



GREEN HRM –A PARADIGM SHIFT TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Green human resources refer to using every employee interface to promote sustainable practices and increase employee awareness and commitments on the issues of sustainability. It involves undertaking environment-friendly HR initiatives resulting in greater efficiencies, lower costs and better employee engagement and retention which in turn, help organizations to reduce employee carbon footprints by the likes of electronic filing, car-sharing, job-sharing, teleconferencing and virtual interviews, recycling, telecommuting, online training, energy-efficient office spaces etc. Efficiency created by Green HRM can lower operational costs and enables industry professionals to realize their Corporate Social Responsibilities in a better manner. This paper aims to study latest environmental friendly solutions to stay “Green” in the Human Resource function and proposes a paradigm shift towards green HRM by reviewing the literature on HR aspects of environmental management and synthesizing the thinking arising from the review of these literatures.

Keywords: Environment Friendly Solutions, Green HRM, Green Practices, Sustainable.

INTRODUCTION

Green human resources refer to using every employee interface to promote sustainable practices and increase employee awareness and commitments on the issues of sustainability. Sustainable development is concerned with meeting the needs of people today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Companies now realize that they have to develop a powerful social conscience and green sense of responsibility where corporate responsibility is not just a brand building tool to have, but has become a factor essential to business development. The HR function will become the driver of environmental sustainability within the organization by aligning its practices and policies with sustainability goals reflecting an eco-focus.

The HR strategy must reflect and inspire the ambitions of the HR team and other employees, aligning with the company’s strategy, values and culture, deliver sustainable returns to investors, address customer needs, identify and respond to emerging societal trends, respond to governmental and regulatory expectations, and influence the public policy agenda. There is thus a growing need for the integration of environmental management into human resource management (HRM) – green HRM – research practice. Green HR is the use of HRM policies to promote the sustainable use of resources within business organizations and, more generally, promotes the cause of environmental sustainability. Green initiatives within HRM form part of wider programs of corporate social responsibility. Green human resources refer to using every employee touch point/interface to promote sustainable practices and increase employee awareness and commitments on the issues of sustainability. It involves undertaking environment-friendly HR initiatives resulting in greater efficiencies, lower costs and better employee engagement and retention which in turn, help organizations to reduce employee carbon footprints by the likes of electronic filing, car-sharing, job sharing, teleconferencing and virtual interviews, recycling, telecommuting, online training, energy efficient office spaces etc.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this paper are threefold.

- To indicate and study significant works on Green HRM research.
- To elaborate on various green practices that can be incorporated for building a Green Workplace.
- To develop a model on Green HRM.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Secondary Data

The data was collected from various research journals, websites and articles to ensure detailed understanding of the subject authenticity of information.

WHAT IS GREEN HRM?

The term ‘Green HRM’ is most often used to refer to the contribution of people management policies and practices towards the broader corporate environmental agenda. Typical green activities include video recruiting, or the use of online and video interviews, to minimize travel requirements. Green rewards can include the use of workplace and lifestyle benefits, ranging from carbon credit offsets to free bicycles, to engage people in the green agenda, while continuing to recognize their contribution. While many employees often feel it is not their responsibility to protect the environment while they are at work,

the new workforces of millennial are emphasizing environmental consciousness as they chose their employers. There is also a broader opportunity to engage the workforce given that more and more people seek meaning and self-actualization in their jobs. Other simple green actions include minimizing the amount of printed materials used in performance management, salary reviews and so on. While there is definitely a substantial amount of 'green washing' occurring in reducing waste, there are many opportunities here too. However, HR is never going to have a truly significant impact on a business through the improvement of HR processes alone so the greater opportunity is to contribute to the green agenda of the business as a whole.

CREATING HIGH PERFORMING HR SYSTEMS: GREEN HRM

A relevant focus should be placed on job and organizational design. Increased efficiencies in organizational hierarchies, more virtualized work or eliminating unnecessary time spent in the office and optimizing the use of company resources, including travel, can uncover significant cost savings and efficiencies. Increasingly, companies around the globe are supporting greener options include telecommuting, flexible work schedules (allowing people to travel outside peak times). HR can also work collaboratively with the workforce to encourage employees to think more environmentally consciously when developing products and services (and even creating products and services to help customers manage their environmental impacts). Product and manufacturing companies have a great opportunity to look for supply chain efficiencies that can have both a long term economic and environmental impact. In the evolution of HR, establishing a green agenda can have a big impact on an organization and can also increase HR's impact outside of traditional workforce and personnel areas. Strong environmental management can – and should – have an economic impact to an organization including reducing operational costs, increasing sales in new markets, engaging employees and building a strong employee-centric culture. However, for most businesses, there will still be limits to how far this approach can go. Unless employees are already highly engaged in helping a business succeed, it is unlikely that they will be very highly engaged in helping the business through better environmental management.

GREEN HRM HELPS IN FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES

- The influence of social, economic, market and other external forces on the approaches to
- environmental management adopted by firms
- Workforce development needs created by increasing demand for employees in the newly emerging green economy.
- Discussions of how and to what extent HR policies and practices can improve the environmental performance of organizations
- Specific HR philosophies, policies and/or practices that support or inhibit change around environmental issues.
- International differences in Green HRM practices The Role of the HR function in environmental management.
- The role played by trade unions and employee representatives in environmental Management.

GREEN MANAGEMENT

A Green Workplace is defined as a workplace that is environmentally sensitive, resource efficient and socially responsible. In the environmental literature, the concept of green management for sustainable development has various definitions; all of which generally, seek to explain the need for balance between industrial growth for wealth creation and safeguarding the natural environment so that the future generations may thrive (Daily and Huang, 2001).

In the past, sound economic performance of the firm was expected to guarantee corporate success by companies and its shareholders, but now it 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. Therefore, the new strategic issue, corporate environmentalism or green management emerged in 1990s and became a popular slogan internationally in 2000s (Lee, 2009). Green management is defined as the process whereby companies manage the environment by developing environmental management strategies (Lee, 2009) in which companies need to balance between industrial growth and safeguarding the natural environment so that future generation may thrive (Daily and Huang, 2001). This concept becomes a strategic dominant issue for businesses, especially multinational enterprises operating their business globally (Banerjee, 2001). In summary, green management refers to the management of corporate interaction with, and impact upon, the environment (Lee and Ball, 2003), and it has gone beyond regulatory compliance and needs to include conceptual tools such as pollution prevention, product stewardship and corporate social responsibility.

GREEN PRACTICES

Operation requires a lot of consumables, such as paper, plastic, envelope and ink toner. Although there are both environmental and economic concerns, it is very hard to use less of those because they are integral part of our basic operations. Then, is it possible to be ecological, economical and practical at the same time? Apart from general green office practices, here are some latest environmentally-friendly solutions for you to stay Green in the HR functions.

i) Green Printing

Paper and toner consumption are both obvious causes for environmental problems, but reducing printing and paper consumption is very hard especially for those corporations with huge numbers of staff, each with their own habits and preferences. More printing naturally leads to increase in paper, toner wastage and carbon dioxide emission. The latest technology has offered a solution to solve this problem. Preton Saver is software which can reduce paper demand by up to 20% and toner and ink demand by up to 50% without degrading the output image quality. You can set the toner reduction rate by department, and it also helps you to manage printing jobs by consolidating departmental print logs; you can even set printing page allowance for those departments that doesn't require much printing. According to actual case reference, a company with 1000 employees may reduce its toner consumption by around 350 cartridges per year and will reduce its carbon footprint by around 1.68 tons of Co2 annually.

ii) Green Design for Payroll and Taxation Forms

Technology is not the only solution to stay Green in your daily operation. There are some simple and easy ways to be environmentally friendly, for example by just switching to Green design products like sealer forms. You may already have heard of sealer forms, it is a form that can be folded into a self-contained envelope, so a single piece of paper can both act as a form and an envelope, perfect way to prepare pay rolls and taxation forms. 'Sealer Solution' enables automatic individual information printing and form sealing in a secure manner. Comparing with traditional payroll printing method by Dot Matrix, its speed can be as fast as 3400 pieces per hour while operating in a comparatively silent mode. It cannot only reduces the manpower tremendously, but also enhance the indoor working environment in the HR Department.

iii) Green Manufacturing & Disposal of Staff ID Card

ID card issue is a familiar part of HR operation. Usually these cards are made of PVC, which is harder to recycle and cause more pollution. PETG is a better material to produce plastic cards in terms of ecology, it is 100% recyclable, does not produce any noxious fume, and creates less water and air pollution. Moreover, when such cards that contain personal information need to be disposed, you can make use of 'Disposal Service'. This enables the waste plastic cards to be securely transferred for recycling. The above solutions may provide you with some hints to reduce wastage and environmental impacts in your daily HR operation, to be more economical and most importantly to walk towards more ecological business operation.

THE HR ROLE

It has been observed in general that the personal values that employees demonstrate to Environment Management have not been exploited fully towards achieving corporate environmental initiatives, even though they look to have positive effects for managers. Indeed, many organizations are adopting an integrated approach to implement Environment Management programs. But achieving this integration of HR and Environment Management involves importantly changing the approach of some HR staff themselves to green issues as well as changing the unsustainable practices that all levels of staff may have learned over decades. A key role for HR environmental executives could be to guide line managers in terms of gaining full staff co-operation towards implementing environmental policies which means HR needs to nurture supporters and create networks of problem-solvers willing to act to change the current status quo. This can only take place if the company establishes formal and informal communication networks with their employees highlighting the company's green efforts for eg., in the company newsletter and website. Some other ways could be to share research, model green behavior, working with internal marketing staff to circulate informational and inspirational articles, columns and other materials to employees on a regular basis. HR foci as knowledge management, employment screening, training, redundancy, reducing status differentials, and management style can be integrated together to produce environmental improvements for the firm. In addition, HR can generate an environmental report that includes a policy statement, targets, progress measures, overall impact which will encourage line managers and employees to take pride in sustainability initiatives.

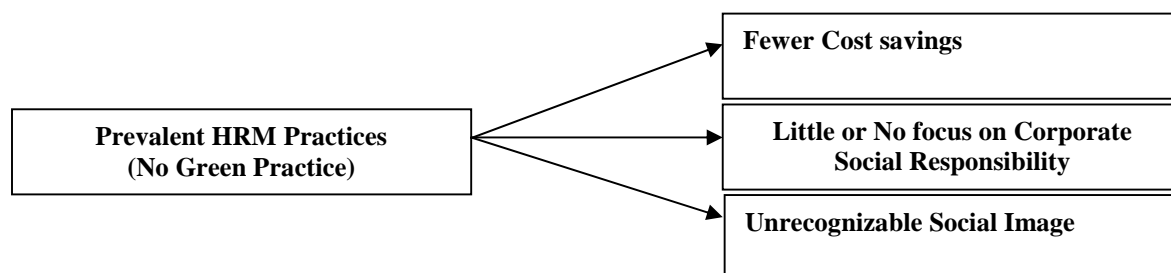


Fig 1.1: Depicts the common consequences of usually prevalent HRM practices in organizations

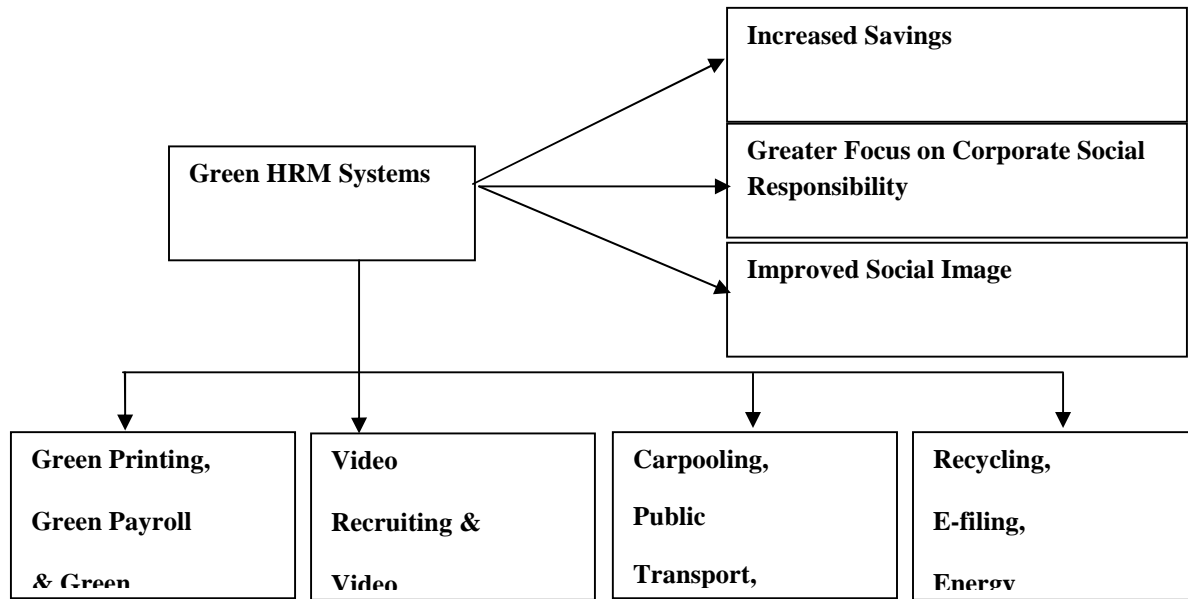


Fig 1.2: Depicts some green practices and their possible outcomes in organizations implementing Green HRM

CONCLUSION

This paper has reviewed the literature on Green HRM and a few Green Practices and offered a model in Green HRM. The future of Green HRM appears promising for all the stakeholders of HRM. The employers and practitioners can establish the usefulness of linking employee involvement and participation in environmental management programmes to improved organizational environmental performance, like with a specific focus on encouraging green practices and help green management evolve and develop. Unions and employees can help employers to adopt Green HRM policies and practices that help safeguard and enhance worker health and well-being. The model presented in this paper clearly distinguishes the usually prevalent HRM system practices in an organization from a system that implements Green HRM, thus highlighting the benefits of Green HRM and some practices associated with it.

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