

21. Green HRM: A New Direction in Sustainable Human Resource Practices

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Abstract:

*Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) refers to the application of HRM policies and practices to promote the sustainable use of resources within organizations and, more broadly, to advance environmental sustainability. The primary objective of this study is to explore the GHRM practices adopted by organizations and to highlight the importance of aligning human resource management principles with green management objectives. This research employs a **descriptive approach** based on both **primary and secondary data sources**.*

GHRM encompasses a range of activities designed to support an organization's environmental management agenda and reduce its carbon footprint, including green practices in recruitment and onboarding, employee induction, training and development, performance appraisal, and reward management. Effective implementation of GHRM practices can foster positive employee attitudes and environmentally responsible behaviors, ultimately strengthening an organization's sustainability performance and corporate image.

Keywords: Human Resource Management, Green HRM, Environmental Sustainability, Organization, Corporate Image.

21.1 Introduction:

In recent years, corporate interest in environmental sustainability has grown significantly across the globe. This increasing attention arises from international treaties on climate change as well as high-profile industrial accidents that have caused severe harm to people and the environment. The harmful effects of industrial pollution, toxic chemicals, and waste materials have prompted governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

worldwide to introduce stringent regulations and policies aimed at slowing down, and in some cases reversing, the destruction of natural resources and mitigating its adverse impact on society and human health (Christmann & Taylor, 2002; Shrivastava & Berger, 2010).

Within the field of management, a considerable body of research has emerged on areas such as green marketing, green accounting, green retailing, and green management. The success of corporate environmental programs depends on the collaborative efforts of multiple organizational units, including Human Resources (HR), Marketing, Information Technology, and Finance. Among these, the Human Resource Management (HRM) function plays a particularly critical role in driving sustainability initiatives.

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) refers to the integration of environmentally friendly HR policies and practices that promote sustainable use of resources within business organizations and support broader environmental goals. According to Mandip (2012), GHRM consists of two primary components: eco-friendly HR practices and the preservation of knowledge capital. The fundamental aim of “going green” is to adopt processes and methods that minimize negative environmental impacts, such as pollution or depletion of natural resources (Robinson, 2008).

By adopting GHRM, organizations can simultaneously achieve financial benefits through green branding and contribute to environmental protection by reducing the ecological impact of their HR practices. This paper reviews key literature on GHRM and examines how contemporary corporations integrate environmental considerations into HR policies. Additionally, it provides insights into common GHRM processes and proposes potential green initiatives for human resource functions.

21.1.1 Green Human Resource Management (HRM): Conceptual Background:

GHRM involves the implementation of environmentally conscious HR initiatives that enhance organizational efficiency, reduce costs, and improve employee engagement and retention. It encompasses a variety of HR functions, including workforce planning, recruitment, selection, performance management, employee relations, and training — all designed to foster sustainable workplace practices and reduce environmental footprints, such as paper usage and resource consumption.

Fayyazia et al. (2015) emphasized the necessity of integrating environmental management with HRM, arguing that it is a crucial requirement rather than a mere preference. Rothenberg (2003) similarly observed that successful environmental management within organizations depends significantly on dedicated HR efforts. Jabbour and Santos (2008) further noted that effective environmental performance outcomes rely on HR practices that support the full implementation and maintenance of environmental management systems. Jabbour (2011) also asserted that aligning HRM practices with environmental management objectives enables organizations to achieve desired results in their sustainability journey. In addition, Harvey et al. (2012) concluded that HRM plays a central role in executing green practices and directly contributes to improved environmental performance.

21.1.2 Significance of The Study:

In the contemporary global context, the importance of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) has become increasingly evident. Ecological awareness significantly influences individuals' lifestyles and working environments, creating a demand for sustainable practices in both personal and professional domains. Employees are now more conscious of environmental concerns and are interested in organizations that prioritize green initiatives within their HRM framework.

Corporate organizations play a crucial role in addressing environmental challenges, as their operations often have a substantial impact on ecological systems. The emergence of GHRM reflects a shift in organizational priorities, where environmental sustainability is no longer an optional initiative but a strategic necessity. While work continues to be essential for livelihood, it is also a source of personal fulfillment. GHRM aligns these personal and professional aspirations by enabling individuals to contribute to ecological well-being while achieving career goals.

Furthermore, GHRM serves as both a **social responsibility** towards employees and a **competitive advantage** for employers. By embedding green policies into HR practices, organizations not only enhance their corporate image but also foster employee commitment, improve organizational culture, and contribute to long-term sustainability objectives.

21.1.3 Review of Literature:

Marhatta and Adhikari (2013) and Zoogah (2011) define Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) as the application of HRM policies and practices aimed at promoting the sustainable use of resources within organizations and contributing to environmental conservation. Their work emphasizes GHRM as a strategic tool for embedding environmental concerns into business operations.

Opatha and Arulrajah (2014) further elaborate on GHRM as the integration of policies, practices, and systems that foster environmentally conscious employees, ultimately benefiting individuals, teams, organizations, and society as a whole. While different researchers define GHRM from varying perspectives, their core objective remains consistent — ensuring sustainability of human resources and the environment.

Wei and Yazdanifard (2014) highlight **individual motivation** as a critical factor driving employees to engage in environmentally responsible behaviors, both in-role and extra-role. They note that motivation for these behaviors may differ based on individual perceptions and organizational contexts.

Xinhua (2015) discusses the environmental reforms initiated by the Chinese government to combat rising pollution levels and public dissatisfaction with deteriorating air, water, and soil quality. These reforms have transitioned from reactive measures to preventive strategies, although they remain insufficient in addressing the growing environmental challenges comprehensively.

Yusliza, Ramayah, and Othman (2015) emphasize that human resources are the most valuable asset of an organization and play a pivotal role in driving green initiatives. They assert that modern HR managers bear the added responsibility of integrating green HR philosophies into corporate mission statements and HR policies.

The adoption of green HR practices has been linked to increased efficiency, cost reduction, employee retention, improved productivity, and other tangible benefits, contributing to a balance between environmental, social, and economic objectives.

21.2 Statement of The Problem:

A review of the extensive literature on Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) indicates the presence of significant gaps and opportunities for further research. While several studies have explored specific aspects of GHRM, there remains limited focus on developing a **comprehensive process model** of green HRM that spans the entire employee lifecycle — from recruitment and onboarding to performance management and exit.

The fundamental aim of adopting green practices is to utilize methods and products that minimize environmental impact, prevent pollution, and avoid the depletion of natural resources (Robinson, 2008). Implementing such practices enables organizations to use scarce natural resources more efficiently while maintaining an environment free from harmful waste and emissions.

Strategic HRM scholars (Collins & Clark, 2003) argue that for HR to be effective, its policies and practices must be implemented holistically and aligned with broader business strategies.

Through this alignment, organizations can shape employee skills, attitudes, and behaviors to achieve both organizational and sustainability objectives.

Although GHRM is gaining prominence among management scholars and practitioners, research that examines the **entire HRM process in the context of environmental sustainability** remains sparse. This gap highlights the need for more comprehensive studies that address emerging trends and challenges faced by organizations striving to adopt sustainable HR practices.

21.2.1 Objectives of The Study:

The primary objectives of this study are to:

- **Explore** Green Human Resource Management practices adopted by organizations.
- **Promote** the ideology and importance of aligning HRM principles with the objectives of green management.
- **Suggest** appropriate Green HRM policies and frameworks for organizations to enhance sustainability.

21.2.2 Methodology of Study:

Research Design:

In line with the stated problem and research objectives, a **descriptive research design** was adopted. The study relied on both **primary and secondary data**.

- **Primary Data:** Information regarding Green HRM practices was collected from reputed organizations known for implementing sustainable HR policies, such as **Google, The Land Rover Group, Dow Chemical, and Tata Group of Companies**. Data were gathered through observation of their green initiatives and review of publicly available reports.
- **Secondary Data:** Literature was reviewed from **academic journals, newsletters, magazines, and industry reports** to understand the theoretical and empirical foundations of Green HRM and its application across industries.

21.2.3 Green Human Resource Management Practices of Organizations:

Cherian and Jacob (2012) identified recruitment, training, motivation, and green rewards as critical factors that influence employees' adoption of environmentally friendly practices. In this section, major HR functions traditionally followed in organizations are revisited from a green perspective. Green practices under each function are summarized as follows:

Green Job Design and Analysis:

Organizations increasingly incorporate **environmental tasks and responsibilities** into job descriptions to align individual roles with sustainability goals. Many firms now ensure that every job includes at least one **environmental responsibility**, ranging from waste reduction to energy conservation. Some organizations have even created **specialized environmental management positions** or redesigned existing roles to embed sustainability considerations. This integration enhances both employee accountability and organizational environmental performance.

Green Human Resource Planning:

Green HR planning focuses on forecasting the **workforce needs and skill requirements** necessary for implementing corporate environmental management initiatives (e.g., ISO 14001, cleaner production programs, responsible care initiatives). Leading companies plan for **specialized roles**, such as environmental auditors or sustainability consultants, and may outsource specific functions when needed. These practices ensure adequate human capital for achieving environmental objectives.

Green Recruitment:

Green recruitment aims to **attract candidates with environmental awareness and sustainable values**. Induction programs emphasize corporate environmental culture to ensure new hires align with green objectives.

Companies such as **Google and Timberland** have successfully implemented eco-friendly recruitment strategies, which not only enhance their sustainability reputation but also help in attracting creative and innovative talent (Wehrmeyer, 1996; Renwick et al., 2013).

Green Selection:

In the selection phase, organizations include **environmental criteria** in their evaluation process. Candidates may be assessed on their environmental awareness, commitment to sustainability, and past eco-initiatives. Environmental-related questions are often incorporated into interviews, enabling companies to select employees who support corporate green goals.

Green Training and Development:

Green training programs integrate **environmental and social issues** into employee development at all organizational levels — from shop-floor staff to top management (Mandip, 2012).

Orientation sessions for new hires, regular workshops, and awareness campaigns help employees adapt to changing sustainability requirements. For example, **The Land Rover Group** provides regular briefings, newsletters, and visual displays outlining environmental policies and encourages employees to propose innovative eco-friendly ideas.

Green Performance Management:

Green performance management aligns employee evaluations with **environmental objectives**. Performance standards may include metrics such as waste reduction, energy efficiency, and compliance with sustainability guidelines (Jabbour & Santos, 2008). Companies like **Tata Group** have implemented corporate-wide environmental performance standards, incorporating audits and reporting systems to track progress.

Green Reward Management:

Reward systems, both **financial** (bonuses, incentives) and **non-financial** (recognitions, awards), motivate employees to contribute to environmental initiatives (Teixeira et al., 2013). **Dow Chemical**, for instance, rewards employees for innovative waste-reduction ideas, fostering a culture of sustainability and continuous improvement.

Green Employee Discipline Management:

Some companies establish **disciplinary policies** to enforce compliance with environmental standards. Clear rules and penalties (e.g., warnings, fines, suspension) are applied to ensure adherence to environmental policies (Wehrmeyer, 1996). Green discipline management encourages self-regulation and reinforces environmentally responsible behavior among employees, ensuring alignment with organizational sustainability strategies.

21.3 Recommendations of The Study:

Green HRM practices not only improve employee morale but also contribute to **environmental conservation**, benefiting both the organization and its workforce. Some key advantages of adopting Green HRM include:

- **Green Buildings:** Organizations are increasingly recognizing the role of green buildings in addressing environmental concerns. Such buildings are energy-efficient, cost-effective, and serve as sustainable workplaces.
- **Paperless Offices:** Digital workflows reduce paper usage, thereby minimizing waste and operational costs while improving efficiency.
- **Energy Conservation Initiatives:** Many organizations implement energy-saving measures, such as LED lighting, motion sensors, and energy-efficient equipment, to reduce their carbon footprint.
- **Recycling Programs:** Recycling initiatives help organizations manage waste more effectively and encourage employees to participate in sustainable practices.
- **Attracting Talent:** Environmentally friendly practices enhance employer branding, attracting creative and innovative employees who value sustainability.
- **Awareness and Resource Utilization:** Green HRM fosters awareness among employees about responsible use of natural resources, ensuring sustainability for future generations.
- **Government Incentives:** Central and state governments often provide subsidies, tax incentives, and rebates to organizations adopting eco-friendly initiatives, further encouraging green practices.

21.4 Conclusion:

This study highlights how Green HRM can influence employee behavior and organizational practices toward achieving environmental sustainability. GHRM encompasses initiatives across the HR lifecycle — including recruitment, onboarding, training, performance appraisal, and rewards — all aimed at reducing the organization's ecological footprint. Adopting Green HRM strategies not only enhances employee attitudes and engagement but also strengthens corporate branding and image. Furthermore, it enables organizations to contribute toward pollution control, waste management, and the production of eco-friendly goods and services.

While conceptual frameworks and theoretical benefits of Green HRM are evident, **future research must empirically examine its outcomes** across manufacturing and service sectors. The proposed process model can guide practitioners in integrating sustainable practices into HR functions and inspire future researchers to address gaps in existing literature.

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