

# When green becomes demanding: work-related stress and required versus voluntary employee green behavior

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Driven by increasing regulatory pressures and the imperative for sustainable transformation, many organizations seek to improve environmental sustainability. In this context, employee green behavior (EGB) represents a key mechanism by which sustainability goals are enacted at the individual level. EGB can take the form of voluntary, self-initiated behavior or be required by an organization. This transformation is designed to enhance greenness but introduces green job demands and thereby potentially increases work-related stress, which simultaneously may undermine employees' engagement in EGBs. Therefore, we examined how work-related stress and EGB are interrelated from the perspective of the job demands-resources (JD-R) model.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This paper adopted a conceptual approach based on a literature review, synthesis of existing theories and logical reasoning. We developed a conceptual model of the relationship between job demands, job resources and EGB that addresses a specific gap in existing literature and derived propositions for further research.

**Findings** – Green job demands and resources shape stress and motivation-related processes that differentially affect required and voluntary EGB. Moreover, work-related stress constrains especially voluntary EGBs.

**Practical implications** – Organizations and leaders should manage green job demands, strengthen green job resources and mitigate employee stress levels to enable particularly voluntary EGB.

**Originality/value** – We integrate the forms of EGB into the JD-R model and illustrate the underlying mechanisms.

**Keywords** Sustainability, Employee green behavior, Environmental sustainability, Employee health, Well-being, Work-related stress, Job demands-resources model

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## 1. Introduction

In light of the current backlash against sustainability policies, discussed as greenlash, it is important for organizations to rely on strict rules and standards for setting sustainability goals (Conti and Seele, 2025). To accomplish this, the concept of employee green behavior (EGB) – measurable individual employee behaviors that support or undermine environmental sustainability goals – has become a major component of environmental performance (Ones and Dilchert, 2012a, b; Zacher *et al.*, 2023).

Since sustainability has become a conviction that many organizations incorporate into their strategy, an increasing number of employees are motivated, encouraged and instructed to engage in EGB (Ones *et al.*, 2018; Unsworth *et al.*, 2021; Zacher *et al.*, 2023). For employees, the requirements for performing EGB can represent new job demands that change the workplace and the nature of work, with direct and indirect implications for employee well-being and the potential to create work-related stress (Richter, 2025; Stein *et al.*, 2025b; Yuan *et al.*, 2024). While research on environmental sustainability at work has primarily examined how organizations can

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effectively enhance sustainable practices (Ones *et al.*, 2018; Unsworth *et al.*, 2021; Zacher *et al.*, 2023), environmental sustainability has received limited consideration in research on work-related stress and well-being (Stein *et al.*, 2025b; Zacher *et al.*, 2023).

Existing research suggests that EGB is shaped by both workplace-related and individual factors, including leaders' green behavior (Zacher *et al.*, 2024), green work climate (Norton *et al.*, 2014), coworker support (Paillé *et al.*, 2016), as well as employees' pro-environmental attitudes and self-efficacy (Katz *et al.*, 2022). Few studies have implied that job characteristics are associated with EGB (Katz *et al.*, 2023; Stein *et al.*, 2025a; Yuriev *et al.*, 2018), but work-related stress as an impairment of EGB has received no scientific attention or empirical testing, making this endeavor a distinct theoretical advance. It is important to link these fields because EGB contributes to organizational sustainability performance but only seems feasible if employees are motivated to conduct EGBs without experiencing strain (Norton *et al.*, 2015; Yuan *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, we aim to answer the following research question: "How are work-related stress and EGB interrelated?"

Work-related stress is embedded in occupational health and safety discussions and has extensive consequences in a wider organizational context (Cox and Griffiths, 2010). Work-related stress is usually analyzed with regard to the performance, motivation and well-being of employees and can arise from a changing work environment (Harshana, 2018; Tennant, 2001), such as the sustainable transition. Recent advancements in the job demands-resources model (JD-R) highlight that periods of crisis or upheaval may even amplify the effects of demands and weaken the buffering function of resources (Demerouti and Bakker, 2023). Green job demands can occur while performing EGB, but simultaneously EGB inhibits the potential to enhance well-being, motivation and adding to job resources (Norton *et al.*, 2015; Stein *et al.*, 2025b). To elaborate on these relationships, we placed the forms of EGB within Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) JD-R model. We argue that green job demands create work-related stress, whereas green job resources enhance motivation. According to the JD-R model, job demands and resources are connected, whereby job resources can buffer job demands (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007); hence, we highlight that green job resources must exceed perceived demands to provide a solid basis for EGB performance. Furthermore, work-related stress is an impediment to EGB performance and especially affects voluntary green behaviors.

The present article adopts an individual-level perspective because employees play a central role in advancing eco-friendliness in organizations (Zacher *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, investigating the association between work-related stress and EGB reflects the holistic perspective of planetary health, an emerging interdisciplinary framework that recognizes the reciprocal links between environmental and human well-being (Horton and Lo, 2015; Whitmee *et al.*, 2015).

The contributions of this paper are threefold. First, we integrate EGB into the JD-R model, clarifying that EGB is affected by green job demands and resources. Second, we distinguish between required and voluntary EGB and show that these forms are associated with different stress- and motivation-related processes. Third, the created concept highlights work-related stress as a central constraint of EGB. This should enable future studies to investigate the complexity of EGB and the sustainable transformation of organizations.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The next section briefly describes the concept of EGB and the JD-R model. After integrating the forms of EGB into the JD-R model, we developed a conceptual model for the relationship between work-related stress and EGB. The final section presents discussion and conclusion.

## 2. Conceptual background

### 2.1 Employee green behavior (EGB): required and voluntary forms

EGB is a workplace specific form of pro-environmental behavior and is most prominently defined by Ones and Dilchert (2012a) as "scalable actions and behaviors that employees

engage in that are linked with and contribute to or detract from environmental sustainability.” EGB can range from either low-intensity (i.e. involving less effort, involving lower risk and being more incremental) to high-intensity (i.e. involving higher effort and risk and more radical) behaviors (Zacher *et al.*, 2023). Ones and Dilchert (2012a) developed the “green five” taxonomy to better understand and categorize the diverse forms of EGB. It identifies five categories of EGB that comprise positive and counterproductive environmental sustainability behaviors: (1) *transforming*, referring to adapting work products and processes to reduce environmental impact; (2) *conserving resources*, focusing on preventing resources and avoiding wastefulness; (3) *influencing others*, promoting pro-environmental behavior; (4) *taking initiative*, proactive and entrepreneurial behaviors that involve higher levels of personal risk and effort and (5) *avoiding harm*, preventing and reducing negative environmental impacts and mitigating and restoring environmental damage. These categories are not mutually exclusive and allow behaviors to belong to more than one group (Norton *et al.*, 2015). Norton *et al.* (2015) embrace a simpler taxonomy with mutually exclusive groups and distinguish between voluntary and required behaviors. Recent empirical studies support this distinction (Bissing-Olson *et al.*, 2013; Norton *et al.*, 2014). However, Ones *et al.* (2018) criticize this distinction because it confounds the motive for the behavior (i.e. voluntary versus required) with the content of the behavior (Zacher *et al.*, 2023).

Voluntary EGB is an environmental behavior that employees choose to accomplish, and it exceeds what is required by the organization, involving personal initiatives that outreach organizational expectations, including activities like initiating environmental programs and policies, lobbying, activism and encouraging others (Norton *et al.*, 2015). It aligns closely with environmental organizational citizenship behavior (OCBE) defined as “individual and discretionary social behaviors not explicitly recognized by the formal reward system and contributing to the effectiveness of environmental management of organizations” (Boiral, 2009, p. 223), which is a subtype of OCB. Thereby the concept of OCBE assumes that environmental sustainability is an established organizational goal (Stein *et al.*, in press). The concept of voluntary EGB differs in the sense of being broader, positioned as a form of EGB and the opposite of required EGB. Furthermore, it also seems related to the notion of proactive pro-environmental behavior, which describes discretionary and self-initiated environmental actions that go beyond employees’ assigned work responsibilities (Bissing-Olson *et al.*, 2013; Norton *et al.*, 2015). Such proactive behavior involves an active, self-starting approach that is not formally required. This may include actions that make constructive suggestions and changes, identify problems, engage in creative problem solving and overcome barriers to improving existing processes (Frese and Fay, 2001; Frese *et al.*, 1996).

Required EGB contributes to core business goals and the improvement of environmental performance. It is performed within employees’ required job duties, including adhering to organizational policies and changing methods of work, such as choosing responsible alternatives and creating sustainable products and processes (Norton *et al.*, 2015; Ones and Dilchert, 2012b). Hence, it refers to the behavior required of employees by their employers, which directly or indirectly influences the core business (Borman and Motowidlo, 1993). Moreover, required EGB is sensitive to sanctioning and represents the opposite of voluntary EGB. It seems close to the notion of task-related EGB, defined as the extent to which employees complete their required work tasks in environmentally friendly ways, but goes beyond the pure completion of work tasks and aligns with organizational policies and procedures (Bissing-Olson *et al.*, 2013).

Because voluntary and required EGB differ in the level of discretion and effort involved, it is important to understand how employees’ behaviors are shaped by their work characteristics.

## 2.2 The job demands-resources (JD-R) model and its relevance for EGB

To explain how EGB is shaped by work characteristics, this paper draws on the JD-R model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). The JD-R model is a theoretical framework that attempts to

understand work behavior by integrating stress and motivation research traditions (Demerouti and Bakker, 2011). The model specifies how demands and resources interact and predict organizational outcomes. It assumes that every occupation has its own specific risk factors associated with work-related stress (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Bakker *et al.*, 2003a; Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). These factors can be classified into two categories that can be applied to various settings irrespective of the specific demands and resources involved.

According to Demerouti and Bakker (2011), job resources are initiators of a motivational process and refer to the physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of a job that (1) are functional in achieving work goals, (2) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs and (3) stimulate personal growth, learning and development. Thus, resources are not only compensators for demands but are beneficial in their own manner.

Job demands are initiators of a health-impairment process and refer to the physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with physiological and/or psychological costs. According to the model, job demands result in work-related strain and stress and may subsequently impair physical or mental health.

The model proposes two core processes: a health-impairment process, in which excessive demands lead to strain and over time reduced employee health and a motivational process, in which resources foster motivation and engagement. In addition to the main effects of job demands and resources, the JD-R model introduces the “buffer effect,” which mitigates the impact of job demands on work-related stress and strain (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Bakker *et al.*, 2003b). Bakker *et al.* (2005) found that employees facing high demands (work overload, emotional and physical demands and work-home interference) did not experience high levels of burnout if they had sufficient resources (autonomy, feedback, social support and high-quality relationships with their supervisor), emphasizing the buffering effect of job resources. Furthermore, various types of resources and demands interact differently; for example, a high-quality relationship with one’s supervisor reduces the influence of work overload (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

Applied to environmental sustainability at work, organizations increasingly implement corporate social responsibility, sustainable development strategies and environmental policies, thereby introducing green job demands such as additional tasks, procedural requirements, compliance obligations or expectations to integrate environmental considerations into daily work (Delmas and Toffel, 2008; Mi *et al.*, 2020). Drawing on Demerouti and Bakker (2011), we define green job demands as physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of the job regarding organizational environmental sustainability performance that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with physiological and/or psychological costs. These factors may contribute to work-related stress when they increase employees’ workload, create role ambiguity or compete with existing performance pressures. Meanwhile, organizations can provide green job resources that we define as those physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of the job that (1) are functional in achieving environmental performance goals, (2) reduce green job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs and (3) stimulate personal growth, learning and development towards environmental sustainability at work. Examples include autonomy in achieving environmental goals, supportive (green) leadership, training, feedback and access to (green) technologies. Green job resources enhance motivation and buffer the negative effects of green job demands.

Although the JD-R model is widely used for explaining how work characteristics affect employee motivation, stress, strain, and performance, there are several aspects facing criticism. These include the distinction between job demands and job resources, which can be conceptually ambiguous, as the same work characteristic may function as a demand or resource depending on context, perception and individual differences. Recent extensions of

the JD-R model have addressed earlier limitations by emphasizing employees' subjective perceptions of demands and resources and highlighting the role of values, commitment and meaning (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). In addition, the model has been expanded to incorporate dynamic and reciprocal processes, acknowledging that employee behavior can reshape job demands and resources over time (Bakker and Demerouti, 2018). The JD-R model has also been examined in times of crisis and transformation, showing that demands may intensify and resources may lose their buffering capacity, meaning that owing to blurred life domains, the regulatory capacity of the individual as well as the partner, organization and leader gained importance (Demerouti and Bakker, 2023).

From the JD-R perspective, stress links work characteristics to behavior and reflects a state in which job demands exceed available resources, thereby limiting employees' cognitive, emotional and motivational capacities. Prior research on discretionary and proactive behavior suggests that elevated strain constrains employees' abilities and willingness to engage in self-initiated actions beyond formal role requirements (Agheli et al., 2017; Organ, 1988). This mechanism is particularly relevant for voluntary EGB, which relies on discretionary efforts and personal initiative. Required EGB, while embedded in formal job expectations, may also be affected by work-related stress when green job demands accumulate without adequate resources. Conversely, the motivational process highlighted in the JD-R model suggests that green job resources can facilitate EGB by strengthening employees' willingness to engage in environmental performance goals. In this sense, motivation enables employees to fulfill required EGB and provides a basis for voluntary EGB to occur.

### 3. Integrating voluntary and required EGB into the JD-R model

#### 3.1 Green job demands and resources and their effects

Organizational initiatives to enhance environmental sustainability create sustainability-related requirements. Regarding the realization of EGB, employees are confronted with green job demands (Mi et al., 2020; Yuan et al., 2024). Carrying out EGB involves additional tasks, requires time and mental effort, which reduces the capacity for other work assignments and may elicit resource conflicts regarding time, budget and goals (Zacher et al., 2023). Moreover, performing EGB potentially increases employees' emotional load, including discomfort and personal sacrifice, which may lead to mental consequences (Stein et al., 2025b). For example, green conflicts or backlashes can further contribute to an experienced emotional load from normative pressure contributing to sustainability (Conti and Seele, 2025). Behaviors such as influencing others and taking the initiative involve personal risks and can provoke conflict with colleagues or supervisors, especially when facing a green backlash (Ones and Dilchert, 2012a; Zacher et al., 2023). In addition, accomplishing EGB results in a higher workload, and research on pro-environmental behavior outside the work context has revealed that engaging in pro-environmental behavior is inconvenient and costly for employees (Gurcham et al., 2025; Krumm, 2024; Zawadzki et al., 2020). Green job demands can lead to feelings of strain, particularly if employees perceive green initiatives as burdensome or conflicting with their existing workload. According to the JD-R model, green job demands have the potential to create and increase work-related stress, which may result in reduced employee health over time. If the risk of green job demands is not sufficiently averted, they negatively moderate the relationship between green job resources and motivation owing to their capacity consumption (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

*P1.* Green job demands are positively related to work-related stress.

*P2.* Green job demands negatively moderate the relationship between green job resources and motivation.

Green job resources are located at the organizational level (e.g. rewards for driving EGB), interpersonal level (e.g. social support from supervisors and co-workers), specific job position (e.g. participation in sustainable decision-making) and task level (e.g. task significance, green

autonomy and performance feedback on EGB) (Demerouti and Bakker, 2011; Katz *et al.*, 2023; Stein *et al.*, 2025a). The availability of (green) digital tools and technologies can also be viewed as a conducive green job resource because they can promote EGB (Veit *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, green human resource management, such as training in sustainable work practices and green feedback mechanisms, is a valuable job resource for EGB (Yuan *et al.*, 2024). In addition to enhance engagement and motivation, green job resources reduce demands and diminish demand-related emerging stress, owing to their buffering effect. For example, positive feedback from a supervisor on EGB compensates for increased environmental workload. In this sense, a lack of green job resources – such as training, support or recognition for engaging in pro-environmental behavior – can amplify work-related stress (Hobfoll, 2001; Yuriev *et al.*, 2018). Regarding the JD-R model, a reciprocal relationship between stress and motivation is highlighted, where elevated strain reduces the engagement for green behaviors and, vice versa, motivation helps to compensate stress (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

- P3. Green job resources are positively related to motivation.
- P4. Green job resources positively moderate the relationship between green job demands and work-related stress.
- P5. Green job demands and resources have a reciprocal relationship, but the buffering effect is stronger for green job resources.
- P6. Work-related stress and motivation have a reciprocal relationship.

### 3.2 The link between work-related stress, motivation and the forms of EGB

Work-related stress affects employees' well-being and motivation and can be understood as potential or actual resource loss (Hobfoll, 2001; Khuong and Linh, 2020). Employee well-being is influenced by work experience, which in turn affects work behavior (Sonnentag, 2015). It encompasses physical conditions and psychological states as well as positive aspects, such as satisfaction and positive emotions, and negative aspects, such as physical and mental illness and negative emotions (Sonnentag, 2015; Stein *et al.*, 2025b). It constitutes a predictor of environmental sustainability in organizations, and poor well-being can present a motivational barrier for employees to perform EGB. Moreover, emotional exhaustion is negatively correlated with EGB. Therefore, when employees face work-related stress and experience poor well-being, they may lack the (psychological) resources necessary to effectively perform EGB (Stein *et al.*, 2025b). Consequently, we argue that work-related stress can be an obstacle to EGB (Norton *et al.*, 2015; Stein *et al.*, 2025b). Research on extra-role behaviors (behaviors that are beyond official job duties (in-role behaviors), consisting of volunteering, positive, autonomic and altruistic behaviors), revealed that stress is especially impedimental to them (MacKenzie *et al.*, 1998; Vandyne *et al.*, 1995). Therefore, work-related stress may be especially impedimental to voluntary EGB, as it reduces employees' capacity for discretionary behavior. Within the JD-R model, work-related stress emerges primarily from excessive or poorly managed demands and undermines motivational and behavioral processes, resulting in a reduced work engagement and motivation. This is particularly relevant for voluntary EGB such as lobbying, activism and encouraging others, which rely on self-initiated efforts beyond formal role requirements (Norton *et al.*, 2015).

- P7a. Work-related stress is negatively related to the performance of required EGB.
- P7b. Work-related stress impairs the performance of voluntary EGB.

Referring to the JD-R model, motivation can be increased by and is a result of sufficient job resources. In organizational contexts, employee motivation drives employees' efforts and



can therefore be considered a procedure to satisfy individuals' different expectations and needs (Alqusayer, 2016; Cole, 2002). Furthermore, it is directed towards the attainment of organizational goals while encouraging and facilitating employees' willingness to accomplish tasks (Robbins, 1993). Motivation theories refer to the factors that drive the decision to engage in a behavior, as well as the intensity and persistence of the effort demonstrated (Norton *et al.*, 2015). Deci and Ryan (1985, 1987) proposed in the context of self-determination theory that behavior is a result of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Behaviors that are not intrinsically motivated require external regulation, and performance depends on perceived outcomes, such as punishment or reward (Gagné and Deci, 2005). Accordingly, extrinsic motivation comprises a sense of pressure and subsequent behavior is driven by obligation (Deci and Ryan, 2000). By contrast, intrinsic motivation features a sense of autonomy and experience of choice. Thus, in subsequent behavior, the actor wants to engage, which makes it more beneficial in terms of satisfaction. Besides it is linked with prosocial behavior that is likely to promote citizenship behavior (Gagné and Deci, 2005). EGB encompasses intrinsic motivators (e.g. attitudes and values) and extrinsic motivators (e.g. environmental management systems and rewards) (Graves *et al.*, 2013; Norton *et al.*, 2015). According to Norton *et al.* (2015), extrinsic motivation drives required EGB. Voluntary EGB is compelled by intrinsic motivation and thus is accompanied by higher levels of satisfaction. In this sense, employees will be motivated to engage in EGB if they derive personal satisfaction from it (intrinsic motivation) or if they believe they will be rewarded for their behavior (extrinsic motivation).

*P8a.* Intrinsic motivation is positively related to voluntary EGB.

*P8b.* Extrinsic motivation is positively related to required EGB.

On the one hand, EGB can increase green job demands by demanding additional effort, time and cognitive resources beyond an employee's core responsibilities and thereby reduces time and mental capacity for other work assignments, e.g. recycling and sorting behaviors (Zacher *et al.*, 2023). Required EGB must be performed within employees' required job duties. This includes adhering to organizational policies, participating in environmental management practices, changing methods of work and creating sustainable products and processes (Bissing-Olson *et al.*, 2013; Norton *et al.*, 2015). In particular, required EGB has an effect on cost savings and contributes to core environmental business goals; therefore, organizational interest in these employee behaviors is high, which may impose pressure on employees and thereby creates green job demands (Chen *et al.*, 2002; Tam and Tam, 2008).

On the other hand, engaging in EGB inhibits motivational potential, e.g. by obtaining task rewards and increasing health and well-being (Aguilera *et al.*, 2007; Stein *et al.*, 2025b). By engaging in EGB, employees can protect and gain valuable resources, reduce stress and improve their well-being (Stein *et al.*, 2025b). Employees with a higher sense of well-being have greater work motivation and contribute to higher productivity (Fan *et al.*, 2019). Performing EGB can be seen as the initiation of a motivational process that (1) is functional in achieving work goals, such as receiving recognition from supervisors (Ramus and Steger, 2000); (2) reduces job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, such as working from home and thereby enhancing work-life balance (Rudolph and Zacher, 2024), or (3) stimulates personal growth, learning and development, for example, by environmental skill development (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). On a more general level, EGB corresponds with the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 2001), which detects prime human motivation as being directed towards the maintenance and accumulation of resources. Voluntary EGB, being intrinsically motivated, is accompanied by high levels of satisfaction and restores meaning and hence may add even more to green job resources.

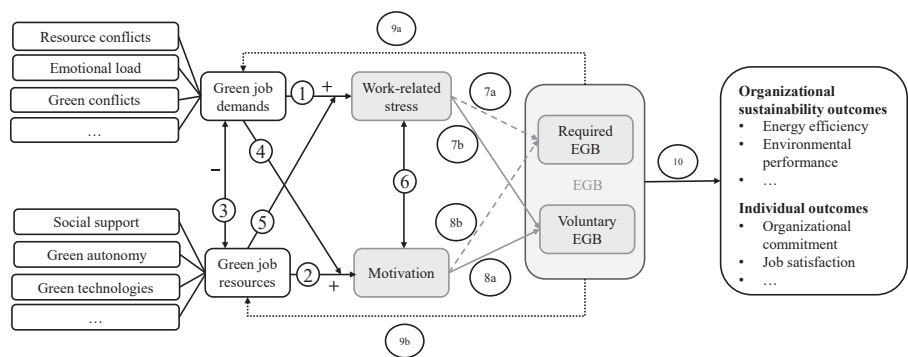
*P9a.* Performing EGB may generate green job demands, if the behaviors are perceived as burdensome.

P9b. Performing EGB may generate green job resources, if the behaviors are perceived as rewarding.

**3.3 Organizational sustainability outcomes**  
Employee engagement in EGB leads to favorable organizational sustainability outcomes such as energy efficiency (Carrico and Riemer, 2011), cost savings (Chen et al., 2002; Masurel, 2007; Tam and Tam, 2008) and overall environmental performance (Zacher et al., 2023). From a JD-R perspective, EGB, which contributes to work-related stress and constitutes a burden, diminishes the achievement of sustainability outcomes. EGB, which is perceived as motivational and resource contributing, leads to favorable organizational sustainability outcomes. In addition, EGB has favorable outcomes at the employee level, such as higher organizational commitment, stronger organizational identification and increased job and need satisfaction (Katz et al., 2022; Zacher et al., 2023). Furthermore, engaging in EGB fosters identity development, self-efficacy, overall well-being and job performance (Bohlmann et al., 2018; Stein et al., 2025b; Zacher et al., 2023). These effects at the individual level are also favorable for the organization. Both required and voluntary EGB are positively associated with organizational sustainability outcomes, although with potentially different mechanisms. Required EGB contributes to organizational sustainability outcomes mainly by ensuring that environmental standards and procedures are implemented reliably. By contrast, voluntary EGB may enhance employees by mobilizing their behavior and enabling engagement beyond formal requirements.

P10. EGB contributes positively to organizational sustainability outcomes and has favorable outcomes at the individual level.

Figure 1 displays the conceptual model and integrates all the propositions, illustrating the proposed relationships between green job demands, green job resources, work-related stress, motivation and required and voluntary EGB.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual model integrating voluntary and required EGB within the JD-R model. Source: Authors' own work

4. Discussion

4.1 Summary

This paper aimed to analyze the relationship between work-related stress and EGB. We developed a model that integrates voluntary and required EGB with the JD-R model to conceptualize how work-related stress and motivation shape sustainability-related behaviors at work. Building on the JD-R model, the conceptual model developed shows that green job demands and resources influence EGB through stress- and motivation-related processes.



Specifically, the model highlights that green job demands are associated with work-related stress and constrain employees' capacity to engage in EGB. By contrast, green job resources foster motivation and thereby enable employees to engage in EGB.

The key to this concept is the differentiation between required and voluntary EGB. While both forms are shaped by stress and motivation, voluntary EGB is particularly sensitive to work-related stress because it relies on discretionary effort and self-initiated engagement. Required EGB, although embedded in organizational requirements, may also be impaired when stress levels are high and resources are insufficient. Finally, the model links both forms of EGB to organizational and individual sustainability outcomes, suggesting that sustainability performance is contingent upon work conditions under which sustainability practices are implemented.

#### 4.2 Contributions

Building on the conceptual model developed, this paper makes three key theoretical contributions to the research on EGB and work-related stress.

First, this contribution integrates EGB into the JD-R model and conceptualizes EGB as a form of work behavior shaped by green job demands and resources through stress- and motivation-related processes. This distinction helps resolve conceptual ambiguity in prior studies and provides a foundation for studying sustainability-related work. [Katz et al. \(2023\)](#), for example, found that job demands positively predicted task-related and proactive EGB at the within- and between-person levels. This could be attributed to measured job demands such as high workload and time pressure, which have been shown to simultaneously increase strain and motivation ([Cavanaugh et al., 2000](#)). More problematic or "hindering" job demands were not captured and might be associated more negatively with voluntary and required EGB ([Katz et al., 2023](#)). Under certain conditions (e.g. high pro-environmental commitment), green job demands may coincide with voluntary EGB as a way to restore meaning at work ([Kühner et al., 2025](#)).

The second contribution refers to the distinction between required and voluntary EGB and their relationship with different stress- and motivation-related processes. Voluntary EGB is driven by intrinsic motivation and closely linked to extra-role behavior, which makes it particularly sensitive to work-related stress and resource constraints. This is concerning because especially intrinsically motivated EGB has consistently been associated with positive outcomes and increased employee satisfaction. In contrast, required EGB is embedded in formal job requirements and compliance structures and relies on extrinsic motivation. Drawing on insights from self-determination theory ([Deci and Ryan, 2000](#)), the conceptual model developed suggests that increased reliance on mandatory green tasks and external regulations may weaken intrinsic motivation for voluntary EGB, thereby highlighting potential trade-offs between required and voluntary forms of EGB. Hence, under certain conditions, required EGB may be experienced as less meaningful, which can have implications for employees' motivation to engage in voluntary EGB activities.

The third contribution refers to work-related stress as a central constraint on EGB. Building on the JD-R model, the conceptual model developed highlights that elevated stress limits employees' cognitive, emotional and motivational resources, thereby constraining their ability to engage in EGB. This constraint is particularly relevant for voluntary EGB, which often involves discretionary efforts, initiatives and personal risks ([Francoeur et al., 2021](#); [Zacher et al., 2023](#)). Required EGB, while embedded in formal job expectations, may also be impaired under high stress when available resources are insufficient.

Work-related stress can occur at lower or higher levels of intensity and is determined by personal and work-contextual factors ([Havlovic and Keenan, 2020](#)). Furthermore, EGB can range from either low-intensity behaviors (i.e. involving less effort, lower risk and being more incremental of behaviors such as switching lights) to high-intensity behaviors (i.e. involving higher effort and risk of more radical behaviors such as convincing supervisors to recycle).

Figure 2 illustrates how the combinations of stress and EGB intensity are expected considering different EGB stress types. If the work-related stress level is low in intensity, the forms of EGB are performed similarly and whether employees fall in the category of calm green minimalists (1) or balanced environmentalists (4) depends on work-contextual and personal factors. Under high levels of work-related stress, forms of required EGB that are low in intensity are probably still performed as part of one’s job duties. In addition, low-intensity voluntary EGB may also still be carried out, as it requires little effort and is less likely to exacerbate strain. However, whether such behavior occurs depends on personal and work-contextual factors, too, and performers would fall into the category of exhausted green compliers (2). Complications surface when the work-related stress levels and EGB are high in intensity. Referring to findings from OCB (Agheli *et al.*, 2017; Organ, 1988), as concept closely related to voluntary EGB, work-related stress at a high level may hinder voluntary EGB that demand high intensity, such as significant effort and personal risk (Bissing-Olson *et al.*, 2013; Norton *et al.*, 2015; Zacher *et al.*, 2023). This is because employees may lack the necessary resources to manage the elevated levels of work-related stress and aligns with the understanding that poor well-being can present a motivational barrier to perform EGB that requires high intensity (Bissing-Olson *et al.*, 2013; Zacher *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, when work-related stress is high and required EGB involves substantial effort, employees’ well-being and motivation may be further strained because behaviors must be conducted despite limited resources (Norton *et al.*, 2015; Stein *et al.*, 2025b; Yuan *et al.*, 2024). This can reduce employee engagement in voluntary EGB, creating a tradeoff between complying with required green tasks and sustaining discretionary green behavior, which is typically associated with positive well-being outcomes (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). Employees in this category are considered as strained green performers (3).

|                           |      |                                 |                                  |
|---------------------------|------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Work-related stress level | high | Exhausted green complier<br>(2) | Strained green performer<br>(3)  |
|                           | low  | Calm green minimalist<br>(1)    | Balanced environmentalist<br>(4) |
|                           |      | low                             | high                             |
|                           |      | EGB intensity                   |                                  |

Figure 2. Four-fold table with EGB stress types. Source: Authors’ own work

The relationship between work-related stress and EGB should also be considered in the light of the planetary health discussion because planetary and human health are interdependent (Horton and Lo, 2015; Whitmee *et al.*, 2015). On the one hand, performing EGB, and thereby contributing to planetary health, should not come at the expense of employee health. On the other hand, work-related stress should not prevent employees from engaging in EGB; otherwise, the transition cannot be sustained.

4.3 Practical implications

Given the conceptual nature of this paper, the following practical implications are offered cautiously. They illustrate how the relationships between green job demands, resources, stress and EGB depicted in the conceptual model developed may inform organizational practices. In addition to providing implications at the organizational level, we also suggest relevant implications for leaders, teams and individuals.

- (1) *Manage and reduce green job demands:* Organizations should actively identify and manage green job demands that contribute to stress, such as excessive time pressure,

unclear responsibilities or competing green and productivity goals, to reduce unnecessary complexity and clarifying the context. Consequently, organizational leaders play a crucial role (Boiral *et al.*, 2014). EGB may be particularly demanding in sectors characterized by high time pressure, strict compliance requirements or safety-critical operations, such as healthcare, manufacturing, logistics or public services, where sustainability-related tasks are often added to already intensive workloads (Bronkhorst, 2015; Kim and Kim, 2026).

- (2) *Strengthen green job resources to support EGB*: To mitigate work-related stress and to enable and promote EGB, organizations should provide and enhance green job resources, and leaders should support employees in engaging in EGB (Ramus and Steger, 2000; Zacher *et al.*, 2024). Green job resources can be strengthened by providing feedback and opportunities to participate in sustainability-related measures and decisions. Employees may benefit from training and skill development, which increases their autonomy in conducting EGB (Yuan *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, establishing a sustainable supportive culture within teams can be viewed as a valuable green resource (Zacher *et al.*, 2023).
- (3) *Monitor and mitigate work-related stress to promote EGB*: Organizations should systematically monitor work-related stress levels and implement stress-reduction measures (e.g. risk assessments), as stress undermines employees' engagement in EGB (Stein *et al.*, 2025b). Therefore, leaders should identify signs of overload and recognize that high stress levels may reduce employees' willingness to engage in voluntary EGB activities (Agheli *et al.*, 2017).
- (4) *Provide conditions for voluntary EGB to occur*: Organizations and leaders should not rely exclusively on mandatory sustainability measures because external pressures and expectations may weaken employees' intrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Graves *et al.*, 2013). Instead, employees should be given opportunities to voluntarily contribute ideas and behaviors.

#### 4.4 Limitations and future research

Despite these contributions, this paper had several limitations that suggest avenues for future research. First, as a conceptual paper, the model developed has not been empirically tested. The relationships and propositions derived from the JD-R model require empirical validation to assess their robustness and boundary conditions across different organizational contexts. Future research should employ longitudinal, experience-sampling or multi-level designs to capture stress- and motivation-related processes considering EGB over time.

Second, although the conceptual model built is based on an extensive body of literature, it does not exhaust all potentially relevant theoretical perspectives. Integrating complementary frameworks such as the conservation of resources theory or self-determination theory may further enrich the understanding of how sustainability-related work characteristics affect employee well-being and behavior.

Third, the conceptual model developed focuses primarily on the individual level and assumes a degree of autonomy and agency in employees' engagement in EGB. In practice, organizational, sectoral and institutional constraints may limit agency. Therefore, future studies should examine multi-level influences, including leadership, green climate, regulatory pressure and sector-specific conditions to better understand how contextual factors shape the relationship between work-related stress and both required and voluntary EGB.

Finally, while Figure 1 deliberately focuses on static relationships to maintain conceptual clarity, future studies may explore dynamic processes, such as behavioral intensity, and examine whether the relationships between EGB, job demands and job resources evolve over time. Sustained engagement in EGB may reshape green job demands and resources, giving rise

to feedback loops that unfold over longer periods. Moreover, behavioral intensity may function as an important boundary condition influencing the stress–EGB relationship.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper aimed to analyze the interrelation between work-related stress and EGB. We developed a conceptual model, grounded in JD-R theory, revealing how sustainability-relevant job demands and resources interrelate with required and voluntary EGB through stress- and motivation-related processes. Work-related stress has emerged as a key mechanism constraining employees' capacity to engage in EGB. This constraint is especially pronounced for voluntary EGB, which relies on discretionary effort and self-initiated engagement, whereas required EGB may also be impaired under high stress and insufficient resources.

Overall, this paper advances research on EGB by integrating stress and motivation processes into a unified model. The conceptual model developed highlights that organizational sustainability efforts depend not only on encouraging green behavior but also on shaping work conditions that allow employees to engage in EGB without experiencing excessive strain.

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