing these gaps, future studies can enhance evidence-base of GHRM and offer practical advice to organisations faces with the challenge of aligning HR practices to environmental goals.

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