*International Journal of Innovative Research in Management Studies (IJIRMS)*
*Volume 7, Issue 7, September 2025. pp.20-34.*

# GREEN HRM-THE CASE OF UNILEVER

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**Abstract**—*Concerns regarding environmental protection and the adoption of more ecological and cleaner production processes have shown a steadily increasing trend. Environmental pressures have compelled organizations to become more sensitive to the growing demands of both consumers and the market, as well as to comply with various legal obligations. This indicates that contemporary organizations face pressure from multiple stakeholders, including customers, governmental bodies, and regulatory authorities. Concurrently, a significant shift is observed as the publics related to organizations and their actions become more informed and stringent. This implies that organizational actions are no longer evaluated in the same manner as in the past. An organization may be deemed operationally successful but face numerous challenges when assessed more holistically, for example, in terms of organizational ethics. In particular, consumers are increasingly well-informed and critical, frequently rejecting companies or brands based on feedback or an overall assessment of corporate behavior. Their focus typically extends beyond the benefits they receive from an organization to include its overall performance on ethical and environmental sensitivity issues. In other words, contemporary organizations are subjected to a more multidimensional and complex evaluation compared to earlier times. Therefore, modern organizations bear an increased responsibility to achieve sustainable outcomes in general, and specifically to mitigate the environmental impacts they cause. This means they are more accountable than ever regarding the results of their actions, their intentions, and the levels of commitment they demonstrate in relation to these concerns. In the present paper the concept of Green HRM was studied, using the case study, research technique.*

## 1. Introduction

Concerns regarding environmental protection and the adoption of more ecological and cleaner production processes have shown a steadily increasing trend (Jabbour, 2013). Environmental pressures have compelled organizations to become more sensitive to the growing demands of both consumers and the markets, as well as to comply with various legal obligations (Pham, Tučková, & Jabbour, 2019). This indicates that contemporary organizations can face multiple pressures from stakeholder groups, including customers, governmental bodies, and regulatory authorities. Concurrently, a significant shift is observed as the related to organizations groups have become more informed and stringent. This implies that organizational actions are no longer evaluated in the same manner as in the past. An organization may be deemed operationally successful but may face numerous challenges when assessed more holistically, for example, in terms of organizational ethics.

In particular, consumers are increasingly well-informed and critical, frequently rejecting companies or brands based on feedback or an overall assessment of strict corporate behavior. Their focus typically extends beyond the benefits they receive from an organization and it frequently includes its overall performance on ethical and environmental sensitivity issues. In other words, contemporary organizations are subjected to a more multidimensional and complex evaluation compared to earlier times. Therefore, modern organizations bear an increased responsibility to achieve sustainable outcomes in general, and specifically to mitigate the environmental impacts they cause (Koberg & Longoni, 2019). This means they are more accountable than ever, regarding the results of their actions, their intentions, and the levels of commitment they demonstrate in relation to these concerns.

Moreover, given that the role of human resources and its management has been strengthened in recent years, it is considered that these elements can play a critical role in promoting sustainability within organizations. Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) (Renwick et al., 2013) has recently emerged as a new research trend (Jabbour & De Sousa Jabbour, 2016). The initial discussion on the importance of GHRM began with a limited number of scholars and has since gained considerable momentum (Jabbour & Santos, 2008). Interest in this concept is growing, with an increasing number of researchers exploring the topic. The effects of GHRM practices on firms' environmental performance have been investigated in earlier studies (Masri & Jaaron, 2017; Kim et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the concept as a whole, remains insufficiently explored, despite encompassing multiple organizational dimensions and bearing significant implications for organizational life.

Numerous studies have investigated the relationships between Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) practices and Green Supply Chain Management (GSCM) (Jabbour et al., 2017; Nejati et al., 2017). In addition to quantitative research, a number of literature reviews have explored the field of GHRM (e.g., Renwick et al., 2013; Ren et al., 2018).

Regarding the published reviews, despite the efforts of several recent studies to highlight the impacts and antecedents of GHRM practices on organizational sustainability, there remains a need for a comprehensive review that can provide a clear research framework for future studies. For example, the review by Renwick et al. (2013) proposed the approach of GHRM through three core components: the development of green capabilities, the enhancement of employees' environmental motivation, and the creation of opportunities for green action.

According to Pham et al. (2019), research focus should be directed toward the mechanisms and processes of GHRM, as well as the internal functions of organizations, such as corporate and environmental performance. Consequently, it would be valuable to study how organizations can integrate internal performance dimensions, such as job satisfaction and employee engagement, with external ones, including environmental performance and financial profitability. This suggests the need for a more critical and thorough examination of GHRM in relation to all its dimensions and their interrelationships.

More recently, Ren et al., (2018) emphasized the importance of clear measurement and conceptualization of GHRM, simultaneously proposing a research framework linking antecedent concepts with GHRM outcomes. Their work has opened new avenues for further research efforts. However, the proposed future directions predominantly focus on the effects of external pressures (such as stakeholder demands and legislation) and the consequences of GHRM on many factors (such as green behavior and organizational performance) (Pham et al., 2019). Therefore, there appears to be a lack of research interest in bridging the external and internal dimensions of organizational performance with respect to GHRM, as well as in the conceptual development of the construct itself. Yong, Yusliza, and Fawehinmi (2019), along with Yong, Yusliza, Ramayah, and Fawehinmi (2019), have offered significant recommendations for expanding research within the domain of green strategic management.

The analysis conducted provided a significant contribution by focusing on recommendations based on an examination of the general body of literature related to Green Human Resource Management (GHRM), including its theoretical approach, implementation, and outcomes at both individual and organizational levels, as well as the methodologies and theoretical frameworks adopted, along with national application contexts. Despite the value of this review, the role of the external environment, technology-related perspectives, the circular economy, and the significant consequences of GHRM implementation—such as the adoption of green attitudes and behaviors outside the organization, green human capital, and corporate social responsibility (CSR)—have not been adequately explored. Therefore, a more detailed and in-depth analysis of the impacts arising from the implementation of Green HRM practices is required.

Simultaneously, increasing environmental awareness and efforts toward sustainable development have reached significant levels. At international environmental conferences, countries discuss issues such as carbon credits, climate change, and its consequences, including earthquakes, floods, glacier melting, and species extinction (Shaikh, 2010). Agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol, the Bali Conference, the Copenhagen Summit and the Paris Agreement have intensified global interest in environmental sustainability, making it imperative for businesses to adopt eco-friendly practices (Daily & Huang, 2001). There is a pressing need to balance industrial development with the preservation of the natural environment to ensure the future of coming generations (Daily & Huang, 2001).

As a result, many organizations have embraced philosophies that can contribute to achieving these goals, with Green Human Resource Management being one of the most recent and significant approaches. Mampra, (2013) has described Green HRM as the use of human resource management policies that promote the sustainable use of resources within organizations and can support environmental objectives, while simultaneously enhancing ethics and job satisfaction. Similarly Zoogah, (2011) has defined Green HRM as the implementation of policies, philosophies, and practices aimed at sustainable management of business resources and the avoidance of negative environmental impacts.

Opatha & Arulrajah, (2014) interpreted Green HRM as a set of policies, practices, and systems designed to make employees "green," benefiting at the same time individuals, society, the environment, and the organizations. Within this context, practices such as recruitment, performance appraisal, compensation, and training are designed to create a workforce that can understand and support environmental behavior (Mathapati, 2013). Green HR initiatives form a part of the broader corporate social responsibility programs, while Green Human Capital encompasses two key elements: environmentally friendly practices and the retention of knowledge capital (Mandip, 2012). Furthermore, the success of organizational strategies for environmental management and sustainable development largely depends on their alignment with human resource practices (Ichniowski et al., 1997).

According to Collins & Clark, (2003), human resources and the systems that support them, form the foundation of any organization, whether for-profit or non-profit. They are responsible for shaping and implementing environmentally friendly policies, thereby fostering a "green" culture within the organization. Consequently, without the support and active involvement of human resources, the success of such initiatives is exceedingly difficult. The present study adopts the case study research method, which will be elaborated upon below.

The case study technique is a widely used qualitative research method, especially effective for exploring in-depth complex organizational phenomena and within their real-life contexts (Yin, 2018). In organizational studies, it allows researchers to examine how theoretical constructs, such as Green Human Resource Management (GHRM), manifest in actual corporate practices. A case study can be defined as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2018, p. 13). Unlike experimental or survey research, case studies emphasize rich, holistic descriptions and nuanced insights into a bounded system (Stake, 1995).

Three key characteristics define the case study approach:

- Contextual depth: The method provides insight into the contextual conditions relevant to the case
- Multiple sources of evidence: Data are typically gathered using interviews, documents, observations, and archival records
- Exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory purposes: Case studies can serve different research goals, including theory development or testing (Eisenhardt, 1989).

GHRM, an emerging domain at the intersection of sustainability and human resources, requires detailed analysis of policies, leadership styles, and employee behaviors, which are not easily captured through quantitative techniques alone (Renwick et al., 2013). Case studies allow researchers to investigate how GHRM practices are implemented, which contextual factors may influence them, and what organizational outcomes result, providing rich insight into the practical integration of environmental sustainability and HRM. Unilever serves as a model example of a multinational company with a long-standing commitment to sustainability, making it highly suitable for a case study on GHRM. The company's Sustainable Living Plan and more recent initiatives have embedded environmental concerns across HR practices and concepts, such as green recruitment and employer branding emphasizing sustainability values, employee training on carbon footprint reduction, eco-efficiency and performance appraisal systems incorporating environmental KPIs (Jabbour & Santos, 2008; Unilever, 2023).

Studying Unilever can enable researchers to examine how top-level environmental strategies cascade into HRM policies and everyday practices, and how organizational culture supports (or resists) green transitions. The Unilever case can be categorized as a single-case (holistic) design (Yin, 2018), given its unique status as a sustainability pioneer and its relevance to theory elaboration in GHRM. While case studies offer depth over breadth, their findings are not statistically generalizable. Instead, they enable analytic generalization, wherein the insights contribute to theory refinement or hypothesis generation for further research (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). In the context of Unilever, insights into leadership, HRM systems, and green culture can inform a broader theory on sustainable organizational practices.

## 2. Literature Review

In the contemporary landscape of management and organizational theory, human capital has emerged as a cornerstone for achieving sustained competitive advantage and driving organizational performance. In recent years a significant paradigm shift has underscored, where the traditional view of labor as a mere input to production has moved towards to the recognition of the inherent value of an organization's collective knowledge, skills, capabilities, and intellectual capacity (Balian et al., 2020; Rudihartati & Dwiono, 2025).

The strategic significance of human capital lies in its distinctive and often inimitable nature, making it a critical resource for organizational success in an increasingly dynamic and competitive global environment (Anwar & Abdullah, 2021; Onkelinx et al., 2016). Unlike tangible assets, human capital possesses the unique ability to learn, innovate, and adapt, thereby fostering creativity and continuous improvement within an organization (Malhotra, 2008). This adaptive and continuous capacity is paramount as organizations navigate rapid technological advancements, evolving market demands, and unpredictable economic shifts. Investment in human capital through education, training, and development programs has been consistently linked to enhanced productivity and improved financial performance (Balian et al., 2020; Mubarik et al., 2020).

Furthermore, human capital has been increasingly seen as the primary "engine for innovation". Research indicates that skilled and knowledgeable employees are the architects of new ideas, processes, and products that can allow firms to differentiate themselves and gain a competitive edge (Rudihartati & Dwiono, 2025). A strong human capital ecosystem, characterized by employee engagement, collaborative learning, and a culture that promotes experimentation, may directly facilitate the development of intellectual wealth and strategic innovation. This goes beyond mere technical skills; it encompasses employees' problem-solving abilities, critical thinking, and capacity for interdisciplinary collaboration, all of which contribute to an organization's innovative output (Roucek, 1970).

The importance of human capital also extends to its direct impact on organizational performance across various dimensions. Studies consistently demonstrate a significant positive relationship between human capital and operational, market, and financial performance (Anwar & Abdullah, 2021; Mubarik et al., 2020). Effective human capital management practices, including robust recruitment, strategic talent development, performance management systems, and a focus on employee well-being, can contribute to higher employee satisfaction, reduced turnover, and increased overall productivity (Emeritus, n.d.). In essence, organizations with deeper and better-developed human capital pools are more likely to achieve superior performance and maintain a competitive advantage (Crook et al., 2011).

In recent years, the discussion around human capital has also broadened to include the imperative for continuous investment in lifelong learning and upskilling, particularly in the context of digital transformation. The rapid evolution of technology has necessitated that employees constantly acquire new competencies to remain relevant and effective (Number Analytics, 2025). Organizations that prioritize and facilitate such ongoing development not only enhance individual capabilities but also strengthen their collective human capital, making them more resilient and agile in the face of disruptive change (Deloitte, 2024).

As organizations face growing pressures to address environmental challenges, the role of human capital has evolved to encompass environmental awareness, green innovation, and pro-environmental behavior at work (Jabbour & Santos, 2008). In this context, Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) has emerged as a strategic approach that integrates environmental goals into traditional HRM practice, to cultivate an environmentally responsible workforce (Renwick et al., 2013; Jackson et al., 2011). By aligning human capital development with environmental sustainability objectives, GHRM functions as a key enabler for organizations to embed green values, reduce ecological footprints, and achieve competitive advantage in a low-carbon economy (Daily, Bishop, & Massoud, 2012).

The concept of Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) has emerged over the past two decades. The term itself was first widely discussed in the context of sustainability-oriented corporate transformation in the early 2000s, in line with increasing societal, governmental, and institutional concern for environmental issues (Renwick et al., 2013; Jackson et al., 2011). As climate change, resource depletion, and global environmental challenges intensified, organizations began to recognize the potential of HRM practices. Organizations understood that GHRM can influence not only the internal culture but also broader sustainability goals.

Initially, many firms approached the concept strategically-seeing sustainability not just as a moral obligation but as a competitive advantage in response to regulatory pressure, consumer demand, and reputational risk (Shrivastava, 1995; Porter & van der Linde, 1995). By integrating green practices into HR, organizations aimed to build a green organizational culture and improve employee engagement in sustainability efforts (Renwick et al., 2013; Jabbour, 2011). Early adopters were typically large firms in environmentally sensitive industries, such as manufacturing, energy, or transport, who saw green HRM as a strategic necessity. However, the push to "appear green" created incentives for greenwashing-the practice of deceptively promoting environmental practices that are superficial or misleading (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). This was particularly common when sustainability claims were not backed by deep operational or HR changes, leading to distrust among employees, stakeholders, and customers. Greenwashing is especially risky in HR when organizations promote green values but don't embed them in training or incentives, when there's a mismatch between external messaging and internal practices and where employees feel pressured to "perform green" without actual organizational support (Walker & Wan, 2012).

Today, almost every organization claims to be green, but only a subset truly integrates sustainability into core HR practices. The difference lies in depth and integration: Genuine Green HRM aligns HR strategy with environmental performance goals, includes green training, development, and rewards, encourages employee participation in sustainability and supports a long-term sustainability culture (Tang et al., 2018). Performative Green HRM (Greenwashing) usually uses symbolic gestures (green slogans, CSR reports) without real impact, fails to adjust HR practices and lacks transparency or accountability in environmental reporting (Tang et al., 2018).

The initial foundations of Green HRM are rooted in the triple bottom line concept (Elkington, 1997), which emphasizes the importance of integrating environmental performance alongside social and financial outcomes. This perspective evolved in the field of human resource management through the work of scholars such as Wehrmeyer (1996), who argued for the alignment of HR practices with environmental management systems, suggesting that employees are central to achieving ecological improvements.

In academic literature, Green HRM is broadly defined as “the use of HRM policies to promote the sustainable use of resources within business organizations in order to promote environmentalism, which in turn increases employee awareness and commitment to environmental issues” (Renwick et al., 2013, p. 1). This definition highlights the functional role of HRM in embedding green values within organizational systems and encouraging environmentally responsible behavior from employees.

A more behaviorally oriented definition was offered by Jackson et al. (2011), who viewed Green HRM as “the extent to which HRM activities contribute to the creation of a green workforce that understands, appreciates, and practices green initiatives within and outside the organization.” This emphasizes the role of HR in building a workforce that not only complies with environmental norms but also acts as an agent of sustainable change. Furthermore, Jabbour and Santos, (2008) conceptualized Green HRM as a set of “policies, practices, and systems that make employees of the organization green for the benefit of the individual, the society, the natural environment, and the business.” This holistic definition underlines the multi-level impact of green-oriented HR activities-from individual behavior to societal outcomes.

Over time, Green HRM has evolved from being a peripheral concern of CSR departments to becoming a strategic function of core business processes. Contemporary approaches include the integration of green principles into recruitment, training, performance management, compensation, and organizational development (Yusliza et al., 2020). Companies that actively practice Green HRM-such as Unilever, Patagonia, and IKEA-often report stronger environmental performance, higher employee engagement, and enhanced corporate reputation (Benbordi & Derbal, 2024; Elshaer et al., 2023).

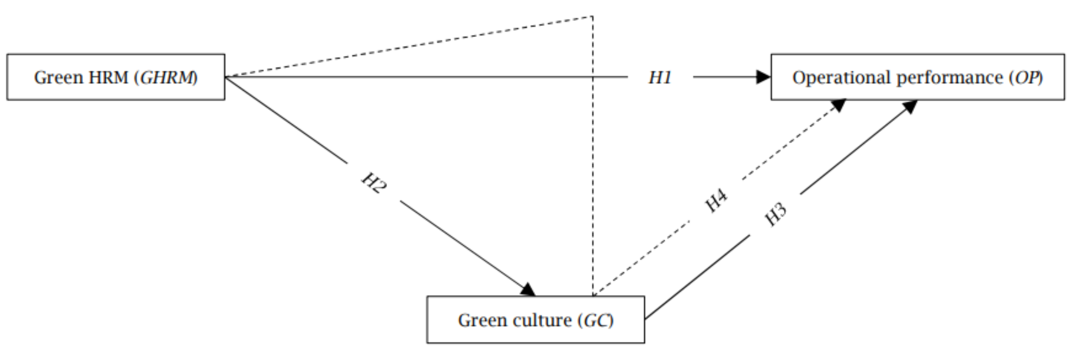


**Figure 1:** Green HRM, green culture and operational performance

**Source**: Abdelwahed & Ramish, (2025)

The increasing global emphasis on environmental sustainability has led organizations to integrate green principles into their core strategies. A growing body of academic literature suggests that Green HRM not only cultivates a green organizational culture but can also contribute to significantly improved operational performance (Jabbour & de Sousa Jabbour, 2016; Pham et al., 2020). Green HRM can facilitate the development of green culture by embedding environmental values into all aspects of HR functions (Jackson et al., 2011). These practices may play a critical role in socializing employees into green norms and values, thereby shaping a workplace culture that prioritizes ecological responsibility. A green culture, in turn, can reinforce employee engagement in pro-environmental behaviors, such as energy conservation, waste reduction, and resource optimization (Yusliza et al., 2020). As a result, employees perceive sustainability not as an external mandate but as an inherent part of their organizational identity and daily work routines.

The link between green HRM and operational performance is increasingly substantiated by empirical research. According to Jabbour (2013), firms that adopt comprehensive green HRM strategies often see improvements in efficiency, reductions in operational waste, and better resource utilization-all of which contribute to enhanced environmental and economic outcomes. Furthermore, Pham et al., (2019) have argued that organizations with a strong green culture fostered by HRM practices are better equipped to adapt to environmental regulations, manage sustainability risks, and innovate in product and process development, ultimately improving operational performance.

Moreover, green HRM can contribute to the development of dynamic capabilities that may enable organizations to align their human capital with evolving environmental demands (Teixeira et al., 2016). For instance, ongoing training in green practices enhances employees' skills and knowledge, making them more competent in managing green technologies or adhering to eco-friendly processes. All the above can directly impact productivity and operational effectiveness. In conclusion, Green HRM acts as a foundational mechanism for embedding sustainability into the organizational culture. By fostering a green mindset across all levels of the organization, a fertile ground for green culture to thrive can be created. This cultural transformation, when effectively sustained, can lead to measurable improvements in operational performance, offering organizations a strategic advantage in both environmental stewardship and competitive positioning. While green training is often positioned as a strategic human resource tool that fosters environmental sustainability and enhances organizational performance, its impact is primarily indirect and contingent on broader organizational factors. Green training in particular contributes by equipping employees with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement and support environmentally responsible practices, thereby fostering pro-environmental behavior and improving the effectiveness of green technologies (Jabbour, 2015; Teixeira et al., 2016). However, its success depends on the alignment of training initiatives with organizational culture, leadership commitment, and environmental strategy (Renwick et al., 2013). Without such alignment, training alone is unlikely to generate meaningful behavioral change or performance improvements. Moreover, green HRM practices like training are most effective when embedded within a broader system of complementary capabilities, including green leadership, supportive policies, and employee engagement mechanisms (Dubois & Dubois, 2012). Thus, green training should be viewed not as a standalone driver of performance but as one component of a multi-faceted approach to sustainable organizational development.

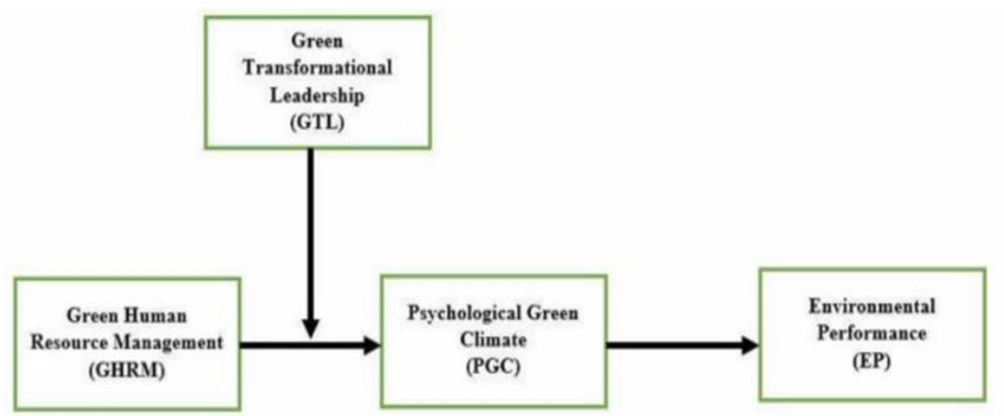


**Figure 2**: GHRM, green leadership, green climate and environmental performance

**Source**: Younis, (2023)

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) and Green Transformational Leadership (GTL) have emerged as influential antecedents in shaping a Psychological Green Climate (PGC), which in turn may enhance Organizational Environmental Performance (OEP) (as shown in the above Figure) (Renwick et al., 2013; Robertson & Barling, 2013). These practices not only encourage pro-environmental behavior among employees but also may institutionalize sustainability within organizational culture. According to Tang et al. (2018), organizations that have embedded environmental criteria in HRM processes are more likely to influence employee behaviors that align with environmental objectives, thereby fostering a psychological climate conducive to sustainability.

Complementing GHRM, GTL (Green Transformational Leadership) is a leadership approach characterized by motivating and inspiring employees to achieve environmental goals through vision, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence (Chen & Chang, 2013). GTL can enhance employees' environmental commitment and engagement by aligning personal values with organizational sustainability goals (Graves et al., 2019). Moreover, GTL can act as a mediator or moderator in the relationship between GHRM and OEP (Organizational Environmental Performance) by reinforcing the importance of environmental practices through role modeling and participative decision-making (Mittal & Dhar, 2016). Leadership tends to play a pivotal role in shaping organizational culture and can directly influence organizational performance. Effective leaders do not merely manage day-to-day operations but also tend to create, maintain, and evolve the cultural framework that may define an organization's identity, values, and behavior norms. This cultural framework, in turn, can significantly impact employees motivation, cohesion, innovation, and ultimately, organizational success.

Organizational culture is commonly defined as a system of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs that governs how people behave in organizations (Schein, 2010). Leaders are often seen as the architects and stewards of culture, especially during periods of change or growth. According to Schein (2010), leaders directly affect culture through mechanisms such as setting strategic direction, role modeling behaviors, reacting to crises, and allocating rewards and punishments. The values and behaviors exhibited by leaders are mimicked by subordinates, gradually shaping the prevailing organizational norms (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000).

Transformational leadership, in particular, is closely linked with fostering strong, adaptive, and ethically grounded cultures. Such leaders usually inspire a shared vision, stimulate intellectual engagement and attend to individual development, all of which can reinforce cultural alignment with organizational goals (Bass & Avolio, 1993). When leaders consistently communicate and demonstrate core organizational values, a coherent culture emerges, promoting clarity and consistency across the workforce.

The connection between leadership and organizational performance has been extensively validated in both theoretical and empirical research. Leadership affects performance both directly-through strategic decision-making and resource allocation-and indirectly, by shaping culture, commitment, and employee behavior (Yukl, 2013). Studies have shown that transformational leadership is positively correlated with employee satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, innovation, and financial outcomes (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Wang et al., 2011).

Moreover, leadership tends to contribute to the development of high-performance work systems by fostering trust, empowering teams, and aligning individual goals with organizational objectives (Podsakoff et al., 1996). A strong organizational culture, guided by effective leadership can act as a performance-enhancing mechanism by reducing ambiguity, increasing engagement, and promoting strategic coherence (Hartnell et al., 2011).

Research also has suggested that organizational culture acts as a mediator between leadership and performance. Leaders shape the culture, and the culture, in turn, drives performance (Schneider et al., 2013). For example, in high-reliability organizations, leaders can promote cultures of safety and accountability that are essential for consistent operational excellence (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). This indirect effect underscores the strategic importance of leadership not only in goal-setting or control mechanisms but also in cultivating a work environment conducive to innovation, sustainability, and long-term competitiveness. PGC (psychological, green climate) represents employees shared perceptions of the extent to which their organization supports and values environmental sustainability (Norton et al., 2014). A positive PGC serves as a critical psychological mechanism through which GHRM and GTL (green transformational leadership) tend to influence employee behavior and attitudes. Studies have shown that PGC mediates the relationship between GHRM practices and employees green behavior, which ultimately affects OEP (Pham et al., 2020). The presence of a strong green climate can enhance employees' sense of meaning in their work and fosters collective engagement in environmental initiatives (Zhang et al., 2019).

OEP encompasses both the tangible and intangible environmental outcomes of organizational operations, including reduced emissions, efficient resource use, waste management, and overall sustainability metrics (Daily et al., 2009). Empirical evidence suggests that organizations with proactive green leadership and HRM systems demonstrate superior performance in meeting environmental standards and sustainability targets (Jabbour & Santos, 2008; Mousa & Othman, 2020). The dynamic interplay among GHRM, GTL, and PGC illustrates a multi-level framework in which strategic HRM and leadership behaviors collectively foster an organizational climate that drives environmental performance. The alignment of these factors not only creates structural support but also psychological commitment among employees, thus bridging the gap between policy and practice. Future research may benefit from longitudinal designs to explore causality and from cross-cultural studies to examine contextual moderators in the relationship between these constructs.

It is important to be noted, that the concept of Organizational Environmental Performance (OEP) has been positively associated with broader Organizational Performance (OP), including financial, operational, and reputational outcomes. This connection is primarily grounded in the Natural Resource-Based View (Hart, 1995), which argues that proactive environmental strategies can become sources of competitive advantage when they lead to unique organizational capabilities, such as pollution prevention, stewardship production and sustainable development. Empirical studies have supported this view, showing that firms with strong environmental performance tend to experience improved efficiency, cost savings, enhanced brand image, and better stakeholder relationships (Klassen & McLaughlin, 1996; Aragón-Correa & Sharma, 2003). Additionally, good OEP can mitigate regulatory risks and attract environmentally conscious investors and consumers, leading to increased market opportunities (Porter & van der Linde, 1995). Green organizational performance (GOP) refers to measurable environmental outcomes: reduced emissions, efficient energy use, waste reduction, etc. Organizational performance, on the other hand, includes broader metrics like financial results, innovation, reputation, and employee engagement. According to Resource-Based View (RBV), firms that integrate environmental performance into strategy can develop unique green capabilities (e.g., eco-efficient operations) that can lead to a competitive advantage (Hart, 1995; Russo & Fouts, 1997).

In regards to stakeholder theory-meeting environmental expectations enhances stakeholder trust, which can positively affect long-term organizational success (Freeman, 1984). Studies have shown that green practices, such as green innovation and green supply chain management, positively correlate with financial performance, brand reputation, and operational efficiency (Chang, 2011; Qi et al., 2010). At the same time, organizations with strong green performance often experience higher employee engagement and retention, contributing to overall performance (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017).

Green organizational culture refers to the shared values, assumptions, and beliefs that prioritize environmental sustainability within an organization (Harris & Crane, 2002). In contrast, a green psychological climate refers to employees' perceptions that their organization supports and expects environmentally friendly behaviors (Norton et al., 2014). While culture is deeper and more enduring, climate is more surface-level and perception-based and both are interlinked. Green organizational culture tends to shape green psychological climate. Culture acts as the foundational layer that influences the development of climate. When leaders and systems prioritize environmental values, employees perceive this, forming a green psychological climate (Zientara & Zamojska, 2018). Climate is the "felt experience" of culture. While green culture represents the organization's espoused values and long-term orientation, green climate reflects how those values are implemented and perceived in a daily manner (Zohar & Hofmann, 2012). A strong green culture amplifies the effects of green HRM and leadership on employee behavior through a reinforcing green climate (Robertson & Barling, 2013).

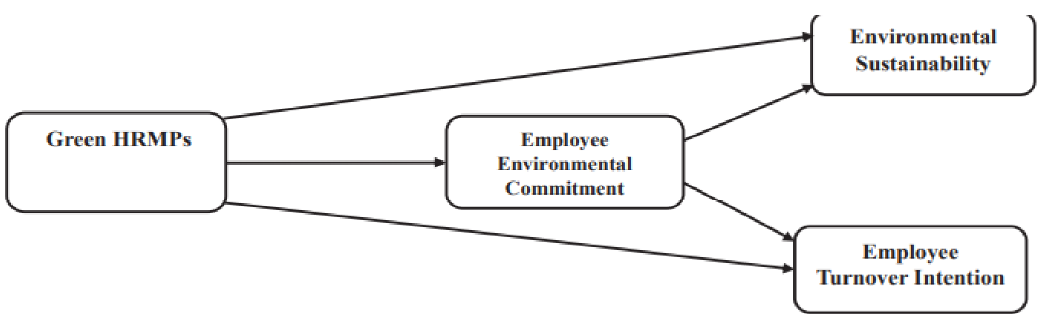


**Figure 3:** Green HRM, employee environmental commitment, employee turnover and sustainability

**Source:** Suleman et al., (2023)

Among the most critical impacts of GHRM are its influence on employee environmental commitment, employee turnover, and sustainability outcomes. Employees are more likely to identify with an organization's environmental mission when HR practices align with sustainability values, leading to stronger personal commitment toward pro-environmental behaviors (Paillé et al., 2014). This commitment is shaped by employees' perceptions of organizational support for the environment (POS-E), which in turn can foster psychological alignment between individual and organizational green goals (Chaudhary, 2020). Green training, for example, may increase employees' competence and confidence in engaging in environmental behaviors, while green rewards signal the organization's seriousness about sustainability.

Green HRM has been also linked with lower employee turnover. When employees perceive their organization as environmentally responsible and supportive, they are more likely to feel valued and satisfied, which may decrease their intention to leave (Pham et al., 2019). Additionally, organizational green values tend to enhance emotional and ethical bonds between employees and the organization, further reducing turnover (Dumont et al., 2017). This relationship is particularly significant among millennial and Gen Z employees, who increasingly prioritize ethical and sustainable practices in employer selection and retention decisions (Aktar & Islam, 2016). Employees working in green organizations often experience greater psychological well-being and job satisfaction because they perceive their work as meaningful and aligned with broader societal and environmental values (Norton, Zacher, & Ashkanasy, 2014). This alignment contributes to value congruence, which is known to enhance organizational commitment and reduce turnover intentions (Kim, Kim, Choi, & Phetvaroon, 2019). Moreover, when employees observe that their employer is taking genuine steps toward environmental sustainability, they are more likely to experience organizational pride and moral satisfaction, which in turn positively influences their motivation and engagement (Ones & Dilchert, 2012). The psychological impact is also mediated by perceptions of organizational justice and authenticity; green practices perceived as genuine (not greenwashing) tend to foster trust, whereas insincere initiatives may lead to cynicism (Ramus & Killmer, 2007).

Employee environmental commitment serves as a mediating mechanism between Green HRM and organizational sustainability performance. That is, Green HRM drives commitment, which then leads to increased participation in sustainable practices, eco-innovation, and reduced environmental harm (Nisar et al., 2021). This chain of influence highlights the strategic importance of HR in operationalizing sustainability through human capital. Green HRM is not merely an internal process; it can contribute directly to the triple bottom line of sustainability: environmental, social, and economic (Jabbour & de Sousa Jabbour, 2016). Environmentally committed employees help reduce waste, improve energy efficiency, and enhance environmental compliance. Simultaneously, lower turnover leads to more stable workforces, knowledge retention, and long-term organizational resilience.

## 3. Company profile

Unilever, a British–Dutch multinational consumer goods corporation founded in 1929 through the merger of Lever Brothers and Margarine Unie, has long been synonymous with sustainability. In the early 2000s, the company unveiled its reference-defining Unilever Sustainable Living Plan (USLP), which explicitly aligned its business strategy with environmental and societal goals. Central to this agenda is the integration of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) across its global operations. Unilever's HR division champions environmental stewardship through multiple green initiatives-ranging from eco-conscious recruitment to sustainability training and performance incentives-all under a centralized corporate sustainability framework (Benbordi & Derbal, 2024). Academic research underscores Unilever as a paradigmatic model for embedding GHRM: Benbordi and Derbal (2024) reported that the company systematically promotes green behaviors, implements sustainable HR policies, and minimizes the environmental impact of HR activities. These efforts are credited with enhanced employee engagement, improved operational efficiency, reduced ecological footprint, and a stronger employer brand (Benbordi & Derbal, 2024).

## 4. Research analysis

Unilever stands out globally as one of the most committed organizations to environmental sustainability, particularly through the lens of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM). The company has not merely adopted environmental practices as an adjunct to its strategy, but has embedded sustainability into the core of its organizational culture and identity. This deep integration is most notably seen through the Unilever Sustainable Living Plan (USLP), which was launched in 2010 and aimed at decoupling the company's growth from environmental impact while increasing its positive social contribution (Benbordi & Derbal, 2024).

A key factor in Unilever's success is the alignment of its HR strategies with environmental objectives. The company ensures that sustainability is reflected in every stage of the employee lifecycle-from green job descriptions and eco-conscious recruitment criteria to continuous training on sustainability awareness and green competencies. By embedding these values in the onboarding process and throughout employee development programs, Unilever cultivates an internal culture where environmental stewardship is not only expected but also rewarded (Renwick et al., 2016).

Furthermore, Unilever has incorporated environmental performance into its appraisal and incentive systems. Employees are encouraged to take ownership of green initiatives within their functional areas, and sustainability metrics are embedded in key performance indicators (KPIs) (Elshaer et al., 2023). For example, managers are evaluated not just on commercial outcomes but also on contributions to energy savings, waste reduction, or supply chain sustainability. This approach institutionalizes green thinking into daily operations and long-term decision-making. Unilever's leadership also plays a critical role. By promoting sustainable leadership and modeling eco-friendly behavior, senior management reinforces green values at all organizational levels (Akyuz & Ertemsir, 2022). Internal communication campaigns and employee engagement programs further reinforce the notion that sustainability is not a peripheral concern but a shared cultural imperative.

As a result of these practices, Unilever has seen tangible benefits, including enhanced employee engagement, reduced operational costs through energy and waste efficiency, and improved employer branding. Studies have shown that Unilever's green initiatives have contributed to higher organizational commitment among employees and a reduced rate of turnover (Nguyen et al., 2023). These cultural and performance outcomes can highlight how GHRM, when effectively embedded, can generate both ecological and business value. Unilever's success story in GHRM demonstrates that sustainability must transcend policy and enter the realm of organizational values and routines. Through a cohesive strategy that integrates green practices across HR functions, supported by leadership and cultural reinforcement, Unilever has built a resilient and environmentally conscious organizational identity.

## 5. Conclusion/suggestions

Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) has emerged as a crucial mechanism for aligning human capital with environmental sustainability goals in organizations. However, for Green HRM to yield long-term impact, it must be embedded into the cultural and operational fabric of the organization, rather than implemented as a series of isolated initiatives.

One of the foundational practices of Green HRM is green recruitment and selection. Organizations committed to sustainability are increasingly framing job advertisements to reflect environmental values and attract candidates who share a similar ecological ethos (Jabbour, 2011). This not only enhances person-organization fit but also builds a workforce that is intrinsically motivated toward sustainability goals. Selection processes may include criteria that assess an individual's environmental awareness, past involvement in green initiatives, or alignment with the firm's ecological principles.

Another core practice is green training and development. Providing continuous education and training on sustainability-related issues-such as waste management, energy conservation, or compliance with environmental standards like ISO 14001-is critical for equipping employees with the necessary skills to contribute to environmental performance (Govindarajulu & Daily, 2004). Such training also fosters a shared understanding of environmental priorities, thereby reinforcing green culture at the grassroots level.

Green performance management and appraisal may constitute another key dimension. Incorporating environmental goals into individual and team-based performance metrics enables organizations to measure and reward green behavior (Daily, Bishop, & Govindarajulu, 2009). This approach ensures that environmental responsibility is not a peripheral concern, but a criterion for evaluating success. Similarly, green rewards and compensation systems serve as powerful motivators. Organizations can provide bonuses, recognition, or other incentives to employees who demonstrate environmentally responsible behaviors, thereby reinforcing desired actions and norms (Renwick et al., 2016).

Beyond structured HR processes, the cultivation of green organizational culture also depends on participatory practices. Encouraging employee involvement in environmental decision-making-through green suggestion schemes, environmental committees, or voluntary sustainability teams- has been shown to increase engagement and personal ownership over green outcomes (Jackson et al., 2011). Moreover, green work design and job flexibility, such as the ability to telecommute or adopt low-carbon work routines, can simultaneously reduce ecological impact and improve employee satisfaction (Jabbour & de Sousa Jabbour, 2016).

To ensure that Green HRM becomes a sustained element of organizational life, several strategic measures are necessary. First, leadership commitment is essential. Top management must actively model environmentally responsible behavior and communicate the strategic importance of sustainability (Robertson & Barling, 2013). Leadership behavior not only sets the tone for the organization but also lends legitimacy to green HR initiatives. Furthermore, Green HRM should be tightly aligned with broader corporate sustainability strategies. This includes integrating environmental values into mission statements, organizational goals, and performance indicators (Milliman, Clair, & Mitra, 2003). Such alignment ensures that sustainability is not siloed within HR but becomes a cross-functional priority.

Internal communication also plays a pivotal role. Regular dissemination of sustainability updates, environmental success stories, and employee contributions through newsletters, intranet portals, and town halls can foster a sense of shared purpose (Dubois & Dubois, 2012). Organizations can further reinforce green values through cultural artifacts such as office layouts featuring sustainable materials, recognition plaques for green achievements, or events centered around environmental themes (Harris & Crane, 2002).

Employee empowerment is another critical factor. Encouraging individuals to act autonomously on green matters-whether by initiating eco-efficiency projects or adopting sustainable habits-supports the internalization of environmental values (Ones & Dilchert, 2012). Organizations may also identify and develop sustainability champions who act as internal change agents, promoting environmental initiatives within their teams and functions (Renwick et al., 2013). In conclusion, the successful integration of Green HRM into organizational culture requires a multi-layered approach that encompasses strategic alignment, leadership support, participatory practices, and the continual reinforcement of environmental values through HR processes. When these elements are harmonized, Green HRM becomes not merely a function of human resource management but a foundational pillar of sustainable organizational identity and performance.

**6. Epilogue**

In recent decades, environmental sustainability has emerged as a critical imperative for organizations seeking long-term success and legitimacy. As a result, Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) has gained increasing attention as an integrative framework that can align human resource policies and practices with environmental objectives. This approach is pivotal in fostering a culture of environmental responsibility, improving organizational performance, and enhancing employer branding in a sustainability-conscious world.

One of the central contributions of Green HRM is its role in embedding environmental values into the organizational culture. By integrating environmental criteria into recruitment, selection, training, performance appraisal, and reward systems, organizations can influence employee attitudes and behaviors in favor of ecological sustainability (Jabbour, 2011). For instance, green recruitment strategies attract candidates who value environmental responsibility, while green training initiatives enhance employees’ knowledge of sustainable practices (Jackson, Renwick, Jabbour & Muller-Camen, 2011). Additionally, organizations implementing green HRM practices often report improvements in resource efficiency, cost savings, and innovation outcomes as said before (Tang, Chen, Jiang, Paillé & Jia, 2018). Moreover, employees engaged in green practices tend to exhibit higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which in turn may improve overall productivity (Dumont, Shen & Deng, 2017).

Another crucial aspect of Green HRM is its impact on corporate image and stakeholder engagement. As environmental concerns gain prominence among consumers, investors, and regulators, organizations that proactively implement green HRM demonstrate social responsibility and can strengthen their legitimacy (Renwick et al., 2013). This can lead to improved customer loyalty, easier compliance with environmental regulations and access to new markets or green subsidies.

However, successful implementation of Green HRM requires alignment with broader corporate sustainability strategies. It demands commitment from top management, consistent policy integration, and ongoing communication efforts. Without these, green initiatives may be perceived as superficial or symbolic, undermining their potential benefits (Jabbour & Santos, 2008).

Green HRM is more than an emerging trend. As the global economy continues to shift towards sustainability, Green HRM will likely play an increasingly pivotal role in shaping the workforce and the organization of the future.

While Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) serves as a strategic lever to align employee behavior with organizational environmental goals, its exclusive focus on ecological values during recruitment and development processes may inadvertently marginalize talented individuals who do not identify as environmentally conscious. This creates a paradox where sustainability goals may come at the cost of human capital diversity and organizational competitiveness.

Green recruitment often emphasizes the selection of individuals with pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors (Renwick, Redman & Maguire, 2013), assuming a direct link between personal green values and workplace performance in sustainability-related roles. However, this assumption may overlook highly capable professionals whose strengths lie in innovation, strategic thinking, or technical expertise but who may not inherently prioritize ecological issues (Zibarras & Coan, 2015). By narrowing the candidate pool based on environmental commitment, firms risk excluding diverse cognitive perspectives that are crucial for adaptability and creative problem-solving (Sharma, 2000). This phenomenon is related to the concept of "value congruence bias" in recruitment-where employers prefer candidates whose personal values align with those of the organization (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman & Johnson, 2005). While this can enhance cultural fit, it may also reduce heterogeneity and foster groupthink, especially in environments where sustainability is framed ideologically rather than pragmatically.

Moreover, prioritizing green values over core competencies may impair long-term innovation and market responsiveness. As Boxall and Purcell (2016) argue, strategic HRM must strike a balance between values alignment and functional expertise to maintain competitive advantage. Green HRM, when implemented rigidly, may risk undercutting this balance. Paillé, Chen, Boiral, and Jin, (2014) said that green behaviors are influenced by both personal values and contextual support; thus, organizations might achieve better outcomes by fostering green engagement internally, rather than selecting only “pre-converted” employees. There are also broader implications for employer branding and labor market positioning. A highly green-centric employer brand may repel otherwise high-potential candidates who perceive such organizations as ideological or narrowly focused (Tang et al., 2018). This effect is particularly pronounced in highly competitive industries-such as tech or finance-where talent shortages make inclusivity in value systems an operational imperative. To address this issue, scholars have recommended an inclusive Green HRM approach that focuses on behavior and capability rather than ideology (Jabbour & Santos, 2008). For example, rather than screening out applicants based on ecological orientation, firms could prioritize training and socialization to build green competencies across a wider talent base (Unsworth & McNeill, 2017). In this way, organizations preserve access to diverse talent while still advancing sustainability goals.

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