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Impact of Employee Well-Being on the Implementation of Corporate Sustainability Strategies: Organizational Identification as a Mediating Variable

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Abstract:

In recent years, corporate sustainability has moved beyond image-building initiatives to become a set of hard governance metrics. Yet in practice, sustainability strategies often break down across formal systems, operational processes, and everyday employee behaviors. This gap suggests that the key to execution is not only how institutions and procedures are designed, but also whether employees are willing to commit to the strategy and carry it out consistently over time. This study examines employees and supervisors in the high-tech industry in Fujian Province and analyzes 723 valid survey responses. The results indicate a well-fitting model: employee well-being significantly strengthens organizational identification; organizational identification, in turn, significantly promotes the implementation of sustainability strategies. Employee well-being also has a direct positive effect on sustainability strategy implementation, and organizational identification plays a significant mediating role. Overall, the findings suggest that the internal momentum for sustainability execution is driven by a chain mechanism in which employees' positive psychological resources foster identity internalization, which then supports sustained and aligned action. Practically, beyond strengthening ESG systems and performance indicators, firms should treat employee well-being and organizational identification as key prerequisites for making sustainability strategies work on the ground—enhancing cross-department collaboration and improving the consistency and durability of day-to-day execution.

Keywords: employee well-being, organizational identification, sustainability strategy implementation, high-tech industry

Introduction

In recent years, corporate sustainability has evolved from image-building to a set of hard management and governance metrics. Climate risk, supply-chain resilience, intensifying competition for talent, and growing demands from investors and regulators for ESG disclosure have all pushed firms to treat sustainability as part of long-term strategy rather than an optional add-on or philanthropic extra. Accordingly, many companies have committed substantial resources to sustainability strategies, including setting decarbonization pathways, promoting circular-economy initiatives, establishing responsible sourcing systems, and strengthening workplace diversity, equity, inclusion, and employee well-being. Yet the most difficult part of sustainability strategy is often not how comprehensive it looks on paper, but how consistently it is executed—how policies translate into processes, how processes shape everyday decisions, and how those decisions are carried out reliably across departments and organizational levels. In other words, the value of a sustainability strategy depends on implementation, and implementation depends heavily on the behavioral choices of people inside the organization.

In practice, sustainability execution frequently suffers from persistent gaps. The first is an awareness–behavior gap: employees may understand that the company is pursuing sustainability, yet under performance and time pressure they revert to familiar routines, treating sustainability requirements as extra burdens or audit tasks. The second is a systems–culture gap: firms may put policies, indicators, and reporting mechanisms in place, but if departmental culture continues to send only one signal—short-term numbers above all—employees may respond with symbolic compliance and substantive hesitation, effectively pushing sustainability work onto a specialized unit rather than embedding it in daily operations. The third is a commitment–resources gap: sustainability implementation requires cross-functional collaboration, process redesign, and capability development. When resources are insufficient or roles and accountabilities are unclear, frontline employees experience uncertainty and exhaustion, which reduces willingness to participate. Taken together, these gaps point to a central proposition: sustainability implementation is not merely a technical or institutional problem; it is fundamentally a human problem—especially whether employees, as internal stakeholders, are willing to treat sustainability as "our responsibility."

From this perspective, employee well-being may be an underestimated yet pivotal factor in sustainability strategy implementation. Well-being is not limited to positive emotions; it also includes psychological safety at work, perceived support, work–life balance, and positive evaluations of work and its meaning. When employees experience higher well-being, they are more likely to demonstrate initiative and cooperation and to invest in extra-role behaviors that support organizational goals. By contrast, when employees operate under chronic stress and low well-being, any additional organizational requirement is more likely to be interpreted as pressure or burden, leading to passive compliance or even resistance. If sustainability execution is to bridge the gap between slogans and sustained action, organizations must attend to employees' lived experience at work—whether they feel cared for, whether they perceive fairness, whether they trust organizational commitments, and whether they are willing to connect themselves to the organization's long-term direction.

In recent years, some studies have begun to link ESG or CSR to employee outcomes—for example, by examining how corporate ESG practices shape employee satisfaction and attitudes—and have suggested that attention to employee well-being may generate positive feedback mechanisms. Other studies have focused more directly on the association between organizational identification and employee well-being, indicating a stable relationship between employees' identification with the organization and their positive psychological states. Together, this literature implies that employee well-being and organizational identification should not be treated merely as HR outcomes; they may function as enabling conditions that determine a firm's capacity to mobilize internally during a sustainability transition. In this context, organizational identification is particularly salient. Sustainability strategy implementation often requires employees to go beyond minimum compliance—for example, proactively improving processes to reduce energy use, holding higher standards in procurement and supply-chain decisions, questioning practices that violate sustainability principles, and absorbing the communication costs of cross-department coordination. Such behaviors are difficult to sustain through rules and monitoring alone; they require employees to psychologically regard sustainability as part of who "we" are. When employees hold strong organizational identification, they are more likely to internalize sustainability goals as personal goals and to view sustainability actions as a way to maintain both organizational coherence and self-consistency, rather than as externally imposed rules. By contrast, when identification is weak, employees may acknowledge sustainability's importance yet cooperate only during audits or inspections, making it difficult to build sustained, proactive, and scalable momentum for implementation.

Theoretically, employee well-being may enhance sustainability strategy implementation through multiple pathways. Among these, one of the most explanatory is the pathway through organizational identification. Higher well-being can strengthen employees' trust in the organization and their positive emotional attachment, increasing the likelihood that they view the organization as a community worth relying on and investing in, and thereby fostering a sense of "I am part of this organization." As this identity strengthens, employees become more likely to make daily work choices that support sustainability strategy. Prior research in contexts such as sustainable human resource management has shown that organizational identification can serve as a key mediating mechanism linking management practices to employees' positive behaviors. Other work suggests that during organizational transformation, employees' psychological attachment and identification may be essential for translating ESG aspirations into coordinated, consistent action.

Despite these advances, important research gaps remain regarding the full chain linking employee well-being, organizational identification, and sustainability strategy implementation. Existing studies often use job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intention, or general organizational performance as outcomes. Even when sustainability is addressed, measurement frequently focuses on narrower environmental outcomes such as green behavior or environmental commitment. However, sustainability strategy implementation is a practice-near construct that involves consistent execution of systems, cross-functional collaboration, process redesign, resource allocation, and continuous improvement—multiple dimensions of behavior and outcomes that closely reflect managerial realities. Without a more precise operationalization of implementation, it is difficult to answer the question organizations care about most: how employee well-being translates into the capability to actually make sustainability strategy happen. Moreover, much CSR/ESG research adopts an outside-in perspective, emphasizing how sustainability initiatives improve employee satisfaction or morale. From an implementation perspective, the more consequential logic is inside-out: whether employees' psychological states can serve as a driving force for sustainability change. In other words, causal inference remains limited regarding employee well-being as an antecedent of sustainability implementation, leaving managerial advice stuck in a one-way narrative "more ESG leads to happier employees"—without clarifying how much employee care is needed, and through what psychological mechanisms sustainability becomes executable.

Organizational identification has also been widely discussed, but in sustainability implementation research it is often presented in fragmented forms—such as green organizational identification or organizational pride—or treated only as a moderator. By contrast, clearly positioning organizational identification as the central mediating mechanism through which employee well-being influences sustainability strategy implementation, and empirically testing its indirect effects within an integrated model, remains underdeveloped. While studies in sustainable HRM and employee behavior have supported a mediating role for identification, sustainability strategy implementation involves more complex coordination and deeper institutional embedding. Whether the same mediating logic holds, or whether additional boundary conditions are required, has not yet been fully clarified.

In sum, sustainability strategy implementation should not be understood solely as a matter of institutional rollout; it is better conceptualized as organizational action that depends on internal psychological capital. Although prior research has provided useful clues linking ESG/CSR to employee outcomes and linking organizational identification to employee well-being, integrative work remains limited on how employee well-being, through organizational identification, ultimately facilitates sustainability strategy implementation—with implementation as the focal construct and the mediating mechanism as the analytical backbone, while also accounting for contextual differences and methodological rigor. For these reasons, the present topic has a clear research motivation and a well-defined gap, and it can generate more actionable managerial implications for corporate sustainability transitions. Theoretically, it can address the relative neglect of internal psychological mechanisms in sustainability strategy research. Practically, it can speak to a common managerial dilemma: why sustainability still fails to take root even after systems and indicators are in place. This perspective offers a more realistic pathway grounded in organizational life—sustainability is not only about targets and metrics, but also about whether employees are willing, able, and convinced that it is worth doing together.

Literature Review

(1) Employee Well-Being

Martela (2025) argues that conversations about employee well-being at work should not stop at the question of whether employees feel happy. Instead, the more foundational issue is whether work enables people to live well and sustain a good life. Molek-Winiarska et al. (2024) describe employee well-being as a state marked by comfort, health, and satisfaction, and note that it can be understood across psychological, physical, and social dimensions. Pradhan & Hati (2022) emphasize that employee well-being is not a short-lived emotion; it reflects a combined state of "feeling good" and "functioning well." Shi et al. (2024) conceptualize employee well-being as the overall quality of employees' work experiences and their level of functioning in the workplace. Charalampous et al. (2019) define employee well-being as a multidimensional form of work-related well-being that includes affective experience, social interaction, cognitive functioning, professional fulfillment, and physical and mental health.

(2) Organizational Identification

Weisman et al. (2023) define organizational identification as employees' perceived sense of oneness with, or belonging to, their organization. Christopher & Divya (2024) describe it more broadly as an organization-directed psychological bond that reflects employees' emotional attachment to the company and their feelings of being recognized and accepted, positioning it as a key hub that links attitudes to behavior. Salin et al. (2023) further note that organizational identification is grounded in social identity theory: employees categorize themselves as members of particular groups, and when group membership becomes central to the self-concept, individuals tend to seek a positive social identity and maintain self-esteem—making them more likely to engage in behaviors that protect the organization's image and enhance organizational performance. Caprar et al. (2022) argue that strong identification can satisfy basic human motives and promote a range of positive outcomes, but it also has an often-overlooked dark side. They conceptualize identification as a state directed toward a specific target and systematically summarize the potential negative consequences and pathological tendencies associated with strong identification (e.g., exclusionary identification, blended identification, or tensions arising under multiple identifications). Organizational identification may foster psychological entitlement, pro-organizational rule-breaking, and even unethical pro-organizational behavior. In other words, when the "me = organization" bond becomes too strong, employees may be more inclined to treat actions that benefit the organization as a justification for overriding norms and rules (Irshad & Bashir, 2020).

(3) Implementation of Corporate Sustainability Strategy

Engert et al. (2016) emphasize that implementing a sustainability strategy is not the same as issuing initiatives, producing reports, or announcing commitments. Rather, it requires putting in place a sequence of action arrangements inside the organization that are executable, trackable, and adjustable over time. Engert & Baumgartner (2016) define sustainability strategy implementation as the process through which firms translate sustainability strategy from concepts and plans into concrete initiatives, systems, and everyday operating processes—turning it into a set of management practices that can be executed, coordinated, and continuously advanced. Manninen & Huiskonen (2022) describe it as the sustained, long-term integration of sustainability and business goals, whereby—through alignment with internal and external conditions—sustainability principles are gradually converted into routine decision rules and patterns of action. Beusch et al. (2022) conceptualize sustainability strategy implementation as embedding sustainability objectives into operations and management control, so that sustainability concerns are measured, discussed, and monitored alongside financial performance and can meaningfully guide decision-making and resource allocation—preventing sustainability systems from being marginalized or decoupled from core business. Fleck-Baustian et al. (2025) further view sustainability strategy implementation as a process in which organizational members, within resource and institutional constraints, plan and carry out sustainability actions, establish measurement and reporting mechanisms, and drive internal coordination and change so that sustainability priorities are truly enacted throughout the organization.

(4) The Effect of Employee Well-Being on Organizational Identification

Urbini et al. (2023) suggest that when employees are satisfied with their work experiences, they are more likely to view the organization as an entity worthy of pride and investment, which strengthens organizational identification. In turn, stronger identification can translate this positive state into more proactive organizational behaviors (e.g., discretionary effort and helping). Li et al. (2020) report that employee involvement and positive affect can first enhance well-being and then further increase favorable feelings toward, and identification with, the organization. In this sense, well-being is not only an outcome but may also function as a platform through which identification develops: when employees feel that “life is better here,” they are more likely to incorporate the organization into their self-concept. Ko et al. (2021) emphasize that identification is not built through slogans but through accumulated emotions and everyday interactions. When employees frequently experience positive emotions, they are more likely to interpret the organization using “we” language and to treat organizational goals as their own. Mao et al. (2023) further argue that well-being is not merely a stable trait; it can be triggered by daily work design conditions such as challenge–skill fit and timely feedback, and identification can likewise accumulate through repeated well-being events in everyday work. Çınar (2023) notes that well-being does not necessarily come from pay or formal systems; often it comes from relational experiences—feeling that one has people to rely on, is accepted, and is "in it together." When well-being is rooted in relationships and belonging, employees are more likely to see the organization as "my group," making identification more likely to increase. Sun et al. (2021) provide evidence that well-being—through positive affect and favorable work experiences—can help sustain identification in highly uncertain contexts: when employees continue to feel understood, included, and emotionally steady amid change, identification is less likely to erode. Yue et al. (2021) argue that well-being is not something individuals must carry alone; organizations can normalize well-being through affective culture and interaction norms, thereby stabilizing organizational identification. Atalay et al. (2022) propose that if well-being reflects the accumulation of resources and positive affect, burnout represents the accumulation of resource depletion and emotional strain; when employees remain in prolonged burnout, it becomes difficult for them to identify with the organization or view it as a self-extension that can be relied upon. Liao et al. (2024) describe well-being as a psychological buffer: when well-being is high and resources are ample, employees are better able to interpret organizational imperfections in a more constructive way; when well-being is eroded by exhaustion, employees are more likely to adopt distancing and de-identification strategies. Jeong et al. (2022) further note that when employees perceive their future in the organization as unpredictable, well-being declines and psychological resources tighten, making it harder to form stable organizational identification. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Employee well-being has a significant positive effect on organizational identification.

(5) The Effect of Organizational Identification on Sustainability Strategy Implementation

Cheema et al. (2020) find that employees' perceptions of a firm's CSR strengthen organizational identification, and that stronger identification, in turn, encourages employees to engage in behaviors that support the implementation of corporate sustainability strategy (e.g., voluntarily saving energy and helping colleagues adopt more environmentally friendly practices). Shah et al. (2021) similarly report that the stronger employees perceive a firm's CSR to be, the more likely they are to engage in pro-environmental behavior through enhanced organizational identification; peer advocacy for pro-environmental action further strengthens this linkage. Duarte and Mouro (2022) argue that making environmental systems work in practice cannot rely on communication campaigns alone. Employees must experience organizational identification and further incorporate the firm's environmental positioning into their self-definition; only then do stable day-to-day behavior changes emerge, supporting sustainability strategy implementation. Abdou et al. (2023) note that when employees identify “being green” as part of the organization’s core identity, they become more willing to go beyond formal requirements, turning sustainability from a slogan into a routine element of service processes and thereby strengthening implementation. Wu et al. (2022) emphasize that many sustainability improvement initiatives (e.g., energy saving, emissions reduction, and process reengineering) depend on employees to propose and champion them voluntarily; identification increases employees’ willingness to invest their ideas in the organization, while trust reduces the perceived risk of being dismissed or blamed after speaking up. Li et al. (2020) suggest that the endogenous 动力 behind sustainability implementation—whether employees are willing to sustain long-term improvement efforts—depends on whether they see the company as “my organization” through organizational identification, rather than merely completing assigned tasks. Zafar et al. (2022) argue that in environmentally pressured industries, voluntary behaviors matter because they cover the grey areas that formal systems cannot fully monitor; identification and identity provide a psychological anchor that makes employees view sustainability strategy implementation as central to the organization. Hassanie et al. (2021) further point out that sustainability strategy implementation requires accumulation and persistence (e.g., process improvement, culture building, and cross-department collaboration), and employees’ psychological bonds—identification and attachment—shape whether they are willing to invest in and continue pushing these changes. Lythreatis et al. (2021) emphasize that sustainability implementation requires employees to believe it is not merely public relations but something the organization genuinely cares about; once organizational identification forms, employees become more willing to maintain consistent behaviors and decision logics, making sustainability feel like “how we do things around here.” Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Organizational identification has a significant positive effect on sustainability strategy implementation.

(6) The Effect of Employee Well-Being on Sustainability Strategy Implementation

Gyensare et al. (2024) argue that green HRM practices (e.g., green training, green performance management, and green rewards) foster employees’ sustainability behaviors not simply because they impose requirements, but because they enhance employees’ subjective well-being. When employees feel supported and experience work as more meaningful and controllable, they are more willing to internalize sustainability expectations as everyday work habits. Pellegrini et al. (2018) likewise emphasize that employees’ perceptions of sustainable HRM practices (e.g., supervisor support, sustainability training, and sustainability-oriented feedback and rewards) can promote sustainability behavior. In practice, making sustainable HRM effective often requires first strengthening employees’ positive psychological states and affective engagement. Ahmed et al. (2020) note that CSR may feel distant to employees if it remains at the level of external messaging; however, when CSR

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practices make employees feel cared for, respected, and supported through positive work experiences, increased well-being can motivate employees to voluntarily adopt green behaviors, allowing sustainability strategy to enter everyday routines. Su & Swanson (2019) suggest that CSR affects employees not only by enhancing corporate image, but also by improving employee well-being and the employee–organization relationship. These improvements, in turn, encourage employees to engage in behaviors such as supporting the firm's environmental practices and assisting colleagues or customers in taking greener actions, making sustainability requirements easier to embed into service processes. Li et al. (2023) report that higher well-being increases employees' willingness to invest extra effort, while stronger self-efficacy strengthens their confidence that they can carry out green actions effectively. When both increase, green behavior becomes more stable and sustainability requirements are less likely to remain symbolic. Kanwal et al. (2024) further argue that for well-being to translate into on-the-ground behavior, it often needs a supportive climate: when the organizational climate signals that green behavior is encouraged and legitimate, employees are more likely to act voluntarily. Zhang et al. (2024) emphasize that sustainability implementation depends not only on rules but also on employees' positive psychology and moral emotions, with well-being serving as a key lever. Jain (2026) proposes that well-being increases employees' willingness to invest effort, while identification leads employees to treat corporate sustainability goals as "our responsibility." When both are present, green behavior is more likely to become a stable and enduring pattern of implementation. Farmanesh et al. (2025) find that sustainability-oriented leadership can promote more consistent employee sustainability behavior and compliance with green processes by improving employee well-being, ultimately strengthening sustainability strategy implementation. Tang et al. (2024) further note that sustainability strategy implementation goes beyond compliance and includes continuous improvement and green innovation, and that well-being functions as psychological fuel that supports innovation. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H3: Employee well-being has a significant positive effect on sustainability strategy implementation.

H4: Organizational identification mediates the relationship between employee well-being and sustainability strategy implementation.

Research Methods

(1) Definitions of Study Variables and Construct Dimensions

1. Employee Well-Being

In this study, the dimensions and items used to measure employee well-being are adapted from the three-dimension conceptual framework proposed by Zheng, Zhu, Zhao, & Zhang (2015). Employee well-being is defined as an integrated positive state across three domains—life, the workplace, and psychological

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functioning—comprising:

a. Life Well-Being: Employees' positive evaluation of their overall quality of life and social integration, reflecting a broad sense of affirmation and comfort with their life situation.

b. Workplace Well-Being: The positive emotions and satisfaction employees experience in work settings, including enjoyment, fulfillment, and favorable feelings toward their work experiences.

c. Psychological Well-Being: A positive state of psychological functioning that emphasizes self-actualization, purpose, personal growth, and healthy psychological functioning.

The questionnaire items for employee well-being in this study are listed as follows:

Table 1. Employee Well-Being Items

Dimension	Items
Life Well-Being	1. During my time working at this company, I am satisfied with my overall life situation.
	2. During my time working at this company, my life has largely been the way I expected it to be.
	3. During my time working at this company, I feel that my quality of life is good.
	4. During my time working at this company, I feel happy and at ease with my life.
Workplace Well-Being	1. When I am working at this company, I often feel happy.
	2. When I am working at this company, I am satisfied with my work experience overall.
	3. When I am working at this company, I can engage in my work with a mostly positive mindset.
	4. When I am working at this company, I often find the feelings my work brings me to be pleasant.
Psychological Well-Being	1. During my time working at this company, I feel that my life/work has clear goals and direction.
	2. During my time working at this company, I feel that I continue to grow and improve.

	3. During my time working at this company, I feel that what I do is meaningful.
	4. During my time working at this company, I feel positive about being able to use my abilities and realize my potential.

2. Organizational Identification

In this study, the dimensions and items used to measure organizational identification are adapted from Mael & Ashforth (1992). Organizational identification is operationalized as employees' perceived sense of belongingness and oneness with the organization. Higher scores indicate stronger feelings of oneness and belonging. This construct is measured as a single dimension.

The questionnaire items for organizational identification in this study are listed as follows:

Table 2. Organizational Identification Items

Dimension	Items
Organizational Identification	1. When someone praises the company I work for, it feels like a personal compliment.
	2. When someone criticizes the company I work for, it feels like a criticism of me.
	3. When talking about the company, I usually say "we" rather than "they."
	4. I care a lot about how people outside the company view the company I work for.
	5. How others evaluate the company affects how I feel about myself.
	6. I feel proud to be a member of this company.

3. Sustainability Strategy Implementation

In this study, the dimensions and items used to measure sustainability strategy implementation are adapted from the employee-perspective ESG integration measurement instrument developed by Barbosa et al. (2024) and validated using Item Response Theory (IRT). The instrument includes the following dimensions:

a. Environmental Integration in Practice: Employees can perceive that the organization has embedded environmental risk management and resource-efficiency requirements into targets, processes, investments, and day-to-day operational controls, and that progress is tracked through indicators.

b. Social Integration in Practice: Employees can perceive that the organization has institutionalized and implemented requirements related to employee rights, occupational health and safety, DEI, fair treatment, and social responsibility toward external stakeholders through management processes and concrete practices.

c. Governance Integration in Practice: Employees can perceive that governance systems centered on transparency, accountability, compliance, and ethics have been put into practice, including mechanisms for anti-fraud, conflict-of-interest management, disclosure, and accountability for sustainability goals.

The questionnaire items for sustainability strategy implementation in this study are listed as follows:

Table 3. Sustainability Strategy Implementation Items

Dimension	Items
Environmental Integration in Practice	1. Our company has clear management measures for major environmental impacts (e.g., emissions, waste, water use, and energy use), and employees can experience them in day-to-day work.
	2. Our company encourages and supports the adoption of energy-saving, waste-reduction, or resource-efficiency practices in work processes.
	3. Our company tracks environmental improvement outcomes using specific indicators and regularly shares progress updates with employees.
	4. When environmental risks or compliance issues arise, our company activates clear response procedures rather than relying only on verbal reminders.
	5. In decisions about equipment, production processes, or purchasing, our company meaningfully considers environmental impacts (not merely as a formal requirement).
Social Integration in Practice	1. Our company values employee rights and workplace safety, and these priorities are reflected in day-to-day management and operating standards.
	2. Our company has trustworthy reporting and handling mechanisms for mistreatment, discrimination, harassment, or unfair incidents.
	3. Our company provides necessary resources (e.g., training, equipment, and support measures) to reduce work-related risks and improve employee well-being.
	4. Our company takes responsible approaches to its external social impacts (e.g., on communities, customers, and suppliers) rather than stopping at public statements.

	5. Our company translates social responsibility requirements (e.g., human rights, labor conditions, and supply-chain responsibility) into executable processes or standards.
Governance Integration in Practice	1. Our company emphasizes transparency and accountability in governance, and employees can observe this in decision-making and management processes.
	2. Our company has clear rules for fraud, conflicts of interest, and misconduct, and these rules are consistently enforced.
	3. Our company has clear role accountability and tracking mechanisms for sustainability/ESG goals (who is responsible, how progress is tracked, and how improvements are made).
	4. Our company regularly reviews ESG-related risks and compliance requirements and reflects the results in adjustments to systems or processes.
	5. Our company uses formal systems to ensure that ESG is not merely a project-based activity, but continues to shape day-to-day operations and management.

(2) Research Participants

The study sample consisted of employees and supervisors in the high-tech industry in Fujian Province. Paper-based questionnaires were distributed using convenience sampling. A total of 800 questionnaires were issued. After excluding invalid and incomplete responses, 723 valid questionnaires were retained, yielding a valid response rate of 90%.

Sample profile: (1) Gender: 402 males and 321 females. (2) Age: 351 were under 30; 264 were 31–50; and 108 were over 50. (3) Tenure: 298 had less than 5 years; 316 had 5–10 years; and 109 had more than 10 years.

(3) Analytical Approach

Structural equation modeling (SEM) is a statistical technique used to examine multiple causal relationships among variables simultaneously. By integrating the strengths of factor analysis and path analysis, SEM is well suited for testing direct and indirect effects among latent constructs (e.g., sustainability strategy implementation and organizational identification). SEM is particularly appropriate for theory testing and for handling complex multivariate structures.

Key advantages of SEM include:

1.Modeling multiple relationships: It can simultaneously estimate relationships among multiple independent and dependent variables.

2.Latent variable modeling: It enables accurate measurement of psychological traits and behavioral dimensions that are not directly observable.

3.Mediation testing: It provides a precise approach for assessing the role of mediators in causal relationships.

In this study, SEM is appropriate for several reasons:

1.Handling latent constructs: Constructs such as sustainability strategy implementation and organizational identification are not directly observable and must be measured through multiple observed indicators; SEM can effectively model such latent variables.

2.Testing multiple relationships: SEM allows simultaneous examination of the direct and indirect effects of employee well-being on organizational identification and sustainability strategy implementation.

3.Evaluating model fit: SEM can assess the adequacy of the theoretical model using fit indices (e.g., CFI, RMSEA, and TLI), helping ensure the rigor of the proposed hypotheses.

4.Analyzing causal pathways: SEM tests the pathway relationships among employee well-being (independent variable), organizational identification (mediator), and sustainability strategy implementation (dependent variable).

Overall, SEM enables this study to examine the multiple interrelationships among employee well-being, organizational identification, and sustainability strategy implementation in depth, providing rigorous empirical evidence for theory testing and practical decision-making.

Empirical Results and Analysis

(1) Factor Analysis

The factor analysis results are presented in Table 4. For the employee well-being scale, three factors were extracted. The first factor was “Life Well-Being” (eigenvalue = 2.633, $\alpha = 0.87$), the second factor was “Workplace Well-Being” (eigenvalue = 2.175, $\alpha = 0.88$), and the third factor was “Psychological Well-Being” (eigenvalue = 1.724, $\alpha = 0.83$). The three factors jointly explained 75.461% of the total variance. For the organizational identification scale, one factor was extracted, “Organizational Identification” (eigenvalue = 3.583, $\alpha = 0.92$), with a cumulative explained variance of 84.365%. For the sustainability strategy implementation scale, three factors were extracted. The first factor was “Environmental Integration in Practice” (eigenvalue = 2.156, $\alpha = 0.90$), the second factor was “Social Integration in Practice” (eigenvalue = 1.891, $\alpha = 0.86$), and the third factor was “Governance Integration in Practice” (eigenvalue = 2.874, $\alpha = 0.89$). Together, these three factors explained 78.297% of the total variance.

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Table 4. Factor Analysis Results

Variable	Factor Dimension	Eigenvalue	α	Cumulative Variance Explained
Employee Well-Being	Life Well-Being	2.633	0.87	75.461
	Workplace Well-Being	2.175	0.88	
	Psychological Well-Being	1.724	0.83	
Organizational Identification	Organizational Identification	3.583	0.92	84.365
Sustainability Strategy Implementation	Environmental Integration in Practice	2.156	0.90	78.297
	Social Integration in Practice	1.891	0.86	
	Governance Integration in Practice	2.874	0.89	

(2) Correlation Analysis

As shown in Table 5, employee well-being, organizational identification, and sustainability strategy implementation are significantly correlated. These results indicate the possibility of linear overlap among the study variables. At the same time, the significant associations among variables also suggest patterns that are consistent with the proposed hypotheses.

Table 5. Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	α	Employee Well-Being	Organizational Identification	Sustainability Strategy Implementation
Employee	0.86			

Well-Being				
Organizational Identification	0.92	0.29**		
Sustainability Strategy Implementation	0.88	0.24**	0.37**	

(3) Structural Equation Modeling: Estimated Results

The estimation results of the structural model are shown in Table 6. First, overall model fit was evaluated using χ^2/df, RMSEA, GFI, AGFI, RMR, and NFI. The recommended criterion for χ^2/df is ≤ 5; the present study obtained χ^2/df = 1.638, which meets the criterion. For RMSEA, the recommended value is ≤ 0.08; this study's RMSEA was 0.046. For GFI and AGFI, the recommended values are ≥ 0.90; this study obtained GFI = 0.966 and AGFI = 0.937. For RMR, the recommended value is ≤ 0.05; this study's RMR was 0.029. For NFI, the recommended value is ≥ 0.90; this study obtained NFI = 0.943. These indices indicate good overall model fit. Given the satisfactory model fit, the estimated structural parameters are reported in Table 6.

The results show a significant indirect effect of employee well-being on sustainability strategy implementation through organizational identification (0.869; 1.044 × 0.832 = 0.869). The confidence interval for the indirect effect (−0.463 to 5.091) does not include zero, indicating statistical significance ($p < 0.05$) and supporting the mediating role of organizational identification. The direct effect (0.302) is also significant, as its confidence interval (−4.113 to 1.621) does not include zero. The total effect is 1.171 (total effect = direct effect + indirect effect; 0.302 + 0.869 = 1.171), and its confidence interval (1.014 to 1.455) does not include zero, indicating significance. Overall, these findings confirm that organizational identification mediates the relationship between employee well-being and sustainability strategy implementation, thereby supporting Hypothesis H4.

Table 6. Structural Equation Modeling Results

Parameter/Fit Index	Coefficient
Employee Well-Being→ Organizational Identification	0.842***
Organizational Identification→ Sustainability Strategy Implementation	0.878***

Employee Well-Being→ Sustainability Strategy Implementation	0.302***
Employee Well-Being→ Organizational Identification→ Sustainability Strategy Implementation	0.869***
χ2/df≦5	1.638
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, RMSEA ≦0.08	0.046
Goodness-of-fit index, GFI≧0.9	0.966
Adjusted Goodness-of-fit index , AGFI≧0.9	0.937
Root mean square residual, RMR≦0.05	0.029
Normed fit index, NFI≧0.9	0.943

Note: ** indicates significance at the 5% level.

Based on the SEM estimation results above, the hypothesis testing summary is presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Correlation	Empirical Result	Outcome
Hypothesis 1	+	0.842***	Supported
Hypothesis 2	+	0.878***	Supported
Hypothesis 3	+	0.302***	Supported
Hypothesis 4	+	0.869***	Supported

Note: *** indicates $p < 0.001$.

Source: Compiled by this study.

Discussion

This study centers on employee well-being, organizational identification, and sustainability strategy implementation, and tests the proposed hypotheses using factor analysis, correlation analysis, and structural equation modeling. Overall, the findings indicate that employee well-being not only directly predicts sustainability strategy implementation but also exerts a significant indirect effect through organizational identification. Taken together, the results reveal a sequential mechanism in which affective/psychological resources strengthen identity-based attachment, which then translates into sustained on-the-ground behavior.

These findings support a microfoundations perspective on sustainability strategy implementation: whether strategy "sticks" is not only a matter of institutional design, but also a psychological and identity-based question—whether employees are willing to cooperate, internalize expectations, and maintain behavioral consistency in everyday work.

From a measurement standpoint, factor analysis of employee well-being yielded three dimensions (life well-being, workplace well-being, and psychological well-being), suggesting good internal consistency and clear structural validity for the scale within this sample. This pattern implies that well-being is not a single emotional state; rather, it captures a stable, multi-layered experience that simultaneously reflects overall life satisfaction, positive affect in the work context, and psychological functioning/goal orientation. The three-dimensional structure also provides a useful interpretive basis: when employees face sustainability-related requirements or process changes, what enables sustained engagement is rarely a momentary emotional response, but a more durable, cross-context psychological resource state. In other words, the "implementation resilience" required for sustainability strategy is likely rooted in the accumulation of multi-faceted well-being resources, rather than achieved through external monitoring or one-off communication alone.

Organizational identification emerged as a single-factor structure in the factor analysis, indicating that respondents tended to draw on an integrated sense of oneness with the organization—feeling proud of membership and viewing organizational success as personally relevant—when answering identification items. This suggests that employees perceive the organization as a social identity source that is worth relying on, investing in, and taking pride in. Because sustainability strategy implementation commonly involves cross-department coordination, process discipline, and trade-offs between short-term performance and long-term responsibility, weak identity ties can cause sustainability to be experienced as an added burden or managerial rhetoric. Conversely, strong identification makes employees more likely to interpret sustainability requirements as something "we" do together, and to self-regulate, step in proactively, or uphold standards in grey areas—helping strategy move from written rules to everyday practice. Finally, the sustainability strategy implementation scale produced three dimensions (environmental integration in practice, social integration in practice, and governance integration in practice), indicating that ESG components are distinguishable in employees' perceptions. This aligns with practical observations in sustainability governance: employees can often tell whether sustainability is real by whether environmental processes and metrics exist, whether social systems and fairness are enacted, and whether governance is transparent and accountable. The strong reliability of the three dimensions further suggests that sustainability strategy implementation in this study is not treated as an abstract concept, but as a set of institutionalized and procedural practices that employees can observe in daily operations.

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Regarding relationships among variables, correlation analysis shows significant positive associations between employee well-being and organizational identification, between employee well-being and sustainability strategy implementation, and between organizational identification and sustainability strategy implementation. Although the correlation coefficients are in the low-to-moderate range, such magnitudes are common and theoretically meaningful in organizational behavior research. The pattern suggests that the link between well-being and implementation is not simply an emotion-driven effect; it likely operates through multiple forces, including identity, internalization of norms, and work resources. The stronger association between organizational identification and implementation further implies that behavioral consistency in sustainability execution resembles an identity-driven, long-term investment that cannot be fully substituted by short-term incentives. The SEM results provide additional support for this interpretation.

Specifically, employee well-being has a significant positive effect on organizational identification, indicating that when employees feel more stable and positive in life, work, and psychological functioning, they are more likely to incorporate the organization into their self-concept and develop a “me-with-the-organization” bond. From a psychological resources perspective, well-being signals greater access to positive resources and usable energy; when facing organizational demands and uncertainty, employees are less likely to become defensive and more likely to interpret organizational actions constructively, viewing the organization as a group worth joining and investing in. Moreover, employees with higher well-being tend to perceive and respond more strongly to organizational support cues, which facilitates feelings of belonging and pride and, in turn, strengthens identification.

Organizational identification, in turn, has a significant positive effect on sustainability strategy implementation, indicating that implementation is not merely compliance with procedures, but also a concrete expression of employees’ identity-based support for the organization’s direction. When identification is strong, employees are more likely to treat organizational goals as shared goals and to prioritize the organization’s long-term interests in their work choices. As a result, they are more willing to follow sustainability processes, participate in improvement efforts, and maintain standards even under resource constraints. This also suggests that if sustainability strategy is to avoid becoming the responsibility of only a small specialized unit, organizations must build a shared identity narrative across the broader workforce, positioning sustainability as part of the organization’s core. At the same time, employee well-being still exerts a significant direct effect on sustainability strategy implementation. This indicates that beyond the identity pathway through identification, well-being may also influence implementation through other mechanisms, such as stronger self-regulation, greater willingness to exert discretionary effort, lower burnout and resistance, and higher-quality cooperation. In this sense, well-being provides sustainable action capacity, making it more likely that employees translate sustainability expectations into everyday details.

Finally, the mediation effect is significant, confirming that organizational identification serves as a key bridge: improvements in well-being strengthen employees' identity ties, and these identity ties further promote integrated implementation across environmental, social, and governance domains. This partial mediation pattern also fits organizational realities. Effective sustainability execution typically requires both a positive psychological state (energy and resilience) and identity internalization (meaning and belonging). When these two conditions work together, implementation quality and persistence are more likely to improve.

Overall, this study advances sustainability strategy implementation research from a macro-level focus on governance and institutional design toward a more fine-grained account of micro-level psychological and identity mechanisms. The findings suggest that well-being and identification are not merely "soft" indicators of employee sentiment; they function as core conditions that shape whether sustainability strategies succeed in practice. For organizations, sustainability implementation is not achieved simply by adding ESG indicators to reports. It requires employees to be psychologically able and identity-wise willing to treat sustainability as "our work," thereby forming a sustained pattern of everyday practice.

Conclusion

This study focuses on employee well-being, organizational identification, and sustainability strategy implementation. Using factor analysis, Pearson correlations, and structural equation modeling, it seeks to clarify the key psychological and identity-based mechanisms that determine whether corporate sustainability strategies can truly be implemented in practice. The conclusions drawn from the findings provide a useful reference for future research on sustainability governance as well as for managerial practice.

At the measurement level, all three focal constructs demonstrated satisfactory construct validity and internal consistency, indicating that the instruments used in this study effectively capture core psychological states and implementation phenomena in organizational settings. At the level of associations among variables, correlation analysis indicates significant positive relationships among employee well-being, organizational identification, and sustainability strategy implementation. Employee well-being is positively related to organizational identification, suggesting that employees with higher well-being are more likely to develop a sense of belonging and identity-based attachment to the organization. Employee well-being is also positively related to sustainability strategy implementation, implying that when employees are in a more favorable well-being state, they are more likely to cooperate with and support day-to-day implementation across environmental, social, and governance domains. The association between organizational identification and sustainability strategy implementation is stronger, suggesting that implementation is, to a considerable extent, an identity-driven expression of behavioral consistency. Although the correlation coefficients are not extremely large, their magnitude is consistent with what is typically observed in organizational behavior research. Sustainability implementation is shaped by multiple forces (e.g., systems, resources, leadership, culture, and external pressures), making it unlikely that any single psychological variable can explain all variance. Nonetheless, the presence of stable and significant relationships for psychological and identity variables carries substantive theoretical value and provides a foundation for testing causal pathways with a structural model.

At the SEM level, the overall model demonstrates good fit, indicating that the proposed theoretical framework reasonably reflects the data structure and that explaining sustainability strategy implementation through well-being, identification, and implementation is both feasible and persuasive. In terms of path estimates, employee well-being has a significant positive effect on organizational identification, supporting Hypothesis 1. This suggests that the more positive and stable employees feel across life, work, and psychological functioning, the more likely they are to develop belongingness and identity ties to the organization. This result can be interpreted through a psychological resources lens: well-being provides employees with greater psychological capacity, making them more willing to engage with the organization in an open, cooperative, and invested manner, and thus more likely to incorporate the organization into their self-concept. This point is particularly relevant during sustainability transitions, when employees often face uncertainty related to process adjustments, performance expectations, or cross-functional coordination. Under higher well-being, employees are less likely to respond defensively or disengage, and more likely to interpret organizational intentions constructively, thereby strengthening identification.

Organizational identification has a significant positive effect on sustainability strategy implementation, supporting Hypothesis 2. This indicates that when employees view the organization as part of who they are, they are more likely to support and follow ESG-related systems and requirements in daily work. The finding underscores the nature of sustainability strategy implementation: it is not simply external compliance or administrative command, but a pattern of consistent behavioral choices and self-regulation. Sustainability implementation often involves behaviors that appear minor but require long-term maintenance (e.g., saving energy and reducing waste, adhering to procedures, ensuring transparency and disclosure, and fulfilling stakeholder responsibilities). When employees lack identification, these requirements are easily experienced as extra burdens, leading to unstable implementation quality or short-term compliance only during audits. By contrast, when identification is strong, employees are more likely to approach sustainability requirements from a "we" perspective and uphold standards even in the absence of external monitoring, thereby improving persistence and continuity.

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In addition, employee well-being has a significant direct effect on sustainability strategy implementation, supporting Hypothesis 3. This suggests that well-being influences implementation not only through identification but also through other pathways. For instance, employees with higher well-being may have stronger self-regulation, higher engagement and responsibility, lower burnout and resistance tendencies, and greater willingness to invest discretionary effort when new systems are introduced—all of which can directly enhance the level of sustainability implementation. This result highlights an important managerial implication: if organizations rely only on identity narratives while neglecting employees' psychological and physical state, sustainability efforts may still encounter implementation fatigue or psychological depletion, undermining stability over time.

Most importantly, this study confirms the mediating role of organizational identification, supporting Hypothesis 4. Organizational identification functions as a bridge that converts employee well-being into on-the-ground sustainability implementation. In other words, higher well-being not only provides employees with the energy to act, but also increases their willingness to treat sustainability as "our responsibility," thereby enhancing the consistency and persistence of ESG-integrated implementation. From a strategy management perspective, internal gaps in sustainability execution often arise not because systems are absent, but because employees interpret the meaning of those systems differently—some see sustainability as a short-term cost, others as image management, and still others as a genuine organizational direction. Organizational identification can narrow these meaning gaps by making employees more likely to interpret sustainability as an extension of the organization's core values and to maintain consistency in daily work, thereby embedding strategy from the outside in into organizational operations.

Taken together, the overarching conclusion is that whether a corporate sustainability strategy can be implemented effectively depends on employees simultaneously having sufficient well-being (psychological energy) and strong organizational identification (identity internalization). Organizational identification is the central mediating mechanism that translates well-being into sustained implementation behavior. This conclusion carries a broader implication: sustainability is not a management project that can be completed through systems, audits, and reports alone. It is a collective organizational project that must enter employees' everyday behavior. Employees' psychological states and identity ties are not peripheral concerns; they are core conditions for sustainability execution. If firms can enhance employee well-being while building an organizational identity narrative that employees can genuinely internalize, they are more likely to achieve sustained implementation across environmental, social, and governance domains—avoiding the common trap of sustainability remaining at the level of public statements or being driven only by a small specialized unit.

Limitations

Although this study offers meaningful findings, several limitations should be acknowledged and addressed in future research:

(1) Limitations of Cross-Sectional Data

This study relies on data collected at a single point in time. While SEM results support the proposed path directions, reverse causality cannot be fully ruled out. For example, organizations with more mature sustainability strategy implementation may, in turn, enhance employees' pride and well-being. Future studies are encouraged to adopt longitudinal designs or multi-wave data collection to more rigorously test causal ordering.

(2) Limitations of Self-Reported Measures

All three constructs were measured using employee self-reports, which may be influenced by social desirability or halo effects. Future research could incorporate more objective indicators—such as supervisor ratings, departmental KPIs, environmental audit data, or internal ESG review records—to strengthen external validity.

(3) Sample and Context Constraints

The sample in this study is concentrated within a single industry, which calls for caution in generalizing the findings. Sustainability pressures, the degree of process standardization, and governance maturity vary across industries and may lead to differences in the strength of well-being and identification effects. Future research could conduct cross-industry studies and multi-group analyses to examine measurement invariance and potential differences in structural paths.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, organizations seeking to strengthen sustainability strategy implementation (i.e., integrated execution across environmental, social, and governance domains) should not focus solely on metrics, audits, and reporting. Instead, they should simultaneously build two foundational conditions: employee well-being (psychological energy) and organizational identification (identity internalization).

(1) Treat sustainability implementation as a project of building organizational psychological resources, not merely a compliance exercise

This study shows that employee well-being has a significant direct effect on sustainability strategy implementation, indicating that employees' positive state is itself a prerequisite for "making it work" in practice. From a managerial perspective, well-being can be understood as usable action capacity. When employees experience higher life well-being, workplace well-being, and psychological well-being, they have greater bandwidth to engage in process changes and cross-functional coordination and are better able to maintain consistent implementation quality. Accordingly, firms should incorporate the reduction of unnecessary depletion, the enhancement of perceived controllability, and the creation of meaningful work experiences into the sustainability agenda. In doing so, sustainability becomes not an added burden, but a way to redesign work so that efficiency and human-centered value improve together—creating a more durable foundation for execution.

(2) Strengthen organizational identification through identity-based narratives

The mediation results indicate that organizational identification is a key bridge through which well-being translates into sustainability implementation. This implies that improving implementation requires turning sustainability from an external requirement into part of internal identity. Managers can shift sustainability communication away from policy announcements and toward identity-based narratives that clearly answer three questions for employees: Why are we doing this? What does doing it say about who we are? And how does it relate to me? When employees view sustainability as a shared goal and a core organizational value, they are more likely to make sustainability-consistent choices in grey areas and to uphold standards even under short-term pressure. In other words, implementation is not only about process design; it also involves building a shared language and shared pride that encourage employees to self-regulate and proactively support sustainability as organizational members.

(3) Translate ESG implementation into institutional signals that employees can perceive

The analysis shows that employees can clearly distinguish the environmental, social, and governance dimensions in their perceptions, suggesting that firms can strengthen the felt reality of implementation by sending consistent signals through day-to-day management. Environmental integration in practice depends not on slogans, but on whether processes and metrics reach the frontline and whether employees can see feedback on improvement. Social integration in practice hinges on whether fairness, safety, respect, and trustworthy handling mechanisms are actually experienced. Governance integration in practice depends on whether transparency, responsibility, and accountability truly operate rather than remaining on paper. Firms can audit implementation from the employee's vantage point: Are responsibilities clearly assigned? Is there a trackable feedback loop? Do resource allocations genuinely support sustainability goals? When institutional signals are consistent and perceivable, employees are more likely to conclude that "the company is serious," which increases willingness to cooperate and facilitates identity internalization.

(4) Use participatory governance to reduce psychological resistance and enhance internalization and persistence

Because sustainability strategies often require changes in how work is done, purely top-down mandates can increase cognitive load and psychological resistance, which may erode well-being and weaken identification. A more governance-oriented approach is to invite employee participation—within reasonable boundaries—when introducing major sustainability processes or rules, such as involving employees in problem definition, risk identification, and feasibility discussions. When employees feel they are not merely being "required" to comply but are co-building the solution, participation can simultaneously enhance workplace well-being (through greater control and respect) and organizational identification (through a stronger sense of community). As a result, implementation behavior is more likely to stabilize. The point is not to add meetings, but to establish a governance rhythm in which sustainability is treated as a shared continuous-improvement project rather than a one-time rollout.

(5) Incorporate employee well-being as a leading indicator in sustainability performance management

Given that well-being has both direct and indirect effects on implementation, firms can treat well-being as a leading indicator for sustainability execution—especially in early stages of strategy rollout—to ensure employees are not over-depleted. This does not mean turning well-being into a welfare slogan; rather, it frames well-being as part of execution risk management. Well-being is not decorative to sustainability—it is a foundational condition for sustaining implementation over time. If firms redesign the rollout cadence and resource allocation with this logic in mind, they are more likely to build long-run implementation capacity instead of relying on short-term mobilization.

In sum, effective sustainability strategy implementation requires simultaneous attention to institutional execution and psychological/identity grounding. The institutional dimension provides executable processes and accountability; the psychological dimension provides sustainable action capacity; and the identity dimension provides value internalization and a community-based perspective. Together, these elements ensure that ESG is not only written into reports but is consistently embedded in daily management and work behavior, resulting in truly sustainable implementation.

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