

## Green Human Resource Management Practices and Environment Sustainability: From Empirical Evidence

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### Abstract

Green human resource management, if well designed and implemented, is undeniably one of the avenues that is envisaged to contribute towards the actualization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This paper set out to interrogate the extant literature on Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) Practices and its nexus to environmental sustainability. One of the emerging issue within business communities is the campaign of going green (GG). GHRM is a drive which helps to create green workforce that can understand and appreciate green culture in businesses and institutions. It is paramount to note that human resource and their systems are the basic foundation of any business. It is a fact that human resource function in an organization is responsible for planning and executing those eco-friendly policies to create a green environment. The study was mainly a desktop, where a review and synthesis of the existing empirical literature, was undertaken. The main source of the data and information for purposes of this paper were largely relevant reports, journals and books. Past writings, indicate that there is a growing need for the integration of environmental management into Human Resource Management (HRM) practice. This article pursues an integrated view of the literature in Green HRM. It examines and interrogates the current empirical literature in the area of green human resource management with a view to pointing out and synthesizing the gray areas and suggesting way forward towards enriching knowledge and practice in the area of green human resource management. Finally, the paper suggests some key HR initiatives towards creating and nurturing GHRM practices and behavior for environmental sustainability. This article draws together the extant literature in this area in suggesting managerial implications and research direction in GHRM. Hence, the papers demystifies the debate and discussion on GHRM and suggests new fronts that requires research focus.

**Keywords:** *Going Green, Environment, Sustainability, Eco-friendly, GHRM*

### INTRODUCTION

#### Human Resource Management

According to Tiwari & Saxena (2012), human resource management practices refer to organizational activities directed at managing the pool of human resources and ensuring that the resources are employed towards the fulfillment of organizational goals. Effective HRM practices have the potential to create organizations that are more intelligent and flexible than their competitors through the use of policies and practices that focus on hiring, developing talented staff and synergizing their contribution within the resource bundle of the organization (Saeed, Afsar, Hafeez, Khan, Tahir & Afridi, 2019).

Human resource management practices are central to the improvement of the quality of services offered by organizations. Human resource management practices are important pillars in building and maintaining trust in employees for they shape the employment relationship between the employee and the employer (Tang, Chen, Jiang, Paille & Jia, 2018). They are aimed at improving the overall performance of employees within the organization, ultimately resulting in increased organizational performance.

Human resource management practices have changed dramatically during the last two decades owing to globalization, privatization or deregulation, competition and technological advancements. The highly turbulent environment has forced organizations to adopt new workplace practices that lead to sustained levels of high performance (Ray & Ray, 2011). As firms enter into a more dynamic world of international business, and as the globalization of world markets continues at a fast pace, human resource management issues appear to be gaining momentum (Namusonge, Gathungu, & Iravo, 2015).

When employees are managed effectively through consistent practices, they are able to act flexibly in pursuit of the organization excellence. Douglas, Tom and Stuart (2012) observe that worldwide, human resources have to be managed effectively if they are to generate value from other resources. In Nigeria, Oaya, Ogbu and Remilekun (2017) observe that recruitment and selection strategy in the manufacturing companies have an influence on organizational efficiency hence performance. Kianto, Sáenz & Aramburu (2017) argue that in the contemporary business world, human resource represents the most important resource and each organization strives to achieve a competitive advantage and improve organizational performance.

### **Green Human Resource Management**

In Green HRM, different human resources practices such as recruitment and selection, training, compensation and rewards, and performance appraisals are adapted to ensure their employees understand and promote green behavior (Douglas, Tom & Stuart, 2012). Green HRM aims to design, implement, improve, and maintain a green vision within every employee of the organization (Douglas, Tom & Stuart, 2012). It is the use of HRM policies to promote the sustainable use of resources within organizations and, more generally promotes the causes of environment sustainability (Ren; Tang; & Jackson, 2017). GHRM is directly responsible in creating green workforce that understands, appreciates, and practices green initiative and maintains its green objectives all throughout the HRM process of recruiting, hiring, training, compensating, developing, and advancing the firms human capital. It refers to the policies, practices, and systems that make employees of the organization green for the benefit of the individual, society, natural environment, and the business. Chemjor (2020) explains that green human resource management refers to using human resources management practices to reinforce environmental sustainable practices and increase employee's commitment on the issues of environmental sustainability and it embraces considering concerns and values of environmental management in applying human resources initiatives generating greater efficiencies and better environmental performance. Similarly Mampra (2013) defines green human resource management as the use of human resource management policies to encourage the sustainable use of resources within business enterprises and promote the cause of environmentalism, which further boosts up employee morale and satisfaction). This then affects the employee attitude towards the implementation of sustainable environment.

Green practices in human resource can take a wide range of forms, from communications methods, employee selection, employee training and reward among others (Behrend, Baker & Thompson, 2009). For example, green recruiting and hiring practices can be seen through hiring and recruiting more of a workforce that is aware of and personally more committed to green matters than the typical job candidate; green training and development practice through instilling awareness and values along the green theme by way of targeted training and development on everyday practices, specialized area of employee activity, efficiency in the use of company equipment, proper waste disposal, and recycling methods; and, green reward practice where employees are rewarded for their alignment with green company practices, and often times, the rewards themselves are additionally of some eco-friendly nature (Behrend, Baker & Thompson, 2009). Today players are looking for and embarking on more ways to sustain and be conscious of environmental issues affecting people, the community and the society at large. Green human resource management is one of these ways. Currently, the discussion on green human resource management not only includes awareness toward environmental affairs, but also stands for the social as well as economic well-being of both the organization and the employees within a broader prospect. Green human resource management if well designed and implemented is undeniably one of the avenues that is envisaged to contribute towards the actualization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### **Statement of the problem**

Human resource management is an important field of studies today. It is a recognized practice of high value for any business. Human resource management is explained as the efficient and effective utilization of employees in order to achieve organization's goals (Ren; Tang; & Jackson, 2017). It is about managing the people side of the business, putting in place and actualizing policies, procedures, rules, and systems that influence the behavior and productivity of employees of the organization (Opatha, 2009). In the human resource management there is a growing research attention and literature on green human resource management. However, Renwick, Redman and Maguire (2013); Jackson, Renwick, Jabbour and Camen (2011) note that the literature on green human resource management is not only diverse and piecemeal but also it does not have strong analytical and theoretical framework to underpin the valuable knowledge obtained by the scholars through a systematic research works in this field. Greening organizational operations and activities has become a talk of the day so much so that every organization could like to put in practice to ensure sustainability. Past writings indicate that there is a growing need for the integration of environmental management into Human Resource Management (HRM) research practice. This article pursues an integrated view of the literature in Green HRM. This article draws from the extant literature in this area in proposing a new process model and research agenda in Green HRM. Hence, this paper presents and interrogates the current GHRM literature and proposes way forward towards enriching knowledge and practice in the area of green human resource management for environmental sustainability.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This paper employed an H-Classics methodology. This is regarded as an objective approach to categorizing classic papers that takes in account the magnitude and history of citations in a given field of knowledge, providing useful information for developing lines of research (Katarzyna

Piwowar-Sulej, 2021). Therefore, H-Classic approach as utilized offers an objective method to identify core knowledge in green human resource management and environmental sustainability. This paper pursued a desktop research approach. Relevant empirical literature is reviewed and synthesized. Textbooks and journal articles were the main sources of the data and information for purposes of this paper.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Green job analysis and design**

Crosbie and Knight (1995), Revill, (2000) advocate for including environmental, social, personal, and technical requirements of the organizations in job descriptions and person (job) specifications. This assertion was supported by Beard and Rees, (2000) and Griffiths and Petrick (2001) who observed that teamwork and cross-functional teams can be used as job design techniques to successfully manage the environmental issues of the company. Renwick et al, 2013 noted that a number of environmental protection related tasks, duties and responsibilities should be incorporated in each job and put into effect. Opatha (2013) on his part suggests for the inclusion of environmental dimension as a duty in job description and inclusion of green competencies as a special component in job specification.

### **Green recruitment and environmental sustainability**

Wehrmeyer (1996) notes that general job descriptions can be used to specify a number of environmental aspects. For example, based on evidence from UK, environmental reporting roles and health and safety tasks, which staff are exposed to, harmful substances/potential emissions, and matching personal attributes to needed environmental competencies, buying-in specialist competencies via new hires or investing in training and induction for new recruits is seen to be needed to ensure employees understand and approach their corporate environmental culture in a serious way. Based on survey data in UK, Wehrmeyer (1996, Oates (1996) further argues that environmental issues have an impact on recruitment. According to them, survey data shows that high-achieving graduates judge the environmental performance and reputation of a company as a criterion for decision-making when applying for jobs. As reported by Clarke (2006), a survey by the British Carbon Trust shows over 75% of 1,018 employees considering working for a firm see it as important that a firm should have an active policy to reduce carbon emissions. A study by The U.K. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development shows that 49% of their respondents take environmental credentials into account when deciding whether to take a job or not, with firms like Boots viewing the 'green job candidate' as influencing thinking in this area (Brockett, 2006). Jabbar and Abid (2015) in their study of green Human resource practices and its impact on environmental performance noted that employees recruited on the basis of their environmental cognizance achieve higher grades of satisfaction when they are more involved in decisions and day to day operations.

### **Green Performance Appraisal and environmental sustainability**

There has been debate as to how to measure green performance through performance appraisals. Firms like Amoco in the United States (U.S.) has installed corporate-wide environmental performance standards (which cover on-site use, waste management, environmental audits, and the reduction of waste) to measure environmental performance standards, and developing green

information systems and audits (to gain useful data on managerial environmental performance), Union Carbide Corporation an American chemical corporation, use green audit programme that contains field audits which are seen as important, as they can give employees a mechanism by which they can raise any recurring problems, and gain information and feedback on past and future environmental performance of their firm (Milliman and Clair, 1996). Milliman and Clair argue that there is need for managers to be held accountable, so that they familiarize themselves with compliance issues. However, several of the existing PA systems in use in the U.S. seem limited to plant and division managers and executives only. TUSDAC (2005) proposes that one way in which PM systems can be successfully initiated in an organization is to develop performance indicators for each risk area in environmental awareness and education.

### **Green training and development and environmental sustainability**

There is debate and discussion on the who and how in terms of embracing employee training and development for purposes of environmental sustainability. Organizations are training teams of front-line employees to produce a waste analysis of their work areas. Such employees are seen as ideal staff to spot and reduce waste as they are closest to it, but they must be knowledgeable on how to collect the relevant data. Examples of best company practice in training and development in EM in the U.S. comes from Allied Signal Inc., who include a Total Waste Minimization (TWM) component into their training, whilst Nordstrom use education initiatives in general waste minimization (May and Flannery, 1995: 30, 34-35). Training seems to be one area where the role of HRM in environmental management has been recognized for some time (as job rotation provides a useful way to train Green executives or future Board members in EM, and is seen as a crucial part of successful environmental programmes (Wehrmeyer, 1996). North and Daig (1996) reports that in Adam Opel AG in Germany, environmental issues are integrated within the training programmes given with all new projects and processes, in the U.K. at General Electric Company (GEC), all of their companies are required to work out their own environmental targets individually. At GEC, such training incorporates the aspects of environmental legislation, the environmental management system (EMS) (for environmental managers) and issues like waste management, transport and air emissions, a discussion of treating waste and ground water, communications, awareness-raising and risk management.

According to Wehrmeyer and Vickerstaff (1996), A number of steps may be used to establish an environmental training system, such as: a) an audit of existing training system resources and activities, forming a corporate environmental committee (with HR representatives, environmental professionals and other executives on it), b) a job analysis producing a job description, and environmental awareness as part of induction training (as done at the Body Shop in the U.K.) and c) use a performance management system to monitor and review performance on productivity, quality, wastage and accidents. According to Jabbour (2011), green training refers to a system of activities that motivate employees to learn environmental protection skills and pay attention to environmental issues, which are key in achieving environmental goals. Lasrado & Zakaria (2019) not that green training must be given together with educational programs for all company members, not only those who are related to the environment department

Jabbar H. M, Abid M. (2015), in their study of green Human resource practices and its impact on environmental performance, proposes that organizations who want to increase their employee

performance should put emphasis on training as it motivates them to achieve higher performance levels. Simms (2007) advocates for initiatives to encourage and empower staff to act in more environmentally friendly ways at work and home. A study by Chemjor (2020) recommends that there is need for training and development to build capacity for those institutions that have embraced green human resource management practices and provide support to various green network movements and other groups as the leading vehicles for green human resource management and sustainability in our entities.

### **Employee relations and environmental sustainability**

Employee relations through employee involvement and participation has been seen as one of the ways of nurturing an eco-friendly workforce. Reed (2002) reports that since 1975, 3M has encouraged employees to propose changes to generate revenue and reduce pollution through their Pollution Prevention Pays (3P) programme. So far, 3M claim their 3P initiative has produced more than 2,500 pollution solutions, halving their waste release, and saving them nearly \$300million. Indeed, later estimates for 3M are that their 3P programme has seen employees propose more than 4,750 projects worldwide, preventing 1.7 billion pounds of pollution, and saving them \$850 million in pollution control and raw material costs. According to May and Flannery (1995), American Airlines claim their flight attendants recycle over 616,000 pounds of aluminium cans, earning at least \$40,000 to them in one year. Newman and Johnson (2000) reports that other employee involvement team projects in the U.S. have also been seen to produce environmental improvements for Chrysler at the Jeep plant in Toledo, AT&T in Ohio, and the Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel plant.

Fernandez, Junquera and Ordiz (2003), argue that Eco-initiatives occur from creative ideas from all employees, and that mechanisms need to be made to involve employees in it giving employees independence to generate creative solutions to solve problems. Ramus and Steger (2000) examined the relationships of environmental policy and direct supervisory support behaviours in promoting employee-led environmental initiatives in a survey of 353 mid and low-level workers in 10 European (and one U.S. and one Canadian) leading-edge firms committed to environmental protection. Their results reveal that factors associated with organizational and supervisory encouragement are important in employee environmental creativity. A HSBC initiative in the U.K. found benefits in carbon saving being seen to come from employee initiatives (Simms, 2007). Phillips (2007) notes that Argos (UK) are aiming to engage their staff through increased environmental awareness, including initiatives in recycling and waste segregation.

### **Green grievance & discipline and environmental sustainability**

Wehrmeyer (1996) argues that disciplinary procedures should be attached to environmental rules and duties where non-compliance occurs. Brockett (2006) supports this position by noting that environmentally unfriendly behaviour may constitute a breach of contract and therefore possible grounds for disciplinary measures to be undertaken. This is expected to act as a deterrent to behaviors and conduct which are eco-unfriendly.

### **Green compensation and reward practices and environmental sustainability**

It is argued that organizations could benefit from establishing a reward system for waste reduction practices that teams develop. May and Flannery (1995) cites various examples in this

line such as DuPont in the US which has an Environmental Respect Awards program that recognizes employee environmental achievements, and both Nordstrom and 3M which offer rewards for suggestions that individual staff make to help the environment and increase firm profitability. However, Fernandez, Junquera and Ordiz (2003) note that assessing results that employees produce in environmental activities is a difficult task and argue that it is important to consider linking of contingent remuneration for senior managers and the higher performance produced in environmental management, and the successful use of public recognition systems that include financial compensation for employees.

Milliman and Clair (1996) roots for recognition-based rewards. This suggestion is supported by Govindarajulu and Daily (2004) who further suggests these could take forms of paid vacations, time off, favoured parking, and gift certificates all aimed at encouraging employees on environmental performance.

### **Green employee exit interview practices and environmental sustainability**

An exit interview has been described as a discussion between the departing employee and the employer, which can vary in structure and formality, and is designed to get information about their employment experience and motivations for leaving (Evans 2006; Rudman, 2002; Stone, 2005). It is meant to find out what exactly the departing employee think and feel about the organization (Evans 2006). According to Wehrmeyer (1996) such discussion should contain environmental dimensions. Marcus and Fremeth (2009) noted that data collected from departing employees about firms' environmental behavior have been constructively used to improve firms' environmental performance. Behrend, Baker and Thompson (2009) report that departing employees are more factual in reporting environmental activities of a firm and therefore HRM teams are more likely to obtain quality data on environmental management conduct of employees which they can use to improve firm's environmental performance.

### **Green Human Resource Management Practices and Environmental Sustainability**

Samant & Sangle (2016) view sustainability as a competitive strategy which represents the philosophy as well as the strategy of an organization. As a company's performance, including the achievement of its sustainability-oriented goals depends first of all on its employees, more and more attention is being directed toward new human resource management concepts such as sustainable HRM, green HRM, socially responsible HRM, triple bottom line HRM, and common good HRM. Ren, Tang, & Jackson (2018); Saeed et al., (2019) argue that the concept of green HRM can also be described as sustainable human resources management which is defined as "the adoption of HRM strategies and practices that enable the achievement of financial, social, and ecological goals, with an impact inside and outside of the organization and over a long-term time horizon while controlling unintended side effects and negative feedback" (Ehnert, Parsa, Roper, Wagner, & Muller-Camen, 2016).

Thomson and Leviski (2011) in their study on the economically advanced countries of Europe noted that the spread of green human resource practice gained momentum during 2005-2010, mainly in countries like Germany, Austria, France and Spain and linked this development to the growing adoption of sustainable management practices in these countries. Robert and Timber (2013) studying service organizations in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region noted that firms achieved effective decision making, better precision in operational implementations

and reduction of manpower cost responsible as a result of the growing popularity of green human resource management practices.

Kanapala P. M.K, Battu N (2018) carried out a study on the role of Green Human Resource Management Practices on Employee Performance in the Health Care Industry and noted that green HRM practices (recruitment, performance management and appraisal, training and development, employee relations and pay and rewards) had the moderate effect on employee performance.

In their study of Green HR practices and its impact on environmental performance, Jabbar and Abid (2015) concluded that GHRM enables organizations to reduce their costs and invest their resources for the betterment of the environment. Organizations that recruit employees with the objective to enhance environmental outcomes have gained customer satisfaction and eventually increased their performance. Companies that are able to align practices and human resource dimensions with the objectives of environmental management can be successful in the organization journey towards environmental sustainability.

A study by Andjarwati, Audah, Khouri and Rebilas (2019) on the impact of green human resource management with a focus on training and development and Eco- Friendly policies enterprise sustainability. Using data collected from the employees who are associated with the mining sector of Indonesia, the findings revealed that green training and development are not important predictor of environmental sustainability.

A study by Owino & Kwasira (2016) investigated the influence of selected Green Human Resource Management Practices on environmental sustainability at Menengai Oil Refinery Limited Nakuru, Kenya. The practices focused on were green employee sourcing, green occupational health, green employee training and green performance management. Findings from this study indicated that embracement of these practices influenced environmental sustainability. The study further found out that the firm was able to improve its environmental sustainability practices when it offered training and development programs on green aspects of the organization and environmental consciousness and implemented green occupational health and safety programs. A similar study carried out by Langat and Kwasira (2016) at Kenyatta University, Kenya found out that employees' application for employment at the University was not based on green issues hence their little understanding of the concept. It further showed that many employees were aware of Environmental sustainability and National Environmental Management Authority policies and regulations as opposed to Green Human Resource Management and sustainable organizational practices. Findings from the study at Kenyatta University further indicated that green/environmental performance indicators were not adequately included in performance management and appraisals systems and thus recommended the need for training and capacity building among the employees of the university and inculcating the culture of green and sustainable ecological practices as well as developing pro-environment managers and leaders to ensure sustainability in the workplace. Whiegar (2012) observes that almost all Supermarkets in Nairobi, Kenya have adopted various green logistics such as use of lead free fuels, recycling of materials, complying with the National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) regulations, and use of environmental friendly packaging materials in serving customers through the embracement of green human resource management practices.

A study by Chemjor (2020) recommends that there is need for training and development to build capacity for those institutions that have embraced green human resource management practices and provide support various green network movements and other groups as the leading vehicles for green human resource management and sustainability in our entities. Mohammad Abdullah Al Mamun (2019) examined the extent of awareness of Green Human Resource Management among different levels of HR Managers from various organizations in Bangladesh. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods the study found out that Green HRM knowledge depends on various factors and noted that organizations should employ requisite Green HRM practices to achieve excellent organizational performance through proactive organizational and national human resource development initiatives.

In their study, Saputro A. and Nawangsari L. C. (2021) analyzed the effect of green human resource management on employee performance through organization citizenship behavior for environment at PT Andalan Bakti Niaga, Indonesia and noted that green training, green compensation and rewards have a positive and significant effect on organization citizenship behavior for environment, green performance appraisal has no significant effect on organization citizenship behavior for environment, green recruitment, green training, green compensation and rewards have a significant effect on employee performance through organization citizenship behavior for environment and green human resource management has a significant effect on organization citizenship behavior for environment.

Kuria M. W, Mose T, (2019) studied the effect of green human resource management practices on organizational effectiveness of universities in Kenya and reported that during recruitment and selection, the management should seek to employ and recruit staff and personnel that are conversant and ready to apply their skills and expertise to better the ecological surrounding. Further, through this study, it was noted that staff so recruited should also be coached and trained on their specific matters and issues that relate to the environment and motivation to realize eco-friendly work environment.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This paper has reviewed the relevant literature on Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) and its implications on Environmental Sustainability (ES). From evidence reviewed, indeed green human resource management practices and initiatives are critical for the realization of environmental sustainability at individual, corporate, community and society levels. However, it is evident that there is limited literature and therefore evidence on the practice of GHRM and its implications on environmental sustainability across the diverse sectors in the developing economies.

Based on the review and discussion of the extant literature in GHRM, going green in HRM should be the slogan and anthem for individuals, corporate and the community as one of the avenues towards achievement of environmental sustainability and contributing to the realization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Employers and human resource practitioners are encouraged to incorporate aspects that impress upon eco-friendly and behavior in the hiring and recruitment, staff training and development, staff deployment, employee performance appraisal,

employee relations through involvement, employee reward system and employee exit process. This is envisaged to contribute to improved organizational environmental performance. Top leadership of organizations are also encouraged to develop and support policies and strategies that create an enabling working environment for the people and organization exhibiting a “green” behavior with keen interest on waste management and recycling and safeguarding and enhancing worker health and well-being.

We suggest that more research efforts and support should be directed to documenting evidence on GHRM practices with a focus on the level of adoption and implications on not only environmental sustainability but also organizational or institutional performance within the developing economies and across sectors and sub-sectors. Therefore academicians and researchers are called upon to step into gaps and contribute to the growing literature and knowledge in the area of GHRM.

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