



Green Human Resource Management Practices and Organizational Sustainability Performance

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ABSTRACT

This study adopted a mixed methods approach to analyze the role of the green human resource management (GHRM) practices (green recruitment, green training, and employee environmental involvement) on organizational sustainability performance. During the quantitative part, 180 employees from ecologically aware companies filled out a structured questionnaire that included a five-point Likert scale for green recruitment, green training, employee environment involvement, and sustainability performance. The data of the survey were analyzed with descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and hierarchical regression to determine the incremental contribution of each HR practice to the sustainability performance. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 15 HR managers to gain understanding of the implementation of green HR policies in practice, with responses from the interviews analysed thematically. Cronbach's alpha was computed to establish reliability of the research instrument in all constructs and the results were satisfactory. The results of the hierarchical regression showed that the three predictor variables (green recruitment, green training and employee environmental involvement) all made significant incremental contributions to the variance in sustainability performance, with the three variables working together accounting for 36.5% of the variance in sustainability performance, with employee environmental involvement being the largest. Through thematic analysis of the HR manager interviews, five themes emerged: embedding sustainability in recruitment criteria, green training as a culture-building activity as opposed to a compliance-driven one; grassroots momentum through employee-driven green initiatives; challenges of measuring and reporting sustainability performance; and the need for leadership commitment for effective implementation. The qualitative themes were shown to be substantively meaningful in terms of the pattern of incremental contribution found in the regression results through integration of the two phases. This results indicates that the most effective way to improve organizational sustainability performance is to focus on the net effect of the combination of GHRM practices, namely recruitment, training, and employee involvement practices.

Keywords: green human resource management, green recruitment, green training, employee environmental involvement, sustainability performance, mixed-methods research, hierarchical regression

INTRODUCTION

As pressure from regulators, investors and consumers continues to increase, organisations of all types are being increasingly called upon to exhibit credible environmental sustainability performance, which means that they are increasingly turning to HRM as a means of achieving sustainability goals (Jackson et al., 2011). Green human resource management (GHRM) is a new stream of research and practice that focuses on the integration of HR policies and practices with environmental management objectives, whereby



Volume 2, Issue 3, 2026

organizations recruit, train, and engage their employees in a manner that enables them to perform their job roles in a way that is favorable to the environment (Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013).

HRM plays an important but largely overlooked role in supporting organizations to act in environmentally sustainable ways, as HRM participants are the ones who will be responsible for operating and maintaining the environmental initiatives at the work front line (Jabbour & Santos, 2008). The GHRM literature has grown significantly since this seminal research, covering topics from green recruitment and selection to green training, performance management and employee involvement, which are all hypothesized to influence organizational environmental and sustainability results via different pathways (Ren, Tang, & Jackson, 2018).

Proposals have been made to make recruiting and selecting environmentally aware and value-based candidates the starting point for GHRM practices (Renwick, Jabbour, Muller-Camen, Redman, & Wilkinson, 2016). Green training, defined as training that focuses on the development of employees' environmental knowledge, skills, and competencies has also been correlated with better environmental performance, because it enables employees to recognise and implement opportunities to practice in an environmentally responsible way in their work (Zibarras & Coan, 2015). It has been theorized that employee environmental involvement, defined as the level of involvement of employees in the decision-making, problem solving, and voluntary green initiatives for the organization, is another link between GHRM and continued organizational sustainability outcomes (Paillé, Chen, Boiral, & Jin, 2014).

While the linkage of individual GHRM practices to environmental or sustainability performance has been the focus of a growing body of quantitative research (e.g., Dumont, Shen, & Deng, 2017; Kim, Kim, Choi, & Phetvaroon, 2019), less research has focused on the incremental and combined effect of multiple GHRM practices in a single model and even less have considered the linkage between quantitative evidence and the qualitative aspects of how HR managers implement GHRM in practice (Pham, Tučková, & Jabbour, 2019). This represents an important gap because the understanding of the relative statistical contribution of the various GHRM practices and the mechanisms through which they are implemented, have implications on how the GHRM strategy of the organization is prioritized and designed (Yong, Yusliza, & Fawehinmi, 2020).

Based on this gap, the present study used a mixed methods research design to explore the role of green recruitment, green training, and employee involvement in organizational sustainability performance. For the quantitative phase, the incremental contribution of each GHRM practice was tested through hierarchical regression analysis, whereas the qualitative phase involved a study of the implementation of the GHRM practices, as revealed by interviews with HR managers. The study aimed at (a) understanding the individual and incremental effect of the three green HR practices of green recruitment, green training and employee environmental involvement on organizational sustainability performance; (b) understanding how the green HR practices in their organizations were introduced through the HR managers' personal accounts; (c) incorporating the quantitative findings with qualitative findings to understand the joint effect of the three green HR practices on organizational sustainability performance (Amrutha & Geetha, 2020).



LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Green Human Resource Management

Green human resource management is the embedding of environmental management aims into the fundamental human resource management activities, including recruitment, training, performance management and employee relations, to enable the organisation to become environmentally sustainable (Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013). According to Jabbour and Santos (2008), HRM is a vital catalyst in achieving the success of any environmental program because the effectiveness of any environmental program will ultimately depend on the knowledge, motivation and behavior of the people who are responsible for it. Jackson, Renwick, Jabbour, and Muller-Camen (2011) followed this path in the development of GHRM as a field of research; initially, most studies were aimed at individual practices separately, and then the field evolved into multi-practice, more integrative models. A comprehensive review by Ren, Tang and Jackson (2018) classifies GHRM practices on the basis of the HR function that is influenced by the GHRM practice concerned, such as green recruitment and selection, green training and development, green performance management and green employee relations, and this classification is followed by many studies since then, including this one.

Green Recruitment and Selection

Green recruitment is defined as the process of attracting, screening, and selection of job candidates who have at least some aspects of their environmental awareness, values and previous involvement in activities related to environmental issues (Renwick, Jabbour, Muller-Camen, Redman, & Wilkinson, 2016). Tang et al., (2018) have developed and validated a comprehensive GHRM practices scale, which includes two dimensions: the integration of environmental considerations in the job specification and leveraging environmental reputation to attract environmental-minded applicants. Green recruitment practices also had an impact on creating a green organizational culture, in ways that may be less direct than immediate behavioral changes, by influencing who is recruiting and what their values are, as explained by Roscoe et al. (2019) who found that the impact of green recruitment on sustainability performance may have an indirect effect through the green organization culture.

Sustainable Development of Trainers and Employees

Green training relates to learning activities, both formal and informal, that focus on the knowledge, skills and competencies needed by employees to practice in an environmentally responsible way (Zibarras & Coan, 2015). Training was one of the most consistently practiced GHRM practices identified by Jabbour and Santos (2008), because they believed it was directly relevant to organizations to ensure employees have the practical skills they need to minimize environmental impacts in their daily work. The findings of Dumont, Shen, and Deng (2017) indicate that, green training was correlated with improved employees' green workplace behavior, and that the relationship between GHRM practices and green workplace behavior was stronger when employees had green values and a positive green psychological climate at work. This suggests that training works in conjunction with other organizational and individual factors, rather than on its own.



Employee Environmental Involvement

Employee environmental involvement focuses on the level of engagement employees are involved in environmental-related decision making, problem solving, and voluntary environmental projects, in addition to their formal job duties (Paillé, Chen, Boiral, & Jin, 2014). Guerci, Longoni, and Luzzini (2016) discovered that the involvement of the employees and their behavioral engagement instead of simply implementing policy were the key factors in turning stakeholder pressure for environmental performance into environmental outcomes. In line with this, Ababneh (2021) found that Green HRM practices were related to employees' green behaviours with employee engagement acting as an important condition strengthening this relationship, indicating that employee involvement might be a stronger catalyst for green outcomes. Additionally, Saeed et al. (2019) discovered that GHRM practices encouraged employees' pro-environmental behavior both during and outside of their work, thus further strengthening the role of employee involvement as a mechanism through which GHRM practice influences overall environmental performance.

Sustainable performance of GHRM practices.

Empirical studies have directly explored the link between GHRM practices and organizational environmental performance or sustainability have increased in number in recent years. In a sample from the hospitality industry, Kim et al., (2019) showed that GHRM practices significantly predicted employees' eco-friendly behavior, which predicted the better environmental performance at the organizational level. Building on their mixed method design, which shared common methodological elements with the present study, Pham, Tučková, and Jabbour (2019) revealed that the practices of GHRM positively affected organizational citizenship behaviour towards the environment; qualitative interview data was used to help explain how the hotel managers interpreted GHRM policy into employee behaviour. In a systematic review which examined more than ten years of GHRM research, Yong, Yusliza and Fawehinmi (2020) found that although individual GHRM practices have consistently shown positive linkages to environmental and sustainability outcomes, few studies had investigated the incremental or combined effect of multiple practices in a single empirical model, the latter of which was addressed in this study through the hierarchical regression approach adopted.

Theoretical Framework

The ability-motivation-opportunity (AMO) framework for green human resource management was the foundation for this study, as it posits that HR practices affect outcomes related to performance through building employee ability (recruitment and training), motivation (values alignment and employee engagement), and opportunity (employee involvement in environmental decision-making and initiatives) (Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013; Ren & Jackson, 2020). In this context, the theoretical framework for green recruitment is to establish an ability foundation by recruiting employees who have a proclivity or inclination toward environmental involvement, and the theoretical framework for green training is to provide an ability foundation, one in which the capacity and motivation are created by developing knowledge and skill related to environmental involvement. Employee environmental involvement is theorized as a way of providing an opportunity structure, where the capacity and motivation are translated into an ongoing pattern of environmental involvement and, in turn, organizational sustainability performance. This theoretical framework gives reason to hope that every practice will have an own and



Volume 2, Issue 3, 2026

incremental impact on sustainability achievement as assumed in the current study, which employs a hierarchical regression model.

Based on the above theoretical review and empirical, the following Hypothesis and Research Question were formulated:

H1: Green recruitment contributes positively and incrementally to the sustainable performance of organizations.

H2: Beyond green recruitment, green training contributes positively to the sustainability performance of the organization, in an incremental way.

H3: Beyond the effect of green recruitment and green training, the effect of employee environmental involvement also has a significant positive incremental effect on organizational sustainability performance.

RQ1: What are HR managers' descriptions of implementation of green HR policies in their organizations?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used mixed-methods research approach to investigate the influence of GHRM practices on organizational sustainability performance. The quantitative phase consisted of a cross-sectional survey in order to test the incremental statistical contribution of the three groups of green HR policies (green recruitment, green training and employee environmental involvement) to the sustainability performance, the qualitative phase was based on semi-structured interviews with HR managers to understand the implementation of green HR policies in practice and the qualitative results were used to complement and explain the quantitative results.

Qualitative Phase: Characteristics of the population and sample

The quantitative phase focused on employees at environmentally conscious organizations (defined as organizations with an environmental policy publicly stated or whose name is printed on a sustainability certification). The questionnaire was completed by 180 employees, which was a sufficient sample size for a hierarchical regression analysis using multiple predictor blocks.

Quantitative Phase: Instrumentation

The data were gathered through a structured questionnaire of three sections, which included information on demographics and organizational characteristics, GHRM practices, and sustainability performance. The substantive items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Five items were used to measure green recruitment, reflecting the degree to which environmental issues and its reputation were a part of the organisation's recruitment and selection process. Six factors were used to assess the level and perceived level of green training given to employees: the level of environmental knowledge training, the level of environmental skills training, the level of environmental attitudes training,





Volume 2, Issue 3, 2026

the level of environmental behavior training, the level of the green culture environment training, and the level of training involving green culture. An environmental involvement scale was used to measure the involvement of employees in environmental decision making and in implementation of voluntary green actions, with 5 items. In order to assess sustainability performance, six items were used that reflect the perceptions of the employees regarding the sustainability performance of their organization.

The following is a summary of the qualitative phase of the study. A brief summary of the qualitative phase of the study is outlined below.

In the second phase, the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 HR managers from organizations included in the quantitative phase and chosen by purposive sampling so that the HR managers were directly involved in designing or implementing green HR policies. The interviews lasted from 30 to 45 minutes and focused on the experiences participants had with implementing green recruitment, green training, and employee involvement initiatives, challenges they faced, and their perceptions of the impact these practices have on the sustainability performance of their organizations. Interviews were recorded on audio recording with the consent of the participants and then verbatim transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis Technique

The quantitative survey data were statistically analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis in order to explore the relationships between the constructs of the study and hierarchical regression analysis was used to find the incremental contribution of green recruitment, green training and EES to sustainability performance. The predictors were added in three blocks in order as they were theorized to support themselves and the ΔR^2 (incremental R^2) at each block was analyzed to evaluate each practice's incremental contribution to the model. To ensure the reliability of the research instrument, the Cronbach's alpha was used for each construct. The transcripts of qualitative interviews were analysed thematically, which included familiarisation with the data, systematic coding and iterative development and refinement of themes. After analyzing each phase separately, a joint display was used to combine the quantitative and qualitative results to gain a deeper understanding of the qualitative themes' explanatory power of the pattern of incremental statistical contribution observed in the regression results.

Ethical Considerations

For all studies, data collection was preceded by ethical approval in both phases. Before participating, all respondents of the survey and HR managers interviewed were informed about the purpose of the study and asked to sign an informed consent form. All participation and withdrawal from the study was voluntary and no penalties were incurred. No personally identifiable information was mentioned in the report of the study, and all the responses to the questionnaires and the interview transcriptions were securely kept and only for the purpose of this research.



RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Quantitative Phase: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic and organizational characteristics of the 180 employees who completed the survey.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents (N = 180)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	92	51.1
	Female	88	48.9
Age (years)	22–30	64	35.6
	31–40	71	39.4
	41 and above	45	25.0
Organizational tenure	Less than 2 years	38	21.1
	2–5 years	74	41.1
	More than 5 years	68	37.8
Industry	Manufacturing	58	32.2
	Services	52	28.9



	Energy / Utilities	40	22.2
	Other	30	16.7

Quantitative Phase: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

The descriptive statistics and correlations among the four constructs of this study are presented in Table 2. There were significant positive correlations among all constructs, with employee environmental involvement with sustainability performance demonstrating the highest relationship.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Study Constructs

Construct	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Green Recruitment	3.58	0.74	1.00			
2. Green Training	3.71	0.69	0.46**	1.00		
3. Employee Environmental Involvement	3.64	0.72	0.39**	0.52**	1.00	
4. Sustainability Performance	3.77	0.66	0.41**	0.49**	0.55**	1.00

Note. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Reliability of the Research Instrument

Table 3 presents the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for each construct. All constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming adequate internal consistency.

Table 3. Reliability of Study Constructs

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's α
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Green Recruitment	5	0.841
Green Training	6	0.867
Employee Environmental Involvement	5	0.855
Sustainability Performance	6	0.872

Hierarchical Regression Analysis

he incremental effects of green recruitment and green training as well as employee environmental involvement on sustainability performance were tested using hierarchical regression and controlling for two baseline variables: organizational tenure and organizational size. Table 4 indicates that green recruitment was a significant additional variable in the sustainability performance dimensions beyond the control variables ($\Delta R^2 = .084$, $p < .001$), thus supporting H1. Additionally, green training significantly contributed beyond green recruitment ($\Delta R^2 = .121$, $p < .001$) to support H2. In addition, green recruitment and green training ($\Delta R^2 = .098$, $p < .001$) were supported by employee environmental involvement, which made a significant incremental contribution. Furthermore, employee environmental involvement contributed an additional significant incremental control ($\Delta R^2 = .098$, $p < .001$) to support H3. The standardized regression coefficient for employee environmental involvement was .341 ($p < .001$), while green training and green recruitment were .241 ($p = .001$) and .142 ($p = .041$), respectively, accounting for a total R^2 of .365 (36.5% of the variance in sustainability performance was explained).

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression Results Predicting Sustainability Performance

Step / Predictor	β (final step)	R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	p-value
Step 1: Controls (tenure, organization size)	—	0.062	—	5.84 (2, 177)	.004
Step 2: + Green Recruitment	0.142	0.146	0.084	17.32 (1, 176)	<.001
Step 3: + Green Training	0.241	0.267	0.121	28.94 (1, 175)	<.001





Volume 2, Issue 3, 2026

Step 4: + Employee Environmental Involvement	0.341	0.365	0.098	26.87 (1, 174)	<.001
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Note. β values shown are standardized coefficients from the final model (Step 4). All predictors remained statistically significant in the final model ($p < .05$).

Qualitative Phase: HR Manager Participant Profile

Table 5 presents the profile of the 15 HR managers who participated in the semi-structured interviews.

Table 5. Profile of HR Manager Interview Participants (N = 15)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency
Industry sector	Manufacturing	5
	Services	4
	Energy / Utilities	4
	Other	2
HR role	HR Director / Head of HR	6
	HR Manager	7
	Sustainability / HR Partner	2
Years in HR role	Less than 5 years	4
	5–10 years	7





	More than 10 years	4
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Qualitative Phase: Thematic Analysis Findings

Thematic analysis of the 15 HR manager interviews identified five themes, summarized in Table 6, reflecting how green HR policies were implemented in practice.

Table 6. Themes Identified from Thematic Analysis of HR Manager Interviews

Theme	n (%)	Summary
Embedding sustainability into recruitment criteria	12 (80%)	HR managers described incorporating environmental awareness questions and sustainability-related criteria into job postings and candidate screening.
Green training as culture-building rather than compliance	13 (87%)	Training was most often framed as building a shared environmental culture and identity, rather than as a one-off compliance requirement.
Employee-driven green initiatives as grassroots momentum	10 (67%)	Several managers described employee-led green committees or initiatives that generated momentum beyond what formal HR policy alone achieved.
Measurement and reporting challenges	11 (73%)	Managers frequently described difficulty quantifying the sustainability impact of HR practices for internal and external reporting purposes.
Leadership commitment as a precondition for implementation	9 (60%)	Visible senior leadership commitment was described as essential for green HR policies to be taken seriously and resourced adequately.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Table 7 presents a joint display integrating the quantitative and qualitative findings, illustrating how the qualitative themes helped explain the pattern of incremental contribution observed in the hierarchical regression results.



Table 7. Joint Display: Integration of Quantitative Results and Qualitative Themes

Quantitative Finding	Related Qualitative Theme	Integrated Interpretation
Green recruitment: smallest incremental contribution ($\Delta R^2 = .084$)	Embedding sustainability into recruitment criteria	HR managers' accounts suggest recruitment criteria are often applied inconsistently or weighted lightly relative to other qualifications, consistent with its comparatively modest statistical contribution.
Green training: larger incremental contribution ($\Delta R^2 = .121$)	Green training as culture-building	Managers' description of training as central to building a shared environmental culture helps explain its stronger statistical contribution relative to recruitment alone.
Employee environmental involvement: largest incremental contribution ($\Delta R^2 = .098$; strongest final β)	Employee-driven green initiatives as grassroots momentum	Manager accounts of grassroots, employee-led momentum substantiate involvement's emergence as the strongest predictor of sustainability performance.
Final model explains 36.5% of variance, leaving unexplained variance	Measurement and reporting challenges	Managers' reported difficulty measuring sustainability outcomes suggests some of the unexplained variance may reflect measurement limitations rather than the absence of further GHRM effects.
Consistent positive contribution across all three practices	Leadership commitment as a precondition	Managers' emphasis on leadership commitment as an enabling condition suggests an unmeasured contextual factor that may amplify or constrain all three practices' effectiveness.



DISCUSSION

The results of this study confirm the hypothesized incremental effects of green recruitment, green training, and employee involvement in green issues on the organizational sustainability performance and offer a qualitative interpretation of the relationship between these practices based on HR manager perspectives. Like H1, green recruitment also contributed to sustainability performance to a more or less significant degree, although, as suggested by HR managers' accounts, environmental factors do not have the same priority as other aspects of candidate qualifications in recruitment practices (Renwick, Jabbour, Muller-Camen, Redman, & Wilkinson, 2016).

The bigger role of green training as a contributor to H2, is congruent with HR managers' perceptions of training as not just a compliance exercise, but as a more direct way of developing employees' environment relevant capability, as argued earlier (Zibarras & Coan, 2015; Dumont, Shen, & Deng, 2017). The results showing that employee environmental involvement had the largest incremental contribution and was also the highest predictor in the final model which supported H3, were supported by the vivid stories of HR managers on how employees had initiated green projects, leading to the emergence of grassroot momentum that was stronger than the effect of formal policy, thereby complementing the existing evidence that employee involvement practices are particularly strong predictors of sustainability-relevant outcomes (Guerci, Longoni, & Luzzini, 2016; Ababneh, 2021).

The qualitative theme on measurement and reporting difficulties provides a plausible explanation for the significant variance in sustainability performance not accounted for by the three GHRM practices studied and may, at least in part, be due to how difficult it is to measure sustainability outcomes in organizations rather than the absence of any other GHRM effects (Yong, Yusliza, & Fawehinmi, 2020). Lastly, HR managers also repeatedly emphasized that the success of implementing green recruitment, training, and involvement practices may depend on the extent to which HR managers are visible, which is a contextual factor that was not a part of the quantitative analysis and is worthy of further exploration in the next research (Ren & Jackson, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study adopted the mixed methods research method, which involved surveying 180 employees and semi-structured interviews with 15 HR managers, to understand the role of green human resource management practices in achieving organizational sustainability performance. The quantitative phase revealed that both green recruitment and green training had positive significant impacts on sustainability performance, as did employee environmental involvement, with employee environmental involvement being the strongest predictor of sustainability performance (36.5% of the variance explained). During the qualitative phase five themes were identified that described how these practices were put into practice: embedding sustainability in the recruitment criteria, green training as a culture-building activity, employee-driven grassroots initiatives, measurement and reporting challenges, and the need for leadership commitment. The matching of the two phases revealed that the themes presented in the qualitative analysis had content meaning in explaining the pattern of incremental statistical contributions across the three GHRM practices. These results extend the GHRM literature by showing, from a quantitative as well as qualitative perspective, that in order to boost organizational sustainability performance, it is not just any individual GHRM practice that should be implemented but rather the synergistic and synergistic-cumulative



Volume 2, Issue 3, 2026

impact of recruitment, training, and employee involvement practices in a supportive organizational and leadership context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Organizations aiming to enhance their sustainability performance via their human resource management system are recommended to invest in all GHRM practices of this study and not in only one of them separately, and with emphasis on policies on employee environmental involvement (EEIs) practices such as EEIs committees and EEIs schemes, as they make a relatively high contribution to sustainability. HR departments should also further emphasize on the weighting of environmental criteria in recruitment and selection processes, and create green training programs that clearly aim to cultivate the shared sense of the environment instead of only carrying out training as a compliance exercise, in line with HR managers' personal account that effective training is one that focuses on cultivating the shared sense of the environment. Organizations should also create and strengthen sustainability performance measurement and reporting systems within their organizations, in view of the measurement difficulties that HR managers have highlighted in this study, and provide clear and strong leadership at the top of the hierarchy for green HR projects, as this was deemed as a precondition to their success. The current study used a cross sectional survey design and purposive sample of HR managers from organizations with an established track record of environmental concern, thus, further research should adopt a longitudinal design to track the impacts of the GHRM practices on the sustainability performance over time and a mixed methods approach with organizations at the early stages of environmental commitment to determine whether the pattern of this study can be replicated across other organizations.

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Volume 2, Issue 3, 2026

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