

The Role of Green HRM Practices in Promoting Sustainability among Star-Rated Hotels in China

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Abstract

This paper investigates the integration and effectiveness of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) practices in promoting sustainable performance within star-rated hotels in Shandong Province, China. Drawing from key GHRM dimensions; green job analysis, recruitment, selection, training, performance assessment, and rewards, this study critically evaluates their impact on hotels' economic, environmental, and social performance. In addition to examining direct effects, the study incorporates Green Work Climate as a mediator that channels HR practices into employees' eco-initiatives, and Top Management Commitment as a moderator that strengthens the linkage between organizational climate and sustainable outcomes. Employing a comprehensive literature review and grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV), the conceptual framework positions employees' environmental competencies as strategic assets essential for achieving competitive advantage and long-term sustainability.

Keywords: Green HRM, Sustainable Performance, Green Work Climate, Top Management Commitment, Hotel Industry, Shandong Province

Introduction

The hospitality industry is a cornerstone of the global economy, contributing substantially to employment creation, service innovation, and GDP growth. In China, star-rated hotels play a pivotal role in the tourism sector, accounting for a significant share of national economic activity and serving as key sites of cultural exchange (Cultural and Tourism Ministry, 2023). Despite their importance, these hotels face persistent challenges in achieving sustainable performance, including high energy consumption, excessive waste generation, and considerable carbon emissions (Mondok, 2023). Addressing these challenges is critical not only for mitigating environmental impacts but also for meeting the rising expectations of environmentally conscious consumers and aligning with China's national policy agenda on sustainable development.

China has committed to ambitious sustainability targets, including peaking carbon emissions by 2030 and reaching carbon neutrality by 2060. These commitments highlight the urgency of adopting sustainable practices across industries (Xiang et al., 2021). The hospitality sector is uniquely positioned to contribute to these goals given its resource-intensive nature and direct influence on consumer behavior. In particular, star-rated hotels in Shandong Province, home to more than 400 such establishments, exemplify the dual challenge of balancing economic growth with sustainability imperatives. Yet, compared to national benchmarks, these hotels frequently underperform on key sustainability metrics, underscoring the need for targeted interventions and effective management strategies (Li et al., 2023).

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) has emerged as a strategic approach for embedding sustainability principles into organizational systems. By integrating environmental considerations into HR functions such as recruitment, training, performance evaluation, and rewards, GHRM fosters a workforce that aligns individual behaviors with broader sustainable performance objectives (Renwick et al., 2013). For instance, green recruitment practices attract candidates with environmental values, while sustainability-focused training equips employees with practical skills to support eco-initiatives. Performance assessments linked to sustainability metrics further incentivize employees to engage in pro-environmental behaviors, thereby cultivating a culture of environmental accountability (Jabbour & Santos, 2008).

Nevertheless, the adoption of GHRM practices in China's hospitality industry has been uneven. Barriers such as limited managerial commitment, inadequate training infrastructure, and high implementation costs often restrict their effectiveness (Tang et al., 2018). Moreover, the bulk of GHRM research has been conducted in the Western contexts, leaving a gap in knowledge regarding its applicability in China's unique socio-economic and regulatory environment (Hassan et al., 2023). This gap emphasizes the importance of contextualized studies that capture the realities of Chinese hotels.

Against this backdrop, Shandong Province offers a compelling setting to investigate how GHRM practices can enhance sustainable performance. Beyond the direct impact of GHRM, emerging literature highlights the role of Green Work Climate as a mediating mechanism that channels HRM initiatives into collective pro-environmental behaviors. At the same time, Top Management Commitment is recognized as a critical moderating factor that strengthens or weakens the translation of green climate into tangible sustainability outcomes. By incorporating these constructs, the present study develops an enriched framework that explains how GHRM, GWC, and TMC interact to influence economic, environmental, and social performance outcomes in hotels.

This paper therefore addresses existing gaps by examining the adoption and impact of GHRM practices, the mediating role of GWC, and the moderating effect of TMC in star-rated hotels in Shandong Province. The findings aim to provide both theoretical insights and actionable recommendations, demonstrating how strategic HR interventions and leadership commitment can jointly contribute to China's broader environmental and economic sustainability goals.

Literature Review

Sustainable Performance in the Hotel Industry

Sustainability in the hotel industry is a multifaceted concept grounded in the triple-bottom-line framework, which integrates three critical dimensions: economic, environmental, and social (Elkington, 1997). This framework emphasizes that hotels must balance financial performance with environmental stewardship and social responsibility to achieve long-term viability. As observed by Alvarez-Risco et al. (2023), incorporating digital tools and aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have further reinforced this approach. Moreover, studies suggest that a holistic focus on environmental, economic, and cultural sustainability is increasingly becoming a cornerstone of hotel management strategies (Dos Santos et al., 2023; Diamantis, 2023).

Economic sustainability in the hospitality sector involves achieving cost efficiency and profitability while addressing operational inefficiencies such as excessive energy use and resource waste. Hotels are energy-intensive enterprises, consuming substantial electricity and water resources for heating, cooling, laundry, and food preparation. Operational inefficiencies not only increase costs but also undermine competitiveness in a price-sensitive market (Dincer et al., 2023). To address these challenges, hotels are investing in energy-efficient systems, such as LED lighting, smart HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) systems, and renewable energy sources like solar panels (Verma & Jain, 2016). These investments reduce operational costs and enhance financial resilience over time (Alameeri et al., 2023). Additionally, adopting sustainable supply chains that prioritize local and eco-friendly suppliers further reduces costs associated with long-distance transportation and aligns with consumer preferences for environmentally conscious practices (Eldho Babu et al., 2023). Evidence indicates that eco-conscious travelers are willing to pay a premium for sustainable accommodations, boosting revenue and profitability (Onoufriou, 2023).

The environmental dimension of sustainability focuses on reducing the hotel industry's ecological footprint, which encompasses carbon emissions, water consumption, and waste generation. Hotels contribute significantly to global environmental challenges, accounting for approximately 1% of global carbon emissions (Abeydeera & Karunasena, 2019). To mitigate these impacts, hotels are adopting strategies such as installing water-saving fixtures, implementing waste management systems, and sourcing sustainable materials for construction (Chen, 2023). Programs like towel and linen reuse reduce water and energy consumption while aligning with eco-conscious guest expectations (Göğüş et al., 2023). Renewable energy sources and technologies such as automated lighting systems further enhance sustainability outcomes (Jones et al., 2023). Achieving certifications like LEED and ISO 14001 not only strengthens environmental accountability but also bolsters brand reputation (Agyeiwaah, 2023).

Social sustainability addresses the human and community aspects of hotel operations, emphasizing equitable labor practices, employee welfare, and community engagement. Key practices promoting social sustainability include fair wages, safe workplaces, and employee training (Alberton et al., 2023). These initiatives improve employee satisfaction and retention, fostering a culture of creativity and productivity (Diamantis, 2023). Engaging local communities through sourcing, internships, and projects strengthens the hotel's social

license and reputation (Ozturkoglu et al., 2023). Moreover, addressing inclusivity and equity enhances the social impact of hotel operations (Santos et al., 2023).

While the benefits of sustainability are well-documented, hotels—particularly in emerging markets—face challenges such as high upfront costs for green technologies and resistance to change (Tauringana, 2020). In response, innovative approaches like Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) are bridging the gap between sustainability goals and practical implementation (Asadi et al., 2023). Through green training and recruitment, GHRM aligns workforce behavior with environmental objectives, empowering employees to drive sustainability efforts internally (Alameeri et al., 2023).

Green HRM Practices

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) represents a transformative approach to aligning workforce practices with organizational sustainability goals. By embedding environmental considerations into core HR functions, GHRM fosters a culture of eco-consciousness and accountability within organizations (Renwick et al., 2013). It ensures that sustainability becomes an integral part of day-to-day operations and decision-making processes, thereby enabling organizations to respond effectively to the growing environmental challenges of the modern era (Pham et al., 2023; Jabbour et al., 2016).

Green job analysis involves incorporating environmental responsibilities into job descriptions; ensuring employees understand their roles in achieving sustainability objectives. This practice goes beyond traditional job analysis by explicitly including environmental goals and responsibilities, such as energy conservation, waste reduction, or compliance with environmental regulations (Yong et al., 2023; Carter, 2018). By clearly defining eco-related tasks and expectations, organizations enhance role clarity and align individual contributions with broader sustainability goals (Masri & Jaaron, 2023). For instance, star-rated hotels might include responsibilities such as monitoring energy consumption, promoting green guest practices, or participating in waste management initiatives (Amui, 2020).

Green recruitment focuses on attracting candidates who share the organization's commitment to environmental values. This involves integrating sustainability themes into job advertisements, interviews, and selection criteria (Shafaei et al., 2023). Organizations that emphasize green recruitment not only improve engagement but also build a workforce intrinsically motivated to meet sustainability objectives (Ojo et al., 2023). Evidence suggests that such alignment fosters higher retention and engagement rates (Freitas et al., 2023).

Green selection refers to the process of evaluating and hiring candidates based on their demonstrated environmental competencies, knowledge, attitudes, and past experiences related to sustainability (Renwick et al., 2013; Raza & Khan, 2022). Incorporating environmental criteria into job analysis and selection processes ensures that roles and tasks align clearly with the organization's sustainability objectives (Siyambalapitiya et al., 2018). Moreover, selecting environmentally conscious employees directly supports the organization's sustainable practices by reinforcing an internal culture of environmental responsibility. Employees chosen through green selection processes are more likely to demonstrate proactive environmental behaviors, leading to improved organizational

environmental performance and greater alignment with strategic sustainability objectives (Tang et al., 2018; Siyambalapitiya et al., 2018).

Green training equips employees with the skills necessary for sustainability initiatives. Training topics often include energy conservation, waste management, and eco-friendly technologies (Mousa & Othman, 2023). Ongoing green training ensures that employees remain updated on best practices, enhancing operational efficiency and reducing ecological footprints (Gholami et al., 2023). Behavioral training also fosters eco-friendly habits that extend beyond the workplace (Yu et al., 2023).

Green performance evaluation integrates sustainability metrics into appraisal systems, incentivizing eco-conscious behaviors (Ghoury et al., 2023). For instance, performance appraisals in hotels could include metrics such as energy saved, waste reduced, or customer feedback on green initiatives (Ren et al., 2020). Effective reward systems—financial and non-financial—motivate employees to engage in green practices (Jabbour et al., 2016). Green rewards refer to the integration of environmental objectives into the compensation and reward systems of organizations. In the hotel industry, Green rewards are used to incentivize employees to engage in and support sustainability initiatives, thereby aligning their personal goals with the environmental objectives of the hotel (Renwick et al., 2013).

Green rewards are critical for motivating employees to contribute to the hotel's sustainability efforts. By linking compensation to environmental performance, hotels can encourage behaviors that reduce resource consumption, minimize waste, and promote sustainable practices. This alignment can lead to enhanced environmental performance and a stronger commitment to sustainability among employees (Jabbour & de Sousa Jabbour, 2016; Guerci et al., 2016).

Despite their transformative potential, GHRM practices face challenges such as inadequate managerial commitment (Freitas et al., 2023), resource constraints (Masri & Jaaron, 2023), and resistance to change (Shafaei et al., 2023). These barriers highlight the importance of strategic alignment and leadership commitment to integrate GHRM practices effectively into organizational culture (Yu et al., 2023).

Green Work Climate (GWC)

Green Work Climate (GWC) is defined as the shared perception among employees regarding their organization's commitment, policies, and practices towards environmental sustainability. It signals the extent to which eco-friendly values are integrated into daily operations and reinforced by leadership and HRM systems (Norton et al., 2014; Boiral & Paillé, 2012). A strong GWC promotes alignment between employees' behaviors and organizational sustainability goals, motivating individuals to engage in practices such as energy conservation, waste reduction, and the adoption of innovative green solutions (Lamm et al., 2013).

Prior research shows that GWC acts as a critical mediator linking Green HRM practices and organizational sustainable performance outcomes. For example, when employees perceive support for sustainability through green training, performance appraisals, and reward systems, they are more likely to exhibit pro-environmental behaviors (Paillé & Raineri, 2015). Moreover, GWC enhances collective green identity and team-based cooperation, thereby

strengthening innovation and knowledge sharing in environmental practices (Robertson & Carleton, 2018). Recent studies in service industries, including hospitality, confirm that GWC mediates the relationship between HRM initiatives and sustainable performance by channeling employees' motivation and discretionary efforts toward eco-friendly outcomes (Onubi et al., 2023).

Thus, GWC is considered a vital construct in this study, capturing the psychological and cultural context that translates Green HRM practices into tangible improvements in economic, environmental, and social sustainable performance.

Top Management Commitment (TMC)

Top Management Commitment (TMC) refers to the extent to which senior leaders prioritize, support, and actively engage in sustainability initiatives within the organization. It encompasses strategic guidance, allocation of resources, and the consistent reinforcement of environmental values at the top levels of management (Daily & Huang, 2001; Jabbour & de Sousa Jabbour, 2016). Strong TMC creates a supportive organizational environment that legitimizes sustainability practices and motivates employees to integrate eco-friendly values into their work behaviors (Ramus & Steger, 2000).

In the context of Green HRM, TMC functions as a critical boundary condition that influences how effectively GWC translates into sustainable performance outcomes. Specifically, when top managers demonstrate visible commitment—through communication, strategic planning, and performance monitoring—employees are more likely to perceive sustainability as a core organizational priority, thereby reinforcing the effect of GWC on sustainable performance (Renwick et al., 2013; Pham et al., 2023). Conversely, weak managerial commitment can undermine the influence of GWC by signaling inconsistency between organizational rhetoric and actual practices.

Recent empirical studies have confirmed that leadership commitment strengthens the relationship between HRM practices and sustainability outcomes by fostering trust, enhancing employee engagement, and creating a culture of accountability (Tang et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2023). Therefore, in this study, TMC is introduced as a moderator of the relationship between GWC and sustainable performance, emphasizing the critical role of leadership in bridging organizational policies and employee-driven environmental behaviors.

Underpinning Theory

This study is underpinned by the Resource-Based View (RBV), a foundational theoretical framework that offers a comprehensive perspective on the relationship between Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) practices and sustainability. Introduced by Barney (1991), the RBV posits that organizations achieve and sustain a competitive advantage by leveraging unique, valuable, and inimitable resources. Among these resources, the workforce stands out as a critical asset, particularly when employees possess distinctive environmental competencies and share eco-friendly values. These attributes elevate the strategic role of human resources in enhancing an organization's competitive positioning (Kim et al., 2023; Ishaq et al., 2023).

The RBV emphasizes that investing in human capital through practices such as green training and recruitment enables organizations to cultivate capabilities that are both distinctive and difficult for competitors to replicate (Nisar et al., 2023). For example, green training programs impart employees with the knowledge and skills needed to adopt and implement sustainability measures effectively. These include practices like energy conservation, waste management, and the integration of environmentally friendly technologies. The outcomes of such training efforts extend beyond individual employee growth, fostering enhanced operational efficiency and a measurable reduction in environmental impact (Pham et al., 2023; Cabral & Jabbour, 2023).

Similarly, green recruitment serves as a strategic tool to attract talent whose values and professional goals align with organizational commitments to sustainability (Ahmed et al., 2023). By emphasizing environmental stewardship in job advertisements and selection processes, organizations can build a workforce intrinsically motivated to advance long-term environmental objectives (Asadi et al., 2023). This alignment between workforce goals and organizational values not only enhances employee engagement but also strengthens the organization's overall capacity to achieve sustainability targets (Ozturkoglu et al., 2023).

In the hospitality industry, where resource-intensive operations such as high energy and water consumption are prevalent, the RBV provides a strategic lens for addressing these environmental challenges. Star-rated hotels, as exemplars of this sector, can leverage GHRM practices to transform their human resources into a cornerstone of sustainable innovation and operational resilience (Choy et al., 2023). By embedding sustainability into their core business functions, hotels can simultaneously address ecological concerns and gain a competitive edge in the market.

Beyond operational efficiencies, GHRM practices also contribute to enhancing organizational reputation (Arshad et al., 2023). Demonstrating a commitment to environmental stewardship resonates with eco-conscious consumers, improving brand loyalty and fostering positive public perception (Alvarez-Risco et al., 2023). This reputational advantage not only attracts environmentally aware guests but also appeals to investors and partners seeking to associate with sustainable and socially responsible enterprises.

The RBV further asserts that the strategic value of human resources lies in their ability to innovate and adapt, traits that are indispensable for sustainability initiatives (Hasnelly & Sari, 2023). By empowering employees with environmental knowledge and aligning their efforts with organizational sustainability goals, businesses can transform traditional operational models into sustainable ones (Mousa & Othman, 2023).

In conclusion, the RBV provides a critical theoretical foundation for this study, emphasizing the strategic importance of human capital in achieving sustainability. By leveraging GHRM practices, organizations can address environmental challenges, enhance operational efficiency, and achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. This theoretical perspective not only underscores the role of employees as strategic assets but also situates GHRM as a transformative approach for embedding sustainability into the core of organizational operations.

Research Gap

Although the integration of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) practices into organizational strategies has been widely acknowledged for its potential to enhance sustainable performance, significant gaps remain in both theory and practice, particularly within the hospitality sector in China. Much of the existing research has concentrated on GHRM practices in Western contexts or across general industries, with limited investigation into the unique operational, cultural, and regulatory dynamics of China's star-rated hotel industry (Tang et al., 2018; Renwick et al., 2013). Given that the Chinese hospitality sector is shaped by distinct institutional pressures and evolving environmental regulations, localized insights are essential to better understand how GHRM can be effectively implemented.

While prior studies have highlighted the theoretical relevance of GHRM practices, empirical examinations of their impact on the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of sustainable performance in the Chinese hotel sector remain scarce (Jabbour & de Sousa Jabbour, 2016). Moreover, most existing work tends to emphasize the benefits of GHRM while giving less attention to the practical challenges and barriers that hotels encounter, including managerial resistance, financial constraints, and inadequate employee training (Hassan et al., 2023; Masri & Jaaron, 2017). This limits our understanding of how contextual factors shape the effectiveness of GHRM in practice.

Another critical gap concerns the mediating and moderating mechanisms through which GHRM translates into sustainable performance outcomes. Although the Resource-Based View (RBV) highlights the strategic importance of human capital in achieving long-term competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Hart & Dowell, 2011), few studies have examined how employees' shared perceptions of environmental policies—captured through Green Work Climate—mediate the relationship between GHRM practices and organizational sustainability outcomes. At the same time, while leadership commitment has long been recognized under the Upper Echelon Theory as a driver of strategic change (Hambrick & Mason, 1984), empirical evidence on how Top Management Commitment moderates the effectiveness of GWC in driving sustainable performance in hotels is still underdeveloped.

Furthermore, despite increasing recognition of sustainability challenges in China's hospitality sector, there is a lack of region-specific research that focuses on areas such as Shandong Province, which hosts over 400 star-rated hotels and represents a critical hub for tourism development. To date, limited empirical work has investigated how GHRM practices can be adapted to the challenges and opportunities of this region (Li et al., 2022; Wang & Chen, 2021).

This study addresses these research gaps by developing and examining a framework that positions GWC as a mediator and TMC as a moderator in the relationship between GHRM practices and sustainable performance in star-rated hotels in Shandong Province. By doing so, the study not only contributes to a more nuanced theoretical understanding of how HRM systems shape sustainability outcomes but also provides practical guidance for managers and policymakers on strengthening organizational climate and leadership commitment to enhance economic, environmental, and social performance.

Conceptual Framework of the Present Study

As illustrated in Figure 1, the framework positions six Green HRM practices—green job analysis, recruitment, selection, training, performance assessment, and rewards—as the independent variables. The dependent variable is sustainable performance, encompassing economic, environmental, and social outcomes. In explaining how these effects occur, Green Work Climate is introduced as a mediator, channeling GHRM practices into collective pro-environmental behaviors. In addition, Top Management Commitment is included as a moderator, shaping the strength of the relationship between GWC and sustainable performance. This model, thus, conceptualizes sustainable performance as the outcome of both HRM-driven practices and the reinforcing roles of organizational climate and leadership commitment.

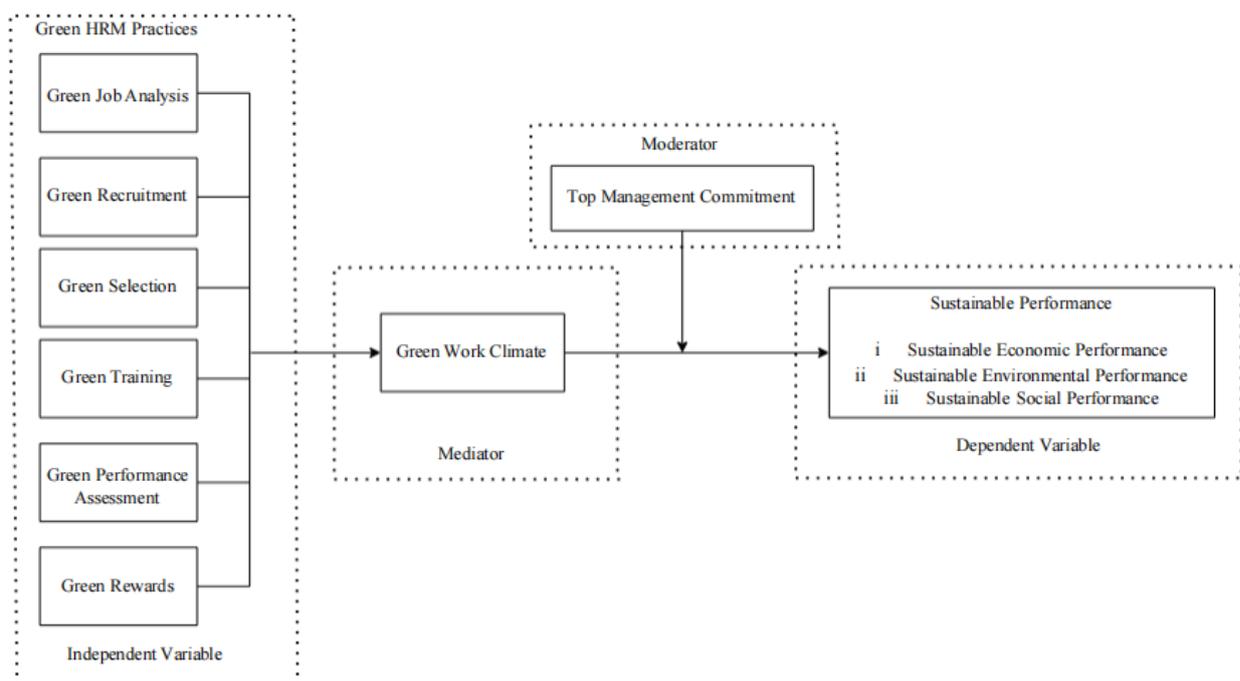


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Present Study

Conclusion

This paper has examined the role of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) practices in promoting sustainable performance within star-rated hotels in Shandong Province, China. By focusing on six key GHRM practices—green job analysis, recruitment, selection, training, performance assessment, and rewards—the study underscores their contribution to the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of sustainable performance. Grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV), the framework highlights employees' environmental competencies as strategic resources that drive efficiency, innovation, and competitive advantage.

Beyond these direct effects, the study incorporates Green Work Climate (GWC) as a mediator that translates HRM initiatives into collective eco-friendly behaviors, and Top Management Commitment (TMC) as a moderator that strengthens the link between organizational climate and sustainable outcomes. This enriched model demonstrates that sustainable performance

is not only the result of HR practices but also of supportive climates and leadership commitment.

The findings provide actionable implications for hotel managers and policymakers by emphasizing the need to integrate GHRM practices with organizational climate-building and visible leadership engagement. By doing so, hotels can enhance operational effectiveness, meet national sustainability targets, and build resilience in an increasingly competitive and environmentally conscious market. Future research should extend this framework to different regional and industry contexts to deepen understanding of how HRM, climate, and leadership jointly shape sustainable performance.

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