

Green Human Resource Management: A Theoretical Overview

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Abstract: *The business environment is transforming itself from a traditional financial perspective to a competency based, strategic perspective. Green issues have already been popular in environmental and social aspects of present corporate world. Corporate green HR focuses on high level of technical and managerial competencies for employees as the firms wants to develop innovative environmental initiatives and functions that have tremendous managerial implications. In general, green HR particularly deals with the HR activities with are environment friendly and promote the sustainability of resources that an organization may have. However, there is a substantial gap exists in human resource management (HRM) literatures on environmental aspects of human resources. There is still a growing need for formulating green HRM strategies, including literature, processes, models and examining their implications on overall firm performance. Firms are also under immense pressure from different stakeholders for integrating green HR policies and strategies into overall firm strategy. The general purpose of this study is to discuss the concept of green HRM practice from a theoretical point of view and to study the strategic implementation of it on various traditional HR activities. The paper will hopefully create an interest for the academicians and tentative researchers who wish to study the basic understanding of green HRM practices in a literature perspective.*

Keywords: *Human Resource Management, Green HRM Practices, Firms, HR Strategy, HR Practices & Policies.*

I. Introduction

For the long term sustainability and development, firms should focus not only on financial performance, but also actively consider all social and environmental aspects which might be affected and controlled by them [1]. Environment can create threats and opportunities for a business, hence must be actively considered by the decision makers. The concept of green management for sustainable development seeks to explain the need of balance between industrial growth for wealth creation as well as protecting the natural environment so that the future generations may thrive [2]. However, the issue of how a firm or the whole society can achieve sustainability through green management is still in center of debate and vague which opens the window of further research on how firms can create a sustainable competitiveness green management. Implementation of corporate green management initiatives requires a high level of technical and managerial skills among employees to develop innovation-focused environmental initiatives and programs that have a significant impact on the sustainable competitive advantage of firms [3]. In this respect, the implementation of rigorous recruitment and selection of employees, performance based appraisal system, the introduction of training programs aimed at raising the employees' environmental consciousness and course materials addressed to the development of new technical and managerial competencies have a basic importance for fostering environmental innovations [4].

Even after a bunch of research on green marketing [5], accounting [6] and management [7], gaps are still evident in Human Resource Management (HRM) literatures on the HR aspects of environmental management, i.e. green HRM [8]. There is an ever growing need for the integration of environmental management into the broader human resource management (HRM) practices, popularly known as Green HRM initiatives. Green HRM is the use of HRM policies and practices for supporting the sustainable use of resources within the organizations that create awareness and commitments on the issues of environmental sustainability [1], [8].

II. The Concept of Green HRM

Green HRM is a relatively new agenda in management and HRM literatures. The concept of green HRM typically includes using less possible paperwork at all HR functions like recruitment & selection, training, performance review etc. to create a sustainable, environment friendly and competitive advantage through employee engagement. It is an emerging issue in management which might have substantial impact on broader corporate and strategic issues including HR practices and policies. Green HRM consists of all activities aimed at helping an organization carry out its agenda for environmental management to enable it reduce its carbon emission and earn carbon credits, as well as in areas concerning on boarding acquisition of manpower, their

induction, performance management, training & development, compensation & reward management [9]. Firms can gain substantial achievement on the engagement, commitment, morale, quality of work life and retention through fair and equitable green human resource management.

III. Review of Literatures on Green Management and Green HRM

The two important achievements through the introduction of green initiatives are seen to be improvements in environmental and worker health and safety; and the development of more knowledgeable workforce and supervisors [10]. The scope of green HRM practices is not only limited to just implementing environmental initiatives but also formulate an implement policies and practices that encourage sustainable people management. HR functions have been claimed as the driver of organizations green culture by aligning its practices and policies with sustainable objectives reflecting an eco-focus [11], [12]. Renwick [13] explained that green HRM involves an integration of organization's environmental management objectives to the HR processes of recruitment & selection, training & development, performance management, evaluation and reward.

Traditionally, mere sound financial performance of the firms were expected to guarantee corporate success by companies and its shareholders which is no longer valid; economic and financial outcomes need to be accompanied by minimization of ecological footprints and increased attention to social and environmental aspects [14]. Therefore, the new strategic issue, corporate environmentalism or green management emerged in 1990s and became a popular slogan internationally in 2000s [15]. Green management is defined as the process whereby companies manage the environment by developing environmental management strategies [15] in which companies need to balance between industrial growth and safeguarding the natural environment so that future generation may thrive [2]. This concept becomes a strategic dominant issue for businesses, especially multinational enterprises operating their business globally [16]. In summary, green management refers to the management of corporate interaction with, and impact upon, the environment [17], and it has gone beyond regulatory compliance and needs to include conceptual tools such as pollution prevention, product stewardship and corporate social responsibility [18], [19] and [20]. Business firms play a vital role in the issues of environmental management since they are part of our society and cannot be isolated from the environment, and in fact, they contribute most of the carbon footprints in the past [21]. Application of innovative technology could alleviate the environmental deterioration by developing, for example, the biotech products and by searching for alternative energy to reduce the use of finite natural resources. Thus, business should put more effort into the research on innovative technology to minimize the impacts of environmental destruction by creating products that are nontoxic and cause less pollution to environment [21], [22].

HR plays a vital role in pursuit of green business practices such as contribution in saving the nature, recruiting, training and development of a green workforce and enforcement of environment friendly green practices and amendments in environment unfriendly behaviors [1]. Application of new technology could improve the environmental decline by developing, the biotech products and by searching for alternative energy to reduce the use of finite natural resources [1]. Environment friendly HR processes gives better efficiency, minimized costs and manage to develop and nurture an environment of engaged employees helping organization to operate in an environment friendly and sustainable manner [1].

The optimum effectiveness and efficiency of a firm do not depend on its financial resources or using the latest technology, rather it is determined by the extent to which way it is using its dedicated, motivated and efficient employees [23]. Many researchers and academicians, especially in the area of HRM, argued that the effectiveness and efficiency of any management innovation and strategic tools depend on the availability and ability of their human resources employed in the strategic manners [24], [25]. HRM is defined as "a set of distinct but interrelated activities, functions, and process that are directed at attracting, developing, and maintaining (or disposing of) a firm's human resources" [26]. Organization generally organizes HR practices into systems that are consistent with their culture and business strategy [24]. Many researchers agreed that HRM is the most effective tools which contribute to the creation of human capital, and in turn, contributes to organizational performance and competitive advantage [24], [25]. Currently, many corporations are implementing a proactive, strategic tool known as an environmental management system (EMS) to gain competitive advantage [2]. This system provides a structure that allows management of the firms the ability to better control the firm's environmental impacts [27], [28]. An EMS includes commitment and policy, planning, implementation, measurement and evaluation, review and improvement [29]. Callenbach [3] argued that in order to carry out green management, employee must be inspired, empowered and environmentally aware of greening to be successful. On the other hand, to effectively implement green management initiatives and fostering environmental innovations, corporations require a high level of technical and management skills [3], [4]. Hence, this paper argues that to effectively implement green management initiatives through the implementation of EMS requires strategic implementation of HR systems that fit with organization's culture and long-term goals.

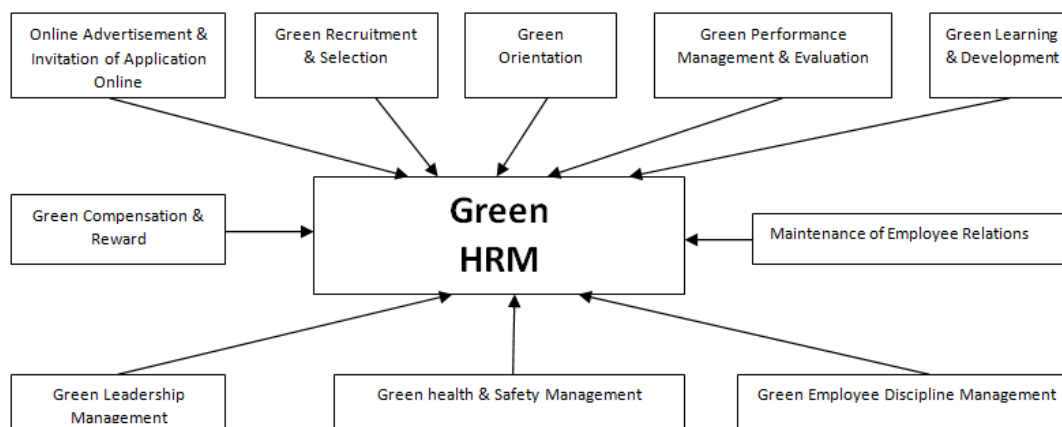


Figure-1: Green Human Resource Management Process

IV. Why Firms Should Adopt Green HRM Practices?

Even though initially it may be difficult to initiate and implement the green HRM practices at the first level, it can fulfill the prime objectives of an organization such as cost control, ensuring corporate social responsibility, talent acquisition and gaining competitive advantage over the rivals through environment consciousness and preservation of natural and ethical values. The usual reasons why a firm should adopt green HRM practices are noted down below:

4.1 Preservation of natural environment: The elements of the environment which are not created by human beings are called the elements of natural environment like trees, forests, rivers, animals etc. Green HRM practices such as online advertising and recruitment which uses less paper, creating less carbon emission on the office space, training through electronic sources to reduce paper waste can keep the environment from loss or negatively affected.

4.2 Ensure healthy working environment and raise employee morale: Making the corporate space green with trees & plants, forbidding smoking on the office premises, using less paperwork (which makes an employee hectic), providing natural fruits & vegetables on HR meetings- all these can create a healthy and habitable working environment which in turn, can raise the speed and morale of the workers.

4.3 Gain competitive advantage through ensuring corporate social responsibility (CSR): Corporate social responsibility is now-a-days a part of company's core responsibilities which no company can ignore. Therefore, a firm can gain competitive advantage over its rivals by ensuring green management practices in a well-performed manner.

4.4 Save cost: Creating a sound working environment can reduce employee fatigue, absenteeism and turnover. The result is reduced cost. Again using less paper and disseminating and recording the information via online can reduce wastage and cost.

4.5 Increase company image: It is obvious that a company which has green management/HRM practices will have a higher image than a company which has not.

4.6 Reduce intervention from the government and other law enforcing agencies: Adoption of proper green management/HRM practices can reduce the chance of intervention by the central/local govt. and other law enforcing agencies.

4.7 Develop eco-friendliness and environmental learning among the employees: Adoption of green HRM practices make the employees environment conscious and make them eco-friendly which makes them a good corporate citizen in environmental perspective.

4.8 Stimulate innovation and growth: Green HRM practices encourages new innovative ideas and practices that facilitates growth in quality and enhancement of methods and processes.

4.9 Facilitate learning and shape behavior: Such practices help to facilitate green/environmental consciousness among the employees and refine or shape their behaviors to develop eco-friendly attitudes in their personal and work lives.

4.10 Maximize use of resources and reduce waste: Green HRM practices can help a firm to maximize its natural resources through the use of recycled products and reduce waste to an optimum level.

V. Challenges of Green HRM

No policies and practices are free of challenges. On the other side of the story of benefits, there are also a few challenges of using the practice in an organization. The challenges are mentioned below:

- a) There are some employees in every organization who are not equally motivated to adopt green HRM practices.
- b) Developing and maintaining a culture of green HRM is a lengthy and time consuming process.
- c) At the initial stage of implementation, it requires a high investment and may bring a low return.
- d) Recruiting and training employees about green HRM is a challenging job to do.
- e) It is very difficult to appraise the green performance of employees' behavior.
- f) It is difficult to transform employee attitude to green HRM from traditional HRM in a short period of time.
- g) A major challenge for HR professionals is to select and develop future green leaders is to create a green working structure, set up green working processes, providing green tools and creating expected green thinking for their employees.

VI. Strategic Implementation of Green HRM on General HRM Functions

As a new expansion of general HRM, Green HRM can be feed into usual HRM functions. Several functions involving regular HRM practices in which green HRM can be implemented could be the following in general.

6.1 Online advertisement and invitation of application via online: The unbelievable advancement of technology has made it easier for the firms to post their job advertisement to the online job sites and their own websites. Even it is now possible to submit the resume for a candidate online. This process is quick, efficient, easy and cheap. The candidates just need online access. Another advantage of online application is that the potential candidate can search and gather the information he/she needs from the company website which would not be possible otherwise.

6.2 Green recruitment and selection of candidates: The companies can pick the resumes/CVs of suitable candidates and download them. Later, they can print whenever needed. The selection tests can also be as much paperless as possible like behavioral observation, interview, presentation in which less paper is needed. Moreover, preferences could be given to the candidates who are more environment aware and friendly or who have strong motivation to keep the office and environment green or natural as it is.

6.3 Green orientation: The induction and socialization process can be designed in a way that facilitates the inclusion of new employees into the process of green consciousness. Orientation programs should uphold the organization's attitude for green issues like health and safety, green workplace, healthy and clean local area etc.

6.4 Green performance management and evaluation: Overall performance management system should be developed including green target in Key Performance Areas (KPA) and Key Performance Index (KPI). Green performance goals and green behavior indicators should be the key areas of performance appraisals at all levels. Examples of such goals might be to create awareness and achievement among the employees, encouraging the subordinates to facilitate green environment learning etc.

6.5 Green learning and development: Training, learning and development process should include programs, workshops, seminars, sessions and presentations that develop and help employees to acquire knowledge in green management skills. The training learning content should be developed to increase competencies and skills in environment management. Extensive online and web-based training modules and tools can be used for not only green management but also other functions as well. Issues like safety, energy efficiency, waste management, recycling can be the core points of green training. Training supervisors should use more on online course materials and case studies rather than printed handouts, books and brochures to reduce the use of paper.

6.6 Green compensation and reward: Compensation packages should include rewarding green skills and achievement. Special bonuses might be given to the employees for extra-ordinary effort to make the workplace clean, maintaining health and safety standards, using less paper and so on.

6.7 Maintenance of employee relations: The company can promote the “eco friendliness” to add value to company’s products and services with efficient utilization of existing financial, human and natural resources [1]. Employees should be motivated for involvement and participation in social and ecological initiatives to create a general healthy and workable office space that results in sustainable, competent, efficient and socially responsible employer-employee relationship.

6.8 Creation of a green leadership management: The company can assign a top level manager to can initiate and organize the green sustainability. He/she can include the green issues in business and corporate plans.

6.9 Green health and safety management: The green health and safety management is really beyond the scope of traditional health and safety management function of HRM. It not only includes the traditional health and safety management but also some more aspects of environmental management of an organization. That is why nowadays many organizations are redesigning post of “health and safety manager” as “health, safety and environmental manager”. This includes a wider job scope when compared with traditional post of health and safety manager in an organization. For example, it includes biodiversity protection and community support initiatives etc. that include local environment and people. The key role of green health and safety management is to ensure a green workplace for all. Green workplace is defined as a workplace that is environmentally sensitive, resource efficient and socially responsible [30]. At present there are companies where traditional health and safety function was extended to include environmental management/protection. These companies have continually endowed to create various environmental related initiatives to reduce employee stress and occupational disease caused by hazardous work environment [31].

6.10 Green employee discipline management: Wehrmeyer [32] stated explicitly that green discipline management is a pre-requisite in corporate environmental management. In ensuring green employee behavior in the workplace, organizations may need green discipline management practices to achieve the environmental management objectives and strategies of the organization. In this context, some companies have realized “discipline management” as a tool to self-regulate employees in environmental protection activities of the organization. These firms have developed a clear set of rules and regulations which imposes/regulates employees to be concerned with environmental protection in line with environmental policy of the organizations. In such companies, if an employee violates environmental rules and regulations, disciplinary actions (warning, fining, suspension, etc.) are taken against him/her [31].

VII. Conclusion

Based on the above literatures and reviews, it is quite easy to conclude that an with proper understanding and implementation of scope and depth of green HR practices, a firm can improve its social and organizational performance in a sustainable manner that will create some competitive advantages for them. It is just a matter of time when almost all the firms must adopt environment friendly practices for the betterment of the overall society and also, for the world. Therefore, firms should integrate the green issues and practices into the regular, day to day HRM activities and also; into the strategic HR decisions and corporate policies.

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