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Sustainable development: The role of green HRM

Syed Sohaib Zubair and Mukaram Ali Khan

Abstract

Concern for environment friendly policies and actions is being highly stressed all across the globe. The recent climate conference held in Bonn where heads of several states sat together to develop a roadmap, is an evidence of the need to rethink our habits and take decisions that can benefit the society in the long run. Sustainable development has now become need of the hour. To ensure that this world remains a good place to live in, environment friendly policies should be adopted. Organizations may they be public or private can contribute significantly in ensuring a greener environment if they integrate different basic environment friendly initiatives in to their operations. This basic conceptual paper discusses one step that organizations can take in order to support the cause and need for sustainable growth or environment friendly missions. This study proposes the adoption of sustainable and eco-friendly practices by Human Resource Management departments in organizations in the shape of Green HRM. Green HRM is a concept that has gained attention of scholars recently, this conceptual paper further adds to the basic understanding of this idea.

Keywords: HRM, sustainable growth, green HRM, environment friendly

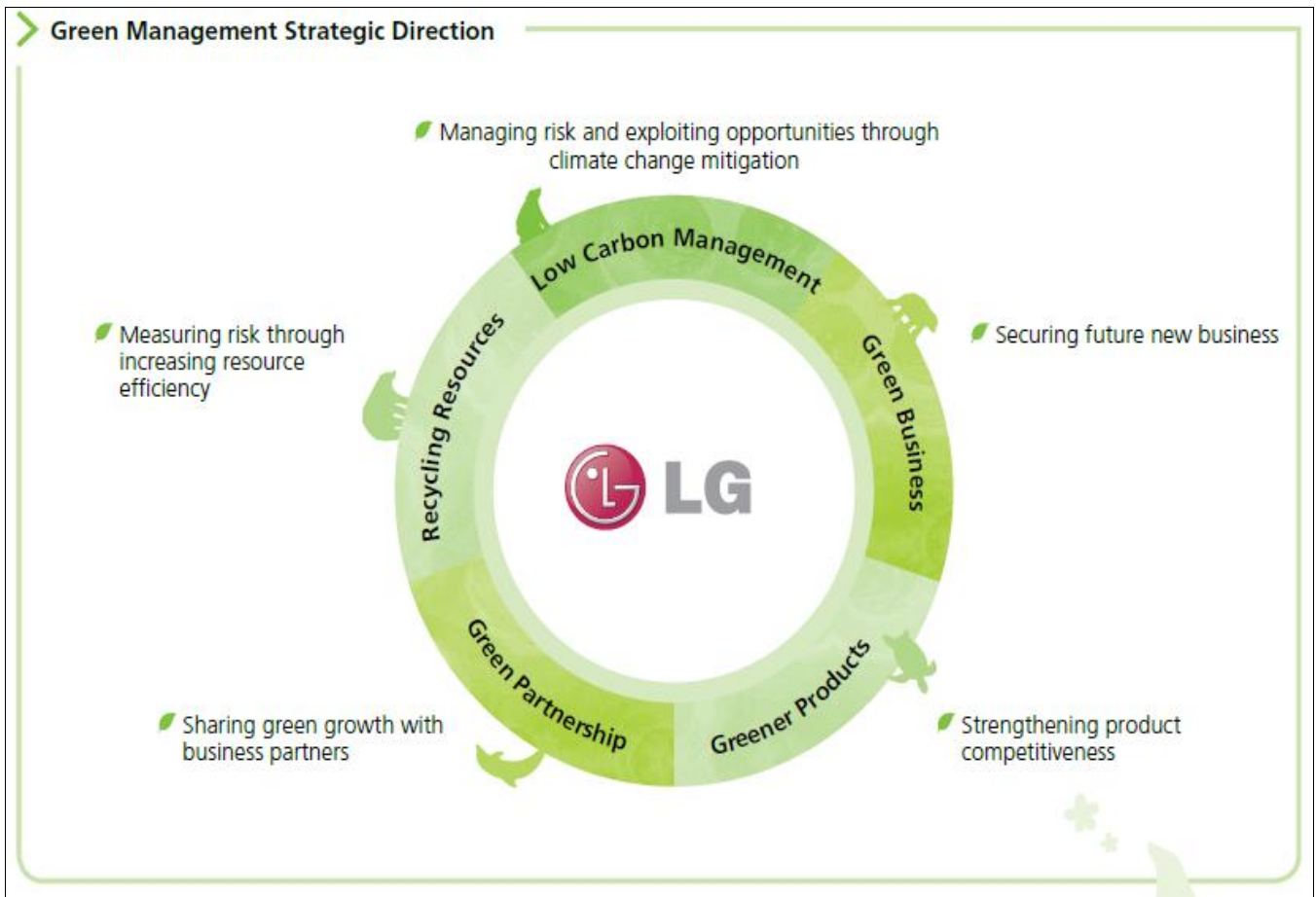
1. Introduction

Change in climate is a reality, environmental experts and activist argue that the quality of our environment is deteriorating and large scale floods and climate alterations are an evidence of global warming phenomenon. It is now imperative to rectify our habits and to seriously indulge in conscious efforts to address environmental issues on priority basis. The importance of sustainable development can be seen from the fact that United Nations has given a new roadmap for all countries to comply till 2030 i.e. sustainable development goals (SDG's). Sustainable development means, development that does not adversely affect resources in such a way that future generations may suffer and cannot enjoy the luxury of a good environment and their needs are not met (Brundt and Commission, 1987) ^[6].

Sustainable Development has now become need of the hour, governments should seriously consider working out mechanisms with private sector to draft out plans favoring and protecting the environment. Organizations under the name of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) claim to pay-back to the environment, but they need to go beyond normal activities and adopt more practices in routine for the better implementation of their green initiatives, and these green initiatives can be a part of the broader CSR as well (Mandip, 2012) ^[18]. Organizations should not take such initiatives as a cost, rather such plans should be considered as an investment of long run. Private Sector is taking initiatives that positively contribute towards sustainable approaches to the environment, one such or most commonly known growing area is that of Green Supply Chain Management (GSCM), and according to Lee *et al.* (2012), there is a vivid relation between GSCM and Business performance of an organization.

Moving beyond GSCM, nowadays multinational organizations are integrating the "Green" idea into their management practices and making it a part of their strategic goals. Referring to various scholars, Ahmad (2015) ^[2] highlights the introduction of areas such as Green Accounting, Green Marketing, Green Retailing and others. Multinationals such as Toshiba, LG and Sony are among few brands that are on this mission. Toshiba Environment report defines Green Management as, "Green Management is an initiative aiming at continuously improving the foundation of environmental management, such as the development of personnel responsible for environmental activities, environmental management systems, and environmental communication as well as conservation of biodiversity". Green Management is a holistic approach towards management and has many facets and dimensions. Figure No. 1 shows how LG Electronics integrated the idea of "Green" into its Management Strategy.

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Source: LG Electronics Environmental Report 2010 pg.13

Fig 1: Green Management Strategic Direction at LG Electronics

As mentioned earlier, different parts of an organization can contribute towards larger Green goals by reorganizing its basic practices or routine tasks. Definitely, larger ownership or integration into broader organizational vision would have a greater impact, but wings of an organization can innovate and take the lead. This paper focuses on one department of an organization i.e. Human Resource Management (HRM) that has gained importance over the past couple of decades with the recognition of its strategic role through acknowledgement of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) as a key discipline. The adoption and integration of the idea of Green Practices by Human Resource Management is the scope of this paper and this idea is basically called Green Human Resource Management. Jabbour and Jabbour (2016)^[11] have provided the integrated framework of GHRM and GSCM in which authors focused on the areas of organizational sustainability. Mampra (2013)^[17] defines Green HRM as “the use of HRM 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”. As per Jabbour *et al.* (2010)^[12] “the greening of functional dimensions of human resource management such as job description and analysis, recruitment, selection, training, performance appraisal and rewards is defined as green HRM”. With this basic introduction to the scope of this paper, authors now define the objectives of this study, followed by an actual approach or conceptual model towards imitation or adoption of Green HRM by organizations.

1.1 Objectives

This conceptual paper has the following objectives that shall be met using the literature on subject under exploration:

- To establish the need for Green HRM
- To explore the elementary concept of Green HRM
- To propose basic measures that can be taken by HRM wings through different functions

2. Green management and employee behavior

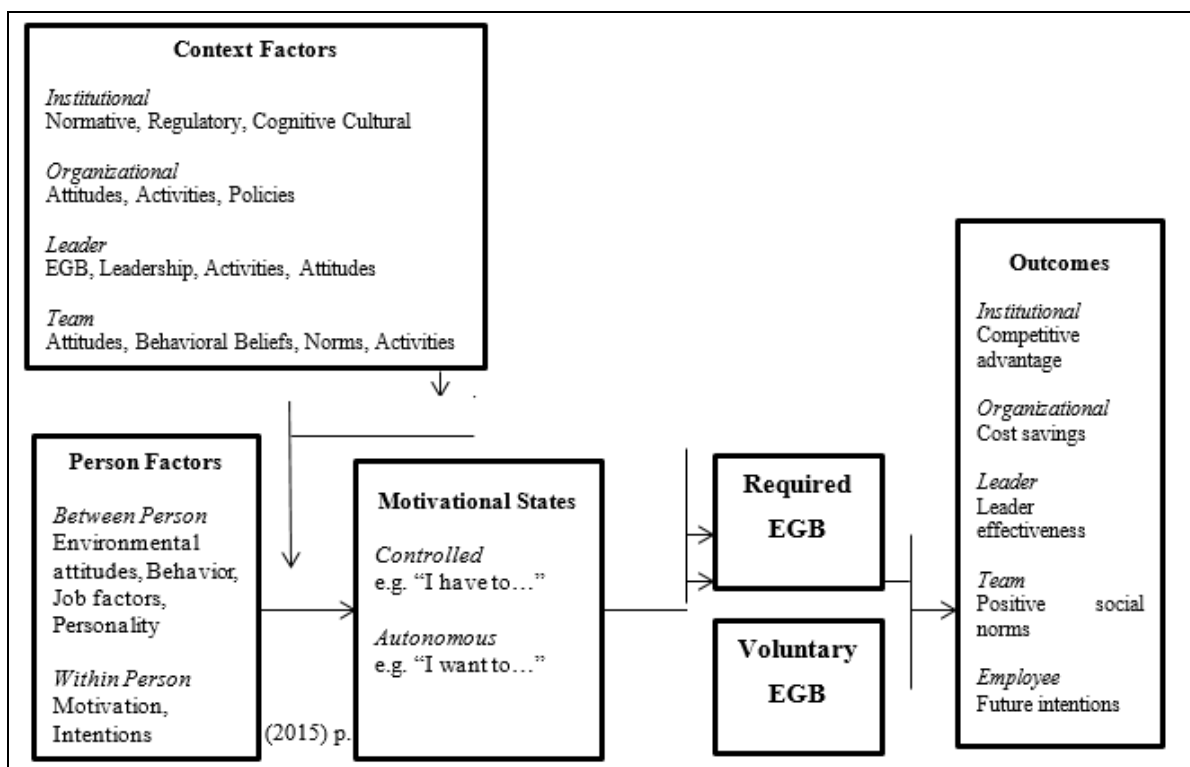
During the past decade, "environmental awareness" is presented in the executives' frameworks as a method for overseeing condition through "organized activities" (Haden *et al.*, 2009)^[9]. In such a manner, administrators set up natural administration frameworks and guidelines to appear and impart their assurance towards "being green" (Ilic and Unnu, 2012)^[16]. Haden *et al.* (2009)^[9] characterize green administration as the firm-wide procedure of applying advancement to accomplish competitive advantage, waste reduction, sustainability, and social responsibility. The "green management system" is a dynamic and constant administration arrangement of exercises and procedures to screen, avoid and control pollutants of nature (Abbaspour, *et al.*, 2006)^[1]. Since green management may affect as a wellspring of competitive advantage through providing strategic and economic advantages, the association should accept it as a moral concern, not as a responsive procedure (Molina-Azorin *et al.*, 2009)^[19]. Consequently, scholars have contended on the significance of "green concern" of the firm. Table 1 has discussed the views of various researchers on green management over the years.

Table 1: Green Management Literature

Bansal and Roth (2000) [4]	“Use data from 53 firms in the United Kingdom and Japan to reveal three motivations: competitiveness, legitimation, and ecological responsibility of green movement under the context of individual concern, organizational consensus and social formal and informal network ties between constituents on environment issue in an organizational field”.
Walter and Bruch (2005) [33] and Porter and Kramer (2006) [24]	“Recommend for a more close alignment between a company’s core strategy and its social responsibility efforts”.
Abbaspour <i>et al.</i> (2006) [1]	“Discuss how implementation of green management in sport complexes of Iran can ensure the continuous arrangement and assessment of activities from the environmental perspective to control and prevent contaminations”.
Sarkar (2008) [28]	“Points out that business practices related to the environment are now seen a transition from environmental management to environmental strategy”.
Bergmiller and McCright (2009) [5]	“Find the strengths of the combination of production process and green programs to improve business results”.
Haden <i>et al.</i> (2009) [9]	“Suggest that green achievement can be made via continuous learning and development through embracing environmental goals and strategies into the goals and strategies of the organization”.
Babiak and Trendafilova (2011) [3]	“Deliberate the role and relevance environmentally focused corporate social responsibility (CSR) plays in professional sport organizations in North America and presents suggestions for future research in this area”.
Khan <i>et al.</i> (2013) [13]	“Notice many business organizations have re-branded their core values including social responsibility in environmental excellence”.

The baseline of the below mentioned framework is that performance is the function of an individual within the surrounding environment. According to Norton *et al.* (2015) [21], contextual factors are very important in shaping up the individual performance including institutional, organizational, leader and team as these shapes up the performance-based behavior of an individual within the streams of these factors. Moreover, person factors also play vital role in the performance with regard to Employee Green Behavior (EGB). “Between person” factors such as job, attitude and behavior and “within person” factors such as motivation and intentions can play the pivotal role in deciding the EGB. Furthermore, motivational states can be either controlled or autonomous with regard to EGB.

However, autonomous state is considered to be relatively more important as there are no obligations or self-interest are visible for having the motivation for EGB. Moving on, it is further argued that controlled motivation state becomes the reason for required EGB in the organizations whereas autonomous motivation becomes the basis for voluntary EGB. Lastly, outcomes of either of the situation lead to be positive. As on institutional lever, one can predict the competitive advantage for having EGB. At organizational level, extra costs can be saved by engaging in EGB. Leader can also prove to be effective in this situation. Moreover, teams tend to display positive social norms while performing in an organization. It all ends with the employee intentions towards career progression in a positive manner.



Source: Norton *et al.* (2015) [21] p. 104

Fig 2: Model for Employee Green Behavior

3. Green human resource management (GHRM)

According to Denisi and Griffin (2009)^[8], HRM is the comprehensive set of managerial activities and tasks concerned with developing and maintaining a qualified workforce in ways that contribute to organizational effectiveness. HRM is a well-known and understood concept; therefore the authors do not focus more on establishing the importance or basic understanding of this term. GHRM is relatively a new idea and is gaining limelight with the acknowledgement of the importance of environmental concerns and role organizations can play.

Basis of this idea can be linked to the 'Green Movement' that actually guides idea of promotion of sustainable practices in different functions of an organization. Green Movement basically consists of four principles: "Environmentalism, Sustainability, Non- Violence and Social Justice". Advocates of these principles are called as "Greens". "Greens" are basically concerned with peace movements, environmental sustainability and non-violent acts (Sharma and Gupta, 2015)^[30]. As discussed earlier, management scholars have inculcated these green practices into different functions of the organizations. Likewise, Green HRM is not a stand-alone concept.

Sharma and Gupta (2015)^[30] are also of the view that Green HRM is a holistic and wider application of the notion of sustainability to organization and its personnel. Green actions can be inculcated into various steps or processes in an organization. Green HRM involves use of HRM to support sustainable use of resources in organizations (Rani and Mishra, 2014)^[25]. Some organizations, such as those mentioned in the introductory part of this paper, present themselves as Green, they are working on building their image as Green organizations in order to capitalize on this goodwill image.

Using the HRM functions defined by Mondy and Noe (2005)^[20], the following section on the basis of literature suggests different ways through which some aspect of Green be reflected in HRM practices of an organization. Mondy and Noe (2005)^[20] say that, there are five functions of Human Resource Management i.e. Recruitment, Selection, Training and Development, Performance Management, Compensation and Benefits, and Safety and Health.

3.1 Recruitment

Recruitment can be defined as a set of processes to obtain a large pool of applicants from which the suitable candidate may be selected by the organization (Schuler, 1987)^[29]. In order to go green in the context of recruitment function, organizations can have two options i.e. such a recruitment strategy be designed that attracts candidates that are somewhat knowledgeable and concerned about the environment.

The other option is that organizations may present themselves as "green employers" because according to a study, people like to work for an organization that recognizes the importance of protecting the environment (Clarke, 2006)^[7]. Basically, in terms of recruitment, most effective option for organizations can be to attract talent that will be concerned for this cause in the long run. Moreover, recruitment sections of HRM can opt for electronic modes for promoting their message and inviting applications.

3.2 Selection

Following recruitment, an important function of HRM is that of Selection. It involves series of steps that lead to hiring of the best suitable candidate for a position under consideration (Mondy and Noe, 2005)^[20]. According to Revill (2000)^[26], a green selection process may involve evaluating candidates on the basis of environment related questions. This shall help panel in gauging a person's attitude towards an organizations goal for greener approach. Furthermore, minimum usage of paper for selection tests can also be a basic strategy towards green selection function.

3.3 Training and development

Training and Development is an important activity once an employee has become a part of an organization. It is now the duty of the organization to invest in its workforce and develop in-line with its organizational objectives and this investment philosophy can give an idea as to how much an organization values Training and Development (Zubair and Khan, 2015)^[35].

Green Training and Development expects employees to be educated and equipped with knowledge of environmentally friendly activities, importance of Environmental Management initiatives and ways that may help in reduction of waste along with conservation of energy (Zoogah, 2011)^[34]. Training and Development programs should be aimed at development of knowledge skills and abilities of employees towards environmental problem solving and enable employees become responsible citizens. Liebowitz (2010)^[15] stresses that HRM should focus on development of a sustainable culture in organizations for having a long lasting impact.

3.4 Performance management

Performance Management function of HRM is aimed at evaluating an individual's performance in the light of organizations goals. Green HRM requires inclusion of evaluation of individuals input in achievement of organizations environmental goals. Opatha (2013)^[22] argues in favor of inclusion of a separate component in performance appraisal forms. It is important to mention that, these environments related criteria or standards must be known to all employees and be fairly evaluated by appraisers.

3.5 Compensation and benefits

Compensation is one of the most important elements of HRM and is considered to be the most difficult and challenging area of HR. Compensation is the total of all remunerations given to an employee in return for service an individual provides. Basic drive of providing compensation is to "attract, retain, and motivate employees" (Mondy and Noe, 2005)^[20]. As for the green aspect is concerned, organizations can link some rewards to fulfillment or green targets identified during performance appraisal process. According to a survey conducted in the UK it was found that approximately 8% of UK firms rewarded "green behaviors" (Phillips, 2007)^[23]. Moreover, organizations can reward for special acquisition of green training or skill acquiring certificates from different certificate awarding institutes.

3.6 Safety and health

Providing a safe and healthy environment to its workforce is major responsibility of any employer. Society for Human Resource Management (2009) defines a “green workplace” as a “workplace that is environmentally sensitive, resource efficient and socially responsible”. Provision of a green environment at workplace shall help in improving health of employees and may ultimately help in reduction of medical costs that an organization might have to incur at some point due to unsafe working conditions.

4. Conclusion and research implications

Green HRM is an emerging field. Some of the concerns for environment and for the need of going green can be addressed through adoption of green HRM by different public and private sector organizations. The GHRM framework is not complex and may not require a fundamental shift in the structure of HRM functions but at the same time have a positive impact in the long run. GHRM can be more fruitful if it is adopted by the organizations as part of the broader sustainable development or green management philosophy rather than just a time bound small isolated step. Ahmad (2015) [2] reiterates that Green HR efforts have resulted in “increased efficiencies, cost reduction, employee retention, and improved productivity, besides other tangible benefits”. Organizations

need to become proactive and go for practices that can help them grow and at the same time enable organizations for paying back to the society. Organizations can opt for ISO 14001 certification track also, this can also help organizations to significantly move towards environmentally sustainable processes.

It is imperative to mention that literature pertaining to GHRM and its implementation is mostly available in the context of developed economies and not in the developing countries. It is high time that developing countries should acknowledge the importance of greener sustainable environment and counter the growing global warming issues. GHRM can be one small but effective strategy as a part of the broader mission. Despite several advancements on the subject, Hosain and Rahman (2016) [10] emphasize that there are still gaps in the GHRM concept with reference to its theoretical as well as practical developments.

As for research implications, further research needs to be conducted in order to test empirically current application of this concept along with identification of factors that may facilitate or impede implementation of GHRM as an integral strategy by different organizations. A tool developed by Tang *et al.* (2017) can be used to measure and test the Green HRM concept in order to further the research on the said subject. Following framework can result in effective use and implementation of Green HRM:

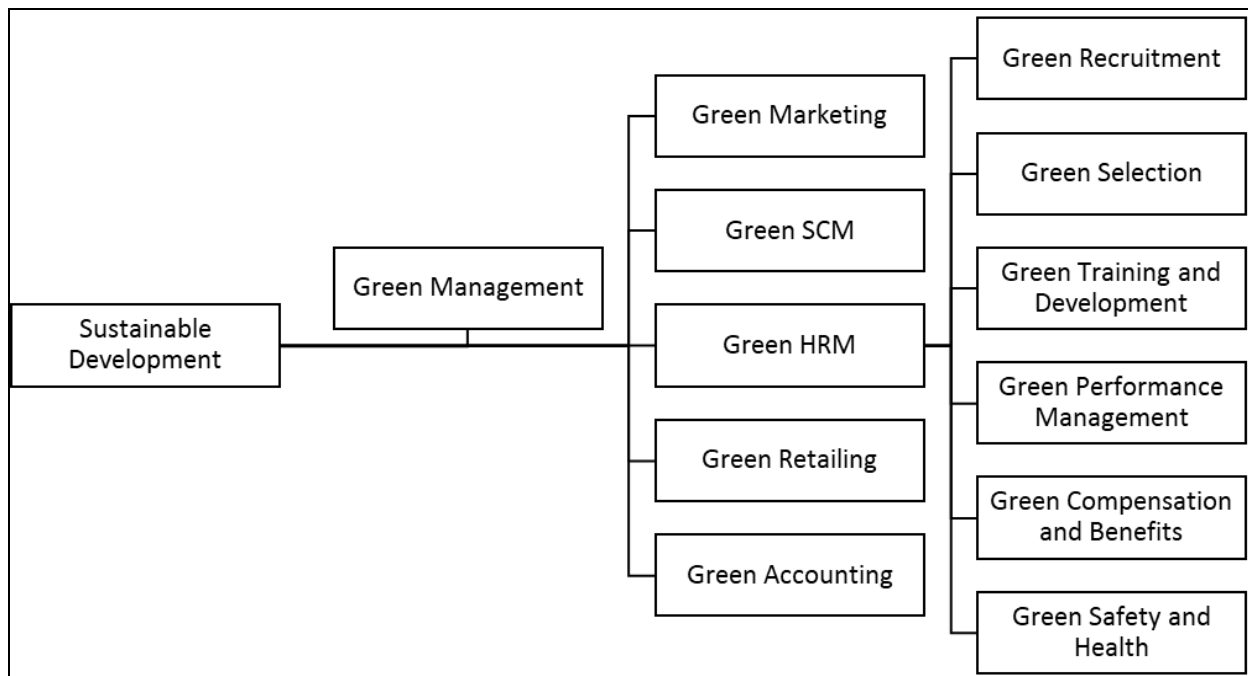


Fig 3: Green HRM Model (Conceptual Framework)

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