

How Green Human Resource Management Enhances Institutional Excellence: The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction in the UAE Public Sector

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Abstract

This study examines how Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) contributes to institutional excellence in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) public sector through job satisfaction. Although GHRM research has expanded considerably, it has given limited attention to the employee-level mechanism linking GHRM with institutional excellence in public-sector organisations. The study develops a conceptual framework integrating GHRM, job satisfaction and institutional excellence. GHRM comprises green recruitment and selection, green training, green performance management, and green rewards, while institutional excellence comprises continuous innovation, service quality and strategic orientation. The framework is grounded in the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) perspective and Social Exchange Theory (SET), with the UAE Government Excellence Model providing the contextual foundation. The proposed framework suggests that GHRM positively influences institutional excellence both directly and indirectly through job satisfaction. Effective green HR practices may enhance employee satisfaction and contribute to continuous innovation, service quality and strategic orientation. The study contributes to the GHRM literature by positioning job satisfaction as an employee-level mechanism linking GHRM to institutional excellence and extends GHRM research to the UAE public sector, where sustainability, innovation, human capital and government excellence are central to institutional development.

Keywords: Green Human Resource Management, Job Satisfaction, Institutional Excellence, Public Sector, United Arab Emirates, Sustainability, Government Excellence, Amo Theory

Introduction

Sustainability has increasingly moved beyond traditional environmental management and become an important concern in human resource management. Organisations are increasingly expected not only to reduce their environmental impact but also to develop employees with the knowledge, motivation and capabilities needed to support sustainable

organisational practices. Within this development, Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) has emerged as an important strategic approach that integrates environmental considerations into human resource policies and practices.

GHRM extends conventional human resource management by incorporating environmental objectives into recruitment, training, performance management, rewards and employee development. The literature identifies GHRM as a mechanism through which organisations can influence employee attitudes and behaviours while simultaneously supporting broader sustainability objectives.

Recent literature indicates that GHRM research has expanded considerably. Lawter and Garnjost (2025), for example, provided a systematic review of the relationship between GHRM and organisational performance. Their review indicates that GHRM has increasingly been examined in relation to environmental performance, sustainability and green innovation.

However, the growing volume of GHRM research also raises an important conceptual question: through what employee-level mechanisms do GHRM practices contribute to broader organisational or institutional outcomes? This question is particularly relevant in public-sector organisations, where performance is not necessarily defined exclusively by financial outcomes. Public institutions are expected to provide high-quality services, innovate continuously, implement strategic priorities and create public value.

This issue is particularly significant in the UAE. The UAE Government Excellence Model emphasises distinctive value, vision realisation and enabling capabilities. It also places considerable importance on human capital, innovation, employee engagement, lifelong learning and a positive workplace.

The original research framework recognises this contextual importance and identifies institutional excellence as an important organisational outcome in the UAE public sector. It also conceptualises job satisfaction as a potential mechanism linking human resource practices to institutional performance.

Nevertheless, an important theoretical gap remains. Existing GHRM research has frequently focused on environmental behaviour, environmental performance, sustainable performance and organisational performance. Less attention has been given to understanding how GHRM may contribute to institutional excellence through employee satisfaction, particularly in a government context where excellence encompasses innovation, service delivery and strategic achievement.

The research gap is therefore not the absence of GHRM scholarship. Recent reviews show substantial growth in the field and increasing attention to organisational outcomes. The more specific gap concerns the mechanism linking GHRM practices to institutional excellence in a public-sector setting, particularly the role of employees' job satisfaction in translating green HR practices into innovation, service quality and strategic orientation. Accordingly, this article develops a conceptual model linking GHRM to institutional excellence through job satisfaction in the UAE public sector.

The study addresses the following research question: How can Green Human Resource Management contribute to institutional excellence in the UAE public sector through the mediating role of job satisfaction?

The article makes three contributions. First, it integrates GHRM and institutional excellence within a single conceptual framework. Second, it positions job satisfaction as an employee-level mechanism through which green HR practices may influence institutional outcomes. Third, it contextualises the model within the UAE public sector and its government excellence orientation.

Literature Review

Green Human Resource Management

Green Human Resource Management broadly refers to incorporating environmental considerations into human resource management policies and practices. Rather than treating environmental management as the exclusive responsibility of environmental departments, GHRM embeds sustainability into the employee lifecycle.

Renwick et al. (2013) established an influential conceptual foundation for GHRM by connecting environmental management with HR functions such as recruitment, training, performance management and rewards. Later empirical work has further demonstrated that GHRM practices can influence employees' workplace environmental behaviour.

Dumont et al. (2017) demonstrated the importance of psychological green climate and employee green values in explaining how GHRM practices influence employee workplace green behaviour.

Tang et al. (2018) subsequently contributed to the development and validation of GHRM measurement, providing an important empirical basis for examining different green HR practices.

In the present study, GHRM is conceptualised through four dimensions derived from the original framework: green recruitment and selection, green training, green performance management and green rewards.

Green Recruitment and Selection

Green recruitment and selection refers to incorporating environmental values and sustainability considerations into the recruitment and selection process. Organisations may communicate environmental values in recruitment advertisements, prioritise applicants with environmental awareness, and assess candidates' compatibility with organisational sustainability objectives.

In the public sector, green recruitment may support institutional development by attracting employees whose values align with sustainability and public responsibility. Theoretically, value congruence between employees and organisations may enhance employee attachment and satisfaction.

Proposition 1a: Green recruitment and selection is positively associated with job satisfaction.

Green Training

Green training involves developing employees' knowledge, skills and awareness concerning environmental sustainability. Training may include environmental awareness, energy conservation, waste reduction, sustainable resource use, green technologies and environmentally responsible workplace practices.

Green training is particularly relevant because GHRM cannot rely solely on employee willingness. Employees require the appropriate capabilities to translate environmental objectives into workplace behaviour.

Proposition 1b: Green training is positively associated with job satisfaction.

Green Performance Management

Green performance management incorporates environmental objectives into employee performance evaluation. Employees may be assessed according to their contribution to environmental initiatives, resource conservation, waste reduction, green innovation or compliance with sustainability policies.

Integrating environmental objectives into performance management can clarify organisational expectations. Employees are more likely to understand how their individual responsibilities contribute to broader institutional goals when formal performance systems incorporate environmental performance.

Proposition 1c: Green performance management is positively associated with job satisfaction.

Green Rewards

Green rewards refer to financial and non-financial rewards associated with environmentally responsible behaviour. Such rewards may include recognition, incentives, career opportunities, awards or other forms of organisational acknowledgement.

Green rewards are particularly relevant because they show that sustainability is not merely rhetorical but valued by the organisation. From a social exchange perspective, employees may interpret organisational support and recognition as evidence that the organisation values their contribution.

Proposition 1d: Green rewards are positively associated with job satisfaction.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to employees' overall positive or negative evaluation of their work and work-related experiences.

The original framework positions job satisfaction as an important employee-level variable because employee attitudes can influence organisational performance. Judge et al. (2001) reported a positive relationship between job satisfaction and job performance in their meta-analytic review.

Job satisfaction is particularly important in public organisations because employees translate institutional strategies into services and outcomes. A satisfied employee may be more willing to cooperate with colleagues, support organisational initiatives, respond positively to organisational change and contribute to service improvement.

Consequently, job satisfaction may represent an important psychological mechanism linking HR practices with institutional outcomes.

Institutional Excellence

Institutional excellence refers to an organisation's ability to achieve superior, sustainable and stakeholder-oriented performance through effective leadership, people management, processes, innovation and strategic alignment.

The concept has become particularly important within public administration. In the UAE, government excellence has been institutionalised through national and emirate-level excellence frameworks.

The UAE Government Excellence Model emphasises distinctive value, vision realisation and enablers. The framework emphasises proactive and innovative services, strategic achievement, human capital, partnerships, data, technology and sustainable value.

The framework operationalises institutional excellence through three dimensions: continuous innovation, service quality and strategic orientation. These dimensions are retained because they provide a focused organisational-level representation of excellence consistent with the conceptual framework.

GHRM and Institutional Excellence

GHRM may contribute to institutional excellence through several pathways. First, green HR practices can build a workforce with environmental knowledge and sustainability-oriented values. Second, GHRM can align employee behaviour with institutional objectives. Third, green HR practices can strengthen organisational cultures that encourage innovation and continuous improvement. Fourth, green performance and reward systems can reinforce desirable employee behaviours.

Recent research supports the broader relationship between GHRM and organisational performance. Lawter and Garnjost (2025) reviewed the GHRM-organizational performance literature and highlighted relationships with sustainability, environmental performance and green innovation.

Evidence from the UAE also suggests that GHRM has become increasingly relevant to public entities. Alhashmi et al. (2025) examined the impact of GHRM on sustainable performance among resources-industry-based public entities in the UAE.

This study extends this discussion by conceptualising institutional excellence, rather than environmental performance alone, as the organisational outcome.

Proposition 2: Green Human Resource Management is positively associated with institutional excellence.

Job Satisfaction and Institutional Excellence

Job satisfaction may contribute to institutional excellence because employees constitute an important organisational resource. Institutional excellence requires more than formal systems and strategies. It depends on employees who are willing and able to implement those strategies.

Satisfied employees may demonstrate stronger commitment, greater willingness to cooperate and greater readiness to contribute to organisational improvement.

The relationship is particularly relevant to the UAE public sector because contemporary government excellence frameworks emphasise human capital, employee engagement and workplace wellbeing.

Proposition 3: Job satisfaction is positively associated with institutional excellence.

The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction

The central contribution of this conceptual framework is the proposition that job satisfaction may mediate the relationship between GHRM and institutional excellence.

The logic is that GHRM practices represent organisational mechanisms; these practices influence employees' experiences, perceptions and attitudes; and those employee-level responses may subsequently influence organisational outcomes.

Thus, rather than assuming that GHRM automatically produces institutional excellence, the model proposes an intervening psychological mechanism. The relationship can therefore be expressed as GHRM → Job Satisfaction → Institutional Excellence.

Under the AMO perspective, GHRM can enhance employee abilities through green training, motivation through green rewards and performance management, and opportunities through participation and supportive HR systems.

Under Social Exchange Theory, employees may reciprocate organisational investment and support through positive attitudes and behaviours.

Proposition 4: Job satisfaction mediates the positive relationship between Green Human Resource Management and institutional excellence.

Theoretical Foundation

Ability–Motivation–Opportunity Theory

The Ability–Motivation–Opportunity framework provides a useful theoretical foundation for the proposed model. GHRM practices can influence the three AMO components.

Green recruitment and green training can develop ability. Green performance management and green rewards can strengthen motivation. Involving employees in environmental initiatives and sustainability-related organisational activities can create opportunity.

When employees have the required ability, motivation and opportunities, they may be better able to contribute to organisational objectives. In this study, AMO therefore explains why GHRM may influence employee attitudes and ultimately institutional outcomes.

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory provides a second theoretical explanation. Organisations that invest in employees through training, development, recognition and supportive HR systems may generate a perception of organisational support.

Employees may reciprocate such support through positive attitudes and behaviours. GHRM can therefore be understood as more than an environmental management tool. It may also signal the organisation's commitment to responsible management and employee development.

Such perceptions may contribute to job satisfaction and subsequently to institutional performance.

Conceptual Framework

The proposed conceptual model consists of GHRM as the independent variable, job satisfaction as the mediating variable, and institutional excellence as the dependent variable.

GHRM comprises four dimensions: green recruitment and selection, green training, green performance management, and green rewards. Institutional excellence is represented by continuous innovation, service quality and strategic orientation.

The direct pathway is GHRM → Institutional Excellence. The indirect pathway is GHRM → Job Satisfaction → Institutional Excellence.

Proposed Relationships

P1: Green Human Resource Management is positively associated with job satisfaction.

P1a: Green recruitment and selection is positively associated with job satisfaction.

P1b: Green training is positively associated with job satisfaction.

P1c: Green performance management is positively associated with job satisfaction.

P1d: Green rewards are positively associated with job satisfaction.

P2: Green Human Resource Management is positively associated with institutional excellence.

P3: Job satisfaction is positively associated with institutional excellence.

P4: Job satisfaction mediates the positive relationship between Green Human Resource Management and institutional excellence.

Methodological Approach for Future Empirical Testing

Although the present article is conceptual, the proposed framework can subsequently be tested empirically. A quantitative survey design would be appropriate for examining the proposed relationships among employees working in UAE public-sector organisations.

The original research design proposed a population of approximately 17,291 employees and a sample of approximately 376–400 respondents, with questionnaire-based data collection and PLS-SEM analysis. However, because this article does not have access to actual responses, these figures are presented only as a proposed empirical design, not as evidence of a completed survey.

Future empirical research could employ validated measurement scales for GHRM, job satisfaction and institutional excellence. PLS-SEM could subsequently be used to assess measurement reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, structural relationships, coefficient of determination, effect sizes, predictive relevance and mediation effects.

This conceptual article reports no empirical coefficients, significance values or mediation statistics because no dataset is available.

Discussion

The conceptual framework developed in this study offers an alternative way to understand GHRM in the public sector. Much of the GHRM literature has focused on environmental outcomes. The present framework proposes that GHRM's implications may extend beyond environmental performance to broader institutional excellence.

The first important argument is that GHRM is fundamentally a people-management mechanism. Although its ultimate objective may include environmental sustainability, GHRM operates through employees. Recruitment determines who enters the organisation. Training determines what employees know and can do. Performance management communicates what behaviours are expected. Rewards communicate what the organisation values.

The second argument concerns job satisfaction as a psychological mechanism. Organisations cannot achieve institutional excellence through formal strategies alone. Employees must perceive organisational practices positively and be willing to translate them into workplace behaviour.

The third argument concerns the public-sector nature of institutional excellence. Institutional excellence in government cannot be reduced to profitability. It encompasses service quality, innovation, strategic implementation, stakeholder value and public wellbeing.

Therefore, integrating GHRM with institutional excellence is theoretically meaningful because both areas emphasise people, innovation, sustainability and continuous improvement.

Theoretical Contributions

First, the study integrates GHRM and institutional excellence and moves beyond examining GHRM primarily in relation to environmental performance.

Second, the framework introduces job satisfaction as an employee-level mechanism. This matters because organisational practices do not automatically generate outcomes; employee attitudes may be a key pathway through which practices translate into performance.

Third, the framework extends GHRM discussion into a government context, particularly the UAE public sector, where public value, service quality, accountability and strategic national priorities are important.

Fourth, the framework is compatible with the UAE's institutional emphasis on innovation, human capital, strategic achievement and sustainable value.

Practical Implications

Public organisations should consider environmental awareness and sustainability orientation when designing recruitment and selection systems.

Organisations should integrate sustainability and environmental responsibility into employee development programmes.

Organisations should incorporate environmental objectives into appropriate performance indicators.

Employees who contribute to environmental initiatives and sustainable organisational practices should receive appropriate recognition.

Managers should recognise that green HR practices may influence not only environmental behaviour but also employee attitudes.

Public-sector organisations should integrate HR sustainability initiatives with broader institutional excellence strategies rather than managing GHRM as a separate environmental programme.

Implications for UAE Public-Sector Policy

At the policy level, the proposed framework suggests embedding sustainability in human resource policies rather than treating it solely as an environmental responsibility.

Government organisations could develop green recruitment guidelines, green competency frameworks, sustainability training programmes, sustainability-related performance indicators, green recognition systems, employee wellbeing initiatives, innovation programmes and integrated sustainability-performance dashboards.

Such an approach would potentially strengthen the connection between human capital development and government excellence.

An Islamic Ethical Perspective

Because the conceptual development context incorporates an Islamic academic orientation, an Islamic ethical perspective can remain a supporting perspective rather than the dominant theoretical framework if the manuscript targets a mainstream management journal.

Islamic principles such as amānah (trust/responsibility), khalīfah (stewardship), iḥsān (excellence) and responsible utilisation of resources provide a compatible ethical foundation for sustainability-oriented human resource management.

From this perspective, environmental responsibility can be viewed as part of responsible stewardship. At the same time, institutional excellence can be linked to the broader principle of pursuing quality and excellence in organisational responsibilities.

Limitations and Future Research

This article has an important limitation: it is conceptual and does not contain primary empirical data. Consequently, the proposed relationships cannot be interpreted as statistically confirmed relationships.

Future studies should empirically test the model using data collected from UAE public-sector employees. Longitudinal research would be particularly valuable because employee satisfaction and institutional excellence may change over time.

Future research could examine moderators such as organisational culture, leadership style, green organisational climate, employee environmental values, organisational support, digital transformation and public-sector innovation culture.

Future studies could also compare federal- and emirate-level government organisations to determine whether institutional context influences the strength of the proposed relationships.

Conclusion

This conceptual study proposes an integrated framework for explaining how Green Human Resource Management may contribute to institutional excellence in the UAE public sector through job satisfaction.

The framework conceptualises GHRM through four dimensions: green recruitment and selection, green training, green performance management and green rewards. These practices are proposed to influence job satisfaction, which subsequently contributes to institutional excellence through continuous innovation, service quality and strategic orientation.

The central argument is that GHRM should not be viewed solely as an environmental management instrument. Rather, it is a strategic human resource approach that can influence employee attitudes and potentially contribute to broader institutional outcomes.

The UAE provides a particularly relevant context because its government excellence philosophy emphasises innovation, distinctive service value, human capital development, strategic achievement and sustainable institutional performance.

The proposed model therefore provides a basis for future empirical investigation and contributes to the emerging discussion on how sustainability-oriented human resource practices can support institutional excellence in public-sector organisations.

Conceptual Model

Green Human Resource Management		
Green Recruitment & Selection Green Training Green Performance Management Green Rewards	→ Job Satisfaction →	Institutional Excellence Continuous Innovation Service Quality Strategic Orientation
Direct Pathway: Ghrm → Institutional Excellence Indirect Pathway: Ghrm → Job Satisfaction → Institutional Excellence		

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