



An Overview of the Challenging Role of Green Human Resource Management towards Sustainability

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Abstract. In the contemporary era of globalization and innovations, protection of our environment and preservation of natural resources for the future generations has become a crucial aspect, and thus, raises a call for Sustainability. This, in turn has paved a route to the emergence of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) in order to incorporate green culture within the organization in order to balance environmental risks and societal needs. The research studied GHRM and its pivotal role in promoting green or sustainable practices, thereby achieving sustainability. Green HRM refers to eco-friendly practices that helps organizations comply with the environmental regulations and achieve its sustainability goals. GHRM is an emerging and growing concept and therefore, needs to be researched extensively, to explore the benefits associated with the implementation of these practices. Several research papers have been reviewed from various databases, and the existing literature has been explored in depth to understand its growing importance and challenges. The research paper highlights the major dimensions of Green HRM practices and the significant role, they play in the organization towards fulfilling societal and environmental goals and thus, gaining a competitive edge in the industry. The paper also focuses on the emerging trends of green HRM initiatives in India. There has been limited research on GHRM, especially among developing nations, and thus, provides more scope for research. Certain suggestions have been added to the existing knowledge base. The paper would be helpful to organizations to understand GHRM practices in depth, and implement GHRM practices in future, as it highlights the benefits of these practices.

Keywords: Green Human Resource Management, GHRM, environment, sustainable practices, organization, sustainability.

1. Introduction

Around the world, there has been utmost focus on the environmental concerns and preservation of natural environment in the recent years, owing to globalization and industrialization. There have been a lot of concerns like climate change, pollution, depletion of ozone layer and so on, especially in the developing countries. And

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therefore, it is necessary that organizations should be oriented to become socially responsible and devise on methods to protect the environment and thus leading to adoption of green practices, collectively called Green Human Management (GHRM). Also, Green HRM reintegrates basic concepts of HRM, its functions and activities in an environmental perspective in order to achieve sustainability. Organizations should resort to sustainable practices, thus providing more focus on the environmental concerns, besides just making profits. Proper training could be provided to the employees on the environmental awareness, so that they can be moulded into responsible citizen and collectively work towards building a greener world. Green HRM refers to the inclusion of environmental aspect with the core functions of HRM (Renwick, Redman and Maguire, 2013). These are practices which promote green initiatives by increasing employee awareness and commitment to environmental issues. Therefore, organizations need to start to incorporate green HRM practices in a few dimensions of HRM functions in order to look forward into the environmental concerns and take corrective measures in terms of environment management, promote green culture and contribute to the environmental sustainability and transformation of the society. Green HRM includes social and economic well-being of the business and its employees in a broader sense, in addition to environmental sensitivity. In a nutshell, GHRM refers to “inculcate environmental awareness” and “promote sustainable practices within the business.” The research attempts to answer the below research questions.

- Are there any dimensions or core functions in Green HRM?
- Are there any Green initiatives in HR undertaken by Indian organizations?
- What are the barriers faced in adopting Green HRM practices and are there any benefits associated with it?

1.1 Review of Literature

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) is an emerging field and it is at nascent level in the developing nations. The studies in this domain are limited compared to other fields, yet it has been taken up nowadays by researchers, academicians because of its growing importance towards sustainability. Going Green concept has become one of the most trending phases among the public and therefore, businesses have started to adapt to the concept.

Ibraheem A. M. and Aburahma (2020) highlighted the necessity of including environment management goals and formulating green goals and objectives to the university performance evaluation model. Green employee empowerment and individual green values are important factors that influence the relationship between GHRM and employees' organizational citizenship behaviour toward environment OCBE, and it empirically analyses these proposed relationships in a developing country context, Pakistan. (Zahid Hameed, et al., 2020). This study emphasized on the importance of adoption of GHRM practices towards sustainability especially in developed nations. GHRM develops employee awareness on environmental concerns by incorporating green initiatives into existing HRM policies and plans (Irani, F. et al., 2022). Through Green HRM, green training can be provided to the employees and create environmental awareness, so that it would help them in

recognizing the environmental concerns in depth and take part in Green Innovation practices (GIC) at the workplace (Karatepe, T. et al., 2022). According to Iqbal, S. et al., 2021, employees who have excellent environment knowledge would be able to suggest innovative ideas and solutions to the environmental concerns, thus striking a balance between work and environment. Reshma Dingra & Padmavathy (2019) suggested green initiatives in Human Resource practices for minimization of environmental pollution. Green initiatives or sustainable practices need to be incorporated in all dimensions of HR functions, such as hiring, training, rewards and compensation to foster a sustainability culture (Ali, M.C. et al., 2020). In the contemporary era of growing impact of environmental crisis, organizations have started to realize their social, economic and ecological perspective, which in turn, has led to realization of sustainability concept and promotion of sustainable goals (Chams, N. & García-Blandón, J., 2019). Sustainable practices in HR domain contribute towards achievement of environmental goals of an organization (Sami et al., 2024). Green culture within an organization leads the employees to green behaviour inside and outside the workplace, resulting in well-being, societal betterment and realization of sustainability goals. It also promotes environmental performance (Gupta, H., 2018; Zhans, S., et al., 2019). Sustainable Development needs to be balanced among the short term and long term perspectives of a firm and a striking balance need to be maintained among the firm's social, environmental and economic needs to achieve sustainability (Nathan, M. L., 2018). The three pillars of sustainability revolves around 3 P's (People, Planet and Profit), also mentioned as Triple Bottom Line concept (Jamal, T. et al., 2021) Existing literature confirms that aligning GHRM strategies along with the sustainability concept provide an aid in achieving the short term financial objectives and lead to a better economic performance (Wagner, M., 2013; Longoni, A. et al., 2018)

Green initiatives need to be incorporated in all core functions of Human Resource Management for achievement towards Sustainability. Green hiring, also known as "Green Recruitment" is an important aspect or dimension in GHRM as it emphasises on environmental knowledge and creation of a green workforce, which builds the foundation towards sustainability and enhance the employee's organizational commitment (Danilwan, Y. et al., 2020) It simply refers to addition of environment perspective in the hiring process. Green training teaches the employees on energy conservation measures, water conservation methods and provide in depth knowledge of optimum utilization of natural resources of the environment and create a sense of responsibility as a good citizen. (Pinzone, M. et al., 2019; Joshi, G. & Dhar, R.L., 2020). Green training leads to green involvement of employees in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and work towards the realization of environmental sustainability. As a result, Green involvement promotes green creativity among the employees according to Pinzone, M., et al., 2019. Green compensation and rewards should be linked with environmental behaviour so that it will motivate and empower employees to achieve green goals. Monetary and non-monetary recognitions promotes green behaviour leading to realization of organization's sustainability goals. (Merriman, K.K. & Sen, S., 2012)

There are numerous benefits associated with adoption of Green HRM practices. Mwita, Kelvin. M., 2019 highlights numerous advantages of adopting Green Human Management practices and as well, contributes to a better understanding of GHRM and its concepts. The relationship between Green HRM and Environmental performance of the firm had been examined in a study and the results confirmed that the green human resource practices contributed towards the firm's sustainability. (Aggarwal, P. and Agarwala, T., 2022) Similarly, Esen, E., & Ozsozgun Caliskan, A., 2019 studied the effect of Green Human Resource Management practices on Environmental Sustainability through making theoretical suggestions. On the whole, GHRM is an essential aspect that needs to be implemented toward analysing the sustainability goals of an organization. It is a popular and emerging concept and it has been interpreted with different meanings across the globe (Amrutha V.N & Geetha S.N., 2020).

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of the study have been framed from the research questions. It is mentioned below:

- i. To determine the major dimensions of Green HRM.
- ii. To emphasize on the prominent GHRM initiatives and sustainable practices undertaken by organizations in India.
- iii. To highlight the benefits of Green HRM practices.
- iv. To study the challenges faced in adopting Green HRM practices.

2. Research Methodology

The research study utilized existing literature on Green HRM in order to systematically review the research papers and present the concepts clearly. Secondary data had been sourced from databases such as Google scholar, Semantic scholar, Scopus indexed online research papers, various journals, manuscripts, websites, published papers, magazines and other online sources available. The secondary data had been examined clearly to understand the existing literature on Green HRM and provide a summarized overview of GHRM practices and as well, the Green Initiatives in HRM field adopted by Indian organizations. The research papers have been searched and scrutinized using keywords pertaining to "Green HRM", "Sustainability in HR", GHRM and Sustainability". Relevant data and findings for the research questions have been extracted and reviewed carefully and presented in meaningful way.

3. Overview of Green HRM and Sustainability

The term Green HRM was introduced by Wehrmeyer in 1996. According to Opatha (2013), Green HRM refers to a set of policies, practices and procedures that leads to greening of the organization, with respect to the employees and accounts for the benefit of individual, society, environment and the business. (p. 28).

There had been quite some studies undertaken on Green HRM in Indian context and yet the scope of research is wider as the organizations have not implemented GRM initiatives at all levels. More emphasis needs to be laid on the importance of Green initiatives by researchers as “Going green” is one of the probable solutions to the environmental crisis in developing nations.

Sustainability refers to the optimal use of resources preserving for the need of future generations. Sustainability in business refers to responsible operation of organizations, without causing any harmful impacts on the environment, society and the economy thereby, maintaining a balance. Green Human resource management emphasizes on sustainability.

The concept of sustainability revolves around three major pillars, namely Social, Economic and Environmental sustainability.

3.1 Dimensions of Green HRM practices

Green HRM refers to the incorporation of eco-friendly practices in the core functional aspects of Human Resource Management such as procurement, selection, performance management, rewards, training and development, utilization of human resources in the right manner such that green culture is cultivated within the system. (Jabbour, Santos & Nagano, 2010).

The Green HRM dimensions are the environmental perspective of HRM functions (Arulrajah & Opatha, 2016). Various green dimensions have been highlighted in the previous studies. (Mousa, S. K. & Othman, M., 2020; Tang, G. et al., 2017). The figure (Fig. 1.) below exhibits the important green HRM dimensions as per the existing literature. The figure has been developed based on the existing literature.

Addition of environmental perspective

Core HRM functions		Functions / Dimensions of GHRM
Procurement and Selection	↓ →	Green procurement and Selection
Performance Management	→	Green Performance Management
Rewards and Compensation	→	Green Rewards and Compensation
Training and development	→	Green training and development
Job design	→	Green Job design
Employee Involvement	→	Green Employee Involvement

Fig. 1. Dimensions of GHRM

The major dimensions of GHRM are as follows:

Green procurement and Selection: Green Procurement or hiring refers to the hiring of candidates, those who have reasonable awareness level on the environment. Companies should favour to recruit employees, those of who would be willing to encourage eco-friendly behaviours in the system and as well contribute to lower energy costs and increased productivity. This would lead to sustainability within the businesses with respect to social, economic and environmental aspects. In this manner, enterprises could pro-actively develop solutions to certain environmental concerns like reducing pollution through relying on solar energy, rather than energy from fossil fuels and resulting in reduced carbon emissions. Green selection implies the use of websites and social platforms for conducting virtual interviews or tests for selecting the potential candidates rather than conducting direct walk-ins, which would result in reduced carbon footprints in the environment.

Green Performance Management: Performance appraisal would be based on the environmental responsibilities of the individual and the organization as a whole. The individual would be appraised according to their sustainable green outcomes and behaviour and business targets. Based on the green appraisal, rewards are established. In the performance management systems, key performance indicators are linked to the green behaviour, wherein an employee who actively engages in green initiatives within the firm is rewarded.

Green Rewards and Compensation: Socially responsible employees are recognized for maintaining eco-friendly behaviours within the firm and are rewarded with monetary or non-monetary rewards. Bonus and incentives are also provided for those who have effectively been involved in reducing additional costs or energy consumption on any projects or endeavours and thereby increasing productivity and building up a green corporate image among the public. These practices ace motivation among the employees to engage in pro-environmental behaviours within and outside the organization, grooming them into more responsible citizen of the country.

Green training and development: Green training focuses on upbringing of employees with environmental awareness and inculcating a sense of responsibility towards the environment. Green development focuses on the development of an employee into a responsible citizen through environmental training, which would in turn reduce the environmental concerns of climate change and pollution in the long run and would pave a pathway to a sustainable country. Green training helps employee fosters skillsets of optimum utilization of resources and no wastage, and thereby understanding the concept of sustainability, preserving the natural resources to future generations.

Green Job design: Green job design is essential for organizations seeking to reduce their carbon footprint, elevate sustainability performance, and contribute to a more sustainable future. Organizations could create a more environmentally conscious workforce and drive positively towards sustainability by integrating environmental considerations into job roles and responsibilities.

Green Employee Involvement: Green Involvement refers to active engagement of employees in eco-friendly practices, exhibiting green behaviour, sustainability projects such as energy saving measures, effective waste management and cleanliness within and outside the organization. Companies encourage their employees to involve in decision making process regarding achievement of environmental goals of the company. Also, they are encouraged to take part in community project outside the organization such as beach clean ups, awareness programs of environmental issues and social campaigns. Green involvement also includes contribution or suggestions of innovative ideas by the employees towards environmental concerns. Green involvement fosters a green culture and work towards the sustainability goals of the company, thus creating a sense of higher morale and satisfaction for the employees.

The dimensions mentioned above are a broad classification of the green functions of HRM. Indian organizations are just emerging with the green initiatives in one or two dimensions of HRM. In the future years, Green HRM would be implemented in all the dimensions in the companies.

3.2 Green HRM initiatives and Sustainable practices in India

Certain organizations have incorporated Green HRM practices in few levels, although not in all dimensions of HRM. The complete implementation would require a lot of

effort and full willingness of the management, stakeholders and employees to incorporate green policies at all levels of HRM functions.

Acceptance to change the current status quo is also required. The Green HR initiatives and sustainable practices are stated below:

Green Recruitment and training: Certain hotels and resorts hire employees based on their environmental knowledge and green behaviour in certain departments in order to match the sustainable practices of hotels like effective waste management, water saving techniques and recycling of water for watering the garden plants in the resorts and so on. The housekeeping department specially hires staff and managers with sufficient green knowledge so that it does not affect adversely. Green training is provided to the staff as well.

Carbon footprint reduction and reduced carbon emissions: Certain companies provide flexible work timings, incorporating work from home relaxations, especially certain outsourcing and IT companies. This results in the carbon footprint reduction. The use of solar panels and renewable sources of energy reduces carbon emissions instead of energy consumption from combustion of fossil fuels.

Energy and Water conservation measures: The HR departments emphasize on saving electricity by training employees to switch off the light during morning time and other energy saving techniques and as well recognize and reward the employees based on their green behaviour in each department. Water conservation techniques are being adopted by large scale companies in order to overcome water shortages.

Green Building and Infrastructure: Nowadays, certain hotels or resorts rely on green construction using recycled construction materials, local resources and technology, natural energy, and harvested water. Green hotel development is also becoming popular in India, with several properties being certified by “Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, LEED”, “Indian Green Building Council, IGBC”, “Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment, GRIHA”, “Energy Conservation Building Board, ECBC” and other organizations. E.g.: ITC Hotels, IHG hotels, Marriott, etc.

Waste Management: Segregation of garbage and installation of STP are the methods used by companies for efficient waste management and dispose waste responsibly through latest technology. The Orchid at Mumbai is a zero garbage hotel (Eco-friendly five star hotel)

Environmental Reporting and Transparency: Certain hotels would publish environmental performance data to communicate their efforts and progress in adopting green practices to guests, employees, and stakeholders. E.g.: Taj Group launched sustainability programme “Paathya” and commits by 2030, to eliminate use of single use plastics and meet water requirements through reduce, recycle and reuse.

Most high rated hotels upload their annual reports along with their Sustainability reports in their websites.

Employee Wellness Programs with an environmental Focus: Certain companies in IT hubs and other sectors conduct employee wellness programs that include outdoor activities or yoga sessions in natural surroundings, promoting mental health and physical well-being of employees. E.g.: In Trivandrum Infopark, Kerala, few companies conduct marathons and wellness programmes.

Apart from the above sustainable green practices there are some other initiatives like paperless office, car-pooling, teleconferencing and so on. (Peerzadah, S. A., Mufti, S., & Nazir, N. A., 2018; M. Mampra, 2013)

3.3 Benefits of Green HRM practices

The organizations that have been incorporated Green HRM practices have quite a number of benefits. (Mehta, Kathak, et al., 2015; B. Nalini et al., 2019) The major benefits of Green HRM have been stated below:

- *Enhanced brand image among the public:* The organization would always have a positive image among the public as they showcase sustainable practices. The employees are more likely to get motivated as they would inculcate a good sense of morale. Therefore it will help in retention of employees and job satisfaction.
- *Increased cost savings and higher productivity:* Responsible use of natural resources, energy efficiency and other sustainable practices would definitely help in higher productivity and minimum wastages.
- *Compliance with governmental regulations and standards:* GHRM leads to sustainable practices within the society and therefore, there would not be any compliance issues.
- *Gaining a competitive edge in the industry:* The employees are empowered to develop innovative solutions to environmental challenges and thus it leads the organization to gain a competitive edge in the industry.
- *Sustainable business:* Organizations would sustain for a longer period in the market, thus enhancing the longevity of business. The firm would operate in a more responsible manner without disrupting the environment and work towards achieving sustainability.

The figure below illustrates the above stated benefits (Fig. 2.).



Fig. 2. Benefits of Green HRM

Overall, these practices enumerate lots of benefits to the organization and helps in realization of individual, societal, organizational and environmental goals.

3.4 Challenges faced in adopting GHRM practices

Although, there are a lot of benefits to the organization, at the same time there are quite a few challenges for practicing sustainable practices for some of the organizations. Some of the challenges in implementing sustainable practices are initial costs involved in implementing the green practices, such as switching to renewable power generation, waste management systems, etc., which in turn requires higher upfront costs for the start-ups, small scale and medium scale industries in a developing nation like India (Sujaya, H. et al. (2019); Ahmed E. Sobaih (2019). The major challenges are discussed below:

- Lack of Management & stakeholder support to adopt sustainable practices: Cultural and social factors of employees and resistance to change can also be hindering to sustainable practices.
- Ambiguous regulatory frameworks and lack of consistent Government support could be challenging for youth firms or start-ups to implement green practices within the firm. Although Governments are providing subsidies,

financial support and other resources, the access to the subsidies and resources is limited.

- Lack of awareness and understanding of sustainability concepts among the employees and management becomes a challenge, as the firm would not be able to achieve the benefits as expected and rather, it would bear additional business or financial risks.
- High investments required during the initial phase of implementing GHRM and a longer wait period to achieving considerable returns.

Due to the above mentioned challenges, it could not be feasible for certain organizations to implement green systems, yet collaborative efforts from the government, stakeholders and other Corporate Social Responsible (CSR) bodies could transform these challenges and pay way to greener businesses in India.

4. Results

The research study highlighted the Green HRM concept in an organized manner that it could be easily read and comprehended.

4.1 Findings and Suggestions

The paper provides an insight into the major Green HRM initiatives and Sustainable business practices undertaken in India. Human Resource Management plays a key role in any organization in realization of the goals of employee, organization and the environment, with an integrated approach. The study confirms that the integrated approach of Green HRM at all levels of an organization could lead to Sustainable Development or Sustainability as per the existing literature. (Khan, M.H., 2021). The study thoroughly examined the previous literature available on Green HRM and has highlighted the importance and role of Green HRM in today's context in a meaningful way. The major green dimensions of HRM have been highlighted as well. The research paper would serve as a guideline for understanding the Green HRM concept and organizations could be beneficial to adopt the green HRM practices. The findings confirm that GHRM increases employee morale and inculcate green behaviour. Employees are considered as an asset for organizations. Green behaviour can be incorporated in the employees through GHRM, which would eventually help the organizations to achieve their sustainability goals.

Although this area has been researched before, there are limited studies in Indian context. And therefore, there is a wide scope of research. A few suggestions need to be noted as a part of this study. The green HRM initiatives need to be executed on higher levels within the organizations, which have already adopted green practices. Proper training should be given to the employees on sustainable practices and its importance. Other firms could start implementing green HRM practices on small levels initially. Although adoption of these practices is exclusively beneficial, there are challenges that involve management support, resistance to change, costs and employee mind-set. Developing nations, for instance, India has been encouraging the "Going Green" concept and therefore firms could take the help of respective

government bodies for short term or long term funds for initiating green practices. The Human Resource departments of every organization could definitely transform the world by going green. This paper would be of great importance to the stakeholders, top management heads and managers to understand the concept GHRM in depth and would help in adopting green practices in future to attain sustainability goals according to the nature of the organization.

4.2 Conclusion

Human Resource Management plays a vital role in every organization and therefore, is considered as the backbone of the organization. In this modern era of innovations, organizations need to focus more on the societal and environmental concerns in their surroundings. Environmental concerns should never be ignored or taken for granted. When the organizations perform responsibly, it contributes to the success of a country. Going green is one of the best solutions in order to overcome the challenges of pollution, climate changes, depletion of natural resources, environmental degradation and so on. Employees are an asset of the organization. Once the employees are given proper green training through adoption of green HR practices, then it could lead to a green culture not only within the organization but also outside the organization, i.e. in the society, which would lead to sustainable development.

According to the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit, 17 Sustainable Development Goals have been laid down (SGD) and India has committed to achieve the SGD's by 2030. (Kono, N., 2014). Achievement of sustainable development goals is a major responsibility, especially among the developing nations which suffers more environmental concerns and Green Human Resource Management practices could definitely help in striving towards sustainability. Overall, GHRM is one of the prominent solutions to reduce environmental crisis.

4.3 Research Limitations

The research study has only reviewed research papers from search databases Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar and Scopus online journals. As Green HRM is in an initial phase in developing nations, there are only a few empirical studies. Hence the scope of research is open to more empirical studies to understand the major factors or reasons to implement Green HRM practices effectively. Also, perception studies has more scope in developing nations to understand on how to effectively implement green practices in such a manner, that would lead to sustainability and as well realization of Sustainable development goals (SDGs), 2030 agenda.

4.4 Research Implications

Theoretical Implications

The study has provided a comprehensive overview of the Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) in a systematic manner. The study reviewed existing literature systematically and has been presented in an organized way. The figure on Green dimensions of GHRM has been developed by the author

and created based on insights and understanding from previous studies (Fig. 1.). Also, benefits of Green HRM have been provided in a nutshell in a figure. (Fig. 2.)

Practical Implications

The paper can easily be apprehended by the Management heads and managers of organizations and it would serve as a guideline to understand the concept and get a clearer view of the existing scenario. The study has provided GHRM concepts in a nutshell that can be easily read by managers such that it would be useful for organizations to adopt GHRM practices in future. The challenges and the benefits have been presented along with suggestions which make it useful for organizations.

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