

THE EFFECT OF EMPLOYEE SUSTAINABLE TRAINING ON SUSTAINABLE PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of employee sustainable training (sustainable strategic training, sustainable social training, and sustainable green training) on sustainable performance. Data were collected from a sample of managers and employees working at manufacturing firms using a questionnaire. The results showed significant and positive effects of sustainable strategic training, social training, and green training on sustainable performance. Strategic training is the most influential variable in sustainable performance followed by green training and then social training. The study contributes to the literature through conceptualizing employee sustainable training in terms of three dimensions (strategic, social, and green). For this reason, researchers recommended using appropriate measures that are consistent with the dependent variable. It also recommended managers to design training programs according to the final goal of the training program.

Keywords: Sustainable Training, Strategic Training, Social Training, Green Training, Sustainable Performance

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability refers to using resources in an efficient and effective manner in order to preserve these resources for the future (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). The majority of sustainability definitions has been built on the definition of sustainable development by the World Commission on Environment and Development in which economic, social, and ecological aspects were identified as three pillars of sustainable development (Eizaguirre et al., 2019, Xu et al., 2020). Incorporating human resource management (HRM) practices with sustainability results in sustainable HRM (Mazur & Walczyna, 2020, Kainzbauer & Rungruang, 2019). According to Paulet and co-authors (Paulet et al., 2021), sustainable HRM enlarges organizations' focus to include not only economic goals but also social and ecological goals. Sustainable HRM outcomes are not only related to organizational outcomes such as sustainable competitive advantage (Lee et al., 2019a) but also to employee outcomes such as employee development and flexibility (Davidescu et al., 2020), as well as employee commitment and employee well-being (Castro-Casal et al., 2019).

Numerous positive effects of sustainable HRM practices had been reported in the literature. Collecting data from a sample selected from public universities in Pakistan, Manzoor and co-authors (Manzoor et al., 2019) pointed out that sustainable HRM practices (employee selection, participation and empowerment) was positively related to job performance through employee training. Conducting an online questionnaire-based survey to collect data from Italian employees, Manuti and co-authors (Manuti et al., 2020) supported the hypotheses that sustainable HRM (HRM involvement) had a significant effect on positive organizational behaviors (organizational engagement and extra-role behavior) as well as on employee change attitude (coping with organizational change). Based on data gathered from employees in tourism and hospitality industry in South Korea, Cho and Choi (Cho & Choi, 2021) found that sustainable HRM practices (training, rewards, and benefits) were positively associated to satisfaction of frontline employee.

Furthermore, using a sample consisted of employees from different organizations in China; Li and co-authors (Li et al., 2019) revealed that high-commitment work systems as a type

of sustainable HRM had a significant effect on employee taking charge behavior as mediated by work engagement and moderated by employee high-level impact feeling. Surveying employees from different sectors such as service, manufacturing and retail trade in Romania, Davidescu and co-authors (Davidescu et al., 2020) indicated that sustainable HRM (employee development and flexibility) showed significant effects on sustainable HRM outcomes (job satisfaction and job performance).

Prior works on sustainable HRM practices indicated that there is a lack of empirical studies on employee training (Zhang et al., 2019) as well as a lack of empirical studies on the effect of sustainable HRM on sustainable performance (Li et al., 2019); hence, this study aims at investigating the effect of employee sustainable training on organizational sustainable performance. The remaining sections of the paper cover literature review and hypotheses development (section 2), research methodology (section 3), results and discussion (section 4), conclusion (section 5), contribution to theory and practice (section 6), in addition to limitations and research future directions (section 7).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee Sustainable Training

Employee training has been defined as teaching employees to perform their jobs in a skilled manner (Manzoor et al., 2019). It is a key way by which employee skills are improved (Lee et al., 2019b). As well, it is a tool used by organizations to boost employee competencies as measured by knowledge, abilities, and skills (Urbancová et al., 2021). The ultimate goal of employee training is to meet organizations' present and future needs (Arucy & Juma, 2018). Employee sustainable training has been regarded as a crucial measure of sustainable human resource development (Zhang et al., 2019).

In line with sustainable HRM conceptualization as a construct of economic, social and ecological aspects (Eizaguirre et al., 2019, Xu et al., 2020), employee sustainable training refers to employee-oriented educational and practical actions directed to teach employees how to carry out their job tasks to yield enhanced economic, social, and ecological outcomes. Following Paulet and co-authors (Paulet et al., 2021) and Diaz-Carrion and co-authors (Diaz-Carrion et al., 2019), employee sustainable training has been operationalized as a construct incorporates employee strategic training (the economic pillar of sustainability), employee social responsibility (the social pillar of sustainability), and employee green training (the ecological pillar of sustainability).

Employee strategic training as a key aspect of employee sustainable training can be defined through distinguishing traditional HRM from strategic HRM. Reviewing the literature to achieve this end showed several features of strategic HRM such as alignment of HRM practices to a firm's strategic plans, employee empowerment, and long-term development of human resource (Latifi & Lim, 2019, Stankevičiūtė & Savanevičienė, 2018). Other features of strategic HRM as a long-term and profit-oriented process include integration of business strategy with human resource policies, as well as partnership between internal and external groups (Kumar & Ayedee, 2019). Paauwe and Boon (Paauwe & Boon, 2009) added that strategic HRM signifies the contribution of HRM to organizational performance. Joining these features of strategic HRM with the definition of employee training as a tool used to enhance employee competencies (Urbancová et al., 2021); employee strategic training was defined for the purpose of this study as educating and developing employees to boost their competencies to contribute to the organizational strategic objectives.

Linking HRM to corporate social responsibility (CSR) results in socially responsible HRM (SR-HRM) (López-Fernández et al., 2018, Sobhani et al., 2021). SR-HRM represents a significant dimension of CSR policies. It encompasses three components, which are legal compliance HRM (LC-HRM), employee oriented HRM (EO-HRM), and general CSR facilitation HRM (GF-HRM). LC-HRM refers to compliance of HRM practices with internal labour laws and

external standards of the International Labour Organization (ILO), while EO-HRM embodies HRM practices directed to satisfy the needs of employees and their families, ensure employee support and justice, and meeting employee personal development needs such as training. Finally, GF-HRM refers to HRM practices that encourage firms and employee to participate in CSR initiatives aimed at developing communities and reducing pollution (López-Fernández et al., 2018). Employee training has been defined in SR-HRM context as building employee skills based on CSR principles such as objectivity, transparency, and nondiscriminatory activities (Diaz-Carrion et al., 2019).

HRM practices that fulfill the requirements of the ecological pillar of sustainability termed green HRM. The focus of green HRM is on ecological sustainability (Hristova & Stevceska-Srbínovska, 2020). Hence, green HRM practices had been defined as practices used to support environmental sustainability (Rani & Mishra, 2014). One of the most important practices of green HRM is green training (Jia et al., 2018, Yafi et al., 2021, Elshaer et al., 2021, Jamal et al., 2021). The aim of employee green training is to raise employee awareness about ecological issues (Malik et al., 2020). Such a practice should develop employee knowledge, skill and abilities toward environmental issues like climate change, energy, air pollution, and waste management (Mishra et al., 2014). Benefits of green training include its significant role in improving firms' environmental performance (Yafi et al., 2021) and sustainable performance (Aboul-Dahab & Saied, 2021).

Sustainable Performance

Sustainable performance consists of three sub-dimensions, i.e., economic, social, and environmental performance (Wang et al., 2018, Yusliza et al., 2020). Chardine-Baumann and Botta-Genoulaz (Chardine-Baumann & Botta-Genoulaz, 2014) developed a framework to measure sustainable performance of supply chains covers economic, social, and environmental dimensions. The economic one contains aspects such as quality, responsiveness, and reliability, while the social one includes aspects such as work conditions, societal commitment, and customers' issues. Finally, the environmental dimension comprises sub-dimensions like pollution, use of resources, and environmental management.

In their study on the antecedents of sustainable performance, Khan and co-authors (Khan et al., 2021) measured sustainable performance using items related to economic, social, and environmental dimensions. For them, economic performance was measured through financial indicators such as sales growth, market share, social performance was assessed using items related to employee satisfaction, health, and safety, and motivation, while environmental performance was measured via items related to waste ratio and recycled materials. In another study (Yusliza et al., 2020), economic performance was measured using items related to costs of energy consumption, waste treatment and discharge, and cost of purchased materials, social performance was valued through improving stakeholder welfare, employee health and safety, community health and safety, and awareness of employee and community rights. Finally, environmental performance was rated via reduction in material usage, consumption of unsafe materials, air emission, and improvement in agreement with environmental standards.

Hypotheses Development

Employee Strategic Training and Sustainable Performance

Strategically, organizations are concerned with maximizing their long-term advantages as well as adaptation to marketplace demands; therefore, strategic HRM plays significant roles in this regard through helping organizations to achieve their goals (Paauwe & Boon, 2009). It has been assumed to exert significant effects on organizational performance and sustainable competitive advantage (Paauwe & Boon, 2009, Vanhala & Ritala, 2016). Strategic HRM has been defined as

HRM strategies used by organization to elevate their performance (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2009). It has been measured using different indicators such as personnel role in implementing an organization strategy and so help achieving its strategic goals (Wei and Lau, 2008). Strategic training is a key practice of strategic HRM (Akhtar et al., 2008, Vanhala & Ritala, 2016). Its focus is on long-term development of human resources to improve organizational performance (Garavan, 1991).

Searching the literature on the relationship between employee training and sustainable performance (i.e., economic, social, and environmental performance) resulted in several insights. In Spitzer's words (Spitzer, 1991) "the goal of good training is always sustainable performance improvement" (P.21). Akhtar and co-authors (Akhtar et al., 2008) investigated the impact of strategic HRM practices (training, results-oriented appraisals, internal career opportunities, participation) on company performance (product/service performance and financial performance) and found positive effects of such practices on company performance. Similar results indicating significant effects of strategic HRM practices (e.g., training) on economic performance (i.e., financial performance) were documented in the literature (Wei and Lau, 2008, Zehir et al., 2016). Regarding the effect of employee training on social performance (i.e., employee satisfaction and employee motivation), numerous studies showed that employee training is positively related to employee satisfaction (Ocen et al., 2017, Hanaysha & Tahir, 2016) and employee motivation (Zahra et al., 2014, Hussain et al., 2013).

On the other hand, employee training plays a significant role in organizations environmental performance. Environmental performance has been measured using recycled materials, waste ratio, reduction in using unsafe materials, reduction in air emission, improvement in compliance with environmental standards, and energy consumption (Mishra et al., 2014, Khan et al., 2021, Yusliza et al., 2020). One of the most important positive outcomes of environment-directed employee training programs is that it enhanced employee awareness of waste reduction throughout the world (Morrow & Rondinelli, 2002) as well as reducing energy consumption (Chen & Chen, 2012). In order to investigate the effect of employee strategic training on sustainable performance, it was hypothesized that:

H1: Employee strategic training is positively related to sustainable performance

Employee Social Training and Sustainable Performance

Employee-oriented HRM is a key dimension of socially responsible HRM. It refers to practices used to meet the needs of employee personal development (López-Fernández et al., 2018). CSR has been categorized into three groups of indicators, which are economic, social, and environmental indicators. Examples of social indicators include human rights, employee health and safety, and employee continuous education and training (Omazic & Banovac, 2012). In terms of the relationship between employee social training and sustainable performance as measured by economic, social, and environmental dimensions, it was found that employee social training is very critical to improve sustainable performance. Reviewing the literature, Jacobs and Washington (Jacobs & Washington, 2003) pointed out a positive relationship between employee development and organizational (economic) performance. For Khan and co-authors (Khan et al., 2011), employee training improves employee performance and hence contributes to organizational performance.

On the other side, employee development as a main aspect of employee social training showed significant effects on social performance (i.e., employee satisfaction and employee motivation). Using a sample of employees from banking sector, Shujaat and co-authors (Shujaat et al., 2013) indicated that employee career development is positively related to employee satisfaction. Analyzing data collected from a university staff, Okechukwu (Okechukwu, 2017) pointed out a significant influence of employee training and development on employee satisfaction. For Ozkeser (Ozkeser, 2019), employee training refers to enhancing employee

physical, social and mental status while employee development is enhancing employee effectiveness in using their knowledge and skills.

Furthermore, it was emphasized based on prior works that employee social training plays a significant role in enhancing environmental performance. The results of Hyde and co-authors (Hyde et al., 2003) showed that employee training and development is very important in minimizing waste among companies in food and drink industry. Studying food waste in hospitals, Goonan and co-authors (Goonan et al., 2014) indicated that training sessions on waste management assist the introduction of effective practices of sustainable waste management. Based on the above-mentioned results on the influence of employee training on economic, social, and environmental performance, it was assumed that:

H2: Employee social training is positively related to sustainable performance

Employee Green Training and Sustainable Performance

In order to develop the hypothesis that employee green training is positively related to sustainable performance, a review of the literature was carried out to find relationships between green training and economic, social and environmental performance. Generally, green HRM practices have a significant effect on firm performance (AlZgool et al., 2021). One effective method to advance environmental performance is green training; therefore, organizations are required to reduce waste and energy consumption (Agyabeng-Mensah et al., 2020). Collecting data from large industrial firms in Malaysia, Ali and co-authors (Ali et al., 2019) showed positive effects of the management of waste, energy, and resources on sustainable performance. Investigating the impact of green HRM on sustainable performance in healthcare sector in Palestine, Mousa and Othman (Mousa & Othman, 2020) indicated that green HRM practices (i.e., green hiring, green training and involvement, green performance management and compensation) have significant effects on economic, social, and environmental performance as three dimensions of sustainable performance.

In the same vein, Ren and co-authors (Ren et al., 2020) investigated the impact of green HRM in small and medium sized firms in China. Their results pointed out that green HRM practices (e.g., green training) exerted a significant effect on environmental performance through green commitment of top-management team. Sessions of green training are very important for employees to enhance their green practices related to reduction of waste, electricity consumption, recycling, and water conservation (Varma & Balachandran, 2021). Benefits of green HRM practices including green training and development had been divided into employee-related outcomes such as employee job satisfaction and employee loyalty as well as organization-related outcomes like environmental performance (Suharti & Sugiarto, 2020). Previous works showed that green training is positively related to sustainable performance. However, in a study on industrial firms from numerous sectors in Pakistan, Malik and co-authors (Malik et al., 2020) found that the effect of green training on sustainable performance was insignificant. In order to explore the effect of employee green training on sustainable performance, it was postulated that:

H3: Employee green training is positively related to sustainable performance

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Sample and Data Collection

The population of the study comprises participants from manufacturing firms. A random sample consisted of 350 participants were chosen for data collection purpose. Data were collected by a questionnaire administered to the sample. A total of 268 questionnaires were returned with complete responses with a response rate of 77%.

Research Instruments

Employee sustainable training consists of three dimensions, i.e., strategic training, social training, and green training. Strategic training was measured using three items emphasize employee competencies in specific issues related to organizational strategic objectives (Paauwe & Boon, 2009 Urbancová et al., 2021). Three items on employee and community health and safety assessed social training (López-Fernández et al., 2018, Sobhani et al., 2021, Ocen et al., 2017, Hussain et al., 2013). As well, three items related to employee competencies in environmental issues measured green training (Malik et al., 2020, Mishra et al., 2014). Sustainable performance was conceptualized in terms of three dimensions, i.e., economic, social, and environmental performance. Sustainable performance was measured in this study as a whole construct using nine item based on previous works (Malik et al., 2020, Chardine-Baumann & Botta-Genoulaz, 2014, Yusliza et al., 2020, Ocen et al., 2017, Zahra et al., 2014, Mishra et al., 2014). These items concern costs of waste and energy issues, employee satisfaction and motivation, and reduction in waste and energy consumption as well as hazardous materials.

Research Conceptual Model

Research hypotheses (H1, H2, and H3) in which three effects of employee sustainable training (strategic, social, and green training) on sustainable performance were assumed are shown in Figure 1.

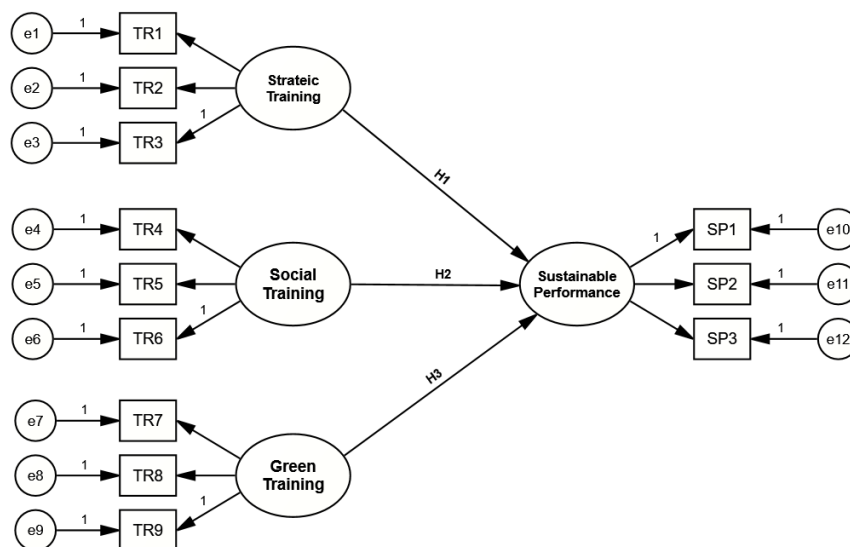


FIGURE 1
RESEARCH THEORETICAL MODEL

Common Method Bias and Multicollinearity

The same questionnaire was used in this study to measure strategic, social and environmental training (independent variables) and sustainable performance (dependent variable), which means that the estimated effects between these variables are influenced by common method bias. The best method to reduce common method bias is to collect data from different sources (Podsakoff et al., 2012, Jakobsen & Jensen, 2015). Therefore, data were collected from employees to measure independent variables and from managers to assess sustainable performance. Multicollinearity is a problem results from high correlations between indicators. Testing such as a problem can be done through examining bivariate correlations between these indicators, which be 0.50 or lower (Hair et al., 2020). For the current study, all correlation coefficients were less than 0.50 as shown in Table 1.

Validity, Reliability and Model Fit

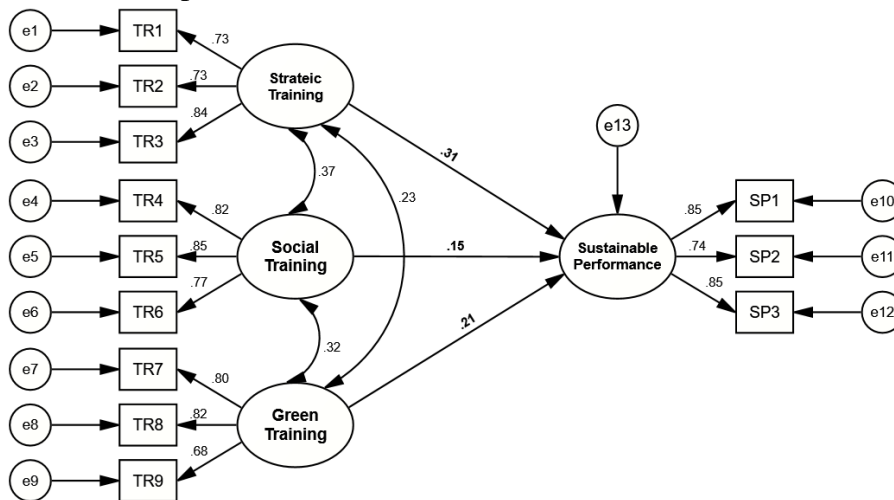
Validity was measured by convergent validity based on average variance extracted (AVE) while reliability was tested using composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach’s alpha coefficients (α). AVE values should be greater than 0.50 (Lukman et al., 2020) and both CR and alpha coefficients should be greater than 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017, Purwanto & Sudargini, 2021, Al-Hawary & Al-Syasneh, 2020). Results of validity and reliability are shown in Table 1. On the other hand, fit of the measurement model was assessed using four indices, which are Chi-square-to-degree of freedom ratio (CMIN/DF), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Root Mean Squared Approximation of Error (RMSEA). Model fit goodness is established when CMIN/DF < 2.0, GFI and CFI < 0.90, and RMSEA < 0.08 (Hair et al., 2010, Wan Omar & Hussin, 2013). It was found that the current model has a good fit as shown in Table 1.

Rotated Component Matrix			Validity and Reliability			Correlation Coefficients					
Variables	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR	α	STR	SOT	GTR	SP		
Strategic training (STR)	TR1	0.847	0.686	0.862	0.812	1					
	TR2	0.803									
	TR3	0.835									
Social training (SOT)	TR4	0.857	0.727	0.889	0.854	0.317**	1				
	TR5	0.868									
	TR6	0.833									
Green training (GTR)	TR7	0.839	0.693	0.871	0.807	0.187**	0.284**	1			
	TR8	0.891									
	TR9	0.762									
Sustainable performance (SP)	SP1	0.889	0.725	0.888	0.855	0.346**	0.300**	0.287**	1		
	SP2	0.803									
	SP3	0.860									

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = 0.807, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Approx. Chi-Square = 1322.507, Sig. = 0.000). Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 5 iterations. Total Variance Explained = 73.65. CMIN/DF = 1.15, GFI = 0.968, CFI = 0.949, RMSEA = 0.024.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 2 shows the structural model of the study. It can be noted that strategic training is linked to sustainable performance (H1), social training is connected to sustainable performance (H2), and green training is related to sustainable performance (H3). As can be seen in Table 2, all these hypotheses were accepted.



**FIGURE 2
HYPOTHESES TESTING**

The results in Table 2 show that there is a statistically significant effect of strategic training (STR) on sustainable performance (Standardized $\beta = 0.335$, Unstandardized $\beta = 0.306$, $P = 0.000$), a statistically significant effect of social training on SP (Standardized $\beta = 0.188$, Unstandardized $\beta = 0.152$, $P = 0.042$). Further, a statistically significant effect of green training on SP (Standardized $\beta = 0.305$, Unstandardized $\beta = 0.309$, $P = 0.004$).

Hypotheses				Unstandardized Estimates	Standardized Estimates	CR	P
H1	STR	→	SP	0.335	0.306	4.05	0.000
H2	SOT	→	SP	0.188	0.152	2.04	0.042
H5	GTR	→	SP	0.305	0.209	2.86	0.004

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

Conclusion

This study aimed at investigating the effect of employee sustainable training, i.e., strategic training, social training, and green training on sustainable performance using three hypotheses. The results showed that the three dimensions of employee sustainable training were positively related to sustainable performance. Such results indicate that raising sustainable performance, which consists of strategic, social, and environmental dimensions, requires relevant training programs that include sessions to increase employees' awareness of the importance of sustainable performance, and teach them how to carry out their work tasks in ways that lead to economic, social and environmental benefits, not just environmental benefits. A good training program directed to improve sustainable performance must consist of three domains. First, strategic training directed at improving sustainable economic performance such as reducing costs of energy consumption, waste reduction and discharge. Second, sustainable social training that leads to the development of individuals and improving health and safety of individuals and communities. Third, sustainable environmental training directed to protect the natural environment and energy conservation.

Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to the literature in two ways. First, sustainable training was introduced as a construct consisting of the dimensions, which are sustainable strategic training, social training, and green training. This type of training is directed to improve sustainable performance. Second, the ultimate goal of the training process is the goal that defines the training measure. For example, if training is intended to improve financial performance, then training programs are directed at improving employees' skills to enhance their role in achieving organizational goals by focusing on variables such as increasing sales. If the goal of training is to improve sustainable performance, then training measures must clarify the elements of training and their impact on the dimensions of sustainable performance. Therefore, researchers are required to use instruments that clear up the effect of training on the dependent variable. General statement such as "I receive continuous training programs" does not explain the effect of the training process on performance.

Managerial Implications

Sustainability training should not be limited to protecting the environment from pollution; but also to provide employees with practical skills that are applied during work to contribute to improving sustainable performance such as thinking about the costs incurred by the company due

to the lack of rationalization of energy use. Managers are requested based on the current results to take the three pillars of sustainability, economic, social, and environmental, into their consideration. This means reconsidering the design of training programs offered by some industrial companies, focusing on spreading awareness of the importance of rationalizing the consumption of energy and natural resources such as water as well as the impact of this on the health and safety of individuals and societies. On the other hand, the sustainability of performance means the sustainability of the people who contribute to improving this performance; that is why social training includes developing employees and helping them to adapt to their surroundings. Additionally, the results showed that strategic training directed to improve sustainable performance by focusing on reducing company costs in dealing with energy and waste is more effective in sustainable performance than social training and green training. This means that one of the most important benefits of sustainable training is to improve the company's performance economically, not just environmentally.

Limitations and Future Studies

The first limitation of the study is its subject, which deals with sustainable training directed to improve sustainable performance. The second determinant is that the study was applied in industrial companies; therefore, the results are related to this sector. Here, the need to conduct future studies dealing with sustainable training in other sectors appears in order to generalize the results.

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