

## **Influence of Internal Sustainable Orientation on Environmental Performance: A Mediating Role of Awareness of Sustainable Development Goals**

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### **Abstract**

*Apprehension of sustainable practices has become vital for organizations as conducive and healthy setting plays a prominent in enhancing employees' green performance. This paper aims to examine the influence of internal sustainable orientation on employees' environmental performance where awareness of sustainable development goals mediates the relationship. Using a self-administered questionnaire an empirical study is conducted to examine the association among 274 United Nation employees. The data is tested using the structural equation modeling technique. The results signify a positive relationship between internal sustainable orientation and environmental performance. Additionally, the results revealed that awareness of sustainable development goals has a significant mediating effect on the constructs. The paper contributes theoretically, as it tries to fill a gap in the literature by explaining how employees who happened to be environmentally aware perform. Moreover, it posits that performance can be enhanced if employees are briefed and guided about sustainable practices. It goes on to incorporate awareness sessions on Sustainable Development Goals and create a learning environment to achieve goals better and perform consciously well.*

**Keywords:** internal sustainable orientation, sustainable development goals, environmental Performance.

### **Introduction**

Institutions may offer Sustainable Human Resource (HR) practices to develop human capital; enhancing performance; growth; and revenue. Sustainable HR practices refer to sustainable activities and are defined as “the adaptation of human resource management (HRM) practices and strategies that enable them to achieve the financial, ecological and social goals of the organization over a long term horizon, while controlling for negative feedback and unintended side effects”(Ehnert & Ehnert, 2009). The HR practices can be categorized into three primary activities viz., abilities, motivation, and opportunities (Kundu & Gahlawat, 2018). Employee abilities can be developed and

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enhanced by creating an integrative positive environmental thinking through HR practices. Appropriate hiring, selection, training, and appraisal keep employees motivated and provide opportunities for improving employee performance levels (Zibarras & Coan, 2015). Several studies are conducted to investigate the relationship between sustainable HR practices and an organization's performance (Hameed et al., 2020; Mousa & Othman, 2020; Pak et al., 2019). The study revealed that HR practices positively influence performance through recruitment, induction, appraisal, promotion, and many others (Zibarras et al., 2015). In short, sustainable HR practices can enhance employee behavior to improve an organization's sustainable performance.

Preliminary literature, consider HRM as a tool for communication that deals with workforce management and helps in generation revenue (Pak et al., 2019). Moreover, the progression in research studies proved that HR involvement is crucial and essential in implementing strategies and achieving sustainability (Dar et al., 2020). In particular, it is a means to end not an end itself (Dar, 2017). Existing literature primarily focuses on the green HR practices including green staffing, green values, green training, and many others to improve the performance and triple bottom line (Lopez-Cabrales & Valle-Cabrera, 2020). In the emerging literature of environmental sustainability and HR, researchers emphasized environmental-friendly initiatives. The perspective arises to involve employees and make them commit to resolve environmental problems and issues. Mousa and Othman (2020) stress institutionalized environmental sustainability practices in various sectors. Further, it is predicted that environmentally sustainable practices play an essential role in the willingness of employees' and the readiness may help organizations in achieving sustainability. There is limited research that focuses on the perspective of employees about the awareness and attitudes towards the implementation of environmental-friendly and sustainable HR practices. However, the present study examines the sustainable HR practices in international institutions, which to the knowledge are limitedly investigated in previous studies (Dickel & Eckardt, 2021; Omisore et al., 2017; Roscoe et al., 2019; Yusoff et al., 2020). A few studies examine the association of internal sustainable orientation (Deslatte & Swann, 2020; Dickel & Eckardt, 2021). Thus, the objective of the current study is to examine the influence and impact of internal sustainable practices on environmental performance in the United Nation institutes of Balochistan. However, the literature thoroughly emphasizes the link between sustainable HR practices and environmental performance (Elshaer et al., 2021). This study attempts to fill the gap by examining how environmentally conscious employees participate and implement

sustainable goals to create an environmentally friendly workplace and how the initiatives shape their performance. The study investigates internal sustainable orientation practices on environmental performance while awareness of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) displays a mediating role.

The study extends the literature by contributing to sustainable HR literature. Consequently, it has also practical implications. Organizations can take fruitful measures by considering the results of the study. It is believed that the study emphasizes organizations to incorporate HR practices and orient employees to take a step ahead to understand the critical issues of green values and practices as this may enhance their performance and make them consciously aware of their responsibilities.

### **Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development**

To explain and examine the link between sustainable HR practices and performance, the paper comprehends on Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity (AMO) theory (Anwar et al., 2020; Appelbaum et al., 2000; Yusoff et al., 2020). This theory is frequently used in the literature as it helps in comprehensive understanding of HR's contribution towards environmental performance. The AMO theory is based on three core aspects which are ability, motivation, and opportunity (Anwar et al., 2020). The ability is a set of practices that ensure knowledge and skills required to perform specific tasks. The ability includes proper recruitment, selection, training, and development programs (Dar, 2017). Similarly, the motivational aspect boosts the efforts to accomplish performance goals and targets. This includes performance appraisal, incentives, and rewards (Elshaer et al., 2021). Lastly, the opportunity is based on several practices that foster participation and help in career building. This practice includes engagement, peer, and supervisor support (Gill et al., 2021). Hence, the AMO theory suggests that employees abilities, motivation, and opportunities contribute to enhancing their performance (Yusoff et al., 2020), and drawing upon this theory, the study argues that internal sustainable orientation practices aim to attract, align, train, motivate and sustain employees behavior towards environmental goals and objectives. In other words, the internal sustainable orientation helps empower employees to be thoughtful and vigilant in retaining a green environment through following sustainable goals and performing well by enhancing green products and services. Based on AMO theoretical lens following arguments and hypotheses are formulated.

*Internal Sustainable Orientation and Environmental Performance*

Institutions recognize the importance of environmental issues and hence, are committed to protecting the environment as their organizational core obligation. Therefore, organizations step ahead to reflect environmental components in their organizational mission, objectives, and ethical standards (Zaid et al., 2018). The motive is to deeply embed an environmentally safe culture and develop an environmentally conscious workplace. Therefore, internal sustainable orientation practices are encouraged to be incorporated. Pellegrini, Rizzi, and Frey (2018) describe it as “the vision and policies adopted by an organization in relation to sustainability as perceived by employees”.

The literature revealed that internal sustainability orientation signifies employees’ and organization’s concern towards environmental issues (Roscoe et al., 2019). The environmentally oriented employee increases knowledge and skills in eradicating waste material and transforming the environment into a less polluted and conducive place (Dickel & Eckardt, 2021).

Moreover, environmental performance relates to “organizational initiatives to meet and exceed societal expectations vis-à-vis the natural environment in a manner to go beyond mere compliances with rules and regulations” (Hameed et al., 2020). Simply, it encompasses environmental effects in a manner that best fits with permissible environmental requirements. Studies suggest that environmental performance depends upon the quality of environment-friendly products, green processes, and ecological sustainable services (Jabbar & Abid, 2015).

Based upon AMO theory it is predicted that organizations that value and leverages the potential of employees ultimately institutionalize sustainable human resource practices (Singh et al., 2020; Yusoff et al., 2020). Their purpose is to attract, align, and provide opportunities to human resources to leverage their potentialities for processing and delivering green services as well as motivating employees to perform environmentally safe. Therefore, it is proposed that internal sustainable orientation should be actively integrated into organizational purpose, as it efficiently invests resources necessary for a sustainable environment and enhances environmental-related performance.

*H<sub>1</sub>: Internal Sustainable Orientation is significantly related to environmental performance.*

*Awareness of SDGs*

Sustainable development is a comprehensive concept that highlights the present and future generations (Sachs, 2012). The idea is based on the economic, social, and environmental dimensions, which are

coherent and holistic. To achieve SDGs, the organizations conjointly get involved in thinking and innovative process. The organizations cooperatively work to make the employees aware and understand the significance of the goals.

Correspondingly, literature also revealed that consciously aware employees show proactive behavior and pay more attention to process the information more accurately than a person who is unaware of his surroundings (Ando et al., 2019). Employees in an environmentally-focused organization create an open environment discussion and build interest in systematic environment development. Using AMO theory the paper argues that awareness programs and sessions aim to develop proficient skills of employees for building and nurturing a green workplace. The institutionalization of sustainable practices and awareness of eco-friendly objectives produce a sense of responsibility (Yusoff et al., 2020) and improves environmental performance by enriching the knowledge on recycling, green products, waste management, and energy efficiency (Singh et al., 2020). Therefore, it is hypothesized that awareness increases the knowledge and perception of employees that contribute to broadening the views which aid in pulling off the environmental goals which are eco-friendly and holding green values.

*H<sub>2</sub>: Awareness of SDGs mediates the relationship between internal sustainable orientation and environmental performance.*

### **Methodology**

The research is conducted in the nine institutes of the United Nations that are located in Balochistan. The study population comprises 347 employees. The self-administered questionnaires were distributed among the employees i.e. the entire population of institutes. Though out of the total population, 281 employees participated in the survey. After screening the data for missing and outliers, almost 274 respondents' data were useable and generated a response of 82%. G\* power analysis shows the minimum sample size of 74 with an effect size of 0.15 and 95% of the probability (Gill et al., 2021).

The questionnaire to measure internal sustainable orientation was adapted from Banerjee et al. (2003). Additionally, questions of mediating variables were adapted from Ando et al. (2019) and the items for environmental performance were adapted from Lee and Ha-Brookshire's (2018) study based on individual perception. All the items were measured on a "5 points Likert scale" ranging from "strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5)".

The data collected initially scrutinized using Social Sciences Statistical Package (IBM-SPSS) version 23. To test the model, structural equation modeling is applied through Smart PLS-SEM (Partial Least Squares-

Structural Equation Modeling). The technique and the software are extensively applied in management sciences as it is most appropriate when predicting the variables (Anjum et al., 2021; Hair et al., 2019; Sarwar et al., 2020). It is also reiterated that “PLS-SEM primarily focuses on the interplay between prediction and theory testing and results should be validated accordingly (Umrani et al., 2020). Following the guidelines from PLS-SEM literature, the study adopted a two-step approach to analyze the results (Hair et al., 2019). In the first step, the measurement model is examined whereas in the second step the structural model is examined to test hypotheses and predictive capability assessment. For testing the mediation analysis this study use bootstrapping technique to test the significance of the indirect path (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). As recommended the Nitzl et al. (2016), while testing the mediation analysis it is not necessary to test the relationships between independent constructs and mediation construct in PLS-SEM.

## Results

### *Demographic Characteristics*

The data screened for missing values, outliers, and normality. The response rate of the study was calculated as 78%. The data on demographic characteristics showed that 62.4% of the participants were male. Likewise, 45.6% of the participant's age lies between 28 to 37 years. Approximately 72% of the employees attained a Master's degree. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the data variables.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics**

Demographics Profile	Respondents categories	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Gender	Female	103	37.6%
	Male	171	62.4%
Age	18 to 27	22	8%
	28 to 37	125	45.6%
	38 to 47	117	42.7%
	48 & Above	10	3.6%
Qualification	Graduation	68	24.8%
	Post-Graduation	197	71.9%
	Ph.D.	9	3.3%

\*\*ISO=Internal Sustainable Orientation, SDGs=Awareness of Sustainable Development Goals, EnrP=Environmental Performance.

The study used two step-method of SEM to test the model, which comprises measurement and structural assessment.

### *Structure Equation Modeling: Measurement Model Assessment*

The measurement model discusses the criterion of individual item reliability that examines the loading of construct items. According to the rule of thumb, the data retain the value of 0.7 and greater (Hair et al., 2019). Similarly, the internal consistency, the composite reliability, rho A and Cronbach's alpha are also examined and the results yield an acceptable range of values for all the mention criteria. Further, the average variance extracted (AVE) scores also retain an adequate of at least 0.50 or/ and more (Umrani et al., 2018). Accordingly, the literature states that if the value is less than 0.40 then it is feasible to delete the reflective indicator, whereas if the value is greater 0.70 than retain the reflective indicator (Gill et al., 2021). Table 2 demonstrates the criterion according to an acceptable range whereas Figure 1 shows the reflective measurement model of the study.

**Table 2: Evaluation of the Measurement Model**

Variables name	Item Label	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE
Awareness of SDGs			0.779	0.79	0.85	0.53
	Sdgs_01	0.809				
	Sdgs_02	0.822				
	Sdgs_03	0.716				
	Sdgs_04	0.621				
	Sdgs_05	0.660				
Internal Sustainability Orientation			0.778	0.783	0.85	0.60
	ISO_01	0.719				
	ISO_02	0.843				
	ISO_03	0.806				
	ISO_04	0.73				
Environmental Performance			0.819	0.82	0.89	0.73
	EnrP_01	0.838				
	EnrP_02	0.885				
	EnrP_03	0.847				

\*\* SDGs=Awareness of Sustainable Development Goals, ISO=Internal Sustainability Orientation, EnrP=Environmental Performance.

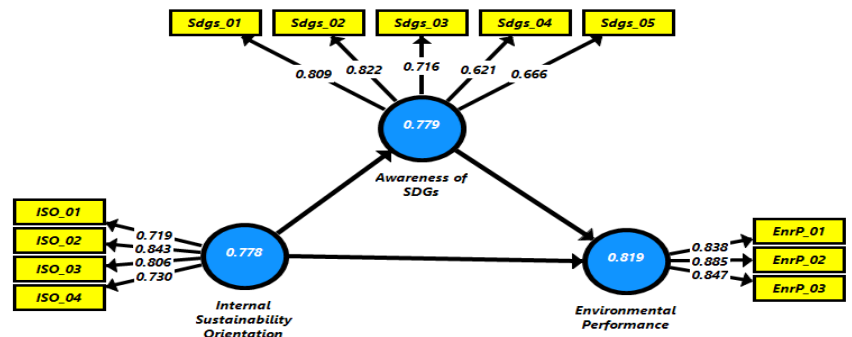
The discriminant validity is measured through Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. Literature put forth that HTMT is a more acceptable criterion of discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019). The table

below showed that the values of HTMT did not exceed 0.85 or 0.90, respectively (Henseler et al., 2015).

**Table 3: Discriminate Validity (Heterotrait-Monotrait Criteria)**

	SDGs	EnrP	ISO
SDGs			
EnrP	0.525		
ISO	0.542	0.402	

\*\*SDGs=Awareness of Sustainable Development Goals, ISO=Internal Sustainability Orientation, EnrP=Environmental Performance.



**Figure 1 Measurement Model**

**Structural Model Assessment and Hypothesis Testing**

The assessment of path coefficients is demonstrated by the collinearity that ensures biases and the VIF values examined to be close to 3 and lower. Moreover, the standard bootstrapping procedure with 5000 bootstrapping samples was run on 274 cases to determine the structural model's significance and relevance.

**Table 4: Testing Hypothesis Using Path Coefficients**

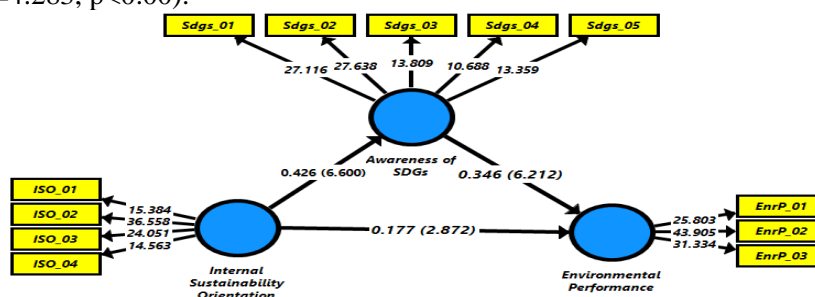
Relationship	$\beta$	S. E	t-value	p-value	LL	UL	Decision
H <sub>1</sub> : ISO→EnrP	0.177	0.062	2.872	0.004	0.056	0.294	Supported
H <sub>2</sub> : ISO→SDGs→EnrP	0.147	0.034	4.283	0.000	0.087	0.221	Supported

\*\*  $\beta$ = path coefficients, S. E= Standard error of the coefficients, LL & UL = lower and upper level of confidence intervals at 2.5% & 97.5%, SDGs=Awareness of Sustainable Development Goals, ISO=Internal Sustainability Orientation, EnrP=Environmental Performance.

Figure 2 and Table 4 shows that the hypothesized relationships are significant. The hypothesis H1 results represent a positive and significant



relationship between internal sustainable orientation and environmental performance ( $\beta=0.177, t=2.872, p <0.00$ ). To identify the mediating relationship, bootstrapping is applied in Smart PLS. To identify the mediating relationship, bootstrapping is applied in Smart PLS. Table 5 represents that the indirect effect i.e. hypothesis H2 is also supported, which signifies that SDGs' awareness mediates the relationship between internal sustainable orientation and environmental performance ( $\beta=0.147, t=4.283, p<0.00$ ).



**Figure 2 Structural Model**

Further, to measure the model proportion of variation, the level of coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) is assessed. The adjusted  $R^2$  shows a variation of 0.197 in environmental performance, whereas 0.178 variations are explained through the mediating variable. The value range is low but valid as literature revealed that the value of  $R^2$  depends on the discipline and field of study (Falk & Miller, 1992). It is recommended that “ $R^2$  value should be equal or greater than 0.10 for adequate variance explained by exogenous variables”.

**Table 5: Construct Cross-Validated Redundancy ( $Q^2$ )**

	SSO	SSE	$Q^2$	$f^2$
Awareness of SDGs	1370	1243.697	0.092	-
Environmental Performance	822	703.862	0.144	0.123
Internal Sustainability Orientation	1096	1096		0.032

\*\*  $Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)$

Lastly, the predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ) of exogenous constructs using the blindfolding procedure was analyzed. According to the rule of thumb, the values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate small, medium, and considerable predictive relevance, respectively (Hair et al., 2012). The predictive relevance of the constructs of this study is demonstrated in Table 5.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study extends the AMO theory by examining the effect of sustainable HR practices on improving the ability and motivation of employees and provides the opportunity to contribute towards the organization's environmental performance. Organizations use sustainable HR practices to involve employees in creating an environment-friendly and conducive workplace. The new and old recruited employees should be oriented to environmental protection and safety issues to ultimately feel responsible towards the organizational environmental setting (Ramus, 2001). Hiring environmentally-conscious employees and then conducting consistent and effective orientation sessions will promote environmental awareness throughout the organization. Such activities show organizational commitment and ensure the applicability of environment-friendly practices. Participation in consultative meetings and orientation sessions helps embed environmentally conscious habits and behavior in employees (Banerjee et al., 2003). It also coincides with the literature that pro-environmental values and beliefs promote green workplace behavior and create green organizational culture (Kundu & Gahlawat, 2018). The environmentally sustainable orientation programs are essentials for enhancing environmental awareness and improving an employee's skills and attitudes towards environmental management. The findings also revealed that integrating awareness and adopting environment-friendly behavior strengthens the relationship between HR and environmental performance. Literature substantiates that sustainable awareness and training sessions help "improve an employee's understanding about the importance of environmental protection, enhances the ability to adapt to change and helps the employee to learn basic ways of conserving energy and reducing waste at the workplace"(Singh et al., 2020). Moreover, the orientation sessions on eco-friendly services provide knowledge that helps in connecting environmental knowledge with environmental behavior (Dar et al., 2020; Hameed et al., 2020). Further enhancing the abilities to solve environmental problems and issues.

### *Theoretical Implications*

The theoretical contribution of the study cannot be overlooked although several studies discussed human resource management and sustainability (Anwar et al., 2020; Dickel & Eckardt, 2021). To the researcher's knowledge, no study examined the role of sustainable development goals as a mediator. Additionally, a few studies examine the impact of internal sustainable orientation on environmental performance. Thus, the current study bridges the research gap by supporting the framework for sustainable HR under AMO theory and promotes

awareness of SDGs and enhances environmental performance. The finding also contributes to the existing literature on sustainable development, notably in the domain of UN institutes.

#### *Practical Implications*

Apart from theoretical implications, the study also contributes to the practical implications. The main implication is for the organizations and UN staff to conduct orientation sessions, workshops, and seminars that help to enhance and equip employees with environmental skills, and provide adequate knowledge for resolving environmental problems of energy, power, waste management, and carbon emissions. The paper put forth that the orientation and awareness sessions must also be linked with organizational and environmental objectives. Such measures will create self-conscious employees that will promote environmentally- friendly behavior for environmental protection and safety. The practitioners and managers need to understand the significance of HR practices, and sustainable development goals to achieve the desired targets and objectives for continuous improvement in environmental issues and performance.

#### *Limitation and Recommendations*

The study recommends the scholars extend the study by examining the relationship with other HR practices like recruitment, selection, training, reward, leadership, etc. (Wright et al., 2003). Moreover, sustainable development goals are based on three main aspects (Lee & Ha-Bookshire, 2018). However, researchers can focus on the other two aspects, which are economic and social (Ismail et al., 2021). Additionally, the moderating effect of various constructs like culture, climate, and organizational citizenship behavior can also be investigated (Pellegrini et al., 2018). Nowadays, it is believed that mixed methodology provides a bird's eye view. Therefore, researchers can also extend the study by adding the subjective aspect of environmental issues.

There are certain limitations in the study; however, the limitations can serve as guidelines for future research. The first limitation is that the information is gathered from UN institutes only, so it is not generalizable to the public sector, civil societies, and non-profit institutes. It is suggested for more elaboration on constructs researchers may conduct the study in other sectors and fields. Also, the context and cultural aspect may create a difference. A cross-sectional study means data is gathered at one point, so it is preferred for more accurate results. The researchers are recommended to conduct a study for a more extended period.

The researcher may also extend the study model by incorporating the mechanism of corporate social responsibility, employee perception, and other related variables (Anwar et al., 2020; Khan & Sukhotu, 2020). Researchers can also study the association of antecedents that help in establishing the environmental-friendly behavior among employees to get long-term sustainable competitive advantage and success (Singh et al., 2020). A moderator role can also be effective to study the underlining relationship in detail. Moreover, the researchers may consider studying eco-friendly behavior at the individual and organization level and evaluate the performance of employees at different stages (Dar et al., 2020). In short, the predictor and dependent variables may be analyzed from different perspectives and through various relevant constructs.

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