

GREEN HRM AND ESG PERFORMANCE: THE MODERATING ROLE OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

MANAJEMEN SUMBER DAYA MANUSIA HIJAU (GREEN HRM) DAN KINERJA ESG: PERAN MODERASI KEPEMIMPINAN TRANSFORMASIONAL

Leonardus Teguh¹, Dendin Jaenudin²

Universitas Dumai¹, Universitas Horizon Indonesia²

*teguh.leonard@gmail.com¹, dendin.jaenudin.krw@horizon.ac.id²

*Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

Sustainability issues and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) performance are increasingly becoming strategic priorities for global companies, yet a significant gap remains between formal Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) policies and their implementation at the employee level. Data shows that most companies are not yet ready for ESG assessments, while only a small percentage of employees believe their organizations are making sufficient contributions to climate issues. This study aims to explore the role of transformational leadership in bridging this gap to strengthen the impact of Green HRM on ESG performance. Using a narrative review approach, relevant literature from Scopus and Web of Science was critically analyzed. The study revealed that transformational leadership, through inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individual attention, can encourage employee green behavior, reduce resistance, and foster a sustainability-oriented culture. Thus, transformational leadership plays an essential linking mechanism in ensuring the effectiveness of Green HRM policies in improving ESG performance.

Keywords: Green HRM, Transformational Leadership, ESG Performance, Sustainability, Employee Green Behavior

ABSTRAK

Isu keberlanjutan dan kinerja Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) semakin menjadi prioritas strategis bagi perusahaan global, namun masih terdapat kesenjangan signifikan antara kebijakan formal Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) dan implementasinya di tingkat karyawan. Data menunjukkan sebagian besar perusahaan belum siap menghadapi penilaian ESG, sementara hanya sebagian kecil karyawan yang percaya bahwa organisasinya cukup berkontribusi pada isu iklim. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi peran kepemimpinan transformasional dalam menjembatani kesenjangan tersebut guna memperkuat dampak Green HRM terhadap kinerja ESG. Menggunakan pendekatan narrative review, literatur relevan dari Scopus, Web of Science dianalisis secara kritis. Hasil kajian mengungkap bahwa kepemimpinan transformasional, melalui inspirasi, stimulasi intelektual, dan perhatian individual, mampu mendorong perilaku hijau karyawan, mengurangi resistensi, serta menumbuhkan budaya berorientasi keberlanjutan. Dengan demikian, kepemimpinan transformasional berperan sebagai mekanisme penghubung esensial dalam memastikan efektivitas kebijakan Green HRM terhadap peningkatan kinerja ESG.

Kata Kunci: Green HRM, Kepemimpinan Transformasional, Kinerja ESG, Keberlanjutan, Perilaku Hijau Karyawan

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainability issues are increasingly becoming a major concern in global business practices. Companies face growing demands from stakeholders—investors, regulators, customers, and employees—to integrate sustainability principles. Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) into their business strategies. A recent survey from the Morgan Stanley Institute for Sustainable Investing (2025) shows that 88% of global companies consider

sustainability a key factor in creating long-term value.This underscores the urgency of sustainability as a strategic element in modern business competition.

In practice, organizations developGreen Human Resource Management (Green HRM)as a strategy to improve sustainability through human resource management. Green HRM encompasses sustainability-oriented recruitment practices, training, performance appraisals, and reward systems, with the aim of encouraging employees to contribute to achieving ESG targets.However, significant challenges remain. While many companies have adopted formal sustainability policies, actual implementation at the organizational and employee levels often remains inconsistent. According to a KPMG report (2023),75% of global companies feel unprepared to meet ESG assessments, while only around 25% have ESG systems and policies that are considered adequate.

Similar findings were shown by the Deloitte survey (2025), which found that only38% of employees believe their company is doing enough on climate change and sustainability.This data shows a clear gap between formal Green HRM policies and their actual implementation at the employee level.To clarify this gap, the following table presents a comparison between the level of adoption of formal ESG policies and the perceived effectiveness of their implementation:

Table 1
ESG Policy Adoption vs. Actual Implementation

Aspect	Statistical Data	Source
Companies that see sustainability as a long-term value driver	88%	Morgan Stanley (2025)
Global companies disclosing ESG information in annual reports	95%	IFAC & AICPA (2021)
Companies that feel unprepared for ESG assessments	75%	KPMG (2023)
Employees who believe their company is contributing enough to climate & sustainability issues	38%	Deloitte (2025)

Source: From Several Reference Sources

Table 1 shows that while adoption of ESG and sustainability policies has been high—for example, 95% of large companies have reported ESG in their annual reports—actual implementation remains suboptimal. This is evident in the low level of company preparedness for ESG assessments (only 25% are ready) and critical employee perceptions, with the majority feeling their companies have not made sufficient contributions to sustainability issues. This fact highlights the gap that needs to be bridged between formal policies and actual implementation on the ground.

In this context,transformational leadership is seen as an important factor that can bridge the gap. Transformational leaders, with characteristics such as inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation, can motivate employees to become more involved in sustainability practices, reduce resistance, and build a green culture aligned with Green HRM. Thus, the role of transformational leadership is key to ensuring that Green HRM policies are truly implemented to drive improved ESG performance.

A number of previous studies have discussed the relationship between practiceGreen Human Resource Management (Green HRM) with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) performance. Various studies have shown that implementing Green HRM can contribute to achieving sustainability goals, for example through green recruitment, environmentally-based training, or reward systems that emphasize environmentally friendly behavior. However, these findings tend to look at the relationship between Green HRM and ESG directly, without considering other factors that may influence the strength of that relationship.

A significant gap emerges in practice: although formal Green HRM policies have been widely adopted, implementation on the ground is often inconsistent. Data from Deloitte (2025) shows that only38% of employees who believe their companies are doing enough on climate and sustainability issues, while the KPMG (2023) report revealed that75% of global companies are not ready for ESG assessmentsThis indicates a significant gap between formal policies and actual implementation at both the employee and organizational levels.

It is in this context that transformational leadership is considered relevant. Transformational leadership has the ability to provide inspiration, motivation, and intellectual stimulation that can strengthen employee commitment to sustainability goals. However, the current literature is still lacking.very limitedin exploring how transformational leadership can bridge the gap between formal Green HRM policies and actual implementation. In other words, while there are studies on Green HRM and a vast literature on transformational leadership, integrating the two within an ESG framework is still rare.

In addition, there are minimal integration of leadership theory with green HR practices in the ESG context. Most research focuses on HR policy or employee behavior, but few have linked leadership dynamics as a moderating factor that can strengthen the effectiveness of Green HRM. This leaves significant research room for both expanding leadership theory in a sustainability context and enriching green HRM practices within organizations.

Based on the identified research gaps, the research questions proposed are:**“Can transformational leadership bridge the gap between formal Green HRM policies and their actual implementation in improving ESG performance?”**This research is investigative in nature, aiming to understand whether transformational leadership truly functions as a connecting mechanism that ensures Green HRM policies are not merely formalized but are truly internalized and practiced by employees. Therefore, this research is expected to provide academic contributions by integrating green leadership and HR theories, as well as practical contributions to the development of sustainability management strategies in organizations.

2. METHODS

2.1. Research Approach

This research uses an approachnarrative reviewThis paper aims to analyze, synthesize, and critique relevant literature related to the relationship between Green HRM, ESG performance, and the role of transformational leadership. A narrative review was chosen because this approach is more flexible in exploring interdisciplinary conceptual linkages and is able to identify research gaps that have not been widely addressed by empirical studies. Therefore,Moreover, this method allows researchers to integrate findings from various studies with different theoretical perspectives, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of the topic being studied.

2.2. Literature Search Strategy

The literature search strategy was carried out through several major internationally recognized academic databases, namelyScopus, Web of Science, Emerald Insight, dan ScienceDirect. To find relevant articles, keywords such as“Green HRM”, “Transformational leadership”, “ESG performance”, “Sustainable HRM”, and “Employee green behavior”. The search was conducted using a combination of Boolean operators (AND, OR) to obtain results

that were more specific to the research theme. The literature period selected was between the years 2000 to 2025, considering that the concept of Green HRM began to develop in the early 2000s and ESG performance has increasingly received widespread attention in global business practices in the last decade.

2.3. Selection Criteria

The article selection process was conducted based on strict inclusion and exclusion criteria. Articles included in the analysis were those that explicitly addressed the relationship between HRM, sustainability, and leadership, both in the form of empirical and conceptual studies. Articles linking Green HRM practices to improved ESG performance were also a primary focus of the selection process. Furthermore, only articles published in internationally reputable journals were considered. Conversely, articles that solely discussed conventional HR practices without any link to sustainability, as well as studies that did not address transformational leadership or did not connect it to ESG, were excluded from the analysis. Non-peer-reviewed articles such as opinion pieces, editorials, and grey literature were also excluded.

The literature review process was conducted systematically, emphasizing three main aspects. First, how Green HRM contributes to improving ESG performance in various organizational contexts. Second, how transformational leadership has the potential to strengthen Green HRM implementation through its influence on employee behavioral and motivational changes. Third, the identification of remaining conceptual and empirical gaps, particularly in integrating leadership theory with green HR practices in an ESG context.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Green HRM and ESG Performance

The integration of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) practices into organizational strategies significantly enhances ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) performance. GHRM encompasses initiatives such as green recruitment, green training, and green performance appraisals, which nurture environmentally sustainable behaviors among employees. Evidence demonstrates that organizations adopting comprehensive GHRM methods witness substantial increases in their employees' ecological actions, thus establishing a strong reputation for sustainability within their respective industries (Aboramadan, 2020; Veerasamy et al., 2023).

Empirical research has revealed that companies effectively integrating GHRM tend to display improved ESG metrics. Specifically, these organizations often record reductions in carbon emissions, advancements in energy efficiency, and enhanced governance transparency (Zheng et al., 2022; Zhang & Liu, 2023). This correlation between GHRM practices and superior ESG outcomes is reinforced by studies highlighting that firms with elevated ESG scores are generally more motivated to pursue innovative environmental measures and engage in green technological advancements (Chen et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2023). The interplay between high ESG ratings and green innovation suggests that GHRM practices can initiate a virtuous cycle of improvement in corporate sustainability metrics.

However, the literature reveals significant challenges to the successful implementation of GHRM initiatives. Critics highlight issues such as greenwashing, where organizations may project an image of environmental responsibility without genuine commitment (Crichton et al., 2024). Additionally, the symbolic adoption of GHRM approaches, characterized by minimal engagement from employees, can often lead to a significant gap between formal policies and their practical impacts on sustainability efforts (Aboramadan, 2020; Veerasamy et al., 2023). Therefore, despite the benefits of GHRM in augmenting ESG performance, the effectiveness of these practices can be undermined by inadequate employee involvement and superficial management commitment.

Further understanding of these dynamics can offer deeper insights for organizations striving to align their HRM strategies with sustainable business practices. Effective GHRM practices, aligned with genuine employee engagement, are essential to bridge the gap between intentions and outcomes in ESG performance, ultimately fostering a more sustainable organizational environment.

3.2. Transformational Leadership and Organizational Change

Transformational leadership has emerged as a critical driver of organizational change, particularly within the context of sustainability initiatives. This leadership style is defined by its four primary dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Research suggests that these components not only enhance employee engagement with sustainability practices but also cultivate a supportive organizational culture that is conducive to change. For instance, transformational leaders foster an environment where employees feel personally connected to their roles in sustainability efforts, moving beyond mere compliance to genuine advocacy for green initiatives (Herold et al., 2008). Such leaders act as credible role models, motivating their teams to adopt sustainable behaviors through shared vision and commitment (Min-xin & Long, 2007).

Additionally, evidence indicates that transformational leadership effectively reduces resistance to change by aligning individual and organizational values. By emphasizing a collective vision, leaders can facilitate employee buy-in, thus mitigating resistance and promoting active engagement with organizational changes (Min-xin & Long, 2007; Herold et al., 2008). In a study focusing on the effects of transformational leadership on employee commitment to change, results demonstrated that employees who perceived their leaders as transformational were significantly more committed to organizational changes, particularly when such changes had a personal impact on their roles (Herold et al., 2008) (Bommer et al., 2005). This finding underscores the importance of leadership in shaping employee attitudes toward change, creating a sense of urgency and purpose that can inspire action within sustainability-focused initiatives (Min-xin & Long, 2007; .

Moreover, transformational leadership also plays a pivotal role in fostering a culture of innovation and continuous improvement in organizations. By encouraging intellectual stimulation, leaders incentivize employees to challenge the status quo and contribute innovative ideas towards sustainability practices (Herold et al., 2008). This iterative approach not only enhances the organization's capacity for change but also strengthens its overall commitment to sustainability (Bommer et al., 2005). As organizations face mounting pressures to adapt to an increasingly competitive and eco-conscious market, the role of transformational leaders as change agents becomes ever more salient (Kuzmin et al., 2021).

In conclusion, transformational leadership fundamentally shapes how organizations approach change, especially in the realm of sustainability. By fostering engagement, reducing resistance, and encouraging innovation, transformational leaders can successfully guide their organizations through tumultuous changes towards a more sustainable future. Consequently, their role extends beyond individual influence; it creates systemic shifts in organizational culture, enabling widespread commitment to sustainable practices (Min-xin & Long, 2007; Herold et al., 2008).

3.3. Bridging the Gap: Green HRM Policy vs. Practice

The disparity between the defined Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) policies and their implementation is a well-documented issue across various sectors. Research has shown that organizational commitment, particularly through transformational leadership, plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between policy and practice. Transformational leaders motivate employees to embrace sustainability values, enhancing intrinsic motivation and

fostering a culture of environmental responsibility within their organizations (Yusliza et al., 2019).

Despite many organizations establishing GHRM policies, the actual alignment of employee behavior with these sustainability objectives often falls short. Studies suggest that while GHRM holds promise for improving environmental performance, a significant number of organizations struggle to integrate these practices into their operational frameworks (Yong et al., 2019; , Fawehinmi et al., 2020). The absence of transformational leaders to champion these initiatives and foster employee adoption of green behaviors likely perpetuates this gap.

Moreover, literature underscores that engaging employees in green initiatives improves individual green behaviors and enhances overall organizational commitment to environmental sustainability (Aboramadan, 2020; , Doghan et al., 2022). It has been demonstrated that when employees perceive support from their organization for green initiatives, they are more inclined to participate in practices that lead to sustainable outcomes (Jnaneswar, 2023). Thus, transformational leadership is essential for translating GHRM policies into actionable practices that resonate with employees' values and behaviors.

Furthermore, organizations that effectively implement GHRM practices can achieve significant benefits, including improved corporate performance and better alignment with environmental goals (Renwick et al., 2012; , Almemari et al., 2021). When GHRM is thoughtfully integrated into organizational strategies, it not only promotes sustainability but can also drive financial performance, providing a strong incentive for leaders to endorse these practices (Meng et al., 2022; , Parab, 2023).

In summary, bridging the gap between GHRM policy and practice necessitates strong transformational leadership that cultivates a supportive environment for employee engagement in green initiatives. This alignment can lead to significant improvements in both environmental and organizational performance, highlighting the crucial role that leadership plays in fostering sustainable workplaces.

3.4. Conceptual Integration

The integration of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM), employee green behavior, Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) performance, and transformational leadership presents a coherent framework for understanding organizational sustainability.

Green HRM serves as the formal policy framework directing organizations towards sustainability initiatives. It incorporates practices that align human resource strategies with environmental objectives, enhancing eco-friendly behaviors among employees. Research indicates that GHRM practices positively influence employee attitudes and behaviors and contribute to improved organizational environmental performance (Yong et al., 2019; (Hameed et al., 2022). According to Gyensare et al., GHRM practices foster employee well-being and sustainable behaviors, emphasizing that the ecological responsibility protocols within GHRM can lead to heightened employee engagement in sustainability initiatives (Gyensare et al., 2023). Furthermore, Hameed et al. illustrate that such practices are significant predictors of a company's corporate social responsibility (CSR), reinforcing the connection between HRM and broader organizational goals (Hameed et al., 2022).

Employee green behavior, defined as actions taken by employees to support environmental sustainability, is notably influenced by GHRM initiatives. Studies find that GHRM enhances in-role green behavior (activities directly related to an employee's job) and encourages extra-role behaviors, which transcend the basic job requirements to include proactive environmental actions (Sidney et al., 2022; Rubel et al., 2021). Transformational leadership plays a crucial moderating role in this relationship by motivating and inspiring employees to align their personal values with those of the organization, thereby internalizing sustainability practices more effectively. The work of Wang et al. confirms that transformational leadership's value congruence fosters a supportive environment where

employee green behavior can flourish (Wang et al., 2018). Moreover, research by Iftikhar et al. emphasizes that the interplay of green HRM and transformational leadership amplifies environmental commitment among employees, which in turn enhances ESG performance (Iftikhar et al., 2021).

The resultant improvements in ESG performance, across environmental, social, and governance dimensions, can be directly correlated to the synergy created between GHRM and employee behaviors. Effective GHRM not only equips employees with the necessary competencies and motivations to engage in sustainable practices but also aligns these efforts with organizational performance metrics. Zhou et al. outline the essential links between green leadership and product development efficacy, indicating a broader implication for ESG indicators that span governance and social responsibility (Zhou et al., 2018).

In conclusion, this conceptual framework enriches the discourse on how leadership and strategic HRM can bridge the gap between policy implementation and real-world sustainability practices. Research supports the idea that fundamentally altering HRM philosophies through green practices can yield significant behavioral and performance benefits, indicating a shift towards a more sustainable and responsible organizational culture.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Theoretical Implications

This research makes a theoretical contribution by integrating the transformational leadership perspective into the Green HRM literature. To date, most studies on Green HRM have focused on functional HR policies and practices, such as green recruitment, green training, or environmentally-based performance appraisal systems. However, there is limited research linking how leadership factors can influence the successful implementation of these policies. By linking Green HRM and ESG performance through the moderating role of transformational leadership, this research broadens our understanding of organizational dynamics in achieving sustainability.

Theoretically, this integration strengthens several key conceptual frameworks. First, the Resource-Based View (RBV) emphasizes that sustainable competitive advantage can only be achieved if an organization has unique resources, including human capital, that are committed to green practices. Second, Stakeholder Theory highlights that companies have an obligation to respond to stakeholder interests, and transformational leadership can help bridge stakeholder expectations with employee behavior on the ground. Third, Transformational Leadership Theory provides the basis that leaders not only act as policy makers, but also as catalysts for change capable of internalizing sustainability values in organizational culture. From the synthesis of these theories, this study offers a new conceptual framework that can be called "Leadership-driven Green HRM Implementation Framework", which emphasizes the importance of the role of leadership in bridging the gap between Green HRM policy and implementation.

4.2. Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, this research provides important recommendations for HR managers and practitioners. First, implementing Green HRM is not simply about formulating formal policies; it requires transformational leadership capable of inspiring, encouraging, and internalizing green behaviors at the employee level. This means companies need to emphasize the leadership aspect of sustainability programs. Second, organizations need to design and implement green leadership training programs, so that leaders have the relevant skills to drive behavioral change. Third, ESG reports, which typically focus on policy indicators and technical performance, should also consider leadership roles as a key factor for successful implementation. Thus, organizations can reduce the risk of getting stuck in bad

practices.greenwashingor symbolic adoption, because there are leadership mechanisms that ensure real implementation on the ground.

4.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this study offers theoretical and practical contributions, there are several limitations that should be noted. First, this study uses a descriptive approach.narrative reviewthus not providing a quantitative synthesis as in a meta-analysis. This may limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, most of the analyzed literature is still limited to a specific industry context or geographic region, so cross-industry and cross-country empirical research is needed to test the validity of the proposed framework. Third, this study only emphasizes the role of transformational leadership, while other leadership styles such as servant leadership or ethical leadership also has the potential to make a significant contribution to driving organizational sustainability. Therefore, future research could expand the scope by comparing various leadership styles in the context of Green HRM and ESG performance.

5. CONCLUSION

StudyThis study highlights that although Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) plays a crucial role in improving a company's Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) performance, there is a significant gap between formal policy formulation and its actual implementation on the ground. This gap often hinders the effectiveness of organizational sustainability efforts. In this context, transformational leadership emerges as a key factor conceptually capable of bridging this gap. With its inspirational and motivating characteristics, transformational leaders can build a green culture, foster employee engagement, and ensure that Green HRM policies are not merely formalities but are truly internalized and practiced. This integration of Green HRM and transformational leadership not only provides valuable theoretical contributions to the development of sustainable human resource management but also offers practical implications for organizations in designing more effective sustainability strategies. To strengthen this understanding, future research is strongly encouraged to empirically test this conceptual model.

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