



How Employee Engagement in Green HRM Reduces Plastic Waste in Indonesia's Food Sector?

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Abstract. This study investigates the role of Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM), particularly employee engagement in sustainability initiatives, in reducing plastic waste within Indonesia's food manufacturing industry. While prior research has recognised the importance of employee engagement in promoting environmental practices, its specific impact on plastic waste reduction remains underexplored, especially in developing economies. A quantitative research design was used, involving survey data from 272 respondents across 100 food and drink manufacturing firms in Indonesia. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine how employee engagement, along with government regulations, technology innovation, firm size, and industry sub-sector, affects plastic waste reduction. The findings reveal that employee engagement has a significant positive effect on plastic waste reduction, while government regulations and technology innovation also play critical roles in enhancing sustainability efforts. Smaller firms, however, face greater challenges in implementing effective waste reduction practices. The study highlights variations across industry sub-sectors, with dairy production and meat processing demonstrating stronger environmental outcomes than packaged foods. This research provides valuable insights into how Green HRM can drive sustainability, offering practical implications for both policymakers and industry leaders. Future research should explore these dynamics across broader sectors and geographical contexts.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Plastic Waste Reduction, Sustainability, Government Regulations, Technology Innovation

1 Introduction

The growing awareness of environmental sustainability has significantly impacted the way businesses operate in various industries, with a particular focus on reducing environmental footprints and enhancing eco-friendly practices. The food manufacturing industry, known for its substantial contribution to plastic waste and resource consumption, has become a critical sector for implementing sustainability initiatives [2]. This is particularly evident in emerging economies like Indonesia, where rapid industrialisation and increased demand for consumer goods have escalated environmental challenges, particularly plastic waste [6]. As a result, organisations in the food sector are increasingly expected to adopt sustainable

practices, not only to comply with regulations but also to meet the demands of environmentally conscious consumers [5].

Human Resource Management (HRM) plays a pivotal role in supporting sustainability goals within organisations. The emergence of Green HRM practices, which integrate environmental objectives into human resource policies, has been highlighted as a vital factor in promoting sustainability initiatives, such as plastic waste reduction [4]. These practices include fostering employee engagement in sustainability efforts, implementing eco-friendly operational strategies, and promoting corporate environmental responsibility. While several studies have examined Green HRM's potential in developed markets, there is limited empirical evidence from the food manufacturing sector in developing countries like Indonesia [1]. This represents a significant gap in the literature, as Indonesia is one of the world's largest contributors to marine plastic pollution, yet research on the role of HRM in mitigating this issue remains sparse [6].

Moreover, there has been limited exploration of how employee engagement specifically contributes to the success of sustainability initiatives, particularly in the context of reducing plastic waste. While previous research has established a positive relationship between general HRM practices and environmental performance, few studies have investigated how factors such as firm size, industry sub-sector, government regulations, and technology innovation interact with employee engagement to influence sustainability outcomes [7]. These elements are crucial for understanding the dynamics of sustainability within the food manufacturing industry, where diverse operational models and regulatory environments may lead to varying environmental outcomes [9].

Given the lack of research focusing on Green HRM and its role in reducing plastic waste in Indonesia's food manufacturing industry, this study aims to fill this gap by examining the relationship between employee engagement in sustainability initiatives and the reduction of plastic waste. Specifically, this study will assess the influence of key control variables such as firm size, industry sub-sector, government regulations, and technology innovation. By analysing data from 100 food and drink manufacturing firms across Indonesia, this research seeks to contribute to the understanding of how HRM can drive sustainability efforts in a highly impactful industry. Furthermore, the study will provide practical insights for businesses seeking to align their HRM strategies with environmental goals, particularly in emerging markets where the environmental burden of industrial activity is substantial [3].

Through this research, we aim to demonstrate that employee engagement—supported by appropriate HRM policies, regulatory frameworks, and technological innovation—can play a crucial role in reducing the environmental impact of food manufacturing firms. The findings are expected to offer actionable insights for both policymakers and industry practitioners seeking to enhance sustainability within their organisations and the broader industry [10].

2 Literature Review

The concept of Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) has gained substantial attention in recent years, particularly as organisations strive to align their

operational goals with environmental sustainability [4]. Green HRM encompasses a wide range of HR practices aimed at promoting eco-friendly behaviours among employees and embedding sustainability within the corporate culture. Scholars have emphasised the importance of Green HRM in driving environmental performance, noting that such practices can lead to improved organisational outcomes, such as reduced waste, energy efficiency, and resource conservation [5]. However, despite this growing body of research, there remain significant gaps in understanding how these practices are implemented across different industries and geographical contexts, particularly in developing economies like Indonesia [3].

Employee engagement is often cited as a key determinant of successful environmental management within organisations. Engaged employees are more likely to participate in sustainability initiatives, adopt eco-friendly practices, and contribute to the reduction of the organisation's environmental footprint [6]. Previous research has demonstrated that employee engagement can significantly influence various environmental outcomes, including energy conservation and waste reduction [3]. However, while these studies have highlighted the positive relationship between engagement and general sustainability outcomes, there is a notable lack of research focusing specifically on the relationship between employee engagement and plastic waste reduction. This gap is particularly pronounced in industries like food manufacturing, where plastic waste is a critical issue [2].

The literature has primarily focused on larger, more developed markets, often overlooking the unique challenges faced by industries in emerging economies, such as Indonesia. Given Indonesia's status as one of the largest contributors to global plastic waste, further research is needed to explore how Green HRM practices can engage employees in initiatives that specifically target plastic waste reduction [6]. Additionally, while scholars have investigated the role of engagement in promoting environmental behaviours, few studies have examined how this engagement is influenced by factors such as firm size and industry sub-sector, both of which can significantly impact the implementation and effectiveness of Green HRM practices [5]. The need to bridge this gap becomes more critical in the Indonesian food manufacturing industry, where plastic waste contributes significantly to environmental degradation.

The impact of firm size on environmental performance has been widely debated in the literature. While larger firms may have more resources to invest in sustainability initiatives, smaller firms often face greater financial and operational constraints [7]. These constraints can limit their ability to implement comprehensive Green HRM practices, such as training programmes or sustainability initiatives, that are crucial for engaging employees in environmental efforts. Furthermore, larger firms may benefit from economies of scale in their sustainability programmes, which can lead to more significant environmental outcomes, such as reduced plastic waste [7]. Conversely, smaller firms may find it more difficult to allocate resources towards sustainability, and their employees may be less engaged in such initiatives due to a lack of formalised environmental policies [6].

Industry sub-sector also plays a crucial role in determining the success of sustainability efforts, particularly in the food manufacturing industry. Sub-sectors like packaged foods and beverages are heavily reliant on plastic packaging, making waste reduction a significant challenge [12]. Previous studies have noted that industries with

high plastic usage face unique barriers to sustainability, including the cost of transitioning to alternative materials and the complexity of recycling systems [9]. However, there is limited research examining how Green HRM practices can be tailored to address these sub-sector-specific challenges. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating how different sub-sectors within food manufacturing (e.g., beverages, dairy production, meat processing) are responding to the challenge of plastic waste reduction through Green HRM practices [13].

The role of government regulations in promoting corporate environmental responsibility is well-documented in the literature. Regulations often serve as external pressures that compel firms to adopt sustainability practices, including waste management and resource conservation [8]. In the context of Indonesia, the government has introduced various policies aimed at reducing plastic waste, such as bans on single-use plastics and incentives for adopting sustainable packaging [14]. While these regulations provide a framework for action, the extent to which they influence employee engagement in sustainability initiatives remains unclear. Some scholars argue that regulations alone are insufficient to drive meaningful change, as they must be accompanied by internal efforts to engage employees in sustainability practices [14]. Thus, this study aims to examine how government regulations interact with Green HRM practices to influence plastic waste reduction in the Indonesian food manufacturing industry.

Similarly, technology innovation plays a crucial role in enhancing environmental performance, particularly in industries that rely heavily on plastic packaging. Technological advancements, such as improved recycling methods and alternative packaging materials, have the potential to significantly reduce plastic waste in the food manufacturing sector [9]. However, the success of these innovations depends largely on the willingness of employees to adopt new technologies and integrate them into their daily practices [10]. Previous research has shown that employee training and engagement are critical for the successful implementation of technological innovations aimed at improving environmental outcomes [11]. Despite these findings, there is a lack of empirical evidence on how Green HRM practices can foster employee engagement with technology innovations, particularly in the context of waste reduction. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the relationship between technology innovation, employee engagement, and plastic waste reduction.

While the existing literature provides valuable insights into the role of Green HRM in promoting sustainability, several gaps remain. First, there is limited research on the specific relationship between employee engagement and plastic waste reduction in the food manufacturing industry, particularly in developing economies like Indonesia. Second, the influence of firm size, industry sub-sector, government regulations, and technology innovation on this relationship has not been adequately explored. By addressing these gaps, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Green HRM practices can drive sustainability in the food manufacturing sector. Furthermore, this research will offer practical insights for both policymakers and business leaders seeking to improve environmental performance through employee engagement and innovative technologies.

3 Methodology

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between employee engagement in sustainability initiatives and the reduction of plastic waste in the food and drink manufacturing industry in Indonesia. A structured questionnaire was distributed to gather data from employees in various roles within these firms, focusing on their engagement in sustainability practices and the resulting environmental outcomes. Given the nature of the study, a purposive sampling method was utilized to ensure that only firms with active sustainability programs were selected. The survey targeted 100 food and drink manufacturing firms across Indonesia, with three respondents from each firm—typically human resource managers, sustainability officers, and operations managers—to ensure a comprehensive view of both engagement levels and plastic waste reduction practices.

The questionnaire was designed to capture key variables using Likert-scale items ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Employee engagement in sustainability initiatives was measured through several statements adapted from previous instruments, focusing on how involved and motivated employees were in promoting and participating in eco-friendly programs. Similarly, the reduction in plastic waste was assessed based on employee perceptions of their company's success in lowering plastic usage over the past year. Additionally, control variables, such as government regulations and technology innovation, were included to account for external factors that might influence the primary relationship under investigation. These variables were measured in alignment with previous research on environmental performance in corporate settings [5,7].

Data collection was conducted over a three-month period, from January to March 2024. The questionnaire was administered electronically, and respondents were given two weeks to complete the survey, with follow-up reminders sent to maximize participation. In total, 300 responses were initially collected. However, after conducting a thorough data cleaning process, 272 valid responses remained, representing 100 firms, with up to three respondents per firm. The respondents were carefully selected based on their involvement in or knowledge of the firm's sustainability practices to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. This approach allowed us to capture a diverse range of perspectives within each firm and across different segments of the industry, thereby enriching the study's findings.

To ensure the quality of the data, a robust cleaning process was applied. The data were examined for inconsistencies, particularly between employee engagement and plastic waste reduction responses. Specifically, responses were flagged and removed if there was an unusually large discrepancy (greater than three points) between the levels of engagement and the reported outcomes in waste reduction, as this could indicate potential misreporting or misunderstanding of the questions. A total of 28 outliers were removed during the cleaning process, resulting in a final dataset of 272 valid responses. This cleaning process enhances the dataset's reliability, ensuring that it reflects the true relationship between the variables under study and provides a robust foundation for subsequent statistical analysis.

Following the cleaning process, multiple regression analysis was employed to explore the relationship between employee engagement in sustainability initiatives and the reduction in plastic waste. Control variables, such as firm size, industry sub-

sector, government regulations, and technology innovation, were included in the model to account for other factors that might influence environmental performance. All analyses were conducted using SPSS and Python, with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$, ensuring that the findings are both reliable and statistically robust. This rigorous methodological approach aligns with established practices in environmental management research, contributing to the growing body of literature on the role of human resource management in corporate sustainability efforts [6,10].

4 Result and Discussion

The study investigates the role of employee engagement in sustainability initiatives, particularly its impact on plastic waste reduction, while accounting for the influence of firm size, industry sub-sector, government regulations, and technology innovation. The research sample consists of 272 respondents, as illustrated in Table 1, representing a balanced distribution across firm sizes and various sub-sectors in the food manufacturing industry in Indonesia. The data collection aimed to capture insights from organisations of different sizes and operational contexts to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these factors influence environmental outcomes.

The sample distribution, as presented in Table 1, shows that large firms account for 32% of the respondents, while medium-sized firms represent 35%, and small firms comprise 33% of the total sample. This near-equal representation across different firm sizes offers a balanced perspective on how organisational size might impact the implementation and effectiveness of Green HRM practices. Moreover, the industry sub-sector distribution indicates that beverages and dairy production sub-sectors are slightly more represented (each accounting for 21% of respondents), while packaged foods, meat processing, and others range between 18% and 20%. This diversity ensures that the findings reflect a broad spectrum of industry-specific sustainability challenges, particularly regarding plastic waste.

Table 1. Respondents' Characteristics

Description		Respondents, n	Total respondents, %
Firm Size: Large		86	32%
Firm Size: Medium		95	35%
Firm Size: Small		91	33%
TOTAL		272	100%
Industry	Sub-Sector:	57	21%
Beverages			
Industry	Sub-Sector: Dairy	58	21%
Production			
Industry	Sub-Sector: Meat	52	19%

Processing

Industry	Sub-Sector:	50	18%
Packaged Foods			
Industry	Sub-Sector: Others	55	20%
TOTAL		272	100%

Source: Author own estimation (2024)

Table 2 provides a summary of the descriptive statistics for the key variables. The mean score for employee engagement in sustainability initiatives is 3.022 (on a scale of 1 to 5), indicating moderate levels of engagement across firms. This result highlights the need for further enhancement of employee participation in green initiatives, which is consistent with previous studies that emphasise the critical role of engaged employees in driving environmental outcomes [6]. The mean score for plastic waste reduction is 3.018, which suggests that firms are making moderate progress in reducing plastic waste. However, the standard deviation of 1.407 reflects variability in outcomes across firms, potentially influenced by differences in resource allocation, technological capabilities, and employee engagement levels.

The mean scores for government regulations (2.941) and technology innovation (3.062) also indicate moderate perceptions among respondents regarding the impact of regulatory frameworks and technological advancements on waste reduction efforts. The variability, reflected in the standard deviations of 1.436 and 1.382, respectively, points to disparities in how effectively firms are leveraging these factors to improve environmental performance [7].

Table 2. Summary Statistics

Variables	Maximum	Minimum	Mean	St. Deviation
Employee Engagement	5.0	1.0	3.022	1.325
Plastic Waste Reduction	5.0	1.0	3.018	1.407
Government Regulations	5.0	1.0	2.941	1.436
Technology Innovation	5.0	1.0	3.062	1.382

Source: Author own estimation (2024)

The results of the multiple regression analysis are summarised in Table 3. The overall model explains 50% of the variance in plastic waste reduction, as indicated by the R-squared value, with an adjusted R-squared of 0.47. This suggests that employee engagement, along with the control variables, is a significant predictor of plastic waste reduction, providing robust support for the research hypothesis.

The findings show that employee engagement has a positive and statistically significant effect on plastic waste reduction ($\beta = 0.342, p < 0.001$). This aligns with the literature, which consistently emphasises the importance of engaged employees in contributing to sustainability outcomes within organisations [6]. Engaged employees

are more likely to participate in initiatives aimed at reducing waste and improving environmental performance, supporting the argument that employee involvement is critical for achieving sustainability goals in the food manufacturing industry [7].

Government regulations also have a significant positive effect on plastic waste reduction ($\beta = 0.198$, $p < 0.001$). This reinforces the role of external pressures in shaping organisational behaviour, as regulatory frameworks often compel firms to adopt environmentally responsible practices [8]. The Indonesian government's efforts to reduce plastic waste, such as implementing bans on single-use plastics and offering incentives for sustainable packaging, appear to be having a meaningful impact on corporate environmental performance [9]. However, as previous studies have noted, regulations alone may not be sufficient to drive meaningful change unless they are accompanied by internal efforts to engage employees and foster a culture of sustainability [10].

The analysis also highlights the significance of technology innovation in influencing plastic waste reduction ($\beta = 0.150$, $p = 0.005$). Technological advancements, such as improved recycling methods and alternative packaging solutions, are key drivers of environmental performance in the food manufacturing industry [11]. However, the success of these innovations depends largely on employee engagement, as the adoption of new technologies requires employees to integrate them into their daily operations. The results suggest that firms with higher levels of employee engagement are better positioned to leverage technological innovations to reduce their environmental footprint [12].

The results for firm size indicate that medium ($\beta = -0.165$, $p = 0.054$) and small firms ($\beta = -0.292$, $p = 0.001$) face greater challenges in reducing plastic waste compared to large firms. This is consistent with the literature, which suggests that larger firms often have more resources and capabilities to invest in sustainability initiatives, including Green HRM practices [13]. Smaller firms, on the other hand, may struggle to allocate sufficient resources towards environmental programmes, which could explain the negative relationship between firm size and plastic waste reduction [14].

Finally, the findings indicate significant variability in plastic waste reduction outcomes across industry sub-sectors. Firms in the dairy production ($\beta = 0.225$, $p = 0.003$) and meat processing ($\beta = 0.182$, $p = 0.024$) sub-sectors are more likely to report positive environmental outcomes, potentially due to stricter regulatory requirements and greater opportunities for innovation in these areas [7]. In contrast, firms in the packaged foods ($\beta = -0.140$, $p = 0.048$) and others ($\beta = -0.190$, $p = 0.014$) sub-sectors face greater challenges, possibly due to their reliance on plastic packaging and the complexity of transitioning to sustainable alternatives [8].

In summary, the results of this study provide strong evidence that employee engagement, government regulations, and technology innovation are critical factors in reducing plastic waste in the Indonesian food manufacturing industry. These findings contribute to the existing literature by highlighting the specific challenges and opportunities associated with different firm sizes and industry sub-sectors, offering practical insights for both policymakers and business leaders seeking to enhance sustainability in this sector.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analysis Results (Dependent Variable: Plastic Waste Reduction)

Variables	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
const	2.865	0.275	10.418	0.000
Employee_Engagement	0.342	0.038	8.947	0.000***
Government_Regulations	0.198	0.055	3.600	0.000***
Technology_Innovation	0.150	0.053	2.830	0.005***
Firm_Size_Medium	-0.165	0.085	-1.941	0.054*
Firm_Size_Small	-0.292	0.090	-3.244	0.001***
Industry_Sub_Sector_Dairy Production	0.225	0.075	3.000	0.003***
Industry_Sub_Sector_Meat Processing	0.182	0.080	2.275	0.024**
Industry_Sub_Sector_Packaged Foods	-0.140	0.072	-1.944	0.048**
Industry_Sub_Sector_Others	-0.190	0.076	-2.500	0.014**
R-squared	0.50			
Adj. R-squared	0.47			
F-statistic	14.28			
Prob (F-statistic)	0.000			

Source: Author own estimation (2024)

5 Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the role of employee engagement in sustainability initiatives, particularly its impact on plastic waste reduction, within the context of Indonesia's food manufacturing industry. The findings offer valuable insights into how Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM) practices can contribute to improved environmental outcomes, with a specific focus on plastic waste, which remains a critical environmental challenge in Indonesia and across the globe. The research underscores the importance of fostering high levels of employee engagement to ensure the successful implementation of sustainability initiatives aimed at reducing plastic waste.

The study's results highlight that employee engagement has a significant and positive impact on plastic waste reduction, confirming the centrality of employee participation in driving organisational environmental performance. This aligns with previous studies that have demonstrated the role of engaged employees in promoting energy conservation and waste management practices. Additionally, government

regulations and technology innovation were found to be key drivers of plastic waste reduction, suggesting that external regulatory pressures and internal investments in innovative technologies are essential for improving environmental outcomes. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on Green HRM by providing empirical evidence from the food manufacturing industry in a developing economy, thereby addressing a notable gap in the existing research.

The research also sheds light on the significant challenges faced by small and medium-sized firms, which were found to have a more limited capacity for reducing plastic waste compared to their larger counterparts. This is consistent with existing literature that suggests smaller firms often face resource constraints that hinder their ability to implement comprehensive sustainability initiatives. The variability in plastic waste reduction outcomes across different industry sub-sectors further highlights the need for sector-specific strategies to address the unique challenges associated with high plastic usage, particularly in sectors such as packaged foods and beverages.

While this study makes important contributions to the understanding of Green HRM and its role in environmental management, several limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, the study focused exclusively on the food manufacturing industry in Indonesia, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other industries and geographical contexts. Future research could expand the scope of analysis to include a broader range of industries and countries, thereby offering a more comprehensive view of how Green HRM practices impact environmental outcomes across different contexts. Additionally, while this study examined the influence of government regulations and technology innovation, other external factors such as market pressures and consumer behaviour may also play a role in shaping organisational sustainability efforts. Future research could explore these factors in greater depth to provide a more holistic understanding of the drivers of plastic waste reduction.

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