

Green Human Resource Management and Employee Green Behavior in Higher Education: A Theory-Driven TPB Framework with Trust and Resistance to Change

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Abstract

Higher education institutions are increasingly expected to embed sustainability into their operations, cultures and human resource systems. Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) provides a strategic mechanism for doing so because recruitment, training, performance management, rewards and employee involvement can shape the conditions under which employees engage in environmentally responsible behavior. Yet the relationship between GHRM and Employee Green Behavior (EGB) is not adequately explained by treating HR practices as direct behavioral predictors. This paper develops a theory-driven framework based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), extended through Resistance to Change and Perceived Organizational Trust. A structured integrative literature review was conducted using the thesis framework and contemporary research on GHRM, EGB and higher education sustainability. The synthesis indicates that GHRM operates through three psychological mechanisms: attitudes toward environmental behavior, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. Attitudes capture employees' evaluations of green practices; subjective norms capture social expectations; and perceived behavioral control captures capability, resources and autonomy. Resistance to change is conceptualized as a constraining condition that can weaken the translation of positive psychological beliefs into behavior, whereas organizational trust is conceptualized as an enabling condition that strengthens receptivity to institutional sustainability initiatives. The paper further argues that higher education creates a distinctive sustainability spillover because faculty and staff can influence students, institutional culture and community practices. The resulting framework provides theoretical propositions for future empirical research while deliberately avoiding presentation of new primary-data results.

Keywords: Green Human Resource Management; Employee Green Behavior; higher education; Theory of Planned Behavior; organizational trust; resistance to change; sustainability; green HRM

1. Introduction

Environmental sustainability has moved from being primarily an environmental-management concern to becoming an organizational and human-resource issue. Organizations can establish environmental policies and technologies, but their day-to-day environmental performance depends substantially on what employees actually do. Energy conservation, paper reduction, recycling, sustainable procurement, responsible transportation and participation in environmental initiatives are all influenced by employee behavior.

Green Human Resource Management provides a mechanism for connecting organizational sustainability objectives with employee management. GHRM broadly involves incorporating environmental considerations into HR functions such as recruitment, training, performance management, rewards and employee participation (Renwick et al., 2013; Tang et al., 2018). The central proposition is that HR systems can shape employees' knowledge, motivation, social expectations and opportunities to behave sustainably.

Higher education is an especially important setting for this question. Universities and colleges consume substantial physical and digital resources, employ large academic and administrative workforces and influence the values of students and communities. A 2024 systematic literature review of GHRM in higher education concluded that empirical research in HEIs remains comparatively limited even though universities are uniquely positioned to lead sustainability initiatives. Contemporary studies in university settings in Bangladesh, Malaysia and Pakistan further demonstrate growing interest in GHRM and employee green behavior.

The thesis underlying this paper focuses on selected educational institutions in Haryana, India. It uses TPB as its central theoretical foundation and positions Attitude, Subjective Norms and Perceived Behavioral Control as mediating mechanisms between GHRM and EGB. The thesis also identifies Resistance to Change and Perceived Organizational Trust as contextual variables that influence the strength of the relationships.

The theoretical problem is therefore not simply whether GHRM is associated with EGB. The more meaningful question is how organizational HR practices are interpreted by employees and under what organizational conditions those interpretations translate into behavior. This paper develops a framework to answer that question.

The paper addresses four research questions: how TPB explains the GHRM–EGB relationship; how its three psychological constructs function as mechanisms; how resistance to change and organizational trust shape the process; and how the framework can guide future research in higher education.

2. Methodology

The study uses a structured integrative literature review. The method was selected because the objective is theoretical development rather than estimation of a new empirical model. The synthesis combines the thesis framework with established GHRM, EGB, TPB, organizational change and organizational trust literature.

The review proceeded through conceptual mapping. First, GHRM practices were identified as organizational antecedents. Second, the psychological mechanisms proposed by TPB were mapped onto those practices. Third, resistance to change and organizational trust were examined as contextual conditions that can alter the strength of the relationships. Fourth, the higher education context was incorporated to account for the institutional and societal spillover potential of faculty and staff behavior. Recent literature was used to situate the framework within contemporary scholarship. Studies published in 2023 and 2024 have examined GHRM and green behavior in universities in India, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Pakistan, while broader research has examined psychological climate, green commitment, environmental knowledge and perceived behavioral control. These studies are used as theoretical context rather than as a basis for claiming new empirical findings.

No original respondents, survey data or statistical coefficients are introduced in this article. Where the thesis contains empirical findings, they are treated as evidence motivating theoretical interpretation

rather than presented as new results.

Table 1. Theoretical mapping of GHRM practices to TPB mechanisms

GHRM practice	Primary psychological mechanism	Illustrative pathway
Green recruitment	Environmental signalling	GHRM → positive attitude
Green training	Capability and knowledge	GHRM → PBC
Green performance management	Social expectations	GHRM → subjective norms
Green rewards	Motivation and reinforcement	GHRM → attitude/intention
Employee involvement	Social participation	GHRM → subjective norms
Green infrastructure	Removal of barriers	GHRM → PBC

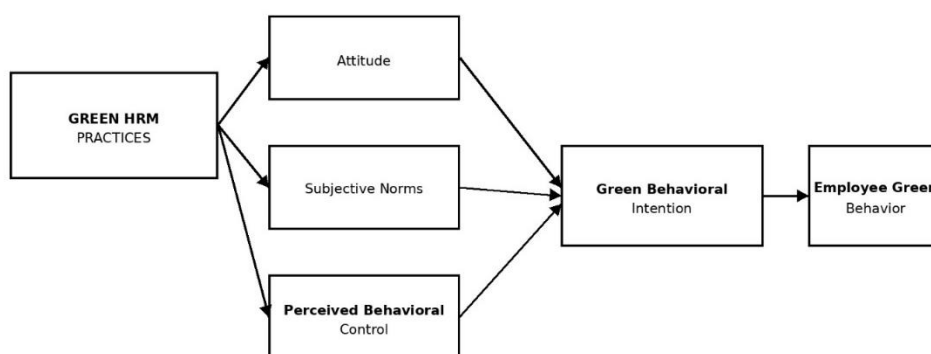
3. Results

3.1 GHRM as an organizational antecedent of behavior

The first result of the synthesis is that GHRM should be treated as an organizational antecedent rather than as green behavior itself. A university can have a sustainability policy, but the policy only becomes environmentally meaningful when employees understand it, accept it and have opportunities to enact it.

Green recruitment communicates environmental values before and at the point of entry. Green training builds knowledge and capability. Green performance management communicates what the organization expects. Green rewards reinforce desired behavior, while employee involvement creates opportunities for participation. These practices therefore influence different dimensions of the behavioral process rather than producing one uniform effect.

This interpretation is consistent with recent research showing that GHRM can influence EGB through mechanisms such as environmental knowledge, green self-efficacy, perceived behavioral control, attitude and green commitment. A 2024 study in a Bangladeshi university, for example, examined environmental knowledge management and green self-efficacy as sequential mechanisms between GHRM and EGB. Another 2024 study of Malaysian public university lecturers examined PBC and attitude as mechanisms in the GHRM–EGB relationship.



GHRM influences behavior through attitudinal, normative and control mechanisms.

Figure 1. GHRM–TPB Framework for Employee Green Behavior

3.2 Green recruitment and environmental signalling

Green recruitment can be understood as an early environmental signal. When job advertisements, employer branding and selection criteria communicate that sustainability is an institutional value, prospective and existing employees receive information about what the organization considers important.

The theoretical significance of recruitment is therefore partly normative. Employees may form more favorable attitudes toward environmental behavior when sustainability is consistently represented as part of institutional identity. In higher education, this can include recruitment messages concerning campus sustainability, environmental research, responsible resource use and community engagement. However, green recruitment is unlikely to be sufficient by itself. If the environmental values communicated during recruitment are not supported by training, performance systems and institutional resources, employees may perceive a gap between organizational rhetoric and actual practice. Recruitment should therefore be considered the beginning of a broader GHRM system.

3.3 Green training and perceived behavioral control

Green training has a direct theoretical connection with perceived behavioral control. Employees cannot reliably perform environmentally responsible behaviors when they do not know what to do or lack confidence in their ability to do it. Training can provide knowledge, procedural guidance and opportunities for practice.

In higher education, green training may involve energy conservation, paper reduction, sustainable procurement, waste segregation, responsible digital practices and environmental awareness. Training can also increase employees' confidence that their individual actions are meaningful.

The thesis emphasizes that employees are more likely to behave sustainably when they possess capability and autonomy. This logic is consistent with TPB because PBC captures perceived resources and control. Green training can therefore operate not simply as a knowledge intervention but as a behavioral-enabling mechanism.

3.4 Green performance management and subjective norms

Performance management communicates organizational priorities. When environmental criteria are included in appraisal and feedback, employees receive a signal that sustainability is part of expected performance rather than an optional activity.

This mechanism is closely connected to subjective norms. Faculty members and administrators observe what their institution recognizes and what supervisors discuss. If environmental performance is consistently acknowledged, green behavior can become socially expected.

However, performance management in universities requires contextual sensitivity. Academic work is multidimensional, and sustainability cannot be reduced to a narrow numerical indicator. Appropriate measures may include participation in sustainability programmes, responsible resource use, environmental teaching and research contributions, or engagement with campus sustainability initiatives.

3.5 Green rewards and motivational reinforcement

Green rewards provide reinforcement for environmentally responsible behavior. Recognition can take the form of awards, certificates, professional development opportunities, public acknowledgment or other incentives. The theoretical value of rewards lies in making desired behavior visible and worthwhile.

Rewards can also strengthen social norms because employees observe which behaviors are publicly recognized. Nevertheless, excessive reliance on external rewards may produce compliance without internalization. A robust GHRM system should therefore combine rewards with environmental education, employee involvement and opportunities for autonomous action.

3.6 Employee involvement and social norms

Employee involvement gives individuals a role in designing and implementing sustainability initiatives. In universities, faculty and staff may participate in green committees, campus audits, sustainability campaigns, recycling initiatives and environmental awareness programmes.

Involvement is theoretically important because it converts employees from passive recipients of environmental policy into active participants. Participation creates opportunities for social learning and visibility, strengthening subjective norms. When employees observe colleagues engaging in green activities, sustainability becomes a social practice rather than an abstract policy.

3.7 TPB as the central behavioral mechanism

TPB provides the core explanatory mechanism for the framework. According to Ajzen (1991), behavior is shaped by behavioral intention, while intention is influenced by attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. In the GHRM context, these constructs explain how employees interpret institutional sustainability practices.

Attitude represents the employee's evaluation of green behavior. Subjective norms represent perceived expectations from supervisors, colleagues and other relevant actors. PBC represents the perceived capacity and opportunity to perform green behavior. The three constructs therefore correspond to motivation, social influence and capability.

The thesis positions these constructs as mediators between GHRM and EGB. This theoretical positioning is supported by recent empirical work. Fawehinmi et al. (2024), for example, found that PBC and attitude were important mechanisms linking GHRM with employee green behavior among lecturers in Malaysian public universities. The importance of PBC is particularly relevant because it recognizes that employees may support sustainability but still be unable to act when resources or autonomy are inadequate.

3.8 Attitude toward green behavior

Attitude captures whether employees view green behavior as beneficial, worthwhile and desirable. GHRM can shape attitudes by consistently connecting environmental responsibility with institutional values and employee roles.

A positive attitude is more likely when employees perceive that green practices produce meaningful benefits rather than simply increase workload. In universities, communication should therefore connect sustainability to institutional mission, resource efficiency, student learning and social responsibility.

3.9 Subjective norms

Subjective norms capture the social environment in which behavior occurs. Faculty members may be influenced by senior academics, department heads, colleagues, student expectations and institutional leadership. Green champions and visible sustainability initiatives can make environmental behavior more socially salient.

The theoretical importance of norms is that employees do not interpret GHRM practices individually. They observe whether others support the practices and whether environmental behavior is rewarded or criticized. Norms can therefore explain why the same formal GHRM policy produces different

behavioral outcomes across departments.

3.10 Perceived behavioral control

PBC is particularly important in the higher education setting because environmental behavior frequently depends on infrastructure. Employees may want to reduce paper but still be required to submit physical documentation. They may support recycling but lack appropriate collection facilities. They may prefer sustainable commuting but have limited alternatives.

These examples demonstrate why behavioral intention alone cannot guarantee action. Institutions must provide the resources and autonomy required to make green behavior feasible. Consequently, PBC links HR policy with operational design.

3.11 Mediation logic

The theoretical synthesis supports a mediation interpretation: GHRM influences EGB through the psychological processes represented by TPB. Green recruitment and communication can influence attitudes; performance systems and social participation can influence norms; and training and infrastructure can influence PBC.

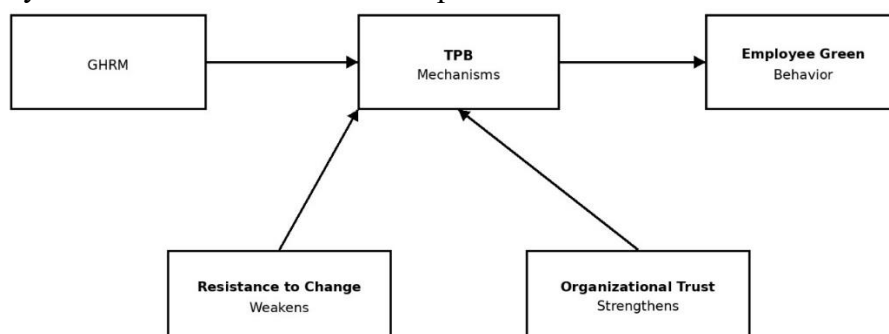
This mediation logic is more theoretically informative than a simple direct relationship because it explains why the same GHRM intervention can have different effects across employees. An employee with a positive attitude, strong social support and high perceived control is more likely to translate organizational policy into behavior than an employee who lacks those conditions.

3.12 Resistance to change as a constraining mechanism

Resistance to change represents an important contextual condition because GHRM frequently requires employees to alter established routines. Resistance can arise from uncertainty, perceived loss of autonomy, increased monitoring, additional workload or doubts about the value of the change (Oreg, 2003).

In the present framework, resistance is expected to weaken the translation of psychological readiness into actual behavior. An employee may have a favorable attitude toward sustainability but resist changes to established work routines. Similarly, an employee may possess the resources to behave sustainably but avoid new practices because they are perceived as unnecessary or imposed.

The thesis identifies resistance to change as a negative moderator within the GHRM–EGB framework. This suggests that successful GHRM implementation requires change-management processes rather than policy announcements alone. Participation, transparency, phased implementation and feedback can reduce uncertainty and create a sense of ownership.



Organizational conditions determine whether psychological mechanisms translate into behavior.

Figure 2. Contextual Conditions in the GHRM–EGB Relationship

3.13 Organizational trust as an enabling mechanism

Organizational trust provides a contrasting contextual mechanism. Trust refers broadly to employees' willingness to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations about organizational actors (Mayer et al., 1995). In sustainability initiatives, trust matters because employees must believe that organizational claims are credible and that participation will not be used unfairly.

When employees trust management, sustainability communication may be interpreted as authentic rather than symbolic. Trust can therefore strengthen receptivity to GHRM and reinforce subjective norms. It may also strengthen PBC because employees who trust management may be more willing to use organizational resources and seek support.

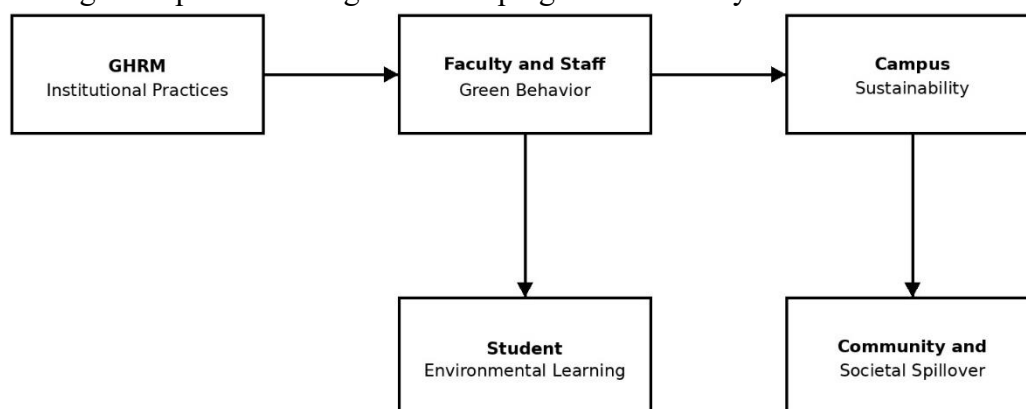
The thesis identifies perceived organizational trust as an enabling factor that strengthens green transformation. This conceptualization is also consistent with the broader organizational literature showing that trust can facilitate cooperation and alignment between employees and institutions (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001).

3.14 Higher education and sustainability spillovers

Higher education provides a distinctive setting because employee green behavior can extend beyond immediate organizational outcomes. Faculty members interact continuously with students and can transmit sustainability norms through teaching, research, supervision and informal modeling.

This creates a potential spillover chain: institutional GHRM can influence faculty behavior; faculty behavior can shape student environmental awareness; and student learning can influence wider social practices. The effect is theoretical rather than automatic, but it provides a distinctive reason for studying GHRM in universities.

Recent university-focused studies support the relevance of this context. Research in Bangladesh found that GHRM was associated with EGB and that environmental knowledge management and green self-efficacy formed sequential mechanisms. Research in Pakistan similarly examined GHRM and green behavior through green perceived organizational support. These studies indicate that higher education is becoming an important setting for developing GHRM theory.



Higher education can transmit sustainability practices beyond the immediate workplace.

Figure 3. Sustainability Spillover Logic in Higher Education

4. Discussion

The integrated framework suggests that GHRM is best understood as a behavioral architecture rather than a collection of independent HR practices. Recruitment, training, appraisal, rewards and participation influence different psychological mechanisms, and those mechanisms operate within an organizational context.

TPB provides the central behavioral logic, but its explanatory capacity is strengthened when organizational conditions are explicitly incorporated. Resistance to change explains why positive beliefs may not translate into action, while trust explains why organizational messages and resources may be more readily accepted in some settings than others.

This perspective also explains why GHRM implementation should be evaluated at multiple levels. At the individual level, employees need favorable attitudes and sufficient control. At the social level, green behavior must become visible and valued. At the organizational level, policies must be supported by infrastructure, leadership and credible governance.

The framework therefore moves beyond a simplistic assumption that green HR policies automatically create green employees. It instead emphasizes interpretation, capability and institutional context. This is particularly relevant in higher education, where employees have substantial professional autonomy and sustainability initiatives must coexist with academic responsibilities.

Table 2. Core constructs and theoretical roles

Variable	Theoretical role	Mechanism	Expected direction
GHRM	Organizational antecedent	Shapes psychological and social conditions	Positive
Attitude	TPB mediator	Evaluates desirability of green behavior	Positive
Subjective norms	TPB mediator	Perceived social expectation	Positive
PBC	TPB mediator	Perceived capability and opportunity	Positive
Resistance to change	Contextual constraint	Reduces willingness to alter routines	Negative
Organizational trust	Contextual enabler	Increases receptivity and cooperation	Positive
Employee Green Behavior	Outcome	Actual environmentally responsible conduct	—

4.1 Theoretical propositions

P1. GHRM practices positively influence employees' attitudes toward environmentally responsible behavior.

P2. GHRM practices positively influence subjective norms concerning green behavior.

P3. GHRM practices positively influence employees' perceived behavioral control.

P4. Positive attitudes toward green behavior positively influence green behavioral intention.

- P5. Subjective norms positively influence green behavioral intention.
- P6. Perceived behavioral control positively influences green behavioral intention and Employee Green Behavior.
- P7. Attitude mediates the relationship between GHRM and Employee Green Behavior.
- P8. Subjective norms mediate the relationship between GHRM and Employee Green Behavior.
- P9. Perceived behavioral control mediates the relationship between GHRM and Employee Green Behavior.
- P10. Resistance to change weakens the relationship between TPB mechanisms and Employee Green Behavior.
- P11. Organizational trust strengthens the relationship between subjective norms and Employee Green Behavior.
- P12. Organizational trust strengthens the relationship between perceived behavioral control and Employee Green Behavior.
- P13. The effectiveness of GHRM is greater when environmental HR practices are supported by leadership, resources and employee participation.

4.2 Theoretical contribution

The paper contributes to GHRM theory in four ways. First, it positions TPB as a mechanism-oriented framework connecting organizational HR practices with employee behavior. Second, it distinguishes the three psychological pathways rather than treating employee green behavior as a single undifferentiated response. Third, it incorporates resistance to change and organizational trust as contextual conditions. Fourth, it places the model within higher education, where sustainability has potential educational and societal spillovers.

The framework is consistent with recent research that has moved beyond direct GHRM–EGB relationships toward psychological mechanisms. Contemporary studies have examined perceived behavioral control, attitude, environmental knowledge, green self-efficacy, green commitment and green psychological climate. The present model adds value by organizing these developments around a coherent TPB structure and by explicitly accounting for organizational resistance and trust.

4.3 Practical implications

Higher education institutions should implement GHRM as an integrated system. Green recruitment should be supported by green training; training should be supported by infrastructure; performance systems should reinforce desired behaviors; and employee involvement should provide opportunities for participation.

Institutions should also distinguish between encouraging behavior and enabling behavior. An employee cannot reliably meet an environmental expectation without the necessary resources. Therefore, recycling facilities, digital documentation systems, sustainable procurement procedures and accessible training are part of HRM effectiveness rather than merely operational details.

Trust and change management should receive equal attention. Leaders should communicate why sustainability initiatives are being introduced, how employees will be affected and how feedback will be incorporated. Visible leadership commitment can make green behavior socially legitimate and reduce perceptions of symbolic compliance.

5. Future Research Agenda

Future research should empirically test the propositions through longitudinal and multilevel designs.

Longitudinal research could determine whether GHRM produces sustained behavioral change or short-term compliance. Multilevel research could examine whether institutional sustainability climate influences individual green behavior.

Comparative research should examine public and private universities, different regions of India and different employee groups. Faculty, administrative staff and support staff may experience GHRM differently because their work structures and opportunities for environmental action vary.

Future studies could extend the framework with green leadership, green psychological climate, environmental knowledge, green self-efficacy and perceived organizational support. These constructs may explain additional mechanisms through which GHRM becomes embedded in daily work.

Research should also examine the relationship between faculty green behavior and student outcomes. Such studies would help establish whether the sustainability effects of GHRM extend beyond employees and contribute to the educational mission of higher education institutions.

6. Conclusion

This paper developed a theory-driven framework explaining how Green Human Resource Management can influence Employee Green Behavior in higher education. The central argument is that GHRM does not operate through a simple direct policy-to-behavior pathway. Instead, employees interpret green HR practices through attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control.

Resistance to change and organizational trust provide important contextual conditions. Resistance can weaken the translation of positive psychological beliefs into behavior, while trust can strengthen receptivity, cooperation and alignment with institutional sustainability goals. These variables therefore extend TPB into a more organizationally grounded framework.

The higher education context adds a further dimension because faculty and staff can potentially transmit sustainability values to students and communities. GHRM can therefore contribute not only to operational environmental performance but also to the educational and cultural mission of universities. The proposed framework is intentionally theoretical and provides propositions for future empirical validation. Its principal contribution is to connect GHRM practices, TPB mechanisms and organizational context within a single model that can guide future research on sustainable employee behavior in higher education.

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