

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Triggering employee green activism through green human resource management: The role of green organizational learning and responsible leadership

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## Abstract

Several studies have unveiled that green human resource management (GHRM) positively affects employees' voluntary green behaviors at work. However, the literature has overlooked the influence of GHRM on employee beyond-work green activism—employees' participation in different environmental campaigns and initiatives and supporting/influencing organizations, environmental groups, and political actions aimed at protecting the natural environment. We hypothesize that GHRM leads to employee beyond-work green activism directly and indirectly via green organizational learning. The present study also tests the moderating role of responsible leadership in the GHRM-green organizational learning link. Multisource survey data collected using the time-lagged strategy supported the proposed relationships. The findings offer important recommendations for managers that can help them signify the role of business organizations and HR practices in protecting the natural environment.

## KEYWORDS

green activism, green human resource management, green organizational learning, responsible leadership

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Corresponding to the increasing pressure to integrate environmental and social issues in the organizational strategy to protect nature, scholars have integrated the environmental management strategy and HRM practices to propose the concept of green human resource management (GHRM) (Aftab et al., 2023; Gyensare et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). Renwick et al. (2013) define GHRM as “HRM activities which enhance positive environmental outcomes” (p. 4). Past research has revealed that GHRM affects several environmental outcomes, such as green psychological climate, firm environmental performance, and employees' in-role green performance (Aftab et al., 2023; O'Donohue & Torugsa, 2016). Despite making valuable contributions,

the effect of GHRM on positive environmental outcomes has primarily been examined within organizational boundaries. By doing so, the literature has overlooked the role of GHRM in encouraging green activism. For example, scholars (e.g., Chiarini & Bag, 2024; Roscoe et al., 2019) have shown that GHRM positively influences employee green behavior at work. Usman et al. (2023), a notable exception, examined how green training affects employee green behaviors beyond organizational boundaries. However, their study focuses on green behavior rather than green activism, defined as employees' engagement in different ecological behaviors beyond organizational boundaries, spanning involvement in environmental organizations and political actions, environmental group membership, and influencing/supporting policies and campaigns intended to preserve ecological

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balance (Paço & Gouveia Rodrigues, 2016). This research gap is crucial because green activism extends beyond individual actions to encompass collective, community-driven efforts to advocate for environmental change. Employees who are environmentally conscious and possess green skills can voice their concerns in different public and private forums and participate in and support different campaigns targeted at safeguarding nature (Chiarini & Bag, 2024; Heyes & King, 2020; Paço & Gouveia Rodrigues, 2016; Zhang et al., 2024). Further, organizations that encourage green activism can enhance their social responsibility profile, fostering a culture of environmental stewardship that extends beyond business operations. By focusing solely on green behavior within organizational confines, we miss the broader potential of GHRM to inspire and mobilize employees toward activism, advocacy, and broader societal change, offering a restrictive view of employees' and organizations' endeavors and practices, such as GHRM tailored to protect nature.

To address this limitation, the present work builds on the conservation of resources (COR) theory to hypothesize a positive association between GHRM and employee green activism. By considering green activism, we challenge the neglect of existing research to confine the role of employees' discretionary green behaviors within organizational boundaries, leading to an incomplete picture of organizations' and employees' contributions to the wider ecosystem of complex and dynamic interactions between humans and nature. We offer a more comprehensive view of organizations' efforts and contributions to protecting the natural environment and provide a complete picture of employees' pro-environmental behaviors. Our focus on employee green activism also concurs with the calls (e.g., Fotaki & Foroughi, 2022; Heyes & King, 2020) to explore the antecedents of employees' beyond-work ecological behaviors. Moreover, organizations are under consistent pressure from community groups, regulators, governments, and other stakeholders to adopt green practices and enhance their contributions to safeguard the natural environment (Abualigah et al., 2023; Vázquez-Brust et al., 2023). By understanding and highlighting the GHRM contributions within and across organizational boundaries, organizations can respond to such pressures.

COR theory proposes that people are driven to accumulate and conserve resources they deem valuable (Hobfoll, 1989). Further, contextual resources (e.g., GHRM) are vital in shaping individuals' personal resources (e.g., motivation, energy, and knowledge) that we argue can lead to their engagement in green activism. Notably, the theory posits that resources tend to develop and exist in aggregate and that resource caravans are either facilitated or inhibited by environmental or organizational climate conditions (Hobfoll, 2011), such as psychological safety climate (Mansour & Tremblay, 2018) and initiative climate (Aslam et al., 2022) that are labeled as resource caravan passageways. Based on the concept, we conceptualize green organizational learning (GOL) as a resource caravan passageway that functions as a medium to facilitate the flow of contextual resources (e.g., GHRM) to employees, leading them to enhance their engagement in green activism. Building on the concept of organizational learning by Theriou and Chatzoglou (2008) GOL, in this context, refers to improvement in green organizational practices through acquiring,

disseminating, and applying eco-friendly knowledge. GOL can have important implications for employee green behaviors, such as green activist behavior. In the face of escalating environmental challenges, such as climate change and resource depletion, it can help organizations adopt sustainable practices (Usman et al., 2023). It leads organizations to adopt radical innovation and achieve competitive advantage (Zhang et al., 2024). By facilitating the acquisition, dissemination, and application of eco-friendly knowledge, GOL leads to improved environmental, operational, and innovation performance (Argote et al., 2021; Bhatia, 2021), contributing to sustainable development goals. GOL also instigates job performance (Lin & Huang, 2021). Tu and Wu (2021) suggest that GOL leads to enhanced behavioral and adaptive capabilities of individuals.

Finally, COR theory states that people's resources are embedded in ecological contexts that either nurture or obstruct resource creation and conservation (Hobfoll, 2011), indicating that the effectiveness of contextual resources in developing enabling conditions (i.e., resource caravan passageways) and shaping employee behaviors is not homogeneous across contexts. Instead, different individual and organizational level factors reinforce or subside the potential of contextual resources to create resource caravan passageways (Hobfoll et al., 2018). As such, we contend that the potential of GHRM to create GOL depends on the presence of reinforcing or inhibiting elements within the organizational context. Thus, to offer a nuanced view of when GHRM practices are more effective in shaping GOL and green activism, the present study explores the role of perceived responsible leadership (RL *henceforth*) as a boundary condition. RL is referred to as "a social-relational and ethical phenomenon, which occurs in social processes of interaction to achieve societal and environmental targets and objectives of sustainable value creation and positive change" (Maak & Pless, 2006, p. 5). We considered RL here because, compared to other leadership styles, it is more consistent in terms of its positive effects on employee environmental and green outcomes (Voegtlin et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2024). RL actively promotes collaborative problem-solving and participative decision-making to fulfill environmental and societal responsibilities (Waldman et al., 2020); it is likely that they make GHRM more effective by providing extended support and resources that align with the organization's sustainability. Since environmental responsibilities are one of the central focuses of RL, it can reinforce the conditions necessary for the success of GHRM initiatives and ensure that the resources introduced through GHRM are more effectively utilized and sustained within the organization, facilitating a stronger relationship between GHRM and GOL.

The current work contributes in several ways to various literature streams. First, our study offers novel insights how GHRM affects employee green activism. Compared to past studies (e.g., Abualigah et al., 2023; Aftab et al., 2023; Chiarini & Bag, 2024; Usman et al., 2023; Vázquez-Brust et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024) that have studied employee pro-environmental behavior, the present work applies COR theory to bring to the fore important yet overlooked aspects of employees' and organizations' contributions to efforts aimed at protecting nature, as well as advance the scope of GHRM. In doing so, we respond to the calls (e.g., Chiarini & Bag, 2024; Heyes &

King, 2020; Zhang et al., 2024) to explore the antecedents of employees' engagement in ecological behaviors and activities outside of work and thus highlight the overlooked role of employees and organizations in protecting the natural environment. Second, by foregrounding GOL as an imperative mediator of the GHRM-green activism link, we emphasize the need to promote learning across individual, team, and organizational levels and establish recurring cycles of iterative learning to encourage their engagement in green activism and contribute to the literature on the environmental sustainability link (Abualigah et al., 2023; Argote et al., 2021; Chiarini & Bag, 2024; Fotaki & Foroughi, 2022; Heyes & King, 2020; Zhang et al., 2024). Finally, previous studies on RL show that it fosters employee green behavior and green innovation performance and leads to environmental and financial performance (Ur Rehman et al., 2023; Waldman et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2024). However, RL in association with green activism has been overlooked. Thus, by highlighting the moderating role of RL, the current study adds to the RL literature. The conceptual framework is visually depicted in Figure 1.

## 2 | THEORY AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

### 2.1 | COR theory

COR theory proposes that individuals have an inherent drive to protect and acquire valued resources, such as personal resources, objects, and conditions (Hobfoll, 1989). According to Hobfoll (1989), a resource is loosely defined as an object, state, and other things that an individual values in his/her life. One of the key premises of COR theory that explains individuals' work tendencies and behaviors is the investment of resources. The investment of resources (e.g., material resources, time, and knowledge and skills) is aimed at gaining additional resources (e.g., knowledge creation and sharing), and individuals who possess more personal resources have an enhanced ability to invest and thus increase resources.

COR theory has also been applied in environmental sustainability literature to understand how individuals and organizations manage and conserve natural resources. The theory serves as a foundation for analyzing how GHRM practices help employees use various resources,

such as energy and water, to manage these resources more sustainably and enhance organizations' environmental performance (Gim et al., 2022; Roscoe et al., 2019). The theory has also been used to explain the role of HRM practices in shaping employee behaviors at work (Gyensare et al., 2023). In this study, green activism has been conceptualized as the potential means of future resource reserves. COR theory suggests that people are driven to generate future resource gains (Hobfoll, 1989). Accordingly, by engaging in green activism, employees can generate various personal resources, such as sensed self-fulfillment through knowledge creation and sharing.

Moreover, we conceptualize GHRM practices and RL as contextual resources. Further, resources spanning different domains, such as personal and contextual domains, are intricately linked, and as a result, changes in resources in one domain can affect those in another (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Importantly, resources travel through caravan passageways, for instance, organizational culture, supportive structure, and so on. Following this concept, we conceptualize GOL as a resource caravan passageway through which GHRM, as a contextual resource, enhances employee green activism. As such, we argue that GHRM offers employees different resources, such as environmental knowledge and competencies that can enhance their personal resources that they can use while engaging in behaviors comprising environmental activism. As such, we argue that COR theory can help understand the role of GHRM in shaping GOL, as well as advance the scope of GHRM.

### 2.2 | Green activism

Environmental activism is about voicing concerns about environmental issues in different public and private forums to incite positive responses from people, government, and businesses to address ongoing environmental degradation (Heyes & King, 2020). Green activism entails an individual's participation in different types of activities, such as engaging in fund-raising campaigns, writing letters to governments and policymakers, signing petitions, and trying to influence the behavior of people toward the environment (Seguin et al., 1998).

Interests in green activism have increasingly grown in recent years (Carberry et al., 2019; Fotaki & Foroughi, 2022), but studies have yet to examine the impact of GHRM on green activism.

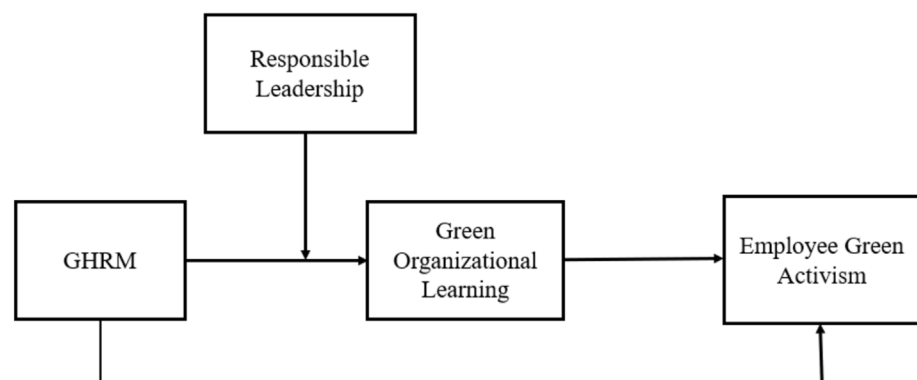


FIGURE 1 Theoretical framework.

A distinction needs to be made between pro-environmental behaviors and green activism. Pro-environmental behaviors refer to employee behaviors like conserving energy and resources, recycling, and reducing waste aimed at reducing organizations' impact on the natural environment (Robertson & Barling, 2017a). Pro-environmental behaviors can also include making environmentally friendly purchasing decisions or supporting the implementation of sustainable practices within the company. These actions can have significant effects on reducing the environmental impact of organizations and promoting sustainability (Tang & Hinsch, 2018).

On the other hand, environmental activism refers to actions taken by individuals and groups outside of the workplace to promote environmental sustainability (Fotaki & Foroughi, 2022). Activism can take many forms, including peaceful protests, educational campaigns, and lobbying for policy change (Carberry et al., 2019). Environmental activists often work to raise awareness about pressing environmental issues and to inspire individuals and communities to take action to address them. The main focus of environmental activism is not within the workplace but rather on a broader societal and political level with the goal of change in law, policies, and societal values to create a more sustainable future (Hysing & Olsson, 2017).

While both employee pro-environmental behaviors and environmental activism can contribute to environmental sustainability, they operate on different levels and have distinct goals. Employee pro-environmental behaviors focus on reducing the environmental impact of a specific company or organization. In contrast, environmental activism aims to create broader societal and systemic change to address environmental issues.

### 2.3 | GHRM and employee green activism

GHRM practices embed green values and behaviors in HRM practices (e.g., green training, recruitment, reward and compensation, and performance management and appraisal) that positively influence several employees' environmentally friendly outcomes (Renwick et al., 2013). The term green recruitment refers to the process of hiring candidates based on their environmental knowledge and propensity to adopt green practices (Ren et al., 2018). Enhancing employees' knowledge of procedures, techniques, and technologies assists businesses in reducing their carbon footprint and improves organizations' green performance is referred to as green training (Usman et al., 2023). Green performance management and appraisal system is defined as a system aimed at monitoring employees' environmental performance based on their contribution to the organization's eco-friendly targets (Robertson & Barling, 2017b). Green reward and compensation system is considered policies to reward individuals based on their eco-friendly initiatives and environmental performance (Pham et al., 2019).

The association of GHRM with employee green activism can be established in several ways. For instance, prior studies suggest that green training provides employees with access to a range of different expertise and resources, including social and technological resources

that help them improve their existing environmental protection skills, develop new skills, and create novel ideas aimed at reducing environmental degradation (Tang & Hinsch, 2018). Importantly, trainers are experts, who are often connected to diverse social networks within and outside the organization and connect the trainees to these networks (Wakkee et al., 2010). Such connections offer employees opportunities to engage in discussions and learn from people with diverse knowledge. As such, green training can configure a new combination of eco-friendly cognitions, practices, knowledge, and resources and thus opportunities to develop new green competencies and a perception that they can play a role in protecting the natural environment. Indeed, extant literature suggests that individuals' knowledge of environmental problems leads them to get involved in general ecological behaviors, such as recycling and sustainable consumption (Chan et al., 2014) and conserving resources (Usman et al., 2023), such as papers, electricity, and water. As such, we infer that those employees who are aware of environmental issues and possess green skills can engage in green activist behaviors, such as supporting policies aimed at protecting nature and environmental support groups/organizations. Likewise, green performance management and appraisal activities challenge employees' existing employees' existing green skills and green contributions, thereby encouraging them to exert extra-role efforts to improve their green skills and contributions (Dumont et al., 2017; Hameed et al., 2020). Importantly, according to Renwick et al. (2013), green performance management activities ignite employees' sense of responsibility toward protecting the natural environment. Such a sense of responsibility is likely to encourage employees' participation in green activism.

Finally, drawing on COR theory, we contend that employees' access to contextual (organizational) resources, such as green training and green rewards enhances their personal resources, for instance, green motivation, skills, and awareness. Moreover, since GHRM practices signal to employees about the availability of generous organizational resources that they have access to, GHRM practices stimulate gain spirals and inspire employees to engage in green activist behaviors that help them accumulate additional resources, such as satisfaction, self-fulfillment, and self-esteem. Furthermore, COR theory proposes that it is essential to maintain a balance of resource exchange between a larger system (e.g., nature, society, organizations, or groups) and an individual. Since green activism can allow employees to achieve such a balance of resource exchange, they may reinvest resources to support different initiatives of protecting nature and help the organization ease the external pressure to safeguard nature and its environment. Therefore, we postulate

**Hypothesis 1.** GHRM is positively associated with employee green activism.

### 2.4 | GOL as a mediator

COR theory proposes that there is an intricate interconnection among resources in various domains. Further, resources in one domain, like

contextual resources, can augment resources in other domains, such as employees' personal resources. Importantly, contextual resources affect individuals' personal resources through resource caravan passageways. As suggested earlier, we consider GOL to be a resource caravan passageway that enhances employees' green knowledge and skills that they may use in green activism. GHRM enables the organization to attract, recruit, and develop employees with a high awareness of environmental issues (Renwick et al., 2013). By focusing on green training and development programs, GHRM ensures that employees develop essential sustainability-related knowledge. Managers' consistent focus on providing employees' training and development encourages employees to create and share novel ideas for developing and implementing pro-environmental strategies (Tang & Hinsch, 2018; Tu & Wu, 2021). This exchange of ideas not only raises environmental awareness among employees but also inspires them to adopt pro-environmental practices and technologies (Leidner et al., 2019). Extant literature on green indicates that green training induces transformations in employees' values, norms, and behaviors toward sustainability (Cop et al., 2020; Pham et al., 2019).

Furthermore, GHRM harmonizes employee actions with the organization's environmental objectives by incorporating sustainability criteria into performance management systems. According to Renwick et al. (2013), green appraisal activities increase the salience of environmental issues and are the source of understanding and acknowledging employees' green contributions. Green performance management and appraisal activities share assessments with employees concerning their environmental efforts, encouraging them to reflect on their green performance and contributions (Renwick et al., 2013). By rewarding green initiatives, GHRM ensures that acquired knowledge is actively applied in everyday organizational practices. Prior studies indicate that GHRM practices create a work environment wherein employees perceive an enhanced sense of support and recognition (McClellan & Collins, 2011; Usman et al., 2023), thereby developing employees' perceptions that, through their job, they are contributing to a greater good (e.g., protecting nature). Studies (e.g., Argote et al., 2021; Theriou & Chatzoglou, 2008) also suggest that employees' sense of intelligibility about how their work roles contribute to the greater good encourages them to enhance and share their knowledge. Thus, we argue that GHRM can lead to GOL.

The organizational learning environment is crucial in enhancing employees' capabilities, facilitating effective collaboration and achieving organizational goals (Subramanian & Suresh, 2022). Organizational learning involves transforming experiences into positive behaviors (Argote et al., 2021; Yin et al., 2020). Organizational learning involves continuous learning and transformation (Marsick & Watkins, 1996; Seguin et al., 1998). In the context of rising environmental concerns, GOL emphasizes acquiring, disseminating, and applying eco-friendly knowledge. Such a focus on green learning may instill in employees sustainable values, encouraging them to integrate these principles into their daily lives. In other words, employees' green learning is not confined to the workplace. Instead, as employees become more environmentally conscious and equipped with green knowledge, they are likely to engage in political actions

and campaigns aimed at protecting the natural environment. GOL also contributes to the development of a sense of collective responsibility among employees (Carberry et al., 2019), encouraging them to collaborate and advocate for environmental causes beyond organizational boundaries. According to COR theory, people strive to maintain and improve precocious resources. Viewed through the framework of COR theory, the natural environment is a crucial source for human life and the survival of other living species on our planet. In essence, building on COR theory, we argue that employees may support different eco-friendly initiatives to protect the natural environment. Together, we postulate

**Hypothesis 2.** GOL mediates the positive association between GHRM and employee green activism.

## 2.5 | Responsible leadership as a moderator

COR theory posits that people's and organizations' resources exist in ecological conditions, which either support or constrain further resource development (Hobfoll, 2011). This suggests that the effectiveness of contextual resources for creating favorable conditions—often referred to as resource caravan passageways—and shaping employee behavior is not uniform across different settings. Instead, various individual and organizational factors either amplify or diminish the ability of these contextual resources to generate such passageways. We draw on this concept to propose that RL moderates the GHRM-GOL link to explain when RL is more effective in developing GOL (a resource caravan passageway).

RL, marked by ethical decision-making, the empowerment of employees, and an emphasis on social and environmental obligations (Bérard & Cloutier, 2023), is likely to use GHRM practices effectively to help employees acquire, disseminate, and apply eco-friendly knowledge. Responsible leaders prioritize ethical, sustainable, and socially responsible decision-making (Folger et al., 2022). Therefore, they can ensure that GHRM policies are not merely implemented but actively supported, enhancing the acquisition, dissemination, and application of green knowledge across the organization. Responsible leaders model environmentally responsible behavior and emphasize sustainability's importance in strategy and daily operations (Liao & Zhang, 2020). Employees under such leadership's supervision are more likely to benefit from GHRM practices (e.g., green training) and are more likely to engage in knowledge-sharing practices and apply green knowledge. As such, we understand that, in the presence of high RL, the effectiveness of GHRM in developing GOL will be strengthened.

Conversely, in organizations where RL is lacking, GHRM practices may not translate into GOL effectively. Without leadership that actively promotes sustainability, the ecological conditions necessary for enhancing GOL will be weakened. In such environments, employees may view GHRM initiatives as superficial or disconnected from broader organizational goals. Consequently, GHRM practices may not foster the acquisition, dissemination, and application of green

knowledge effectively, ultimately limiting the development of GOL. Thus, we hypothesized that

**Hypothesis 3.** Perceived RL moderates the positive relationship between GHRM and GOL, such that the relationship is stronger when RL is high (vs. low).

As posited earlier (H2), GHRM develops GOL, which in turn inspires employees to engage in green activism. Put differently, the influence of GHRM on green activism is translated through GOL. Additionally, as proposed above (H3), high RL may accentuate the effects of GHRM on GOL. Together, we infer that RL can serve as a boundary condition of the indirect association between GHRM and green activism. From a statistical viewpoint, this represents a moderated mediation case (Hayes, 2015), whereby RL interacts with GHRM practices to indirectly (via GOL) influence green activism. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed.

**Hypothesis 4.** Perceived RL moderates the indirect (via GOL) positive relationship between GHRM and employee green activism, such that the relationship is stronger when RL is high (vs. low).

## 3 | METHODS

### 3.1 | Context of the study

We contextualized our theoretical model in Chinese business organizations. China provides a compelling context for this study due to its increasing efforts to balance economic growth with environmental protection, a priority for both the corporate sector and government initiatives. Many Chinese companies have taken significant steps to reduce environmental waste and incorporate sustainable practices into their operations, reflecting global trends in pro-environmental business strategies (Zibarras & Coan, 2015). The Chinese government has introduced stringent environmental regulations, particularly in sectors like construction, to control pollution and manage waste, pushing companies to adopt greener practices (State Council of China, 2013). Additionally, organizations in China are actively integrating green HRM practices, such as environmental training and development, which foster employee involvement in sustainable initiatives both at work and beyond (Zhang et al., 2019). These regulatory and corporate efforts, combined with China's growing focus on sustainability, create an ideal setting for exploring how GHRM influences green activism (Marquis & Qian, 2014).

### 3.2 | Sample and data collection

This study employed a time-lagged design to collect two-source data from supervisors and employees in 60 organizations. We conducted this project in organizations operating in China. We translated

survey questionnaires into Chinese language by applying a back-translation approach. The questionnaire was pretested with five academicians and 20 potential respondents. There was a 2-month gap between the data collection rounds. Data about GHRM practices were collected from supervisors, while data about RL, GOL, and employee green activism were collected from employees. Access to these organizations was managed using alumni networks of different public sector universities in the region. We randomly chose 600 employees from 60 organizations (10 employees from each of the organizations) from the list of employees, and 452,452 participants consented in writing to participate. A cover letter was provided, detailing the study's purpose, confidentiality assurances, the voluntary aspect of participation, and an opportunity to win one of five smartphones.

Those employees who gave written informed consent were working in different departments and thus were reporting to 452 different supervisors, who were given similar cover letters as we provided to employees. We received consent from 398 supervisors. In the first round, we received 334 supervisor responses about GHRM, and at the same time, we received 397 employee responses about RL and demographic data. In the second phase, we collected 353 employee responses regarding GOL. In the final phase, we gathered 344 responses from employees concerning their engagement in green activism. After the data were matched using unique codes and examined for negligence, 322 employee responses and the same number of supervisor responses were retained. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to analyze the data using Mplus (8.8).

The respondents belonged to various organizations from several sectors, including textile, electronics, steel manufacturing, cement manufacturing, energy, healthcare, hospitality, tourism, and banking. GHRM practices can vary considerably across organizations and industries. The objective of obtaining data from diverse industry sectors was to capture the maximum variance in GHRM and its effects on GOL and environmental activism. The sample for this study included 54.3% males and 45.7% females. In terms of education, 26.7% had completed 10 years of schooling, 29.2% had 12 years, 23.6% held undergraduate degrees, and 20.5% had master's degrees. The average age of respondents was 36.33 years, with an average tenure of 3.93 years at their current organization. In terms of industry, 51.9% belonged to different manufacturing sectors, and 48.1% belonged to various service sectors.

### 3.3 | Common method variance (CMV)

We applied procedural and statistical remedies proposed by Podsakoff et al. (2000) to lessen CMV. First, data were collected using the time-lagged design. Second, we also used two-source data. The time-lagged design and multisource data help reduce CMV (Podsakoff et al., 2000). Third, we used Harman's single-factor test. A single-factor extraction solution without rotation explained 29.86% (less than the threshold, 50%) of the variance. Thus, CMV is not a concern in our study.

### 3.4 | Measures

Five-point Likert scales anchored on 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly disagree*) were used to measure the study constructs.

#### 3.4.1 | Green human resource management

Dumont et al.'s (2017) 6-item scale ( $\alpha = .92$ ) was used to assess GHRM. Example item: "Our company provides employees with green training to promote green values."

#### 3.4.2 | Green organizational learning

Green organizational learning was measured by using a 4-item scale ( $\alpha = .86$ ) from Bhatia and Jakhar (2021). Example item: "We are effective in transforming existing environmental information into new environmental knowledge."

#### 3.4.3 | Responsible leadership

Responsible leadership was assessed by using a 5-item scale ( $\alpha = .91$ ) adapted from Voegtlin (2011). Example item: "My supervisor tries to achieve a consensus among the affected stakeholders."

#### 3.4.4 | Green activism

We adapted the 6-item scale ( $\alpha = .91$ ) from Seguin et al. (1998) to assess green activism. Example item: "I give financial support to an environmental group."

#### 3.4.5. Control variables

Research suggests employees' engagement in pro-environmental behaviors can vary across tenure with the current organization, education, industry, gender, and age and thus confound the results (Robertson & Barling, 2017b). Demographics, such as education, tenure with the current organization, gender, and age, can also affect GOL (Theriu & Chatzoglou, 2008). Further, GHRM practices can be different in manufacturing and service organizations. Therefore, we controlled for age (actual age in years), gender (1 = female, 2 = male), tenure with the organization (number of years working with the current organization), industry type (1 = manufacturing sector, 2 = service sector), and education (1 = undergraduate, 2 = master's degree).

## 4 | RESULTS

Since 322 respondents belonged to 60 organizations, we examined the data for nonindependence. We followed Bliese's (2000)

recommendations and calculated ICC(1) values of green activism and GOL. The results showed that the ICC1 values of both variables were .01 (ns). As such, nonindependence did not pose a concern in our data.

Moreover, we also calculated within- and between-level variances of all the variables of the study, including GHRM, GOL, RL, and green activism. The within-level variance of all the variables was significant, while the between-level variance of these variables was insignificant. As a result, all variables in our study were examined at the individual level. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics and correlations for the variables under investigation.

### 4.1 | Measurement model assessment

The measurement model underwent confirmatory factor analysis, revealing significant loadings for all items. The model demonstrated a good fit with the data, as evidenced by the following fit indices:  $\chi^2(183) = 421.17$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.30$ , CFI = .95, TLI = .94, SRMR = .05, and RMSEA = .06. Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE) values for all variables exceeded .50, as shown in Table 2. Additionally, the square root of the AVE for each variable was greater than its inter-construct correlations. Table 2 shows that both the average shared variance (ASV) and maximum shared variance (MSV) were below the AVE for all variables. These findings affirm the satisfactory levels of both convergent and discriminant validities for the scales utilized in the study.

### 4.2 | Hypotheses testing

As shown in Table 3, GHRM was positively associated with green activism, both directly ( $B = .23$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and indirectly, via GOL ( $B = .04$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Thus, we found support for Hypotheses 1 and 2. To test the moderation Hypothesis 3, we added the interaction term of RL and GHRM to the indirect effect model. We found that the impact of the interaction was significant ( $B = .16$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Figure 2 exhibits the moderated path, whereby two conditional values of the association of GHRM with GOL at two different levels of RL (i.e., low and high values of RL) are depicted in simple slope plots. It was found that the association between GHRM and GOL was significant ( $B = .42$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p < .01$ ) when RL was high, while the association was insignificant ( $B = .08$ ,  $SE = .06$ , ns) when RL was low. Thus, we found support for Hypothesis 3.

Finally, it was found that the moderated mediation index was significant for the proposed indirect (via GOL) association of GHRM with green activism [index = .03,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $CI = (.004, .05)$ ]. The conditional indirect association of GHRM with green activism via GOL was significant ( $B = .06$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $p < .01$ ) when RL was high but the indirect association of insignificant when RL was low ( $B = .01$ ,  $SE = .01$ , ns). Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

**TABLE 1** Means and correlations.

Construct	Means	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. GHRM	3.40	.93								
2. GOL	3.57	.82	.26**							
3. Green activism	3.46	.86	.26**	.21**						
4. Responsible leadership	3.27	1.04	.15**	.21**	.19**					
5. Age	36.33	7.66	-.07	.04	.17**	-.04				
6. Gender			.10	-.03	.01	-.02	-.05			
7. Education			.01	-.02	-.03	.06	-.01	.04		
8. Tenure	3.93	2.09	.07	.06	.11	.00	.29**	-.02	.06	
9. Industry type			-.01	-.03	.10	-.01	.04	.02	.08	.03

Note: Sample size (N) = 322. Gender = 1 (male) and 2 (female). Tenure = job duration (in years) with the current organization.

Abbreviations: GHRM, green human resource management; GOL, green organizational learning.

\* $p < .05$ , and \*\* $p < .01$ .

**TABLE 2** Discriminant validity and convergent validity.

Construct	1	2	3	4	AVE	MSV	ASV
1. GHRM	<b>.81</b>				.65	.08	.07
2. GOL	.29	<b>.78</b>			.60	.08	.06
3. Green activism	.29	.23	<b>.80</b>		.65	.08	.06
4. Responsible leadership	.16	.23	.22	<b>.83</b>	.68	.05	.04

Note: Sample size (N) = 322. Bolded values on the diagonals of columns 2 to 5 are the square root values of AVE.

Abbreviations: ASV, average variance shared; AVE, average variance extracted; GHRM, green human resource management; GOL, green organizational learning; MSV, maximum variance shared.

\* $p < .05$ , and \*\* $p < .01$ .

**TABLE 3** Hypothesis testing results with control variables.

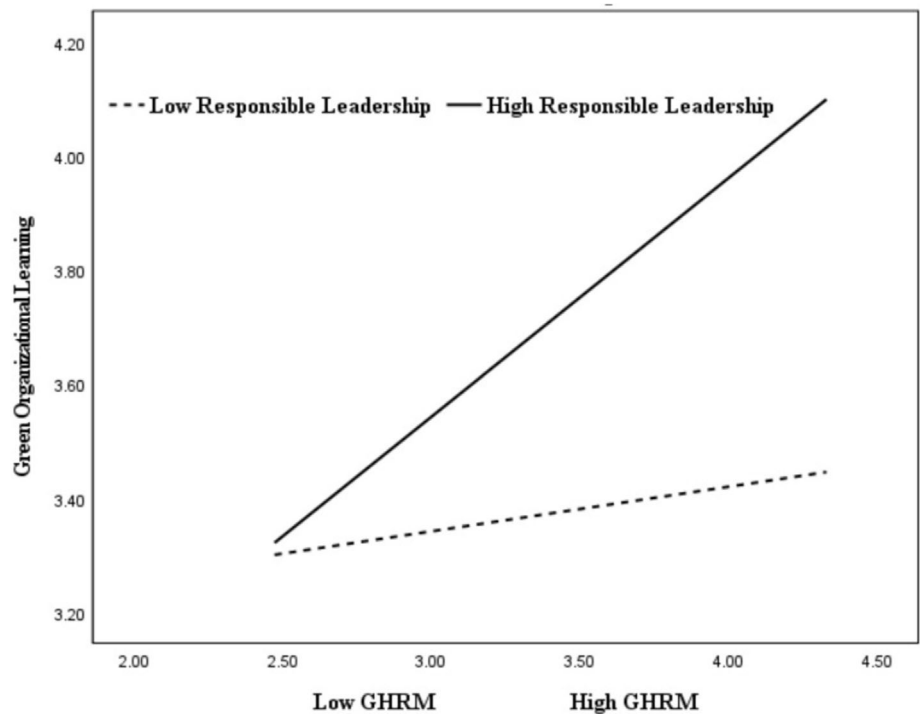
Variables	GOL			Green activism		
	B (SE)	<i>p</i>	CI (95%)	B (SE)	<i>p</i>	CI (95%)
GHRM	.23(.05)	.00	.13, .32	.24(.05)	.00	.14, .33
GOL				.16(.06)	.00	.05, .27
Responsible leadership*GHRM	.16(.04)	.00	.09, .24			
Age	.01(.01)	.17	-.01, .02	.02(.01)	.00	.01, .03
Gender	-.06(.09)	.48	-.23, .11	-.01(.09)	.93	-.19, .17
Education	-.02(.04)	.55	-.10, .05	-.03(.04)	.49	-.11, .05
Tenure	.01(.02)	.80	-.04, .05	.02(.02)	.50	-.03, .06
Industry	-.06(.08)	.50	-.23, .11	.18(.09)	.05	-.001, .36
				B (SE)		CI (95%)
<i>Indirect effects</i>						
Indirect effect of GHRM on green activism via GOL				.04(.02)		.01, .07
<i>Moderated mediation</i>						
Conditional indirect effect of GHRM on green activism via GOL				.03(.01)		.004, .05

Note: Sample size (N) = 322 (bootstrapping by specifying a sample of size 2000). Bootstrapping was specified at 5000 with 95% confidence interval.

Abbreviations: B, unstandardized coefficient; CI, confidence interval; GHRM, green human resource management; GOL, green organizational learning; SE, standard error.

\* $p < .05$ , and \*\* $p < .01$ .

**FIGURE 2** Responsible leadership as a moderator of the relationship between green human resource management (GHRM) and green organizational learning.



## 5 | DISCUSSION

### 5.1 | Theoretical contributions

This paper makes the following important contributions to the literature, as well as advances the scope of COR theory. First, while COR theory primarily emphasizes the accumulation and protection of resources in general contexts and has been used by a number of scholars in the HRM context (Shantz et al., 2016; Sun & Pan, 2008; Yan et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2021), its application in the GHRM context has been scarce. Our study demonstrates how GHRM provides the resources necessary for employees to engage in environmental activism outside organizational boundaries, expanding COR theory's application to environmental practices and behaviors. Importantly, we highlight how COR theory can explain employee behaviors that transcend organizational boundaries. Further, based on the COR theory's concept of resource caravan passageway, several studies have shown how different resource passageways, such as psychological safety climate (Mansour & Tremblay, 2018) and initiative climate (Aslam et al., 2022), play crucial roles in enhancing employees' personal resources from contextual resources. Our study adds to the COR theory by illustrating GOL as a resource caravan passageway, allowing GHRM's potential to convert into tangible employee actions like green activism. We also demonstrate the role of RL as a boundary condition strengthen the influence of contextual resources—GHRM practices—on developing GOL as a resource caravan passageway.

Second, by paying attention to an important yet ignored concept of employees' beyond-work discretionary ecological behaviors, this study explicates the importance of GHRM for shaping employees' engagement in green activism. Consistent with COR theory, our

finding suggests that GHRM practices as contextual resources enhance employees' personal resources, such as awareness and knowledge about environmentally friendly activities and technologies (Dumont et al., 2017; Renwick et al., 2013) that inspire them to engage in green activism. Previous studies have shown that there is a positive influence of GHRM on employees' pro-environmental behaviors (Pham et al., 2019). Our study departs markedly from prior work (Fotaki & Foroughi, 2022; Heyes & King, 2020) by focusing on employee green activism, thereby bringing to the fore a more comprehensive manifestation of the contributions that organizations and GHRM practices can make to protect the natural environment.

Third, our findings suggest that GHRM practices positively influence employees' sense that their work is valuable for others, including society at large (Chiarini & Bag, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024) and nature, which, in turn, stimulates them to participate in green activism. By investigating the mediating role of GOL in the link between GHRM and green activism, this work not only signified the importance of GOL as an essential mechanism underlying the relationship between GHRM and green activism but also extends the literature on the nomological networks of the consequences and outcomes of GOL (Usman et al., 2023).

Finally, a few studies (Akhtar et al., 2023; Liao & Zhang, 2020; Lu et al., 2022) have revealed the role of RL in boosting employees' green behavior. Compared to previous studies that have focused on employees' pro-environmental behaviors within the organizational boundary, our research is the first to illuminate the role of RL in shaping GOL and employees' engagement in green activism. In doing so, the study explicates when GHRM is more effective in developing GOL and green activism. Finally, we advance the scope of COR theory, as to the extent of the authors' knowledge, our paper is the first

research that exemplifies the application of COR theory in explaining the interrelationships between GHRM, RL, and employees' engagement in green activism.

## 5.2 | Practical implications

This study carries significant practical implications for organizations in China and elsewhere aiming to enhance their sustainability efforts. In China, the growing emphasis on sustainable development and environmental protection aligns well with the study's findings. GHRM is shown to foster beyond-work green activism among employees, which is particularly relevant given China's commitment to environmental sustainability. By adopting GHRM practices, Chinese organizations can instill environmental values within their workforce, helping to align corporate environmental goals with national policies and global sustainability standards. This not only contributes to China's transition toward a green economy but also provides a framework for other countries looking to promote corporate responsibility in the area of environmental sustainability.

In addition, the study's emphasis on GOL has practical relevance for countries that are looking to foster continuous learning and innovation around sustainability. As China continues to improve its global standing in environmental leadership, developing green knowledge and skills within organizations is crucial for maintaining competitiveness while meeting environmental regulations. This approach can be adopted by other countries striving to build more sustainable business practices and to stay compliant with international sustainability commitments.

RL is another key factor highlighted in this study, especially in the Chinese context. Leaders in Chinese organizations are well-positioned to drive sustainability efforts by integrating environmental responsibility into strategic decision-making. The findings show that RL plays a moderating role in the GHRM-GOL link, suggesting that leadership can foster a culture of innovation and accountability that enhances organizational performance while meeting China's green development goals. This insight is equally valuable for organizations in other countries, where RL can be a crucial driver of sustainable practices. As China continues to engage with international sustainability initiatives, such as the Paris Agreement, the study's findings provide a useful framework for companies to align with their country's global environmental commitments. By integrating GHRM into their organizational culture, Chinese companies, along with those in other nations, can contribute to meeting global targets for reducing carbon emissions and environmental degradation.

## 5.3 | Limitations and further studies

While our research makes a significant contribution to the existing literature, it is essential to acknowledge several limitations in our study. Firstly, although method bias was mitigated by employing a time-lagged design and utilizing data from two different sources,

future studies should consider employing longitudinal and experimental designs to establish causal relationships more effectively. Secondly, our study's mediation results indicated partial mediation, suggesting the existence of other factors that could potentially mediate the relationship between GHRM and green activism. Therefore, identifying additional mediators in the relationship between GHRM and green activism is a crucial area for future research. Doing so will enhance our understanding of why GHRM is positively associated with green activism, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of this relationship. For instance, employee commitment to environmental issues motivates them to go beyond their typical responsibilities in order to safeguard the natural environment (Pham et al., 2019). Likewise, employees' autonomous motivation for environmental conservation can also mediate the relationship between GHRM and employees' beyond-work ecological behaviors. Future research should consider environmental commitment and employees' autonomous motivation to protect the natural environment as potential mediating variables for the GHRM-green activism link.

Moreover, there may be various individual and contextual factors that could moderate the association between GHRM and green activism. Hence, future studies should explore these potential moderators to highlight the intricacies inherent in this relationship. Additionally, leadership behaviors can significantly influence both GHRM practices and green activism. It is evident that employees' personal traits can positively influence GHRM, subsequently impacting their involvement in green activism. Therefore, forthcoming research should examine the direct relationships between positive personal traits (such as self-enhancement motives) and both GHRM and green activism. Furthermore, investigating the indirect pathways through which these personal traits influence green activism via GHRM is also crucial for a comprehensive understanding of this dynamic.

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