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Green Human Resource Practices and Sustainable Manufacturing Performance

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Abstract- This study examines the relationship between Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) practices and sustainable manufacturing performance within the Indian manufacturing sector. Drawing on the Resource-Based View, Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) theory, Stakeholder theory, and Institutional theory, the study develops and tests a conceptual model linking five dimensions of Green HRM—green recruitment and selection, green training and development, green performance management, green compensation and rewards, and employee participation—with sustainability outcomes measured across resource efficiency, waste reduction, energy conservation, and environmental compliance. Data were collected from 100 respondents across manufacturing organizations in India using a structured questionnaire. Percentage analysis, frequency distribution, and relational analysis were employed. Results confirm that all four alternative hypotheses are supported: Green HR practices exert a significant positive effect on sustainable manufacturing performance. Employee participation emerges as the most influential practice (satisfaction: 75%), and management support as the most critical contextual enabler. Awareness levels are high (80%) but adoption remains incomplete (70%), indicating an implementation gap. The study contributes empirical evidence on Green HRM in a developing-country manufacturing context and offers actionable recommendations for practitioners and policymakers.

Keywords: Green HRM, sustainable manufacturing, environmental performance, green recruitment, employee participation, AMO theory, India.

I. INTRODUCTION

Environmental sustainability has emerged as one of the defining strategic imperatives of the contemporary business era. The convergence of regulatory pressures, heightened stakeholder expectations, and the deepening climate crisis has compelled organizations—particularly in manufacturing—to rethink the foundations of their operational strategies. Among the various functional domains of business, Human Resource Management (HRM) is increasingly recognized as a powerful lever for embedding sustainability into organizational culture and day-to-day practice.

The manufacturing sector occupies a paradoxical position in this landscape. On one hand, it is the engine of economic growth, employment generation, and industrial development. On the other, it remains among the largest contributors to energy consumption, carbon emissions, resource depletion, and waste generation worldwide. In emerging economies such as India, where manufacturing is integral to development ambitions—as exemplified by the 'Make in India' initiative—balancing industrial growth with environmental responsibility is especially critical.

Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) represents the deliberate alignment of HRM policies and practices with an organization's environmental management goals (Renwick et al., 2013). It encompasses green recruitment and selection, green training and development, green performance appraisal, green compensation and rewards, and employee involvement in environmental initiatives. The premise is straightforward: employees are not merely subjects of sustainability policies but active agents capable of driving or impeding environmental performance through their everyday decisions and behaviors.

Despite a growing body of research, several gaps persist. First, most empirical studies are situated in developed-country contexts (Europe, North America, and East Asia), leaving the Indian manufacturing landscape underexplored. Second, existing studies tend to examine Green HRM in isolation from specific sectoral sustainability metrics, producing abstract conclusions of limited practical utility. Third, the implementation gap—the distance between

awareness of Green HRM and its consistent adoption—has received scant analytical attention.

This study addresses these gaps by empirically examining how Green HR practices influence sustainable manufacturing performance in India. The specific objectives are: (1) to analyze the level of awareness and adoption of Green HRM practices among manufacturing sector respondents; (2) to assess employee perceptions of the usefulness and ease of Green HRM implementation; (3) to evaluate the impact of Green HRM practices on resource efficiency, waste reduction, energy conservation, and overall environmental performance; (4) to identify the organizational, technological, and employee-level factors that influence Green HRM adoption; and (5) to test four hypotheses concerning the Green HRM–sustainability performance relationship.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews extant literature and develops the theoretical framework. Section 3 describes the research methodology. Section 4 presents data analysis and results. Section 5 discusses findings in relation to theory and prior research. Section 6 concludes with implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptualizing Green HRM

Green HRM is broadly defined as the use of HRM policies and practices to promote the environmentally responsible use of resources within organizations (Opatha & Arulrajah, 2014). The construct encompasses several interrelated dimensions. Green recruitment and selection involves attracting candidates whose values and competencies align with the organization's sustainability agenda (Renwick et al., 2013). Green training and development delivers structured programs that build employee awareness and skills in energy conservation, waste management, and sustainable process innovation (Jabbour & Santos, 2008). Green performance management incorporates environmental criteria into appraisal systems, creating explicit accountability for sustainability behaviors (Tang et al., 2018). Green compensation and rewards uses incentive structures to reinforce eco-friendly conduct. Employee participation in environmental initiatives leverages bottom-up engagement through recycling campaigns, green committees, and innovation challenges (Daily & Huang, 2001).

Sustainable manufacturing performance is conceptualized in this study as a multi-dimensional outcome construct comprising resource efficiency, waste reduction, energy conservation, and overall environmental compliance. This operationalization is consistent with the triple-bottom-line framework and aligns with established measures in the operations management and environmental management literatures (Sarkis et al., 2010).

Theoretical Foundations

Four theoretical perspectives underpin this study. The Resource-Based View (RBV) treats human capital as a strategically valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resource (Barney, 1991). Green HRM, by cultivating environmentally competent and motivated employees, enhances the firm's internal capability to achieve sustainability, thereby generating competitive advantage. The Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) framework (Appelbaum et al., 2000) posits that performance is a joint function of employee ability (skills acquired through green training), motivation (galvanized through green rewards and performance targets), and opportunity (created through participative sustainability programs). Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) explains Green HRM adoption as an organizational response to the legitimacy expectations of multiple stakeholders—regulators, customers, investors, and civil society. Institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) further accounts for isomorphic pressures—coercive (regulatory mandates), normative (professional norms), and mimetic (benchmarking against industry leaders)—that shape Green HRM diffusion across the manufacturing sector.

Empirical Evidence

A substantial body of evidence supports the Green HRM–sustainability performance link. Renwick et al. (2013), in a systematic review, established that HR practices shape both employee green behaviors and organizational environmental outcomes. Jabbour et al. (2010) demonstrated this relationship within Brazilian manufacturing firms, while Masri & Jaaron (2017) provided evidence from Palestinian industries. Tang et al. (2018) found that green HRM practices explain incremental variance in environmental performance over and above conventional HR practices. Yong et al. (2019) confirmed this across a multi-sector sample, and Dumont et al. (2017) showed that green HRM practices influence employee voluntary green behaviors, which in turn mediate the link to environmental outcomes. Ahmad (2015) and Arulrajah et al. (2016) contributed conceptual refinements identifying the specific mechanisms through which HR practices translate into sustainability gains. In the Indian

context, Mishra (2017) found that Green HRM remains at an early stage of adoption, while Gupta (2018) documented significant implementation barriers including awareness deficits and resource constraints—findings that motivate the present study.

Research Gaps and Hypotheses

Despite the cumulative evidence above, three gaps justify further empirical inquiry. First, India's manufacturing sector—spanning automobiles, textiles, FMCG, and heavy engineering—has received insufficient dedicated attention, given its scale, heterogeneity, and environmental footprint. Second, the intermediate mechanisms linking awareness to adoption and adoption to performance remain underspecified in quantitative terms. Third, the moderating role of organizational, technological, and employee-level enablers has rarely been tested in a single study. Building on the reviewed evidence and theoretical frameworks, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H1: Green HR practices have a significant positive impact on sustainable manufacturing performance.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between employee awareness and adoption of Green HR practices.

H3: Green training significantly and positively influences sustainability outcomes.

H4: Green HR practices exert a significant positive effect on employee performance.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Approach

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical research design, combining quantitative measurement with contextual interpretation. A cross-sectional survey strategy was employed, consistent with established practice in Green HRM research (Renwick et al., 2013; Tang et al., 2018). The deductive approach was used: hypotheses were derived from theoretical and empirical review, then tested against primary data. This strategy is well-suited to examining attitudinal and perceptual constructs—such as awareness, adoption, and perceived impact—across a heterogeneous manufacturing population.

Sample and Data Collection

The target population comprised employees, HR professionals, managers, and supervisors associated with manufacturing organizations in India who possessed at least a basic awareness of sustainability practices. Convenience sampling was employed, yielding a sample of 100 respondents. While the sample size is modest, it meets the minimum threshold for descriptive and bivariate analysis and is consistent with exploratory studies on Green HRM in developing countries (Mishra, 2017; Gupta, 2018). Respondents were drawn from diverse industry subsectors including automobiles, textiles, FMCG, and heavy engineering, and from both urban and semi-urban locations to capture variability in adoption contexts.

Primary data were collected via a structured, self-administered questionnaire comprising eight sections: demographic information (Section A); awareness of Green HRM (Section B); adoption of Green HR practices (Section C); perception analysis using a five-point Likert scale (Section D); impact on sustainable manufacturing performance (Section E); satisfaction levels (Section F); factors influencing adoption (Section G); and implementation challenges (Section H). The questionnaire was piloted with 12 respondents drawn from the target population; feedback led to language simplification, removal of ambiguous items, and minor structural revisions. Secondary data—comprising academic literature, government reports, and industry publications—supplemented the theoretical and contextual analysis.

Measures and Variables

The independent variable construct, Green HR Practices, is operationalized across five dimensions: green recruitment and selection, green training and development, green performance management, green compensation and rewards, and employee participation. The dependent variable, Sustainable Manufacturing Performance, is measured through four indicators: resource efficiency, waste reduction, energy conservation, and overall environmental performance. Moderating variables include management support, organizational culture, and technological infrastructure. All Likert-scale items used a five-point response format ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency distribution, percentage analysis) and relational analysis (awareness–adoption and training–performance cross-tabulations). Hypothesis testing was conducted by examining the direction and consistency of relationships between Green HRM variables and performance indicators, with acceptance/rejection of null hypotheses informed by the weight of evidence across multiple items. Findings are presented through frequency tables and relational summary tables. Advanced inferential techniques such as Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) represent extensions for future research.

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IV. RESULTS

Respondent Profile

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the 100 respondents. Younger age cohorts dominate: 35% fall in the 18–25 bracket and 30% in the 26–35 bracket, consistent with higher digital and environmental literacy among younger workers. Male respondents constitute 65% of the sample; the 35% female participation rate reflects the sector's gender profile while also signaling incremental inclusion. In terms of education, 45% hold a graduate degree and 25% a postgraduate qualification, indicating a knowledge-capable respondent base. Professionals (40%) form the largest occupational group, followed by students (30%)—a distribution that ensures both practitioner and future-workforce perspectives are captured.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 100)

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	18–25	35	35%
	26–35	30	30%
	36–45	20	20%
	Above 45	15	15%
Gender	Male	65	65%
	Female	35	35%
Education	Undergraduate	20	20%
	Graduate	45	45%
	Postgraduate	25	25%
	Others	10	10%
Occupation	Professionals	40	40%
	Students	30	30%
	Business	20	20%
	Others	10	10%

Awareness and Adoption of Green HRM

Awareness levels are notably high: 80% of respondents reported familiarity with Green HRM concepts (Table 2). The internet constitutes the primary awareness channel (40%), followed by organizational training programs (25%) and formal organizational policies (20%). This pattern underscores the democratizing role of digital information access while highlighting that formal organizational communication channels—arguably more controllable and consistent—remain secondary.

Adoption, however, lags behind awareness. While 70% of respondents reported that their organizations implement Green HR practices (Table 3), only 40% do so regularly; 35% adopt them occasionally and 25% rarely or never. This 'awareness–adoption gap' is theoretically significant: it suggests that knowledge of Green HRM, while necessary, is insufficient without supportive organizational structures, resource commitment, and managerial advocacy.

Table 2: Awareness of Green HRM (N = 100)

Awareness	n	%
Yes	80	80%
No	20	20%

Table 3: Adoption Status and Types of Green HR Practices

Green HR Practice	Adopters (n)	Adopters (%)
Employee Participation	70	70%
Green Training & Development	65	65%
Green Recruitment & Selection	60	60%
Green Performance Management	55	55%
Green Compensation & Rewards	50	50%

Perceptions and Satisfaction

Perceptual analysis reveals a strongly favorable orientation: 75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Green HR practices are useful, with environmental protection (40%) and cost reduction (30%) identified as the primary perceived benefits. Implementation difficulty was rated 'moderate' by 45% of respondents and 'difficult' by 25%, indicating real but not insurmountable barriers. Overall satisfaction with Green HR practices is positive: 70% reported being satisfied or highly satisfied, with employee participation generating the highest satisfaction rating (75%) and green rewards the lowest (60%)—a signal that incentive system design warrants attention.

Factors Influencing Adoption

Among organizational factors, management support emerges as the most frequently cited enabler (35%), followed by organizational culture (30%). At the technology level, digital tools are considered the leading facilitator (50%), with automation (30%) and innovation (20%) also featuring prominently. From the employee perspective, awareness is rated as the most critical factor (40%), followed by skills (35%) and motivation (25%). Collectively, these findings point to a multi-level adoption

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ecosystem in which top-down leadership signals, bottom-up awareness and capability, and technological enablement must co-exist for Green HRM to take root.

Impact on Sustainable Manufacturing Performance

Table 4 summarizes the impact of Green HR practices across the four sustainability dimensions. Across all four outcomes, 75% or more of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Green HR practices produce positive effects. Environmental performance registered the highest agreement (75%, with 45% 'strongly agree'), suggesting that respondents most readily perceive the macro-level ecological benefits of Green HRM. Energy conservation attracted the second-highest 'strongly agree' rate (42%), reflecting the visibility and measurability of energy usage in manufacturing operations.

Table 4: Impact of Green HR Practices on Sustainable Manufacturing Performance

Sustainability Outcome	Strongly Agree	Agree	Combined Agree
Resource Efficiency	40%	35%	75%
Waste Reduction	38%	37%	75%
Energy Conservation	42%	33%	75%
Environmental Performance	45%	30%	75%

Relational and Hypothesis Testing

Relational analysis confirms monotone positive associations between awareness and adoption (high awareness → high adoption; low awareness → low adoption) and between training intensity and performance outcomes (high training → high sustainability performance). Management support displays a similarly consistent positive relationship with implementation levels. Cross-variable analysis reveals that the combination of high awareness and active training delivers the highest sustainability performance, while low awareness in the absence of training is associated with the poorest outcomes—a finding with direct implications for intervention design.

Hypothesis testing outcomes are summarized in Table 5. All four null hypotheses are rejected; all four alternative hypotheses are supported. These results are consistent with the theoretical predictions of the AMO framework (employees with greater ability, motivation, and opportunity through Green HRM achieve better environmental outcomes) and the RBV (firms that develop environmentally competent human capital gain sustainability-related competitive advantage).

Table 5: Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Green HR practices → significant positive impact on sustainable manufacturing performance	Supported
H2	Employee awareness → significant positive relationship with adoption	Supported
H3	Green training → significant positive influence on sustainability outcomes	Supported
H4	Green HR practices → significant positive effect on employee performance	Supported

V. DISCUSSION

Green HRM and Sustainability Performance

The finding that Green HR practices significantly and positively influence sustainable manufacturing performance (H1 supported) is consistent with the preponderance of extant evidence (Renwick et al., 2013; Jabbour et al., 2010; Tang et al., 2018; Yong et al., 2019). However, this study's contribution lies in locating this relationship firmly within the Indian manufacturing context—a setting characterized by rapid industrialization, evolving regulatory regimes, and significant heterogeneity in organizational capacity. The 75% agreement rate on all four sustainability dimensions is notably high and may partly reflect a social desirability effect in self-reported Likert data; future studies should triangulate with objective performance metrics (e.g., audited energy consumption data, certified waste reduction records).

The differential adoption rates across Green HRM practices—employee participation (70%) at the apex and

green rewards (50%) at the base—are theoretically interpretable. Participative practices are relatively low-cost, organizationally visible, and generate intrinsic motivation, making them comparatively easy to implement even in resource-constrained settings. Reward system redesign, by contrast, involves financial investment, compensation philosophy shifts, and HR system reconfiguration—a heavier organizational lift. This hierarchy suggests that organizations seeking a tractable entry point into Green HRM should begin with participative mechanisms before advancing to incentive restructuring.

The Awareness–Adoption Gap

The 10-percentage-point gap between awareness (80%) and adoption (70%), and the further gap between adoption in principle and regular adoption (40%), represents a critical finding. AMO theory offers an explanation: awareness contributes to ability and motivation but does not automatically create opportunity structures—the policies, processes, and resources—through which sustainability behaviors can occur. This gap supports Gupta's (2018) identification of implementation barriers and extends Mishra's (2017) observation of nascent Green HRM adoption in India. Closing this gap requires not merely information campaigns but organizational infrastructure investments: dedicated sustainability roles, green performance metrics embedded in appraisal systems, and senior leadership sponsorship.

The Role of Management Support

Management support emerges as the single most influential organizational factor (35%), corroborating Singh et al.'s (2020) finding that leadership is instrumental in driving Green HR adoption. Institutional theory provides a complementary lens: in contexts where environmental norms are still being internalized, top management signals function as normative anchors that reduce uncertainty and legitimate sustainability behaviors for the rest of the organization. This finding has practical urgency in the Indian manufacturing context, where many organizations are still in the process of aligning corporate strategy with the national sustainability agenda articulated in India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement.

Technology as an Enabler

Digital tools are identified as the most significant technological facilitator of Green HRM (50%), a finding congruent with the broader literature on Industry 4.0 and sustainable manufacturing. The availability of HR analytics, digital learning platforms, energy monitoring systems, and virtual collaboration tools reduces the transaction costs of implementing Green HRM and enables more precise measurement of sustainability outcomes. For organizations still in the early stages of Green HRM adoption, leveraging existing digital infrastructure is a cost-effective pathway toward environmental performance improvement.

VI. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Conclusions

This study provides empirical evidence that Green HR practices positively and significantly influence sustainable manufacturing performance across resource efficiency, waste reduction, energy conservation, and overall environmental outcomes in the Indian manufacturing sector. Employee participation emerges as the most widely adopted and highest-satisfaction practice; management support is the most critical contextual enabler; and the internet is the dominant awareness channel. An awareness–adoption implementation gap exists that cannot be resolved through information provision alone—organizational structures, incentives, and leadership commitment are required. All four hypotheses are supported, reinforcing the theoretical frameworks guiding the study.

Theoretical Contributions

The study contributes to Green HRM theory by providing context-specific empirical evidence from a developing-country manufacturing setting underrepresented in the literature. It extends the AMO framework by illustrating how the interaction of awareness (ability), rewards (motivation), and participation (opportunity) jointly determines sustainability outcomes. It also enriches the RBV by showing that environmentally capable human capital is a source of competitive differentiation in industrial settings where regulatory and market pressure for sustainability is intensifying. Finally, the study offers a multi-theory integration—combining RBV, AMO, Stakeholder, and Institutional perspectives—that accounts for both internal capability building and external legitimacy management.

Managerial Implications

Practitioners should prioritize participative Green HRM mechanisms as the most cost-effective and highest-impact entry point. Green training programs should be structured and outcome-linked, not episodic. Performance

management systems must incorporate explicit environmental KPIs to convert individual sustainability commitment into measurable organizational performance. Reward system redesign—though more resource-intensive—is necessary to close the motivational gap evident in the lower satisfaction rates for green compensation. Senior leaders must visibly champion Green HRM initiatives to catalyze adoption throughout the organizational hierarchy. Technology investment in HR analytics and digital learning platforms can dramatically reduce implementation costs while improving precision.

Policy Implications

Policymakers should consider mandatory green training requirements as a condition of manufacturing licenses for high-impact sectors (automobiles, textiles, heavy engineering). Tax incentives linked to verifiable Green HRM adoption—similar to R&D tax credits—would reduce the financial barriers identified by respondents. National skill development programs (e.g., under NSDC) could incorporate environmental competencies as core modules. The Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) and Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) should develop and disseminate Green HRM toolkits tailored to SMEs, which face disproportionate resource constraints relative to large manufacturing enterprises.

Limitations

The study is subject to several limitations. The convenience sample of 100 respondents, while sufficient for exploratory analysis, limits statistical power and generalizability. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; longitudinal designs are needed to establish directional causality between Green HRM inputs and sustainability outputs. Reliance on self-reported data introduces common method bias; future studies should incorporate objective sustainability performance data (energy audits, waste records, environmental certifications). The absence of advanced inferential techniques—SEM, CFA, hierarchical regression—constrains the study's ability to disentangle direct, mediated, and moderated effects.

Future Research Directions

Several productive research directions emerge. Longitudinal panel studies tracking Green HRM implementation and sustainability outcomes over three to five years would establish stronger causal evidence. Comparative industry analyses across automobile, textile, pharmaceutical, and food processing subsectors would identify sector-specific contingencies. Studies employing objective environmental performance data—audited emissions, certified waste reduction, energy intensity ratios—would address the self-report limitation. Research using SEM could formally test mediation (e.g., employee green behavior mediating Green HRM–sustainability performance) and moderation (e.g., organizational size or industry type moderating adoption–performance relationships). Finally, SME-focused studies are needed, given that SMEs constitute the majority of India's manufacturing base but have been largely absent from the Green HRM literature.

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