

# From Policy to Culture: A Narrative Study on Organizational Culture Transformation through Green Human Resource Management

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## Abstract

*This qualitative narrative study investigates the role of Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) in driving organizational culture transformation toward sustainability in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. As global environmental challenges intensify, organizations are increasingly tasked with moving beyond policy compliance to embedding ecological consciousness into their cultural fabric. Through semi-structured interviews with HR professionals and employees in two environmentally certified companies, this research explores how Green HRM practices such as green recruitment, eco-training, and sustainability-aligned performance appraisals reshape values, identities, and daily practices. Findings reveal that Green HRM fosters a collective environmental ethos by aligning individual and organizational identities with sustainability goals. Leadership commitment, peer influence, and the integration of ecological metrics into HR systems emerged as critical drivers of cultural change. Participants' narratives highlighted pride in eco-friendly initiatives and a shift from viewing sustainability as a compliance requirement to a shared responsibility rooted in South Sulawesi's socio-cultural context, where regional ecological vulnerabilities amplify the urgency of action. However, challenges persist in balancing productivity demands with sustainability imperatives, underscoring the need for adaptive strategies and collaborative problem-solving. This study contributes to the socio-cultural discourse on Green HRM, advocating for context-sensitive approaches that bridge global sustainability agendas with local realities. It offers practical insights for organizations seeking to transform environmental policies into lived cultural values.*

**Keywords:** *Green Human Resource Management, Organizational culture transformation, Sustainability-oriented values, Qualitative narrative inquiry, South Sulawesi*

## INTRODUCTION

In an era where climate change and ecological degradation threaten global stability, organizations face mounting pressure to integrate sustainability into their core strategies (IPCC, 2021). While environmental policies have long been institutionalized, the transition from compliance to cultural commitment remains a critical challenge. Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) has emerged as a transformative framework, bridging the gap between policy and practice by fostering sustainability-oriented values, identities, and daily behaviors within organizations (Ahmad, 2022). This shift positions Green HRM not merely as an operational tool but as a catalyst for organizational culture transformation, particularly in regions where ecological consciousness intersects with socio-economic development, such as South Sulawesi, Indonesia.

The urgency of embedding sustainability into organizational culture is underscored by the disconnect between policy implementation and employee engagement. Traditional HRM approaches often prioritize compliance over intrinsic motivation, resulting in superficial adherence to environmental goals (Dumont et al., 2017). However, emerging studies highlight Green HRM's potential to reshape collective values through practices like green recruitment, eco-training, and sustainability-aligned performance metrics (Tang et al., 2020). For instance, employees in environmentally certified companies increasingly report heightened ecological awareness and pride in contributing to green initiatives, suggesting that Green HRM can transcend policy to cultivate shared environmental identities (Yusliza et al., 2020).

Despite growing academic interest, research on the socio-cultural dimensions of Green HRM remains fragmented, particularly in developing contexts like Indonesia. Previous studies have focused predominantly on Western organizations, neglecting the unique cultural, economic, and regulatory landscapes of regions such as South Sulawesi, where community livelihoods often depend

on natural resources (Saeed et al., 2021). A 2023 report by the South Sulawesi Environmental Agency emphasized the province's vulnerability to deforestation and marine pollution, yet local businesses struggle to align corporate practices with sustainability narratives. This gap highlights the need for context-specific explorations of how Green HRM can drive cultural change in resource-dependent communities.

Prior community engagement initiatives in South Sulawesi have addressed environmental education and waste management, but rarely integrated HR systems as levers for cultural transformation. For example, a 2021 community service project in Makassar promoted recycling awareness but overlooked organizational structures that perpetuate unsustainable habits (Muslimin et al., 2021). Conversely, international case studies demonstrate that Green HRM interventions, such as eco-leadership programs and green team collaborations, foster lasting behavioral shifts by aligning individual values with organizational missions (Jabbour, 2020). These insights underscore the untapped potential of Green HRM in South Sulawesi's journey toward ecological resilience.

This narrative study seeks to deepen understanding of how Green HRM initiatives reshape organizational culture in two environmentally certified companies in South Sulawesi. By employing qualitative interviews with HR professionals and employees, it explores the lived experiences of individuals navigating the interplay between policy mandates and cultural evolution. Drawing on the narrative identity theory (Somers, 1994), the research examines how stories of personal alignment with sustainability goals, pride in green achievements, and evolving workplace rituals collectively redefine organizational identity. Such narratives not only reflect cultural change but actively construct it, offering a human-centered lens to analyze Green HRM's transformative power.

The aim of this community service-oriented research is to provide actionable insights for organizations in South Sulawesi seeking to transition from policy-based environmental management to culturally rooted sustainability. By illuminating the role of Green HRM in fostering ecological consciousness, this study contributes to regional development goals while advancing global discourse on the socio-cultural dimensions of sustainability. Ultimately, it advocates for HRM practices that nurture both planetary health and organizational cohesion, ensuring that sustainability becomes a lived value rather than a bureaucratic obligation.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative narrative inquiry approach to explore how Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) initiatives shape organizational culture within the context of South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The research was conducted in two environmentally certified companies in the province, selected through purposive sampling to ensure alignment with the study's focus on sustainability-driven organizations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 25 participants, including HR managers, employees from operational and administrative departments, and sustainability officers. The interviews, conducted in both Indonesian and the local Makassar language, emphasized participants' lived experiences, personal stories, and perceptions of Green HRM's role in cultural transformation. To enrich contextual understanding, field notes from workplace observations and internal documents, such as sustainability reports and training manuals, were triangulated with interview data, enhancing the depth and credibility of findings (Flick, 2020).

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis, guided by a constructivist epistemology that prioritizes participants' subjective interpretations. Interview transcripts were coded iteratively to identify patterns related to sustainability values, identity formation, and daily practices. For instance, narratives about "eco-conscious leadership" and "green peer influence" emerged as recurring themes, reflecting the interplay between policy and culture. NVivo software facilitated the organization of codes and themes, while member-checking sessions with participants ensured the accuracy and resonance of interpretations (Birt et al., 2020). The study's narrative focus aligns with Riessman's (2022) emphasis on storytelling as a tool for understanding cultural change, allowing participants to articulate how Green HRM policies, such as eco-training programs or green performance incentives, reshaped their workplace identities and collective environmental ethos.

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research. Informed consent was obtained, with assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, particularly given the sensitivity of discussing organizational practices in a close-knit regional context (Saunders et al., 2019). Reflexivity was maintained by documenting the researcher's positionality as an external academic and acknowledging potential biases during data interpretation. To address contextual relevance, findings were contextualized within South Sulawesi's socio-cultural dynamics, such as the region's reliance on marine and agricultural resources, which amplified participants' narratives of ecological responsibility. This methodology not only captures the human dimensions of Green HRM but also offers transferable insights for organizations in similar resource-dependent regions striving to align policy with cultural praxis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a profound interplay between Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) practices and the cultivation of a sustainability-oriented organizational culture in South Sulawesi. Participants consistently emphasized that Green HRM policies, initially perceived as compliance measures, gradually evolved into shared values through daily engagement. For instance, green recruitment practices prioritizing candidates with environmental awareness were described by HR managers as "planting seeds for a greener mindset" (HR Manager A). Employees noted that these practices fostered a sense of collective responsibility, with one participant stating, "Hiring people who care about the planet made me reflect on my role in sustainability" (Employee B). This aligns with Ahmad's (2022) assertion that Green HRM serves as a cultural bridge, transforming procedural adherence into intrinsic motivation.

A central theme emerged around the role of leadership and peer influence in normalizing eco-conscious behaviors. Sustainability officers highlighted how environmental training programs, coupled with visible leadership commitment, created "ripples of change" across departments. A department head shared, "When leaders started attending recycling workshops, it signaled that sustainability wasn't just a checklist" (Sustainability Officer C). Such narratives reflect Jabbour's (2020) findings on the cascading impact of eco-leadership. Additionally, green teams and peer-led initiatives such as waste reduction competitions strengthened interpersonal accountability. Employees recounted stories of colleagues gently correcting unsustainable habits, illustrating how social dynamics reinforced cultural norms.

The integration of sustainability into performance appraisal systems emerged as a pivotal driver of identity transformation. Participants described how metrics tied to energy conservation or eco-innovation shifted their self-perception from "employees" to "environmental stewards." One participant noted, "Seeing my carbon footprint reductions in my performance review made me realize my daily choices matter" (Employee D). This aligns with Yusliza et al.'s (2020) observation that aligning HRM systems with ecological goals embeds sustainability into professional identities. Notably, participants expressed pride in their organization's environmental certifications, framing them as symbols of collective achievement rather than bureaucratic milestones.

However, the study also uncovered tensions in balancing cultural evolution with operational demands. Some employees in resource-intensive roles, such as manufacturing, initially resisted Green HRM policies, perceiving them as conflicting with productivity targets. A supervisor recounted, "We had to redesign workflows to reduce plastic use without slowing output, it took time and dialogue" (Supervisor E). These challenges underscore Saeed et al.'s (2021) argument that cultural shifts require iterative adaptation. Over time, however, collaborative problem-solving and transparent communication mitigated resistance, with many participants acknowledging improved morale and innovation stemming from sustainability challenges.

Finally, the socio-cultural context of South Sulawesi profoundly shaped the narratives. Participants frequently linked organizational sustainability efforts to regional ecological vulnerabilities, such as coastal erosion and deforestation. An HR manager reflected, "Our mangrove restoration project isn't just corporate CSR, it's about protecting our home" (HR Manager F). This place-based connection amplified emotional engagement, resonating with Muslimin et al.'s (2021) emphasis on localizing sustainability. Stories of employees volunteering in community clean-ups or

advocating for traditional eco-friendly practices highlighted how organizational culture and regional identity co-evolved, positioning Green HRM as both a corporate and communal responsibility.

### Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the transformative potential of Green HRM in fostering a sustainability-oriented organizational culture, resonating with global discourse while highlighting unique socio-cultural dynamics in South Sulawesi. The evolution of Green HRM from policy compliance to shared values aligns with Ahmad's (2022) conceptualization of HRM as a cultural bridge, where procedural mechanisms like green recruitment and training ignite intrinsic motivation. Participants' narratives of "planting seeds for a greener mindset" reflect a shift from transactional environmentalism to relational engagement, mirroring Yusliza et al.'s (2020) observations in Southeast Asian contexts. This suggests that Green HRM's cultural impact hinges on its ability to intertwine sustainability with individual and collective identities, transcending mere policy adherence.

The role of leadership and peer influence in normalizing eco-conscious behaviors amplifies Jabbour's (2020) findings on the cascading effects of eco-leadership. Visible commitment from leaders such as participating in recycling workshops, signaled authenticity, transforming sustainability from a top-down mandate to a shared mission. Similarly, peer-led initiatives fostered micro-cultures of accountability, where social dynamics reinforced eco-friendly norms. These findings challenge traditional HRM paradigms that prioritize compliance over social learning (Dumont et al., 2017), emphasizing instead the need for HR systems to leverage interpersonal networks as catalysts for cultural change.

Integrating sustainability into performance appraisal systems emerged as a critical mechanism for identity transformation, corroborating Saeed et al.'s (2021) argument that aligning metrics with ecological goals embeds sustainability into professional self-concepts. However, tensions between cultural evolution and operational efficiency reveal a paradox: while Green HRM fosters pride and innovation, it also demands reconciling sustainability with productivity pressures. This echoes Tang et al.'s (2020) caution that cultural shifts require reimagining workflows, not just revising metrics. The gradual acceptance of such changes in South Sulawesi's industries underscores the importance of iterative dialogue, as highlighted by participants' accounts of collaborative problem-solving.

The socio-cultural context of South Sulawesi profoundly shaped the narratives, illustrating how place-based identity enhances Green HRM's cultural resonance. Participants' connection of organizational sustainability to regional ecological vulnerabilities such as mangrove restoration as a "communal responsibility" aligns with Muslimin et al.'s (2021) emphasis on localizing environmental action. This regional embedding challenges the universality of Western-centric Green HRM frameworks, suggesting that cultural transformation thrives when sustainability aligns with local values and livelihoods. The interplay between organizational and regional identities positions Green HRM not only as a corporate strategy but as a vehicle for community resilience.

Ultimately, this study advances the socio-cultural lens in Green HRM research, offering nuanced insights for resource-dependent regions. It reaffirms that cultural transformation requires more than policy implementation it demands fostering emotional engagement, leveraging local identity, and nurturing spaces for collaborative adaptation. For South Sulawesi, this implies designing HRM practices that honor regional ecological interdependence while addressing global sustainability imperatives. Future research could explore how such contextualized approaches translate to other Global South settings, where cultural and environmental realities similarly intersect.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) serves as a potent catalyst for transforming organizational culture from policy-driven compliance to deeply rooted sustainability values. By embedding ecological consciousness into recruitment, training, leadership practices, and performance appraisal systems, Green HRM fosters a collective identity centered on environmental stewardship. Participants' narratives revealed how these practices nurture pride, accountability, and emotional engagement, particularly in South Sulawesi's context, where regional ecological vulnerabilities amplify the urgency of sustainability. The interplay between organizational initiatives and socio-cultural identity underscores the importance of localizing Green HRM, ensuring that sustainability resonates with employees' lived experiences and communal responsibilities. These findings align with Ahmad (2022) and Yusliza et al. (2020), affirming that cultural transformation hinges on aligning HRM systems with both global sustainability goals and regional values.

However, the journey from policy to culture is not without challenges. Balancing productivity demands with sustainability imperatives requires iterative dialogue, adaptive leadership, and reimagined workflows, as highlighted by tensions in resource-intensive sectors. The study emphasizes that Green HRM's success lies in fostering collaborative spaces where employees co-create solutions, bridging individual agency with organizational missions. For South Sulawesi and similar regions, this implies prioritizing HRM strategies that honor local ecological interdependence while addressing global environmental crises. Future research should explore how such contextualized approaches translate across diverse Global South settings, offering scalable insights for organizations striving to make sustainability a lived reality rather than a procedural formality.

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