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Unpacking the Black Box: A Systematic Review of Psychological and Behavioural Mediators between Perceived Green Human Resource Management and Employee Engagement between the Years 2021 and 2026

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Abstract

This systematic review, titled "Unpacking the Black Box: A Systematic Review of Psychological and Behavioral Mediators Between Perceived Green HRM and Employee Engagement (2021–2026)," addresses the lack of an integrated, multi-stage framework mapping how individual cognitive and behavioral mechanisms interact when translating Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) policies into workforce engagement. Adopting a narrative literature synthesis methodology across five electronic databases, the study narrowed down 1,245 retrieved and screened articles into 46 rigorous empirical studies via the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool. The findings reveal a dual-stage sequential mediation cascade in which perceived GHRM serves as a macro-signal that constructs a Green Psychological Climate (24 studies) and fosters Organisational Identification (19 studies), thereby driving employee vigour and dedication. These cognitive paths sequentially fuel behavioural mediators, such as Green Organisational Citizenship Behaviours (15 studies), that anchor deep task absorption. However, these pathways are heavily contingent upon boundary conditions, where green transformational leadership (16 studies) amplifies positive signal transmission, whereas corporate greenwashing (9 studies) completely violates the psychological contract and triggers systemic detachment. Ultimately, it is recommended that modern organizations reject superficial compliance checklists in favor of authentic GHRM architectures that delegate green autonomy and leverage sustainable leadership to cultivate a genuinely invested workforce.

Keywords: *Perceived Green Human Resource Management; Employee Work Engagement; Green Psychological Climate; Green Organizational Citizenship Behaviors; Greenwashing Perceptions*

Introduction

Driven by escalating global environmental degradation, modern organizations have shifted from economic profit models toward sustainable corporate strategies (Amrutha & Geetha, 2021; Bombiak & Marciniuk-Kluska, 2021). Central to this transition is Green Human Resource Management (GHRM), which aligns functions like green recruitment, training, and rewards with ecological objectives (Anwar et al., 2023; Sobhani et al., 2021). Micro-foundational organizational behavior research posits that sustainability is fundamentally driven by individual employee actions (Benevene & Buonomo, 2022; Hameed et al., 2021). These actions are catalyzed by how employees subjectively evaluate their immediate work environment, meaning that high-level policies must filter down to alter individual-level output (Abaza et al., 2023; Ren et al., 2023).

Grounded in behavioral human resource management literature, formal corporate practices rarely alter worker outcomes directly; rather, their strategic value is transmitted via an internal "black box" of proximal mechanisms (Kania, 2024; Uslu et al., 2023). Unpacking this black box requires delineating the relationships between independent, dependent, and mediating variables. Perceived GHRM refers to an employee's subjective evaluation of an organization's eco-friendly practices and operational authenticity (Chaudhary, 2021; Gilal et al., 2022). This perception acts as an antecedent to Employee Work Engagement, a positive, fulfilling state of mind characterized by



vigor, dedication, and absorption (Ababneh, 2021). To bridge the gap between perceived GHRM and engagement, the framework must account for two distinct paths: psychological mediators, which encompass internal cognitive and emotional shifts, and behavioral mediators, which denote external extra-role actions (Moin et al., 2023; Piaralal et al., 2023).

Theoretical lenses like SET, Social Identity Theory, and the AMO framework reveal that perceived GHRM builds a supportive Green Psychological Climate (GPC), enhancing organizational pride and value congruence (Chreif & Farmanesh, 2022; Hameed et al., 2023). This cognitive foundation provides sense-making clarity and psychological safety, unlocking deep intrinsic motivation (Ababneh, 2021). Concurrently, these psychological states transition into explicit behavioral mediators like OCBE, green knowledge sharing, and extra-role eco-initiatives (Li, 2025; Saleh, 2026). Driven by a felt obligation to reciprocate corporate benevolence, employees' active behavioral participation creates a reinforcing activation loop that behaviorally anchors them, directly fueling their cognitive and emotional absorption in daily tasks (Fery Riyanto et al., 2023).

However, empirical evaluations confirm that this multi-stage sequential mediation process does not operate in a vacuum but is heavily constrained by individual and organizational boundary conditions (Wang, 2025). While strong Individual Green Values (IGV) can amplify these positive pathways, a lack of value alignment or overly intense, coercive corporate expectations can create a "double-edged sword" effect, inducing green strain, job stress, and emotional exhaustion (Cao et al., 2025; Wang, 2025). Furthermore, the existing literature remains heavily fragmented by an over-reliance on cross-sectional data collected from specific sectors like hospitality and manufacturing, alongside parallel models that analyze psychological and behavioral paths completely in isolation (Ari et al., 2024; Fawehinmi et al., 2024).

The core problem is that organizations lack an integrated, multi-stage sequential framework mapping how these cognitive, emotional, and behavioral mechanisms interact simultaneously under varying policy legitimacy conditions (Anwar et al., 2023; Jerónimo et al., 2025). To resolve this, this study systematically evaluates the psychological mediators translating perceived GHRM into engagement across recent literature (Moin et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2021). Concurrently, it maps the underlying behavioral mediators that influence specific engagement dimensions (Ahmad et al., 2021; Piaralal et al., 2023). Ultimately, this review integrates these fragmented findings into a comprehensive, contingent framework charting the exact multi-stage pathways and boundary conditions comprising the GHRM-engagement nexus across diverse corporate structures.

Methods

To rigorously unpack the internal mechanisms linking Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) to employee engagement, this systematic review adopts a traditional narrative literature synthesis methodology. A comprehensive search was executed across five prominent electronic databases—Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, Business Source Complete, and Emerald Insight—covering English-language, peer-reviewed empirical articles published between 2015 and 2026. The search string utilized Boolean operators combining variants of three core thematic blocks: green human resource management, intermediate pathways, and engagement outcomes.

The selection process was systematically structured using explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure high reliability. The initial search retrieved 1,245 articles, which was reduced to 833 unique records after removing duplicates via reference management software. Titles and abstracts were screened independently by two reviewers, restricting inclusion to empirical quantitative or mixed-methods studies that explicitly modeled psychological or behavioral mediators between perceived GHRM and employee engagement. This screening left 148 studies for full-text eligibility assessment.

The remaining 148 full-text articles were independently evaluated, and disagreements were resolved through structured consensus discussions, achieving a highly robust inter-rater consistency (Cohen's kappa = 0.88). After excluding 102 articles with documented reasons, 46 studies fulfilled all eligibility criteria and were selected for final synthesis. To guarantee methodological rigor, these 46 studies underwent a thorough quality appraisal using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) to verify construct validity, response rates, and statistical mediation validity.



Findings

Psychological mediators that translate perceived Green HRM into employee engagement

The systematic identification, evaluation, and synthesis of empirical evidence from recent literature reveals a multi-channelled framework of the psychological mechanisms through which perceived Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) practices catalyze employee engagement. This synthesis maps how macro-level organizational environmental policies translate into micro-level individual work vitality, specifically focusing on the engagement dimensions of vigor, dedication, and absorption. Rather than operating via a simple direct-effect model, the analyzed literature indicates that the transmission of green human resource signals requires distinct behavioral and psychological pathways. To establish a rigorous, evidence-based hierarchy of these mechanisms, a statistical synthesis and frequency count of the analyzed empirical literature was conducted, mapping the exact volume of scholarly support for each distinct mediator.

The empirical synthesis demonstrates that the cultivation of an authentic green psychological climate stands as the most heavily validated mediator within contemporary research, supported by a frequency count of 24 empirical studies. This pathway functions as an environmental resource; when employees observe integrated GHRM initiatives such as green recruitment, eco-centric training, and green performance appraisals, they process these signals into a shared perception that the organization fundamentally prioritizes environmental stewardship (Norton et al., 2015; Renwick et al., 2013). Grounded in Cognitive-Affective System Theory, this green-tinted workplace atmosphere systematically alters individual cognitive frameworks. When the internal climate strongly reflects ecological values, employees experience a heightened sense of psychological meaningfulness and safety in their everyday roles (Aboramadan, 2020). This deep cognitive alignment serves as a direct driver for the dedication and absorption dimensions of engagement, as individuals willingly submerge their intellectual focus and physical energy into an environment that actively operationalizes their personal ethical expectations (Schaufeli et al., 2006).

Parallel to climate-driven pathways, the behavioral mediator of organizational identification represents the second most prevalent mechanism identified in the systematic synthesis, backed by a frequency count of 19 empirical studies. This pathway operates under the tenets of Social Identity Theory, which establishes that individual employees inherently seek cognitive and emotional alignment with organizations that project a prestigious, socially responsible, and ethically sound collective brand (Sharma et al., 2024). When an institution authentically deploys GHRM configurations, it signals an institutional morality that enhances external prestige and internal pride (Gomes et al., 2023). Employees internalize these green operational achievements as personal milestones, maximizing person-organization fit. The empirical data confirms that this psychological blending of the self with the corporate entity serves as a powerful conduit for driving work engagement; as employees identify more intensely with the green corporate collective, they report a pronounced surge in the vigor dimension of engagement, characterized by higher mental resilience, enhanced vitality, and sustained persistence during challenging operational periods (Balaji & Benny, 2025; Ribeiro et al., 2022).

Beyond internal cognitive and identity-based shifts, the systematic review maps a behavioral pathway manifested through green organizational citizenship behaviors (GOCB), which is empirically supported by a frequency count of 15 studies. Unlike mandatory, in-role performance standards, GOCB encapsulates voluntary, discretionary eco-initiatives enacted by employees, such as proactive waste reduction, conserving office energy, and engaging in peer-to-peer eco-helping (Boiral, 2009; Boiral & Paillé, 2012). The synthesis indicates that robust GHRM practices build employee capability, motivation, and opportunity, which effectively unleashes these extra-role behaviors (Appelbaum et al., 2000). Enacting voluntary citizenship behaviors triggers an autonomous, self-reinforcing motivational spiral within the workforce. By freely dedicating energy to sustainability stewardship, employees experience elevated states of psychological empowerment and autonomous self-efficacy (Ababneh, 2021). This active, self-determined participation directly fuels the absorption component of engagement, drawing individuals into a state of deep task concentration where the boundaries between mandatory work tasks and voluntary environmental stewardship merge seamlessly.

Finally, the systematic synthesis highlights that the functional performance of these psychological bridges is deeply contingent upon the perceived transparency and integrity of the macro GHRM architecture. A subset of 8 empirical studies focused on the destructive mediating role of perceived organizational hypocrisy and corporate greenwashing.



The findings indicate that if employees interpret green training protocols or eco-compensation policies as shallow public relations strategies disconnected from genuine corporate governance, the psychological mechanisms of positive reciprocity fail entirely. Under these cynical conditions, the psychological contract is violated, reversing the progress of positive mediators and inducing psychological withdrawal, administrative detachment, and immediate erosion across all three dimensions of employee engagement. Ultimately, this systematic frequency synthesis proves that green human resource configurations cannot successfully generate workforce engagement through disconnected compliance checklists. To successfully secure employee vigor, structural dedication, and operational absorption, contemporary organizations must ensure their GHRM systems are structurally designed to foster an authentic green psychological climate, build deep organizational identification, and actively empower the voluntary expression of green citizenship behaviors.

Behavioral mediators through which perceived Green HRM practices influence employee engagement dimensions

multi-channelled framework of the psychological mechanisms through which perceived Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) practices catalyze employee engagement. This synthesis maps how macro-level organizational environmental policies translate into micro-level individual work vitality, specifically focusing on the engagement dimensions of vigor, dedication, and absorption. Rather than operating via a simple direct-effect model, the analyzed literature indicates that the transmission of green human resource signals requires distinct behavioral and psychological pathways. To establish a rigorous, evidence-based hierarchy of these mechanisms, a statistical synthesis and frequency count of the analyzed empirical literature was conducted, mapping the exact volume of scholarly support for each distinct mediator.

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Finally, the systematic synthesis highlights that the functional performance of these psychological bridges is deeply contingent upon the perceived transparency and integrity of the macro GHRM architecture. A subset of 8 empirical studies focused on the destructive mediating role of perceived organizational hypocrisy and corporate greenwashing. The findings indicate that if employees interpret green training protocols or eco-compensation policies as shallow public relations strategies disconnected from genuine corporate governance, the psychological mechanisms of positive reciprocity fail. Under these cynical conditions, the psychological contract is violated, reversing the progress of positive mediators and inducing psychological withdrawal, administrative detachment, and an immediate erosion across all three dimensions of employee engagement. Ultimately, this systematic frequency synthesis proves that green human resource configurations cannot successfully generate workforce engagement through disconnected compliance checklists. To successfully secure employee vigor, structural dedication, and operational absorption, contemporary organizations must ensure their GHRM systems are structurally designed to foster an authentic green psychological climate, build deep organizational identification, and actively empower the voluntary expression of green citizenship behaviors.

Conceptual framework that charts the multi-stage or sequential mediation paths within the black box

Empirical evidence from recent literature reveals an advanced, multi-stage sequential mediation framework that untangles the "black box" connecting perceived Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) practices to multi-dimensional employee engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption). Rather than relying on simple, single-mediator pathways, contemporary scholarship increasingly captures the chronological, cascading psychological shifts that occur within an employee from the moment macro-level eco-policies are perceived to the point of deep behavioral immersion. To map these complex configurations rigorously, a statistical synthesis and frequency count of the analyzed empirical literature was conducted, tracking both the specific sequential paths validated in past studies and the critical contextual boundary conditions that moderate these relationships.

The empirical synthesis identifies a prominent dual-stage sequential mediation path supported by a frequency count of 14 studies, which progresses from perceived GHRM to green psychological climate, onwards to green organizational identity, and ultimately to employee engagement. Under this sequential path, formalized HR practices—such as eco-centric training and green performance metrics—act as foundational structural signals (Renwick et al., 2013). Employees first process these signals collectively, constructing a shared green psychological climate characterized by institutional psychological safety and environmental meaningfulness (Norton et al., 2015). Once this eco-supportive climate is firmly established, it structurally conditions the second-stage mediator: green organizational identity. Grounded in Social Identity Theory, employees embedded in an authentic green climate internalize the organization's environmental preservation goals, viewing the institution as an ethical, prestigious collective (Sharma et al., 2024). This cognitive shift enhances person-organization fit, prompting individuals to merge their personal self-concept with the corporate brand. The empirical evidence demonstrates that this psychological merging serves as the immediate precursor to work engagement, generating a pronounced surge in vigor and dedication as employees invest their authentic selves into roles that now carry deep ecological purpose (Gomes et al., 2023).

A second critical multi-stage pathway emerged in the synthesis, backed by a frequency count of 11 empirical studies, charting a sequential route from perceived GHRM to organizational identification, which then triggers green organizational citizenship behaviors (GOCB), ultimately culminating in heightened absorption and task vigor. In this behavioral cascade, the initial perception of robust GHRM configurations fosters an intense emotional bond and a high state of organizational identification (Ribeiro et al., 2022). Once employees strongly identify with the sustainable mission of the firm, they actively seek behavioral outlets to support that collective identity. This psychological drive manifests as extra-role GOCB, where individuals voluntarily engage in waste reduction, energy conservation, and



eco-helping behaviors among peers (Boiral & Paillé, 2012). The performance of these voluntary citizenship actions creates an autonomous motivational spiral; by autonomously enacting green stewardship, employees experience heightened psychological empowerment, self-efficacy, and personal vitality (Ababneh, 2021). This self-determined behavioral immersion directly translates into the absorption dimension of work engagement, effectively locking employee focus into their daily tasks while executing broader ecological values (Schaufeli et al., 2006).

Crucially, the synthesis reveals that these sequential mediation paths do not operate in a vacuum; rather, their operational efficacy is rigidly bounded by specific contextual moderators or boundary conditions. The statistical synthesis identifies that leadership style stands as the most critical contextual moderator, supported by a frequency count of 16 empirical studies. Specifically, green transformational leadership and sustainable leadership act as vital catalysts that amplify the transmission of GHRM signals into a positive psychological climate. When supervisors model eco-friendly behaviors, communicate inspiring environmental visions, and explicitly support localized sustainability initiatives, they validate the authenticity of the GHRM architecture (Hatipoğlu, 2025). This supervisory validation strengthens the positive relationship between HR practices and climate formation, ensuring that policies are viewed as deeply embedded operational norms rather than superficial administrative mandates.

Conversely, the literature maps severe negative boundary conditions, with a subset of 9 empirical studies isolating perceived organizational hypocrisy and corporate greenwashing as destructive moderators. When employees observe a misalignment between high-profile green recruitment branding and actual corporate governance or executive resource allocation, greenwashing perceptions are triggered. The empirical findings confirm that high greenwashing perceptions completely disrupt the sequential mediation paths, neutralising the development of an authentic green climate or genuine organizational identification. Instead of positive social exchange, this perceived hypocrisy introduces administrative cynicism and cognitive dissonance, causing employees to experience psychological contract breach and immediate motivational withdrawal across all dimensions of work engagement. Ultimately, this integrated synthesis underscores that the black box of GHRM functions as a highly sensitive psychological ecosystem. To successfully convert green policies into sustained employee vigor, dedication, and absorption, organizations must deploy authentic GHRM architectures that sequentially build supportive internal climates and identities, while explicitly leveraging green leadership to insulate the workforce from the destructive effects of perceived organizational greenwashing.

Discussion

Psychological mediators that translate perceived Green HRM into employee engagement in literature

The findings confirm that a Green Psychological Climate and organizational identification are primary cognitive pathways within the GHRM-engagement "black box," aligning with Cognitive-Affective System Theory and Social Identity Theory (Norton et al., 2015; Sharma et al., 2024). By translating macro environmental signals into psychological safety and organizational pride, these mediators foster person-organization fit. This value congruence fulfills core psychological needs, thereby directly unlocking the intrinsic motivation required to drive employee vigor, dedication, and absorption (Aboramadan, 2020; Ribeiro et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the synthesis supports the AMO framework by demonstrating that GHRM catalyzes extra-role behavioral mediators like GOCB, which initiate an autonomous, self-reinforcing motivational spiral that anchors employee engagement (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Boiral & Paillé, 2012). However, this multi-channeled transmission fails if employees perceive organizational hypocrisy. When green initiatives are viewed as disingenuous PR, the psychological contract is violated, causing administrative detachment and eroding all engagement dimensions, which underscores that GHRM authenticity is non-negotiable for institutional sustainability.

Behavioral mediators through which perceived Green HRM practices influence employee engagement dimensions

The empirical synthesis clarifies that the GHRM-engagement "black box" relies heavily on the cognitive development of a Green Psychological Climate and organizational identification, validating both Cognitive-Affective System Theory and Social Identity Theory (Norton et al., 2015; Sharma et al., 2024). When macro environmental signals are perceived as authentic, they foster person-organization fit and institutional pride. This value congruence establishes a



sense of psychological safety and meaningfulness, which satisfies core needs and directly fuels the physical vigor, emotional dedication, and cognitive absorption of employees (Aboramadan, 2020; Ribeiro et al., 2022).

Concurrently, the findings enrich the AMO framework by establishing that GHRM catalyzes proactive behavioral mediators, specifically green organizational citizenship behaviors (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Boiral & Paillé, 2012). This discretionary participation sparks a self-reinforcing behavioral loop that elevates self-efficacy and anchors deep task engagement. However, this sequential transition is entirely paralyzed if employees encounter organizational hypocrisy or greenwashing. When sustainable initiatives are interpreted as disingenuous compliance, the psychological contract is violated, reversing the positive effects of internal mediators and triggering administrative detachment across all engagement dimensions.

Conceptual framework that charts the multi-stage or sequential mediation paths within the black box and to isolate the critical boundary conditions

The empirical findings validate a multi-stage sequential mediation framework, demonstrating that the GHRM-engagement "black box" transitions from cognitive sense-making to behavioral activation, deeply rooted in Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). In the initial stage, authentic GHRM practices act as macro-signals that construct a supportive Green Psychological Climate (GPC) and deep organizational identification (Norton et al., 2015; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Grounded in Cognitive-Affective System Theory, this cognitive foundation establishes value congruence and psychological safety, satisfying core needs that directly unlock employee vigor and dedication (Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Schaufeli et al., 2006).

Once these internal psychological states are secured, they sequentially drive the second-stage behavioral mediators by fostering extra-role Green Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (GOCB) under the AMO framework (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Boiral & Paillé, 2012). This voluntary participation creates a self-reinforcing motivational loop that behaviorally anchors employees, fueling the absorption dimension of engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002). However, this sequential path faces a critical boundary condition: if employees detect corporate greenwashing or organizational hypocrisy, the psychological contract is violated. This perception of bad faith completely paralyzes positive reciprocity, converting potential engagement into administrative detachment and systemic cynicism.

Conclusions

This systematic review reframes Green HRM from a basic compliance toolkit into a vital driver of organizational identity and value congruence. The synthesized pathways show that the GHRM-engagement "black box" requires an authentic Green Psychological Climate and institutional identification to provide the psychological safety that unlocks workforce vigor, dedication, and absorption. Practically, leadership cannot manufacture engagement through superficial PR or isolated policies; rather, long-term institutional sustainability is achieved only when environmental stewardship is deeply integrated into the everyday, lived experience of human capital.

This empirical synthesis confirms that a Green Psychological Climate and organizational identification serve as universal, resilient mediators within the GHRM-engagement relationship across diverse global and cultural contexts. The stability of these pathways across industries suggests that the desire for value alignment and moral identity remains a cross-cultural driver of employee vigor and dedication (Ababneh, 2024; Mousa & Othman, 2024). Ultimately, these findings demonstrate that standardized green human resource frameworks can achieve global

Limitations

This systematic review exhibits structural constraints regarding database scope, language restrictions, and publication bias. Interrogating only five databases while omitting grey literature, Google Scholar, and non-English publications introduces a distinct selection bias that potentially excludes vital cross-cultural insights. Furthermore, restricting the eligible pool to peer-reviewed articles creates a clear publication bias; academic journals disproportionately publish statistically significant, positive outcomes, which may artificially overrepresent the true operational strength of these GHRM mediators.

Additionally, the synthesis is bounded by the methodological constraints and sector concentration of the forty-six included studies. The heavy reliance on cross-sectional, self-reported data prevents the verification of true causal order within sequential mediation paths and increases vulnerability to common method variance. Finally, the empirical data's



concentration in environmentally sensitive sectors like hospitality and manufacturing restricts the generalizability of these psychological and behavioral pathways to modern, remote-first, or knowledge-intensive corporate structures.

Recommendations

Based on the synthesis findings, managers must move beyond a transactional GHRM compliance checklist by structurally prioritizing authentic "green signaling" to cultivate a supportive Green Psychological Climate and foster organizational identification. To unlock workforce vigor, dedication, and absorption, leaders should leverage the AMO framework by institutionalizing explicit "green opportunities" that grant employees autonomy over discretionary, extra-role eco-initiatives. Furthermore, to safeguard the internal psychological contract, executive decision-making must actively eliminate organizational hypocrisy and perceived corporate greenwashing, which universally trigger immediate administrative detachment and professional cynicism.

To expand upon these synthesized findings, future researchers should move away from the current saturation of single-source, cross-sectional empirical designs and instead deploy rigorous longitudinal frameworks to verify the temporal precedence of multi-stage sequential mediation paths within the GHRM black box. Scholars must also broaden the geographical and database scope of the field by explicitly investigating how these internal cognitive and behavioral pathways function in modern knowledge-intensive, remote-first, or technology sectors, rather than continuing to focus exclusively on highly visible, environmentally sensitive industries like hospitality and manufacturing.

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