

# Planting The Seeds of Sustainability: Unveiling the Drivers of Green HRM

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**Abstract:** Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) is a recent trend which is gaining wide popularity since this millennia. GHRM comprises of factors such as green performance and appraisal, green training and development, green compensation and reward, and it is an initiative of organizations to improve environmental efficiency (Amjad et al, 2021). Sustainability is the most important strategy to address environmental issues (Khan, N.U., 2021). There is a growing concern in recent times to introduce sustainable business practice, and sustainability is at the helm of GHRM. GHRM practices have a notable impact on competitive advantage (Muisyo et al, 2021). This study enumerates the conceptual framework of factors impacting green human resource that lead to sustainability through extensive review of literature.

**Key words:** Green HRM, Sustainability, Leadership, Environmental Concerns, Stakeholders

## INTRODUCTION

Sustainability can be defined as achieving success today without compromising the needs of the future (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2005). Sustainability practices are not only focused on the environmental performance of an organization but also places a focus on economic and social performance (Colbert and Kurucz, 2007). Owing to increased environmental issues in the world, there is a heightened pressure on organizations to address environmental concerns. The concept of sustainable performance was introduced, which places a higher focus on organization's environmental responsibilities and social performance rather than the economic performance (Bombiak and Marciniuk-Kluska, 2018). The essence of Green HRM is systematic, planned alignment of typical human resource management practices with the organizations' environmental goals (Jabbour, 2013). In an organization, HR plays an important role in initiating environmental friendly practices (Mishra and Rani, 2014). Green HRM places a great deal of importance on strategies that aid in the sustainable

use of the resources while reducing the damage on the environment caused by the business operations (Zoogah, 2011).

## Sustainability

The concept of sustainability was first introduced by Brundtland in 1987. Sustainability gained a lot of attention and it has become a major focus for organizations because of the issues of climate change, regulatory and social pressures towards greater environmental and social responsibility. Sustainability means that the success of a business is not only measured by financial terms, but also by environmental and social dimensions (Gardberg and Fombrun, 2006). This can be achieved by implementing green initiatives. Some of the green initiatives taken by enterprises include – changes in the expectations of the stakeholders with respect to increased level of their awareness, implementing innovative technological practices, developing a framework for the development of the economy with institutional and legal conditions in mind, and searching for new sources with competitive edge (Munilla and Miles, 2005). When sustainability is important for the management, employees tend to internalize the sustainability objectives and are committed towards sustainable behaviour (Pellegrini et al, 2018).

## Green HRM and Sustainability

As there is an increased focus placed on sustainability, HRM is found to be the key player in developing competencies, collaborative strategies, and organizational capabilities that are essential in supporting an organization's journey to sustainability (Wirtenberg et al, 2007). HRM is considered to be the most potent tool in incorporating sustainability into the organization's scope of achieving prosperity, environmental integrity, and social equity (Jabbour et al, 2012). HRM systems can include sustainability principles

by hiring the right people, evaluating their performance and giving them rewards based on the actions towards achieving sustainability goals for the organization will improve the employee's mindset regarding sustainability (Nabiha, 2015). Green HRM supports the concept of "triple bottom line", by aligning the HR practices with three sustainability pillars of economic, environment and social balance (Yusliza et al, 2015). Green HRM not only helps in increasing the environmental performance of a business but it also helps in changing the employee attitude and behaviour towards the environment (Ehnert, 2009). Employee performance can be explained as the ability of an employee to achieve a particular task measured against the predetermined standards of accuracy, completeness, cost and speed (Sultan et al, 2012). Research has also found that employees go beyond their job function to include social and environmental activities in order to manage the environmental impacts of an organization successfully (Valente, 2012).

#### Green Human Resource Management

##### Nature and Significance

In general, Human Resource Management practices focus on the recruitment and management of people who work in an organization. Green HRM can be described as the aligning the general human resource practices such as recruitment, training, performance appraisal and rewards with the environmental policies and objectives (Teixeira et al. 2016). HRM includes general training of employees working in an organization, whereas, GHRM includes environmental training. In the same way, HRM concerns with the evaluation of an employees' performance and rewards the employees on basis of their dedication to the firm; GHRM evaluates an employees' performance and rewards them by taking into account the environmental facet (Molina-Azorin et al, 2021). GHRM can be categorized into green recruitment and selection, green training and development, green performance management and appraisal, green compensation and reward, green employee empowerment and participation, green management of organizational culture (Ramasamy et al, 2017). Green HRM facilitates the development of skills and competencies in the employees, which are required to align the principles of human resource management with the aspects of green management in an organization. GHRM plays a crucial role in environmental management, wherein,

it focuses on ecological objectives that can be employed in HR activities. These activities include development of an ecological working environment and environmentally responsible workers (Mohrman and Worley, 2010). GHRM is essential for creating a greener workforce by motivating employees to participate in green initiatives. It enhances the role of HRM in making sustainable development concept a reality (Kramer, 2014). GHRM initiatives enhance employee participation in the process of reducing environmental waste, cutting down costs, various ecological innovations, increasing process efficiency (Saifulina and Carballo-Penela, 2017). GHRM also benefits an organization by improving its image. When organizations undertake voluntary environmental initiatives, without focusing only on the legal obligations towards environmental protection, they gain a competitive advantage (Ziolko and Mroz 2015). Employees are attracted towards organizations which are focused on the sustainability, customers are seeking ecological products, business partners are focused on ecological attestations (Bombiak and Marciniuk-Kluska, 2018). Therefore, there is an increasing number of companies which are turning their interest towards ecological issues, noting that environmental protection is in their best interest. Hence, expenditure on environmental protection is also seen as an investment in the development of the organizations (Bombiak and Marciniuk-Kluska, 2018).

**Green Recruitment and Selection** - Recruitment can be explained as attracting and persuading potential candidates to apply for a job opening in an organization, whereas, selection is the process of selecting the most qualified of those potential candidates from the list of job applicants. In the context of GHRM, green recruitment and selection is considered as a systematic hiring process, that focuses on the importance of the environment. The criteria for recruitment and selection goes beyond the basic organizational skills required, to their ability to have a general understanding of the concepts of sustainability such as recycling, conservation, the processes which help in making the world a better place (Grolleau et al, 2012). Green recruitment practices which are essential for environmental management can be done by creating awareness among the new recruits with the environmental values of the organization (Ramasamy et al, 2017)

**Green Training and Development** - Training and Development in HRM is designed in order to improve the skills and knowledge of the employees to perform the tasks assigned to them. Green Training and Development is a concept which aims at the development of skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of the employees in an effort to prevent the corrosion of environment. Under GHRM, the employees are trained so that their knowledge and skills are increased in order to understand the concept of sustainability and environment management techniques to help the employees in “going green”. (Ramasamy et al, 2017). Organizations are investing their time and money heavily to teach the employees regarding the persisting environmental issues, and training them with the skills and knowledge to contribute towards these issues. When employees are aware about the environmental management issues, there is a positive change in their attitudes towards becoming environmentally friendly. Green training and development motivate the employees to ascertain and engage in sustainable activities in their job (Obeidat et al, 2020). Organizations who have a workforce which is mindful of the environment and trained in environmental issues are considered to be more productive.

**Green Performance Management and Appraisal** - Performance management and appraisal systems are basically used to administer salaries, review employees’ performance, giving feedback in order to increase employees’ competence and improve their performance, keeping in mind their optimal capacity level. Performance assessment must consider aligning individual performance with the organizational performance (Tapamoy, 2008). The performance appraisals placed a great deal of importance on ascertaining the organizations’ goal to achieve higher profitability, without considering the ability of an organization to remain sustainable in the long-run. Green performance management and appraisal places an emphasis on the ability of the employees to undertake activities and strategies which focus on the environmental management goals and help organizations in realizing their objectives of becoming sustainable (Ramasamy et al, 2017). The environmental related job performance of an employee can be classified as “employee green performance of job” (Arulrajah et al, 2016).

**Green Compensation and Reward** - Compensation and rewards are a powerful tool in attracting, retaining and motivating potential employees to achieve the goals and objectives of an organization (Jerez-Gomez et al, 2007). They help in aligning the goals of the individual employees along with the organizations’ objectives, employees feel appreciated when their performance is rewarded. They most importantly help in motivating the employees to reach maximum productivity levels, and garner an employees’ total commitment to reach the goals of the organizations. Green compensation and rewards may be explained as a financial and nonfinancial rewards system implemented for employees who have a recognizable potential to contribute to environmental management (Jabbour et al, 2010). Green compensation and rewards are used by organizations and managers to link the green performance of an employee and to support and promote environmentally friendly activities of their employees. Green compensation and rewards have a positive impact on sustainability, as employees were promoted to participate in eco-friendly activities to improve their environmental management techniques by linking their performance and rewards.

**Green Employee Relations** - Green Employee Relations can be explained as the behaviour of the employer to promote engagement of employees, participation and involvement in encouraging the development of potential solutions to environmental issues (Ahmad, 2015). Employee relations play a crucial role in attaining ecological sustainability of an organization, as they help in aligning the capabilities and objectives of the workforce with sustainable practices (Das and Singh, 2014). Green Employee Relations help in aligning the employees’ capabilities, goals, motivations, and perceptions in the various environmental management techniques in order to achieve green initiatives (Ramasamy et al, 2017). Employees who are aware about the significance of the green initiatives are encouraged to engage in various eco-friendly functions in an organization. Employees feel there is a sense of inclusion, and when employees feel included and valued, their participation and morale in sustainable business practices increases. Green Employee Relations help an organization in providing green opportunities to its employees, ensuring the sustainable usage of the resources made available to them. Employee relations and union support facilitate corporate environmental initiatives, that

can increase the levels of environmental performance of an organization (Arulrajah et al, 2015).

#### Antecedents Impacting Green HRM:

##### Leadership Factors

*Ethical Leadership Style* - Ethical and moral values in the leaders of an organization are considered substantial, as the leaders' behaviours are considered to be the portrayal of organizations' behaviour as they are the representatives of the organizational policies and practices (Aselage and Eisenberger, 2003). When leaders display ethical and moral behaviour at work, there is a higher level of satisfaction and pride among the employees, which helps in achieving job satisfaction, leading to an enhanced job performance. Ethical Leadership Style (ELS) is considered as an antecedent of Green HRM, as it places an expectation that ethical leaders facilitate in promoting environmental friendly policies and practices within their organization (Ahmad and Umrani, 2019). One of the significant ways in which the HR department can promote job satisfaction is through the implementation of ELS among the management of an organization. When employees encounter an ethical leader, they expect the policies and practices followed by the HR department to be pro-environmental. Hence, it is preferred if the management of an organization take part in ethical leadership, while improving the job satisfaction of employees by encouraging GHRM activities (Ahmad and Umrani, 2019).

*Transformational Leadership* - Transformation leaders are considered role models, they inspire their followers, challenge them to be creative and have a genuine concern for their needs (Farrukh Moin et al, 2020). Transformational leaders motivate their followers to not just achieve their goals, but also perform beyond their expectations by transforming their attitudes, beliefs, and values (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders place a high value on integrity, morality. They always aim to be fair, and portray a general ethical and trustworthy nature. Transformational leaders encourage GHRM practices in an organization, along with value congruence, supervisor and organizational attractiveness and followers work satisfaction (Farrukh Moin et al, 2020). Employees working under transformation leaders are of the opinion that these leaders promote pro-environmental practices at work. Transformational leaders aim at achieving

sustained profitability and competitive advantage (Hasson et al, 2016). There is also evidence of a link between leadership and job satisfaction, mediated by GHRM (Ahmad and Umrani, 2019).

*Top Management Commitment* - The top-level management's commitment towards greening the work force is an antecedent to GHRM. It is considered as a strong driving force of assessment of the performance of an industry (Moktadir et al, 2019). It is considered as a major component for implementation of various management programs (Steinbach et al, 2017). For instance, the managerial support for positive environmental practices like green HRM, must be instrumental and visible as it helps in having a positive effect on the administration of such practices (Daily et al, 2007). When there is a clear managerial support, it gives an opportunity to the employees for environmental awareness training, which will lead to betterment in the environmental performance of an organization (Govindarajulu and Daily, 2004). Organizations should have a clear view on who should be guiding their green initiatives. Top management commitment is necessary in order to understand the role of green HRM, motivating green behaviour, encouraging employee participation in environmental programs, and making organizational resources easily available for their employees (Yong, 2019). Top management has been observed to be the source of change and a facilitator of environmental behaviours. Therefore, the top management plays a crucial role in adopting and initiating the green HRM practices in an organization (Obeidat et al, 2020).

##### Environmental Factors:

*Organizational Environmental Culture* - Organizational culture is the values, beliefs and behaviours of organizational employees (Schein, 1992). The organizational environment culture can be considered a green environmental culture when it focuses on the green values, green belief and green behaviours of employees. The organizations that are aware of the issues in the environment, undertake a proactive role in mitigating those issues (Shafaei et al, 2019). They are also concerned about the distressing effects they have on the environment, and work towards establishing an organizational environmental culture, where utmost importance is placed on developing the green employees. Organizational environmental culture is at the helm of bringing into effect the green HRM practices and

initiatives, which eventually leads to a better environmental performance of an organization. Organizational Environmental Culture is found to be a predictor of green HRM at organizational level, as it plays a key role in implementing green HRM practices in an organizations, which lead to an enhanced environmental performance (Shafaei et al, 2019).

*Environmental Orientation* - Environmental orientation is the recognition and practice of ethical values by the organizations towards the improvement of natural environment (Banerjee, 2002). Environmental orientation may be of two types, internal and external. Internal environmental orientation is when the employees and managers understanding the necessity of protecting the natural environment. External environmental orientation is the company's relationship with its external stakeholders (Obeidat et al, 2020). Organizations that exhibit a higher level of environmental orientation are successful in promoting effective environmental value system within their organizations. When importance is placed on an environmental policy, it leads the organization towards environmental sustainability (Ramus and Steger, 2000). When employees have a clarity with respect to the environmental policy of the company, they are in favour of accepting the implementation of green HRM practices. Adopting environmental orientated programs such as green hiring, green compensation helps an organization in having better environmental performance (Obeidat et al, 2020). The impact of environmental orientation on green HRM is that it not only enhances the environmental performance, but also contributes positively towards the overall organizational performance (Renwich et al, 2013).

*CEO Environmental Belief* - CEO environmental belief is considered as an important antecedent in the use of green HRM in organizations. The CEO of an organization plays an important role in implementing the green HRM practices in an organization, as the use of green HRM is dependent on the CEO environmental belief and external pollution situation. According to Ren, 2021, in order to promote the green HRM practices in their subsidiary companies, the parent organization has to focus on building up the environmental beliefs of the CEOs of the subsidiary companies. The beliefs of the CEOs in a company align with the companies environmental performance and the employees

environmental commitment. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to choose CEOs who understand the importance of protecting the environment (Ren, 2021).

#### Other Antecedents

##### Strategic HR Competencies

Strategic HR competencies have six elements, they are, strategic positioner, credible activist, capacity builder, HR innovator and integrator, technology proponent, and change builder (Ulrich et al, 2012). HR competencies help a HR professional in acquiring knowledge about the business environment. These competencies help them in having competitive advantage by converting external business trends into internal strategies (Ulrich, 2013). Efficiency and effectiveness of an organization may be increased by utilizing these strategic HR competencies. HR professionals must encompass the strategic HR competencies, in order to bring about changes and adopt green HRM practices. Strategic positioner is a highly functioning HR professional who understands the business conditions that affect their industry and take informative actions and make strategic decisions so that the organizations' can respond to the external business trends (Ulrich et al, 2012). In order to take correct strategic decisions in implementing the green HRM policies and initiatives, a HR professional must possess the quality of a strategic positioner. It is necessary for HR professionals to act as a change champion to protect the environment. Organizations have found the need to be environmentally sustainable, and these change champions initiate change and help in sustaining the change employing the resources of organizations. HR professionals need to communicate the changes required for sustainability and must be willing to constantly update themselves on the issues (Ulrich et al, 2012). HR professionals can bring about the change by initiating green HRM practices and sustaining the practices in order to protect the environment (Yong, 2016). Strategic positioner and change champions are qualities that influence the adoption of green initiatives in an organization, and they are also instrumental in building the green organization identity (Yong, 2016). The credibility of HR professionals paves the way for innovating and integrating HR practices in accordance with the environmental goals.

##### Stakeholder Pressure

Stakeholder pressure influences the organization towards adopting green initiatives. Organizations are under pressure from stakeholders to adopt green practices. When stakeholders are concerned about the environmental issues, they influence the managers in undertaking green HRM practices. Organizations cannot sustain in the long term if they do not pay heed to the concerns of the stakeholders. As explained by the Stakeholder Theory, HR managers have been pressured from the governments, customers, employees and the society as a whole to implement green HRM practices as these stakeholders play an important role in the business (Yong, 2019). The policies and regulations placed by the government have been instrumental in adopting green practices, and business have to comply with the environmental regulations in order to prevent legal actions. Organizations claimed that pressure placed by the government is the key factor in making companies comply with the policies to adopt green HRM, failing which legal implications will be there. At times, organizations are also forced to implement certain environmental practices by the customers (Sarkis et al, 2010). Hence, stakeholder pressure can be considered a factor influencing the adoption of green HRM (Yong, 2019).

#### Relative Advantage of Green HRM

Organizations are heavily inclined to adopt new innovations like creating a better company reputation, increasing the performance of the company, increasing the profitability of the company and increasing the customer satisfaction if the changes are advantageous to the company (Kassim et al, 2012). Relative advantage is significant in the adoption of new innovations (Rogers, 2003). Since green HRM are new innovations, if the organizations are of the opinion that adopting green HRM practices are going to give the organization an economic advantage and help them improve their company image, they may be interested in adopting the green HRM practices (Lin and Ho, 2011). The relative advantages include reducing the costs, reducing the usage of papers and cartridges, reducing the consumption of energy, increasing the efficiency by using online systems, increased employee engagement, increased efficiency, improved economic and environmental performance. Research has found that the adoption of green practices had a relative advantage for Chinese Logistics companies (Lin and Ho, 2011).

One of the major advantages of implementing green HRM is that it improves the process flows, eliminates the errors thereby increasing process efficiency (Yong, 2019). Relative advantage is one of the motivating factors in adopting sustainable business practices (Cha et al, 2018). Large manufactures will be inclined to undertake green HRM practices, if they are of the belief that the practices may help them save cost, increase employee engagement and improve efficiency (Yong, 2019).

#### Green Intellectual Capital

Intellectual capital of a company is helpful in generating value and improving company performance. The elements of green intellectual capital are green human capital, green structural capital and green relational capital (Chen, 2008). Green intellectual capital is a significant influencing factor in adopting green HRM in an organization. Managers have recognized the value of their employees and they are considered as the human capital. Employees who possess environmental knowledge can be classified as green human capital (Chen, 2008). It is essential that the companies to educate and improve their existing employees to adopt green HRM practices and develop a green organization. Green structural capital can be explained as the operation processes, managerial mechanisms and the organizational culture of a company (Yong, 2019). If the organization has policies that emphasize on environmental protection, that employees would place a higher priority on the environmental concerns. Green relational capital is the organization's intangible assets that are based on its relationship with stakeholders which helps in achieving competitive advantage. Green intellectual capital influences the preparedness of a company to adopt green HRM practices. Managers must focus on investing and developing environmental management system with the help of green intellectual capital. When an organization has a strong green culture, the employees understand the value of going green and actively take part in environmental performance of a company (Lopez-Gamera et al, 2011). A strong green culture, combined with the environmental knowledge, skills and expertise of the employees, spearhead the effort of an organization in adopting green initiatives (Yong, 2019).

After conducting an extensive literature review, this study proposes the model:

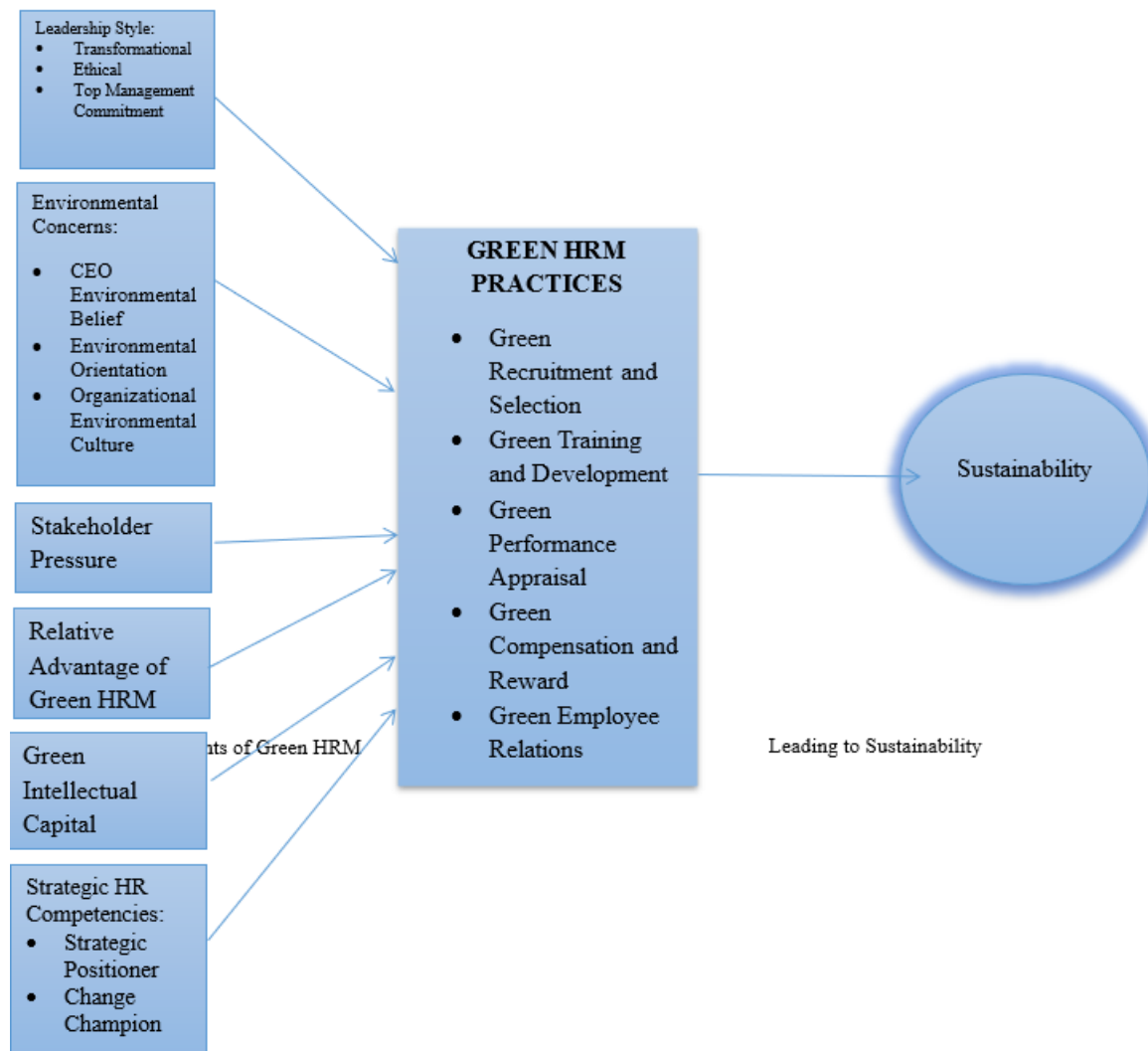


Fig 1. Antecedents of Green HRM Leading to Sustainability

## CONCLUSION

Organizations have a responsibility towards the environment and environmental management is an important factor towards sustainable development. The increase in various environmental issues has led to the concept of sustainable development, and there is a great emphasis on the need to focus on social and environmental performance as compared to the economic performance. Green Human Resource Management is crucial in initiating environmentally friendly activities, initiating changes in existing processes. Involving the manpower in green activities will help organizations in achieving environmental sustainability. This study has found that leadership – transformational leadership, ethical leadership and top management commitment; environmental concerns – CEO environmental

belief, environmental orientation, organizational environmental culture; strategic HR competencies – strategic positioner, change champion; stakeholder pressure, relative advantage of GHRM, green intellectual capital are all antecedents of GHRM which lead to sustainability.

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