

From Training to Trust: Examining How Green HR Practices Enhance Corporate Authenticity Under Greenwashing Pressures

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ABSTRACT: This study examines how Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) activities, namely green employee training, can increase organizational authenticity during a period when greenwashing has become a worldwide issue. Based on the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) and Signaling theories, the study focuses on determining the impacts of green employee training on the employees in terms of their environmental knowledge, skills, and perceptions regarding alignment of messages between internal practices and external communication. Based on the findings of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using the data obtained on the employees working in medium and large-scale organizations in Pakistan, the corresponding results indicated that the green employee training has a significant positive effect on green competencies and message alignment, which subsequently enhances perceptions of authenticity. The mediation of message alignment was especially high, which has to be taken into consideration when referring to the inconsistency in corporate activities and sustainability assertions. Remarkably, perceived greenwashing did not affect the positive effect of training on authenticity to a significant extent, which indicates that credibility and competence-based sustainability efforts may maintain credibility even in the face of distrust. On the whole, the study highlights that true sustainability starts within the organization, through empowered, knowledgeable, and aligned employees who embody environmental values in their day-to-day work.

KEYWORDS: Green Human Resource Management (GHRM), Green Employee Training, Perceived Authenticity, Greenwashing

Introduction

Sustainability is now not only a strategic concern of the corporate world, but also a moral and image-related necessity. Companies of all sectors are increasingly expressing their environmental responsibilities through their sustainability reports, eco-labels, and green advertising campaigns. However, with this increasing excitement, many companies fail to move beyond superficial activities toward genuine practices of embedding these practices. This disparity between organizational declarations and actions has led to the issue of greenwashing, where sustainability is said to be more than what it is or claimed to be. These practices destroy not only the organization's external credibility but also employees' internal trust in its values and intentions.

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With the shift of sustainability from a marketing slogan into a cultural value, Human Resource Management (HRM) becomes instrumental. HRM is the intermediary between the organization's objectives and the employee behaviors and influences internalization and implementation of the environmental values in the daily labor practices. Green employee training is one of the green HRM initiatives that is especially important and provides employees with knowledge, skills, and motivation to facilitate eco-friendly practices. Nevertheless, although the connection between green HRM and environmental performance has been extensively researched, little is mentioned about the impact of such initiatives on the perceptions of employees regarding authenticity, i.e., the degree to which employees see the sustainability activities of their organization as authentic and not pretentious.

It is essential to understand authenticity in the sense of sustainability since corporate messages do not simply enter the employees, but they are central to the interpretation of meaning in the organization. The success or failure of the green initiatives depends on how they are perceived. Theories of Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) model and Signaling Theory are useful in this respect. The AMO model describes why the HR practices are able to create the abilities and motivations of employees to perform activities according to the company's objectives, whereas Signaling Theory underlines the ways in which the regularity of internal and external signals may be used to create or ruin impressions of authenticity. Trust and authenticity would get enhanced when the employees are given sustainable signals between what the organization espouses and what it does.

Although more and more employers are willing to focus on green HRM, there is still very little empirical research that studies the role of green training in perceived authenticity, especially when it comes to situations where concerns of greenwashing are involved. Most previous research has examined the reactions of consumers towards greenwashing, without considering the inner-world view of the employees who see these sustainability practices directly. In addition, little consideration has been paid to the mediating processes, including green knowledge and skills or internal-external message alignment that may be used to elaborate on how training leads to perceptions of authenticity.

In filling these gaps, the current research explores ways in which green employee training improves organizational authenticity via the knowledge, skills, and perceptions of message consistency by employees as well as the impacts of perceived greenwashing on such relationships. The present study involves the development of an AMO and Signaling framework-based study that has implications for theory and practice; it provides a more in-depth insight into how organizational authenticity can be achieved through the application of employee-centered sustainability interventions to promote genuine and trust-based organizational behavior. By so doing, it goes beyond the symbolic practice of green and brings out the human aspect of sustainable transformation, whereby the real change starts at the personal level.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the impact of green employee training on employees' green knowledge, skills, and alignment of internal and external messages.
2. To explore the role of employees' green knowledge and skills in enhancing perceptions of organizational authenticity.
3. To assess how internal–external message alignment influences employees' perceptions of organizational authenticity.
4. To investigate whether green employee training directly contributes to perceived organizational authenticity.

5. To analyze the mediating roles of employees' green knowledge, skills, and message alignment in the relationship between training and authenticity.
6. To examine the moderating role of perceived greenwashing in the relationships among training, knowledge, skills, alignment, and authenticity.

Research Questions

1. How does green employee training influence employees' green knowledge and skills, and internal–external message alignment?
2. Do employees' green knowledge and skills contribute to perceptions of organizational authenticity?
3. In what ways does internal–external message alignment strengthen authenticity perceptions?
4. Does green employee training directly enhance authenticity perceptions?
5. Do knowledge, skills, and message alignment mediate the relationship between training and authenticity?
6. Does perceived greenwashing weaken the positive effects of training, knowledge, and alignment on authenticity?

Literature Review

Green employee training and Green knowledge and skills

Green employee training is generally considered to be one of the pillars of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM). This kind of training gives employees technical skills and environmental consciousness to make them embrace sustainable practices at work (Renwick et al., 2013). By shifting the training focus to eco-friendly activities, including waste minimization, energy savings, and sustainable resource use, not only can employees acquire useful skills but also form the mentality of sustainability (Renwick et al., 2013). This is in support of the Ability dimension of the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) theory, which states that employees should have the right skills and competencies to be able to act sustainably (Jiang & Messersmith, 2018). The lack of training of the employees might mean they do not know how to translate organizational goals into practice. Therefore, green training will have a direct positive impact on the environmental skills and knowledge of the employees.

H1: Green employee training positively affects employees' green knowledge and skills.

Green employee training and internal–external message alignment

In addition to developing competencies, green training influences the perception by employees about the fit between what is said (organizational external communication) and what is done (organizational internal practices). According to research, the more employees receive structured training, the more they tend to perceive coherence (Connelly et al., 2011). The sustainability claims in the organization and the actual workplace behaviors. This goes along with the Signaling theory, which proposes that internal practices serve as a source of signals to both the staff and other stakeholders on whether corporate promises are genuine or not (Connelly et al., 2011). Conversely, in the absence of training, the employees might feel that there is no connection between marketing outside and what is happening internally, a factor that undermines perceptions of authenticity. Therefore, employee training on green issues is vital in overcoming internal and external alignment of messages.

H2: Green employee training positively affects internal–external message alignment.

Employees' Green Knowledge and Skills, and Perceived Authenticity

Perceived authenticity refers to stakeholders' belief that an organization is genuinely committed to the values and practices it professes. Employees' knowledge and skills play a crucial role in shaping these perceptions, as they

translate organizational policies into observable behaviors (Jang, 2021). Strong green competencies among employees signal that sustainability is embedded in organizational practices rather than merely symbolic. Prior research indicates that employee competencies enhance perceptions of authenticity by reducing skepticism and strengthening credibility (Jang, 2021; Rahman et al., 2015). Simply put, employees act as visible carriers of organizational authenticity.

H3: Employees' green knowledge and skills positively influence perceived authenticity.

Internal–External Message Alignment and Perceived Authenticity

The consistency between external and internal practices of organizations is one of the most significant sources of perceived authenticity (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Stakeholders are also fast to spot inconsistencies, and even slightest deviations can be used to make greenwashing accusations. On the other hand, the credibility of organizations is perceived when employees and managers support sustainability claims with observable activities (Rahman et al., 2015). The alignment of messages between the internal and the external environment makes sure that the sustainability efforts are not seen as mere symbolism. Therefore, alignment is an effective trust-building tool.

H4: Internal–external message alignment positively influences perceived authenticity.

Green employee training and Perceived authenticity

In spite of the importance of the knowledge, skills, and alignment, training itself can have a direct influence on the perceptions of authenticity. Investing in employee development sends such information to the organization that sustainability is not a short-term branding, but a long-term plan (Bilderback, 2024). Previously reported research indicated that visible training and development spending can be trusted as effective indicators of commitment, which affects the attitude of employees and communities toward genuineness (Testa et al., 2018). Therefore, mediators may not be the only way in which the green training will work, but it may directly increase the authenticity.

H5: Green employee training directly enhances perceived authenticity.

The Mediating Role of Employees' Green Knowledge and Skills in the Relationship between Training and Authenticity

Training becomes useful when it translates into employee competencies. The AMO theory suggests that knowledge and skills acquired during the training help employees to pursue sustainable behavior, which ultimately leads to a perception of authenticity (Renwick et al., 2013). According to this mediation, the impact of training on authenticity does not merely exist on the level of policy but through the live practices of the employees. In the absence of acquisition of skills, training can be only symbolic, not effective.

H6: Employees' green knowledge and skills mediate the relationship between training and authenticity.

The Mediating Role of Internal–External Message Alignment between Training and Authenticity

Green training provides the employees with knowledge to incorporate sustainable practices in daily life, which enhances the alignment between the external assertions and the internal practices (Rahman et al., 2015). It is then this alignment that serves as a channel through which training develops authenticity. That is, the training could not necessarily generate perceptions of sincerity per se but just provide some consistency between what the organization states and what it does. This mediation plays an important role in overcoming stakeholder skepticism since consistency in the message builds trust (Jang, 2021).

H7: Internal–external message alignment mediates the relationship between training and authenticity.

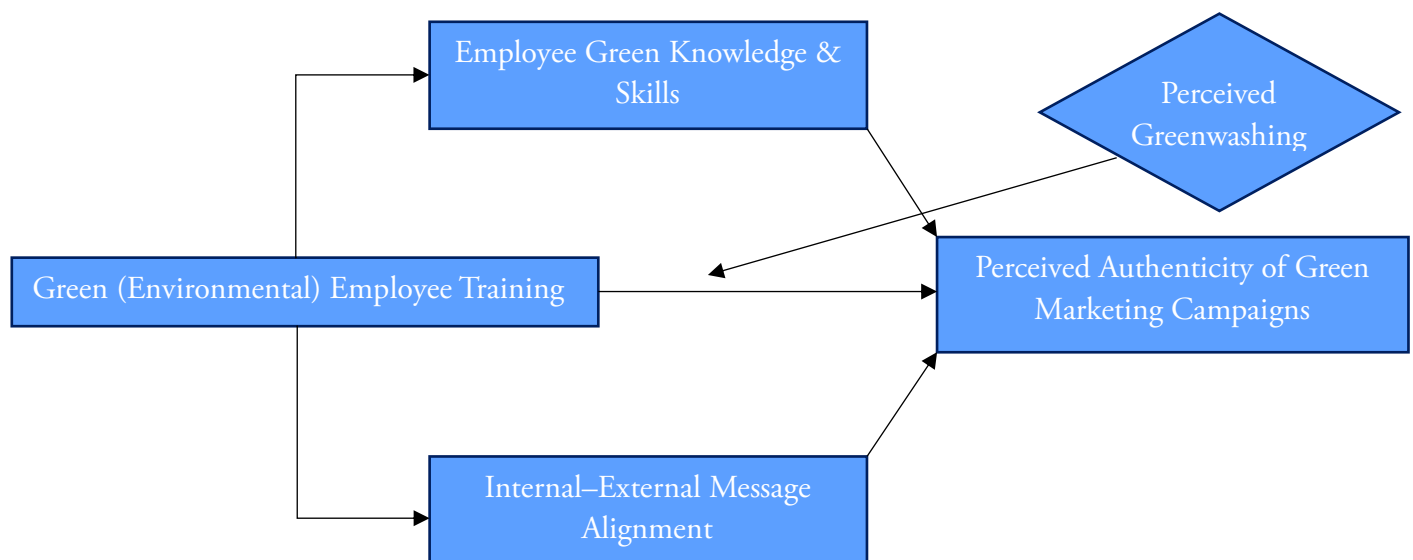
Perceived Greenwashing as a Moderator of the Relationship between Training, Knowledge, Alignment, and Authenticity

The presence of greenwashing perceptions may still influence outcomes of the organization even in cases where they deliver strong training and attain message alignment. Greenwashing is the situation when the stakeholders feel that sustainability statements are far-fetched, deceptive, or even hypocritical (Rahman et al., 2015). In case of a high level of such perceptions, organizational motives are undermined, since stakeholders doubt them because of the positive effect of the knowledge, alignment, and training on authenticity (Chen & Chang, 2013). This is consistent with the study that revealed that once the trust is destroyed by the greenwashing allegations, even the real efforts are perceived with hesitations (Bernini & Rosa, 2025). Perceived greenwashing, therefore, is a moderate contextual element between training and authenticity.

H8: Perceived greenwashing weakens the positive effects of knowledge, alignment, and training on authenticity.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Methodology

The study used a cross-sectional survey design to examine relationships among green employee training, green knowledge and skills, internal-external message alignment, perceived authenticity, and perceived greenwashing. A structured questionnaire ensured standardized data collection and supported reliable statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The population included employees from medium- to large-sized organizations in manufacturing, energy, services, and consumer goods sectors. Stratified random sampling was applied to capture perspectives across hierarchical levels, and a minimum of 300 valid responses was targeted to meet SEM requirements (Hair et al., 2019). Data were collected through self-administered online and paper questionnaires, with respondents briefed on the study's purpose and assured of anonymity to encourage honest participation. All constructs were measured using four-item, validated scales drawn from prior studies.

Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM in SmartPLS, given its suitability for complex and predictive models. The measurement model was assessed through reliability and validity indicators, including Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, AVE, and HTMT. The structural model was evaluated using bootstrapped path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values, while R^2 and Q^2 values were used to assess explanatory and predictive power.

Results

Table 1

Demographic Profile

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	58	46.4%
	Female	67	53.6%
Age	20–30 years	45	36.0%
	31–40 years	65	52.0%
	Above 40 years	15	12.0%
Marital Status	Single	40	32.0%
	Married	85	68.0%
Degree Level	Bachelor	30	24.0%
	Master	70	56.0%
	MPhil/PhD	25	20.0%

Figure 2

Measurement Model

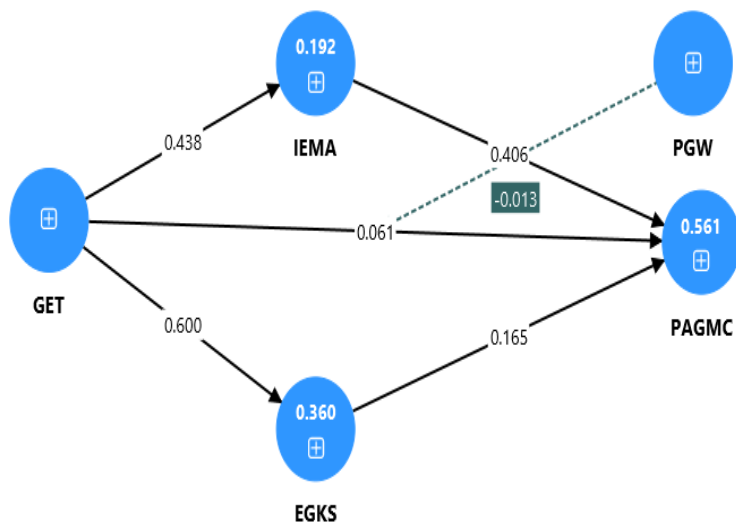


Figure 3

Structure Model

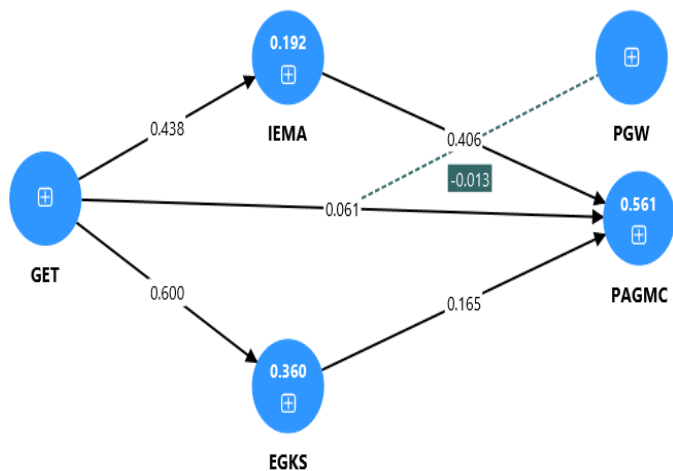


Table 2

Outer Model

	EGKS	GET	IEMA	PAGMC	PGW	PGW x GET
EGKS1	0.75					
EGKS2	0.738					
EGKS3	0.677					
EGKS4	0.704					
GET1		0.71				
GET2		0.679				
GET3		0.796				
GET4		0.757				
IEMA1			0.786			
IEMA2			0.703			
IEMA3			0.682			
IEMA4			0.749			
PAGMC1				0.733		
PAGMC2				0.735		
PAGMC3				0.73		
PAGMC4				0.59		

Measurement Model Results

To assess the measurement model, reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were examined. The results of internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability), convergent validity (AVE), and discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker and HTMT) are presented below.

Table 3

Reliability and Validity of Constructs

Construct	Cronbach’s α	Composite Reliability (ρ_a)	Composite Reliability (ρ_c)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
EGKS	0.686	0.687	0.809	0.515
GET	0.721	0.732	0.826	0.543
IEMA	0.709	0.714	0.821	0.534
PAGMC	0.649	0.657	0.792	0.490
PGW	0.624	0.624	0.780	0.470

All constructs meet or approach the minimum reliability standards (Cronbach’s $\alpha \geq 0.70$; $\rho_c \geq 0.70$). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceed or closely approximate 0.50, indicating satisfactory convergent validity (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 4

Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Constructs	EGKS	GET	IEMA	PAGMC	PGW
EGKS	0.718				
GET	0.600	0.737			
IEMA	0.621	0.438	0.731		
PAGMC	0.606	0.467	0.674	0.700	
PGW	0.578	0.493	0.525	0.603	0.686

The square roots of the AVE (diagonal values in bold) are greater than the interconstruct correlations, confirming discriminant validity according to the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 5

Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio Matrix

Constructs	EGKS	GET	IEMA	PAGMC	PGW
EGKS	—	0.701	0.734	0.689	0.661
GET		—	0.512	0.558	0.592
IEMA			—	0.903	0.731
PAGMC				—	0.911
PGW					-

Most HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.90. However, the values for IEMA–PAGMC (0.903) and PAGMC–PGW (0.911) slightly exceeded the threshold, indicating possible conceptual overlap that should be interpreted with caution.

Table 6

Specific Indirect Effect

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
GET > IEMA > PAGMC	0.178	0.178	0.029	6.203	0.000
GET > EGKS > PAGMC	0.099	0.098	0.033	2.953	0.003

The analysis revealed two significant indirect relationships. Employee training in green had a positive effect on perceived authenticity in both internal and external message congruency, and Green knowledge and skills of employees. The indirect influence by way of alignment of the message ($b = 0.178, p < 0.001$) was more powerful than the one by means of knowledge and skills ($b = 0.099, p = 0.003$). This suggests that an employee who has been well trained on green matters does not only become more competent but he or she develops a sense of consistency between what the organization says and does. This consistency, in turn, increases their organizational authenticity. On the whole, these results prove that message alignment and employee competence are some meaningful bridges between training and authenticity.

Table 7

Hypothesis Testing

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
EGKS > PAGMC	0.165	0.163	0.054	3.039	0.002
GET > EGKS	0.600	0.603	0.047	12.871	0.000
GET > IEMA	0.438	0.442	0.059	7.457	0.000
GET > PAGMC	0.338	0.338	0.058	5.820	0.000
IEMA > PAGMC	0.406	0.405	0.052	7.820	0.000
PGW > PAGMC	0.267	0.270	0.058	4.611	0.000
PGW x GET > PAGMC	0.013	0.017	0.029	0.444	0.657

The total effects analysis gives a broad overview of the interaction between the variables in the study. The results indicate that the green employee training (GET) has a strong impact on employee green knowledge and skills (EGKS) ($b = 0.600$, $p = 0.001$) and internal-external message alignment (IEMA) ($b = 0.438$, $p = 0.001$). Both knowledge and alignment, in its turn, have a significant positive effect on perceived authenticity (PAGMC) ($b = 0.165$ and $b = 0.406$, respectively, $p < 0.01$).

The direct effect of training on authenticity is also positive and significant ($b = 0.338$, $p < 0.001$), which proves that training in itself conveys honesty and enhances credibility. Furthermore, there exists a moderate positive correlation between perceived greenwashing (PGW) and authenticity ($b = 0.267$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that even in the case of a situation when people are slightly doubtful about the realness of the initiatives, the employees may still perceive these initiatives as credible. Nevertheless, the interaction effect (PGW \times GET) was not significant ($b = 0.013$, $p = 0.657$), which implies that the impressions of greenwashing have no meaningful influence on the effect of training on authenticity.

Altogether, the findings corroborate the hypothesis that green employee training is one of the key factors behind the concept, aiming at building the employee competencies and aligning the sustainability messages, as well as the perceived greenwashing does not have a significant moderating effect.

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the central role of Green HRM in promoting real sustainability. Green employee training not only creates environmental awareness and operational competence, but also enables employees to understand and internalize sustainability messages in their organization. This is very similar to the Ability Motivation Opportunity (AMO) theory, which also stresses that employees should be provided with appropriate skills and motivation to be sustainable in their actions. When structured green training is made available to employees by their organizations, employees become active contributors towards the environmental objectives as opposed to mere recipients of the policy mandates.

The findings also confirm the Signaling theory that holds that practices by the internal HR can be a reliable indicator of corporate intentions. Employees who undergo sustainability-oriented training are more likely to achieve consistency between external communication and internal practices. This message congruity supports the belief in authenticity, since employees get to know that the organization's environmental commitments are more than mere words, but are manifested in everyday life and reinforced by actual investment in people.

The mediating relationships that were tested showed that message alignment was a stronger mediator compared to the green knowledge and skills. This underscores the fact that technical competencies are important, but what employees believe is what is genuine is whether the company is perceived to be doing what it says and what it does. The credibility of sustainability messages can be enhanced by the fact that they are supported by concrete actions, which also reduces the danger of cynicism. This observation aligns with prior research emphasizing consistency between internal practices and external communication (Jang, 2021; Rahman et al., 2015).

An interesting finding was that perceived greenwashing did not have a significant moderating effect on the relationship between training and authenticity. This means that in the event that organizations are genuinely committed to employee training and development, even a level of external mistrust is unlikely to diminish genuine perceptions of authenticity. It implies that authenticity that is based on individuals and practices is more resilient than the one that is based only on marketing narratives.

Overall, these results support the premise that sustainability starts in the workforce. Green training is a potential enhancer of capabilities and a trust-building mechanism. It helps close the gap between sustainability promises and actual practice and thus demonstrates genuine action rather than symbolic communication.

Conclusion

The study is relevant to the growing literature on sustainable HRM because it shows that green employee training is central in developing perceptions of corporate authenticity. The research proves that training improves authenticity both directly and indirectly in two ways, namely, the formation of green knowledge and skills of employees, and the fact that internal practices meet external communication. It is probable that organizations that invest in the development of people would be perceived as authentic, open, and credible.

Interestingly, despite the existence of mild greenwashing perceptions, the training's beneficial effect has not been affected. This finding provides useful insight to organizations that want to restore credibility when they are in markets that are likely to question their claims based on environmental concerns. In the case of the emerging economies like Pakistan, with the sustainability processes still under development, this points to the key strategic role of internal HR led interventions as the basis of authentic corporate sustainability.

Authenticity, in a nutshell, cannot be acquired by words but by actions that can be observed, engaged in, and felt by the employees. Organizations that make HR systems to ensure people development correspond to the purpose of the environment, develop credibility and commitment, which are the most important values for long-term sustainability success.

Future Recommendations

Looking ahead, this study opens several meaningful paths for future research. One valuable direction would be to use longitudinal designs to understand how the influence of green training unfolds over time. Observing how employees' perceptions of authenticity evolve as sustainability practices mature could reveal whether the positive changes seen at the beginning continue to grow or fade as the organization evolves. Another promising area would be to explore how leadership and organizational culture shape authentic sustainability. Examining the role of green leadership, ethical values, and top management commitment could help explain how a genuine sustainability mindset is nurtured and sustained within organizations. Finally, future work could also look beyond the internal perspective of employees and include voices from outside the organization—such as customers, investors, and community members. Comparing these different viewpoints would offer a more complete picture of how authenticity and trust in an organization's sustainability efforts are built and perceived across various groups.

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