



Research on Employee Green Behavior from the Perspective of Sustainable Human Resource Management: The Role of Diversity, Inclusion, and Well-being

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Abstract

Enterprises are increasingly prioritizing social and ecological issues, cultivating sustainable Human Resource Management (HRM), and focusing on the sustainability of both people and the environment to achieve overall Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This study primarily draws on green HRM, selecting four key variables, including organizational diversity and inclusion, employee well-being (EWB), work stress, and employee green behavior (EGB), focusing on Chinese enterprises. This study employs quantitative research and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis to explore the relationships among these variables, aiming to promote internal green behavior within organizations and achieve SDGs. Data were collected from a randomly selected sample, resulting in a valid sample size of 453 questionnaire responses after data cleaning. The research found that organizational diversity and inclusion have a positive impact on EWB and EGB. There is also a positive correlation between EWB and EGB. However, organizational diversity and inclusion are negatively related to work stress, and work stress is negatively related to EGB. EWB and work stress mediate the relationship between organizational diversity, inclusion, and EGB. This study deepens the understanding of the relationship between diversity, inclusion, well-being, and green behavior, providing new directions for future research, and offering pathways for organizations to improve their environment and EWB to promote social sustainability.

Keywords: sustainable Human Resource Management, green Human Resource Management, employee well-being, diversity and inclusion, employee green behavior

1. Introduction

In contemporary times, an increasing number of organizations have begun to incorporate Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) into their policies and strategies (Opatha & Arulrajah, 2014; Wikhamn, 2019). Sustainable development, as an integral aspect of CSR, naturally attracts widespread attention on a global scale (Chams & García-Blandón, 2019; Lo et al., 2012; Tang et al., 2018).

The focal point of sustainable development is humanity (Stankevičiute & Savanevičiene, 2018), and it is evident that human factors play a dual role as both initiators and beneficiaries in the implementation of sustainable development goals. At the organizational level, employees emerge as crucial stakeholders, with some scholars contending that one area contributing most significantly to achieving these goals is HRM (Chams & García-Blandón, 2019; Stankevičiute & Savanevičiene, 2018). Consequently, a nexus and interconnection arise between sustainable development and human resources management, representing an innovative and emerging approach, as well as an existing gap awaiting further exploration (Ehnert et al., 2016; Macke & Genari, 2019). Ensuring the appropriate integration of sustainability into human resources policies stands as a contemporary and significant challenge (Saeed et al., 2019).

Sustainable Human Resource Management (Sustainable HRM) constitutes a discipline that promotes "greening" organizations (Chams & García-Blandón, 2019), aiming to achieve organizational objectives while striking a balance between business growth and environmental resource conservation (Chams & García-Blandón, 2019). At the employee level, emphasis is placed on engagement, encouraging practices and actions that enhance the company's environmental management, fostering environmentally friendly behavior in the workplace (Saeed et al., 2019; Temminck et al., 2015).

Despite extensive research on ecological and social sustainability in recent years, there has been limited attention to sustainability research at the individual levels (Wikhamn, 2019). Most studies on this topic have predominantly discussed environmental performance and practices at the organizational level, often neglecting the specific individual behaviors contributing to environmental performance and typically emphasizing management and managerial processes (Arulrajah et al., 2016; Lo et al., 2012; Renwick et al., 2013). However, understanding the behavioral dimension may be crucial for a better comprehension of the precise mechanisms behind overall environmental performance (Lo et al., 2012). Moreover, by focusing on and encouraging employees to participate more actively in environmental conservation activities, organizations can actively promote the dissemination and practice of environmental protection, as well as drive the organization towards sustainable development. This study aims to contribute theoretically and practically to HRM research, exploring the pivotal role of sustainable HRM in promoting the achievement of sustainable development goals (Chams & García-Blandón, 2019). Based on an understanding of the scope and objectives of sustainable HRM, several key variables have been selected for focused research: organizational diversity and inclusion, employee well-being (EWB), work stress, and employee green behavior (EGB). Exploring whether EGB is influenced by several other variables and understanding the connections between them aids organizations in understanding how to improve employees' work environments and quality of life, thereby enhancing their well-being and green behavior. It contributes to building a healthier, more vibrant organizational culture and propels organizations towards SDGs. Simultaneously, investigating the connections among these variables aims to bridge the association between organizational and individual levels, providing an effective pathway for businesses and expecting to foster behavioral changes at the micro level. In addition, by examining how organizational inclusion and EWB influence EGB, along with exploring mediating mechanisms, we can comprehensively understand key factors in sustainability management.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sustainable HRM

Sustainable HRM represents an endeavor to establish a connection between sustainable development and HRM. Despite the rapid advancements in this field and a notable surge in scholarly interest regarding this innovative concept, Sustainable HRM remains in its nascent stage of development. There is a lack of a universally applicable precise definition for Sustainable HRM, and the academic community exhibits a highly diverse range of perspectives on this matter. (Aust et al., 2020; Manzoor et al., 2019; Piwowar-Sulej, 2021; Stankevičiute & Savanevičiene, 2018; Wikhamn, 2019).

Piwowar-Sulej posits that the most frequently cited definition is, "Sustainable HRM is a pattern of deliberate or emergent human resource strategies and practices designed to accomplish organizational objectives while replicating the human resource base over an extended calendrical time frame" (Piwowar-Sulej, 2021). Some scholars also assert that this is a composite concept, combining the ideals of sustainable development with human resource soft approaches (Piwowar-Sulej, 2021). Thus, it is evident that diverse conceptualizations of Sustainable HRM are reflected in the varied terminology currently in use. Despite the multiplicity of terms and the authors' diverse focal points on what they deem significant, they all implicitly or explicitly recognize the organizational humanistic and societal perspectives, as well as the impact of human resources on the success and survival of the company (Macke & Genari, 2019; Piwowar-Sulej, 2021). Current literature also explicitly indicates its dual role, namely, facilitating the implementation of sustainability within the organization and endowing the HRM system itself with sustainability (Stankevičiute & Savanevičiene, 2018).

In the existing literature, there is a school of doctrine that focuses on transforming ordinary employees into green employees to achieve the organization's environmental objectives, ultimately making a significant contribution to environmental sustainability (Amrutha & Geetha, 2020; Aust et al., 2020; Opatha & Arulrajah, 2014). Sustainable HRM signifies that business organizations have a responsibility to reduce their environmental impact by influencing employees' sustainable behavior (Rubel et al., 2021). Hence, this study incorporates employee green behavior as a crucial factor into the model to explore the relationships among the potential core elements in fostering Sustainable HRM within organizations.

2.2 Diversity and Inclusion

The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect, implying an understanding that each person is unique and recognizing our individual differences. It involves exploring these visible and invisible differences, as well as surface and deep-level diversity, in a secure, positive, and favorable environment (Daya, 2014; Patrick & Kumar, 2012; Shore et al., 2018). Inclusion can be considered as an indicator of the extent to which an individual feels a part of the internal group within an organization (Downey et al., 2015). The characteristic of an inclusive organizational culture is derived from an openness to and appreciation of diversity (Ashikali & Groeneveld, 2015b). Therefore, numerous scholars point out that diversity and inclusion are two distinct yet overlapping concepts, and they are interdependent, with diversity being a necessary prerequisite for inclusion, and inclusion being a necessary precondition for diversity (Jaiswal & Dyaram, 2020; Oswick & Noon, 2014; Sabharwal, 2014). In other words, an organization needs diversity policies first (to acknowledge the importance of valuing differences) and then commits to inclusion to harness the benefits of diversity (Oswick & Noon, 2014). This is also the reason why this paper combines the two concepts as a variable for study,

as they are inherently inseparable and interdependent. They may indeed contribute to sustainable HRM within an organization.

2.3 Employee Well-Being

In essence, EWB is widely defined as the overall quality of employees' experiences and functioning in the workplace. Therefore, EWB refers to employees' overall experiences or impacts on work and the organization (Guest, 2017; Khoreva & Wechtler, 2018; Kooij et al., 2013; Pradhan & Hati, 2022). The primary dimensions of EWB include psychological, physical, and social well-being. Psychological well-being focuses on subjective experiences and functioning in the workplace, while physical well-being encompasses happiness related to physical health and functioning. Social well-being refers to the quality of an individual's relationships with others and the community (Khoreva & Wechtler, 2018).

Sustainable HRM revolves around addressing soft issues, such as demonstrating sincerity to employees, providing a dignified work environment and conditions, offering developmental opportunities, and focusing on employees' mental and physical well-being in the workplace. Consistent with this perspective, scholars argue that sustainable HRM requires providing a healthy work environment and opportunities for development (regeneration) for employees (Wikhamn, 2019). Therefore, Sustainable HRM and EWB are closely intertwined, sharing a common core concern. Sustainable HRM emphasizes a comprehensive approach to employees' experiences and overall quality in the workplace, encompassing aspects such as mental and physical health and the work environment, aligning with the concerns for EWB. Incorporating EWB into this discourse is not only feasible but also necessary.

2.4 Work Stress

Over the years, some authors have held different theoretical perspectives on the definition of the term "stress" (Nekoranec & Kmosena, 2015). Initially, it was considered as stress from the environment, later being viewed as stress within the human body. The widely accepted definition today involves the interaction between the situation and the individual (Michie, 2002). Stress is typically manifested as a deviation from the normal functioning of the body and mind. The body has limited capacity to respond to stressors, and excessive stress can have harmful effects on the physical, mental, and psychological well-being of employees (Nekoranec & Kmosena, 2015; Panigrahi, 2016).

Each type of job has its potential stressors, encompassing both internal and external factors. Internal factors involve personal mindset, thinking patterns, and other aspects originating from within the individual, leading to stress. Examples include personality traits and coping mechanisms. External factors comprise numerous elements within the organization that influence an individual's performance, such as job insecurity, organizational roles, working hours, and workload (Bickford, 2005; Nekoranec & Kmosena, 2015; Panigrahi, 2016).

2.5 Employee Green Behavior

In recent years, scholars have increasingly recognized the significance of EGB, leading to a growing body of research in this area (Saeed et al., 2019). Individual green behavior refers to actions taken to minimize negative impacts on the environment or have beneficial effects on environmental conservation. It pertains specifically to environmentally friendly within the workplace (Ahmed et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2021). In other words, EGB constitutes one of the numerous strategies organizations employ to enhance environmental performance and achieve SDGs (Ahmed et al., 2020; Chaudhary, 2020). Furthermore, some scholars interpret EGB as a conscious effort by employees to mitigate the negative impacts of human activities. This may

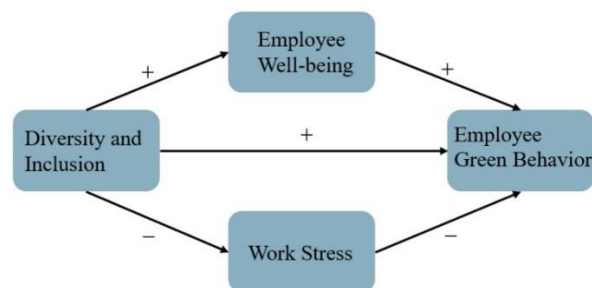
encompass activities such as water conservation, judicious resource utilization, waste reduction, energy conservation, and recycling efforts (Chaudhary, 2020; Su & Swanson, 2019).

The benefits of EGB are twofold: contributing to organizational greening efforts and positively impacting climate change, thereby preventing further environmental disasters (Rubel et al., 2021). Researchers in the field of organizational behavior and sustainable development have consistently focused on the factors influencing EGB from the perspective of safeguarding human resources. EGB is deemed a crucial micro-level activity for achieving SDGs and is paramount for an organization's green initiatives (Rubel et al., 2021; Tapia-Fonllem et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2021).

3. Conceptual Framework

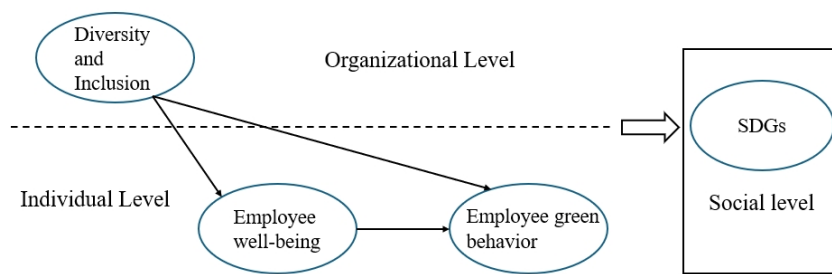
The focal point of this study is to explore sustainability within individuals and between individuals and organizations. This exploration is conducted by investigating the relationships and mediating effects among organizational diversity and inclusion, employee well-being, work stress, and employee green behavior, thereby tightly integrating sustainable HRM with the achievement of SDGs. The hypothesized model of this study (see Figure 1) is constructed based on the literature review. Figure 1 illustrates that in our study, we have selected four variables relevant to sustainable HRM: organizational diversity and inclusion, EWB, work stress, and EGB. In addition to the reasons mentioned earlier for selecting specific variables, choosing particular variables helps to focus efforts on delving deeply into the relationships between them, without making the study overly large and complex. Moreover, these variables are often quantifiable and measurable through survey methods, which enhances the study's feasibility. Specifically, diversity and inclusion are positively associated with EWB (H1), diversity and inclusion are negatively associated with work stress (H2), EWB is positively associated with EGB (H3), diversity and inclusion are positively associated with EGB (H4), work stress is negatively associated with EGB (H5), and EWB and work stress mediate these relationships (H6, H7).

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study and hypotheses (self-created)



At the organizational level, the development of an inclusive culture through diversity management signifies not only short-term economic benefits but also recognition and appreciation of each employee's uniqueness and sense of belonging (Ashikali & Groeneveld, 2015a; Jaiswal & Dyaram, 2020). The outcomes of organizational efforts are reflected in their impact on each employee, closely related to their well-being and green behavior. Through the combined impact of these two dimensions (see Figure 2), organizations contribute to sustainable HRM and long-term SDGs, potentially leading to better long-term performance for the company (Manzoor et al., 2019). Furthermore, the discussion on how improving green behaviors and EWB not only affects the organization but also may influence broader economic and societal outcomes forms the conceptual framework of this study.

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework (self-created)



4. Methods

The study focused on four technology companies headquartered in Beijing, China. Data were collected from regular employees of these selected companies through an anonymous online survey distributed via random web links from November 2023 to January 2024, which were completed through self-reporting due to the large sample size. All questions were standardized and closed-ended, requiring respondents to select answers from a fixed set of options. This method of data collection involved a broader participant pool, provided quantitative data, and introduced randomness to minimize bias in the study. Respondents accessed the survey questionnaire via internet hyperlinks using computers, tablets, or smartphones. A total of 671 responses were collected, and after data cleaning, the final valid sample size was 453. The majority of respondents (256: 56.5%) were male, with the remaining being female employees. Among them, nearly 30.7% (139) were aged between 25 and 30 years, while the majority fell within the age range of 31 to 35 years (186: 41.1%). All respondents had at least two years of work experience.

The questionnaire consists of four sections: Workplace Diversity and Inclusion, EWB, Work Stress, and EGB. It aims to collect data related to sustainable HRM. The questionnaire includes a total of 35 items, each designed based on core concepts derived from definitions in the literature review. The Workplace Diversity and Inclusion section includes items that gauge participants' perceptions of characteristics such as age and gender, as well as their recognition of employee engagement, sense of belonging, and uniqueness. EWB section is structured around three dimensions: psychological, physical, and social well-being. The Work Stress section is developed to capture perceptions across physical, psychological, and interpersonal aspects. And EGB section is based on behaviors that contribute to environmental protection or aim to conserve natural resources and mitigate human-induced environmental degradation. This includes activities such as water conservation, efficient resource utilization, waste reduction, energy savings, and recycling. These items are designed as rating questions, commonly used to gather individual opinions and attitudes. The study employs a five-point Likert scale to assess respondents' opinions on specific statements, ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree," indicating the degree of their agreement or disagreement.

The study involves complex relationships among multiple variables, and SEM is well-suited for simultaneously considering multiple variables and effectively detecting complex structures of mediation effects. Additionally, since the data in this study are non-normally distributed, the use of SEM is appropriate and aligns with the actual characteristics of the data.

This study utilized Mplus 8.3 adopting a fully non-parametric approach to test the standard errors of each path model coefficient in the form of bootstrap samples. This process involved randomly selecting cases and replacing the original sample to create a large number of pre-specified bootstrap samples (5000) (Awang et al., 2015; Fan et al., 2016; Gefen et al., 2000;

Hair Jr et al., 2021). It enabled the assessment of multiple mediation model, offering increased flexibility and handling more choices (Muthén, 2011; Narayanan, 2012; Preacher & Hayes, 2004). To evaluate model fit, several indices are used, and according to Hu and Bentler (1999), more stringent criteria need to be applied. These criteria include having several indices such as the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) exceeding 0.95, while the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) should be below 0.06, and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) should be below 0.08. A model meeting these criteria is considered to have good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; West et al., 2012). However, fit adequacy standards may be overly stringent when applied to most multi-factor rating tools. According to Marsh (2004), when conducting analyzes at the item level and dealing with multiple factors, even with well-constructed multi-factor rating tools, it is almost impossible to achieve the acceptable fits mentioned above. Browne and Cudeck (1993) suggested that an RMSEA value of $< .08$ would indicate acceptable approximate error, and the model data fit would be reasonable (Rigdon, 1996; Xia & Yang, 2019).

5. Results

The overall measurement model hypothesis exhibits good fit ($\chi^2 = 445.576$, $p < 0.01$; RMSEA = 0.073 (90% CI [0.028, 0.125]), $p > 0.05$; SRMR = 0.033; CFI = 0.983; TLI = 0.967). Therefore, it is deemed adequate for subsequent analysis.

In presenting the results of the standardized model, significance is considered when p-values are less than 0.05. As shown in Table 1, the p-values for the loadings of all five path factors are less than 0.05, indicating that all five path factors are significant. Additionally, the table elaborates on the path coefficients for each path. The data demonstrate that Diversity and Inclusion has a significantly positive effect on EWB ($B = 0.603$, $p < 0.001$), a significantly negative effect on Work Stress ($B = -0.370$, $p < 0.001$), EWB has a significantly positive effect on EGB ($B = 0.616$, $p < 0.001$), Work Stress has a significantly negative effect on EGB ($B = -0.167$, $p < 0.05$), and DI has a significantly positive effect on EGB ($B = 0.525$, $p < 0.001$). Hypotheses H1-H5 are all supported.

Table 1. Standardized Model Results (STDYX)

Path	Estimate	S.E.	Est./S.E.	Two-Tailed P-Value
EWB ON DI	0.603	0.045	13.400	0.000
WS ON DI	-0.370	0.032	-11.563	0.000
EGB ON EWB	0.616	0.047	13.106	0.000
WS	-0.167	0.034	-4.912	0.024
DI	0.525	0.047	11.170	0.000

Furthermore, observe the 95% confidence intervals obtained using the bias-corrected percentile method. If the bias-corrected confidence intervals do not contain zero, then the mediation effect is significant. In Table 2, rounding to two decimal places, the values of the 95% confidence intervals are [0.47, 0.60], [-0.57, -0.49], [0.07, 0.16], [-0.23, -0.19], [0.37, 0.55]. It can be seen that none of these five intervals contain zero, indicating that the mediation effects in this model are significant.

Table 2. Confidence Intervals of Standardized Model Results (STDYX)

Path	Lower .5%	Lower 2.5%	Lower 5%	Upper 5%	Upper 2.5%	Upper .5%
EWB ON DI	0.443	0.465	0.476	0.589	0.600	0.621
WS ON DI	-0.587	-0.567	-0.557	-0.524	-0.494	-0.454
EGB ON EWB	0.056	0.070	0.077	0.155	0.162	0.177
WS	-0.254	-0.233	-0.223	-0.212	-0.192	-0.174
DI	0.342	0.371	0.386	0.540	0.554	0.583

6. Discussion

In the present study, we explored the relationships involving organizational diversity, inclusion EWB, EGB, and work stress, thereby expanding our understanding of the mechanisms influencing internal organizational variables and employee behavior. By examining the relationships among these variables, we can better understand the impact of the organizational environment on EWB and EGB. Furthermore, this study validates the mediating effects of EWB and work stress on EGB through a multiple mediation model. It underscores the significance of EWB and emphasizes the importance of alleviating work stress, which holds crucial implications for research on sustainable development and CSR. By investigating these mediating processes, researchers can uncover the mechanisms through which EWB, and work stress promote or hinder EGB, providing a theoretical basis for developing targeted management strategies. The current study filled the mentioned gap by examining the correlations among the four variables. The findings supported the established notion of the positive significant influence of organizational diversity and inclusion on EWB consistent with some results from previous studies by Huong et al. and Jaiswal & Dyaram (Huong et al., 2016; Jaiswal & Dyaram, 2019). The main finding of the positive correlation between EWB and EGB aligns with the results of Ahmed et al., who reached similar conclusions in their study (Ahmed et al., 2020). This implies that employees with higher levels of well-being are more likely to exhibit green behavior. Moreover, we found that diversity and inclusion within the organization foster a more open and innovative culture, contributing to the formation of a shared green value system. This may help inspire employees to engage in green behaviors actively, supporting the hypothesis that organizational diversity and inclusion are positively associated with EGB. The results of this study also strongly support the hypothesis of a negative relationship between organizational diversity and inclusion and work stress. Some research has also addressed the direct relationship between organizational diversity and inclusion and work stress (Behnke et al., 2023). This suggests that in organizations with higher levels of diversity and inclusion, employees are more likely to experience lower levels of work stress. Additionally, the hypothesis of a negative correlation between work stress and EGB was also supported, suggesting that higher levels of work stress may lead to reduced engagement in green behavior. Research on the mediating role of EWB and work stress in promoting or hindering EGB is still ongoing. This study carefully examines this gap and demonstrates that as mediating variables, EWB and work stress play a bridging role between organizational diversity, inclusion, and EGB. Diversity and inclusion indirectly promote employees' active participation in green behaviors by enhancing their sense of well-being. When employees perceive organizational inclusivity and fairness, they are more willing to engage in the organization's goals, including supporting sustainable green practices. Conversely, high levels of work stress may lead to discomfort and negative emotions among employees, thereby reducing their likelihood of

participating in green behaviors. In summary, EWB and work stress mediate the relationship between organizational diversity, inclusion, and EGB. This reveals the psychological and social mechanisms behind employee behavior, providing theoretical support for the development of more effective sustainable development strategies.

7. Conclusions

Most studies concentrate on the overall organizational level, with little attention given to the specific contributions of individual behaviors to environmental performance. Indeed, the environmental performance of an organization depends on the behavior and decisions of each individual. This study aims to explore the relationships among organizational diversity, inclusion, EWB, EGB, and work stress to gain a deeper understanding of how these variables influence organizational dynamics and employee behaviors.

Data from 453 employees in Chinese enterprises were collected via a questionnaire survey. Structural equation modeling was used to test the hypotheses. Results show that organizational diversity and inclusion positively affect EWB and EGB. However, they also negatively correlate with work stress and EGB. Further analysis indicates that EWB and work stress mediate the relationship between organizational diversity, inclusion, and EGB.

These research findings are crucial for understanding the importance of sustainable development and CSR. They provide us with theoretical foundations for formulating management strategies, while also emphasizing the critical roles of EWB and work stress in shaping EGB. By integrating the principles of sustainable HRM into the organization's strategy, a more innovative, diverse, inclusive, and employee-centric work environment can be established. This, in turn, fosters greater employee engagement in green behavior, thereby facilitating the achievement of organizational sustainability goals.

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