

Effect of Green Human Resource Management on Corporate Environmental Performance: The Mediating Role of Green Innovation and Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Chinese Telecom Enterprises

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Abstract

This article aimed to study: 1) to explore the effects of green human resource management (GHRM), green innovation (GI) and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) on corporate environmental performance (CEP) in Chinese Telecommunication Enterprises. 2) to explore the effects of green human resource management (GHRM) through green innovation (GI) and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) that impact the corporate environmental performance (CEP) in Chinese Telecommunication Enterprises. A mixed-methods research approach was employed, integrating quantitative survey analysis with qualitative semi-structured interviews. In the quantitative phase, 369 valid responses were collected from employees across multiple Chinese telecommunication companies using structured questionnaires designed to measure green human resource management, green innovation, organizational citizenship behavior, and corporate environmental performance. The qualitative phase involved in-depth interviews with managers and employees, providing nuanced insights into the mechanisms by which green human resource management practices and green initiatives are implemented and experienced within organizations. The findings indicated that green human resource management, green innovation, and organizational citizenship behavior all exert significant positive effects on corporate environmental performance, with green innovation demonstrating the strongest direct influence, emphasizing its strategic role in driving environmental improvements. Organizational citizenship behavior also positively contributed to corporate environmental performance and further

enhanced it indirectly by promoting green innovation. Green human resource management's effect on corporate environmental performance was largely mediated through organizational citizenship behavior and green innovation, highlighting the systemic importance of cultivating employee engagement and innovation in green practices. Qualitative insights corroborated these results, revealing that effective green human resource management practices, including recruitment, training, and performance appraisal aligned with sustainability objectives, fostered a culture of environmental responsibility and enabled employees to actively participate in green innovation initiatives.

Keywords: Green Human Resource Management; Corporate Environment Performance; Green Innovation; Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Introduction

The telecommunications industry has undergone rapid technological evolution from the analog era to 5G, which has driven economic growth and digital globalization while generating significant environmental concerns. In China, the three state-owned operators—China Mobile, China Telecom, and China Unicom—are strategic pillars of the economy, yet the accelerated deployment of 5G has led to shortened equipment life cycles, more than 500,000 tons of annual e-waste, and a threefold increase in power consumption compared to 4G, with the industry's total electricity use reaching 216 billion kWh in 2022. To mitigate these issues, telecom enterprises have promoted green strategies such as AI-based energy-saving systems, minimalist site designs, and base station sharing. Despite these advances, structural deficiencies persist, particularly the imbalance between hardware procurement (72% of investment) and human resource development (<5%), which restricts the effectiveness of green transformation (Niazi et al., 2023). These dynamics underscore the dual nature of telecom progress in China: fostering digital innovation and efficiency while creating pressing sustainability challenges that demand systemic governance and balanced resource allocation (Khan et al., 2023).

Surveys reveal that China's telecommunications sector faces significant gaps in environmental governance, with only 34% of employees aware of dual-carbon goals and environmental KPIs accounting for just 6.8% of performance evaluations, far below financial indicators. Compared to manufacturing, telecom enterprises lag in Green Human Resource Management (GHRM), particularly in recruitment, ESG training, behaviour incentives, and cross-departmental collaboration, resulting in low equipment optimization and limited employee

engagement. While operators have introduced environmental measures in network construction, operations, and digital transformation (Awwad Al-Shammari et al., 2022), the absence of systematic GHRM undermines their effectiveness. GHRM, grounded in resource-based theory, embeds ecological responsibility into recruitment, training, and performance appraisal, thereby promoting environmental literacy, green behaviours, and cross-functional collaboration. Recent studies suggest that GHRM and Green Innovation (GI) jointly reinforce environmental and organizational sustainability, although GI demonstrates stronger direct effects on environmental performance (Goh et al., 2020; Niazi et al., 2023). This underscores the urgency for Chinese telecom enterprises to enhance GHRM integration with GI in order to achieve long-term green transformation and sustainable development.

This research paper presents (a) To explore the effects of green human resource management (GHRM), green innovation (GI) and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) on corporate environmental performance (CEP) in Chinese Telecommunication Enterprises.(b) To explore the effects of green human resource management (GHRM) through green innovation (GI) and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) that impact the corporate environmental performance (CEP) in Chinese Telecommunication Enterprises. (c) To develop the corporate environmental performance (CEP) model for Chinese Telecommunication Enterprises.

Research Objectives

1) to explore the effects of green human resource management (GHRM), green innovation (GI) and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) on corporate environmental performance (CEP) in Chinese Telecommunication Enterprises.

2) to explore the effects of green human resource management (GHRM) through green innovation (GI) and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) that impact the corporate environmental performance (CEP) in Chinese Telecommunication Enterprises.

Research Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: Green human resource management has a positive impact on corporate environmental performance.

Hypothesis 2: Green human resource management has a positive effect on green innovation.

Hypothesis 3: Green innovation has a positive effect on corporate environmental performance.

Hypothesis 4: Green human resource management has a positive impact on organizational citizenship behavior.

Hypothesis 5: Organizational citizenship behavior has a positive effect on corporate environmental performance.

Hypothesis 6: Green innovation mediates the relationship between green human resource management and corporate environmental performance.

Hypothesis 7: Organizational citizenship behavior mediates the relationship between green human resource management and corporate environmental performance.

Hypothesis 8: Organizational citizenship behavior has a positive effect on green innovation.

Literature Review

Environmental performance is now recognized as a critical success factor linked to sustainable development and competitive advantage, prompting scholars to explore models that integrate theories such as the resource-based view, the stakeholder model (Fassin, 2008), and the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) framework. Within this context, Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) has emerged as a key driver of organizational sustainability, aligning HR practices with eco-focused objectives and fostering employees' green behaviours, which, together with innovation and research, enhance corporate environmental performance. Accordingly, recent studies highlight the importance of examining the relationship between GHRM and environmental outcomes, particularly the mediating role of green innovation and organizational citizenship behaviours, to better understand how enterprises can achieve sustainable transformation.

The Impact of Green Human Resource Management on Corporate Environmental Performance

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) has emerged as a crucial approach to integrating environmental sustainability into HR practices, covering recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and incentive systems, with the aim of enhancing employees' environmental awareness and behaviours to improve Corporate Environmental Performance (CEP) (Mansoor et al., 2021; Elshaer et al., 2021; Ansari et al., 2022). CEP, reflecting dimensions such as eco-efficiency, pollution reduction, waste management, and carbon footprint, is widely recognized as a key indicator of corporate responsibility, competitiveness, and reputation

(Makhloufi et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2022). Evidence suggests that GHRM significantly contributes to CEP by attracting environmentally conscious employees through green recruitment, enhancing environmental skills via systematic training, aligning employee behaviours with environmental goals through performance management, and incentivizing active participation in sustainability initiatives (Raza & Khan, 2022). However, its effectiveness depends on factors such as organizational culture, managerial support, and employee commitment, while challenges including resource costs, employee resistance, and industry-specific differences may constrain outcomes (Farooq et al., 2021; Fawehinmi et al., 2020). Overall, the literature indicates that when effectively implemented, GHRM can play a transformative role in driving environmental performance, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability. Hence, this study presents the following hypotheses:

The Impact of Green Human Resource Management on Green Innovation

Green Innovation has emerged as a pivotal response for enterprises facing environmental pressures, technological change, and market demands under sustainable development. Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) is widely recognized as a strategic enabler of this process, as it not only fosters employees' environmental awareness and innovative capacity but also creates organizational conditions that facilitate eco-oriented innovation (Singh et al., 2022). Green innovation is typically manifested in two dimensions: green product innovation and green process innovation, both of which contribute to resource efficiency, pollution reduction, and ecological improvement (Wang & Juo, 2021; Dangelico, 2016). A growing body of research demonstrates that GHRM positively influences green innovation by integrating environmental goals into recruitment, training, and incentive systems (Khan et al., 2023). Green recruitment attracts employees with strong environmental values, while systematic green training develops their knowledge and creativity for sustainable solutions (Goh et al., 2020).

Furthermore, incentive mechanisms and performance management systems that reward eco-innovation create stronger motivation for employees to embed green concepts into daily work and propose novel solutions (Fawehinmi et al., 2020). In addition, GHRM nurtures a supportive culture for green innovation by encouraging environmental communication, fostering cross-functional collaboration, and embedding sustainability in organizational values. These practices provide both psychological and structural support for employees to engage in R&D and innovative design processes (Singh et al., 2022). Nonetheless, the implementation of GHRM is not without challenges. The resource intensity of large-scale initiatives, coupled with potential employee

skepticism or resistance, may constrain the effectiveness of GHRM (Huang & Chen, 2022; Wang & Juo, 2021). Moreover, the impact of GHRM is contingent upon contextual factors such as employee creativity, industry dynamics, and external environmental pressures.

The Impact of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour on Green Innovation

Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) involves helping colleagues, being proactive, and showing initiative in various organizational activities. In environmental sustainability, OCB is related to promoting eco-friendly practices, fostering a positive work environment, and contributing to the organization's overall environmental goals (Luu, 2019). Green Innovation (GI) involves the development and implementation of new processes, products, or services that contribute to environmental sustainability. It is aimed at reducing the ecological footprint of business activities and ensuring that organizations adopt greener, more sustainable practices (Pham et al., 2018). Research suggests that OCB can positively influence the adoption and implementation of Green Innovation within organizations. Employees who engage in OCB are often more committed to their organization's goals, including environmental sustainability initiatives. Their voluntary efforts, such as proposing green ideas, participating in environmental projects, or supporting eco-friendly behaviours at work, create an organizational culture conducive to the development of GI (Makhloufi et al., 2022).

From the perspective of RBV, organizations that foster OCB can leverage the creativity and initiative of their employees to enhance green innovation (Wang & Juo, 2021). OCB allows organizations to tap into the resource of employee-driven innovation and sustainable problem-solving, enhancing their ability to develop and implement green practices and technologies. Research suggests that OCB, particularly behaviours like helping colleagues or suggesting improvements (Zhu, Wu & Shen, 2021), fosters a work environment where employees are more likely to engage in GI efforts. Employees who display OCB are often proactive in identifying opportunities for innovation, including environmentally friendly innovations, contributing to a more sustainable and green organizational culture (Sabokro, Masud & Kayedian, 2021). A study found that employees' participation in environmentally-focused OCB significantly influenced the organization's adoption of green technological innovations (Singh et al., 2022). These behaviours, such as actively sharing green ideas, participating in environmental committees, or supporting eco-friendly projects, help organizations generate new, sustainable processes or products, thus fostering GI (Ansari et al., 2022). The link between Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Green Innovation is evident through theoretical and empirical research. OCB promotes a supportive and

proactive work environment where green innovation can thrive. By fostering OCB through targeted organizational practices, particularly GHRM, firms can create a culture that encourages sustainability-driven innovation and contributes to improved environmental performance. Hence, this study presents the following hypotheses:

Conceptual Framework

Therefore, this study developed a model that aligns with the research objectives and assumptions. The model in consideration is seen in Figure 1. Research framework

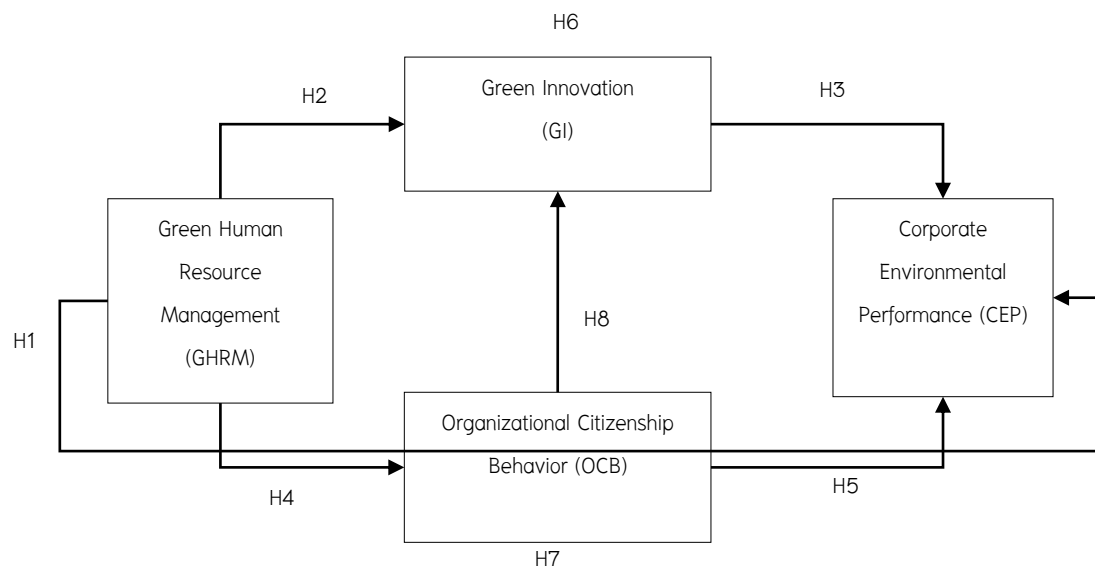


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

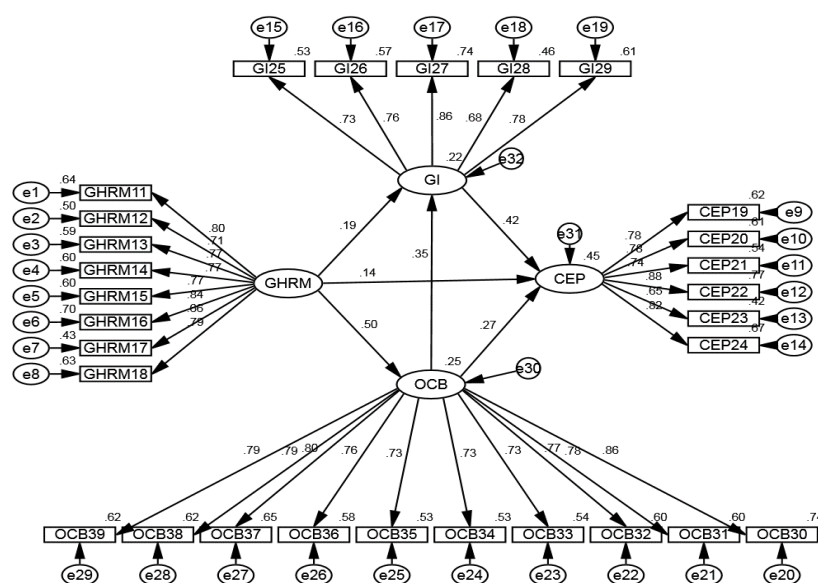


Figure 2 Leadership–Employee Innovation Behavior Model for Private Universities in Thailand

Research Methodology

Population and Sample

The target population of this study comprised managers from the three major telecommunications companies in China—China Unicom, China Mobile, and China Telecom—given the sector's dual role in economic growth and environmental challenges. Managers were chosen because their organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and green innovation (GI) are critical for enhancing corporate environmental performance (CEP). Considering the total managerial workforce of 10,982, a stratified sampling technique was employed to ensure representativeness across companies. Following Krejcie & Morgan's (1970) estimation method, a minimum of 398 responses was required with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. To account for possible non-responses, the final sample size was set at 400 managers, proportionally distributed across the three firms (China Unicom: 89, China Mobile: 165, China Telecom: 146).

Measurement

Quantitative the study employed a structured questionnaire consisting of validated measurement scales adapted from previous studies to ensure content validity and reliability. Green human resource management (GHRM) was measured with eight items drawn from Saeed et al. (2019), focusing on green recruitment, training, and job description practices. Corporate environmental performance (CEP) was assessed with items adapted from Úbeda-García et al. (2021) and Wang and Juo (2021), which examined practices such as minimizing the environmental impact of products and processes, as well as the use of renewable energy sources. Green innovation (GI) was measured with items obtained from Fatoki (2021), and Makhoulfi et al. (2022), capturing environmentally friendly product design, packaging, and production processes. Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) was measured using ten items developed by Boiral and Paillé (2012), reflecting voluntary, environmentally oriented behaviors beyond formal organizational requirements, such as implementing environmental protection actions and encouraging colleagues to adopt sustainable practices. In addition, control variables including managers' age, gender, educational background, and work experience were incorporated, as extant studies have highlighted their potential influence on environmental behavior and corporate environmental performance (Peng et al., 2020; Chen & Cao, 2023; Song et al., 2023). All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Qualitative to complement and validate the quantitative findings, this study employed focus group discussions with semi-structured interviews to further examine the mechanisms

linking green human resource management (GHRM), green innovation (GI), organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and corporate environmental performance (CEP) in Chinese telecommunications enterprises. A total of twelve HR managers and related managers from China Unicom, China Telecom, and China Mobile participated in the discussions, selected based on their industry experience, familiarity with organizational green practices, and decision-making insight. Each session lasted 1 hour and was moderated to ensure relevance to the research objectives. The data analysis process involved familiarization with the transcripts, initial coding of key concepts, induction of core themes, and refinement of these themes to ensure clarity and consistency. The results were then interpreted in comparison with the quantitative findings, highlighting convergences and divergences. The semi-structured interview guide ensured consistency while allowing participants to elaborate freely and engage in interactive exchanges. This qualitative component thus provided rich contextual insights and strengthened the robustness of the study's conclusions by confirming and extending the results of the quantitative analysis.

Reliability Analysis The reliability analysis indicated that all four dimensions in this study demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha values far exceeding the 0.70 benchmark. Corporate Environmental Performance showed the highest reliability ($\alpha = 0.937$, 6 items), followed by Green Human Resource Management ($\alpha = 0.917$, 8 items), Green Innovation ($\alpha = 0.899$, 5 items), and Organizational Citizenship Behavior ($\alpha = 0.870$, 10 items). These results confirmed that the scales were statistically reliable and suitable for further analyses.

Research Results

The results showed that the findings of this study demonstrated that Green Human Resource Management (GHRM), Green Innovation (GI), Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), and Corporate Environmental Performance (CEP) were significantly and positively related, forming an integrated and reinforcing system. GHRM embedded green values throughout the employee lifecycle, as one participant noted: "Our recruitment emphasizes candidates' environmental awareness and commitment" (P01), while training and performance appraisal mechanisms further strengthened environmental responsibility. GI extended beyond technological improvements to include organizational and cultural practices, with managers emphasizing that "Green innovation is supported by cross-department collaboration" (P01) and that "Eco-friendly materials and efficient construction techniques are applied" (P09). OCB, characterized by voluntary pro-environmental behaviors, also emerged as crucial, as reflected in statements such as "Green teams initiate

recycling and energy conservation drives” (P02) and “Employees voluntarily report inefficiencies and suggest improvements” (P06). Together, these practices contributed to improved CEP, illustrated by remarks such as “Environmental performance has steadily improved due to integrated GHRM and GI efforts” (P01), although challenges remained, particularly in balancing short-term business demands with sustainability goals: “Short-term business pressures conflict with long-term sustainability goals” (P01). Correlation analysis further confirmed strong interrelationships among the constructs, with GI showing the strongest link to CEP. Overall, the findings highlight the systemic interplay of HRM practices, innovation, and employee behaviors in advancing corporate sustainability, providing both theoretical contributions and practical guidance for the green transformation of the telecommunications industry.

Discussions

The findings confirmed that Green Human Resource Management (GHRM), Green Innovation (GI), and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) jointly enhanced Corporate Environmental Performance (CEP) in Chinese telecommunication enterprises. Interpreted through the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) framework, GHRM shaped employees’ environmental abilities, motivation, and opportunities, thereby stimulating OCB and GI, which mediated most of its effects on CEP. From the Resource–Based View (RBV), GI functioned as a valuable and inimitable capability, directly driving CEP through green technologies, sustainable processes, and innovation-oriented management. GHRM reinforced these outcomes by building human capital and organizational learning, consistent with prior evidence on HRM’s role in sustaining innovation-based resources (Úbeda–García et al., 2021). Yet RBV tends to overstate resource stability, which may be less applicable in dynamic, policy-driven industries, suggesting the need to incorporate a dynamic capabilities perspective.

Social Identity Theory further explained how OCB emerged from employees’ identification with a green organizational identity, cultivated by HRM practices and cultural narratives. This identification motivated discretionary pro-environmental behaviors that strengthened GI and CEP, aligning with studies emphasizing the persistence of identity-driven behaviors beyond formal incentives (Hameed, Mahmood & Shoaib, 2020; Siwei & Wongvanichtawee, 2023). Nonetheless, in large and diverse organizations, fragmented identities may weaken this effect unless supported by leadership and coherent cultural strategies.

Taken together, these perspectives reveal a multi-level mechanism: GHRM activates employee ability, motivation, and opportunity (AMO), channels behaviors into innovation as a strategic capability (RBV), and sustains them through shared identity and culture (Social Identity Theory). This integration explains why GI exerted the strongest direct impact on CEP, while OCB amplified HRM's indirect effects. For managers, this underscores the importance of aligning HR practices with innovation resources and identity-building strategies to sustain long-term environmental outcomes.

New Knowledge from Research

Effect of green human resource management on Corporate environmental performance Mediated by green innovation and organizational citizenship behavior. Show overall, the findings highlight the systemic interplay of HRM practices, innovation, and employee behaviors in advancing corporate sustainability, providing both theoretical contributions and practical guidance for the green transformation of the telecommunications industry.

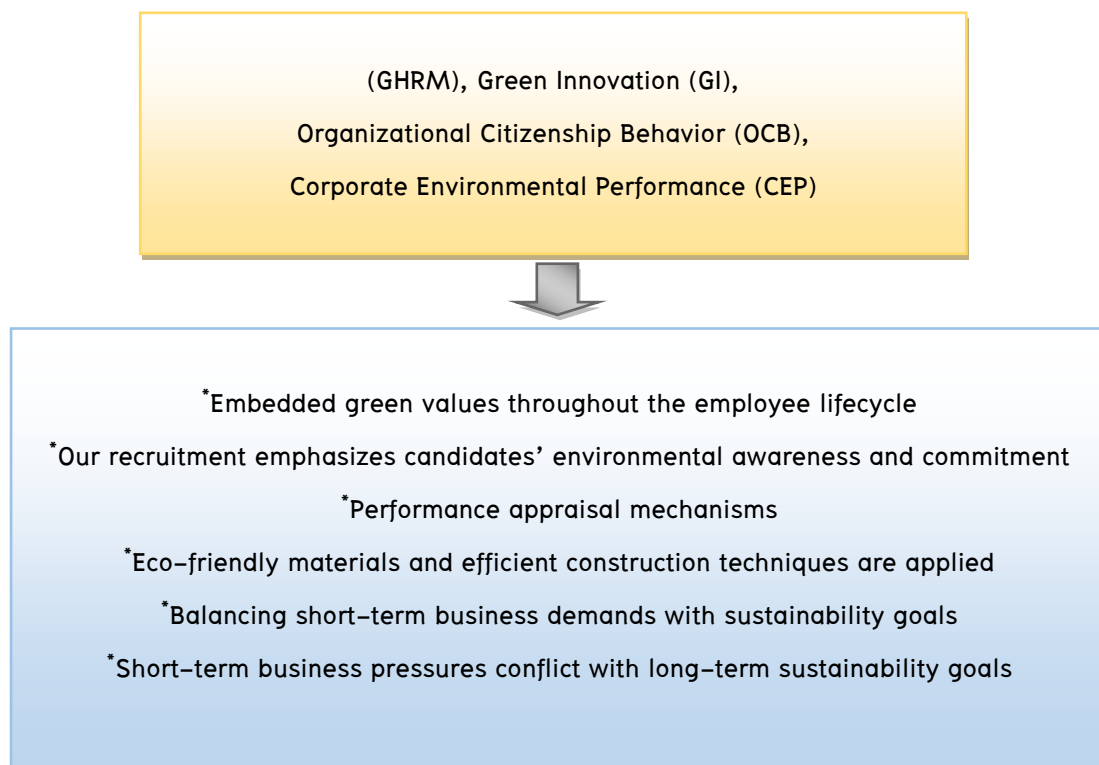


Figure 3 Knowledge from Research

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that green human resource management, green innovation, and organizational citizenship behavior jointly and positively influenced the corporate environmental performance of Chinese telecommunication enterprises. Among these, green innovation emerged as the most decisive driver, while organizational citizenship behavior played a bridging role in strengthening innovation outcomes. Green HRM exerted both direct and indirect effects, underscoring its systemic value in embedding sustainability within organizational strategy.

The findings further revealed that the effect of GHRM on CEP was primarily mediated through voluntary green behaviors and innovation practices. Employees' extra-role initiatives, supported by training, recognition, and cross-departmental collaboration, created an enabling climate for innovation, which in turn translated into measurable environmental improvements such as energy efficiency, emission reduction, and waste minimization. This dual pathway confirmed the necessity of aligning human capital policies with innovation mechanisms to achieve long-term environmental goals.

The study highlighted that effective evaluation and guidance of CEP require a multi-level framework combining clear environmental indicators, employee participation, and process-oriented management. Embedding sustainability into performance systems, fostering bottom-up initiatives, and enhancing cross-departmental collaboration are essential for sustaining progress. Continuous investment in green technologies and adaptive strategies is also critical to overcoming tensions between short-term pressures and long-term sustainability objectives, ensuring that corporate environmental performance evolves as a dynamic and integrated process.

Suggestions

To enhance corporate environmental performance (CEP), Chinese telecommunication enterprises must adopt a holistic strategy that integrates human, organizational, and systemic dimensions. Strengthening Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) embeds environmental competencies throughout the employee lifecycle, aligning ability, motivation, and opportunity to foster Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) and support Green Innovation (GI). Prioritizing GI as a strategic driver requires investment in eco-efficient technologies, supply chain sustainability, and cross-departmental collaboration to convert discretionary behaviors into measurable innovations. Cultivating OCB further sustains this process by embedding environmental values into organizational culture and identity, motivating voluntary green initiatives beyond formal job roles.

Finally, implementing a comprehensive evaluation system that combines quantitative indicators with qualitative insights ensures continuous monitoring, feedback, and strategic alignment. Together, these mechanisms form an integrated framework where HR practices, innovation resources, and cultural identity interact to institutionalize sustainability, thereby strengthening CEP and long-term competitiveness.

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